

WAVE

On light-line





By Tim Simpson of *BlueWater Magazine* www.bluewatermag.com.au

Photos by Tim Simpson and IGFA International Committee Representative, Bill Boyce www.boyceimage.com

For more than four years I have followed a burning quest to catch the IGFA world record wahoo on 8-lb (4 kg) tackle. It's a challenge that has led me to the spectacular waters of Fiji at Matava Resort with IGFA Captain Adrian Watt on the *Bite Me*.

I first met Capt Adrian Watt in 2006 on a trip to fish heavy-tackle for enormous blue marlin over the seamount to the southwest of Matava Resort. While discussing fishing, waiting for the big bite, we got to talking about our shared passion for light-tackle and the excitement of really stretching the teamwork and skills of the angler, captain and crew.

I also shared with Adrian a longing that I'd harboured for nearly 20 years – to attempt the IGFA world record for wahoo on 8-lb (4kg). (Since July 1999, the world record-mark was a 56 lb 11oz (25.71 kg), for a wahoo caught off Bermuda by a Mr. M .Hassell, Sr.)

I told Adrian that I was simply waiting for an opportunity, with the right run of fish, together with an agreeable crew, to make the attempt.



Mr. M .Hassell's 56 lb 11oz (25.71 kg) wahoo on 8-lb line class (4 Kg) was recently retired when the author, Tim Simpson, eclipsed the record on June 17, 2009 with a 69 lb 10 oz (31.6 kg) wahoo while perfecting the technique of trolling plugs on light-line.

Adrian replied that Kadavu Island in Fiji has a prolific run of huge wahoo every winter and that finding a fish big enough to beat the record should not pose any problem at all – then it would be simply a matter of landing it! After that discussion, it was settled. We were both determined to beat the world record.

First major challenge

Unfortunately, it was not quite as simple as it had first sounded! Fiji's winter run of wahoo arrive around June when the current cools to below 79°F (26°C) and rides in with the beginning of the southeast trade winds and some occasionally challenging winter weather.

The prolific wahoo grounds are along the coral points of the outer reef, on the current – and weather – side of the Great Astrolabe barrier reef. Having the weather to reach them would be a hit-or-miss chance. June-July generally offers better weather than later into the year, but then (as I would discover) there is always the chance that the main wahoo run has not yet arrived.

In early July 2007, I returned to Kadavu armed with a brace of custom 8-lb (4 kg) game outfits and a mobile tackle shop of hooks, rigging and lures. The weather was beautiful – but the wahoo didn't show until two weeks after I had returned to Australia. (At that time, I was taunted by reports of wahoo leaping through the air, everywhere!)

Luckily, there are usually schools of sailfish around Kadavu, even in the sheltered waters on the lee side of the reef. On that trip, Adrian and I tried to catch the world record sail on 8-lb (4 kg) – a 129 lb (58.51kg) task. I hooked several and eventually – after a five-hour battle – came extremely close to landing a fish that might have given it a scare.

The following year I returned in July once more, teaming up with photographer and IGFA International Committee Member, Bill Boyce, who had flown over from California. This time the wahoo were in force, but the weather was atrocious for the entire week and we didn't make it out to the wahoo grounds even once. Still, we caught new Fijian national records for barracuda, giant trevally, yel-



The Matava Resort is located on the south coast of Kadavu Island which is located south of Fiji proper. Captain Adrian Watt runs the boat *Bite Me* and specializes in light tackle fishing for IGFA world records for fast moving species like dogtooth tuna, wahoo and sailfish.

lowfin tuna and other species on the 8-lb (4 kg) tackle, and had a ball.

In the months leading up to June 2009, expectations were high that this would be the year. Enormous wahoo were being caught in numbers as early as May and, as Bill and I prepared to board our respective planes to Fiji, the weather reports were for light winds, even though heavy clouds blanketed many of the islands.

Destination Sea-Mount

A miserable dawn on our second day struggled to break through thick sheets of clouds and grey banks of drizzling rain that threatened to drift ever-closer. The exciting part was that the sea was glass-calm!

