

FLY FISHING CROCODILE BAY, A NEW DAY By Tom Boyd

Crocodile Bay is the world's premiere eco/fishing lodge. It has luxurious accommodations, an incredible array of amenities, spa, pool with walk up bar, eco-tours, activities, and up close and personal opportunities from horseback riding the beaches, repelling a waterfall, to zip lining the tree tops in the most bio-diverse area on our planet – namely the Osa Peninsula and Corcovado National Park. The Osa is the back yard to the lodge and the largest remaining lowland rainforest on Earth. This unparalleled opportunity for families, non-fishermen, or the adventurous explorer complements a diverse fishery that offers virtually limitless opportunities of catching a dazzling array of many of fly fishing's greatest gamefish. We have worked hard to give the fly angler the rare and exquisite challenge of taking a giant roosterfish on a fly.

A new day has arrived at our lodge to enhance what is one of the finest fisheries on our planet. Conservation practices, supported by us are showing results. It has been 4 years since gill netting for black snook was eliminated and purse seiners driven from our shores. Many inshore and offshore species are thriving like days of old. Noted angler and world class fly tier/developer, Enrico Puglisi, will join me in April, 2016 to improve my successful Boyd's Wounded Baitfish Fly and develop a line of flies to target the most popular species.

Crocodile Bay has three distinct fisheries: 1. Mangroves and rivers, 2. Inshore waters of the Golfo Dulce and the nearby sandy beaches and rocky shores, 3. Offshore.

I. MANGROVES AND RIVERS: The Golfo Dulce has seven rivers flowing into it that resulted in its name, the "sweet gulf." This is by far the least explored and developed fly fishery at the lodge. This fishery is accessed from flats boats. Much of the opportunity here peaks in the rainy season, June through November, which attracts fewer fishermen, although the fishing is excellent. Prime mangrove and river species are black snook (the largest of the snook family), barracuda, numerous jacks headed by Pacific jack crevalle, mangrove snappers, and various other snappers, corvina (similar to weakfish), and of course, roosterfish which like the corvina will frequent the river mouth drop-offs into deep water at the confluence with the gulf. Incredibly, Pacific tarpon are now flourishing since migrating from their natural range in the Atlantic and Caribbean through the Panama Canal and the huge manmade Lake Gatun. Several Pacific tarpon were taken at CBL in 2001. I caught my first Pacific tarpon here in the mouth of the Rio Tigre near the lodge, and another near Mata Palo Rock at the entrance to

the Golfo Dulce. In January of 2003, fishing with Dr. Jeff Simpson, we photographed a school of over 100 tarpon, in the 30 – 35 lb. range, near Carate on the border of Corcovado National Park. The tarpon seemed to be a pre-spawning aggregation and were interacting with several huge Pacific jack crevalle and several massive roosterfish. To my knowledge, this is the first observation of this kind of interaction between alien species. I would give my right arm to be able to get into their minds to see what they were thinking. At that time a few individual tarpon had been documented in the Pacific, but a school of this size was unprecedented. Tarpon represent one of the ocean's most prolific spawners with individual females capable of dropping up to twelve million eggs. You're fishing Valhalla, and these wonderful interlopers show up. Noted CBL Fishing Director Todd Staley reported recently taking the lodge's first Pacific tarpon double. It was with Rapala lures but is an indication of the growing number of tarpon. Todd also reported some time back of fish over 100 lbs. I can only wonder what impact they will have on this incredible fishery in the next few years.

Lagoons: There are several small rivers and lagoons east of Carate that hold large snook. However, it is nearly impossible to access them from water via boat due to their shallow entries and the presence of large waves. They can be accessed by road, then by walking through private property where permission is required. Some of the snook are reported to exceed four feet and attain weights to 75 lbs. or more. These huge blacks are females and the dominant spawners and must be treated with great care, photographed, measured, and released. One of Crocodile's captains reports that locals harpoon large snook in the lagoons at night. The reported size of these fish sounded unbelievable to me until recently I saw what I thought was a shark chasing my fly while fishing with Captain Will Kitsor. It turned out to be a black snook. It veered off before taking my fly, but was simply huge and made a believer out of me. Special arrangements and a surcharge will have to be imposed to arrange this challenge.

Tides: Due to the tide spread (8 – 12 feet), river access can be limited to a three to four hour window of opportunity and less in neap tides, which occur twice a month. In the dry season, mid-November through May, black snook are far up the river channels. The rivers of the Gulf are short and drain the surrounding hills and mountains. They run muddy all year round. They have fairly deep V-shaped channels near the confluence with the Gulf but with wide shallow mouths. Success lies in fishing noisy poppers, sliders, or tube-fly style flies near the river shoreline or with full sink lines and bright, colorful clousers or weighted deceivers on or near the bottom in the river channels with 4-500 grain sinking lines, depending on the depth. Also successful are big noisy flies that push a lot of water and perhaps with a rattle. A Dahlberg diver, Catherwood Giant Killer, or a big whistler are good

choices when fished deep. Upstream, cast cross channel above a good holding spot and let your fly swing with the current and arrive at a good holding spot. Snook are ambush predators and will wait near or behind surface or submerged structure and have the current or flow deliver their meal to them. Without a good current forget fishing for snook. The river mouths hold fish on outgoing tides and can be as muddy as the rivers themselves or gin clear on occasion on the incoming tide. Look for feeding baitfish or check your fish finder for the steep drop-offs that hold many species of fish at times. On the incoming tide, when clear, you can see the steep drop-offs. It may be helpful to chum here or to make some low vibration sounds to help attract fish. Casting hookless chugger-type poppers with a spinning rod is another way of enticing fish to fly casting range.

