

October 11, 2008

50th Malindi Festival next weekend

First held in 1959, next weekend, the 18th/19th October, sees the fiftieth Malindi Fishing Festival, the oldest sea angling tournament in Kenya. The Malindi Sea Fishing Club had been formed by a few enthusiasts a little earlier, and used to meet in a room at Lawford's hotel, while one of the earliest charter boat operations advertised fishing at 35/- per hour. The client was able to sell the fish, at about a shilling a pound for good eating fish, and on a lucky day, he could even make a profit!

When a hundred shilling note put enough fuel in a large station wagon to get from Nakuru to Malindi this soon became a very popular event, and has remained so ever since, though air travel is now more convenient, and the hundred shillings might just buy one a beer!

On Friday 17th the Churchill Cup, for light lines of 10kg breaking strain or less, will be fished, and this is sponsored by VFS Financial Services of Nairobi. This is a formula event, where the weight of each fish caught is divided by the breaking strain of the line used, and sailfish will be the main target, as the experts will be fishing for these with lines testing as low as 4kgs!

The main two day event is sponsored by Robert J Goodson Ltd from UK, and while the points system favours billfish, the present run of yellowfin tuna at Watamu might induce many skippers to have a go at these fish – for sure, boating a couple of hundred kgs of tuna beats not catching a sailfish for many!

Tuna have definitely been flavour of the week in Watamu waters, as there are plentiful shoals of small 'school' yellowfin, interspersed with big fish up to 30 kgs, these however being hard to hook, with live baits being the most effective method. Unreel has been out with Phil Revett and David Bird from UK fishing several trips, 26 yellowfin for 200 kgs one day, 32 fish a couple of days later, and then another successful morning, after which they went out to try the Rips, twenty miles out. Plenty of small tuna there, but no big ones caught, while an hours bottom fishing yielded grouper and snappers for the table. White Mischief also tried the Rips, sixty-five yellowfin must be a great day – a few big fish were seen rolling out there.

Castle Lager, fishing with John and Andy Lisher from Grahamstown, South Africa, found a big black marlin on live rainbow runner bait last weekend, tagging it after a two hour fight – a nice fish estimated at 230 kgs. On other trips they had caught sail, tuna, giant trevally and wahoo – their first visit to Kenya, but probably not their last! Tarka seems the only other boat to have caught a marlin, while the same day landing a 72 kg shark.

The boats at Shimoni have not been out, but this weekend many of them were off to the Latham Island tournament off Dar-es-Salaam. Latham Island has always been a legendary fishing hot spot, especially for big tuna at this time of year, but last year's

results were disappointing. Indeed, if the reckless licensing of foreign commercial fishing vessels continues, tuna could virtually disappear off our coasts.

In South Africa last March, the annual Tuna Derby yielded no fish at all, while in four main events, only 34 tuna were caught in 1160 boat days! Of course, the commercial boats will eventually move away – when there are no fish left!