

The IGFTO Observer Holiday Newsletter ~ December 24, 2023



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

The IGFTO Observer

A Newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers

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Edition 4~

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A message from the IGFTO President

By: Steve Hargett

Let me start by expressing my sincere gratitude for your support of IGFTO throughout 2023. Because of your participation in tournaments this past year, IGFTO recorded another milestone witnessing the 60,000th billfish released since our inception in 2009. In addition, your financial contributions enabled IGFTO to provide aid to like-minded conservation groups.

This past year marks the end of an era. As previously announced, I am stepping down from the board of directors as president. The annual meeting on January 17 in Los Sueños, just prior to the first leg of the Signature Triple Crown, will mark the end of my term. Election of a new board of directors will take place at that meeting.

I have truly enjoyed serving as director and president. It has been a blessing to

work with our dedicated and passionate members. I have greatly enjoyed the camaraderie and all the great times we have experienced together during tournaments. The efforts from members such as yourself have enabled IGFTO to grow its brand. I can say with pride that it is now recognized as the leader in billfish conservation, and catch and release tournaments.

I feel confident IGFTO will continue to grow. I know your new board of directors will strive to exceed in achieving our goals. I am grateful to have had the pleasure to serve as president of IGFTO. I have made so many new friends and participated in fantastic tournaments. I am blessed.

May 2024 be prosperous and healthy for you and your family.

As always, tight lines, and Sincerely Yours,



El Salvador Billfish Tournament

Story by: Reese Bowles

The first week of November provided almost twenty IGFTO Observers an opportunity to explore Central America. The 29th Annual El Salvador International Billfish Tournament was held November 2nd–5th 2023. Hosted by the Bahia Del Sol Marina, 30 boats prepared for this event.

Day 1 found Observer Colleen Joyce in the envious position to call nine sailfish releases and a Black Marlin release on the *Monique*. The Sailfish and Marlin bite was somewhat slow compared to the last few years due to a storm that passed two days before the tournament.

Every boat found Dorado on Day 1. So many Dorado. Most of the day we went less than 10 minutes without a Dorado.

Day 2 found the conditions improving and Dorado again on a feeding frenzy all day. Billfish were hard to come by as the mates could not keep the Dorado off long enough to troll.

Day 3 began with every boat having a chance to win. Again, Dorado made it difficult to troll any Ballyhoo. *Monique* and the *Hooker* battled it out trading Sailfish releases until noon. The *Hooker* rallied from five fish down to take the lead and pulled away catching a handful of Sails the last three hours.

The awards ceremony was enjoyable, and the food was good! The fireworks presentation was excellent! Unfortunately, the sky opened up and a downpour chased everyone under cover. I had a blast observing and everyone was so nice. I can't wait until next year.

8th Annual Guatemala Billfish Invitational

Story by: Lynette Catha

What a fantastic time observing in the 8th Annual Guatemala Billfish Invitational. From start-to-finish, it was an amazing experience.

The crews and hospitality at both Pacific Fins and Buena Vista (Jody's) were very welcoming and top-notch.

The welcoming ceremony was special as IGFTO donated monies for more research the second year in a row. It was great to sit and meet many of the other observers and put faces and names together.

We were taken every morning to Marina Pez Vela Empresa Portuaria Quezel to report for our daily assignment. The captains and crews were eager to start the day and be in place for lines in the water at 8:00 a.m.

I enjoyed the warm sunshine, as I had reports of snow flurries in my hometown in Maryland. Many Sailfish were logged every day totaling 764 released, five Blue Marlins and a plethora of Dorado encompassing the three-day tournament.

The beauty of the Pacific Ocean everyday was a different adventure on the water seeing many sea turtles, spinner dolphins, whales.

This was a wonderful billfish tournament, I will cherish my new friendships made, and looking forward to the next adventure with IGFTO.



Left Photo: IGFTO President Steve Hargett is pictured with Pacific Fins Partner Neils Erichsen and Director of Operations Juan Manuel during opening ceremonies.
Right Photo: IGFTO Treasurer Reese Bowles present Pacific Fins Partner Neils Erichsen a donation for \$3,000.00 to assist with the Billfish Conservation Project – IGFTO's second year of observing and donation.

Member Profile – Bob Smith

Story by: Art McDonald

For our year-ending edition of The IFGTO Observer Newsletter, we feature Bob Smith—a relatively new IGFTO Observer who has hit the ground running and has found good stride.

Bob is mostly a diehard northeast canyon tuna fisherman but has found his sea legs in the Pacific and Caribbean Seas with Billfish tournaments. Although no stranger to Costa Rica and the country's pelagic species, including its steroidal blue marlin, and Jersey's white marlin bite, he has been a quick study of the “hunt” for bills.

