



the tight line®

Vol 8, Part 1

THE TIGHT LINE

VOLUME 8 PART 1

It has been a fair while since the last Tight Line Emag was produced; as with many things in our hectic day to day lives, it had dropped off our radar for a while. We did not however, stop going fishing (thankfully) and although some of our trips have had some ups and downs, we are glad to be able to present some of them here.

For those who haven't seen The Tight Line before, it is the creative outlet for the crew involved with the fishing tackle store, Fish Head. For the rest, welcome back and sorry we stayed away so long!

In this issue you will find stories of adventure in Socotra and a pictorial documenting South East Queensland's emerging carp fishery. In Part 2 of Vol 8, you will find red bass, black bass, spot tail bass, Australian bass and.. Murray cod!

Cheers

Duncan O'Connell

SOCOTRA	6
FRIEND OR FOE	34
THE HYBRID WORM	42



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SOCOTRA

PARADISE INTERRUPTED

“That little bay up the back, can you see it?” I called out to Dirk.

“By that school of milkies?” he replied, gesturing to the daisy chain of milkfish slurping their way along a current line up ahead.

“Nah, right against the shore, that’s a little bunch of Fusi’s”. I pointed again to an otherwise flat pocket of water further into the bay.

Wedged between the rocky mountain on one side and a sea full of raging currents and monstrous predators on the other, a small school of fusiliers were clinging to the flat water, hoping that they could go unnoticed. Dirk nodded dubious approval; I could sense he was more inclined to head back to the boiling current on the point where we had just landed two nice GTs, but I had a good feeling about this spot.



I motioned to Saed, the driver, to push us further up into the calm bay, then cut the motor and slowly drift in. The current was pretty minimal in the back of the bay and only a gentle breeze was pushing us on towards the patch of nervous water clinging to the shoreline. We let fly with casts; simultaneously the poppers slapped down on the water, just metres from shore. Fusiliers spooked and showered against the rocks like they were attempting to grow legs and climb onto the land. Instantly, I got that special, sixth sense tingling feeling when you just know there is a big fish close by your lure.

One bloop... two bloops and whoomp! My popper was engulfed. Not the splashy, messy airborne kind of strike; but a half body out of the water, proper inhalation that was full of angry intent. There was weight immediately, but I struck hard several times nonetheless to make sure the giant single hook was well planted. The fish reacted by diving hard for the bottom and heading back to the deeper water. I jumped up and crossed from my narrow casting position at the bow of the longboat, over the bench seats and back

down to the stable mid-section in record time. For once, with no major structure or crazy current I could actually enjoy the fight. The trevally ran hard and fast, tearing line off the big Saltiga like the heavy drag meant absolutely nothing. It is an amazing feeling being attached to



a huge out-of-control fish, even better knowing that it was burning off a heap of energy running out in open water. I hoped the GT would leave nothing in reserve for slugging it out straight under the boat. My poor suffering lower back could do with some respite! After the

first big run, the fish came in deceptively easily for a time, before taking off on a second big run. Then the GT began to use its bulk to hang deep in the water, turning side-on to maximise the effect. Now my muscles were really starting to ache and the rod was at full load – line



singing a high pitched tune in the breeze, but the fish was slowly surrendering to the pressure. My back, arms and even fingers were all on fire, screaming at me to stop as I pumped the fish a few last metres to the surface. Lying spent beside the boat, Dirk grabbed the tail, while I

held on the leader. We marvelled at the gleaming monster for a few seconds, then we prepared to lift the trevally into the boat. It took a couple of attempts, but we finally got it aboard the boat safely for photos before a quick release. I was elated! A massive 40kg beast of a fish: broad shouldered, tall silver-grey sides and an armoured tail wrist that you can't get your hand around.

Two days later, we all sat together on the deck of the Sambuca (a local trading boat) as we began our journey back to the main island of Socotra, then on to Sana'a and our homes scattered around the globe. The sun had just set and we were laying out our sleeping mats for the overnight passage. We were all pretty shattered from a week of heavy tackle GT popping, but we still had another day back on Socotra to plot the downfall of some big bonefish at a lagoon nearby to our hotel.