If possible, I like to time my visit with a "spring tide", where the sun and moon align to promote large tides. Often spring tides can produce fabulous fishing.

Equipment, Flies, and Techniques: The camp record black snook is 46 lbs., on a plug with many fish over 20 lbs. Many of the river species are smaller, however, and an 8 wt. rod is appropriate. At river mouths, go to a 9 wt. for the shallow deltas. Use a 10 wt. for fishing the drop-offs and the shallow foam areas created after a wave breaks on the shore. Often you can see the backs of predators including snook, roosters, and jacks as they cruise the foam looking for prey species trapped there. Use white or light blue popper heads and tube flies with black tails for surface flies. Also try a Lefty's big-eye deceiver in a size 3/0 and 4/0 with black, blue, or green on top and a distinctive yellow stripe at the high lateral line and a white or silver underbelly. This pattern imitates a flatiron and threadfin herring, both primary baitfishes. A sink tip or full sink line is the ticket when fishing drop-offs. Fish right on top of the drop-offs, and parallel to the steep slope. Floaters often work well when coming perpendicular to drop-offs from shallow water. Fish big shrimp patterns when the local shrimp boats are in the gulf. Usually this occurs in April through August and is a good time to catch corvina to 20 lbs. Corvina are beautiful and a wonderful treat at the dinner table, so keep one and have it prepared "Costa Rica style." Shrimpers will often discard waste including heads, which act as a natural chum and attract birds and fish. Fish your shrimp pattern low and slow with short jerky strips.

Keep in mind that snook will never stray far from fresh water, brackish is ok, but remove the fresh and often you remove the snook. The primordial tarpon design allows them to gulp air on the surface. Consequently, they can survive, even thrive, in stagnant backwater that is depleted of oxygen. During daylight hours fish patterns with standard colors; at night

change to a dark color or black as they are more visible to a fish looking up and seeing the fly's silhouette. In cloudy water use bright colors and noisy flies that push a lot of water like Whistlers. A stroll down to Crocodile Bay's dock at night might prove successful, particularly for snook who are active nighttime feeders and hang out next to the lighted water that attracts numerous baitfish like a magnet and provides a feast for the snook to feed on.

II. INSHORE WATERS OF THE GULFE DOLCE AND NEARBY SANDY BEACHES AND ROCKY SHORES.

Much of the waters of the gulf are fairly deep – up to 700 feet. Often billfish, dolphins, whale sharks, and feeding humpback whales are seen in its waters. Most of the opportunity for fly rodders is on the beaches, rocky structures, or shallow reefs. The opportunity to catch a world record size fish is present here every day of the year. The size and diversity of species is astonishing. I once caught a 30 lb. plus bluefin trevally (almost 50% larger than the next biggest IGFA fly rod record) and lost two fly rod-caught roosterfish in the 60 – 70 lb. class to a big white tip shark. It is not uncommon to take a wahoo near shore. Wahoo are generally considered an offshore species, but the CBL waters often drop off very near shore and many deep water species from amberjack, billfish, tuna, and wahoo are taken near shore. The wahoo I've taken were all caught incidentally when fishing for roosters, BFT, Pacific cubera, Jack crevalle, etc. With no wire leaders, I lost over half but lucked out while using long hooked and tandem hooks. The challenge continues with mounds and shallow reefs in the gulf itself. Once fishing inside and using a fish finder we marked a plethora of fish in 50 to 70 feet of water. My guide cringed and asked about spin fishing as the fish were holding near the bottom. I scoffed and dug out a 1,000 grain Tungsten Dredger and tied on a huge Lefty's big eye deceiver. I took five world record sized Pacific Jack crevalle on five successive casts before the tide changed and the fish disbursed.

The Challenge: Wow! This fishing is not for the unskilled or unprepared. The rewards, however, are greater at CBL than anywhere I know of on this planet, but the challenge is also great. The near shore Pacific fishery can be difficult for virtually its entire length south of the Bering Sea to Tierra del Fuego. Generally, the near shore waters become deep very quickly close to shore as is often the case here on the Osa Peninsula. There are not a lot of barrier islands and shallow cays, reefs, and such structure that bless much of the Atlantic all the way out to the Continental shelf. Nor is there the minimal tide change from Massachusetts through the Caribbean that often allows flats wading in green water. The near shore Pacific is a wild beautiful exotic coast that often has to be accessed by boat and boat only. There are so many different species to target one has to choose and target a short list of desired gamefish. It's helpful to target species prior to departure to be

able to bring the proper fly fishing gear and order the appropriate specie fly selection from the lodge.

