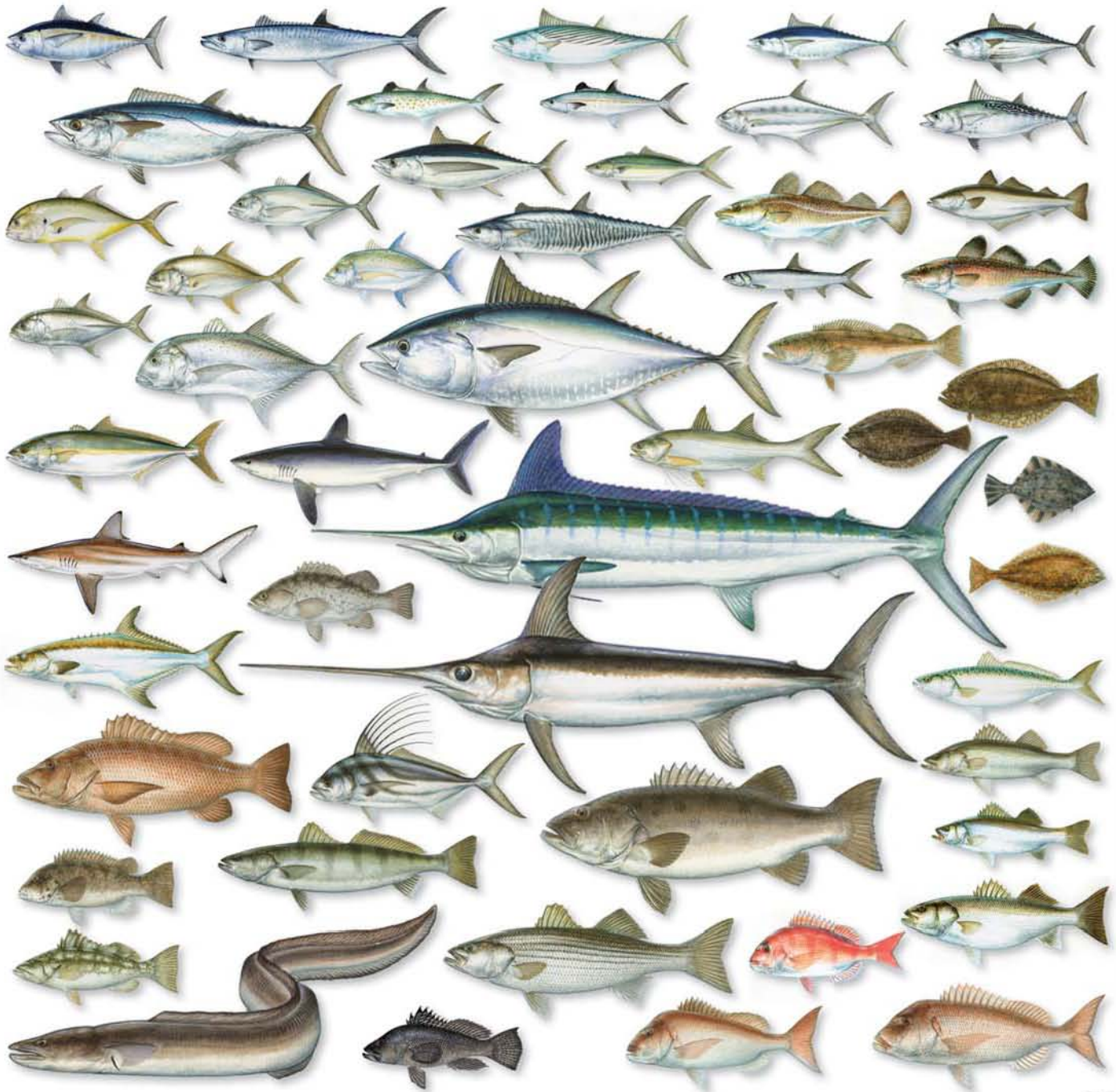

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IGFA WORLD RECORD GAME FISHES

FRESHWATER, SALTWATER, AND FLYFISHING
PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNATIONAL GAME FISH ASSOCIATION



YOUR VERY OWN

Fishing

Testing Your Angling



Photo by Derek Redwine

G

uana Island, located just off the coast of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, has not changed much since the day Christopher Columbus first stumbled upon the West Indies. Minus a few hidden cottages up on the hill, a beach cabana and a dock, the 850-acre private island has been left mostly wild and ready for exploration. Few, if any, locations in the Caribbean offer an angler such a prime location to test his or her prowess when it comes to finding fish. It's also a perfect spot to kick back, make your own schedule and unwind.