While discussing fly tactics, Laurent, the Swiss contingent of the team poked his head up from the lower deck, satellite phone in hand.

“Guys, I think have a problem. The Saudis have bombed the airport in Sana’a.”

So how did we end up in this situation? My interest in Socotra had been brewing for some time as every season, a new batch of photos would splash across my computer screen of what was billed as adventure fishing for the world’s biggest GTs in the wildest island location imaginable. This sort of teaser pretty much ticks all the boxes for me: adventure, wild location, and monster

giant trevally – tick, tick, tick! When one of our long-time customers Guillaume mentioned he would be guiding there the following year I really began to think seriously about making the trip. Once a few more pictures arrived via email of extraordinarily large GTs - with an amazing backdrop of desert mountains rising out of the sea, I was hooked.

Logistically, going to the island of Socotra presented some problems. Its location, 500km south of the coast of Yemen and Oman is but one of them. Another is that it is part of Yemen, one of the poorest countries of the Middle East and also the subject of several coups, insurgencies and tribal wars over recent history. Socotra in contrast to the rest of

the country is quite peaceful; politically neutral compared to other parts of the region and operates more or less as an independent state. In recent times, a group from the northern part of the Yemen called the Houthis staged a coup and were in control of Sana’a; the capital city on the mainland. Travel in Yemen was not recommended by some, but after talking to the trip organisers along with several anglers who have been to Socotra in recent times, everything seemed to be settling down. News reports also had life returning to normal in the capital, tourists were returning, embassies reopening and politicians were in talks again. The itinerary for our trip was to fly in to the capital Sana’a,

overnight there and travel on to Socotra the next day. From the main island of Socotra we would board a local trading boat and travel overnight to the outer islands where our fishing camp would be based. I held off making the final decision for some time, but after the first group of the season returned from the island with mind boggling reports of monster fish and no issues with travel, we were on!

Organising gear for the trip was an interesting event. Much of the tackle I would usually pack for a GT trip was considered too light for fishing Socotra. Recommended lures started at large 150g models and went through to enormous 220g+ monsters that can break both an



anglers back and spirit in a short space of time. The main reasons being that many of the fish need to be called up from deep water to strike, and the lures need to float the massive hooks that are needed to consistently land XXL trevally. Unlike most popping trips where I promise myself that I am going to get fit beforehand (and then do nothing of the sort), for this expedition I actually spent some time preparing with weights. Nowhere near as much as I should of mind you, but a whole lot more prep than I have done for any other trip in memory.

I loaded up with PE 8, 10 and 12 outfits on the trip. I never ended up using the PE8 (100lb) line, and if I was going again I would just run PE12 (150-170lb) braid on every GT outfit. This may seem way over the top (I certainly thought so at first) and I physically can't pull any extra drag on this line than I normally would. However, when you spend a week hooking 30-60kg fish on popping gear, every little part of your system is stretched to the maximum. A small nick in the braid can have disastrous consequences

for your chances of landing the fish of a lifetime. Tackle wear is further accelerated by casting the heavy lures all day long. In the choppy conditions it is not unusual for the line to clip the roughed-up timber gunnels of the boat and during fights it is pretty common to see two anglers teamed up, struggling to hold a rod off the side of the boat as they charge through a washing machine of currents and waves after a rampaging fish. In short; if it can break, it will. On one day I managed to lose two 40kg+ fish in two casts – first one pulled the hook after a short battle and when I cast back into the whirlpool in which we were sitting, an even bigger fish climbed all over my Patriot 205 Masterd Bomb. I set the hook extra hard with a straight pull – making up for the previous effort and the 170lb braid cracked like a shot! Probably a nick in the line or maybe a small wind knot - I'll never know, but these are the things that can and do happen.

Another interesting gear choice was using assist cord as a bite leader. It is usual when popping to use leader from 150

-250lb, to cope with the sharp gill plates, tail scutes and tremendous jaw power of the GT. Giant Trevally lack cutting teeth, but they still find ways to destroy heavy leaders. On a previous trip I have even had 300lb mono worn through by a monster fish during a long fight! There are a number of popular leader systems among popping aficionados but one I hadn't tried until this trip is to use a regular leader of 200lb mono attached to a short 30cm length of 330lb Kevlar assist cord in front of the lure. This looks ungainly and will probably never gain acceptance in more hard fished areas where fish are wary, but it sure does work on monster fish! It also has the added bonus of not putting the fish off like wire tends to do. The islands we fished were packed with big Spanish mackerel, as well as the GTs and no-one lost a lure to bite offs all week, despite regular attacks from the toothy critters.



