



**BLACK FIN TUNA ON THE FLY**  
.....

**ADDICTION & FAILURE**  
.....

**GET HOOKED ON SALTWATER  
FLY FISHING**  
.....

**BAHAMAS BONEFISH FLY**

**SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER 2012 *volume 1***

**ISSUE 1**





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## **TAIL FLYFISHING MAGAZINE IS THE FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE OF FLYFISHBONEHEAD.COM**

### **Letter from The Flyboss:**

Thanks for reading Tail fly fishing, the online magazine of Flyfishbonehead™. Our goal is to provide great articles that are informative and educational, as well as entertaining and lighthearted. We at Flyfishbonehead are not attached to any specific brand or product, we are fly anglers who love to fish and want to share our information and knowledge with you, our readers. This is our first issue and we know there is always room for improvement, and we promise to do just that. Our focus is on the reader and to provide great articles and amazing images from all over the world. Coming issues will include our time in Belize at the Blue Horizon Lodge with famed permit guide Lincoln Westby. Lincoln did a fantastic video interview with us about permit fishing and how the legendary Blue horizon came to be. We're also planning a destination feature from Cabo San Lucas on the hunt for striped marlin and Roosterfish as well as an entire edition dedicated to fly fishing in Cuba. We are in our infancy, but we are planning for longevity and greatness in the saltwater fly fishing world. Combined, the artists, writers and contributors at Flyfishbonehead™. com have over 105 years of fishing experience. That's a lot of fishing knowledge and creative talent that we are willing to share with our readers.

The magazine will always be free but we hope that you will

join as a member of flyfishbonehead.com to access the other amazing features of the site. The Interactive World Map and HD fly tying library are truly two of the most innovative ideas to come along in a really long time. As a member you can access these and all the other features of the site.

Every month, Tail magazine will feature a fly tying article or video so you'll get an idea of the quality of work we are creating for the website and the magazine. We'll also have feature articles specifically about the top spots to fish and the top species to fish for. It's truly awesome. Your comments are always welcome as we are constantly looking for your input. We hope that you like what we've done so far and will support us through our launch and infancy. Don't forget that our goals are conservation, promoting the sport of fly fishing in saltwater, and providing a high quality magazine that is informative and entertaining. We support the Bonefish & Tarpon Trust & The International Gamefish Association and are in the process of expanding our conservation efforts everyday with our site. Hope you enjoy Tail fly fishing, the free online magazine and the rest of flyfishbonehead.com. Let us know what you think.

**Joseph Ballarini (Flyboss)  
& the rest of the contributors at Flyfishbonehead™**



A close-up photograph of a man wearing a blue polo shirt and dark sunglasses. He is holding a large, silvery bonefish with both hands. The fish is held horizontally, showing its side profile. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall image has a halftone or dithered texture.

# ADDICTION

*ON MY FIRST CAST TO A BONEFISH ON BASCAYNE BAY,  
MIAMI IN AUGUST, 2008 I HOOKED MY FIRST BONEFISH*

## PART 1

We rolled out of Black point Marina, into a skinny water eel grass flat which was as smooth as a bowl of melted glass. The sun was just starting to surface in its awesome orange glow, illuminating the horizon. We saw spiders the size of birds high up in the mangroves in the early morning light. In fact, there may have been a bird caught in one of the webs.

What am I doing here? We traveled by canoe through a very small creek.

It was shallow, muddy, smelled like sulfur and there were lots of bugs.

Again, what was I thinking this morning?

It fed into a small cove named Black Point located about 10 miles south of Miami Beach. It did get better. As I was admiring the sunrise and right as we entered the creek mouth onto the flats, the guide whispers; "see them? There they are!"



I was nervous, very nervous.

