

The IGFTO Observer ~ January 22, 2025



*Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow*

**The IGFTO Observer**  
**A Newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament**  
**Observers**

**~Volume 13**



**Edition 4~**

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**9th Annual Guatemala International Billfish Tournament**

**More than 25 marlin and 600 sailfish released**

**Story by Randy Weitzel**

**Dec 4-9th saw 25 members of the IGFTO descend upon Buena Vista Fishing Resort in Iztapa, Guatemala for the 9th Annual Guatemala Billfish Tournament. Pacific Fins Resort played host to the tournament and provided a top-notch experience for both observers and anglers. Several of our members arrived on the 4th to an angry Guatemalan volcano. However, it could not prevent a great day of pre-tournament fishing for our observers. Three boats set out for the early day of fishing with one going 6 for 10 on sailfish and the others bringing back catches of tuna, snook, snapper and other deep water and inshore species. A great experience for all that chose to take an extra day of fishing.**

**Day 1: Twenty-nine boats release almost 200 fish**

**Friday the 6th kicked off day one of the tournament with an amazing sunrise and rush of 29 competing boats exiting the harbor at 7 a.m. Eighteen boats were competing in the pro division and 11 in the amateur division. As an observer on "Gringo" in the pro division on day one, I called the release of 10 sailfish on 10 bites. They were**

in second place after day one. "Amante" released billfish worth 2,000 points in the pro division and "The King II" lead the amateur division with 1,800 points. Day 1 saw 183 sails and 8 blue marlin released. In addition, 236 lbs of "fun fish" were brought to the scales.

#### Day 2: 200+ fish

Day 2 woke us all up to some angrier waters but didn't hold anyone back. With consistent 5'-6'+ swells for most of the day, several boats were still able to put solid scores on the board. I had the pleasure of observing on "Fishy Business" which brought in 10 sails and one blue marlin. In addition, Stacy Wills set herself up as the lead female angler by scoring 3 sails this day and 5 for the tournament. In total, the tournament saw another 192 sailfish and 9 blue marlin released along with 140.5 lbs of "fun fish" brought to the scales. Day two leaders consisted of "Decisive" scoring 1,800 points and "Poco Loco" scoring 1,400 points in the amateur division.

#### Day 3: Close to another 200 fish released

At the start of day 3 all teams were within reach of the top of the leaderboard. I was tossed into the lap of luxury on the 70' Ocean Yacht "The King II". After day two they were atop the amateur total leaderboard. Day 3 saw them hook and release 10 sailfish for a very successful day. In total, 175 sailfish and 10 blue marlin were released along with another 226.5 lbs of "fun fish". "Gringo" held off the other boats in the pro division as the day 3 top scorer and "Sails Pitch 2" led the amateur division.

#### Nine blue marlin for *Decisive*

After 3 successful days of the tournament, Pacific Fins Resort hosted a fun-filled evening of great food and camaraderie. The leaderboard was tight at the top with team "Decisive" scoring 4,300 total points in the pro division and team "Intensity" taking first place in the amateur division with 3,800 total points. Of note team "Decisive" led the tournament with 9 blue marlin released. Team "Canaso" also led the "fun fish" scoring bringing over 161 lbs to the scales. Although many will say the bite was a little slow for Guatemala, the 9th Annual Guatemalan Billfish Tournament finished with a successful release of 631 sailfish and 27 marlin. IGFTO had a great showing of 25 observers with almost 20% of them being first time attendees. A good representation of our organization that reflected greatly upon all of our members.

