



# BILLFISHING

THE QUEST FOR

MARLIN, SWORDFISH,

SPEARFISH & SAILFISH

PETER GOADBY

ADAPTED FROM SALTWATER GAMEFISHING



# BILLFISHING

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**MARLIN, SWORDFISH**

**SPEARFISH & SAILFISH**

**PETER GOADBY**



International Marine  
Camden, Maine

## DEDICATION

*To the Ladies, to Lorrie Fay, Kay Mulholland and Sandra Clarry, and to the many others from a mere male fisherman.  
In the past, fishing offshore for the big fish has been regarded as the province of male activity and achievement. Nowhere  
has this been more evident than with billfishing – the epitome of the saltwater challenge on balanced tackle.*

*Lady anglers, lady fishing administrators and lady scientists have met and beaten challenges  
from the fish and male competition.*

*This book acknowledges the achievements of all the lady anglers from all countries for all species – particularly billfish.*

*It has been and is a privilege to know and to fish with and against the ladies. It is appropriate that recognition  
of the ladies extends to the great ocean fish sought by the anglers, where the females of the gamefish species make up  
most of the record listings for the species.*

First published in the United States of America by International Marine,  
a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

Originally published in Australia in 1996  
by HarperCollinsPublishers (Australia) Pty Limited Group.

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ISBN 0-07-011779-9

Cataloging-in-Publication information for this title can be obtained  
from the Library of Congress.

Questions regarding the ordering of this book should be addressed to:  
The McGraw-Hill Companies  
Customer Service Department  
P.O. Box 547  
Blacklick, OH 43004  
Retail customers: 1-800-262-4729  
Bookstores: 1-800-722-4726

Cover: *Photo: Sean Wallace*

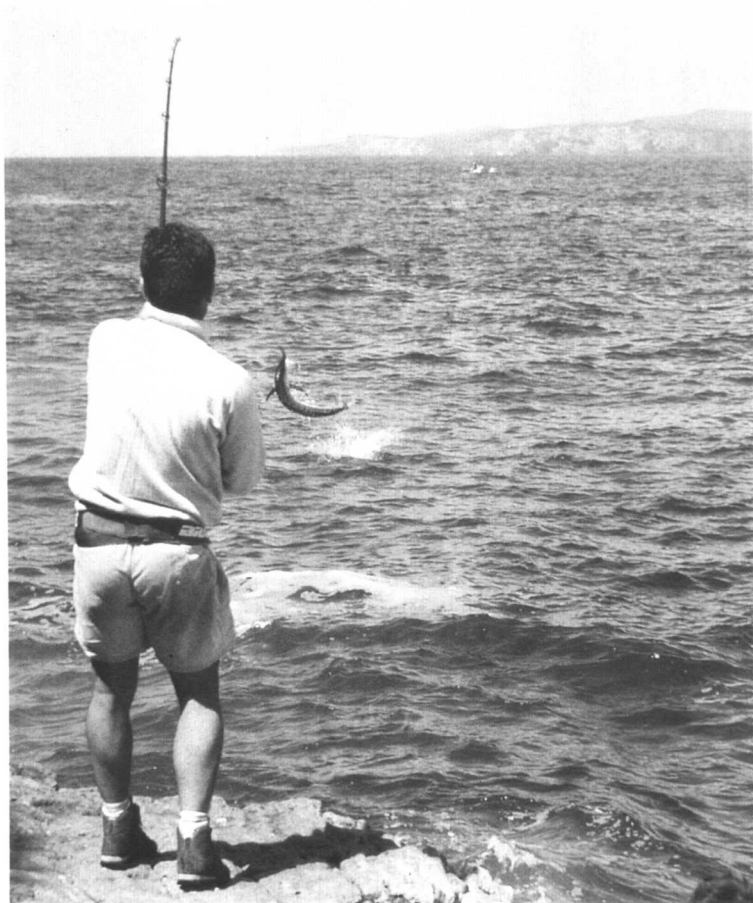
Title page: Master angler, Marsha Bierman, exerts maximum pressure  
on her PENN stand up tackle. *Photo: Darrell Jones*

Printed in Hong Kong

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▲ Billfishing from shore. The latest challenge. (See page 57.).