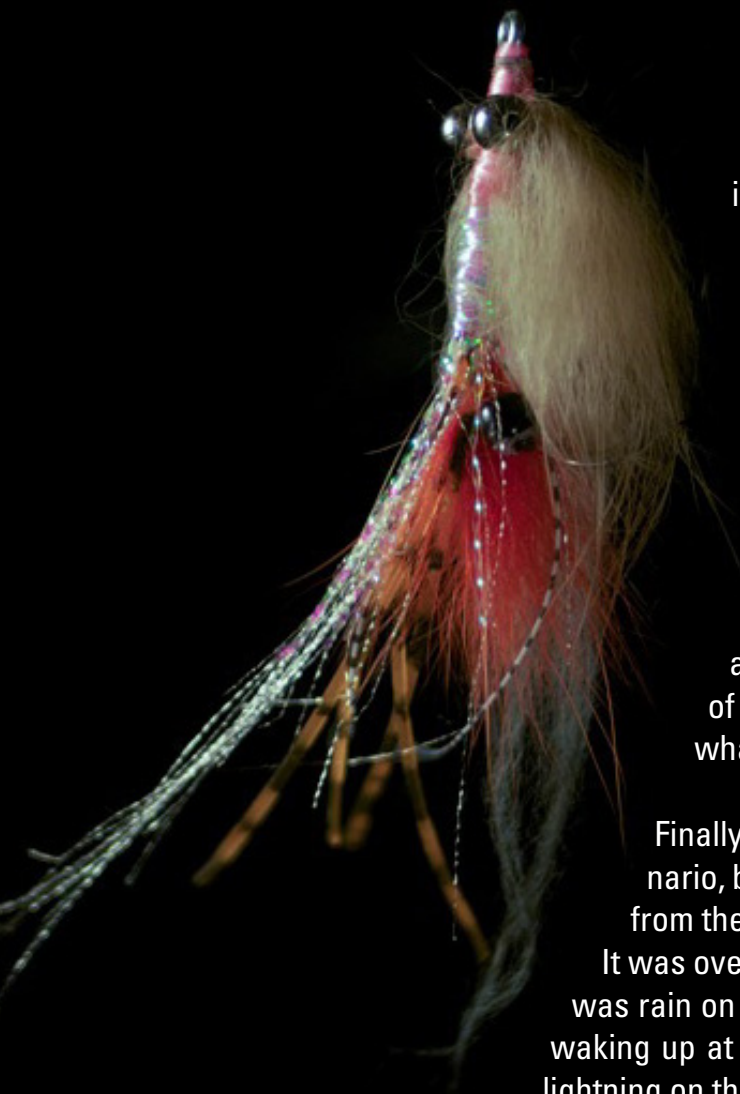
I had just started flyfishing after being a bait chunker since age 4, frankly, my fly casting wasn't that good. He said; "I'll get you closer, get ready to cast." My heart was racing at about 120 beats per minute, I felt my palms getting sweaty and the grip on my cork handle start to loosen. The cork was indented from the raw pressure of my grip but it just didn't seem tight enough so I just kept squeezing. I felt my body getting heavier and heavier and there was little I could do about it.

"12 o'clock, about 45 feet, see them?" I did, there were 6 or 7 big bonefish right in front of me, tailing, I'd never seen them tail at such short range. This was my chance to catch my first bone on a fly, I was so excited, I could taste success.

The first cast was completely flubbed of course, throwing the fly about 20 feet short and about 30 feet to the left of the school. I picked up my line using the water haul technique, which at that moment, I really didn't know existed. Somehow, I don't know if it was the adrenaline or just plain luck but I fired a 40 foot laser into the center of this small school of tailing bones. I saw a flash of silver and heard my guide scream, he ate it, set it ....set it!



## **HUGE FISH & A BAD KNOT**



So I pulled back on the line and set the 7 pound bonefish on the hook. My rod bent like I had never seen it bend before. Probably because I never had a fish of that brawn on it before. With reel screaming, the mighty bone pulled off about 150 feet of line in a blazing initial run lasting only seconds. My guide bellows, "you are the luckiest guy in the world, no one catches a bonefish on their first cast." It was actually my second cast, historically speaking. While completing his statement, as quick as it was hooked, it was gone. My knot gave way, leaving a pig-tailed leader shooting back at the canoe. I quickly retrieved my line and the guide grabbed it for a closer look. "You need to check your knots, man...."you just lost a huge fish because of a knot."

I had a pit in my stomach and for the first time since I was 4 years old, I didn't want to fish anymore. That was probably good because there weren't any more fish that morning. I felt like a complete failure but there was a part of me that thought, well if you did it once, you can do it again. This optimism is what kept me coming back.

Finally near Matheson Hammock in Miami it happened again. It was the same scenario, but I had been fishing without a guide for about a week. I launched my kayak from the public beach on a pebble shore which was not too far from a channel.

