

A Passion for Bonefish

with Ian Davis

D. Roger Maves: [00:00:00] Welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, your source for learning more about fly fishing in cold water, warm water and salt water. Hello, I'm Roger Maves, your host for tonight's show. On this broadcast, we'll be featuring Ian Davis and he'll be answering your questions on A Passion For Bonefish.

This show will be 90 minutes in length and we're broadcasting live over the internet. If you'd like to ask Ian a question, just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use the Q and A text box to send us your question. We'll receive your question immediately, and we'll try to answer as many of 'em as possible on the show tonight.

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Before we introduce Ian, I'd like to let you know about the great prizes we have to give away tonight for our drawing tonight we'll be giving away one year membership to Fly Fishers International and a one year membership to Trout Unlimited. Now, if you haven't registered yet for the drawing.

You can do so now just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and look for the link under tonight's section that says, register for a free drawing. Click on that link, fill out the form, and we'll

announce the winners at the end of the show, we will also be giving away a copy of Ian's book, My Hundred Favorite Flies for Bonefish courtesy of Wild River Press.

And we have a link on our homepage to both that book and A Passion For Bonefish, which will take you over to Wild River Press and if you'd like to purchase either of those books. So check that out. Now, how can you win that book tonight? Well, we're gonna ask a [00:03:00] question at the end of the show. It's gonna be something that Ian and I talk about in the show, and, uh, whoever submits the answer first, along with their name, location, will be the proud winner of Ian's book, My Hundred Favorite Flies for Bonefish.

So pay attention, take notes, and type fast, and maybe you'll be the proud winner of one of Ian's latest books.

Our guest tonight is Ian Davis, Yellow Dog owner, Ian has been involved in the fly fishing industry since the early 1990s, having grown up in the Catskill Mountains. Ian later went on to attend the Art Institute of Chicago where he studied landscape painting.

In the early nineties, he moved to Colorado where he spent 12 years as the owner of Breckenridge Outfitters. A three-time Orvis endorsed Outfitter of the Year Fly Shop. After leaving Colorado in 2003, Ian joined the Yellow Dog team as co-owner and saltwater program director. He has fished extensively throughout the world in both fresh and saltwater.

Ian is an accomplished photographer and handles all of the art and [00:04:00] illustrations for Yellow Dog's Catalogs and other literature. He has just completed A Passion For Bonefish, the third in Wild River presses series, and Ian lives in Bozeman, Montana with his wife Karen, and 3 daughters Hillary, Maggie and Sophie.

Ian, welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio.

Ian Davis: Well, thank you very much for having me and it's a pleasure and I've always enjoyed listening to you over the years and seeing you at the, our annual tour of fly fishing shows throughout the United States, and it's an honor to finally be here.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, well thank you. Thank you. Yeah. Well we, you know, we interviewed years ago, interviewed Jim, your partner, Jim Klug.

Ian Davis: You bet.

D. Roger Maves: It took me this long to get around to you, but always a new book inspires me and, uh, and your new book is, uh, I don't know how to describe it, coffee table book, dictionary, encyclopedia, uh, hundreds of illustrations and photographs that are just beautiful. [00:05:00] So it's something to behold. But typical of what Tom, you know, produces out of Wild River Press, he never seems to disappoint.

So you guys did a great job on this. So, so tell us, Ian, you know, how did this book come about, you know, and where did the inspiration come from how was it put together? Yeah,

Ian Davis: Yeah. Tom asked me to do it. He had read a chapter on a book I had done for a gentleman named Tom Caro about kind of the history of fly fishing and guides in The Bahamas.

And I wrote the chapter on Andros and Tom liked it enough to follow up with me and asked me if I'd be interested in the project. And I was, uh, you know, my family was a little younger then, and Yellow Dog. We were just super busy Yellow Dog. And I, I was quick down to turn down the offer. It just didn't seem right.

And, you know, I, I thought a saltwater guide should do it. I'd never guided in the salt more of a freshwater guide back in my previous life in Breckenridge, in early [00:06:00] Montana. And, and I just, and Tom told me to take a couple weeks to think about it, and I did. And, and I kind of, you know, I loved Andy's book on.

Passion for Tarpon and Jonathan's book on A Passion for Permit. Those were inspirational books to me, and I really enjoyed them. And it's an intimidating and daunting task to tackle such a big project. And, you know, I'm not a, I hadn't written a book and so, but I was, uh, I was actually watching CNN one day and kind of got an idea that I could kind of do the, you know, because all the passion books are interview based. They, we interview experts in the field and get their reactions to, you know, the species of fish that we love to hunt and stalk. And so one thing that kind of struck me was that, you know, everybody nowadays, today and, and you know, particularly on social media and with all our [00:07:00] kids and all these different tablets and phones and TVs, and heck, your car's talking at you nowadays. And that kind of spurred a little idea that, you know, we could have a number of different answers and topics coming to the reader at once.

And so, you know, unlike the previous books that were longer chapters on subject matters or individuals, mine would be more smaller tidbits of digestible information in a short amount of time. So if you were going to The Bahamas or Belize, you could kind of pluck information and use the book as a manual or as a guide for your next trip or your next day on the water. Or maybe are you on Grand Bahama and you. Or casting to a tailing fish and it didn't work out in your best interest. And so it's an easy to use manual that you can flip through in no particular order to grab information that's most pertinent to your next day on the water. [00:08:00]

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. And folks, you know this book is about 380 pages long, but if this is a normal sized book that it would be twice that size, let's put it that way.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because there is, you just have to double it, I would say. But um, yeah, manual is a good way to describe it, as well as the other adjectives I used it as as well. So, well, let's dive in because I know you've done a lot of bonefish fishing yourself. You've traveled all over the world. With your job and also for just pure enjoyment, I'm sure.

But

Ian Davis: Sure.

D. Roger Maves: Let's talk about bonefish and you can speak to these questions as would any of the people that you interviewed or your personal experience, and let's see if we can help people learn more about bonefish and how to fish for them.

Ian Davis: Great.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Let's just talk about the anatomy of a bonefish. What makes their anatomy challenging? Such a challenging and thrilling fish, [00:09:00] you know, to pursue on the fly.

Ian Davis: Yeah, the need for speed. I mean, they're torpedo shaped. They're very dense fish. Unlike a largemouth bass or lethargic, cutthroat, they are taught in the hand, they are durable. In fact. Historically bonefish prized debate for marlin and offshore trolling because they could keep on trolling after getting bit a bunch and take a licking and keep on ticking.

So because of their bony matter, hence the name bonefish, they're very durable, which makes them perfectly suited for their environment, whether they're evading a barracuda or a shark or digging through hard coral and marrow, their physical makeup is precisely designed for eating very vicious little critters like mantis shrimp, which can cut a chunk [00:10:00] off your finger with a simple swipe.

The rubbery nose is the consistency of your, your pink pencil eraser you had in school, and the crushers in the back of their mouths crushed their prey and into digestible thighs and so when you see a bonefish, they can be hard to see, or when you don't see a bonefish, oftentimes you just see the shadow because their scales are essentially small mirrors.

And those mirrors pick up and reflect the surrounding hues and colors of their aquamarine environment, thus making them somewhat invisible or as lefty said, the ghost of the flats. And so oftentimes you see just their shadow and if a school's coming, it's kind of a color change coming at you. And so it's really their over hundreds of thousands of years in Darwinism and natural selection, [00:11:00] they've become this extremely durable, super fun fish to pursue on a fly with a fly rod.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, and it's, you know, my experience has been with them that they're highly sensitive. Now, I'm not sure if it's eyesight or along with, you know, lateral line or whatever, but boy, they seem to feel or see everything. And have you found the same thing?

Ian Davis: You bet. Well, everything wants to eat them. Whether it's an osprey from above or a shark or a barracuda, they are a prime food source.

And so when you're oftentimes, when they start to school up in a pre spawned situation and you get these schools of thousands of fish on flats adjacent to deep water before they go into their spawn, you'll see a dozen sharks patrolling that school and dashing in and out and eating 'em. And then there's us.

