



Dancing with dorado

Scuba diver **Tony Baskeyfield** visits Desroches Island, part of the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, and while anglers catch dorado above he captures the action underwater in a series of images that will blow the warm water angler's mind...

Head fishing guide
Henk Ferreira
returns his dorado

There was an air of suppressed excitement as Justin the guide asked me if I'd like to dive something different today. He couldn't get the words out quickly enough while trying to be calm about what he was saying.

"Henk, the sports fisherman here has found an FAD some 10 miles off and I thought we'd dive it? We've never seen an FAD before and we're not sure what we'll find. Are you interested?"

I was visiting Desroches Island in the Seychelles Archipelago for an adventure and also to write about the scuba diving potential there for Dive magazine.

"So, yes...yesss..." - the enthusiasm was infectious.

I'd heard about FADs, which are fish attracting devices designed to do what it says on the can - attract fish. Actually they trigger a natural

food chain with all sizes of fish, from the tiniest to the largest, and especially tuna, all feeding on each other, and I'd seen some unique underwater video footage from them.

So this was an opportunity not to be missed. The water here would be blue, clear and very deep. Anything could turn up - even sperm whales and orca had been sighted off Desroches. I had my sights set on dorado or maybe a bill fish. Whatever we were served up was out there waiting for us.

Three of us sped out across the glassy flat water west off Desroches to the Amerantes drop off. The colour of the sea turned inky blue as the depth increased to over 1000 metres.

On the way we sighted dolphins and pilot whales glinting in the water. Once at the FAD we could see a school of dorado circling

the boat. It was a race to put on our diving gear and get into the water. I wasn't sure what we'd see and was curious at first as we swam under and around the FAD. It was made from a wooden pallet that floated on the surface with a piece of net suspended underneath that trailed down to 10 metres. There was a solar panel with a radio transmitter tethered to it on the surface.

Hundreds of fusiliers and striped pilot fish congregated close to the FAD. Circling was a school of dorado. They had silver sides with blue dorsal fins and yellow tails,

and blended into the sea.

When head fishing guide Henk Ferreira started to fish, all the dorado moved away from the FAD and circled the dive boat ignoring me but never getting closer than three metres when passing. The water was very clear, and underwater visibility 50-60 metres. From my position 10 metres under the boat I could see it all, the FAD and fish coming in and out of my range of vision.

I could see the splash on the surface where the lure hit the water, and as it moved across the surface back towards the boat a group of dorado chased it and

one was immediately caught.

Then I watched it fighting on the surface with others swimming close by. They seemed to go crazy for the lure, swimming at around 5-20 knots and then accelerating to the lure in the water.

Then it was free, it slipped the hook and as soon as the lure was out of the first one's mouth, I was amazed to see another snap it up. It all started again with this dorado swimming on the surface, hook in its mouth and a group of maybe 10 other fish trying to get the lure from its mouth. The hooked fish flashed gold, so it was easy to see which one was on the line and the one that had escaped was gradually returning to its original silver colour.

As Henk played the dorado closer to the boat the fish began to dive under the hull. At this point I was able to get within half a metre of the fish that was swimming,

twisting and jumping to get free. Its mouth was open with the lure, hook and line clearly visible. With an expert playing it, to me this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. To get so close to a fish that I had never seen before left me shaking with excitement.

A spot of dorado revival

Justin Sauber, who was diving with me, climbed back on the boat and had a crack at the dorado. At one stage the two of them had fish on and had to pass rods around to prevent their lines from tangling.

Watching from under the boat, I reckon they were catching a fish about every five to 10 minutes. One fish that was out of the water a bit too long needed a bit of reviving. I gently took hold of it and swam it around for five minutes to get the water flowing over its gills. What a lovely experience it was