*Photo: Greg Finney.*

# FOREWORD



Peter Goadby's previous books on gamefishing, *Big Fish and Blue Water* (1970) and *Saltwater Gamefishing* (1991) were coffee table compendiums of all the knowledge available at the time for aspiring anglers, captains and crew. These books showed that Peter had 'been there and done that' and, most importantly, that the knowledge and experience gained was freely passed on.

*Billfishing – the quest for marlin, swordfish, spearfish & sailfish* will be considered as the on-board as well as the at-home reference on how to find and fish successfully for the billfish of the world.

This new book has the exciting colorful action photographs and clear drawings that accompany a clear text, the trade mark of his previous books.

Here is emphasis on conservation of the big fish and the importance of the marine food chain. Tag and release is the fishing ethic of the 90s and the future. Modern fishing practice recycles a billfish, even a grander, to fight another day. Catch and kill is fast being replaced by catch and release. Tag and release is the order of the day. As *Billfishing* says, 'Billfish are too valuable to be caught only once'.

This book sets out the problems of the indiscriminate pressure fishing method, the pelagic longliner, on the the pelagic fish population and the need for management. In this new 'how-to' book Peter Goadby gives anglers, captains and crews, in his concise style, tips on how to specialize with billfish whether by trolling, spinfishing or saltwater fly fishing within the IGFA rules, the world-wide standard for ethical fishing.

Peter has had the opportunity to fish with, and to observe and to learn from many of the world's great

anglers, captains and crews. This knowledge, when combined with his own practical and successful involvement in all phases of saltwater fishing ensures that the readers of his books have a unique opportunity for knowledge and expertise as well as the excitement that is billfishing, and billfish around the world. In his writings, Peter's thirst for knowledge, for history, to know the people and the great animals of the oceans, is clearly evident. It is now more than thirty years since this Australian first fished and competed successfully in the Hawaiian islands in the Hawaiian International Billfish Tournament. Since then our Board of Governors have used his knowledge and judgement in fishing rules and ethics as have administrators in his own country, in New Zealand and internationally.

His scientific involvement has also spread widely. It has been said of Peter Goadby that 'fishing is not just a sport, it is a way of life'.

As we move towards the next century we are vividly aware of the problems created for the billfish stocks by commercial longliners.

We are lucky there is this book *Billfishing* that gives the 'how-to' and the 'where' in regard to the great fish, for all tackle disciplines.

Peter's up-to-date knowledge and involvement will greatly increase all saltwater anglers' appreciation of the blue water challenge of the billfish, the mightiest of all fish.

*Many tight lines and much aloha.*

Peter S Fithian

TRUSTEE, IGFA  
CHAIRMAN, HIBA  
CHAIRMAN, PORE, HONOLULU, HAWAII





# INTRODUCTION



There is a special challenge and charisma associated with the offshore fish species known as billfish.

These are the fish that dominate the records and other memorable photographs of fish, angler, crew and tackle. Billfish are the dream fish that trigger heightened fishing excitement and numerous descriptive clichés. Their speed, power, endurance and acrobatic, aerial activity have forced tackle improvements, the evolution of special boats, and carefully thought-out techniques.

Even the names of the billfish are exciting. The heavyweights, such as the broadbill swordfish, the blue marlin and the black marlin, are the food chain peak predators in their tropical and temperate environments weighing up to and over 445 kg (1000 lb) – the magic weight in fishing, the granders. The striped marlin is the middle weight champion growing to 250 kg (550 lb). The white marlin of the Atlantic is smaller and equally acrobatic, requiring expert angler skill from hook-up to boatside. Sailfish are, and always will be, the lightweight champions that establish charter industries and light tackle feats. The spearfish are the smallest of the billfish. Here again, pound for pound, they are tough fighters on balanced tackle and active jumpers.