A quick breakfast at first light preceded a dingy ride to *Bite Me*, then a 90 minute blast southwest to the seamount



Do You Know Wahoo?

(*Acanthocybium solandri*)
(Cuvier, 1832); SCOMBRIDAE
FAMILY; also called oahu fish,
Pacific kingfish

Worldwide in tropical and warm temperate seas. Pelagic and seasonally migratory, it tends to be a loner or travel in small groups of two to six fish. There are indications of seasonal concentrations off the Pacific coasts of Panama, Costa Rica and Baja California in the summer, off Grand Cayman (Atlantic) in the winter and spring, and off the western Bahamas and Bermuda in the spring and fall.

The upper jaw is movable and the teeth are large, strong and laterally compressed. The well-defined lateral line dips noticeably near the middle of the first dorsal fin, further forward than on the similar looking tanguigue (*Scomberomorus commerson*), and is wavy back to the tail. The back is a brilliant, deep-blue sometimes described as metallic or electric blue. Bright blue vertical bands, or "tiger stripes" flow down the sides onto the silver and sometimes join into pairs on the belly. These beautiful stripes are not, however, always prominent in large specimens and occasionally may be missing entirely.

It is found around wrecks and reefs where smaller fish that it feeds upon are abundant, but it may also be found far out at sea.

It is reputed to be one of the fastest fish in the sea, attaining speeds of 50 mph (80 km) and more. The first scorching run may peel off several hundred yards of line in seconds. Occasionally this fish jumps on the strike and often shakes its head violently when hooked in an effort to free itself. Fishing methods include trolling with whole, rigged baits as well as with strip baits or artificial lures. Live bait fishing and kite fishing are productive, but the wahoo is a relatively scarce species and is usually taken incidentally while fishing for other oceanic species. The wahoo has commercial importance in some countries. The flesh is finely grained and sweet and is considered excellent eating.

off the other end of Kadavu. Adrian was keen to take advantage of the weather window and hoped to find a huge dogtooth tuna for Bill.

It's only recently that Adrian has tried jigging off Kadavu, as most of his clients are very content to troll for marlin or wahoo. However, over the past six months he's discovered a healthy population of dogtooth and has frequently jigged-up fish of 130 lb - 200 lb (60-90 kg) – and seen bigger.

He's now hopeful of taking out the all-tackle world record of 230 lb (104.32 kg), which he's sure is just waiting there for an angler with the gear and the strength to land it.

On the way out, Bill and I prepared jigging outfits loaded with specially pre-tested 80 lb (37 kg) Platypus gel-spun braid. As we neared the seamount, small schools of yellowfin tuna appeared, shattering the slick, grey surface under the squawking cries of wheeling seabirds.

Over the peak of the seamount it's still 100 fathoms deep but, even so, there are often churning boils on the surface as the ocean currents pour up and over its steep slopes. But on this day there was obviously no current and no upwellings to concentrate the predators. We knew it would take considerable scouting to find any pockets of activity.

Do What?

Adrian suggested running out the four 8-lb (4 kg) outfits while he scouted around with the sounder. I looked up at him horrified.

"You want us to put our good lures out, on 8-lb (4 kg) tackle, over a seamount – with yellowfin crashing around? That's got to be crazy!" we said.

But, as Adrian reminded us, we were there to take chances and push the limits – and besides, I had plenty of lures. With a shrug we agreed and, once again, deployed three high-speed trolling minnow plugs from the gunwale rodholders.

We hadn't travelled for more than 30 minutes before a wahoo pack found the plugs and, within seconds, destroyed our carefully prepared tackle.

Wahoo blitzed through the wake. Two rods screamed as wahoo struck the lures; then a third; then one of the first two was bitten off as another hit the swivel at the top of the leader. Then the other two crossed as both fish headed first one way, then doubled back and flashed across the transom followed by racing zipper trails of cut water where the lines sliced the surface as they bounded from one swell crest to another.