XL single hooks were favoured in Socotra for strength and durability



A selection of trip survivors from Patriot Design, FCL Labo, ASWB and Glide



The trip into Yemen proved to be quite uneventful and the flight into the capital, Sana'a was surprisingly busy. The flight comprised a mixture of locals, Chinese and Russian businessmen along with a couple of Australian aid workers. Our hotel for the stay in the capital was in the centre of the Old City, an amazing network of narrow lane ways lined with 500 year old buildings. Sana'a is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth, standing at the crossroads of ancient trade routes. Our stay here was brief, but we were greeted by many friendly locals as we took a short walk around the ancient local marketplace before dark. The next morning we were on our way again, meeting the rest of the group as we flew on to Socotra and then by van across the island to our waiting Sambuca. That night we slept under the stars on the gently rolling deck of the boat, putting us in the perfect position to observe the approach to our island campsite at dawn. Socotra is an extraordinarily rugged mountainous desert island, but our destination of Ab'd Khoury was, if anything even more inhospitable.



Clockwise from above: ancient skyscrapers in the Old City of Sana'a, Market stall selling Janbiyas - ceremonial daggers worn by the men, Woman buying flour from the local mill.



Kids in happier times. Three days after this picture was taken, Saudi Arabia commenced bombing the city. Thousands of people have died in the ongoing war since.



The Old City of Sana'a has been continually occupied for 2500 years and the average building is over 500 years old!



Markets in the Old City of Sana'a, operating like this for more than a thousand years. The World Heritage listed city has taken significant damage in the months of bombing, both in lives lost and ancient buildings destroyed

Steep hills and mountains rise out of the sea, no vegetation bar a few spiky grasses and stunted shrubs can survive. We were arriving in spring with temperatures a pleasant 27-30 degrees most days, light breezes and high cloud keeping the heat in check. By the time summer rolls in this becomes one of the windiest places on earth, with 30-40 knot winds and 40 degrees being common. It is hard to imagine anyone living here permanently and it was no surprise to

learn that many of the inhabitants return to Socotra during the summer months. Our accommodation consisted of tents on the beach. Not luxurious, but comfortable enough after a hard days popping and the views were awesome in every direction. The food prepared by locals; not surprisingly contained a lot of fish, but also rice and pasta dishes accompanied with various local dishes of beans and fresh made flat bread.



Our first session started not far from camp. A broad ridge ran off the tip of the island underwater for a several kilometres out to sea. Angry currents boiled back and forth with the tides each day - standing waves marking the shallow sections, further punctuated by larger car and house sized boulders thrust up to within a metre of the surface. Naturally this is where we began. The local longboats proved to be surprisingly stable in the choppy waters, allowing two anglers to cast in reasonable comfort. The sides were high enough to offer some protection, though you could step up onto the large built in fish box to get a higher position if the swell allowed. Fighting the fish was more of a challenge; the boats simply aren't built to outmanoeuvre fast moving fish in strong currents. Plus the boat drivers seemed loathe to use reverse gear, making for plenty of hairy moments as the big fish powered back under the boat. Several times anglers were pinned to the side by heavy drag, desperately trying to hold their



rod and braid off the hull while the boat slowly came back around.

We ended that first day with a couple of GTs each, mostly “rats” in the 25kg class! These fish attacked with the aggression and vigour of rebellious teenagers, making us fight for every centimetre of line and would have been considered trophy catches in most parts of the world. In the final dying light of the day, Laurent finally latched on to the first monster of the trip over a shipwreck of a fishing boat; the Marion Four. This 40kg fish really punished him by swimming straight for the bottom, trying to do all of its fighting directly underneath us, 25m down. We must have driven the boat in circles over a dozen times attempting to find an angle we could work with to lever the fish up,

but it was all worth it in the end. As we hoisted the giant fish onto Laurent’s lap, he was almost as tired as the GT. Fingers, hands, arms and back all pumped out to exhaustion, struggling to keep the beast upright for a photo.

