

### Tackle, techniques and Tactics

In this article, I will talk you through all the gear, tactics and tackle that we use out here on the Pacific in Panama. If you fancy joining us sometime or are just curious about how we go about the fishing, then this article will point you in the right direction and answer some of your questions. We spend a huge amount of time lure fishing; whether it's from the boat or the shore, it keeps you on your toes and active, which I love!

Top-water fishing and casting lures inshore along rocky coastline or over shallow reefs, surf breaks and estuaries makes up a large percentage of the fishing we do here and holds great appeal for many. It's fairly simple in that you are just casting and covering ground or structure that is usually visible. Anyone can do it and once you've got your techniques honed and perfected then you're good to go. It can be hard work throwing poppers and lures all day in the tropical heat and humidity but it's so very exciting. The sheer variety of species available here means that you never quite know what will strike next.

For me, there's little to beat the thrill of seeing a Roosterfish appear behind your surface lure, with its dorsal comb scything through the water as it closes in on your offering. This really gets the adrenaline flowing and it's in these moments you really have to hold your nerve and keep a cool head. It's a magic experience, but don't be fooled into thinking it's easy. These fish can be incredibly fussy at times, just following and nudging your lure rather than fully committing to it. The visual aspect of the technique is what makes this style of fishing so very exciting. It's addictive and the rewards can be great!



As we move out in to deeper water in the boat then our attention switches to a different set of species and techniques. Jigging plays a major part in our fishing in this scenario as we search for the bottom

dwellers and also systematically work the water column with our jigs. It's a very satisfying way of fishing. Its more technical and relies on good communication with your guide/captain and careful use of the GPS and sonar. There's much more to think about. It really captures your imagination as you work your jig down deep below and our job as the angler is to try and bring our little chunks of fancy looking lead to life and make them appear as appetising as we can! There's a real art to it.

Generally speaking, then there are 2 styles of fishing we practice with our jigs - 'Speed jigging' and 'Slow Jigging', which are both fairly self-explanatory given their names. Each style can have its day and there are some species that prefer a jig fished one way rather than the other. There are also some tricks and subtle nuances in technique that can help buy a bite. Its local knowledge, time on the water and experience that count and bring success with jigging. As a guide, I'm able to offer advice to visiting anglers from my many years of experience fishing the waters here, helping give a short cut to success. When the jigging is hot and the bites are coming thick and fast it makes for very exciting fishing on the relatively light tackle that we use.



At the right time of year, chasing feeding schools of pelagic fish offshore can be very exciting. The birds are the key to location here and they can often be spotted many miles away giving us a clue in which direction to head. This method can provide success with Mahi Mahi and Yellowfin Tuna especially and is wonderful fishing. Throwing poppers and stickbaits into a frothing school of feeding fish all going crazy on the surface is about as exciting as it gets. This can provide arm wrenching sport and often some grade 'A' fish for the kitchen too.

Trolling with a spread of lures from the boat can be devastatingly effective also. Although this method of fishing artificials is not for everybody due to its more sedentary nature, there is certainly a time and a



place for it. It's perfect for covering ground and locating shoals of pelagic fish when pushing further offshore and can also provide a welcome relief after having spent many hours popping, casting and jigging.....its hard work! Trolling can often throw up bonus fish you otherwise would have missed when moving between fishing spots as well. It gives those slightly fussier fish a chance to get really wound up by the lure and provoke a strike. Many times, when casting from a boat then fish will follow right in close and shy away at the last moment when they see you. Trolling at distance behind the boat eliminates this issue.



The use of livebait is the other technique that we use regularly and has produced some truly epic fish for us. At the end of the day, this is what the fish are accustomed to eating. Without a doubt, this is the most selective technique for the really big fish. We tend to use large bluerunners or bonito as these will single out the specimen Roosterfish, Cubera, Amberjack and Grouper. To me, there is no sense in using small livebaits to catch jacks, sierra mackerel and small snapper, you might as well use lures. Its more fun too.

Many of these techniques described may be familiar to you already and the skills you already have are undoubtedly totally transferable to help you enjoy success out here in Panama with a little guidance. The big difference here in Panama is that everything needs to be stepped up immensely tackle-wise. The fish here are on steroids, I kid you not!