Billfish are the superfish, even those who do not rate the name 'giant' before their name. Their color, conformation and power are a tribute to nature's evolution of speed and power. The unsolved answers to many questions about them are sought by scientists, fishermen and fishery managers alike. Billfish have gripped the

imagination and triggered our quest for knowledge as have no other fish. They are the stars of the fishing world.

At sea and in every film image of them, billfish make fishermen look and absorb the fascinating qualities of these mighty fish. Photographs, paintings and sculptures bring back vivid memories for those of us who are fortunate enough to seek and find the fish in their natural environment. In print, great writers such as Zane Grey, Ernest Hemingway and Philip Wylie, who were also keen fishermen, created written images that brought the billfish to life. Their works are recognized, even by non-fishmen, as classics today.

The object of this book is to record the 'how to' for maximum results, and to further encourage the fishing ethic of 'tag and release', the sport fishing of the present and even more of the future. Tag and release is a tribute to the fish themselves. The feeling shown by the fishermen at the culmination of a successful tag and release of any billfish, but especially giant billfish, is a very special mix of common sense and euphoria.

The book deplores the frightening effects of commercial longlining on billfish, and recognizes the damage done by thoughtless exploitation of the food chain.

*Billfishing* gives current and future anglers everywhere the opportunity to be aware not only of the fish but the methods that have evolved and stood the test of time through years of fishing in the world famous hot spots. The tackle methods and techniques have changed over the years and will refine even more as our understanding develops.



Photographs shot by some of the world's great fishing cameramen bring the visual impact of first-hand contact with these colorful purpose-evolved and graceful predators to the reader. Photographers who have helped beyond thanks include Darrell Jones, Gilbert Keech, Captain Paul Murray, Biff Lampton, Bill Harrison, Jacquie Acheson, James Watts, Vic Dunaway, Graham Farmer, Syd Kraul, Kim Holland, Mike Kenyon, Jim Witten, Peter Hoogs, John Jordan, Greg Finney, Tudor Collins, Lyndon Rea, G. Angus, Simon Cassetarri, Andrew Taulerman, Tim Simpson, Greg Edwards, Shaun Wallace, Bob Bury, David Rogers, Julian Pepperell, Mark Deeney, and all the others credited in the photographs in the book. I would also like to thank my designer, Louise McGeachie, who has showcased their work to such good effect.

Billfishing has become the epitome of the challenge of saltwater fishing in the 90s. As we move towards the turn of the century the sport is no longer with heavy knucklebusting tackle. Billfishing is now whatever is your tackle preference. There is the more traditional method of trolling tackle, with special brake materials and two speeds of reel and line from 1 kg to 60 kg (2 lb to 130 lb line). Saltwater fly fishing has been improved to cope with the power and action of the billfish. To this is added the thrill of

raising and teasing the fish within casting range and the skill of fly presentation. The third recent tackle evolution is the powerful spinning tackle. Spinning, once the domain of fresh water, now has the benefits of casting and performance and capacity that make its use routine.

The question of the ingredients for success in saltwater gamefishing can be briefly summed up. A mix of preparation, concentration and perspiration, to which is added a little luck, will ensure success. Even though the necessary proportions may vary with the type of fish, the first three are the most necessary. The experience factor can be offset to some degree by communication and coaching from skipper, crew or another experienced angler. One of these assisting is enough. Participation by all creates possible confusion.

It is hoped *Billfishing* will give information and direction to the anglers and charter fishermen interested in billfish of all sizes and all species – the memory creators.