Such a setting represents an empty page for an angler, just waiting for you to fill in the blank space with your own adventure. You can fish for whatever you want whenever you want. And that was the idea when myself and two friends, Adrian Gray and Derek Redwine, decided to take a busman's holiday to the virtually uninhabited island and check out every inch of the place in search of fish. Armed with nothing more than a steady steed (in the form of a golf cart), a 15-foot Boston Whaler that the staff so graciously let us borrow, and whatever tackle we brought along, we managed to catch a laundry list of game fish from tarpon to rock hind.

Oasis

Skills on a Virgin Island

By Charlie Levine

Photography by Adrian E. Gray



A LONG TIME COMING

I first heard about Guana after becoming friends with Jason Goldberg four or five years ago, and the place always stayed in my mind because I had never read about the island in any fishing magazine. Jason fly-fishes extensively, but we got to know each other when he sent some dramatic photos of jumping blue marlin that he shot in the Azores to me at *Marlin* magazine. We ended up publishing a couple of the photos and Jason and I stayed in touch, sharing fishing stories every few months or so.

Jason became the manager of Guana, which operates as a small-scale resort catering to folks who are looking to truly get away from it all. Most of the guests who vacation on Guana amuse themselves by taking long walks on the many hiking trails, snorkeling or reading a book under a lonely palm tree. Much to my surprise, few want anything to do with the bonefish running the beaches in the morning or the tarpon hanging out under the dock lights at night. And Jason would email me about the fishery left just for him.

"I jumped a 65-pound tarpon on the dock last night," Jason would write me. "When are you coming down?"

Messages like that would pop up in my in-box about every month or two, but schedules being what they are, I could never find the time to get away. After a few years of these messages, however, Jason's

The Ins and Outs of GUANA ISLAND, British Virgin Islands

At 850 acres, Guana Island is one of only a few privately-owned islands left in the Caribbean that guests can enjoy without coughing up exorbitant room rates. Guests stay in hillside cottages with inspired views and all meals are shared together in a charming dining hall with plenty of outside seating.

In the 18th century, two Quaker families came to Guana as part of what was called "the Quaker Experiment" which lasted for about forty-five years in the BVI. They cultivated sugar cane for rum manufacturing. They were later recalled to the United States and England. Archaeologists have extensively studied the Quaker ruins and have also unearthed older artifacts that give insight into Guana's earlier Amerindian history.

Beth and Louis Bigelow of Massachusetts purchased Guana in 1934 and they built six stone cottages and developed a reputation as creative pioneers.

Henry and Gloria Jarecki bought Guana in 1975 and began improving accommodations and other facilities. An interest in conservation led them to establish a long-term restoration program to protect the island's flora and fauna and bring back once-common species.

The island is a wildlife sanctuary with more than 50 species of birds, a massive population of hermit crabs and more than 125 species of inshore fish. There are miles of hiking trails to explore, water sports, tennis, spa services and plenty of other activities to fill your days. For more information visit www.guana.com.

tone began to change. I sensed an air of urgency and when I received an email in early 2010 I finally got the hint. "This is it, my friend," he wrote. "Get your butt down here. We've got bonefish, permit, tarpon, and we're a short run from the North Drop. What are you waiting for?"

IT WAS NOW OR NEVER

A few weeks later, Adrian, Derek and I checked out of our busy deadline-oriented lifestyles, and for the next week we were just three buddies on a fishing trip — no phones, no computers, no problem.

After a quick flight over to Tortola's Beef Island Airport from San Juan, Puerto Rico, we boarded a small launch for the 15-minute run to Guana. The island's tall, densely green peaks are rimmed with a white

sand beach. There are no high-rise hotels to block the view and you'll find more walking trails than people. We were about to step foot in Eden and El Dorado all wrapped up in one.