Tides and Moons: The tides are significant and range from 8 – 12 feet near Crocodile Bay, with intermittent patches of volcanic deposits and rocky stretches of beach that provide structure to attract and hold baitfish and, thus, predators. The moon phase and tide movement becomes strategically important here. Water moves more dramatically nearing a full moon and clear skies under a bright full moon offer extended feeding conditions for many species. In general, on the outgoing tide I like to fish where water drains. For example: where a lagoon drains into the ocean, drop offs, stream or river mouths. On the incoming I fish rocky areas, structured beaches, peninsulas, islands, coves, or points. However, fish are often unpredictable and don't always follow the game plan, especially at places like river mouths, so you take them where you find them. You just play the odds as best you can and be alert for any sign. A good example is BFT, arguably the world's most beautiful gamefish. They loath fresh water. They may be schooling around Matapolo Rock on its confluence with the ocean and as soon as the tide turns and starts the flood, they disappear. It is imperative to study the behavioral patterns of gamefish. For example BFT are territorial and have a home base they patrol, usually within a few miles of shore. However, they leave their guarded waters every day at dawn and dusk to feed in shallow beach waters, often the same shallows. Knowledge of this precise behavioral pattern makes bluefin vulnerable to the wise angler. When fishing these areas always be extremely vigilant of wave action. A rogue wave can appear quickly and unrepentantly.

When fly fishing, always look for a difference, something not quite right, like dimpled or flat water, floating debris, working or resting birds, etc. Fish every edge, like a color change, suddenly cloudy water, a current edge (currents run like rivers in the Gulf and Pacific), a foam or tide line, an eddy or undertow, etc. Always be on the alert for baitfish, surface activity, birds working, nervous water, slicks etc. Glass the water, and always move until you find feeding fish. If the fish are moving in a particular pattern, intercept them and fish as they approach you, and drift into them with stealth.

Beginners: The beginner can fly fish here, but often not conforming to IGFA regulations. Beginners can troll flies using a swivel so as not to ruin their fly line, or short cast and let the boat's momentum carry their fly a good distance behind the boat before beginning their strip. These methods are forbidden in IGFA regulations, but are extremely productive and fun. Another good area for beginners or advanced anglers to explore are the shallow reefs inside the Gulf. There are several large shallow reefs that harbor good numbers of jacks, various snappers and groupers, roosterfish,

and the like. Reefs to depths of 10 feet or so are located throughout the Gulf. A few of my favorites include the one near the confluence of the Tigre River and another south of the lodge near Parrot Bay. Fish this type of water with 300 grain sinking lines and vary your flies from deceivers to crab, shrimp, and squid patterns until you find success. Also try poppers, sliders, and crease flies on a floating line. Beginners or novices should practice casting with floating and weighted fly lines as much as possible prior to their visit. Also practice while at the lodge, and of course, there's no better way of improving than doing it. Ask your captain or mate for advice, or if there is a professional around like myself, ask for help.

IGFA Standards: For those who wish to fish to IGFA standards, however, the challenge is great. Long casts from a boat to shore are often required. Your fishing boat must stay far enough offshore so as not to make it part of the beach structure by a rogue wave. Surf action may often keep you off balance. It sounds tough and often is, but God do I love it! This is fly fishing's greatest challenge and not for the faint of heart. It takes determination and a love of the sport to test your will and skill. Ideally, your fly should land in the white foam aftermath of a dispelled wave and be stripped up the face of the next incoming wave to be most successful when blind casting. If you can't reach the foam, fish as close to shore as possible while remaining at a safe distance. Choose effective areas when doing this. For example, differences in the shoreline, i.e. draining lagoons or rivers, rocky structure or outcroppings, coves where baitfish can be trapped, where outgoing undertows are present, or productive areas your captain knows of. Often you can see abrupt color changes or cloudy water indicating severe changes of depth or turbidity, or a flat spot indicating an underwater rock. Always watch for surface activity, high flying Man of War birds, sitting or working birds, oil slicks, nervous water. NOTE: See diagram for IGFA standard leader and consult the IGFA yearly publication for rules governing fly fishing.

Roosterfish (El Gallo) on the Fly: The key near shore target fish is "el gallo" – the roosterfish. Roosters are notorious feeders and can be enticed to the surface. In my opinion, catching a large rooster on a fly is the sport's greatest challenge. They are not only the hardest fish to hook on a fly (until recently), but are extraordinarily difficult to land once hooked. One nice incentive to surface fishing for roosters is that many other species will take your fly. Testing my Boyd's Wounded Baitfish pattern at CBL where it was developed, I caught thirteen different species over a two-day period. Since, I've added numerous additional species including sailfish and understand numerous Atlantic species have recently been caught by a friend.

I've also heard it said that only a handful of top fly anglers have caught a good-sized rooster on a fly utilizing IGFA regulations. I don't doubt that one bit. For many years I tried unsuccessfully to master catching big roosters from the shallows of Ecuador to Cabo San Lucas. Big coastal Pacific roosters are a bird of a different feather and very difficult to catch indeed. Nowhere I'm aware of has more large specimens of this incredible warrior than Crocodile Bay. I caught the only large IGFA rooster several years back, but only through sheer stubbornness and determination and five straight tiring days of casting. Pacific roosters are more challenging than those from the protected waters of Baja, and fight much harder. I believe the challenging vigor's of coastal Pacific tides and currents and the abundance of formidable predators produce a tougher more wary fish than more secluded area like Baja.