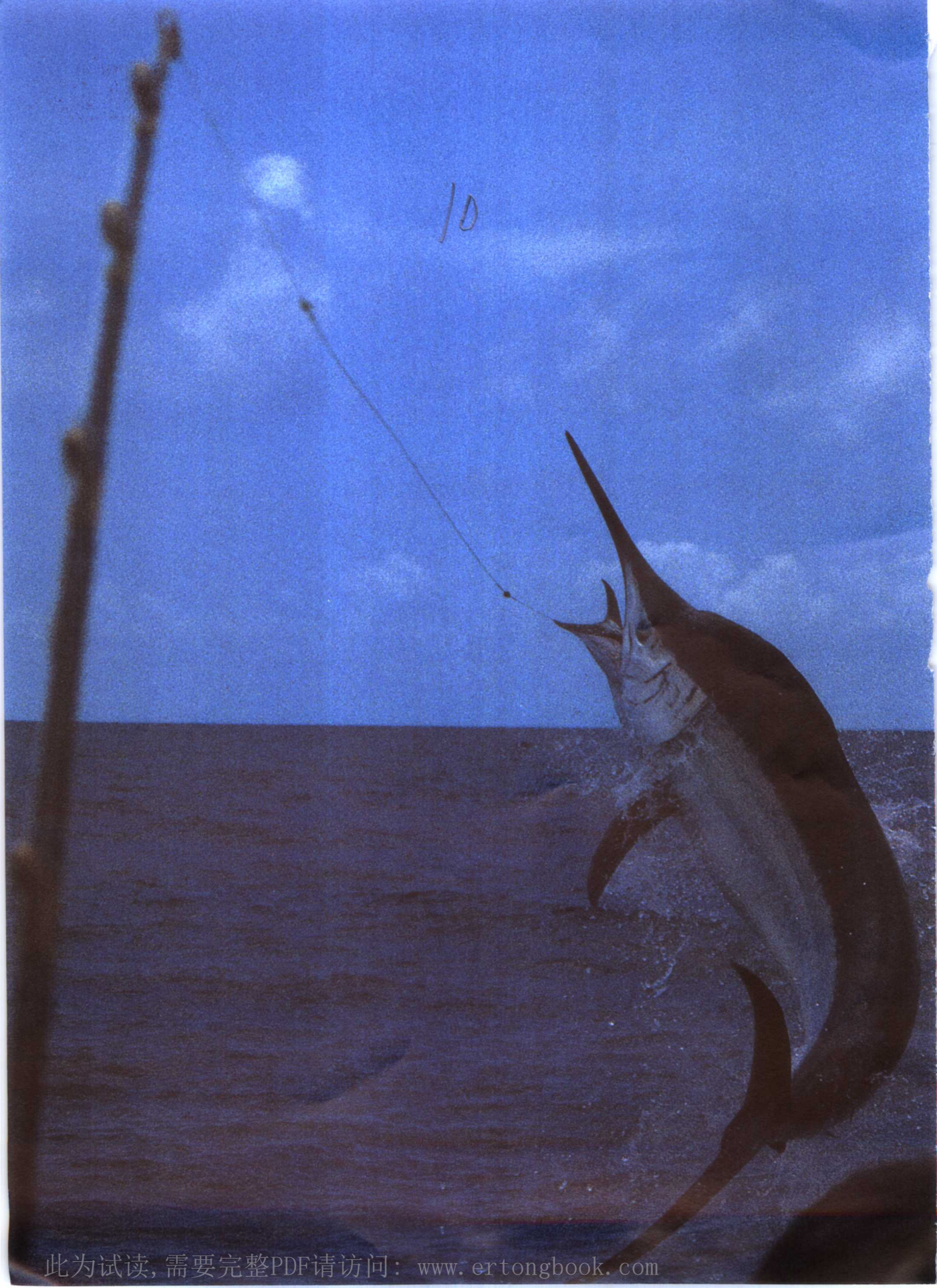
Billfishing is many things to many people. It is a special challenge. Tag and release will give another dimension to this sport as we move towards the year 2000.

This book, like fishing itself, is a team effort.





10



# THE BILLFISH



**O**f all the world's fish, the billfish are the supercaptures. In recent times, the tag and release ethic has added a new dimension — a new feeling — to billfishing. Anglers fishing even the super hot spots such as Cairns for black marlin and Madeira for blue marlin are tagging and releasing giants weighing over 450 kg (1000 lb). Anglers who have experienced first hand the thrill of billfish alongside the boat, seeing them recover their color and become active, rate the act of release as one of fishing's top experiences.