Anglers that are stalking 'em and sneaking up on 'em. So they're hyper aware. [00:12:00] They've got very acute eyesight and we kind of forget or need to be reminded or be informed that sound and vibration travels 10 times further and faster underwater than above water. So whether your buddy's, you know, getting a beer at a bad moment and slamming the cooler or, or you step on a piece of crunchy coral that bonefish, it could be quite a ways away that you might not have even seen yet.

Can be spooked.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. What about their habitat? And I know you've traveled all over the Caribbean, you know, Belize, Mexico, Cuba, The Bahamas. Are the flats and ecosystems that they thrive in across these different regions similar? Or have you found them to be quite different depending on where you are in the world?

Ian Davis: Well bonefish live in beautiful places, and that's what makes them so much fun to fish for. Typically, those places [00:13:00] are shallow water marine environments, and you know, often that classic white sand that produces such brilliant color changes based on depth of water and what makes it so pleasing to the eye.

They're also attracted to reefs such as in Belize and Central America, like Turneffe Atoll. There's spots in Seychelles that look exactly like The Bahamas. I mean, it's crazy how similar they look when you're halfway around the world. But bonefish feel safe in protected waters such as shallow water and mangroves, and the mangroves is theoretically their supermarket. That's where all their food is, and they get nervous when they're traveling to and from the restaurant, so to speak.

So as anglers, we're pursuing feeding bonefish in these type environments. And you'll often find a great example of [00:14:00] patients when angling for bonefish is there's a lot of parts of The Bahamas or Central America that, you know, the sand is very hard, it's concrete like.

Well, there's not a ton of food in those areas. So when you see a school of bonefish there, they're typically just traveling to the restaurant. They're on the move, they're cruising. So if you see that, you might just follow that school for a little bit and then there'll be a little patch of turtle grass or a little soft bottom or some shrimp mounds or just a, a little coral head and you kind.

Get your fly near that environment and wait for those fish to come closer and then just give it a little slow strip and watch that fish attack it or a fish attack it. Whereas if you had laid out a cast, you know, over that hard bottom where nothing can hide, it's just too dense, it's too hard. Typically ocean front flats, you might not get a bite. In fact, it can often spook a [00:15:00] fish because if that school or single fish is moving over that hard sand, they know that any shrimp or crab that's there is not real because they just don't live there. And so being patient and let fish approach more the crab and shrimp condos that we call 'em, the coral heads and the rocky banks or the marrow or really soft bottom can trigger a lot more eats.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, that's a really good tip. Uh, I had never thought of that of uh, just because it's sandy and looks bone fishy. Doesn't mean it is, it could be quite the opposite. Yeah, that's really good. Good observation. You know, I fish for bonefish in Belize and one of the comments down in Belize is always, oh, the bonefish here are small compared to other parts of the world.

And from my experience and, and talking to people, it seems like the larger bonefish used to be in Florida, maybe not so much anymore, but really The Bahamas is where you go for the larger ones. What makes the difference in size, you know, as you move around the world there? [00:16:00]

Ian Davis: Yeah, and that's an interesting and, and valid observation and statement about Belize and Central America, but since the advent of catch and release for all bonefish, permit and Tarpon in Belize.

About eight years ago. And when you look at places like the Scion Con Biosphere in Mexico, which is another protected area, parts of Cuba as well, that are protected, we're seeing these bonefish get bigger and you know, and they are a different subspecies, so you're not gonna maybe see a 10 or 12 pounder like you would in the Seychelles or the Florida Keys, or The Bahamas.

But those fish are, they've gotten bigger. And so we're really excited about that, that we can reverse our changes, our mistakes that we've made, because there used to be a lot of netting in those environments. And we know that, you know, it can take a school of bonefish up to 30 years to come back after being netted if they keep all the fish.

And so we are starting to see some bigger fish in those areas. And that's [00:17:00] exciting. And that happened on Christmas Island years ago, or the, the natives were netting and, and now they,

D. Roger Maves: You cut out there, Ian, you cut out there.

Ian Davis: Oh, sorry. Um, no. And so, you know, one of the things that lends itself to bigger fish are flats adjacent to deeper water.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Ian Davis: And that is a characteristic. If you look at Google Earth and you look at a map or Google Earth of The Bahamas or Farquhar or Alphonse Atoll in the Seychelles. You'll find in Florida, you will find that those flats are adjacent to deeper water and that typically lends itself to bigger bonefish, such as Los Rokus, which is not far from Belize and Mexico, yet it has bigger bonefish.

You can look at Scorpion Atoll in Mexico. It is off the mainland and it has got larger bonefish, you know, very [00:18:00] reminiscent of The Bahamas. And so even parts of Turneffe that are surrounded by deeper water have larger bonefish and, and like I said, with more and more catch and release, we're starting to see bigger bonefish in those areas where, you know, they kind of call them banana bonefish in Central America. Well, we're definitely seeing bigger fish, which is exciting and a testament that we can make a difference and we can change our ways.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. And you just, you kind of flew by this quick, but did I hear you say that it is a different subspecies in, uh, central America than in The Bahamas?

Ian Davis: You know, I, I think that there are, you know, Aaron Adams would be your guy for that.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Ian Davis: I don't wanna speak to something that's untrue, but I'm pretty sure that there are different species throughout the area and, and that those smaller fish that tend to hug the mainland are different than those fish that are out living in that open areas of the, you know, flats adjacent to deeper water.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. Well, um, hang tight, we're gonna take a quick break here and when we come back we'll talk more [00:19:00] about bonefish and like what they eat. So hang tight everybody. We'll be right back.

Ian Davis: Excellent.

D. Roger Maves: The Ugly Bug Fly Shop in Casper, Wyoming has been serving fly fishers in Wyoming and around the world since 1983.

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So Ian, I always, uh, take [00:20:00] a pause here and ask my guests, you know, what's going on in their fly fishing world? So, uh, yeah, tell us what's happening in yours.

Ian Davis: Well, you know, it's, uh, there's a little saying, you know, we don't leave Montana in the summer. And so we've had a, we had a great snow year with lots of snow pack. We had a great ski season and now it's time to reap the benefits as that snow melts. And we've just had a fantastic few weeks as the Yellowstone and the Madison and the Gallatin have all, and the Jefferson and all our surrounding rivers in the Bozeman area have started to drop and clear.

And that's one of my favorite times of year. When you get some salmon flies, you can still throw streamers and some larger nymphs with heavier leader material and go after some truly large brown trout and rainbows. And so this is that time of year. In fact, I was just loading up my boat to go fishing with my youngest daughter tomorrow, and we're gonna go do the Gallatin and uh, it's just a great time of year to be here. Beautiful weather. We've had some hot weather last week, which kind of [00:21:00] slowed the fishing down a little bit, but it's brisk and chilly the last couple days, so that'll rejuvenate our fisheries.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. And, uh, what's happening with Yellow Dog and your business there?

Ian Davis: Well, we're excited. We're in about our second full year of. Having a retail shop here in Bozeman, Montana, as well as our online e-commerce shop. And one thing that we take great pride in is outfitting our traveling anglers. We do a tremendous amount of business with our valued friends that travel all over the world, and we were just having trouble servicing in them with proper gear, whether it's for Mongolia, Bolivia, the Seychelles or your hometown fishery.

And oftentimes finding that gear in one spot, whether it's uh, you know, a patos crab for Ascension Bay or one of Doug McKnight's awesome crab patterns for Belize, or even just a simple hopper pattern. We've got it all under one roof. And so Jim and I have been working [00:22:00] really hard over these past couple years to get that retail animal going and it's there.

It's a fantastic environment with a beautiful shop and a state of the art website. So that's been a big change for us over the past couple years. But I'm also have, about four years ago started our Yellow

Dog Community and Conservation Foundation tournament series, and that's a series of charitable fishing events that is in The Bahamas and Mexico.

And we do a big event here in Montana, and that raises money for the places that we love to fish. And Jim and I started that foundation about eight years ago. And the tournament series is a compliment to it, and it's been a lot of fun. We're doing a sports park on Andros because the kids just have nowhere to run track or, or the basketball courts are kind of dilapidated.