The following days drifted into the blur of events that great fishing trips are made of. Aching muscles, epic bust offs, prehistoric size red bass stealing lures intended for even more prehistoric GTs, screaming muscles, leader knots at breakfast, leader knots at lunch, copious amounts of sweet tea, airborne mackerel strikes, airborne mackerel landing in the boat, grumpy crabs crawling into open

tents at night. Casting, casting, casting.... Oh my aching back!

Throughout the week, we tried a few other fishing styles to mix up the fishing. The deep water jigging and light tackle in the shallows was pretty quiet overall, but in between there were plenty of giant red bass, green jobfish, grouper and mackerel hunting around bait schools that kept everything interesting.

By the end of the week, the numbers told the story. 122 GTs landed between 5 anglers, 4 landed over 50kg (largest weighed was 54kg) and plenty over 40kg. I’ve had trips with more fish, but never at that size. You could be certain

that each day you would get a strike from a monster, landing it was another matter. Despite the super heavy tackle, scores of monster fish were lost to bust offs as well as pulled and straightened hooks. Giant poppers and stickbaits were reduced to woodchips and the through-wire was torn from several lures. In between throwing giant poppers, I lost all of my light tackle poppers to marauding red bass.

I had caught my PB Trevally a couple of times over, seen a harsh, rarely visited part of the world and shared it with a great people, both locals and anglers from all over the world. Then the trip got really... interesting.



While we were away, cut off from the world in our desert island 'paradise', the new king of Saudi Arabia decided to declare war against the Houthis who were controlling much of Yemen. The reasons to justify or explain this could fill several issues of this magazine and

(a Saudi/US supporter) and of being supported by Iran. The Houthis accuse the previous government of being corrupt, discriminatory and backed by Saudi Arabia and Al Qaeda. When we signed on for the trip we knew all about the issues of personal safety associated

with travelling in a dysfunctional country like Yemen. What we were not expecting was for a coalition of foreign countries to begin bombing targets of strategic influence all over the mainland, including airports. Because Socotra is not considered to be of strategic or political importance,

it had been left alone by all parties involved. We further discovered that the Saudi Airforce had declared a no-fly zone across the entire country for commercial flights, meaning nothing was going in or out.



The main street of Hadibo, the largest town on Socotra

still not get to the bottom of it. Suffice to say, the Houthis follow a sect of Islam (Zaidist) that is different to other parts of Yemen that are mainly Sunni. Saudi Arabia (also Sunni) accuses the Houthis of kicking out the rightful ruler of Yemen

Our first day back on the main island had seen us camped out at the airport waiting for news and more importantly waiting for a Sheik from the Arab Emirates to appear. He had been holidaying in the mountains and his private jet was coming to collect him (clearly not subject to the flight restrictions). If we could just hitch a lift everything would be sweet! Unfortunately things were not sweet. Despite his private jet actually being a large Air Force Hercules with room for the Sheik, his large entourage, literally tonnes of baggage,

his personal Land Rover and more; there was not room for us or the other handful of foreigners stranded on the island. To be fair, the Sheik delayed his flight for several hours to try and get permission to take us on board, but couldn't be cleared with the

powers that be in the Arab Emirates.

Our spirits were well and truly flagging at this point, as we arrived at our hotel in the dirty, rubbish strewn town of Hadibo (the main town on Socotra). It was just as well that we spotted a bunch of freshly caught crayfish being carried



Looking from Hadibo inland to Socotra's magnificent mountains

into the adjacent café whilst checking in. So we found ourselves sitting in a café on the dusty main street, watching a war unfold on TV, stuffing ourselves silly on magnificent crays, fresh baked bread and sweet tea whilst discussing

how to get off the island.

The next day was the same, so was the following one, and the next. Only the café menu changed. Some meals it was lamb, or goat, then fish, always accompanied by bread and beans (khoobs and fool).