If there is any weakness in your set-up then these fish will find it and hand it to you on a plate! It's not until you experience the sheer power and brute strength of these hard fighting, warm water tropical species that it all starts to sink in to place. You need the right tackle, the right knots and a little bit of luck of course. You really can't leave anything to chance as it will only end in tears.

### Rods:

As a British travelling angler myself, I've roamed all over the world since the early 2000's seeking my thrills and kicks. I've had many multi-piece travel rods and have suffered many breakages. Due to the very nature of these rods and the multiple weak points, they are prone to it. Sure, they're super convenient to travel with but they've let me down too many times. Especially so for the kind of heavy-duty saltwater fishing we are doing here in Panama. I've seen it happen with many visiting anglers too; their brand new and pricey travel rods ending up in bits.

For this kind of fishing, you cannot beat one-piece rods as they will put up with the rigours and abuse you're going to be dishing out. If you're so inclined, you can travel with your own in tubes and pay the transport costs. Better still, use/hire the rods that your guide or captain can provide as they will be fit for purpose and you don't need to worry about transporting any yourself.



I have a huge amount of faith in rods from Shimano, specifically the 'Terez, Trevala and Teremar' range. Also, the 'Ugly Stick Tiger Jigging' range from Shakespeare. These are all quality one-piece rods that are absolutely perfect for the fishing we do here in Panama. This range will cover all you need for jigging, casting, popping and trolling. I find a 'med/heavy' rated rod is perfect for most of the jigging and inshore lighter lure fishing. A 'heavy' or 'extra heavy' rated rod is great for throwing bigger lures and poppers or trolling.

### Reels, braid and leader:

It's your reels that do all the hard work and will be pushed to their limits when fishing in Panama. I've tried many different makes and models over the years and have enjoyed using Penn and Shimano



products the most. I always travel with my own reels as they're easy to transport and I know they won't let me down. I find the Penn Slammer and Spinfisher range to be my go-to reels these days, they are serious workhorses. They may be a little heavier than other makes but the build quality, durability, waterproofing, incredible drag systems and great value for money make them my number one choice. I'm not precious about really using them and dishing out the abuse at that price point.



4500/5000 size reel spooled up with 35 lb braid for light tackle lure fishing and slow jigging is fine from boat or shore. Then additionally a 6500 size reel with 50lb braid for heavier duty popping, trolling, jigging and other stepped-up applications covers most of my fishing here.

Sure, if we're going all out popping for giant Tuna or other monster species then I may even step-up to 65 lb or 80 lb braid on an even bigger reel if the need arises.

Braid is really a personal thing and everyone has their favourite. I've been fishing with 'Rovex D8' which is a super smooth, silky 8 strand braid for the last 5 years. It's incredible stuff and comes at a great price point. Daiwa J-Braid and Power Pro have also performed well for me.

Many argue that fluorocarbon is a better choice for leader material, due to its 'invisibility' in the water, but I'm not so sure I buy into this theory. For me, this is just the magic of marketing from the product manufacturers. I think that once you get up into the heavier breaking strains and thickness of the leaders we use here, then both are just as visible as each other in the water. The fish here are wild and not particularly leader shy. I like a good quality hard wearing monofilament such as 'Rovex 10X' which has proven to be very durable, supple and knots well at a fantastic price point. For fluorocarbon, then Shimano make a very abrasion resistant product 'Ocea F' which is very hard and stiff, so can be a little

tricky to knot, but is very tough. However, it comes at a price point that will make you wince. At the end of the day both will do the job, take your pick.



I use a 40 or 50 lb leader for lighter tackle, shore fishing and slow-jigging. For heavier applications such as deep drop jigging, popping, trolling or fishing over really snaggy ground then 80 lb is perfect. For me the FG Knot is the only choice for connecting the braid to the leader. It's incredibly strong and has never let me down in many years fishing here. It's easy to tie once you know how and is well worth learning, especially so for connecting the heavier breaking strain leaders and braids.