It was overcast and warm for the time of year, the tides were very dramatic and there was rain on the horizon. Only lightning would make me leave the flats, especially after waking up at 4:30 am to get on the water by sunrise. Wouldn't you know it, there was lightning on the distant horizon amid the rain. I knew I didn't have much time.

I had my favorite 8 weight ready, handle at my feet with the tip off the bow, this time I tied my own leader and checked my knots twice. I even tied my own fly, Peterson's spawn-

ing shrimp, my go to bonefish fly at that time. While poling my kayak over a deep boat channel, I saw something in the distance. There they were, 6 or 7 bonefish tailing in about a foot of water on an eel grass flat. They were fat and happy. It looked like the same school as before but the chance of that was seriously nonexistent.

Here we go again.

I pole with a rope looped around my wrist. The rope is tied to the anchor line which allows me to quickly loop the rope around my push pole and gently drop it behind the kayak to drag behind my vessel, well out of the way. I pushed hard just one more time to get into a better position. I looped my rope, dropped the pole,

picked up the fly rod and attempted to visualize my attack.

This time I was ready. Calmer, more experienced, and a much better caster, but still no bones to date so the nervousness persisted to a significant degree. In this moment, you just accept the tachycardia and sweaty palms knowing that the hunt is on. I began my cast, very sloppy and too fast of a backcast which seems to be the norm while casting when fish are actually present. I threw a 35 foot lob which hit the water like a rock, just to the right of the tailing fish. Fortunately, they were just starting to move right. It was more luck than skill honestly.

There was very little light, almost no light. In fact, I'm quite surprised I saw them in the

first place. I couldn't see what was going on but before I could react, one took the fly and there was a fish on.

Again the rod had a ferocious bend and a crazy bounce to it as I held it over my head. But this one wasn't as big as the previous bonefish hooked. The fish took off into the boat channel that I had just crossed and before I knew it, it was well into the "holy crap" part of my backing. Over 250 feet of backing gone and at no point did I have any control of the fish.

Suddenly, it stopped.

My heart sunk as I thought the fish was lost. In frustration, I began to reel as fast as my hand could move and watched the kayak start to drift toward the direction of the fishes run. It was still on! In minutes





I had retrieved my backing and was back to fly line but at that point the resting fish recovered. Another screaming run begins which put me back into "holy crap" territory but this time I noticed that the lightning, that was off in the horizon, is much closer and now the rain began to fall.

Here I am on a kayak in Biscayne Bay, in a lightning storm fighting a bonefish that just won't make it easy. I debated whether I should break it off and head for shore before the storm got too bad but my ego got the best of me and refused to let it go. I was tired of failure and frustration and I was going for broke. Succeed or die trying was the motto that day, which in retrospect was an incredibly stupid decision. I started to pressure the fish hard, really hard. At any moment I was expecting him to break off and become just another "almost" story. To my amazement, he began to wilt. He lost his mojo and any desire to fight. Again my heart raced, I could taste it, success was almost mine. Within five minutes, my leader was to the tip and I had a bonefish, my first bonefish to the side of the kayak, he had surrendered. Soaking wet from the rain, not remotely concerned about the lightning I pulled him out of the water, so excited that I dropped my rod into the water but it didn't matter.

There it was, mirrored silver scales, blackish green stripes, unrealistic pink lips and my Peterson's spawning shrimp stuck in its top lip. It was slippery, slimy & stinky, but it was a bonefish, caught on a fly, finally in my hands. It was glorious! The most beautiful fish I had ever seen at that moment. I actually just stared at it for some time taking in the details before I realized it was raining hard, there was lightning nearby and this poor bonefish couldn't breathe. I lunged for the camera for a quick photo of my trophy but to my dismay, the battery was dead and to add more insult I dropped the fish into the water and stepped on the fly. One rookie mistake after another, they seem to never end.....I can be such a bonehead. But after months of frustration, repeated failure and countless hours of research and investigation I had just caught my first bonefish on a fly. After finally catching this fish, I realized that this was more than just an obsession. Not only that, but perseverance in the face of constant failure & determination to succeed had turned my obsession to an addiction. A healthy one of course but I still had so many questions. Why was it so hard to find good information about fly fishing in saltwater? Why did it take me 6+ months to land a bonefish when I've been fishing my whole life? Where are there other places to fish? What other species are as