Saltwater fly fishing originated when Webster Robinson took the world's first billfish on fly. This, and subsequent pioneer efforts, triggered incredible expansion, acceptance and tackle development for one of the fastest growing sport fishing methods.

Fly fishing devotees are now showing that even the peak pelagic species are open to those who choose the fly reel in preference to the long-established familiar overhead trolling and spinning reels. There is a whole new world of developing techniques and fishing challenges.



◀ A 300 kg (660 lb) black marlin jumps alongside Ted Nofftger in the cockpit. Photo: Peter Goadby.

▲ World record angler, Kay Mulholland with a 230 kg (500 lb) black marlin on Captain Peter Wright's boat *Euyfken*. Photo: Peter Goadby.



Much scientific study has been directed at the world's billfish, particularly because the pressure from commercial fisheries adversely affects stocks. The long-lining activities of many fishing nations — each boat running up to 3000 hooks on miles of long line — take billfish both as by-catch and deliberate targets.

This is a serious problem as all billfish are worth much more, in dollar value, as a recreational sport fish than as a dead, commercial fish. The tag and release of billfish increases their value to a fishing area. In fact, they are too valuable to be caught and killed; they should be caught, tagged and released for the benefit of scientific information gathering and the good of the various billfish species.

Experienced anglers, skippers and crews are often asked which is the mightiest of the billfish. From personal experience and listening to hundreds of people around the world who should know, the rating for adult fish may be: broadbill; blue marlin and black marlin; striped marlin; white marlin; Pacific sailfish (because of their size) and Atlantic sailfish; and finally, longnose and shortnose spearfish.

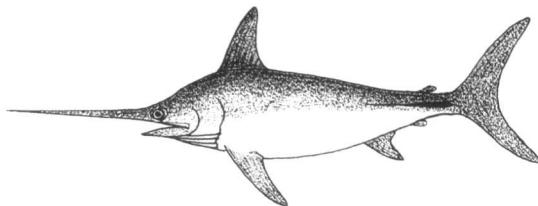
This is a quick way to get into an argument as all billfish are great. Each species has characteristics that mean special degrees of difficulty in hook-up, in fighting, and in just plain orneryness. Some specialize in power acrobatics close to the boat, others at a distance. Naturally there is a difference in fighting characteristics depending on the age, weight and condition of the fish. The equal rating of black marlin and blue marlin, whether Atlantic or Indo-Pacific, will no doubt trigger many cries of dissent from devotees of one particular fishing location.

One thing for certain is that all billfish are a challenge and surefire generators of adrenalin. Sport fishermen are fortunate to have the opportunity to see these great fish in their natural environment, displaying their power and savagery — an experience unknown by other fishermen and those who don't venture into the deep blue of the ocean.

## **BROADBILL SWORDFISH**

*Xiphias Gladius*

LINNAEUS 1758



### OTHER COMMON NAMES

Swordfish, broadbill.

### IDENTIFYING FEATURES

Upper body dark blue, often with bronze coloration, lower body silvery white, colors merge to light brown. Maximum weight 680 kg (1500 lb). Long flat bill. High, rigid sickle dorsal, equal in height and similar in shape to upper caudal lobe. Straight lower jaw. No visible lateral line. Fixed sickle pectoral. Wide single body keel at junction of body and tail.

### EXPECTED TEMPERATURE RANGE

13°C–22°C (55°F–72°F).

### TYPICAL LOCATION

Open water deeper than 110 meters (60 fathoms) to 1850 meters (1000 fathoms) or more, over canyons and submarine peaks and banks, cruising to reoxygenate along current lines.

### FISHING METHODS

In daylight, presenting trolled baits of squid, barracuda or chub mackerel, striped tuna or small tuna to broadbill cruising on surface with dorsal and tail clear of surface. Drifting at night with live or dead squid, spotted mackerel, small tuna, bonito or bottom fish species obtained from commercial trawlers. Eating quality is excellent.

