

SPECIES

FARQUHAR ATOLL

GALORE





It doesn't really matter much that Farquhar Athol is damn far from anywhere else, or that it's a safe haven from those Somali pirates currently cruising the Indian Ocean. It may be beautiful and it may be occupied by scarcely 25 locals, but none of that really matters, does it? All we care about, all that really matters, are the monsters that live in the depths of its lagoon and come up onto her bountiful flats to feed. Between February and April this year, we had this atoll all to ourselves, with consistently perfect weather to allow our guests a full two months of uninterrupted fishing.

The Indian Ocean is best known as an incredible GT fishery, so naturally we were hoping Farquhar would be obliging. What we didn't expect was that the atoll would far exceed any great GT fishery.

On one of our first mornings, we arrived at some extensive flats on the southern end of the atoll. These flats extend from a coral ridge in the lagoon all the way to the crashing surf and form an area where we were hoping to find GTs surfing onto the flat in search of bait as the tide pushed in. However, we barely got into our intended ambush position and

anchored the boats on a gravel bar, when dozens of tails began waving furiously. Some were so vigorous you could hear the slap of water as the fish discovered a potential meal. The tails were tan and had a broad black bar on the outer edge, so we knew at once they were the giant or moustache triggerfish, and that we were in for some serious fun. The morning was subsequently spent chasing triggers in skinny waters with crab patterns. Sometimes they would pounce on the fly from a rod-length away, while other times they would turn spooky if the fly landed slightly too close. Either way, this fish has a huge personality and it's hard not to chuckle as they dance around the fly, trying to get into the best position to pick up the tasty treat with their big ugly gnashers.

On occasion, the fish would retrieve the fly right up to the rod tip; then it would see you and slowly reverse, backed-up like a hunter confronted by an angry lion. Sometimes the fly would return without sticking the fish and, on closer inspection, would have no resemblance to the original pattern





superior to any other atoll we have fished.

During Farquhar's prime tides, we would station ourselves at known GT highways, those deep channels and ridges where the fish were likely to show up. These highways are as close to a sure thing as fly fishing odds will allow. Like clockwork, the tide change would make things happen. Singles, pairs, and sometimes-small shoals, would appear bringing our handheld radios alive as guides began reporting the GT madness. General fish fever would grip the atoll for a short period with meter-plus fish here and broken rods and fly lines there, only for time and tide to tick by, allowing sanity to resume and give the anglers a respite to soak up what actually just happened.

Lulls in activity are a part of fishing, as you know, but the nice thing about Farquhar is that the pause is usually voluntary. No matter what the tide, there is some species doing their thing. One

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but looked like something that had endured a particularly nasty car accident. When you were lucky though, the trigger would snap up the fly. They have grim teeth and need a ruthless strike to get the hook past those scissors. The fish would momentarily seem stunned and then take off as if stung in the arse by a horsefly. These typical encounters throughout the season make fishing for triggerfish on Farquhar far





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such species that is certainly worth seeking out (and on Farquhar there are a hell of a lot of them) is the bump-head parrotfish, or the Bumpies as we like to call them. Bumpies will enter the flats through gaps in the reef. At the point where water hits your knees, you will see enormous blue paddle-shaped tails start waving, enticing you to come closer. The sight of twenty to thirty of these wonderful fish is so strange that one of our clients who had not fished for them before actually asked if they were manatees! He never lived that one down, but he did get to sample a Bumpie's raw power.



Although Bumpies move as slowly as a herd of grazing buffalo, once hooked, the entire shoal will erupt as they rush into deeper water at a pace that will astound you. The line peels off the reel at a steady but blistering pace and sometimes it's possible to turn its Bumpie head before the backing knot — but not always. They are not an easy fish to battle, and more often than not the fish breaks, bites, or rubs you off.