One of the lines sheared through the other, and then the final fish was itself cut off as yet another wahoo slashed at the bubble being torn through the waves at the line's entry point.

We shook our heads and smirked up at the skipper, then headed back into the cabin to rig up another \$150 worth of gear. It was part of the challenge – and we sure hoped we'd have another round with them soon.

An hour of fruitless jigging saw us desperate for an easier way to catch a fish. We resumed trolling while Adrian continued searching with his sounder.

Nothing happened for more than two hours, so I put out a fire-orange Boone mirrored teaser on a short tether in a bid to capture some interest with its flashing beams of light. We continued across the oily calm swells, searching for signs of life.

Wahoo Pack Attack

Then, without warning, torpedo-trails of bubbles jet through the wake as a wahoo pack attack slashed through our pattern. Three rods buckle and reels wail, then pause as hooks fail to connect, then blur again as another streaking flash snatches the lure that its brother just dropped.



Richard Akhtar – one of Matava's directors, who had joined us for the day – picked up a 8-lb (4 kg) outfit and was soon stepping around the outrigger on his way to the bow as his wahoo lit the afterburner and made for the horizon.

Meanwhile, back in the cockpit, Bill was losing line fast to another hot fish that screamed out astern. I, too, was hooked up. Mine shot left, then doubled back and threatened to cut off on Bill's line, before settling and shooting off left again, and down.

Joe dived for the teaser line, but a wahoo beat him and wrestled to take it home. The hookless, mirrored plug jerked

free, but was immediately pounced on by another of its schoolmates. This one was big and tenacious and Joe strained hard, battling to wrench the teaser free from the thrashing teeth just metres behind us.

The next thing I saw was shattering glass and floating fire-orange foam debris as the wahoo bit the teaser in half! The front end was still connected to Joe's tow line and he yanked it away from the destruction.

That's when another blue-banded missile launched through the air in pursuit of the remains, narrowly missing the boat as it rocketed by to land just an arm's length away from where we stood.

Lures choices for light-line 2 lb - 8 lb (1 kg - 4 kg) wahoo fishing

I'd decided on minnow trolling plugs as a strategy for the wahoo record attempt as they offered several distinct advantages for this species. First, they were exceptionally good lures for wahoo. Being a subsurface diver, they were much more appealing to wahoo than the surface-splashing skirted lures that we usually troll for billfish.

Minnow plugs also presented the hooks cleanly, without any bulk from skirts to impede the entry of the small, fine-gauge hooks that would be essential to secure the bony, tooth-filled mouth of a wahoo, with only minimal strike drag.

The hard body of the lure may also prop the wahoo's mouth open and reduce the blistering first run that could pose a serious problem to the fragile line.

After all, wahoo share the front-running with sailfish as some of the fastest fish species on the planet.

To attract a sizable wahoo, I wanted the biggest minnow that I could troll with only 2-3 lb (1-to-1.3kg) of strike drag on



the 8-lb (4 kg) outfits. The two biggest and best I've found are the Australian-made Halco Laser Pro 190 shallow-diver and the 200mm Bluewater Classic shallow F18. Both can be trolled at more than 6 knots on 8-lb (4 kg).

To reliably set the hook on 8-lb (4 kg), the lures must be refitted with much sharper and finer-gauge hooks than come standard in the pack. I chose the Japanese Owner ST-41BC trebles in size 2/0 for the rear hook of the Halcos. These

trebles are exceptionally sharp and have reinforced cutting-edge points and fine-gauge wire that is still reasonably strong. As these hooks are unavailable in size 3/0, I used the slightly lighter-gauge Owner ST-36 in 3/0 for the tail trebles on the slightly larger Bluewater Classic F18 lures.

For the belly hook on both lures, I changed from a treble to a single 6/0 Owner Aki hook or a 7/0 Pakula Katana hook. (Katana hooks are not generally available and can be sourced only through Peter Pakula's website: www.pakula.com.au). The advantage



Minutes later, Bill was in trouble. His fish had over 400 yards of line out and was still running hard. Richard's was also way out off the bow, but at least his had slowed.