### TYPICAL FIGHTING CHARACTERISTICS

Regarded as the king of fishes, broadbill are dogged deep and mid water fighters that





occasionally jump in a spectacular fashion. At night they often run to the surface immediately after hook-up. Use of a light stick shows the position and depth of swordfish in night fighting. The soft mouth and body flesh and skin dictates that these fish be fought with maximum 10 kg (22 lb) brake. 24 kg (50 lb) and 37 kg (80 lb) tackle is balanced for most broadbill, with 60 kg (130 lb) for the superfish.

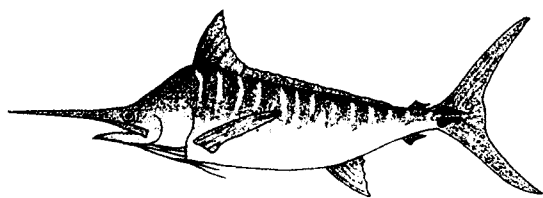
#### MAJOR SPORTFISHING AREAS

Chile, Peru, Panama, Ecuador, Mexico, north-east coast USA, Florida, Venezuela, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Hawaii.

## ATLANTIC BLUE MARLIN

*Makaira Nigricans*

LACEPEDE 1802



#### OTHER COMMON NAMES

Blue marlin.

#### IDENTIFYING FEATURES

Back dark blue with light blue stripes of dots and bars, belly silvery white. In life, fins and tail electric blue. Maximum weight 900 kg (2000 lb). Start of second dorsal behind start of second anal fin. Pectoral fins fold flat. Lateral line generally does not show in adults. When scales or skin are removed the lateral line shows as multiple, up to four, chain loops. Bill medium long. Lower jaw turns down slightly at tip. Dorsal fin and anal fin pointed and medium height.

#### EXPECTED TEMPERATURE RANGE

21°C–30°C (70°F–86°F).

#### TYPICAL LOCATION

Open ocean along continental shelf drop off over deeper canyons along 110 meter (60 fathom) reefs and submarine mountains and peaks and ledges, along current lines, around bait schools of tuna, mahi mahi (dolphin fish), squid, around logs, weed lines.

#### FISHING METHODS

Trolling lures of hard and soft plastic, trolling dead baits, tuna, mullet, Spanish mackerel, squid, trolling live baits, drifting with live or dead baits. Eating quality good.

#### TYPICAL FIGHTING CHARACTERISTICS

Whether in the Caribbean, the Atlantic or the Indo-Pacific, blue marlin are the heavyweights — very fast, tough fighters and spectacular jumpers that tend to fish deeper than black or striped marlin.

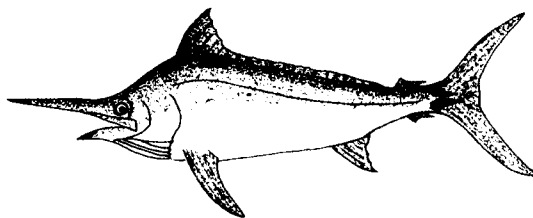
#### MAJOR SPORTFISHING AREAS

Puerto Rico, Walker's Cay, Bimini, Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Bermuda and other east Atlantic and Caribbean islands, Costa Rica, North and South Carolina, Florida, Gulf of Mexico, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Azores, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands, Ivory Coast of Africa, Madeira.

## BLACK MARLIN

*Makaira Indica*

CUVIER 1832



#### OTHER COMMON NAMES

White marlin (in Japan, possibly from color of flesh), giant black marlin, silver marlin.



### IDENTIFYING FEATURES

Temperate waters: back and fins dark slatey blue or black, belly silvery white. Tropical waters: back dark blue, sometimes with light blue stripes that fade after death, belly silver, dorsal fin lavender, other fins and tails electric blue, sometimes spots on dorsal. Maximum weight 863 kg (1900 lb). Start of second dorsal forward of start of second anal fin. Fixed pectoral fins in marlin in excess of 50 kg (110 lb). In black marlin less than 50 kg (110 lb) the pectorals can often be moved despite rigor mortis, but will not fold flat against body. Short lower jaw curved down. Short, heavy, round bill.

### EXPECTED TEMPERATURE RANGE

21°C–30°C (70°F–86°F).