Planning our exit from Socotra at the local cafe

Most of the time we sat around waiting for the intermittent power and internet connections to come on, while our trip leader Nicola burned through scores of the local prepaid Sim cards trying to organise our route off the island. Back home my wife was also trying to

organise a flight with Yemenia Airways in conjunction with the travel insurance companies; dependant on Saudi Arabia allowing the flight to proceed. Dimitri, our Russian crew member was also hopeful that we may be able to leave on the Russian evacuation flights.

Hundreds of Russian nationals were in the capital and flights had been planned to evacuate them as soon as the airspace was opened. This too proved to be a dead end, as it appeared that the runway on the island was not long enough for the huge Russian transport aircraft to land and take off safely.

Finally we got a break. Nothing was moving in the air so the decision was made to charter a boat and evacuate across the Gulf of Aden to Oman. After several more dead ends and false starts, a Sambuca was located with an owner willing to let his boat make the journey. Many of the owners and captains were concerned about having their boat impounded by Omani authorities on

arrival. After a mad dash around town for supplies and to empty the town's only ATM machine of Yemeni Rials to pay for the trip, we hit the road to head for the port. The arrival of a bunch of foreigners at the Port (really just a long jetty with a crane at the end) created a quite a stir. We were a mixed bunch, 12 travellers from 8 countries (we picked up 5 other tourists stuck on the island as well). The controller of the port was not impressed at our arrival and got into a heated argument with our local guides, over whether we were allowed to leave Socotra this way. Things were at a stalemate for a while, until the Minister for Tourism on Socotra arrived with additional paperwork for our departure. Finally after more arguments, yelling between the authorities, we clambered aboard the Sambuca, handed over a shopping bag overflowing with Rials to the captain and we were off!

I could probably write another article on the rest of the trip home, except that it would be both long and boring. Suffice to say, the trip was very long and very slow (50hrs), due to the little ship



Bread was made fresh with every meal

carrying a full hold of fish to sell in Oman. Everyone made it ok, except for the kid (goat) that became lunch and dinner on the first day. The sea was flat as a tack and we trolled lures all the way; only two mahi mahi broke the monotony. We saw a bunch of freighters sailing past over the two days and only one naval vessel, which showed absolutely no interest in us. Luckily no Somali pirates either - piracy has almost been eradicated here in the last few years. Eventually, with great celebration, we arrived at the port of Salalah in Oman; tired, sunburnt,



Roughing it Socotra style

covered in diesel soot and hungry for something other than goat. Ed Nicholas, the owner of No Boundaries Oman charter was there to greet us with cold drinks and most importantly a Customs Agent to organise our unconventional arrival. Without his fantastic help at the Oman end, we could have spent all night at the Port organising visas and entry.

A couple more days and 3 flights later I walked through the customs gate in Brisbane airport, to a warm welcome from the family (phew! I wasn't 100%

sure how that would go). We were certainly all glad to be home and I can say without a doubt that my wife was suffering far more than I was through the ordeal. Not knowing what was going on, constantly worrying about our situation was mentally more challenging than actually experiencing it. Since returning, many people have asked whether I would go again. There are so many 'what ifs' and 'maybes' associated with a question like that, but if the political situation was different, I would probably go again (though my wife may have something to say about that). Overall though I am glad to have travelled to one of the wildest places I am ever likely to visit, met some wonderful people, battled monster GTs and had experiences that I will remember forever.



Arrival at the Port of Salalah, Oman

How to Visit Socotra:

Realistically, you can't. At the time of writing, the civil war in Yemen has continued. Internal factions are fighting one another, while the Saudi led coalition is still waging war against the Houthis. With the US supporting Saudi Arabia and Iran probably supporting the Houthis (Iran denies giving any military support), the chance of a long term solution seems remote. Whilst Socotra doesn't play a part in the war, there is no realistic means of travelling to the island, not to mention that there is likely ongoing food, water, medical and communication problems facing the locals. One day, when life approaches some sort of normality again, Nicola, Guillaume and the crew from Wild Sea Expeditions will surely be one of the first to go back there.