My fish zipped around behind the boat and at one stage – just 10 minutes into the fight – it looked like we might get an early shot at it. The fish came to the surface and I could see the end of the leader just a boat-length behind. If the other lines were not going every which way, Adrian could have pounced on it.

The opportunity passed. My wahoo headed down – and down.

Adrian, who's seen a lot of huge

wahoo over the years, always said that the really big wahoo dive deep while their smaller brethren are busy screaming all over the surface. I took some small comfort from that as I helplessly clung to my outfit, while losing a serious stream of line into the depths.

While my fish took over 400 yards of line at a steep angle down beneath the transom, Bill's fish was out on the surface over 500 yards away. Had we been able to chase his fish there was a good chance that it could have been caught right then. But we couldn't.

Then Richard's fish was bitten off. At least now, we thought, with

that single hooks have over trebles is their substantially larger gape for similar overall bulk. This offers much more security than a 2/0 or 3/0 treble when pulling on the leader. In the belly hook position, their longer length is not a problem.

Halco split rings are significantly stronger than most as they feature a third turn of wire. However, they do not fit through the eye of the single hook so, for this particular split ring, I used an Owner Hyperwire No.7. For all other split rings (on both brands of lure) I used Halco 7XX rings.

The small split ring on the nose of each Halco was removed and a 24 inches (600 mm) length of 105 lb No.9 (0.022-inch gauge) brown, stainless steel, single-strand (piano) wire haywire twisted on. At the other end of this length of exceptionally thin and, importantly, vibration-free wire was a blackened brass (or stainless steel) solid ring in size 5/16-inch. Crimped to the other side of this solid ring was 150 lb Momoi Ultra Hard mono to make up the remainder of the precisely measured 14 ft 9 in leader (overall – including the lure). Each leader was then attached to a carefully plaited double on the line via a small, blackened snap swivel.



For convenient storage and use, all minnow plug lures were carried to Fiji in a pouch without hooks. A pair of split-ring pliers then made a quick and simple job to fit fine-gauged, needle-sharp hooks.

Lure Tips

Good Tips for Fishing lures



While metal lipped lures have advantageous applications for diving deeper, in light line application they may impose too much pressure for light line to handle. Also if the metal lips get bent, it can be difficult to "tweak" them back to where they would swim as they were designed to. The author prefers the smaller plastic lips.



To get these single hooks to ride point-down, The author added a second split ring to the split ring on the lure's belly attachment.



The author used single-strand wire that is haywired to the lure rather than cable which has a tendency to vibrate or hum,

only two directions to contend with, Adrian might be able to maneuver the boat to give us some assistance.

Bill's fish settled at about 500 yards and then slowly dived. Simultaneously, mine rose and switched positions with Bill's, cruising the surface half a kilometre away while his line pointed to the depths. Again, Adrian was powerless to assist.

More Pressure!

Each fish switched levels several times, but after 45 minutes both were tired and slowly pulsing at the end of a long line. Mine was deep and seemed set into a monotonous circling routine.

Without the benefit of boat-maneuvring to change the angle, I eased the drag up to nearly 4-lb (2 kg) in the hope of breaking the wahoo's pattern while at the near edge of its circuit.

It worked! I coaxed its head around and, once coming, maintained relentless pressure with short, fast strokes, keeping the rod continuously bent under maximum drag.

Joe stretched for the leader and the fish arched in a wide sweep around the transom, with its long, low dorsal fin and the top lobe of its stiff, upright tail gently breaking the glass surface and slowly paddling the enormous, razor-jawed bullet ever closer. I held my breath.

During those final seconds, my world ticked by in heartbeats. The fish was right there beside us, its enormous, vividly barred flanks clearly visible in the purple, clear water – and yet, torturously, still out of gaff range.

And then the gaff struck home and Richard hauled it up and into the boat. I can still picture it paused, momentarily, on the gunwale – motionless, exhausted – while we all looked on with the immediate knowledge that, yes, this could be *the* fish.

