

FISHERIES IN ST. LUCIA, BRITISH WEST INDIES

By Henry L. Taylor, American Vice Consul

St. Lucia, British West Indies, is 24 miles long by 12 miles wide. It is separated from St. Vincent by a deep (462 fathoms) channel 24 miles wide, through which the prevailing stream sets strongly to the west at a knot and a half, and often more, as the extremities of the land are approached. St. Lucia is separated from Martinique to the north by a similar deep channel 17 miles wide, and over 500 fathoms deep, known as the St. Lucia channel. On the west coast of Castries the insular shelf is extremely narrow, varying from a couple of hundred yards to three-quarter of a mile. Off the north end of the island the shelf broadens to about 4 miles. Off the east coast it averages about 2 miles. Off the southern extremity it broadens again to about 4 miles. Tide rips are indicated off the north and south extremities.

Driving, bulling, potfishing: Driving for flying fish is the dominant activity from November to June, from all the Leeward villages between Rosalie and Soufriere where considerable quantities of the larger pelagic fish are also landed. This fishery is at its best from February to April, being replaced in the early summer by trolling from the villages in the extreme south. From May until December fishermen go bulling and handlining, but their most frequent activity at this time is probably potfishing. Potfishing here is much more systematic than in any of the islands further south.

Trolling: Trolling is practised systematically. Six whalers from Castries troll during most of the year in the St. Lucia Channel to the north of the island, especially on "Grand Sec" to the northeast of Pointe du Cap. In the south there is some trolling during most of the year, but the special season is from February to June. This activity is most marked at Vieux Fort, and in a decreasing degree at Laborie, Piaye and Choisel. Trolling and "ligne dormant" catches include dolphin, kingfish, mulatto kingfish, yellowfin albacore, blackfin albacore, ocean bonito, marlin and sailfish.

Windward Coast: On the windward coast fishing is restricted to the hurricane months, when the weather is moderate enough for canoes to put to sea. It mostly consists of potfishing, some handlining and a little trolling. Canoes are preferred here to whale boats, because they can be got out over the bar in worse weather than can whale boats, and can be baled out and refloated if swamped. The seas break on the bars in weather which is quite moderate and suitable for fishing outside. Some blasting, especially at Micoud and Palmiste, to widen and deepen the reef channels would result in more fishing days in the year and increased production.

Seines and gillnets: Jack seines are also important, being worked all the year round. Blackfin albacore (thon nuit) and spotted bonito (thon blanc) are more common in October - November, while in June and July, after the first rains the various species of couvalli are taken : carangue grosyeux, grasse, ronde and camard. One or two seines are already out of commission, and all are in bad condition. Gillnets (filets) are more common, and at Soufriere are in considerable variety, being specialized for different fish, 7 at three-quarter inch mesh for balahoo, 2 at two and a half inches mesh for jacks, and 2 at six inches mesh for bonito.

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