Smith's style in life is eclectic, forever finding crossovers and mashups between seemingly diverse disciplines. For Bob, fishing is art, science, and as crazy as it sounds, a means by which to tap a spiritual connection – especially when the target is released to swim and reproduce another day.

Bob's professional background is law, politics, and government. He started fresh out of college working on Capitol Hill for a Member of the House of Representatives, went to law school and ran for office himself. Never content with stillness (and the inevitable algae growth) as a younger man, he served in the New Jersey General Assembly (The House), as a county commissioner and as a short-term, fill-in mayor of a large municipality.

In the New Jersey General Assembly, Smith was assigned the Chairmanship of the Natural Resources Committee, which – surprise, surprise (can you hear the drum roll?) – was responsible for fisheries, its management and the people associated with the never-ending conflict. On February 8, 2003, Bob was honored as “Man of the Year” by the Recreational Fishing Alliance, New Jersey chapter.

In between the political fun and mind-sucking madness, Bob learned to become a competent trial attorney, as a prosecutor of 17 years, and developed a good understanding of government and land use law. He is certified as a diplomate in New Jersey Local Government Law. Today, he makes a living developing land and by building a few modest, semi-custom homes a year – from soil to CO.

Why is this new guy on fire with the mission of the IGFTO? Defining moments in life are often unplanned, and, for Bob, one such moment occurred when a childhood hero picked up the phone and said, “I have a problem with what you are doing, so I want to meet and talk”.

It was Peter Benchley, the author of *Jaws* – the master of words and story, the man of the pen who set a seismic wave upon our sandcastles of life. Peter also carried a heavy heart for unleashing the villainization of sharks. “I primarily wanted to illustrate man's insane response to nature and the natural balance of ecosystems,” recalls Smith.

That moment stuck like the perfect head shot with a four-inch steel hook. But it faded until he met the folks at the tournament whose mission it was to release these magnificent creatures!

The IGFTO has and will continue to be an international leader in billfish and gamefish conservation. The IGFTO is the antithesis of the Amity Island mob that Bentley penned. Bob is looking forward to assembling a lifetime of skills to advance the mission.

If you ever see Smith observing, his mind may be replaying the indelible voice, “Come up fish. Come to Quint”. Show me your dorsal.



Bob underway in El Salvador.

Bet You Didn't Know
Story by: Art McDonald

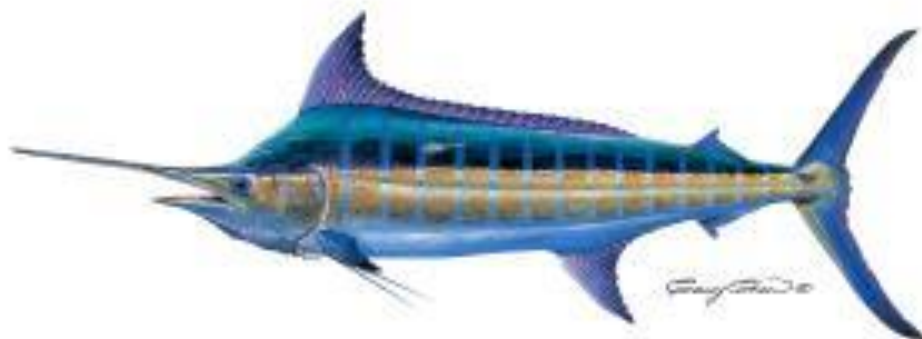


Image usage courtesy of Carey Chen

About Blue Marlin:

Blue Marlin are found in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Marine biologists have determined there is no difference between Atlantic and Pacific Blue Marlin – both having the scientific name *Makaira nigricans*. The IGFA has divided the species into an Atlantic and Pacific category for World Record acknowledgment.

Per the Billfish Foundation and reports from Japanese commercial fishermen, Blue Marlin are the largest of the billfish species. Commercial catches have exceeded 2,000 lbs.

The IGFA all-tackle record Blue Marlin (both Atlantic & Pacific) weighed 1,402 lbs. (Victoria Brazil – 1992). The largest, non-record Blue Marlin caught on rod & reel weighed 1,805 lbs. (“Choy’s Monster” – fought by multiple anglers – Oahu, Hawaii 1970). The second largest, non-record Blue Marlin caught on rod & reel weighed 1,656 lbs. (Gary Merriman on the Black Bart/Capt. Bart Miller in 1984 (mate hooked) – Kona, Hawaii). Blue Marlin over 1,000 lbs. are called “Granders.”

Rarely do male Blue (or Black) Marlin exceed 350 lbs.

The Blue Marlin is a highly-migratory species, with individuals migrating across all ocean basins and even between oceans. One individual, for example, was tagged off the east coast of the United States (western Atlantic ocean) and re-captured in the Indian Ocean.