So this will be our, uh, this February we'll be our fourth annual Andros Big Yard Classic. And we've got a lot of repeat guests, but, uh, there's [00:23:00] tons of information at ydccb.org. And then I've been doing a Red Bone Foundation to raise money for cystic fibrosis event. That one has moved. It's now in Mexico for the next couple years, but, uh, that's to raise money for cystic fibrosis through the Red Bone Foundation.

And that one's kind of coming to the fold of the Y-D-C-C-F tournament series. And that's with a, a wonderful group of guides. And then we do an event on Grand Bahama that's just a couple months away in October. We do have space for that one. And that's kind of a big bonefish, permit focused event and multi-species.

And that's at East End Lodge in mid-October. And that was to raise money for folks that lost their homes during Hurricane Dorian.

D. Roger Maves: Wow.

Ian Davis: And last we've built about two tiny homes. We raised enough money last year at the event for two more tiny homes. So, um, it's pretty exciting. You know, McLean's Town is a great little [00:24:00] village and settlement, and people just had to leave. They, their homes were destroyed and they couldn't come back, so they want to go back home and we're helping them get there.

D. Roger Maves: Wow, you're busy.

Ian Davis: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: To say the least. And doing a lot of great things in this world. So, um, that's wonderful. Now, as far as the Yellow Dog and your online shop, is that all under the yellowdogflyfishing.com domain?

Ian Davis: It is.,

D. Roger Maves: Or, okay, so people you wanna find out about that, go to yellowdogflyfishing.com and, uh, you can see all about what Ian and his partner Jim Klug are doing there.

Terrific. Terrific. Well, thanks for sharing. Let's talk about what Yeah, yeah, let's talk about what bonefish eat. You already mentioned mantis, crabs and, but they more than that. So, um, and I'm assuming there again, in the different parts of the world, what they have to eat could be quite different because, uh, tell us about what they eat.

Ian Davis: Yeah. We never really think about [00:25:00] matching the hatch like we do in freshwater and trout fishing, and a lot of that is because. It's a little bit harder to, to find your critters that they eat where when you're trout fishing, your caddis lands on your hat or a salmon fly crawls down your shirt and it's pretty evident to what's going on. It's right there in front of you.

And for salt water, you know, a bonefish are an honest fish. They're feeding and you put a fly in there, there's a good chance that fish is going to eat it. So we never really got too technical on flies. You know, my old buddy, Charlie Smith, crazy Charlie and Bob Nauheim invented the co-created the Crazy Charlie, which was really just a simple fly with a couple chicken feathers strapped to it and some bead chain eyes. So the hook would ride up.

And that did really well. And then that kind of turned into the gotcha. And you know, back in the day when we were fishing in The Bahamas, we'd tie [00:26:00] all these elaborate flies that we had these fancy names for, and we'd open the box and the guide would say, got any gotchas?

And it was such an effective fly. And, and what a lot of people forget is that oftentimes because the bonefish are bottom feeders, your fly rests on the bottom. That's the zone. That's where you want that fly. Because anything that a bonefish eats, such as a crab or shrimp, scurries along the bottom, they know better than to swim up high and make themselves seen or evident.

And then I'm sure you've been swimming or seen a crab and kind of threatened it and it digs backwards into the sand and completely disappears. That's what a lot of these shrimp and crabs and mantis shrimp and even bait fish do, when they feel threatened. And so oftentimes when you're stripping your fly along the bottom, you're mimicking that scurrying crab or shrimp, [00:27:00] and there's a puff of sand around it, particularly when you stop the fly.

And so the fish doesn't even see your fly. It just sees a rooster tail of sand or mud. And then maybe some, you know, a couple pieces of flashabou, which may be imitate an antenna of a shrimp or a eye of a crab emanating from that, cloud of debris. And so oftentimes it really doesn't matter what fly you're throwing, as long as it's the right weight.

And so people like Enrico Puglisi have come out with a spawning shrimp series, which are just fantastic and come in a whole variety of sizes, weights, and colors. And so the, the whole concept of picking a fly boils down to, I go with weight first and foremost. When we pull up on a flat with a guide, or when I'm wading, I kind of say, bee chain or dumbbell.

You know, that's kind of, you know, we going light or we going heavy. Are we fishing deep water? You know, [00:28:00] maybe for some bigger bonefish where we gotta get that fly down quickly. Or we fishing super skinny water where we just need a little bit of weight to, to get that fly down because. As you mentioned earlier, bonefish are hyper aware and you can't have that fly land with a loud plop.

And that's why spin fishing can be very difficult for bonefish or throwing a, a crab or a bucktail jig because it enters the water so quietly, particularly if you have to reposition your bait or spinning lure because you gotta reel it all the way back in and then huck it out there again and it goes kerplunk.

Where a fly, you can pick up 30 to 50 feet of fly line with one quiet, subtle move and replace it, you know, five feet to the right, 10 feet to the left, and one shot. And so, you know, all you. Beginner

saltwater anglers out there, even experienced anglers, you know, before your next [00:29:00] saltwater trip. One of the key things you can do at home when you're practicing is just that single pickup and that lay down and try to do it in water and not rip that line off the water anytime it goes, whak..

And you spray a bunch of water, no bueno that bonefish hears that and the game's over. So doing a couple long, quiet, slow strips with the rod tip down in the water and just a single haul is you quietly pick up that fly rod and all that line and do an accelerated stop. Let that line open up behind you and then just make a nice, subtle presentation is paramount.

If you can get really good at that, you'll catch a lot more bonefish.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. You had mentioned earlier Jonathan Olch, who I interviewed and who wrote A Passion for Permit. He inspired me after interviewing him and reading his books when I went down to Belize to use the same method he was to try to make these [00:30:00] casts of these little crabs and so forth.

And so we were trying to collect crabs. We were out on a pancake flat and I was lifting up rocks and looking underneath or crabs, and I was collecting all these crabs. And at that time I go, well, this is, none of these crabs are the same color. They're all different. You know, you get a tan, a green one, a, you know, a spotted one.

And it just kind of resonated with what you just said, which was that you don't really have to match them. And that was the day that I realized that the foods that is out there is so diverse. That you're probably not gonna see two crabs that look identical, like you might a may fly or something. So, um, anyway, is this point that, um, I had kind of observed two at one time with the crabs.

Well, now let's talk about expectations for fly fishers. Somebody you know that hasn't been out to fish for bonefish, they might be a first timer, or maybe you've only tried it [00:31:00] once. What kind of expectations do you give people? I'm assuming a lot of people that go on your trips are first timers as well.

So what expectations do you give them?

Ian Davis: Yeah, I mean, there's kind of a misconception out there that, oh God, I'm not good enough to bonefish, or it's too hard. You have to throw 87 feet into a bottle cap, and that's just not true. I mean, I've caught dozens of bonefish as my fly line. The end of my fly line goes through the tip top guide with just my nine foot leader stick, you know, still out of the rod tip. So catching a fish with an eight feet.

The biggest thing with bone fishing is, like I mentioned earlier on a saltwater trip is practicing before you go on the trip. And maybe that's taking some lessons at your local fly shop or from a federation instructor, but having the ability to cast quickly, it doesn't have to be so far.

You know, I like to think that 75% of saltwater fish are caught within [00:32:00] 50, 60 feet. And the reason that is, is because. Approaching bonefish or permit. If you make a long hero cast at 90 feet, odds are by the time that cast unfurls and you get all that line out and then it unfurls hits the water and has time to sink to the fish's level, that fish is probably looking somewhere else.

And so it's prudent to be patient and let that fish get a little closer so that you can make one good cast instead of a long errant cast that's either off target because the cast is errant or because the fish has moved to a different location. And so the big key there is being able to generate 40, 50, 55, 60 foot cast with minimal false casting.

And that's where, mastering the double haul will really help because it's in effect, like double bouncing your buddy on a trampoline. It's [00:33:00] gonna catapult that line because you're generating more line speed by pulling against the direction of the line with the haul and the action of your fly rod. And so I always encourage people to pantomime to practice their double haul without a rod in their hand and just get the movements down because it is a little tricky. It's kinda like playing in an accordion to some degree and just go through the hand motions while you're watching a movie or something, and then pick up the rod and do that. And you know, there's tons of information on YouTube and from instructors at your local fly shop on fine aspects of the double haul.