The Plan For A New Fly: No one had been successful at Crocodile Bay for over three years in catching a big rooster with IGFA regs, nor any of the other lodges from Ecuador to Baja. This was extremely perplexing as roosters are so common, visible, and available - like right near the CBL docks. It took me two days of non-stop casting to catch the first good fish there using a fly I had designed five years earlier, made with EZ body material. However, on that trip, with the help of Crocodile Bay's Fishing Director, Todd Staley, and their experienced captains and mates, we devised a plan. We captured all the significant prevailing baitfish in the area including google eye scad, blanquitos, blue runners, mullet, and several varieties of sardines. We photographed and discussed the availability and characteristics of the baitfish. The sardine was chosen as the most likely candidate for our fly. It was abundant and when herded by roosterfish, they fled to the surface. In fact, the locals call the threadfin herring "sardines de los gallos," the sardines of the roosterfish.

Using photographs, some taken under water, definitive characteristics of the fly emerged. A sardine's shape and distinctive profile, its very large eyes, a darkly colored, widely separated tail, and a bright yellow band above the lateral line, plus femoral blotches of black and pink. The colors above the lateral line were dark - black, dark blue, light blue and green. Bellies were white or silver. Its dorsal fin was distinctive and yellow. The Boyd Wounded Baitfish Fly encompassed all of these characteristics save the black dorsal fin. The "wounded baitfish" had a thin piece of foam inserted in the EZ body material to aid in keeping the fly on top of the water. If correctly made, it should swim when stripped slowly, and bounce and skip on top when retrieved quickly, the latter being the preferred method.

With this fly, over 50 (mostly large) roosters were enticed to rise to it in one spectacular day. Only six were landed, as there were many refusals and the

prototype hook was much too small. Never had I envisioned this much success. Size 5/0 and 6/0 Gamakatsu and Owner hooks replaced the original 2/0.

Success: Seeing a roosterfish attack a surface fly is one of fly fishing's greatest rewards. They can light up like a yellow school bus, chartreuse, and purple – their long unique black comb breaking the surface. Roosters have huge bucket mouths and terrorize baitfish like no other. When the water world erupts with fleeing baitfish the captain and mates invariably yell "Gallo! Gallo!"

Landing a big Pacific coastal rooster is another tough challenge. They have little or no quit. I teach fighting techniques that allow the angler a chance to land this tireless adversary. Many of the techniques are blue water and large tarpon tactics, but any way you do it, you're in for one hell of a fight. Roosters will run and run and occasionally jump. If you don't use proper tactics or give them slack you won't land them. They have to be thoroughly resuscitated after the grueling fight or you risk having them not recover. Roosters leave little or none of their energy on the table, in fact they will fight to the death or close to it, so proper handling is a must. CBL strongly recommends catch and release for this mighty warrior.

Other Available Species: Another beautiful exotic fish of the area is the bluefin trevally, locally called blue jack. This exquisite fish is cobalt blue with sky blue markings. It is caught in much the same manner as roosters, although trevallies, jacks, and snappers readily take offerings deeper in the water column than roosters. Other inshore species include jack crevalle and amberjacks plus many other jacks, various snappers, including giant cubera, Colorado, yellow tail, and rock, and many groupers, including tiger, broom tail, and gag, and horse eye trevally, hound fish, bonito, several species of mackerel, yellow fin, wahoo, African pompano, barracuda, Pacific tarpon, and so on. In fact, I've caught a few "what the heck is that?" fish here.

Other interesting fish available near shore, particularly under floating debris like groups of floating coconuts, logs, or tide line debris is the tripletail and mahi mahi. Both of these fish are tough customers and are determined fighters and will often jump, particularly the mahi mahi. A sardines de los gallos, colored Deceiver or Clouser works well although these species are unsophisticated and will strike almost any offering top or down. Cast into or as close as possible to the debris.

General Game Plan: Bring the best equipment you can afford. You'll need good gear to successfully challenge this fishery. Be prepared with quality rods and reels and properly maintained equipment including: new or cleaned

and stretched fly lines, a good selection of leaders and tippets, metal from American Wire or mono shock tippets in 40# and 80 to 100# fluorocarbon. It's important to be prepared with as many different rods and lines as possible to cover different situations. When I venture out, I put string on 5 or 6 rods. I'll take an 8 wt. with a floating line and a small popper slider or crease fly selection for schooling Pacific bonito. I'll use a 9 wt. with a warm water clear intermediate with 3 – 4 inch Deceiver patterns (preferred coloration like the sardine or blanquito) for rocky shore areas frequented by various snappers, jacks, trevally, and snook. I'll take two 10 weights, one with a WF floating line (shooting head) and a Boyd's Wounded Baitfish Fly for roosters, big jacks or whatever. The second 10 wt. is loaded with 300 to 500 grain line and fished with a short tippet of 3 – 4' and a Lefty's big eye deceiver (imitating a sardine, blue runner, google eye, etc., coloration often with some pink in it). Many of the jacks, trevally, snappers, grouper, and mackerel plus Wahoo like this presentation – particularly around agitated schools of baitfish or dead-drifted on some of the long runs on the outgoing. Additionally, I fish a long, 10 ft. leader with my BWBF pattern, to cast to sandy beaches from a skiff near shore (100 ft. or so) off the beach so as not to be deposited on the shore, and let the fly flop around in the wave foam aftermath to catch roosters and sometimes other species.