#### Lures, Poppers, Stickbaits etc.. :

The lures we use here are mostly in the 4 to 6 inch size as a rule. We find these smaller lures are the most effective. To cover your bases, you need a selection of surface lures, poppers, shallow diving lures, jerkbaits and stickbaits. Soft plastics are a waste of time as the fish destroy them very easily with their powerful jaws and teeth....it can get costly!

The subject of lure choice is never ending and there are literally thousands available on the market. When people book with me, I send out a list of tried and tested models, makes and colours to help narrow things down a little. I've tested these lures extensively over the years and know they work.





Some particular favourites that keep on producing the goods are as follows:

Tackle House Feed Popper 150, Yozuri Sashimi Bull Pop 150, Savage Gear Panic Popper 135, Nomad Chug Norris Popper, YozuriMagDarter 125, Rapala Xrap 140, Salmo Slider 120, Buster Jerk 150, Williamson Speed Pro 160, Rapala Xrap-Magnum 30, Hybrida Tropical Series Jerkbait, Samson Fat Minnow 80g and GT Ice Cream 2.5oz. I favour natural patterns and colours, sometimes pink too and I never overlook the humble and incredibly versatile bucktail jig!

Some of the lures listed come supplied with quality 'Owner' or 'Bkk' brand treble hooks. Some of them don't. I recommend upgrading those that don't to quality 5 x strength trebles such as the 'Owner ST66 or ST76' It's important to match the size of the hooks used to upgrade to the size of the hooks on the lures. It's important you change them out like for like with regard to sizes to ensure you don't mess up the action of the lures.

The original hooks on some of the lures are likely to open up if you are lucky enough to hook something really big, the 'Owners' or 'Bkk' won't. This is the point of connection between you and the potential fish of a lifetime.....so it pays to make sure you're well equipped.

To connect the lure to the leader I recommend attaching directly using a split ring and solid ring combo or a product called a 'tactical anglers power clip' which is available from the US online and very convenient. They're like the breakaway clips available in the UK/Europe but MUCH stronger. They come in 75 and 125 lb test. I've tried many different clips over the years and these are the only ones that have never let me down. American made, quick-change clips that are built as tough as they come.

Jigs:

Inshore, in depths up to 90/100 feet then a small jig in the 40 to 60g range can be devastatingly effective if conditions allow. Something flashy with a good 'flutter' action that can be fished either fast or slow style is my go-to choice in these circumstances. You can spend ridiculous amounts of money on jigs if you like but I have found that in the smaller sizes especially, then the cheaper, mass produced chinese ones on the market can be very effective. If you put them in the right place and give them the right action then many fish species find them irresistible.



A range of jigs up to a maximum of 150g is sufficient for most of the inshore work we do here in medium depths and Shimano make an excellent range of products that have produced some fantastic results over the years - the flat fall, butterfly and colt sniper jigs.



When we push further offshore and get into 'deep dropping' territory then a selection of knife style jigs and heavier slow-jigs in the 150g to 250g usually covers it. Pinks, blues, orange and silvers seem to be the most favourable colour combinations for jigging here in Panama. Pink, especially so!



Top quality assist hooks are needed to go with the jigs and these can be purchased from quality dealers such as Terry at [www.jigabite.co.uk](http://www.jigabite.co.uk) or you can make your own if you're that way inclined. The fish are very powerful out here and at the end of the day this is the one thing that connects you to your quarry. Top quality split rings and solid rings in the 100lb class are also essential for rigging your metals.

#### Livebait:

There are times when the use of a big live bait is absolutely killer over here. It's well worth dedicating some time to this method if you find yourself out here as it can really produce the goods. Due to its selective nature, it can often single out some very large and special fish that will blow your mind. This requires the use of some seriously heavy tackle as you could literally hook anything! We have hooked huge Black Marlin doing this.



We use heavy duty circle hooks in a size 12/0 for the big baits with a long leader of around 150lb test. The rod of choice is a 50 to 80lb class stand up stick paired with a 30 size conventional reel loaded with 80lb braid. We mean business and its well needed with the big almaco jacks and cubera snapper we often catch in deep water.

I hope you've found this piece of interest and it has given you a nice insight into the fishing we do over here and how we approach it. If you made it this far then, thanks for reading!