We met the staff and checked into our room. The two-bedroom





Guana attracts visitors who want an unspoiled island experience. Guests have an 850-acre oasis they can explore at their disposal. There's no giant resorts or loud bars to contend with, just miles of open space and virgin waters. The cottages are subtly luxurious and most of the meals contain locally caught seafood and fruit and vegetables grown right on the island. You can find tarpon at night and use the resort's Boston Whaler during the day to try casting around one of the many points.



cottage had a laid-back, luxurious feel to it, with a stocked fridge and a small pool with a million-dollar view of the bay. There is no reason to lock the doors here as there are never more than 30 or so people on the island. After a fantastic lunch of locally caught fish and vegetables grown in the orchard, we decided to take

a run around on the Boston Whaler that the staff had so kindly gassed up for us.

The cardinal rule of any angling trip is to always be prepared. The one time you can pretty much count on seeing fish is when you leave the rods at the dock. But we figured we

had a week to fish, so a quick cruise would just help us get the lay of the land. So, for some ungodly reason, we decided against toting along the tackle. Sure enough, just as we rounded the first point, we were greeted by giant schools of little tunny. Each point we approached, we found predators busting bait. We kept cursing the decision to "just take a look around."

TAKE ONLY WHAT YOU CAN CARRY

You won't find any tackle store or outfitter of any kind on Guana, so we brought in all our own gear.



Airlines make billions these days with their various baggage restrictions, so before you start packing things like lead weights, make sure to consult with your air carrier or visit their website. Extra-long pieces of luggage such as rod tubes and surfboards are also susceptible to tacked-on fees. For the amount of money you would spend checking a long rod tube roundtrip, you can buy yourself a nice three-piece travel rod that comes with its own carrying case and fits in the overhead compartment. For our trip, we brought three three-piece spinning rods for a range of situations. We had a featherweight rod for light line, perfect for 10-pound tackle, and two medium-action rods for heavier stuff up to 20 pounds. We also brought along three fly rods for bones, tarpon and permit with a 10-weight being the heaviest. The one thing we probably should've packed that we neglected was a stout conventional setup with a small reel that can handle heavy drag. This would've been the ideal weapon for the

cubera snapper that nearly destroyed one of our spinners.

As far as plugs, lures and line, we took a lesson from Steve Wozniak (not the Apple guy), who has flown more than one million miles in the last 10 years on his quest to land 1,000 different species of fish. "I always bring my own equipment," Wozniak says. "You

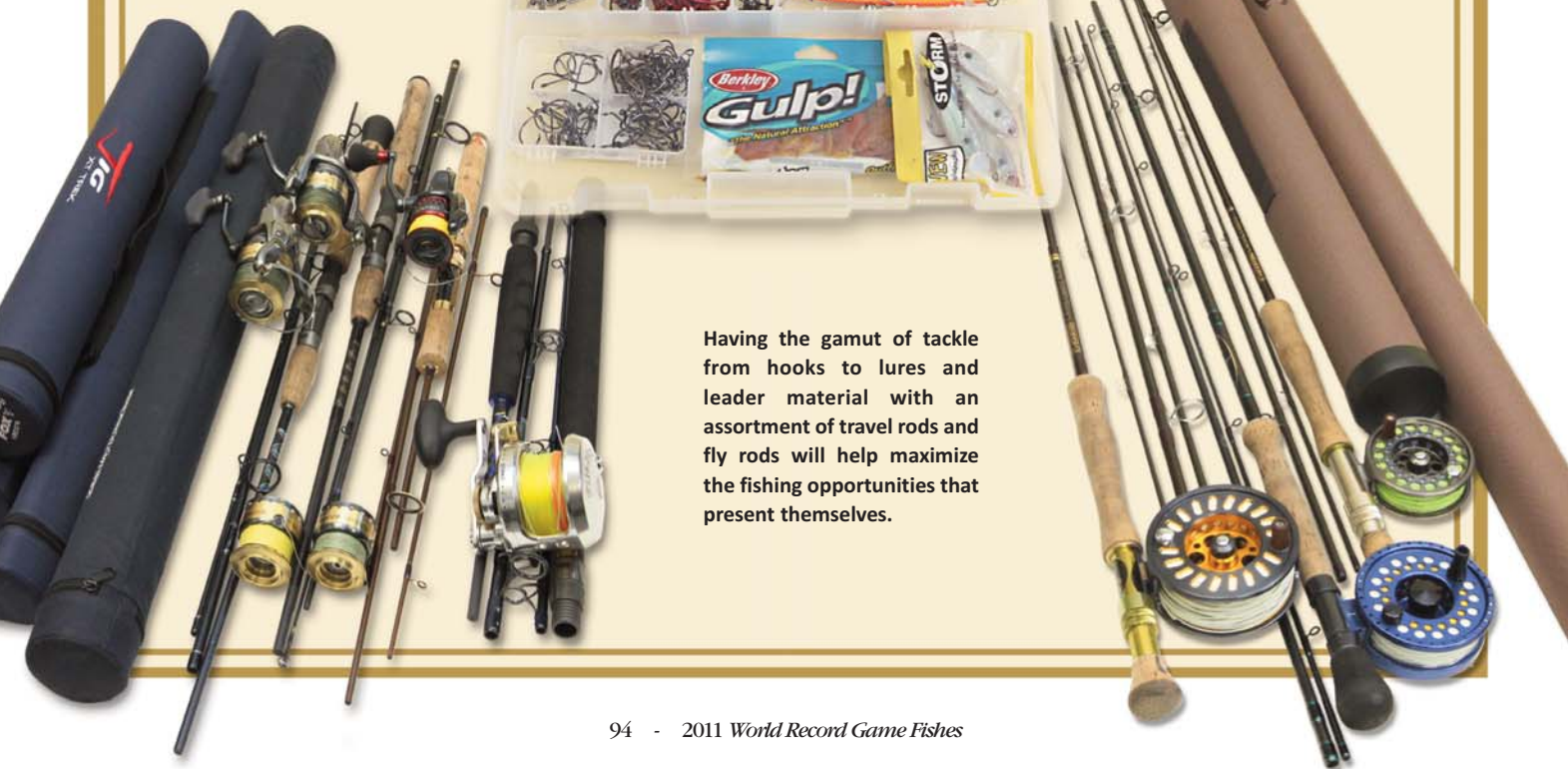
Steve Wozniak (not the Apple guy), who has flown more than one million miles in the last 10 years on his quest to land 1,000 different species of fish, says, "I always bring my own equipment, you just don't know what they're going to have."