**Thank you Guatemala!**



***IGFTO President Evan A. Hipsley, Jr. addresses the audience during the 9th Annual Guatemala Billfish Invitational held December 6-9, 2024 at Pacific Fins Resort and Marina. Pictured to Evan's right is Juan Manuel-Pacific Fins Director of Operations. Photo Credit: Pacific Fins Public Affairs.***

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***Bet You Didn't Know***  
**Black Marlin**  
**Story by: Art McDonald**



***Black Marlin Breaching - Photo Credit: WorldWideWeb***

- **The scientific name for black marlin is *Istiompax indica*, which is part of the *Makaira* genus. For many years the black marlin was called *Makaira indica*. The species is currently classified in the genus *Istiompax*. Before their classification, they were called Pearl of the Ocean, D'ombrain's marlin in Australia, and in Hawaii they were called Silver Marlin.**
- **While they might be named black marlin, they are not black in color. Their top half is dark blue, while the lower half of the fish is grey-white. Juvenile black marlin have distinct stripes along their bodies, fading away as they mature into adults. Adult black marlin are usually dark blue or black with silver-white bellies. They have faint blue stripes, a brownish dorsal fin, and dark pectoral fins. Black marlin differ from all other billfish species by having rigid pectoral fins that do not retract, and cannot be pressed against their sides. However, these pectoral fins can be tilted backward for reduced drag when swimming at high speed. Their dorsal fin is also the shortest of all billfish, at around half the height of its body. It's high at the front and dips downward to the back. They have a shorter bill (akin to a baseball bat) and a rounder lower dorsal fin. The black marlin's dorsal fin is proportionately the lowest of any billfish. When standing less than 50% of the fish's body height. They also appear "bulkier" than corresponding blue marlin of the same weight/size.**
- **Researchers can count the growth rings on the spine of their dorsal fin to determine their age. Black marlin inhabit the Pacific and Indian Oceans and there have been reports of black marlin in the far eastern Atlantic in the southern regions of Africa that have crossed over the Cape of Good Hope (Cape Hope) dividing the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.**
- **Food items consist largely of other larger fish such as tuna, mackerel, and rainbow runners. Analysis of stomach contents indicates that the black marlin uses its bill to slash prey before swallowing. On a trip to Tropic Star**

Lodge (Pinas Bay, Panama) in early 1990, a 535 lb. black marlin's stomach contents included a pacific sailfish.

- The all-tackle IGFA world record is 1,560 lbs. - caught in Cabo Blanco, Peru by angler Alfred Glassell, Jr. in 1953. Most world-record black marlin are caught in Australian waters (16 of 22 men and women's categories).
- There is controversy over whether a black marlin is larger than a blue marlin with examples of non-compliant blue marlin IGFA catches exceeding the current IGFA record black marlin of 1,560 lbs. (example: "Choy's Monster" blue marlin in 1970 (Oahu, Hawaii) @ 1,805 lbs., and Gary Merriman/Black Bart's blue marlin @ 1,656 lbs. (Kona, Hawaii) in 1984). Japanese longliners report blue marlin catches exceeding 2,000 lbs.
- Black marlin are highly migratory and usually found in shallow waters above the thermocline near shore close to continents, islands, and coral reefs. Unlike blue marlin, black marlin are often found in green water closer to shore. There is even a fishery off the west coast of Australia where juvenile black marlin are caught from shore. They are considered a solitary species and rarely school unless there is a ready food source available, or they are in spawning mode. Their depth rarely exceeds 600' (180 meters+/-).
- Female black marlin can release up to 32 million eggs at a time depending on their age with larger females producing more eggs than smaller counterparts. Spawning occurs in various areas of the Indo-Pacific oceans at various times of the year.
- Black marlin, once they reach maturity (2 years), have no known predators (other than man) – there is nothing big enough that can catch them. As with all billfish species, females are larger than males. If adequate food is available, a female can reach up to 450 (1,000 lbs. +/-) kg by the time she is 10-12 years old. In contrast, males rarely reach 200 kg (450 lbs. +/-) in weight. The estimated maximum lifespan of a male black marlin is only seven years, compared to 13 years for a female.
- As mentioned, black marlin are found in shallower water than their cousins, the blue marlin. Often they will be encountered on the edges of deepwater reefs in places like Panama, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and in the waters between Mozambique and Madagascar in Africa, as well as in the Indian Ocean near the shores of Sri Lanka and India. In places where black marlin are concentrated,

live-baiting is an effective tactic. Small tunas, bonito, and other forage fish are captured live using small spoons or jigs, then bridled to a larger hook and deployed for black marlin. Boats slow-troll these live baits along drop-offs (such as the Zane Gray Reef near Pinas Bay, Panama or Hannibal Bank in northern Panama), in hopes of enticing a bite.

- Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is another hot spot for black marlin, particularly the larger specimens over 1,000 lbs., known as “granders.” In the fall months (September – December) the larger females inhabit the reef areas near Cairns and nearby Ribbon Reefs to spawn. Here the tactic is to fish with large rigged baits (sometimes exceeding 20 lbs. ) like mackerel, scad, etc. using large hooks sewn to the bait. These can be trolled much faster to cover more ground. Black marlin is the most common marlin species in South African waters and is most abundant on the KwaZulu-Natal coast during summer (lower coastal area of southern Africa). This species may range as far south as Cape Point.
- Scientists have tracked black marlins on their migrations and have discovered that these fish migrate huge distances, with some traveling over 8,000 km (close to 5,000 miles). For example, two black marlins that were tagged off the coast of Australia were caught again off the coast of India and Sri Lanka.
- NOAA regulations prohibit the sale of any black marlin unless caught by U.S. fishing vessels and landed and kept in Hawaii or Pacific Insular Areas and then sent outside the U.S. or used for local consumption. Similarly, Australia has banned the commercial fishing of black marlin.

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## **Member Profile - Dr. Virginia “Ginny” Richter**

**Story by: Art McDonald**

Dr. Virginia “Ginny” Richter comes to the IGFTO team in a roundabout way – and we’re happy to have her because if you have any questions about education, our new Director of Education is your go-to gal!

Ginny grew up in South Texas and has lived in McAllen, for all of her adult life. Her home in McAllen is about 15 miles from the Mexican border and about 70 miles from South Padre Island.

## **A Retired Educator After 34 Years**

**She is a happily retired educator who served 34 years doing everything from being a teacher to a Superintendent. Her favorite job was working as a principal for turnaround schools in Austin and San Antonio! What motivated her most was being able to build the team necessary to get the students to believe in themselves in order to succeed!**

**Ginny's introduction to fishing came when she first got married in 1986. She and her husband would bay fish in the Gulf of Mexico for reds, trout, and flounder almost every weekend for about 7 years. She won several tournaments and immensely enjoyed her time on the water.**

### **Director, Aqua Inspiration**

**Ginny's love of fishing is what brought her to IGFTO. She attended a training course several years ago but was interested in helping with our Aqua Inspiration educational program. And her timing was perfect, as we just recently had an opening for a new Director.**

**In her spare time, Ginny is an avid traveler ... with her husband and/or with friends. No matter where she travels to, she always tries to fit in a visit to a local school and a fishing trip!**

**Ginny is looking forward to joining the IGFTO circuit and is excited to help expand IGFTO's educational programs.**



*Ginny and friends putting the slam on some Texas Redfish.*

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### **Member Profile - Paul Hogg**

**Story by: Art McDonald**

**Paul is a relatively new member of IGFTO having taken the class in February, 2024, at the IGFTO Observer Training Class at Marina Pez Vela in Costa Rica.**

**He was born and raised in Newburyport, Massachusetts – on the New Hampshire border. Newburyport is the birthplace of the United States Coast Guard (“USCG”), so it comes to reason this is a seafaring area. Fishing is a mainstay – especially for the giant bluefin tuna that haunt that area in the late spring to early fall.**