I prefer an 11 wt. with a floating line and big wounded baitfish, chugger or tube style fly (blue over white with yellow stripe), or match the hatch, to be used around large schools of agitated baitfish. When fishing in pairs, one fisherman can use a chugger/tube setup while the other the wounded baitfish fly.

Lastly, if possible, I'll use a 12 weight with a heavy full sink line of 600 to 1,000 grain in conjunction with a big squid pattern like Popovics's Shady Lady Squid, Cotton Candy or a huge 10 – 12 inch big eyed deceiver with bright yellow feathers, or one of Puglisi's monster flies in the appropriate colors. Fish the 12 weight over medium depth reefs up to 70 or 80 feet. Fish the squid by casting out as far as possible, wait a for your line to sink near or on the targeted bottom area, then make two or three quick yard-long strips, then pause, let the fly drop and repeat the action. Fish the big deceiver low and slow with occasional quick strips and then let it sink and repeat. Often you'll get strikes on the drop so keep your rod down, pointed directly at your fly for a good hook setting position. You can fish deeper than this if your fish finder shows a good population of fish. Your boat must be fairly stationary, either dead drifting or with a sea anchor. Use large circle hooks 4/0 to 6/0 at depths below 70 feet in conjunction with Rio's "Tungsten Dredger" fly lines or use no-stretch, gel spun backing with Cortland's Lead Core line in 15 to 25 foot or more lengths to get down to where the fish are. At depths it's important to use thin braided line rather than Dacron backings

to keep in touch with your fly and be able to set the hook with no stretch. Fishing deep I often strip set the fly.

Equipment: I strongly recommend quality rods like a Scot, Sage, T & T, or Loomis. The 4 piece rods make the restrictive flight regulations more bearable. Also, strong but light reels with outstanding drags like the Islander, Tibor, or Pate. Large arbor models aid in quicker landings and make it easier for the angler and fish alike. Dual mode (SeaMaster) or anti reverse (Islander) reels are also well adapted for these conditions. Make sure your reels are clean and oiled. For bargain priced but top performance try a TFO rod from Springbrook and their TFO ATL (Atoll) reels. Having equipment failure when you have a once in a lifetime fish on is not a fun thing. Crocodile Bay has some equipment available but should be considered as a backup source. Call in advance to check what fly fishing tackle is available in weights you might want to use.

Fly line extensions and leaders and tippets: I use a 40 lb. Fluorocarbon shock tippet as a general rule. It's virtually invisible when a fish is looking up. Using a fluoro shock is important even for the toothless rooster, whose sandpaper like mouth will easily wear through even quality 20 lb. mono during a hard fight. Use 80 lb. hard Mono or fluorocarbon, when targeting Pacific tarpon. For snappers or jacks, I prefer fluoro to wire; you'll break some fish off but generally land more than with wire. American Wire has a really great selection from strait stainless to camo coated wire. If you're targeting cuberas, however, wire is a must, as their first move is into a protective cave or outcropping and they'll break you off. For WF floating lines, I like Cortland's looped ends and sometimes will add a clear poly extension (10'), or, if stealth is paramount as for roosters, fish their floating Liquid Crystal line. Often I'll just use a loop to loop with a 5 foot section of 50# mono with a 3 foot section of 30# and a 15 inch section of line class tippet and a 12 inch tippet of 40# fluoro. Tie the 40# fluoro to the line class with a blood or improved blood knot.

Hook set: For roosters try to set the hook immediately. As an alternative, or if less experienced, use a circle hook. Make sure you have a high quality but thin wire hook to penetrate a concrete maw. With lesser hooks be prepared to have it straightened out. It is extremely important to have a razor sharp point. When you set the hook, try to do it at as close to a 90-degree angle on the fish as possible. This gives you the power of utilizing the strength of the rod butt.

Fighting techniques: It is imperative to fight roosters with a low rod. Even though the modern fly rods are far more powerful than a decade or two ago, a high rod still lacks the power required to pressure these incredibly strong

warriors. I use low rod tactics almost exclusively in the Pacific. I have added many of Stu Apte's down and dirty tactics when fighting roosters, getting cubera away from their hideouts, and tarpon away from cover. One specific tactic that helps bring a tarpon to bear quickly is not allowing them to roll and gulp air since this reinvigorates them. Always fight your quarry from as close as possible so you can exert more pressure and defeat your quarry sooner, thus releasing it in better shape than with a prolonged battle. However, sometimes you're in for the long haul, no matter what. Fish, like people, are individuals and differ greatly from one to another. Some are ready to hang it up more quickly and others are likely to battle up to and including death. All the big roosters I've had the pleasure to dance with were in the latter group. Stand at a 90-degree angle to the fish you're fighting, keep the rod down near the water, and point the last 5 or 6 feet of the rod directly at the fish. This allows you to battle the fish with the power of the rod butt. Roosters have no quit, neither can you. Change the direction of your angle of pressure by rotating your rod every few minutes – this technique assumes you have some sort of shock tippet. This and other "down and dirty" tactics will help you psychologically defeat the fish, land him more quickly, and keep you off the masseuse's table.