But now, Bill's fish was also nearing the boat. It was stubbornly resistant, and Bill fought doggedly for every metre that he pumped, under great pressure, on to the vintage TLD 5. There was only 30 yards to go...



With only 8-lb (4 kg) line, Bill Boyce fought hard to bring his huge wahoo back from 1500 ft (500 m) down. He landed the fish - but the pressure of all the taught line on the spool destroyed the reel when it imploded.

Oh No!

And then the reel blew up!

With a loud CRACK, Bill's reel imploded; the spool crushed under the immense accumulated pressure of hundreds of metres of incredibly tight monofilament. The reel was frozen. Nothing moved.

Having been there before – last time with a big yellowfin, after five hours on 4kg – I knew there was nothing to do but hope the fish could still be landed by hand-lining the fish.

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Rods, Reels, and Line: The preferred combination

Adrian and I each had a selection of custom 8-lb (4 kg) rods. To these, Adrian matched tiny Avet lever drag reels, while I used a Duel Speedie 12 lever drag (and, for a while anyway, had an old Shimano TLD 5 for a backup outfit).

Before the trip, I sent my Duel Speedie up to Jack Erskine in Cairns for him to work his magic and fine-tune the reel for ultralight work. Besides perfecting the reel's already excellent drag, Jack replaced the reel's Belleville cupped spring washers and added a shim to provide the perfect graduation of strike to full drag over the reel's quadrant.

His expertise is well worth



Each morning, the drag on every reel was tested with a 10 lb (5 kg) tension scale.

chasing if you're looking for perfection in any of your reels. (Jack can be reached by emailing sporint@dodo.com.au)

For line, I wanted a brand that would not only reliably test very close to the line class breaking strain, but one that would also offer low stretch. Since I expected to have several hundred yards of line in the

water throughout most of the fight, I didn't want to give the fish the unnecessary advantage of being able to swim on the end of a huge elastic band.

I needed a tough, but low-stretch, pre-test line. This is less forgiving of mistakes, but with careful handling would allow much more effective pressure to

be delivered to the quarry. I found exactly what I wanted in Australia's Platypus Lo-Stretch.

When trolling with 8-lb (4 kg), we don't clip the fragile lines into outriggers, instead preferring to gain the height necessary to troll long-set skirted lures by setting the rod(s) in the outside rodholders on *Bite Me's* rocket launcher at the back of the 31 ft Deep Vee's flybridge.

The first thing we did each morning was test the Strike drag and Full drag on every reel. To set the ultra-light outfits with accuracy we used a Bouz 5kg drag-checking tension scale (available from www.wellsystackle.com).



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Finally, it's done! With the fish he'd been chasing for more than four years finally in the boat. Tim Simpson lets out a whoop of joy. At 69 lb 9 oz (31.6 kg) it's now an IGFA World Record for wahoo on 8-lb (4 kg) line class.



At first, Bill was incredulous. But then his fisherman's instincts kicked in. Without anyone else touching the rod (to save from disqualifying it – we still didn't know how big it was) Bill tucked the rod butt into his pocket and grasped a handful of line at the rod tip.

The fish was exhausted, having not taken a yard of line for minutes, and the sea was mirror-calm. We thought we might just have a chance.

Bill calmly, almost laughingly (although painfully aware that a dream catch was in imminent peril), took handful after cautious handful of the thread-like yellow line and gathered it in a growing bunch of tangled strands. There would be no giving line back.

Standing outside the boat on the narrow swim step, Bill continued hauling until, finally, we saw the faint glimmer of a silver bar deep in the blue ink beneath us. Steadily, the bar grew closer and larger. Then the leader was visible and our hearts leapt with the thought that we might just pull this off. Only metres to go...

Joe thrust his arm beneath the surface, his face level with the water. The leader was in his grasp and he guided the wahoo the final metres to my waiting gaff. It was done.

Bill's wahoo hit the deck and we erupted once more. How could this be true? Two enormous wahoo on 8lb (4-kg) – and under incredible circumstances!