<http://www.wildseaexpedition.com/>



Gear Used

I took loads of tackle to Socotra, particularly a range of rods to test. Mostly we stuck to the heaviest gear, because of the possibility of a giant fish appearing at any time. Lighter PE 8 GT gear just didn't make it out of the bag. I did use an assortment of lighter tackle in PE4 and PE2 for chasing smaller species in the shallows. The problem with PE2 was the prevalence of enormous red bass that made short work of the gear. Likewise, when fishing PE4-5 tackle to stop the bass, big GTs would smash the lures for a similar result. Basically all of my light/medium poppers and stickbaits were lost!

Here is some of the tackle that worked well for us:

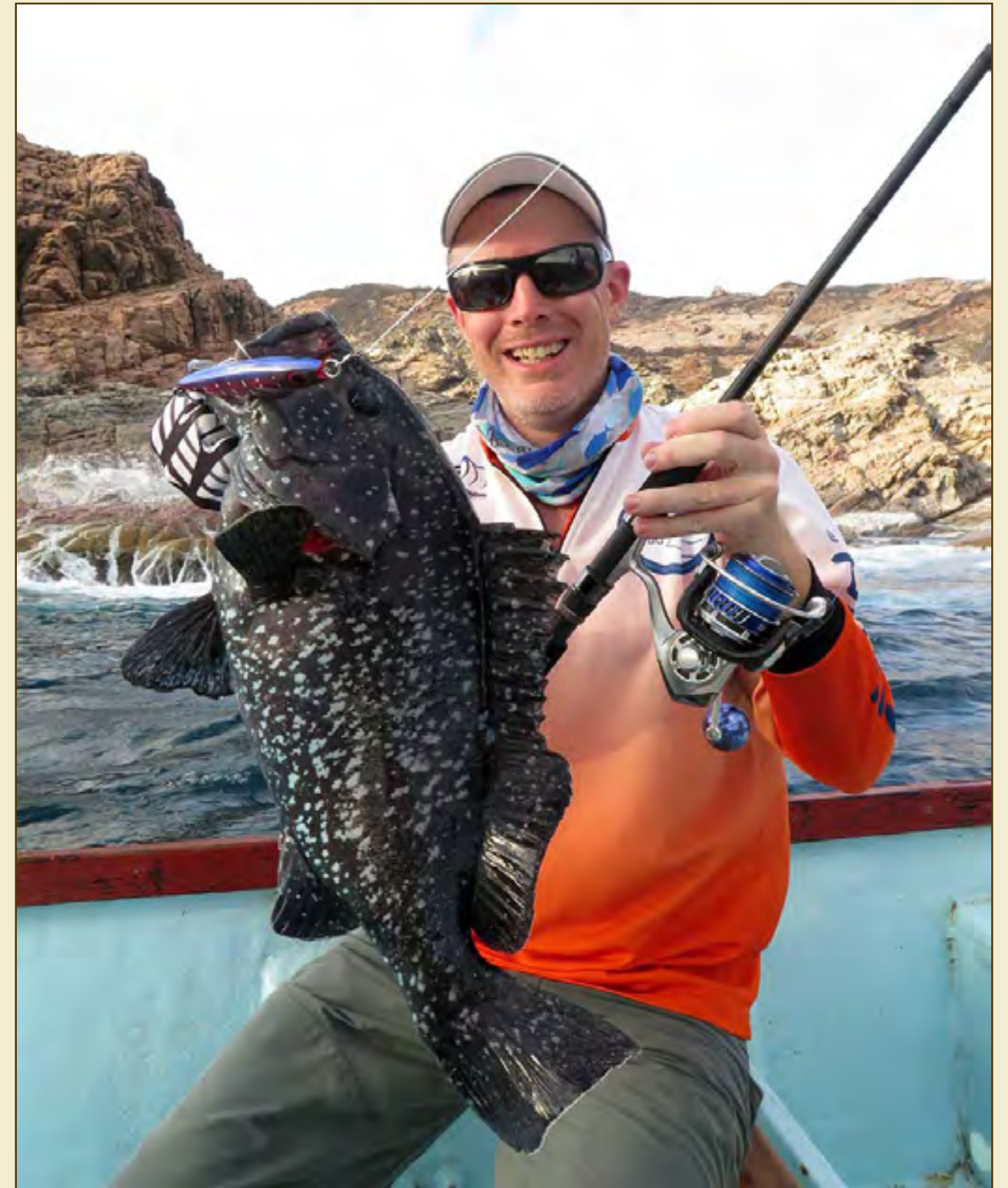
GT rods: Zenaq Fokeeto 80-10, FCL Labo UCB 81-H, 81M and 85 Stickbait. Patriot Design Black Diamond 77, NS Black Hole Cape Cod Special

