

DENIS ISLAND

By Richard Schumann

Just as any salmonoid will attempt to forge its way to the sea if at all possible, so there lurks in every flyrodder, however latent, an urge to cast a line into the salt. To many though, saltwater flyfishing conjures up images of huge, weighted flies and "thunder-stick" fly rods that would have you in a truss after just one back cast. But hernias aside, there is also the constant gale force wind and fish of such size and legendary fighting capabilities, that even if you doubled the time spent at the Health & Racquet Club you would still be on a hiding to nothing. That type of fishing is just not on. After all, the general idea of flyfishing – for most of us anyhow – is light tackle, fished with skill and finesse in beautiful surroundings and that is just what flyfishing tropical flats is all about.

Much has been written about flats flyfishing in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and, although the Indian Ocean has escaped most of the media attention to date, the beauty of the countless thousands of flats that are spread across this vast ocean are gradually being discovered by a growing band of itinerant fly anglers. Of these jewels in the Indian ocean crown, there is one which sparkles brighter by far than any other that has so far been found.

Within the Seychelles archipelago, about three degrees off the equator and 350 acres in extent is Denis Island. A classic private retreat of unspoiled beauty, fringed by coconut trees, brilliant white beaches, coral reefs and stunning, gin clear, wadeable flats, which are home to the most sought after of shallow water gamefish – the bonefish.

Several years ago, French industrialist Pierre Burkhardt bought this island with a population of 50 and built a small landing strip and an 18-guest lodge. In no time it became renowned, not only for its French and Creole cuisine but also for its superb angling. Just a short walk from the lodge, the bonefish flats run along the entire eastern side of the island and are bordered by brilliant white beaches, an ideal place to leave the family to safely swim and snorkel while you wade off in search of Mr Bone.

Flyrodding for bonefish on these tropical flats is an ideal introduction for the freshwater angler to the exciting world of salt, as the tactics and tackle are very similar. In the clear, shallow water, a quiet approach is as vital to success as a good, accurate presentation and once you've hooked up be prepared for two and sometimes three blistering runs. Having a good reel that will hold 150m of backing will be about the only upgrading you will need to do as the standard 9ft, 5 or 6 weight trout rod, loaded with a weight forward, floating or intermediate line will do just fine. A range of Crazy Charlies, Clouser Minnows, shrimp and crab flies will serve you well.

It is an experience you will never forget or regret as a whole new world unfolds before you. Frigate Birds and Fairy Terns wheel and glide above, while in the water below baby turtles and tropical fish of all shapes and colours swim slowly by and you can almost hear the calypso strains of Walt Disney's *Little Mermaid* above the distant breaking surf. And after a long day in the sun, nothing is more relaxing than sipping sundowners back at the lodge, watching one of the spectacular tropical sunsets that grace this part of the world.

Getting there

The main island, Mahé, is serviced by regular flights from Europe and South Africa. Denis Island, in turn, is served by a daily Air Seychelles flight which takes 30 minutes from Mahé. The minimum stay at Denis Island is three days.

■ *Editor's note: This article was written in response to a challenge – where can one get salt water flyfishing which a trout fisher can relate to? In other words, no battling to pound huge flies into the wind with nine-weight thundersticks while in constant danger of being drowned by huge waves threatening to wash you off the rocks. What was being sought was sight fishing to small fish of about a kilogram while wading in clear water and using four and five weight rods in relatively wind free conditions. Denis Island, says Richard, is the answer – but it is not inexpensive, I gather. Richard has sold his flyfishing shop in Durban to The Flyfisherman and is now operating as a guide to the best spots on the east coast of Africa and the Indian Ocean islands. His address is 18 Rosston Drive, Durban 4001, and his telephone number is 031 815691.*



Denis Island from the air with the fishing flats in the foreground



Richard Schumann fishes off a sheltered beach at Denis Island