### TYPICAL LOCATION

Along current lines. Open ocean around schools of bait species and small tuna, along reefs, along continental shelf drop-off 182 meters

(100 fathoms) and submarine peaks, along shore where warm currents are running, around logs. A few 'local' fish on reefs, even in cooler waters off-season. Juveniles move in schools of similar age and class along coast and islands.

### FISHING METHODS

Adults: trolling tuna, Spanish mackerel, mullet. Trolling lures of hard and soft plastic. Drifting or anchor live and dead bait. Juveniles: trolling mullet, ballyhoo (garfish), chub mackerel, strips often in combination with plastic squid, feather jigs. Trolling live baits, skipjack and other small tuna, kawa kawa (mackerel tuna), trevally. Fly fishing after teasing occasionally from rocky headland with live bait. Trolling small lures, spoons, konaheads, knuckleheads, big and bibless minnows, plastic squid.

### TYPICAL FIGHTING CHARACTERISTICS

A dogged deep fighter and aerial performer that usually mixes jumping, fast runs with deep fighting characteristics. Will jump at any time



▲ The crew cut the leader to complete the tag and release. *Photo: Mike Kenyon.*

during fight, and right alongside boat when leader is in hand.

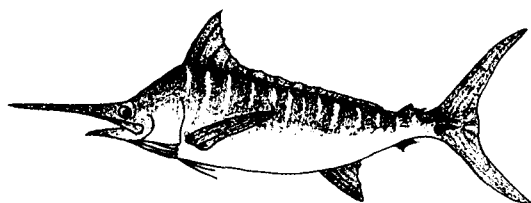
#### MAJOR SPORTFISHING AREAS

East and west coast of Australia, Panama, Peru, Costa Rica, Mexico, Ecuador, Tahiti, Papua New Guinea, Pacific islands, southern Asia, New Zealand, Fiji, Mauritius, Mozambique, East Africa.

### **INDO-PACIFIC BLUE**

*Marlin Makaira Mazara*

JORDAN & SNYDER 1901



#### OTHER COMMON NAMES

Pacific blue marlin, blue marlin.

#### IDENTIFYING FEATURES

Back dark blue with light blue stripes of dots and bars, belly silvery white. In life, fins and tail are electric blue. Maximum weight 1181 kg (2600 lb). Start of second dorsal behind start of second anal. Pectoral fins fold flat. Lateral line generally does not show in adults, but with scales or skin removed is single line of chain. Bill medium and long. Lower jaw turns down slightly at tip. Dorsal fin and anal fin pointed and medium height.

#### EXPECTED TEMPERATURE RANGE

21°C–30°C (70°F–86°F).

#### TYPICAL LOCATION

Open ocean along continental shelf drop-off. Over deeper canyons along current lines. Along 110 meter (60 fathom) reefs, submarine mountains and peaks and ledges, weed line, around bait schools of tuna, mahi mahi (dolphin fish), squid, and around logs.

#### FISHING METHODS

Trolling lures of hard or soft plastic, trolling dead baits of tuna, mullet, Spanish mackerel, trolling live baits, drifting and at anchor with live or dead baits.

#### TYPICAL FIGHTING CHARACTERISTICS

At all weights a very tough fighter and spectacular jumper that tends to fight deeper than black or striped marlin. Will spin and reverse direction when jumping and greyhounding, a tactic that often causes cut or broken lines. The first run will sometimes spool the reel.

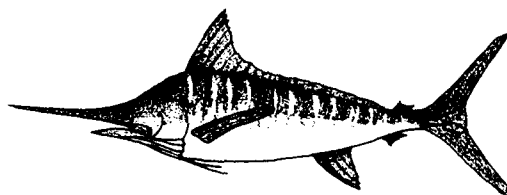
#### MAJOR SPORTFISHING AREAS

Hawaii, Tahiti, Fiji, Guam, other Pacific islands (including Tonga and Vanuatu), Mexico, Panama, Ecuador, Costa Rica, east and west coast of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Mauritius, southern Asia, East Africa, Mozambique.