just don't know what they're going to have. I bring two rods, an 8-pound-class spinning and popping rod and a super-heavy casting rod. With these two rods you can catch anything from bottomfish to bluefin tuna."

When it comes to tackle, you need to think ahead and resist the urge to pack your entire box. "You've got to keep it under 44 pounds so you learn to pack light," Wozniak says. "Just bring those things they won't have. I don't leave home without swim baits, soft plastics, some bucktail jigs, silver spoons in various sizes, sabiki rigs and Gulp. For line I pack two spools: 8-pound mono and 20-pound braid. I bring a Plano tray with every possible hook from a #14 up to a 4/0 live-bait hook, swivels, clips, sliding sinkers and an assortment of other small sinkers. Bring leader material from light stuff on up and wire." Don't forget the other necessities such as pliers, sunglasses and sunblock.



Having the gamut of tackle from hooks to lures and leader material with an assortment of travel rods and fly rods will help maximize the fishing opportunities that present themselves.



On our first night, we headed down to the dock and Adrian sent out the first cast along the dock into the shadows. A tarpon snatched the swim bait and started ripping off line. We heard the explosions as the fish jumped off in the distance. Adrian worked the fish down the dock and got in the water to revive and release our first catch of the trip, a nice tarpon.

The dock was swarming with tarpon. We snapped a few photos of the water and you could see at least 20 pairs of glowing-red eyeballs. We also caught ladyfish, which we used for live bait to solicit some wild strikes from the biggest tarpon of the bunch. We jumped a few more fish before leaving them there and heading in for the night.

HIRING A GUANA GUIDE

It's always good to find a reputable guide if at all possible when traveling to a new location, and lucky for us, Guana keeps Capt. Garfield Faulkner on speed dial. Based out of nearby Anegada Island, Garfield knows Guana's best spots and we quickly went to work. I was the first to take a turn on the forward casting deck, using an 8-weight with a small shrimp fly. Working along the beach, I saw two large shadows heading for the boat.



Photo by Derek Redwine



Photo by Charlie Levine



Catching nighttime tarpon off the beach and small pier never got old. The tarpon ate plugs, fly and live bait.

Just as Derek started to say, "It's a tarpon, grab a 10-weight," I was already sending the fly at the incoming tarpon. I just couldn't resist. A massive splash turned into a lightning run and within seconds the fish broke me off.