But being able to generate a cast quickly is probably the single most important thing because. Unlike trout that are trapped in a river that don't go anywhere, these bonefish and permit and tarpon, they're constantly moving and your shot is now and then it's over. And so you've gotta be able to get that fly into play [00:34:00] quickly.

And so one tip that really has resonated for me throughout my career is making sure you've got quite a bit of fly line out of your tip top guide. And so I like eight to 12 feet of fly line already out of my rod before I've even started casting. And what that does is it reduces the amount of false cast and enables me to generate more power quickly because I'm able to load the rod faster because I've got.

10 feet of fly line. I've got a 10 foot leader roughly, and a nine foot rod. And so literally I can roll cast a 29 foot cast without doing anything. And so when people get intimidated, oh, 40, 50 feet, well you already got 30 feet out just about, so now you just gotta get 10 to 15 to 20 feet of fly line out.

So practicing that in the backyard is key and getting that cast out in a timely [00:35:00] fashion.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. And then we have wind and weather to play with, right?

Ian Davis: Sure.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Everybody, you know, when people ask me what should I do? I say, well, you know, cast on the water in a windy day and practice that and you'll be better prepared when you get down there because there always seems to be wind on the salt.

I mean, a breeze of some sort, right? It's never, and if it's ever really calm than it's doldrums or whatever, then fishing doesn't seem to be good. But, what do you do? What adjustments should Anglers make when conditions are less than ideal with the weather?

Ian Davis: Well, and, and you know, you kind of touched on this, the wind's actually your friend, people always ask me when they're, we're talking about a saltwater destination trip.

When's it not windy? When's it not windy? And then you get that dead calm day and those fish can see and feel you from a mile away, and they get really spooky. [00:36:00] You can spook a school of

bonefish or permit before just false casting. And so everything is magnified, whether it's the pole digging into some rock as the guide moves the boat across the shallow, or stepping on some hard bottom and you actually want wind.

You know, I asked a buddy of mine years ago on Grand Bahama, what his favorite moon phase and tide was. To fish for big bonefish and he said 10 knot winds and sun. And so you want a little bit of wind because it camouflages us. It camouflages our casting. It breaks up the water surface, which hides us and hides our not always perfect cast.

It may be land a little heavy or sloppily. And so that wind is really important that you have. It also keeps you cool. And then it is nice to have good visibility. I will take wind over clouds any day. And then you get the dreaded, [00:37:00] windy, cloudy day, and that's when we just head for shallow water and that's when we fish super skinny water on the lee side of an island, which is out of the wind.

So if the wind's coming from the east and you're on a little tiny island, you'd fish the west side, which won't be as windy. So having a Plan B fishery. In your next trip is advantageous for adverse conditions. And what I mean by a plan B fishery is somewhere you can go to get outta the elements and that's somewhere like Boca, Palo Lagoon and Ascension Bay, or the interior of Turneffe Atoll or the bites of Andros or the East end of Grand Bahama, or the bite of Acklands and Crooked and the Bay of Florida and the Everglades.

All these inland fisheries are gonna enable you to get out of the weather, find some skinny water where those fish are making nervous water tailing and thrashing about, [00:38:00] which gives him away to us as anglers.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, you mentioned sun and um, I just got done talking to Terry Gunn. I'm sure you know Terry Gunn and his wife Wendy, and they just came back from a week in Belize and I said, well, how was fishing?

And he said, well. Uh, not so good. He said the whole week it was cloudy and uh, they were after permit, you know, not bonefish, but same kind of thing. Right. Can't see into the water, can't. And he said, yeah, the weather just wasn't cooperating with us cloudy all week. And those two are some excellent fly fishers and I guess they landed a permit, missed one, but they just couldn't see fish.

Couldn't see the fish. Yeah. So,

Ian Davis: Yeah, it's been a strange season in central America. Typically that mid to late April, May, June is just peak months where it's dead calm in the morning you see permit high in the water column thinning, your tarpon are rolling and everything's just magical. And then it heats [00:39:00] up.

You start to get these, you know, small bursts of weather, whether it's a rain, quick rainstorm, or some brief wind, but it just doesn't hang around long. For some reason it's just been a really weird spring in Central America, and I was in Cuba in April and I've been in The Bahamas since then and it's just been dead calm and absolutely beautiful.

So I don't know what was up. It's just a weird anomaly of a year down there. It's very atypical for that area at that time of year.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. Let's take a quick break here and then we'll come back and we'll talk more about, uh, uh, going, you know, fishing for bonefish, working with your guide, reading the flats, things like that. So hang tight everybody. We'll be right back.

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If you'd like to ask Ian a question, uh, go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use that text box to send us your question.

We did get a [00:41:00] question in here. It's kind of a observation, but I'm gonna start out with, you know, working with your guide here with this, uh, Carl wrote in, he's in Northern Virginia. He says, how much importance do you think should be put on distance casting? And we were just talking about this. So, uh, on distance casting, when fishing from a. Fanga in Belize. Friends have told me before I went there that I should be able to cast at least 40 feet, hopefully into the wind. That is about my limit, perhaps a bit further. Being in my mid eighties.

Hey, uh, kudos to you for still fishing and, but I've gone three times and have some of my best fun fishing ever. I love the take and fight of their bonefish. Though I've heard they may be larger elsewhere, such as in The Bahamas, I've been able to cast far enough to reach the permit, and juvenile tarpon, they'll never land in one, but in my opinion, it's more important to be able to respond to your guide quickly and to cast accurately to where he tells [00:42:00] you to cast. He knows his customer's ability, so a good guide will work with that.

So that's, uh, that's a good introduction to, um, you already talked about the casting, so good introduction to talking about working with a guide.

What kind of tips can you give us in, on working with a guide?

Ian Davis: You know, it's one of the most unique and treasured relationships you can have in life, in my personal opinion. And it can be, you know, almost compared to a caddy and a golfer, that you really work together as a team. And that can often include your buddy or another angler in the boat.

It really is a team effort. And you know, we have a, I'm sure everybody's heard the saying, don't guide the guide. You know, you really wanna let them be in the catbird seat and run the show. And so one of the most important aspects of getting the most value out of your guided day is to start the [00:43:00] day with a little meeting, whether it's in the dock, in the tackle shop, or as you're getting close to the fishery.

And so what I mean by that is I always like to ask the guide. To put them in that catbird seat to make them feel like they're running the show, which they are is what they think the day is gonna hold for us as anglers. What do with the weather and the tides, what do they think some options are? They'll kind of give us their take on the day, and then that can be a time where you can say, okay, well I'm kind of new to this, or, geez, I've never caught a.

Seven pound plus bonefish, or geez, if there's a good time for some permit or baby tarpon or snook or what have you, then you can kind of, you know, say that and say, you know, and I love instruction. I always feel when I was a guide that I was an educational service, not a fish catching service. And it's important that we remember [00:44:00] that.

You know, there's a lot of factors that go into saltwater fly fishing. It's a pretty big ocean out there. And those fish can swim wherever they want, unlike a river like I was saying earlier. So it's important to, be understanding of the situation. And you know, it can be a bluebird day. The guide's all excited, and geez, 20 minutes later you get a huge rain system.

And it's hard not to be frustrated. This isn't a reasonably priced endeavor. You've invested your most valuable commodity of all your time and your hard earned dollars. And to get some things outta your control that are negative can be frustrating. And it's just as frustrating for the guide. And so being a good listener and being understanding of how challenging it can be is your best friend, because the more time you spend on the water, you're gonna get those beautiful days and those wonderful opportunities that you know, plenty of fish opportunities.

And then there's Angler ability. [00:45:00] And that's the hardest thing to talk about, particularly in my profession, because oftentimes we don't meet the folks that are traveling through Yellow Dog and you know, and we do a post-trip call and they just didn't have the experience that they had hoped to have. And then you don't want to dig too much into their ability and how each shot of the trip, he kinda, how was the food?

And he kind moved to other subjects. Well, you know, then you might go to find out later with the guide that, yeah, he just couldn't see very well. He was a really good caster, but you know, he wanted to see the fish first. And we just kind of, we didn't get, we weren't on the same page. And so just listening to your guide and being patient are some really good, important aspects.