## *SOME TAKE HOME POINTS*

**DON'T FORGET TO CHECK YOUR KNOTS**

**CHARGE YOUR CAMERA BATTERY**

**BRING RAIN GEAR**

**NEVER LET GO OF YOUR FLY ROD**

**DON'T FISH IN A LIGHTNING STORM**

**DON'T HOOK YOUR OWN FOOT**

**CHECK THE WEATHER REPORT,  
NOT JUST THE TIDE TABLE**

..... challenging? Where can I get really solid advice and real data? I didn't have any answers until it hit me.....I'm am a bonehead, I'm a a fly fishbonehead! The light-bulb in my head just lit.

Read what happens in the next issue of Tail flyfishing & share your first bonefish catch on a fly on our blog.

At Flyfishbonehead.com want to share our passion, our knowledge, our successes and our failures with everyone. Learn from others mistakes (mostly mine) and rest the of addicts/contributors that fly fish the world on our website.

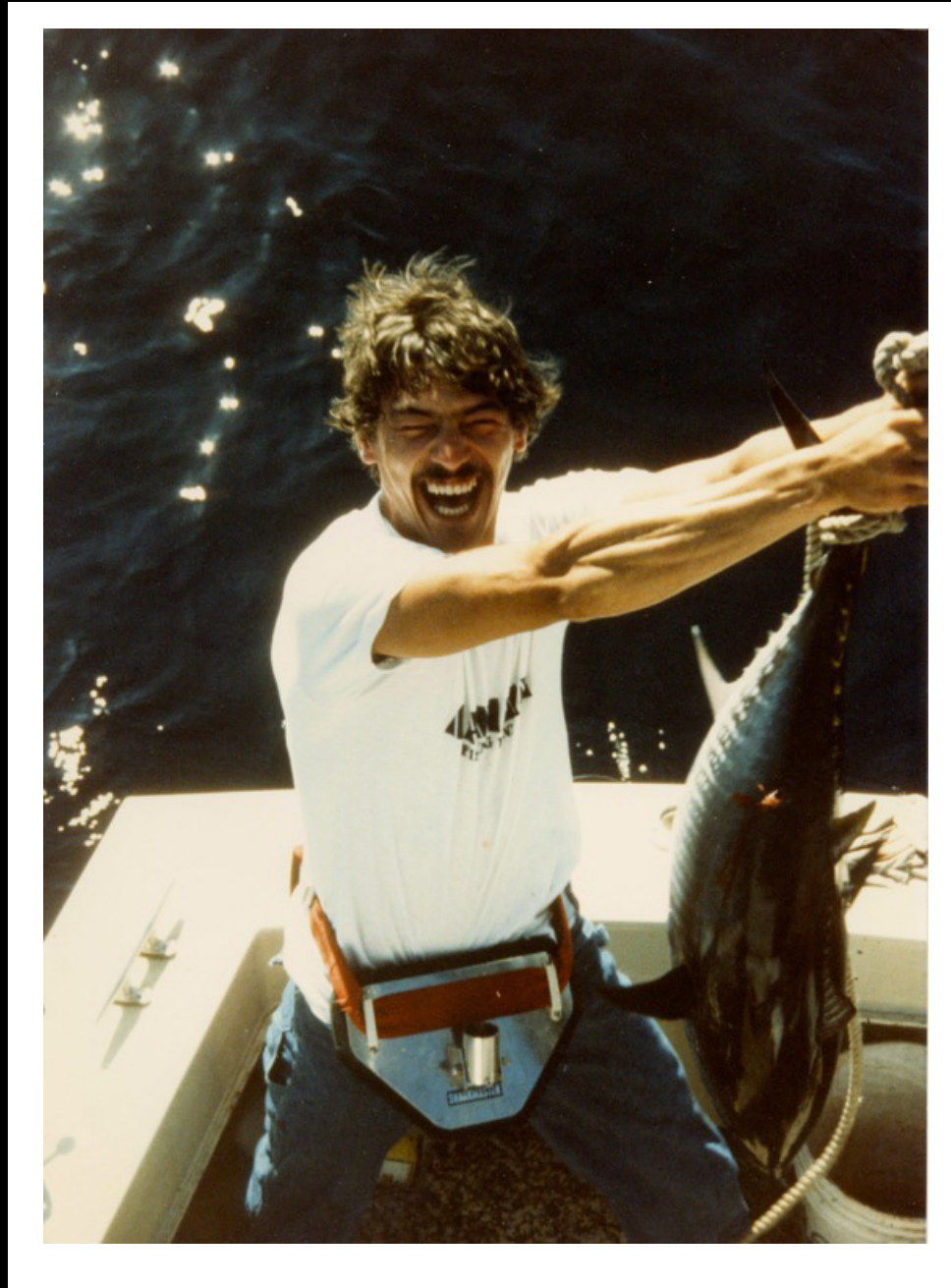
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HUNT FOR FISH, NOT INFORMATION