Handling fish: Boga grips are recommended for most species as they have good sets of ivories. However, I don't like to lift them out of the water with a Boga. Use a heavy glove and both hands to lift or to handle species such as roosterfish. Basically the rules are catch and release except for the unusual trophy, although sometimes I keep a yellow fin for sushi or a mahi mahi or snapper for dinner. Billfish and roosters should be for photos only. Release tuna/mackerel species by holding them above the water and dropping them in headfirst. Hold others by the tail and while supporting their belly, in a comfort lift, gently rock them back and forth until they are ready to swim off.

Seasons: Fish are available year round at CBL, subject to moving in response to spawning or migratory baitfish, shrimp, squid etc., or in the case of snook which are not accessible during the dry season except when caught incidentally. However, roosters seem to bunch up more and cooperate in herding baitfish from around mid-November through April. Big fish are also here year-round, but it seems the average size is somewhat larger in the rainy season.

III. OFFSHORE: After all is said and done, I believe the best quality fly fishing for billfish is in Pacific Costa Rica from Punta Quinones south to the Panama border. Other Central American areas can be more prolific at times, but for smaller fish, on smaller boats, in rougher seas and further offshore. At Crocodile Bay and for miles north and south of there, the blue water

billfish grounds are only a few miles offshore. Offshore is really close to shore. This means several things: a shorter boat ride and therefore more fishing time, the ability to split days from offshore to inshore, because of the generally steep shoreline it is a rarity to lose a fishing day to wind, particularly in the most popular dry months. The near shore deep water also makes migrating blue, black, and striped marlin plus sailfish available to augment the billfish endemic to the area. Crocodile Bay's 33 foot Strikes are fast, sleek, comfortable fishing machines and are the only boats in the area with tuna towers.

The billfish: Southern Costa Rica's sailfish are the largest sails I've encountered since first catching a smaller Atlantic sail in the Caribbean in 1969. They average a solid 100 lbs. Sails and marlin are present 12 months of the year and to quote fishing director Todd Staley, "the fishing can vary more day to day than season to season." However, there are times when the chance of catching a marlin improves on average due to migration patterns. For example, blues are more prevalent in March and April, while blacks and stripes are more common in July and August.

Sailfish chances are in the 10 to 15 sighted fish on an average day and twice that, or more, on a good day. Billfish "ups" are counted if one is sighted in the teaser spread. Often multiple fish are sighted. In Costa Rica I've seen pods of as many as 10 sails immediately behind the boat within easy casting range. On another occasion I looked on with awe at a pod of nine fish, including two blue marlin.

Sails are a lot easier to hook than marlin. First they're far more plentiful as they are among the most prolific spawners of all fish. Additionally, they are also far more aggressive than any marlin species. Usually you only get one shot at a marlin; if you miss him, he's history. You usually have to be quicker with your fly presentation as well. Marlin don't usually hang around, although I've seen a number of exceptions. I've seen sails, lit up like a Christmas tree, attack a fly repeatedly. I've seen 4 sails hooked out of one pod of fish - these fish hung around the drifting boat for many minutes. On one occasion my fishing partner broke off a big record class sail on a blue and white popper fly and then 15 minutes later I caught the same fish on a red and white offering and retrieved both flies. Now that's cooperation for you. So sails have great hearts but are not the brightest bulb.

Marlin average sizes are about 200 - 350 lbs. for blues, 400 for blacks, (Granders - 1,000 lbs. or more are known in these waters), and 150 - 300 lbs. for striped. The average number of sightings for all types of marlin/day is one. The lodge record is 4 in a half-day session. This was on conventional tackle, but where else could such a feat as this be

accomplished in a half day. Marlin to 250-300 lbs. offer the fly rodder a good shot at landing a fish if proper tactics are employed.. An expert fly fisherman who is prepared and has good equipment and a solid game plan can catch larger fish. Once I put a fly in the maw of a black of about 700 lbs., but unfortunately, I was armed only with an 11 wt. rod, a smallish Streamline 3N reel, and an IGFA 12 lb. class tippet. I gave the big boy a run for his money, though, before losing him. Had I had one of the new larger arbor reels and two or three times the backing, who knows? I have landed a 340 lb. blue and 240 lb. black out of CBL using a 20 and 16 lb. class lines respectively. IGFA line class setup. The weights were estimated by measurement and the estimated weigh formula.