### **USCG Captain License at 18**

**As a youngster, Paul had the opportunity to fish for these 1,000 lb. monsters with his dad. Paul reports they used hand lines to fight them. He was running his dad’s boat at the tender age of 12 and once he caught his first giant – he was hooked! He always had a passion for the water as well as law enforcement/public safety. At the age of 18 he got his USCG Captains license and moved to St John, in the Virgin Islands, where he was a cook and worked on day boats. He was young and knew he wanted to take a couple of years off to travel. He ended up sailing home on a 120 ft sailboat after 2 years. By that time, he was ready to settle down and joined the police academy. After graduating, he immediately became a police officer in the town of Merrimack and became Assistant Harbormaster. It was a good thing he did because he had his first**



son at the age of 22 and second at 23.

### Full-time Newburyport Harbormaster

When he turned 31, the full-time Harbormaster position, for the city of Newburyport became available and Paul (along with 80 other applicants) applied for the job. Fortunately, he scored the highest through the interview process and got his dream job – which he still has. On his days off he owns a charter business and marine shop where they store and service boats. He named his company “HOGG TIDE, LLC” and, as he says, “with a last name like Hogg, I had to use it in my business name.”

Back in January, 2024 Paul saw a friend of his post a Facebook picture saying he was going to fish a tournament in Costa Rica, so he called him and asked if he needed anyone else because he was available. Turns out, his friend was Marty Pouliot, an IGFTO member who was observing in the first leg of the Los Sueños Signature Series. He thought to himself “what a great organization and this was something I wanted to be a part of.”

### Hooked by the Pescadora

He took the IGFTO Observer Training Class in Quepos, Costa Rica, and then, three days later, observed in his first tournament – the Pescadora all-female tournament at Marina Pez Vela – he was hooked! He followed that up observing in the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Guatemala Billfish Tournament, hosted by Pacific Fins Resort, in December, 2024. He notes what a great experience he has had and was very glad he decided to Join IGFTO. He liked both the mission and camaraderie of IGFTO so much, and wanted to get more involved, he now runs our ship’s store.



Paul with a Roosterfish, Tuna, and Mahi Mahi.

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What is a “Sancocho?”  
Story by Art McDonald

**So, there you are...somewhere in Latin America trolling 45 miles offshore. You've been assigned the left-flat and are diligently holding your rod and keeping your eyes on your trolled ballyhoo just outside the left teaser. Suddenly, from the bridge, the captain yells out "Sailfish... left flat!" and you poise to feel the "tap" and know enough to lower the rod, disengage the drag and immediately drop back keeping your mind on avoiding a birdnest... You tense for what seems like forever but, in reality, is only a few seconds – engage the drag, wind a couple of turns and...nothing – damn!**

### **It's About the Drop Back**

**When you drop back again, something tells you it's over – you have missed. You reel the rig back to the boat to find only the head of a ballyhoo... Welcome to being "sancochoed!" We've all suffered through our share of these, when a billfish escapes with a free meal at our expense. It usually happens when you hold onto the spool too long. Knowing just when to drop the bait back makes all the difference, but if you let the fish grab the tail of the bait and then hesitate, you're on a one-way trip to Sanchocho City!**

### **The Origin of Sanchcho**

**Did you ever wonder where the term "sancocho originated. Much of it is lore, but in Spanish dictionaries, sanchcho is a traditional Latin American stew consisting of fish or meat cooked in a broth often containing fish heads. The word sancocho is derived from the Spanish verb sancochar, meaning "to parboil." It is the national dish of Panama and one of the national dishes of the Dominican Republic and is popular in several other Latin American countries, including, but not limited to Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Colombia, each having its own variations of ingredients and seasonings. Your guess is as good as mine as to why someone decided to call a ballyhoo head the word for stew, but the fish head must have some bearing. Suffice it to say, sanochos are to bllfishing what strikeouts are to baseball!**

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**What's in store for our first quarter you ask?**