# SOUTH FLORIDA TUNAS ON THE FLY CHUM THEM UP

by *Captain Zac Grossman*

➔ **There are three very easily accessible species of tuna** in south Florida and the Keys that just love flies. They are the blackfin tuna, the skipjack tuna, and the bonito. The bonito (as they are called in Florida) are known by other names elsewhere. They are one and the same as the false albacore and little tunny.

They are the easiest to find, so I'll discuss them first. They are here all year long; most commonly found in 60 to 200 feet of water and at times will follow and harass bait in water as shal-

low as 15 feet where many are even caught from piers. From early summer until early fall they are often marauding bait pods on reefs and wrecks. For these reasons, they are targeted by half day head boats, called drift boats down here. Multiple bent rods are often the norm and this is without chumming!

For fly anglers to cash in on this you only need a boat, either yours or a charter (fly casting would not be allowed on a head boat). Drive out to the depth where all the head boats are fishing (from Spring until Winter), and start chumming with a block of frozen bunker in a chum bag.

When you see the silver flashes in the slick, start casting. You can use a sinking line with almost any baitfish imitation (you're trying to mimic small fish feeding on the chum bits), a floating line with the same flies, or most enjoyably small poppers (white on the belly, blue or green on top, silver metal flake all over). The strike is electrifying and the fight incredible. Perhaps the best part is that these fish are so thick down here that losing one only means rigging up again and expecting to hook another in mere minutes.

Bonito are often teen sized and are ferocious fighters. In the north (New England through New Jersey) they are the most highly prized species of the awesome fall runs. While the waters are being churned by huge bluefish and striped bass that are easy to target up there, fly anglers (and spin casters) race around chasing fast moving flocks of birds that indicate where the false albacore have pushed



## SOUTH FLORIDA TUNAS ON THE FLY



a school of bait to the surface.

While bonito can be found virtually everywhere (both Florida coasts and the Keys), the blackfin tuna is targeted in specific locations, being more of a pleasant surprise when caught elsewhere. This member of the tuna family is highly prized because of its size and its taste. Its fight is much like that of the bonito but they often weigh two or three times as much and that sure makes a difference. Skipjack tuna are often found among the blackfins but not really targeted specifically.

Of the locations associated with blackfins, I'll discuss the "humps" off Islamorada and Marathon keys first. Fishing is

done the same way at both of these spots where the dramatic rise from the bottom coupled with the strong currents create an upwelling that both attracts and disorients bait; the ideal feeding place for predators including blackfin tuna, skipjack tuna, bonito, dolphin, amberjack, wahoo, billfish, and sharks (which also like the taste of all the above and can become a nuisance).

The standard methods of fishing the humps are trolling and drifting. Drifting is obviously the way to fly fish and again chumming is the answer. The idea is to get the tuna on top and reckless as they compete with each other.

If you are going on a charter, expect the

captain to stop and net pilchards. If in your own boat be prepared to do the same. The best chum is LIVE pilchards and this means a top notch live well system because the norm is to head out there with about 1,000 of them.

The boat is positioned to drift over the crown of the hump and live chum is tossed over the side, a dip net full at a time. You could blind cast with sinking lines as the baits will be trying to dive to supposed safety or you could wait until the steady stream of baits creates a trail for the tunas to follow as they head to the surface. Once they are there, tossing over baits is like feeding pigeons; every handful creates a



frenzy of competition for the “crumbs”. At this point all you need do is cast a fly into the melee to hook up. In actuality, once your fly hits the water all you have to do is wait for the hit as everything in the water that is either white or shiny at this point will be tasted before some other fish grabs it. If you set the hook before the scam is realized, then you will be tied to a member of the speediest species in the ocean.