Capt. Garfield Faulkner, based out of nearby Anegada Island, knows Guana's best spots and quickly put us on tarpon in the early morning.



We moved to the other side of the island after lunch and searched for permit, but found nothing. We decided to jump in the Whaler and spent the afternoon chasing pods of little tunny as they busted bait just off the beaches. The small spoons and bucktail jigs hooked tuna and jacks and we fought fish until dusk. We cut one tuna up for bait and managed to hook a massive mystery fish that put on a long fight before breaking off.



Small jigs, spoons and plugs provided hours of light-tackle action with cero mackerel, little tunny, rock hind, houndfish, barracuda and a range of snapper.



I think it was either a shark or a big barracuda. That night, after dinner overlooking the Caribbean, we went back to the dock and played around with some more tarpon. It never got old.



The next morning we spent a few hours fly-casting the beach for bonefish. The water had turned a bit murky and we were blindly working our way toward Monkey Point when Derek came tight with something heavy. The fish didn't behave like a bonefish, but its silver flash gave it away. In just a few minutes, the quiet morning became a concert of cheers as Adrian photographed Derek's first bonefish on fly.



Later that afternoon we toured the island and took in the sights, including the bat caves, the flamingo-lined salt pond, an 18th century sugar mill and the three-acre orchard where most of the fruit consumed on the island is grown. We had heard about the island's resident tarantula population and when we



Derek's wish came true with his first-ever bonefish on fly. The fish was caught while fly casting the beach in slightly murky water.



Fishing Guana with a Captain

INSHORE:

Capt. Garfield Faulkner runs two 18-foot flats boats out of Anegada Island, a short run from the shores of Guana. Unlike most of the mountainous islands that make up the British Virgin Islands, Anegada is known as the flooded island as it hardly rises up from the ocean surface. The island is ringed by a barrier reef, and loaded with bonefish flats and ample mangrove habitat. Capt. Faulkner fishes for bonefish year-round with fall being his prime season. During this period, the weather fronts become a non-event and the sight-casting in the clear waters is world-class. Faulkner will happily run over to Guana Island to take clients fishing. He specializes in fly-fishing, with some of his favorite flies being the Crazy Charlie, Gotcha, Bahama Special and Clouser. He also offers a full quiver of spin-cast gear, fishing grubs and jigs on 10-pound test. Contact Capt. Faulkner at 284-495-9569, 284-496-9699 or e-mail kgfaulk@hotmail.com



The orchard on the island had ripe fruits and beautiful flowers unlike any plants we had ever seen before.

Inquired about the many holes in the ground, we got a quick lesson on what lives in them. The gardener showed us how to go fishing for tarantulas. Take a piece of long grass and remove everything except a puff of silk at the end. Stick this in a hole and twirl it until the spider grabs hold. Then, slowly pull out the shy, nocturnal arachnid. We spent hours teasing up tarantulas.



Fishing for tarantulas with a piece of puffy-ended long grass was very entertaining. The spiders would latch on and with the right touch you could pull them from their holes.



OFFSHORE:



For the offshore enthusiast, Guana Island is perfectly situated to access Anegada Reef, which at times can out-produce the blue marlin action along the famed North Drop. If you're willing to pay a little extra, you can likely arrange a trip with some of the better-known marlin operations in St. Thomas. Ideally, book a multiple-day charter on the June, July or August moon and have the charter boat moor just in front of Guana. Two of the top St. Thomas charter skippers include Capt. Red Bailey on the 44-foot *Abigail III* 340-775-6024; Red@SportfishVI.com and Capt. Eddie Morrison on the 45-foot *Marlin Prince* 340-693-5929; www.marlinprince.com

Over the last couple of days, we fell into an island schedule. Mornings were spent fishing the beaches, and our afternoons were left open for snorkeling and exploring. We fished from the boat in late afternoon and worked the dock lights at night. Through it all, we had to use our own knowledge as fishermen to figure out where the fish might be biting and what to use to land them. The days went by much too abruptly, but the trip was one we'll never forget. Being on Guana makes you appreciate nature and your surroundings. I'm forever indebted to Jason for not giving up on me and continually inviting me to this incredible island. I couldn't wait to call him when I got state-side just so he could tell me, "I told you so."