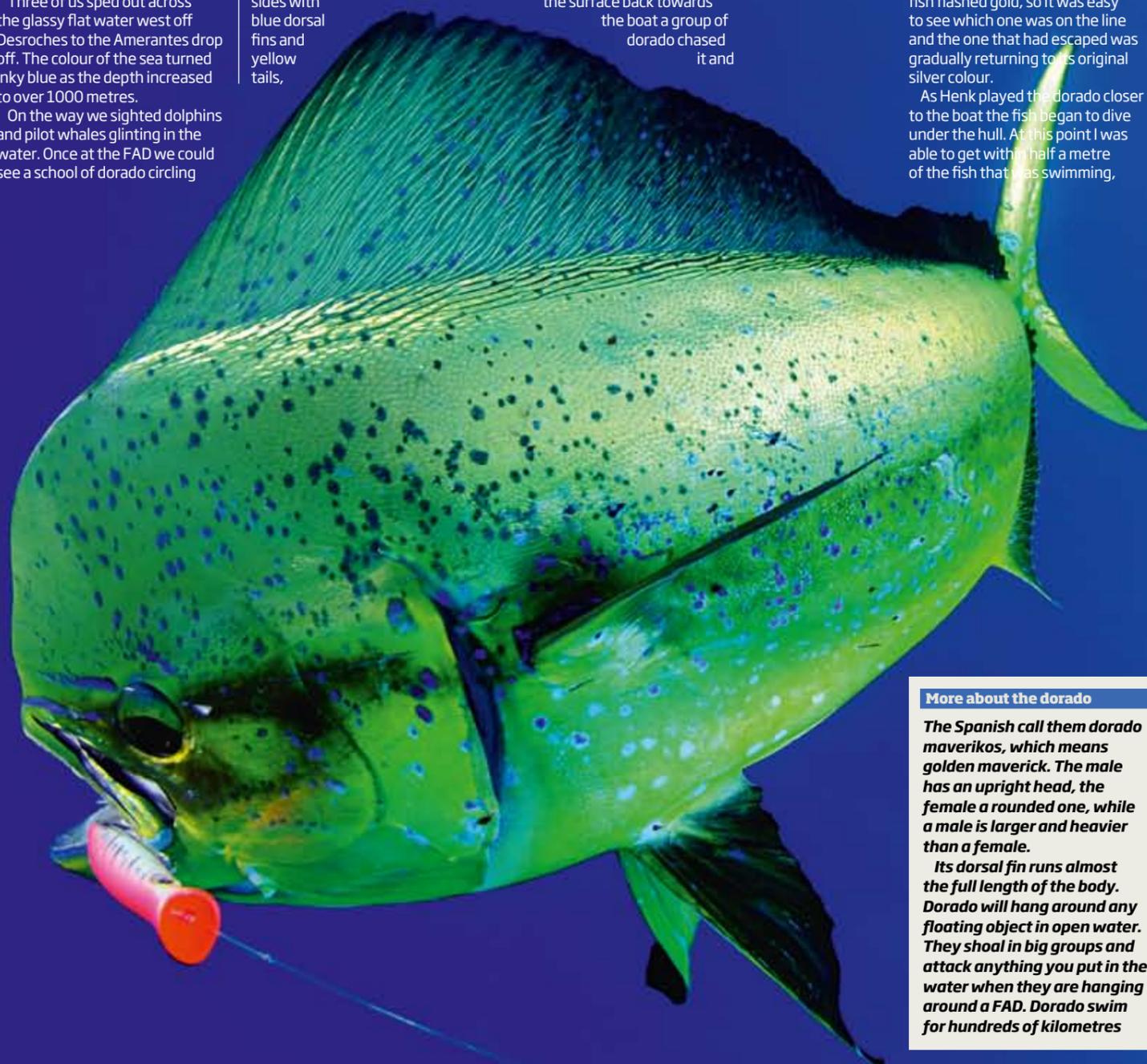
WHAT'S SO FASCINATING ABOUT A FAD?

FADs, short for Fish Aggregating Devices, but big-game anglers call them attractors, are widely used by tuna fishing fleets.

A FAD is a man-made floating object used to attract ocean-going pelagic fish.

They usually consist of buoys smothered in old netting and have a radio transmitter attached so the commercial boats can locate them. Pelagic fish aggregate in considerable numbers around drifting flotsam, rafts, jellyfish or floating seaweed.

The objects provide a visual reference point and offer some protection for juvenile fish from predators. Drifting FADs are responsible for a catch of over one million tons of tuna per year.



TOP TIP
CATCH ONE DORADO AND THERE WILL BE OTHERS IN THE VICINITY

More about the dorado

The Spanish call them dorado maverikos, which means golden maverick. The male has an upright head, the female a rounded one, while a male is larger and heavier than a female.

Its dorsal fin runs almost the full length of the body. Dorado will hang around any floating object in open water. They shoal in big groups and attack anything you put in the water when they are hanging around a FAD. Dorado swim for hundreds of kilometres

and will feed on any small fish and swimming organisms.

They are brilliantly coloured with golden hues on the sides, irregular metallic blue and green blotches on the back and sides, and white to yellow underneath. These striking colours quickly fade to a uniform blotchy white when they die.

Normally if you can catch one you can catch several since they are inquisitive and will follow hooked comrades to the boat.



Inquisitive fish are attracted to the FAD



Up close and personal with a shoal of fish

Dive instructor Justin Sauber appears not to want to lose his rod

to hold such a magnificent fish in all its glory – bright gold with electric blue spots. Eventually, I felt the first sign of recovery as its tail, then its mouth, moved. I swam it round until it started to move a bit more then watched it swim away into the blue water.

Back aboard the boat I just had to have a go at fishing. Not being a regular, I was given a quick brief

and then cast my lure off the stern. My first attempt wasn't far enough. "You'll have to cast a bit further to where you can see them swimming," advised Henk.

Second cast, then reel in and wham! I'd got a dorado. Hooked, played, landed then returned to the sea all within five minutes. What a delightful experience. Diving in deep blue water with dorado has got to rate as one of my best top 10 dives ever.

We returned to Desroches Island in silence with our own images of the afternoon, the setting sun on our backs, big grins on our faces and a couple of lovely fish for the barbecue.



"What an experience to hold such a magnificent fish in all of its glory; bright gold with blue spots"

A word about tackle

We fished with 80g Halco roosta poppers on light rods and Shimano Stella fixed-spool reels carrying Berkley Fireline.

Find out more about Desroches Island at www.desroches-island.com