Reels: Saltiga 6500-8000, Stella 18000

Lures: Patriot Design Masterd Bombs, std and Big Cup. Glide 180 Popper, FCL Ebi Pop 200. FCL CSP 230EXT

Line: Varivas, Jerry Brown, Tuf-Line

Medium Tackle: Zenaq Twitch 73-4 Proto





FCL Labo by Y. Tsurusaki Handmade in Japan Rods Stickbaits Poppers Jigs Minnows Cranks @ Fishhead.com.au



CYPRINIOUS CARPIO

FRIEND OR

FOE?

A PHOTO ESSAY

BY BRETT HABENER

Environmental disaster, slimy mudsuckers, hillbilly bonefish: all of these names are pretty accurate in describing carp. Love them or despise them, one thing is certain (for the time being) they are here to stay.

South East Queensland provides some challenging opportunities for anglers who like sneaking through the undergrowth to stalk these spooky and sometimes downright frustrating fish.



Tom's first carp

Close up with a chunky mud
sucker that fell for a Hybrid
Worm fly





To stalk carp successfully you need to blend in with your environment



For a bright orange carp to survive in the wild, they need to be very aware of their surroundings and as such are a real challenge to tempt



Chris with a double header

HYBRID WORM FLY

BRETT HABENER

The Hybrid is one of the most successful carp flies I have used over the last few years around Southeast Queensland and Northeast New South Wales. The original was designed by John Montana in the US for targeting carp feeding on clams and worms. It has since become one of most popular flies worldwide for targeting carp. You can make it with many different colour and weight combinations, but the traditional red tail/brass eye version is

a must have in the carping box.

Materials:

Hook: Daiichi X510 - Size 8

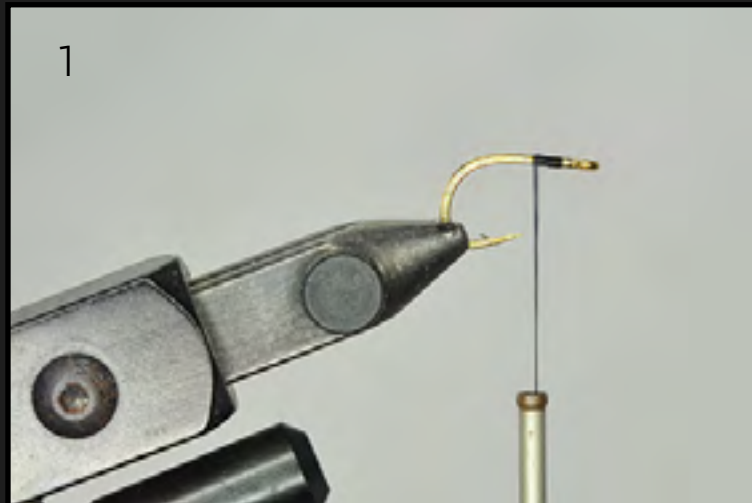
Eye: Extra Small Brass Eye- Black

Thread: UTC 140- Black

Tail: Ultra Chenille Standard- Red

Body: Peacock Hurl

Collar: Grizzly Hackle



Pic 1-2, Secure the thread to the shank and make a small thread base about 3mm long. Next secure the brass dumbbell eyes to the hook about 1-2mm back from the eye of the hook.