**We'll kick off 2025 with our annual Director's Meeting as a prelude to the Los Suenos Triple Crown, the Ladies Tournaments, and the Pescadora; see you in Costa Rica! We are also offering an Observer Training Course a few days prior to the Pescadora; sign up here and make the Pescadora your first tournament. [OTC Pescadora.](#)**

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

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**Welcome Aboard!**

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**Congratulations and Welcome Aboard to our ten newest observers from the Hollywood, FL class held on November 23, 2024. For those keeping track, 2024 set a new record of attendance for both our facilitators and new members. We shored-up our observer ranks by adding 70 new members. As a reminder, Observers are always welcome and encouraged to attend one of our courses as a refresher.**

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<b><u>Sue</u></b>	<b><u>Beckett</u></b>	<b><u>Pompano Beach</u></b>	<b><u>FL</u></b>
<b><u>Lisa</u></b>	<b><u>Brewer</u></b>	<b><u>Sarasota</u></b>	<b><u>FL</u></b>
<b><u>Diane</u></b>	<b><u>Charbonneau</u></b>	<b><u>Pompano Beach</u></b>	<b><u>FL</u></b>
<b><u>Hugh</u></b>	<b><u>Dailey</u></b>	<b><u>Anthony</u></b>	<b><u>FL</u></b>
<b><u>Barbie</u></b>	<b><u>Fischer</u></b>	<b><u>Key West</u></b>	<b><u>FL</u></b>
<b><u>Joe</u></b>	<b><u>Liggett</u></b>	<b><u>Tavernier</u></b>	<b><u>FL</u></b>
<b><u>Jefferson</u></b>	<b><u>Marin</u></b>	<b><u>Cozumel</u></b>	<b><u>Mexico</u></b>
<b><u>Brenda</u></b>	<b><u>Ortega</u></b>	<b><u>Cozumel</u></b>	<b><u>Mexico</u></b>
<b><u>Marshall</u></b>	<b><u>Phaneuf</u></b>	<b><u>Dallas</u></b>	<b><u>TX</u></b>
<b><u>Mario</u></b>	<b><u>Uc</u></b>	<b><u>Cozumel</u></b>	<b><u>Mexico</u></b>

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#### **Dues Renewal.**

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**It's that time of year again Observers. IGFTO's renewal campaign launched on October 1st and ran through December 31, 2024. To keep up with increasing expenses, a slight increase was added; your Board continually strives to keep costs down, however many external factors beyond our control contributed to the decision. Thanks for your continued dedication to IGFTO and gamefish conservancy.**

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**Have feedback or want to submit an article? Get in touch with our [webmaster](#).**

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**Around the circuit.**



**IGFTO donation to the Guatemala Billfish Conservation Project. Pictured to Evan's right is Juan Manuel-Pacific Fins Director of Operations.**  
**Photo Credit: Pacific Fins Public Affairs.**



**IGFTO Directors past and present contribute to the Guatemala Billfish Conservation Project. Pictured L to R: Juan Manuel-Pacific Fins Director of Operations, IGFTO Treasurer Lynette Catha, IGFTO President Emeritus Steve Hargett, IGFTO Vice President Emeritus and Membership Chair Art McDonald, and IGFTO Vice President and Membership Chair Bob Smith. Photo Credit: Pacific Fins Public Affairs.**



***IGFTO Observers at the 9th Annual Guatemala Billfish Tournament.  
Photo Credit: Pacific Fins Public Affairs.***

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### **Website Update**

**The IGFTO Directors have been working extensively over the past several months to improve User Experience(s) (UX) based on feedback received, technology trends, and updates. Plainly explained, UX is how a user interacts with and experiences a product, system, or service. It includes a person's perceptions of utility, ease of use, and efficiency. Be on the lookout for the new website rollout in the second quarter.**

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**Thanks for taking the time to catch up as we commence the 2025 tournament season in Costa Rica. As always, Tight lines and all the Best,**



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**Evan A. Hipsley, Jr.**  
***IGFTO President | Director | 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.***