Saltwater fly anglers have a hard time just standing there doing nothing and they also have a hard time just fishing a simple white streamer fly when there are hundreds of beautiful flies to choose

from. If they tie their own, then it is downright impossible. In that case choose something that looks like a pilchard and strip away.

The length of the fight, and it will be lengthy, depends on the size of the fish. All three species are fast enough to test you and your tackle. Try to strip out only enough line to land your fly where the tunas are busting. The more line on the deck from either having pulled out more than you need or from having stripped the fly in, the more you have to concentrate on getting that line through the guides without a hangup. A knot, a loop, anything that hangs up for even a fraction of

a second means a snapped leader at the speeds these fish generate.

Tunas have small teeth, almost like large grit sandpaper so no wire is necessary. The frenzy allows you to use a mono shock tippet if long battles are wearing through your actual tippet.

At the humps all three species are likely to appear in your chum. The most desired blackfins tend to hang back and appear much, much darker than the others and much fatter. Cast to the outer edge of the frenzy and hope for the best. Finally there is bycatch chumming. This works where commercial draggers oper-



ate. When they haul back and then cull the catch huge schools of tuna rise to the surface and gorge themselves. Fishing behind a dragger engaged in this can be very tricky and even dangerous so the best thing to do is simulate.

The schools of tuna and bonito know there is no percentage in swimming all over the place when all they have to do is hang out near the draggers, even when they are not dragging because once they do start, a smorgasbord is not too far into the future.

In the Keys, it is the shrimp boats that the tuna hang with. They drag all night

and the crews sleep during the day, at anchor. Charter captains know approximately where the fleet is, and if you plan to use your own boat you need to find out from local tackle shops, mates, or even captains, if you can convince them to share the information. The fleet will be in the Gulf and usually about 50 miles out. Mind the weather, that's a long way from home. What might be an hour ride out can seem like an eternity when coming back in a squall.



Getting chum for this kind of fishing means pulling up to a dragger and "buying" a few bushels of the bycatch they would normally just shovel overboard. When the weather is good, the draggers shovel less and put aside more knowing this will happen. I have seen the "price" vary from a couple of twenties to a few six packs of Dr. Pepper



and a local newspaper. Charter captains know which boats are where and what to bring; hard earned local knowledge.

If doing this on your own, with a cooler full of bycatch (baitfish, mantis shrimp, puffers, shellfish, and such) position your boat about a hundred feet off the stern of an anchored shrimper. Looking down into the emerald green water you will see nothing moving. Throw a couple of handfuls of by-

catch and that will quickly change. If you see a mantis shrimp that is not lying there limp, but seems alive, DO NOT reach for it - they can open up the whole length of a finger in a millisecond.

When a school rises to your chum, it will usually be both bonito and blackfins, about 10 to 1. There will be silver streaks crisscrossing in all directions and on the outskirts of the frenzy will be the darker,

slower target you really want; the blackfin tuna.

Throw any white streamer and let it sit and a bonito will inhale it almost immediately. Even a cast directed at the blackfins will suffer this fate 9 out of 10 times. It's not so terrible; fighting a huge bonito will test your reel's drag, your knots, your knuckles (if they get in the way of a wildly spinning reel handle), and your rod's backbone as the fish goes into its final ploy. Blackfins will however make all the above even harder.

There is one trick that will increase your odds of getting a blackfin under these conditions, if you have the reflexes. A fly that closely imitates a puffer (brown and orange mostly) is the answer. Bonito generally will wolf down anything you throw over but they usually spit the puffers out. The blackfins love them. When spin fishing it takes nerves of steel as a dead puffer on the hook might be inhaled and spit out by a dozen bonito before a blackfin grabs it. The angler has to restrain from setting the hook until sure it is in the right mouth.

For the fly angler it is setting the hook in time, but not on the "wrong" fish. Use a puffer fly cast to the outskirts but remember that a bonito might speed up and taste it out there too. They will spit it out, but not because it tastes like a puffer; because it is not real. So the fly angler has to both resist striking back and try to keep some slack in the line so the fish doesn't hook itself. You have to see the take to know who took it!