And then lastly, speak up. Guides are not mind readers. And I've had plenty of people say, well, you know, we just kept fishing for snook. I really just wanted to catch bonefish. Well, did you say anything about that? Well, I didn't.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Ian Davis: And then, okay, so how's the guide supposed to know? And so don't [00:46:00] be shy, ask questions and speak up.

And I've always thought, Hey, if you miss a fish, get an explanation why. And if he says, well, your cast is a little off, you know, it's windy, you need to have a little bit more of a sidearm cast. There's a lot less wind closer to the water than there is up high and just because of surface area. And so a sidearm cast can be deadly in windy conditions and say, okay, well why don't you teach me how to do that?

Why don't you come down off the platform? Or let's do a little wade fishing and please teach me that cast. And that's the true value. And that's really what you're paying for is the educational aspect of the day.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah, totally agree. And being flexible too. I know like with the Guns were telling me, you know, well it was cloudy when I went to Belize and the guide that I use has become a really good friend, which they do right, when you fish with them a lot, right?

Yeah. But I was, I was telling him, Hey, if this isn't, you know, if it's not working [00:47:00] for permit, we can go for bonefish or Tarpon. Let's do that. You know, let's just pick up and go, because I'm not gonna be picky about what I'm fishing for. But I know other people that, that will go down for bonefish or permit, and they say, that's all I want to do.

I'm not gonna look at anything else that's, I don't care. That's what I'm gonna do. Well, then they've set their kind of own expectations too, what's possible. But I think if you're flexible and I just, this is just me, but I think you can have more fun sometimes, you know? But I remember coming back home from a day of terrible permit fishing, but on the way home I said, Hey, my partner's back on the island there and can we catch some fish that we can eat?

And we trolled a clouser minnow and caught mackerel and stuff like that. And uh, had the chef cook 'em up when we got back. So, turned out to be a fun day at the end. So, yeah, always, always an experience. Um,

Let's talk about reading the flats. You had mentioned this a bit earlier, you know, hard sand, [00:48:00] concrete sand is not a good area.

So kind of describe for us the different types of bottom that we would be looking at, and then what would be the activity in those areas with the bonefish?

Ian Davis: Yes. One of the things from a big picture standpoint, not getting into the bottom quite yet, is you wanna. Kind of envision a bird's eye view or an elevated view of the makeup of the flat, of the topography of the flat.

And back in the day, those Florida Keys guides would hire charter pilots to kind of take 'em up and not only look for schools of tarpon, but look at the paths they were taking. I remember when we were kids pulling the west side of Andros and saying how cool it would be to have some type of device that could fly ahead of us and look for fish. Well, now we've got drones.

Google Earth is a wonderful [00:49:00] tool if you're going to an island or a fishery that you've never been to, and maybe you're gonna do some DIY fishing around some guided days to have that bird's eye view. And we wanna see where the entrance is to the flat and exit, and that's gonna be a deeper channel that's gonna be, or the edge of the flat meets the deep ocean or a major river system.

And then we wanna remember that those fish want to get protected and get inland as far as they can. And so if you've got a big full moon or a new moon and and big spring tides, they're gonna be pushing back into the back country. And we wanna have those things kind of laid out for us mentally before we even fish, because that's gonna tell you what direction to look.

So if it's an incoming tide, let's say you're fishing the east side of an island and the fish are coming in when it's early in the morning, you're gonna have some trouble seeing because the sun rises [00:50:00] up. On the east side, on the eastern horizon, and you're gonna be staring right into the sun.

So you might want to find an area where you can look with the sun behind you, and you can do all this beforehand on Google Earth and make these kind of game plans before you get to the fishery or when you're stringing up your rod at your car on a DIY flat, and have these kind of concepts in mind beforehand.

And vice versa. If it's an outgoing tide and it's an hour or two after high tide and you're putting on your boots and getting ready to wade, you wanna find that inland fishery where those fish have been feeding back inland and wait for them to come out. And then you kind of wanna back step to that, to those areas adjacent to the deeper water and those channels where those fish are falling off the flat as it goes dry.

And so knowing your tides is paramount for bone fishing. And then you could [00:51:00] start to look at the different bottoms. So once you've kind of got your overall game plan and your approach to the day, then you can start to say, okay, well geez, we saw some fish on that hard white sand, and boy they wouldn't eat anything and so let's go find some softer bottom where they can really dig in and get some more food out of that substrate.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. The, um, all great information. And it's kind of like, yeah, if they're not on the feed, then the flat is kind of like a desert, right? I mean, they've gotta be moving up there to be feeding. And I mean, that's just the nature of what they do. How can you tell when they are feeding from cruising and when it's time, you know, what their body language is when it's time to make that cast.

So can you talk about that?

Ian Davis: Yeah, everybody kind of, whenever we fish diffuse Spring Creek here in Montana, we're looking for noses poking [00:52:00] up. We want that, you know, fish rising and those rise forms. We want to fish dry flies. And when we're bone fishing, we want to see tailing bonefish. And when you see bonefish tailing on the flat, you know they're feeding because their tail sticks outta the water when they're rooting out prey.

And so that's when we get excited and that's when you know that they're feeding. Another thing we can look for is what we call bone for smoke. And that is when you see poofs of sand emanating and popping up. That's an active school or a single fish digging up enough prey that it makes cloudy water. And you can literally sometimes follow a school from these bonefish feed marks that are left in the sand, kind of like a little divot you'd make in the sand trap.

And they're directional if the pile of sand is. On the southern part of the dugout of the divot, they're moving north. You know, they're moving the opposite direction. [00:53:00] And so by reading those signs and looking for mud and bonefish smoke and those feed marks, you can find those feeding fish and follow 'em and hunt 'em down, which is super exciting.

And so when you see a tailing bonefish, you know you gotta take a breath. You don't want to get buck fever and get too quick. You want a nice patient, relaxed cast. And you know when those bonefish are feeding, you have to be patient. You gotta let that fly hit the bottom. One of the biggest mistakes they see people make is the fly hits the water and they wait about half a second and start stripping.

They're so darn excited, understandably, you know, they've planned this trip out. They've waited so long to get there. Well, then they say, these fish are spooky. They're just, they don't eat anything. Well, the fly isn't even in the zone. You've gotta let that fly, get down to the bottom. So one little trick I have is when you get on a flat, whether you're in a boat or wading, take that fly and drop it next to you, whether you're in [00:54:00] the boat or on foot, and count how many seconds it takes for that fly to hit the bottom.

And now you know, when you cast that fly to a fish, roughly how long you have to wait before you can start to move that fly. And what you'll find oftentimes, particularly on larger fish, is that as soon as it hits the water, as soon as it hits the bottom and makes that sand. Poof on the bottom when it hits and creates a cloud, that fish dashes over and just inhales it and you didn't do anything.

You didn't strip, you didn't do anything. You just let that fly, hit the bottom and that's what you want. That's the sign of a great cast in an area where, you know, the bonefish are feeding and you know, for big fish you definitely strip a lot less, you know those fish, you gotta let them find that. Maybe if they don't see it right away, you give it a slight strip, but you want those fish to pin it pretty much when it's not moving and you know, you know, sometimes you can just make a real slow [00:55:00] strip to keep it taught, but it's definitely important to not overs strip big fish, those schooling fish that get competitive over flies and things they eat because there's, you know, five or six or 10 or 20 of them, they typically get competitive when they see a fly. So, you can strip a little bit more and it's a little bit more for forgiving.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. All great information and tips. Um, what does the presentation look like? In other words, how far ahead are you casting, are casting beyond them and ahead? Where do you present the fly?

Ian Davis: Yeah. It's a case by case scenario, and generally speaking, you need to figure out how deep it is and how fast the fish is moving.

Oftentimes, tailing fish, which we just discussed. They're not moving. They're pretty much idle, rooting out prey. It could be small clams that there's a lot of, and they're just kind of hoovering them up. Or it might be just a, a cluster of crabs and shrimp and they're just kind of [00:56:00] going through there and digging them out.