On the last day of the trip, Tim tried his luck at the 23.13 kg world record on 6 lb (3 kg) and caught one fish only a few pounds shy of the record but not heavy enough to make this book.

LINE CLASS	WEIGHT	PLACE	
M-01 kg (2 lb)	.81 kg (1 lb 12 oz)	Guanamar, Costa Rica	
M-02 kg (4 lb)	19.14 kg (42 lb 3 oz)	Salinas, Ecuador	
M-03 kg (6 lb)	23.13 kg (51 lb 0 oz)	Mayaguez, Puerto Rico	
M-04 kg (8 lb)	31.6 kg (69 lb 10 oz)	Kadavu Island, Fiji	
W-01 kg (2 lb)	VACANT	VACANT	
W-02 kg (4 lb)	9.79 kg (21 lb 9 oz)	Destin, Florida, USA	
W-03 kg (6 lb)	13.18 kg (29 lb 0 oz)	Huon Gulf, Papua New Guinea	
W-04 kg (8 lb)	24.94 kg (55 lb 0 oz)	Miami, Florida, USA	

How Big Are They?

The question was, were the fish big enough to beat the 56.6 lb (25.71 kg) world record? Bill's fish looked huge and mine was obviously a few kilos even heavier. But although the larger fish had an impressive girth, it did not have the length of some of Fiji's monster wahoo. We were hopeful, but far from assured.

I climbed the bridge ladder and had a quiet conversation with the captain. "Just how big do you think it really is?" I asked. "Hard to say," replied Adrian. "I'd call it somewhere between 53-59 lb (24-27 kg)."

"It's certainly close – but maybe not quite enough. I think we should head straight in before it dehydrates even a gram."

So, with a growing feeling of trepidation building in my stomach, we all agreed to head straight in and weigh it.

Three hours later, the fish was hoisted on to Matava's certified digital scales. I could hardly bear to look at the reading.

Light-Line Wahoo Records

Wahoo from 8 lb (4 kg) to 2 lb (1 kg) line-class

The wahoo is known for its incredible burst of speeds which make it one of the most challenging species to catch on very light line. The anglers below took the challenge and fulfilled a lofty goal in the quest for world records.



DATE	ANGLER	BAIT / LURE
19-Apr-03	1. Enrico Capozzi	Clark spoon
22-May-04	2. Jose "Pepe" Anton	feather jig
04-Mar-78	3. Leroy Battistini	Ballyhoo
17-Jun-09	4. Tim Simpson	Halco laser pro 190
VACANT	5. VACANT: Your Name Here	VACANT
26-Aug-97	6. Ms. Melanie Mitchell	Ballyhoo
30-Mar-02	7. Ms. Dianne Cross	garfish
20-Jun-99	8. Pamela W. Marmin	pilchard

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Then it was happening. Numbers flickered continually higher as my wahoo's full weight settled on the load-cell. I steeled myself and braved a glance at the readout screen.

Thirty-one-point-six kilograms! I exhaled for the first time in hours; joy exploded through my veins. Was it real? Who was pulling on the fish to trick us?

Yes, it was real – a new world record! We couldn't believe it. Enormous relief washed over me. We also realized that Bill's catch (now cut up for the kitchen) must have been about the weight of the previous world record itself!

That evening, melded together with the excitement of the catch, I also felt a strange pang of regret. It was the realisation that my quest – that aching passion that had so excited and inspired me – was now over. For years I'd been fired by its latent possibility and now that fire had been extinguished.

Only moments later, a new excitement coursed through me. There were lots of other challenges still begging for attention off Kadavu. In the morning I would re-spool my reel, with 3kg.



Try Your Wahoo Luck! Matava Resort, Kaduva, Fiji



There are many places to catch quantities of wahoo and sailfish, but one that offers exceptional fishing in stunning surroundings – at a very reasonable cost – is Matava Resort on Kadavu Island, Fiji.

For more details about Matava Resort and Bite Me Gamefishing, visit www.matava.com

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