Other offshore species: In addition to billfish, there are opportunities for many other blue water species. The "catch 22" however is that if you only have hookless teasers and feathers out when fly fishing, you're not in a position to catch most other non-schooling species. If you happen to be trolling your teasers very quickly you may scare up an occasional wahoo. If you have a plan and are ready for schooling species that are visible on the surface from a distance, like yellow fin tuna, you can replace a teaser with a Wounded Baitfish Fly and catch some sushi. Beginners can troll this fly but make sure you use a swivel or you can ruin your fly line. Advanced anglers can just be prepared to slow down or stop to cast when a species other than a billfish show up in your teasers or near cover. I've done this many times and on several occasions caught big yellow fin or big eye tuna on light tackle that was more than I bargained for. I've also caught non-billfish species while casting to sailfish including a 61 lb. Yellow fin on a 16# tippet and several Dorado. The best shot for Dorado, however, is to stop and cast for them near floating debris or to troll with conventional light tackle and after catching one, shut down the engine, keep the hooked mahi mahi in the water until others in the same harem will stay in the area to be caught. As long as one fish stays active in the water the others will not leave. A lone bull dolphin, the one with the flat head, travels with his harem of females. The bigger the individual fish, the fewer in number. At Crocodile Bay the mahi mahi grow to awesome proportions. While available year round they are particularly abundant December through February. During this time a catch of 20 fish/day averaging 25 lbs. is common. The first mahi mahi I saw taken here weighed 78 lbs. and they are known to go over 100 lb. Mahi mahi are a cinch to catch once you locate them. They'll attack virtually any baitfish imitation on top or down and their aerial contortionist antics are a sheer delight.

Yellow fin tuna are abundant here in all sizes and range from a football to over 300 lbs. On occasion, big eye tuna are also taken up to 300 lbs. Tuna, along with mahi mahi are the primary food staple for marlin. Often various

bottle nosed dolphin run with schools of tuna and are a great sign for billfish. A good opportunity arises when yellow fin school to feed on small squid or schools of herring. Birds, mostly gulls and boobies, announce their presence for long distances. When approaching these situations make your decision, fly or conventional tackle! Man of War birds (frigates), also often indicate the presence of baitfish from afar - they are a good sign for billfish.

Preparation: Crocodile Bay's captains and mates are well versed in fly fishing blue water with regard to boat preparation, tactics, the number and type of teasers (up to four or five), teaser colors to use and how to position them. The angler must decide what role he wants to play with regard to teasing the fish. He can help tease the fish himself or defer to the mate and or captain who are experts. Being able to properly tease a fish to within casting range of the boat is as important as any individual aspect of catching a billfish. Other teaser rods must be handled with co-ordination and teamwork that is predetermined according to the number, skill, and desires of the angler. Talk to your captain and mate and create a plan of action so you all know in advance what your individual responsibilities are. Make sure all items that might catch a fly line are covered with a wet towel or taped up. Clear the deck on the side you cast from. Put 6" or so of water in the bottom of a 5 gallon bucket and cast your fly into the water to about 40 ft. Strip your fly line back while coiling it into the bucket. That way you avoid tangles and the line you put in last comes out first. Put as much of your fly line outside your last rod guide, about 16 ft., and hold your fly hook between your fingers with the barbless hook pointed outward from your fingers. I almost never cast more than 40 feet and try to cast slightly beyond the targeted fish.

Equipment: As with the inshore equipment, get the best you can afford, Scott, Sage, Loomis and T & T. In January of 2003, I landed a big sailfish on a Scott 10 wt STS in 9 or 10 minutes using a 16# class tippet and my Boyd's Wounded Baitfish Fly while fishing with senior Captain Lindor Elizondo and his son. I did this to demonstrate what can be accomplished with a quality rod and proper fighting techniques. Later I landed another big sail in 5 or 6 minutes using Scotts new S3S, at the time, 4 pc. 12 wt. When fly fishing offshore I'll prepare six rods if possible. If I only have one it will be for my primary target species. For mahi mahi: string a 10 wt. rod with a floating line and a small popper, slider, or small wounded baitfish fly on about a 2/0 hook. A clear intermediate line will probably take more fish with a small clouser or deceiver but isn't as much fun. For smaller yellow fin an 11 wt. is a good choice. Even small yellow fin are fast, hard fighters. Small baitfish patterns work well on intermediate, sink tip, or 300 to 400 grain lines.

For sailfish: Catching your first sailfish is very easy and very difficult. Easy if you do what you are taught. Difficult, as you are in such a state of excitement, with a 10-foot animal trashing your fly with his bill 20 feet from your face that you somehow can't even chew gum right. This is truly a totally electric moment, one to cherish for the rest of your life. A 12 wt. rod is the ticket for the experienced angler. I prefer to have three sail rods ready, if possible, with different colored flies. Many, including beginners, prefer to use heavier rods to a 14 or 15 wt. for the really big sails here. Catching a world record fish is a definite possibility. On two separate occasions I landed back-to-back record sailfish here, I released all four fish after taking their measurements and photos.

For marlin: A 14 or 15 wt. is your best choice. Cam Sigler offers perhaps the finest marlin rod I've ever used. All reels must be large arbor with good smooth drags: Islander, Tibor, Pate and TFO ATL. I like to load about 500 yds. of 35 or 50 lb. Gel-spun as the base for backing. I loop this (with a Bimini twist) to about 30 yds. of 30 lb. flat Dacron braided backing and then loop again onto a blue water WF fly line or a length of Cortland's lead core of from 18 to 28 feet depending on how big the fly is you're casting and the size of the rod. Novices can use a straight 30 lb. mono leader with a 24" length of 80 or 100 lb. shock tippet or a prepared IGFA standard leader.