### **STRIPED MARLIN**

*Tetrapturus Audax*

PHILLIPI 1887



#### OTHER COMMON NAMES

Striper, stripey.

#### IDENTIFYING FEATURES

Upper body dark with powder blue, cobalt or lavender stripes, lower body silvery white. Maximum weight 250 kg (550 lb). High dorsal fin in which three high rays are of almost equal height. Single prominent lateral line. Pectoral fins fold in against body. Start of second dorsal behind start of second anal fin. Tail veed, cuts away at tip of each lobe of tail. Anal fin high. Bill long and slender. Lower jaw straight.



#### EXPECTED TEMPERATURE RANGE

20°C–26°C (68°F–79°F).

#### TYPICAL LOCATION

Around bait schools, chub mackerel, sardines, pilchards, anchovies, small tuna, squid.

#### FISHING METHODS

Trolling dead baits, chub mackerel, kahawai, yellowtail, squid. Trolling strip baits, sometimes with plastic squid in combination. Trolling live bait, chub mackerel, small tuna, kahawai. Trolling lures, hard and soft plastic lures, minnows, plastic fish or squid replicas. Casting live bait, chub mackerel, yellowtail scad, sardines, anchovies. Drifting with live bait, kahawai, small tuna, yellowtail, chub mackerel. Eating quality good. Excellent for sashimi.

#### TYPICAL FIGHTING CHARACTERISTICS

Exciting jumper, a greyhounding and tailwalking fighter that gives long runs and sounds deep. The marlin that is a challenge on tackle of all weights up to 37 kg (80 lb). In many areas is an ideal opponent on 13.6 kg (30 lb) tackle.

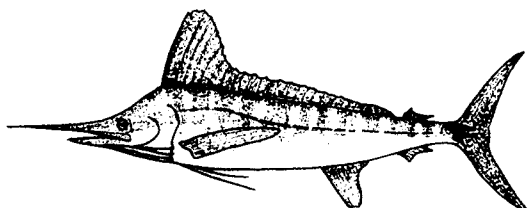
#### MAJOR SPORTFISHING AREAS

California, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile, New Zealand, east and west coast of Australia, East Africa, Kenya, Japan, Okinawa, Hawaii and other Pacific islands, Indian Ocean islands, Western Arabian sea.

### WHITE MARLIN

*Tetrapturus Albidus*

POEY 1860



#### OTHER COMMON NAMES

Atlantic white marlin.

#### IDENTIFYING FEATURES

Back dark blue, belly silvery white, light stripes along body, dorsal fin dark blue with spots. Maximum weight 90 kg (200 lb). Dorsal, anal and pectoral fins rounded at tips. Single lateral line. Dorsal fin high and rounded. Slender bill. Slender, straight lower jaw. Second dorsal starts forward of start of second anal fin. Pelvic fins long.

#### EXPECTED TEMPERATURE RANGE

20°C–29°C (68°F–84°F).

#### TYPICAL LOCATION

Open water around bait schools (ballyhoo, mullet squid, flying fish). Over deep reefs, canyons, drop-offs and holes in the sea bed. Along current lines and weed lines.

#### FISHING METHODS

Trolling dead bait (ballyhoo (garfish), mullet, squid, chub mackerel, eel). Often rigged with plastic squid or feather jigs. Trolling with small hard and soft plastic lures. Trolling with live bait, ballyhoo (garfish), chub mackerel. Spin casting live bait. Eating quality good.

#### TYPICAL FIGHTING CHARACTERISTICS

This aggressive ocean acrobat is a most spectacular jumper, with all the surface tricks punctuated with long runs and sounding to depths. Ideal for light tackle up to 15 kg (30 lb).

#### MAJOR SPORTFISHING AREAS

Bahamas, Walker's Cay, Cat Cay, Bimini, Chub Key, Puerto Rico, St Thomas, Gulf of Mexico, Florida, east coast of USA north to Hudson Canyon, Bermuda, Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba.

Even though white marlin are the lightest of the marlin species, acrobatic jumps and their fighting ability make them memorable opponents on light tackle.