And if the fish are moving across a flat, you're gonna need to lead them more because that fly, because they're moving at, you know, away from you or quartering you or coming at you. Hopefully you've gotta allow for that fly to your fly line and the time to cast and your fly line to unfold or

unfurl, and then for the fly to hit the bottom. And then if it takes three or four seconds for that fly to hit the bottom, you've gotta wait.

And then you want your fly there, kind of ready to ambush the fish, so to speak. So when the fish gets narrowed, it either sees it waving at it in the subtle current of the tide, or you just give it a slight little strip to activate the fish's natural predatory instinct and it comes over. And so when that fish makes a move on your fly and you can see it, you'll notice that it'll rush the fly stop and tip. And that's when you give it a nice long [00:57:00] strip set. And that's when the fun starts.

D. Roger Maves: We'll talk about that right after our next break. So hang tight everybody, and we take a quick break and we'll talk next about importance of being ready and setting that hook as, uh, Ian was just describing.

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You're listening, Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio. We're talking with Ian Davis about, A Passion for Bonefish, Ian we did get some other questions in here. I'd run by you. Roy Fukushima in Orange County, California. Do you prefer production tapered leaders or do you make your own? What length and do you use mono or fluorocarbon?

Ian Davis: That's a great question, and thank you very much for calling that in today. I kinda use a hybridization of both, and so I prefer a fluorocarbon leader. It's a little more abrasion resistant. It doesn't reflect light as [00:59:00] much, and it's the same density as water, so it sinks faster.

And we want those flies like we were just talking about, to get down and sink quickly. And so what I'll tend to do is, you know, I'll have a, a store-bought nine or 10 foot, 15 or 16 pound leader, and that's my go-to bonefish and permit leader. And then. Over time, you're gonna start to eat into that leader as you tie a couple more flies on over. And what I'll do is I've got some, you know, 20 pound and 15 or 16 pound fluoro kind of on the outside of my boat bag or my backpack so I can easily access it at any time and I don't have to go rooting and digging for it. And then I'll start to rebuild that leader.

And the main thing that when you're rebuilding your leader or you're setting up your leader for the day, is that you want to customize it for the current conditions.

So if it's really windy and you got a good gale, you want to short stouter leader. [01:00:00] And so you're gonna back off that leader. It might only be seven feet and so that you can punch it through the wind because with the surface being broken up and it's camouflaging us, the fly line and the leader itself, so you can get away with a much shorter leader, which is easier to cast into the wind.

Conversely, if it's dead calm, you kind of want to have Spring Creek tactics in your hands. A nice long leader, maybe 10, 11, 12, 13 feet, and you're gonna rebuild that with that 20 pound and 15 pound spools of fluoro. And so I have had the, and then I, what I do is I run a, a, a piece of 60 pound butt section from my fly line to the leader system.

And I would rather have more clear line on the back end of my leader system in between the tapered leader [01:01:00] and the fly line, because it's a little thicker, it gives me a better rollover and punching capability through the wind. But it's kind of like a clear tip, fly line. So a lot of people will use more of a monofilament in that situation for the back end of their leader because if they do wanna pick it up quietly and reposition it for a fish, let's say tailing, and you cast five feet, 10 feet off, and you need to recast by having mono at the back end of your system will, because it doesn't sink as fast as a little quiet easier.

And then you can have fluoro towards the front say, I don't like to marry fluoro and mono, if anything, because fluoro is a little denser and can eat through that monofilament. But when you're 30, 40, 50, 60 pound, I don't think it makes that much of a difference if you marry the two together with [01:02:00] a knot, a blood knot, or what have you.

And so really the length of my leader kind of depends. And like I said, I've had that store bought. Tapered section in my bonefish rig for probably well over two years. And it's just that four feet of in between the butt and that 20 pound. And what I like about and I, you build your own leaders too. It's a lot of buddies, leaders don't like is a lot of the knots with the hand.

D. Roger Maves: Ian. Ian, sorry to interrupt but you broke up there. Can you repeat the last few sentences that you said?

Ian Davis: Yeah, so what I like and with my store-bought leader, I have less knots periodically throughout the leader system. And if I'm fishing, we get a lot of sargassum nowadays and a lot of weeds in the water, it can pick up those knots, can pick up and snag on a lot of stuff and debris that's in the ocean, [01:03:00] whether it's sea grass or what have you.

And it makes these little spots on your leader, which kinda lead to your fly. So I just kind of have one knot from my butt section to that store-bought leader butt knot, and then I've got that store-bought leader, and then I just have maybe no knots to the fly. And then when I start to eat into that leader, I'll put on another piece of 15.

So I really only have two knots in there, which just makes my leader system a lot less likely to snag, whether it's running through coral or sargassum.

D. Roger Maves: Okay, great. Terrific. Roy also asks here, what color and brand sunglasses do you prefer and or do you carry several different pairs for changing satellite conditions and bottom terrains?

Ian Davis: Well, that's a great question. And basically I go with a glass lens. The optics are so much better. You know, you only get one set of eyes. So we don't want [01:04:00] to gimpy out financially on some cheap sunglasses. You wanna make sure that you've got a high quality glass lens. And then I'll use a lighter color, like a amber, a light amber, or a light yellow if it's cloudy.

And then I like a darker amber or Vermillion lens when it's bright and sunny. And I've always been a Costa Del Mar guy. They make a fine product. The Bahia's are great as well. Smith makes a great sunglass. So it's really kind of, you know, as long as you got some glass to protect your eyes. And then I'll have two or three pairs in the boat with me.

'cause if I get a big cloud bank, I'm gonna be going to that lighter shade and you're always gonna break the darn thing. So it's always good to have some backup sunglasses with you in the water, as well as backup fly lines in case you chop one off in the prop or it gets, uh, all beat up running [01:05:00] around the coral head.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Great tips. Great tips. Let's see. Oh, here's another one. Treg in Moscow, Idaho. He says, how do you feel about rubber legs on flies? I was in Christmas Island and the guides pulled all the legs off my flies.

Ian Davis: You know, um, again, remember what we talked about where half the time the bonefish doesn't even see your fly 'cause it's in mud and augering in the sand.

And that's kind of goes with weed guards too. You can always take it off. And I like rubber legs on my shrimp patterns and my crabs because it just gives more of an animated feel and action in the water craft for Enrico Psi fibers, all that stuff. I will say that I don't like too many rubber legs. I don't like too much craft fur.

I don't like too much EP fibers. I like a sparse fly. And if you've ever seen a shrimp in the [01:06:00] water, they're translucent. And like you were saying about the crabs, they're hard. They're perfectly camouflaged when resting on the bottom or they dig in the sand. So you want a fly that blends in to its surroundings.

It's because the number one thing, everything a bonefish eats to not be eaten is camouflage. They 100% rely on it. Nothing's gonna outrun. Bonefish. They're one of the fastest fish in the ocean on par with Oahu and Marlin. And so any crab in its right mind or shrimp knows better than to out try and outrun a bonefish.

So it's gonna freeze and hide. And that's camouflaging. So when you're tying your flies, you just don't want to use that many material. You wanna make them sparse so that they're, they kind of blend in with the environment, you know? That's why. A lot of these crab patterns are tied with that mesh pattern like the Alphlexo [01:07:00] Alec Gerbec's fly because it kinda looks like wherever it lands, you know?

And that's why the gotcha is such a good fly, because it's tied with reflective materials that Mylar, it reflects the colors of the environment. It's fishing. So when you pull up on a flat or you're getting outta the boat, your first move is the weight of the fly. You know, bee chain dumbbell plastic eyes, no eyes.

And then your second one is the color of the environment that you're gonna be fishing and you want that fly to match the color of your surroundings. So whether it's the rubber legs or the Marabou or whatever you're using calf tail or the man-made fibers, you want them to match the environment because of that camouflaging trait.

D. Roger Maves: Perfect. Perfect. I guess, well, Treg asked another question here. I guess he's talking about for humans, but he says, who has the best food in the places you have been?

Ian Davis: Yeah. [01:08:00] So it's always fun to have a real good meal afterwards. I am a little partial to The Bahamas. I kind of grew up fishing there and I just love conch salad.