Rob Scott and Keith Clover, owners of Tourette Fishing, a well-established African outfitter that specializes in trophy tigerfish, have developed a fascination bordering on obsession with Bumpies. Each morning we would take them out and they would do battle with massive Bumpies and each evening they would return to repair their tackle. They got the hang of it though and as soon as they had some good fish under their belt, they felt

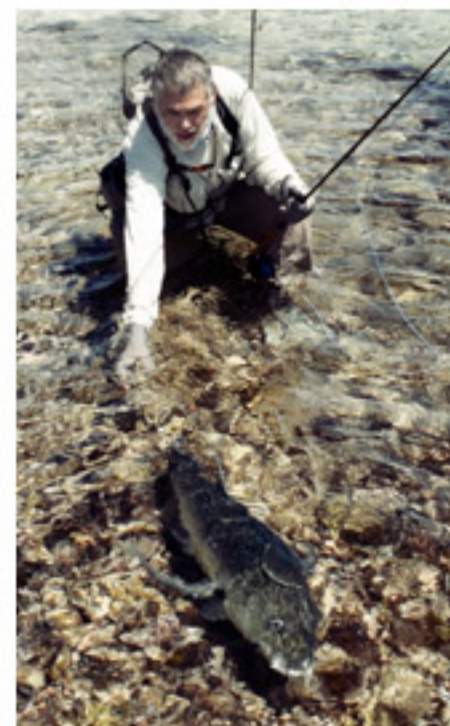




Each morning we would take them out and they would do battle with massive Bumpies and each evening they would return to repair their tackle. They got the hang of it though and as soon as they had some good fish under their belt, they felt happy enough to move on to the next species.

Farquhar has a rather high tidal range, meaning at some stage of the day the flats become too deep to wade and have currents too strong to pole. In most world venues, you would head back to the cool air-conditioned lodge for a siesta or just stop for the day. Here, there are so many options it would be a mistake to write any day off. The numerous coral bommies or outcrops, as well as islands and wrecks, make productive hunting grounds. You can indiscriminately pick

off powerful reef fish, which include a plethora of snappers, groupers, giant barracuda, and any of the six trevally species. And let us not forget the monstrous Napoleon wrasse. With a 12-wt outfit and straight 130-lb mono leader, it's hard to believe anything could get the better of you, but I have seen big men buckle after a grouper takes the fly. If you give them any leeway and they start running down to their hole, it's like trying to stop a steam train.



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What else can Farquhar offer? May I say the bonefish are plentiful? My favorite spot is on the eastern edge of the atoll where a lagoon drains through three beautiful cuts separated by coconut palm-covered islands. Idyllic! It's here where the bones literally stack up, one on top of another, as they feed in the surf's cool ocean water. These five- to six-pound fish seem to come from the ocean side and consequently seem to be the largest of the atoll, although one may find the odd monster bone in their midst.





In general, fly fishermen seem to be reluctant to head into blue water. The swell and trailing teasing lures seem to attract only a small band of hard-core enthusiasts. Those who volunteer for a pelagic dust up on Farquhar are greatly rewarded. Wahoo and tuna, as well as some large sailfish, come to within a short distance of the shore. In some areas, the drop-off falls from 15 to 300 feet in less than a mile from the reef's breakers. This means that if the flats fill up with water, it is a matter of jumping back into the boat and a short run will put you on the money.

Grant Dunbar, a long-time friend and client, has quite a lot to say about Farquhar's offshore fly fishing. One morning, after being out in the big blue for just a few minutes, Grant hooked into a little bonito in the wash behind the transom. Before he could get the little rat off, a massive fish inhaled the bonnie and lowed its way down to the bottom. It did not take us long to realize that it was one of Farquhar's monstrous dogtooth tuna. Poor Grant held on for dear life while his mate, Malcolm, cheeks wet with tears of mirth, ripped into him about this UPGRADE. After a long

fight, the line went slack whilst deep into the backing. We had been sure Grant was winning before he lost the fish; Grant remained sceptical. I think he was just glad the fish came unstuck.

There were too many other epic encounters and moments of madness during the season to recount, and hence the consensus from our clients is that they will be returning to Farquhar in the not too distant future. I, too, cannot wait for the new season to begin!

For more information on fly fishing trips to Farquhar Atoll, please contact ryan@flycastaway.com or take a look at www.flycastaway.com



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