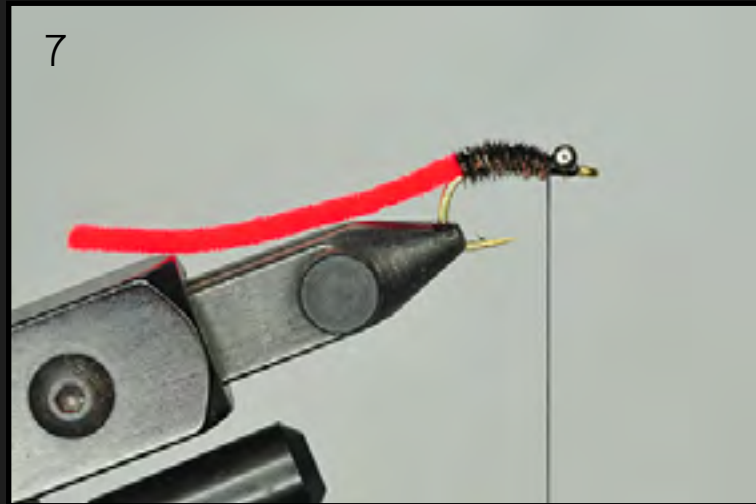
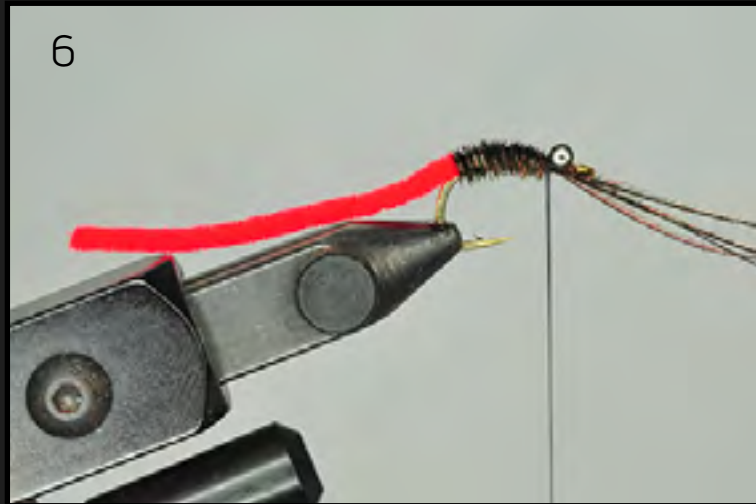
Pic 3, Cut off a generous length of Ultra Chenille and secure just behind the Brass Eyes. Pull the Ultra Chenille tight and wrap it with thread down toward the bend of the hook. I like to stop the thread wraps just past in-line with the barb of the hook.



Pic 4, Find 4 nice Peacock Hurls and secure them with a few wraps at the rear of the hook and progress your thread back to the brass eyes.



Pic 5-7, Grab the Peacock Hurls and twist them together until the small fibres begin to stand up. Once that is done wrap the twisted Peacock Hurl from the back of the hook toward the front getting a nice even coverage. Secure under the eyes with a few wraps of thread and trim the excess.



Pic 11, All that is left to do is trim the tail to the desired length. Once cut, lightly burn the end of the Ultra Chenille to prevent it fraying.



Pic 8-9, Find a nice hackle feather with fibres about 5mm long. Secure just behind the eye with 3-4 wraps of thread and trim the excess. To create the collar, wrap hackle feather around the hook 4 times neatly working back towards the brass eyes. Secure under the eye and trim excess.

Pic 10, Place 2-3 wraps of thread behind the brass eye to angle the collar slightly backwards. This will help the fly sit correctly at rest. Whip finish and cut thread.





Off Shore Casting Rod



FOKEETO  Trevally

ZENAQ

EST. 1960



Zenaq Trevally Lineup

Fokeeto Trevally 80-5 Duro Length 8'0, Best lure match 90-140g Max 170g
Line PE5-8, Avg Rod Weight 390g

Fokeeto Trevally 83-5 Length 8'3, Best lure match 90-130g Max 170g
Line PE5-8, Avg Rod Weight 440g

Fokeeto Trevally 83-7 Length 8'3, Best lure match 100-150g, Max 180g
Line PE6-8, Avg Rod Weight 440g

Fokeeto Trevally 76-7 Length 7'6, Best lure match 100-150g, Max 180g
Line PE6-8, Avg Rod Weight 420g

Fokeeto Trevally 80-10 Length 8'0, Best lure match 120-200g, Max 230g,
Line PE8-10, Avg Rod Weight 425g



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