Billfish flies: There are a number of excellent billfish flies. Cam Sigler Co., at www.camsigler.com, has a good selection of flies with his tube heads and Owner tandem hooks. Cam just put his new marlin fly on the market. It has been in research and development for about two years and is a marlin killer for sure. It is hot pink which my research indicates is the top color for both sails and marlin. Enrico Puglisi also has some beauties at www.epflies.com. Quality, sharp, tandem hooks offset at different angles is crucial. Enrico also has all the finest materials required to tie your own and pre-tied as well. Boyd's Wounded Baitfish Fly is being improved by Enrico and will be available in the near future directly from him or on site at Crocodile Bay Lodge. Keep in mind the materials and finished offshore flies required for billfish and/or roosterfish are expensive.

I have taught blue water fly fishing for over three decades and believe sometimes color patterns can make a difference in flies. For sailfish, I have a great deal of confidence in flies that are red or pink over white; blue over white, dark pink over light pink. My #1 choice is a darker pink over a lighter pink. For marlin or sails I will fish any of the above but also like green and yellow (dorado colors) especially for marlin. If possible, I like to co-ordinate my fly and skirt colors.

It is critical that flies have thin but super strong sharp hooks. A hook is sharp when it cannot be firmly dragged across your fingernail without digging in. You need a strong, thin gauge, barbless hook to penetrate the concrete maw of these great predators.

The game plan: Make a plan with your captain and mate as to how you want things done. Who's up first, who's next? Usually what constitutes an up is a legitimate chance to cast to a billfish and he tries to eat your fly. If you miss, you're done – next angler. If the billfish doesn't attack and try to eat the fly, you're still up.

Determine how many teasers and the type, and assign who's to man each of the teasers. For example if you're targeting marlin you might want to use a whole rigged black fin tuna or a good sized mahi mahi belly bait as your primary teaser. Whereas, for smaller sailfish, a rigged ballyhoo and smaller belly bait, or rigged sardine or mullet with a skirt might do the trick, particularly if color coordinated with your fly. Often I like to color coordinate teasers and skirts, particularly with marlin, so your fly looks somewhat like the teaser when you present it to him. Have several rods rigged, two or three for sailfish, one for marlin – or more if you're targeting marlin with big teasers and belly baits.

Fishing techniques: Discuss with your captain if you want to fish IGFA regulations or not. There is a better chance of setting a record here on billfish than anywhere else I know of. If fishing IGFA regs, the engines must be in neutral before you can cast. Cast slightly behind your billfish but near their head. I always try to cast to the side of the billfish that they're heading, and behind. Billfish have peripheral vision and see and hear the fly. By casting in this manner you can get an angle going away, and set the hook in the opposite direction the fish is swimming to. This improves your chances of getting your hook set in the corner of the mouth. All billfish have mouths like concrete. They have a small soft area in the top front of the mouth and a very narrow band circling the mouth. Except for these tiny areas, and you have almost no chance of gaining a purchase there, you have to set the hook in the corner of the mouth.

Strip set the hook hard several times until the fish starts to jump or run. If he jumps quickly drop your rod tip into the water to reduce your chance of breaking your line, a technique called bowing to the fish. When he runs, let him go. Often sails or marlin will jump or greyhound across the surface at over 60 mph. They are among the ocean's fastest swimmers. Let them go. Jumping tires them by knocking the air out of their lungs on impact. Always keep your rod low when fighting billfish. Never raise your rod up high as many of us have been taught. Always try to stay as close to the fish as

possible. Believe me, sometimes it is really difficult with the speed of these fleet creatures. Just try to remember that the closer you are the more pressure and control you can exert on your quarry. It doesn't make a whit of difference trying to apply pressure at 400 yards. When the billfish is done with his run, he'll go down. Back down on him – tighten your drag and put the wood to him. Side angle him with a low rod then change pressure directions. Repeat this process. It discourages them psychologically and makes them give up earlier. When they run again, let them and repeat the process. This way, you can drastically cut your fighting time for sails to under 30 minutes, often to under 15 minutes, if you're good at it.

Clinics and Tournaments: I will periodically run hands-on "how-to" clinics at Crocodile Bay for inshore and offshore fly fishing keyed specifically to the new tactics and flies I have developed for the lodge with the help of Fishing Director Todd Staley and its able captains and mates. These clinics will allow you to catch more fish on a fly in this or any other location. The next open dates will be announced in the near future. The Clinics are centered around PowerPoint presentations and hands-on demonstrations. The Clinics last about an hour and are held in the early evening prior to dinner in the beautiful conference center. I'll also answer any questions related to any aspect of the three distinctive fly fisheries at Crocodile Bay. We are also analyzing the possibility of organizing a roosterfish or a CBL grand slam event - catching a combination of 3 or 4 of the following species: roosterfish, bluefin trevally, tarpon, Jack crevalle and black snook.

Lastly, you can discuss any specific interests or goals with Fishing Director Todd Staley who is extremely well qualified on Costa Rican waters with over two decades of running fishing camps there. Todd spends time each evening of your stay reviewing and organizing a customized schedule to meet your needs.

In Tom Boyd's *Saltwater's Greatest Gamefish, Techniques and Tactics to Catch the Top 35 Species*, he provides much more detail on how to catch the top gamefish available at Crocodile Bay. It is available through Amazon and Stackpole Books.

Contact Dave Kanski for CBR reservations or future Clinic dates at [1-800-733-1115](tel:1-800-733-1115)