When a blackfin grabs the fly you have to set the hook immediately because they will also realize it is a fake rather than a tasty puffer. Again, if you hook a blackfin the fight will be amazing, enhanced by its size. Pace yourself and enjoy the fight.

**MAY THE FISH BE WITH YOU**  
Captain Zac







# BAHAMA BONEFISH GOTCHA FLY RECIPE

**HOOK** ▶

Gamakatsu SC15 wide gap or SL45 sizes 2, 4 & 6 (4 is largest size of of SL45)

**THREAD** ▶

Pink or Orange waxed saltwater thread

**EYES** ▶

Medium bead chain eyes

**BODY** ▶

Pearl mylar piping

**WING** ▶

Tan rabbit fur & Tan craft Fur

Bahama Bonefish Gotcha Fly is a favorite for schooling bonefish in the Bahamas. It is small, lands lightly when casted properly and has all the major components of temptation for bonefish. The double wing allows for a banded pattern on the craft fur while still allowing for rabbit to provide movement in the water. Not sure who said it first but “nothing swims like a bunny” is indeed a true statement. The Pink or Orange thread on the nose gives the illusion of an egg sac. Bonefish love flash so thats why the tail and body of this fly is made with wrapped pearl mylar. If you add glue or cement to the thread this is a very durable fly. It could last an entire day if you can avoid beating it up on coral and snagging other obstacles including the side of the skiff. You’ve done it, I’ve done it, why lie about it.

## WATCH THE VIDEO TO LEARN HOW TO TIE IT

Visit the [Flyfishbonehead.com](http://Flyfishbonehead.com) HD video fly tying library to access all of the saltwater fly tying videos.

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*I have read about the rush anglers experience the first time they set the hook on a bonefish.*

*The intense power of the first run, followed by bursts of energy during the fight.*

The sound of line stripping off a large arbor reel is what brings fly fisherman back time and time again to chase the fish that many call “the gray ghost”.

My first big saltwater fly fishing trip took me to the famed South Andros in the Bahamas. I grew up fly fishing for trout, introduced to the sport by my father, fly fishing small streams in Pennsylvania and taking yearly adventures out west to various fly fishing hot spots. I always loved to fish. But fishing for me had taken the back burner to starting a

**HOOKED**

new family and a new job. That is until meeting a new colleague at work that was opposite of me. My new friend grew up fishing saltwater and was looking for someone to go trout fishing with. It was a match. We were two guys both with the love of adventure and a passion for fishing.

So, we were off on an adventure and I was on the hunt for my first bonefish. Santa Clause had treated me well this Christmas, bringing me a new Scott S4s 9wt rod and a light speed Lamson large arbor reel. On the end of my line was a super gotcha fly, and I was standing at the front of the flats boat with my heart racing a mile a minute. Finally, I heard those words; "Are you ready buddy, cast thirty feet at nine o'clock". I made a few too many false casts, but my fly hit its mark and my first

BY MATT GROVE



**HOOKED!**

*So, we were off on an  
adventure and I was on  
the hunt for my  
first bonefish.*





bonefish was on the loose and I was hooked.

The fight was everything I dreamed it would be and I was living a dream. We ended up boating close to 100 bonefish during that trip to South Andros along with some barracudas and Lemon sharks. My best was this one pictured. Saltwater fly fishing rekindled my love for fishing and opened up a sea of new possibilities for me as a fly fisherman.

Fly fishing saltwater holds so many opportunities for excitement and adventure. The ocean and flats holds so many species, and the bottom line is that salt water species are bigger, stronger and more aggressive. They live in such a pred-

ator based environment in which they have to feed to survive and that makes for great fishing.

I am now inspired to learn more about the sport of fly fishing, especially in salt water. I'm motivated to be able to cast more effectively into the wind and cast not only with accuracy but with distance.