And if I could teleport myself anywhere right now, it would be Shine's Conch Stand on Mangrove Key, sipping on a cold click with a bowl of fresh conch salad. It's my favorite.

D. Roger Maves: There you go, Treg. Now you know where to go. Another question here, I don't, you may not be familiar with this area at all, but Rich in Vero Beach, Florida says the bonefish migrate as far north as Vero Beach, Sebastian, Florida, or is Miami the limit?

Ian Davis: You know, I'm sure there's some fish offshore a little bit, but you know, that Biscayne Bay area is where you'll find most of them on the flats. You know, once you get north of there, you just don't have the flats that you have.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Ian Davis: Um, in Miami and South and those bonefish, they don't like [01:09:00] that deep water. That's where Mr. Shark lives. So, you know, they need that fresh or that shallow, shallow, skinny water to feel protected and that's where they find their foods. But you typically don't find them in really deeper water. There are a couple spots in Australia where they catch 'em on long lines, just by chance.

And I've even heard of somebody caught one in San Diego once slammed through the Panama Canal or something. But there are anomalies. But generally speaking, if there's no really skinny water that IE goes dry at low tide, you're probably not gonna find bonefish.

D. Roger Maves: Okay, running out of time. So I'm gonna have to move quickly to hit these last few questions, but, um, can you talk about importance of being ready on the boat or in the water if you're wading, because to me that's always been a super important thing to be, to be ready.

So can you speak to that, Ian?

Ian Davis: Yeah. And this [01:10:00] starts with before you've even gotten on the water, making sure your gear is in good working order is paramount. I have had so many times where, you know, the reel was used a year ago and maybe it wasn't cleaned and it's a little seized up or the fly line, sticky or worst yet, though you get a real nice fish and it tears off into the backing, and the backing eats into itself.

So pre-trip preparation and maintaining your gear is one of the most important things, and that starts with, you know, when you get home from a trip washing your fly lines. Washing the reel and mild detergent with warm water, which dissolves salt faster, not keeping your flies after they've gotten salty in with their buddies.

You want to keep your flies in a separate box when you're actively fishing them. I use like a little fly cup and drill some holes in the bottom so I can constantly be [01:11:00] rinsing the flies I have used on that trip, whether it's yesterday or two days ago, and that way I've got my little collection in my pocket.

I might throw a couple big heavy flies, a couple small flies in there so I don't have to root through my boat bag when I'm, when I need to change a fly quickly in the field, maybe, uh, you get snapped off on a mangrove or you set a little too hard, you get a little too happy and, and pop off a fly where you got one in your pocket.

And so having the ability to access flies and leader material quickly is. The most important thing about being ready and having good quality gear that's in good working order. I've seen it too many times where there was a Nick Fly line from a year ago and the person forgot about it, and now we've got a problem where on the first day of a trip and they can't use their fly line.

And so having extra backup material, I'll even throw an extra reel in there. I've seen too many reels [01:12:00] fall apart in the field, unfortunately. Maybe they're just a little older and not good working orders being ready. And then when you've got all your gear squared away, being ready on the boat or when you're wade fishing is making sure your line is tangle free.

That's what the non angler in the boat is doing. If you're fishing two out of a boat, that other person is basically your caddy. They are maintaining your line, making sure it's coiled properly with the line that you need first on top of the pile, and then that it's snag free. That there's not a camera bag or a rod laying in the gunnel of the boat that the line's gonna catch on a reel if the person hooks a fish.

Their mate isn't grabbing their camera, they're making sure that line is getting sucked up into the reel and not around the guide's, the angler's pliers or the butt of the reel, and they're there to help 'em rectify the situation before the fish is lost. So there's a lot of different things that [01:13:00] can go wrong in a boat and in saltwater fishing or wading.

If it can go wrong, it will, and that's, you know, you'll be wade fishing for hours with snag free line trailing behind you, and then all of a sudden your fish of the trip comes and within the last 10 seconds you've stepped into your line and it's like spaghetti all wrapped around your feet and you're hog tied and all you can do is watch that fish.

So you gotta constantly be maintaining your line and making sure it's ready to be shot tangle free.

D. Roger Maves: Great tips again, and there are more in your book. I'm looking at that section now. So, uh, folks, you don't know what you're missing if you don't get, uh, Ian's book, that's for sure, because we're just kind of scratching the surface here tonight.

But Ian's provided incredible information to close out here. Ian, can you talk about setting the hook, fighting that fish and landing it, what are some key points you'd like to make about those [01:14:00] activities?

Ian Davis: Yeah. One of the biggest challenges is a lot of freshwater anglers, particularly trout anglers, make the transition to salt, and they do the trout set.

They lift the rod when the guide goes set, or you see the fish tip on your fly, and they reach for the heavens with the rod tip, and that will pull the fly right outta the fish's mouth. 90% of the time. We want to use a strip set, and that means you keep the rod tip low and you give a long strip as if you're stripping your fly in.

And the reason being is when a fish, whether it's a permit or bonefish pins your fly to the bottom, you just want to give it a quick hook set because the fish's mouth is angled low. Another aspect of it is that oftentimes the fly doesn't set on the first strip set and it pops out of the fish's mouth.

Well, if you trout set, that fly is catapulted behind the [01:15:00] air, in the air and is gonna land however long behind you, 30, 40 feet or however long your cast was. Your fly is now out of the zone and nowhere near the fish. Well, interestingly enough, because of what bonefish eat like mantis shrimp and crabs, oftentimes when a bonefish eats, it gets pricked.

The crab is defending itself, so it's gonna take a jab at that bonefish, which really makes them mad. And so by just strip setting and if the fly pops out of the fish's mouth, you don't get a good hook set. That fish is gonna rush that fly and hammer it with vengeance because it just got, you know, your hook just kind of pricked its lip.

And so it's coming now in hard to take that fly. And so, and one trick that crazy Charlie taught me years ago on the strip set is. When you make your presentation cast and your fly is sinking and you're getting ready to move it maybe for that [01:16:00] bonefish stick your rod tip in the water. And this does a couple different things.

It gives you an immediate line or tension to the fly with no angle or interruption. It's also quieter when you strip it. If your fly rod tip is 8, 10, 12 inches, two feet outta the water when you strip, it's gonna go, it's ripping that it's line up out of the water and making noise again. Sound and vibration travels 10 times further and faster underwater than above water.

So by having that tip in the water, it's way quieter and more subtle. Then lastly, if the fish, or when the fish eats your fly, you've got a visual cue not to trout set. And that visual cue is keeping your raw tip in the water and you can keep stripping until you feel the fish, dead [01:17:00] weight or the tug. And then I will start to move into a scissor set. I'll start to pull the rod to the side to utilize the flex of the rod as a shock absorber to cushion the blow.

And I really don't lift until that fish starts to take line, because oftentimes if you lift too quickly, the fly will come flying out. And so I like to wait until I, until that fish is kind of underway and running, uh, before I start to, you know, clear the line and lift my rod.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. And then what about the fight in the land?

Ian Davis: Yeah, so with any fish species, whether it's a steelhead or trout. You always want to use leverage. And so if the fish is swimming to the left, you're angling the rod to the right. If the fish turns and starts swimming to your right, you're gonna gradually and slowly dexterously, you know, not too [01:18:00] suddenly subtly you're gonna move the rod to the left.

And the reason is, is we wanna keep that fly lodged back in the corner of the fish's mouth. And we do that by pulling the opposite direction. They're moving and swimming. And then we have to remember that it, you know, if a fish is running and you're into 70, 80, 90 feet of your fly line, or you're halfway into your backing or what have you, fly line stretches a lot.

And so, you know, there can be up to 10, 15%, 20% stretch at 60, 70 feet. And so you wanna be able to have enough pressure on that fish and 15 pound. Fluorocarbon is extremely strong. You can land a marlin on that. You can pull a lot harder than you think. And so it's really important to keep a lot of tension on that fish so we can land them quickly.

And the reason we wanna land them quickly is for conservation purposes. [01:19:00] I just, I hate to say it, there might be some record holders out there, but I'm just not a record person. Uh, the last thing I want to do is catch a bonefish on three pound test because I'm gonna kill that fish. Whether the fish. Fish might not die in your hands, but you're gonna over fight it and make it so tired that when you release it, a shark or a barracuda eats it 10 minutes later because it's so tired, it can't outrun those prey.