It takes 2–4 years of age for Blue Marlin (both males and females) to become sexually mature.

Females lay 30–100,000,000 eggs annually (during 3–4 spawns) depending on the size of the female. The larger the female, the more eggs she carries. Eggs are 1mm in diameter and hatch within a week of spawning.

The average lifespan for Blue Marlin is 22 years for females – 17 years for males.

Blue Marlin have been clocked at 60 MPH – although there is some controversy surrounding this claim.

Though almost all fish are cold blooded, Blue Marlin and other billfishes have a specialized blood vessel structure – called a countercurrent exchanger – that allows them to warm their brains and eyes. This adaptation provides them with a major advantage when hunting by allowing them to think more quickly and see more clearly.

Satellite tags showed Blue Marlin diving routinely to depths of 400–600 meters (1,300–1,900’) during the daytime.

Blue Marlin migrate to lower latitudes during cooler months and higher latitudes during summer months.

IGFTO Observer Training Course (OTC) Welcomes 14 New Observers

Our most-recent OTC was held on Saturday November 11, 2023 in Fort Lauderdale, FL facilitated by Director Emeritus and Co-Founder Terry O'Neill and Director Bob Stimolo. This program completed our training year and we met our goal of **50 new Observers this year**. Welcome Aboard!

<u>Name:</u>	<u>Hometown:</u>
Andrew Bott	Winter Park, FL
Kristen Brown	Sullivan's Island, SC
Scott Hill	Denver, CO
Justin Kirkpatrick	Jacksonville Beach, FL
Lori Cardew Lowers	Merritt Island, FL
Russ Lowers	Merritt Island, FL
Charlie Muse	Rockport, TX
Jim Nicholson	Panama City Beach, FL
Jenn Pastorius	Ocean City, MD
Ana Pazos	Toa Baja, PR
Harold Roebuck	Punta Gorda, FL
Lana Sena	Boca Raton, FL
Andrew Simmerman	Spanish Fort, AL
Pedro Vega Sanchez	Ridge Manor, FL

IGFTO Achieves New Benchmark

Statistics by: Evan A. Hipsley, Jr.

International Game Fish Tournament Observers, Inc. are both professional and amateur sport fishermen originally trained by the International Game Fish Association, now taught by IGFTO, in both species identification and tournament rules. **In IGFTO's fourteen-year history, Observers have witnessed releases of 60,187 Billfish [as of December 2023] (all species). CONGRATULATIONS!!**



2023 dispatched 230 Observers to 10 tournaments including:

Costa Rica for six instances including three Los Sueños Ladies Tournaments and Legs One, Two, and Three of the Triple Crown Quepos for the Pescadora
Puerto Rico for the 70th International Billfish Tournament
El Salvador for the International Billfish Tournament
and Guatemala for the 8th Annual Guatemala Billfish Invitational

Observers witnessed the release of 3,655 billfish. Among these were 3,215 Sailfish and 440 Marlins (Blue, Black, and Striped). Releases were observed in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. 2024 is shaping up in similar fashion with the tournament circuit kickoff in Los Sueños, Costa Rica January 16, 2024.

Annual Dues Reminder

IGFTO's annual renewal program aligns with the fiscal year (Oct 1 – Sep 30) and commenced on October 1st. In order to be considered a "member in good standing" and to be eligible to both sign up and to participate in tournaments as an IGFTO Observer, your dues **MUST** be current. We've made it convenient and easy to pay with the link provided in the invoice. Thanks to those that have renewed and confirmed their dedication to the conservation and protection of Game Fish. Have a question about your dues, send an email to our [TREASURER](#).

Want More Information? Navigate to: [IGFTO](#), upcoming [OTCs](#), and [FAQs](#).

Ship's Store Update

Our inventory / merchandise has been relocated to the Mid-Atlantic portion of Virginia Beach thanks to IGFTO Member Steve Reynolds. Steve has volunteered to assist with this endeavor and may be reached by emailing: [Ship's Store](#). Want to volunteer for something? send us an email: [Volunteer](#)

Directors: To contact one of the IGFTO Directors, navigate here: [DIRECTORS](#)
Our 2024 Board of Directors Meeting will be held in Los Sueños coinciding with Leg 1 of the Triple Crown. IGFTO Members are welcome to attend in person, space is limited, or join virtually via Zoom.

Feedback? Have feedback for us, send an email to our [webmaster](#).



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International Game Fish Tournament Observers Inc. is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt charitable organization dedicated to the preservation and conservation of game fish worldwide. We provide trained and insured observers to authenticate the "catch and release" of billfish and game fish during international big game fish tournaments.