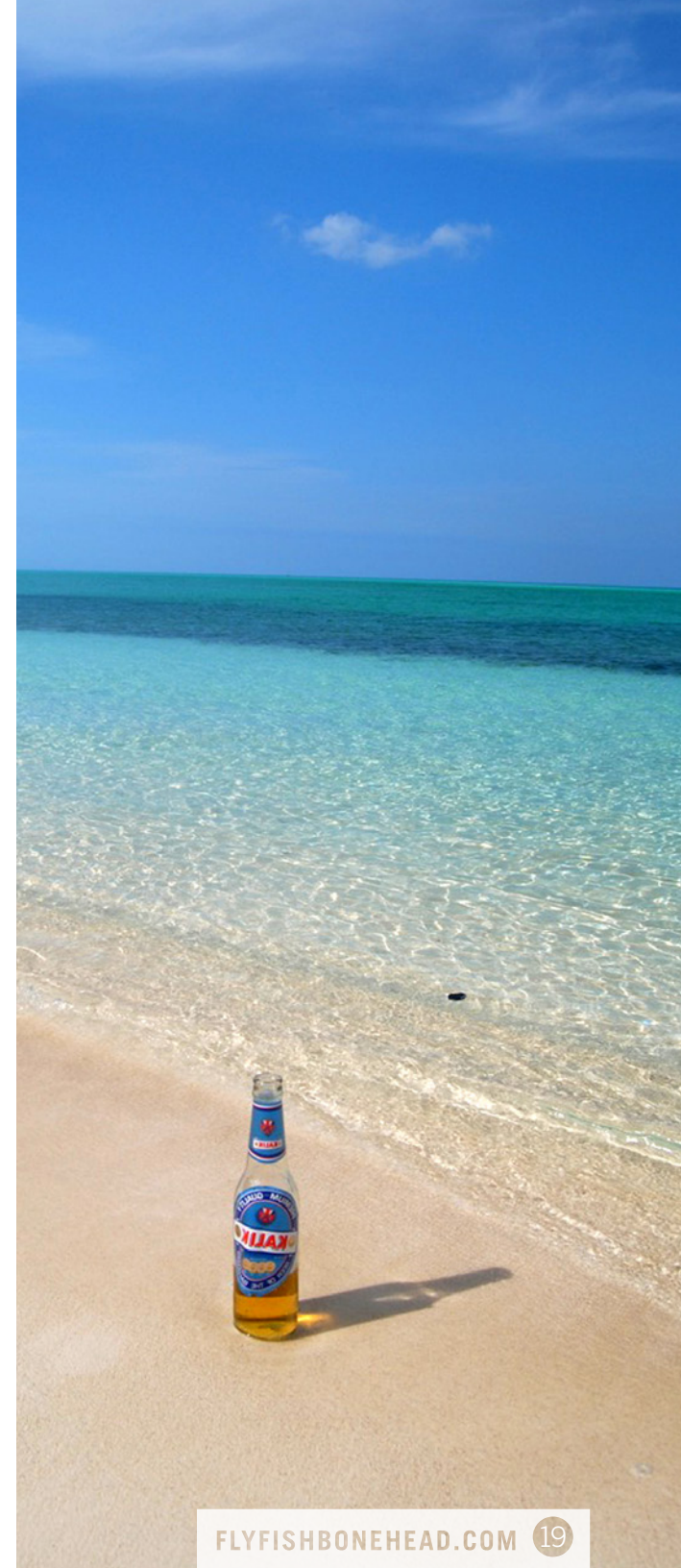
The opportunities seem endless in saltwater, with so many different fish to hunt, and endless destinations to fish.

Most of all, I am inspired by a new friendship and the excitement of new fly fishing adventures.

I am... ***HOOKED!***

..... **MATT GROVE IS A NEW SALT WATER ANGLER BUT A VERY ACCOMPLISHED FRESH WATER FLY FISHERMAN AND PHOTOGRAPHER.**

FOLLOW HIS CONVERSION TO SALT WATER FLY FISHING IN TAIL FLY FISHING - THE ONLINE MAGAZINE OF FLYFISHBONEHEAD.COM.





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# IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF TAIL FLY FISHING

## PERMIT FISHING!

FROM BISCAYNE BAY TO  
BELIZE, ALL THE WAY TO  
SRI LANKA & BACK

**GREETINGS FROM THE BLUE  
HORIZON** - OUR INTERVIEW  
WITH THE LEGENDARY  
LINCOLN WESTBY

**NOT ALL PERMIT FLIES ARE  
THE SAME.**

EPOXY FLIES, CRABS,  
SHRIMP, SQUID?

THE DO'S & DONT'S OF  
PERMIT FLIES





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