And so by when the fish starts to get within that 50, 40 feet, you can start to angle your rod and give them the stew apt down and dirty by keeping that rod tip low and using the lower third of the rod, not the upper third of the rod to apply maximum pressure. And in all honesty, I'd rather pull a flyer or two out over the course of a day or a trip and lose a couple fish because I'm pulling so hard to land that fish quickly, then land them, tire 'em out and have a high mortality rate, whether it's just pure exhaustion [01:20:00] over handling or predatory from a shark eating it.

And that kind of leads into our last little tip on landing and catching fish. Bonefish have a protective slime that coats their scales and we call it, you know, a bonefish slime or whatever. And when we were stupid kids, we used to catch a bonefish and hold it with our hand and then put a hand print on our shirt or our shorts to show how many fish we caught today because it would leave a print of the hand.

Well, little did we know we were probably harming those fish to a degree. We don't want to think about, you don't want to really even touch the fish, particularly with dry hands. That protective coating masks its smell and scent from predators. That's why bonefish can swim right by a shark and go undetected because the shark can't scent them.

When you overhand a fish and you release it and then you start to see a shark zigzagging and keying in on it and [01:21:00] eating it, it's because it cannot smell it because it doesn't have the protective slime. So those catch and release tools, a little wire with a pigtail at the end, so you can just poke the fly out are awesome.

If you are gonna handle a fish and you want a picture of it, hashtag keep 'em wet, keep that fish in the water until the photographer has their camera ready to shoot that photo and then wet your hands and just gently caress the fish with an ao. Okay? Sign around the tail and just, uh, cradling it underneath with your other hand and leave them in the water.

Imagine if I picked up you by your mouth and your mouth only, or by your tail. I would damage your internal organs and stretch them out and tear ligaments. We're doing the same thing when we grab lip those fish. So by keeping 'em in the water, it supports their internal organs and ensures a safe and healthy release.

D. Roger Maves: Again, incredible tips. Thank you so much, Ian. We gotta wrap it up. In fact, we're way over [01:22:00] time, but I don't wanna stop, you know, so, uh, but we gotta stop at some point. Buy his book, folks, and then you'll, you'll get a complete encyclopedia on all this. Well, listen, um, we're gonna give away a few things here really quickly and then we'll be done for the night.

But we're gonna give away a one year membership to Fly Fishers International and one year membership to Trout Unlimited. And a copy of your book, My Hundred Favorite Flies for Bonefish courtesy of Wild River Press. So hang, tight in. We'll do that in just a moment.

The Bonefish and Tarpon Trust works very hard to safeguard the future of our beloved flats, fisheries from protecting spawning sites threatened by unsustainable fishing pressure to securing historic funding to restore Florida's Everglades and estuaries. Thanks to their members, they've expanded their conservation to The Bahamas, Belize, and Mexico.

There's still much more work to be done, and they need your help with your support. They can ensure that the flats fishery is healthy and sustainable [01:23:00] now and for generations to come. Visit btt.org and become a member of the Bonefish and Tarpon Trusts today. Again, that's btt.org.

A quick reminder to everyone before you leave the website tonight, please take a minute and give us your feedback about the show.

You can find a link on our homepage in the section under tonight's show that says, what do you think of the show? Click on that link. Leave your comments. We'd really appreciate it.

Now it's time to give away some prizes. For our drawings, the winners for our drawings are randomly selected from our show's registration database.

And if you didn't register for the night show, it's too late now. But make sure you do so for a next show so you don't miss a chance at, uh, winning one of these prizes. Now, if you are one of the lucky winners, we'll contact you after the show, collect your information so we can deliver the prize to you.

First thing we're giving away is a one year membership to Fly Fishers International. Again, a great organization to support. If you're not a member or you don't win tonight, go to flyfishersinternational.org, learn more about 'em and [01:24:00] become a member. Our winner for that is Gary Harris. Gary Harris in Alabama.

And Gary, you're gonna like our next, uh, guest next month in August. Uh, 'cause we're gonna talk about best Places to Fish in Alabama. So, uh, anyway, congratulations Gary and I know you'll enjoy your membership.

Our next prize is, uh, one year membership to Trout Unlimited. Again, to learn more about tu and if you're not a member, go to tu.org.

And another great organization to support our winner for that is Rich Stanton in New Jersey. Rich Stanton. So congratulations, Rich.

And now we'll give away a copy of Ian's book, my 100 Favorite Flies for Bonefish courtesy of Wild River Press. And the, let me just clear my queue. The way you play this is to, on our homepage there for tonight's show, it's uh, that's where you could ask questions during the show.

You're gonna put your answer in there, your name and where you're from. And um, and then if you're the first [01:25:00] person to answer this question correctly, then you'll win a copy of Ian's book, A Hundred Favorite Flies for Bonefish.

So the question is, what is bonefish smoke? What is bonefish smoke? I hadn't heard that term before tonight. So that's a new one on me. So, uh, again, Ian, it takes a moment 'cause there's a, a kind of a delay before they hear what I just said and then they have to type in the form and answer the question. And so let's see what we get.

And the first answer, I'll ask you if this is good enough here, Ian is a poof of sand.

Is that close enough or do we need something with

Ian Davis: I, without a doubt. You bet.

D. Roger Maves: Without a doubt. Okay Treg, you win again. Uh, Treg's probably listen to every [01:26:00] show I've ever done. So he's a good listener and uh, and he pays attention. He always answers these questions quickly and accurately. So Treg, you're the proud winner of another book, uh, via Ask About Fly Fishing and send me your address again 'cause I don't keep that stuff around and we'll get. Wild river press to send you out a copy of Ian's book, My 100 Favorite Flies for Bonefish. And not to diminish that again, on the homepage of our website, the right hand column, you're gonna find a link to A Passion For Bonefish, the book we've been talking about all night. Be sure to check that out, out on Wild River Press and also Ian's other book, 100 Favorite Flies for Bonefish. So, um, support these, uh, fine authors such as Ian and I know they really appreciate it.

Ian, thank you so much for being on the show tonight.

Ian Davis: Yep.

D. Roger Maves: Uh, pleasure to talk to you and, uh, thanks for sharing all your experiences and knowledge with us tonight. We really appreciate it.

Ian Davis: Well, thank you for this opportunity. I've had a [01:27:00] great time. It's always super fun. And thank you everybody out there and podcast Radio Land for listening. We really appreciate your support and keep on fishing and keep that raw tip in the water.

D. Roger Maves: There you go. There you go. Hopefully you've all found a podcast archive on our website. If you haven't, just look for the link on the top line of our menu.

In that archive, you'll find all of our past shows, over 400 and some shows. Now you can search by keyword like bonefish, tarpon, permit, or whatever you want, and you're gonna find some good information on that. So, um, go ahead and explore and I know you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Our next broadcast will be on August 20th, 7:00 PM Mountain 9:00 PM Eastern Time. And on that show I'm gonna interview Matt Lewis and our show will be Alabama's Best Fly Fishing.

Alabama has, is quickly becoming one of the most exciting and diverse fly fishing destinations in North America, and Matt Lewis is here to prove it. Join us as we uncover more than 50 hidden gems across the state from [01:28:00] Appalachia streams, teaming with red eye bass to coastal marshes alive with trophy redfish, whether you're chasing bass, bream, or saltwater giants, Alabama has it all.

Don't miss this eye-opening journey through one of fly fishing's best kept secrets. And don't forget, just add this upcoming show to your calendar, right under Matt's picture on our homepage, there's a link. Just click on that and add it to your favorite calendar and you'll be all set.

I'd like to thank Fly Fishers International, Trout Unlimited, Bonefish and Tarpon Trusts, Olympic Peninsula Skagit Tactics, the Ugly Bug Fly Shop and Water Master for sponsoring our show tonight.

Don't forget to visit our website at askaboutflyfishing.com and make sure you signed up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future live broadcast.

Thanks for listening, Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio. We hope you enjoyed the show. That's it. Goodnight everyone and good fishing.