

# **A How To ..... CATCH and RELEASE**

The title may be slightly misleading because I am **NOT** going to give away any secrets that may inhibit any chances of winning any coveted titles - you already know how to do the catching part - I hope.

This article is the result of a request made at an A.G.M. of how to release fish with the minimum chance of mortality. Lets face it, this is an inherent part of caring for the resource and for the little extra effort, it may well pay off for you one day. That little bloke you once threw back may well be thrashing on the end of your line as a great granddaddy to thousands of playful big and little off-spring.

Nowadays not only are the little ones returned to the water through necessity by law, but more and more often the big guys are regaining their freedom from anglers for their own various reasons.

Handling the fish is the first consideration, obviously you are not to gaff the big guy you are going to put back unless you can slide the gaff under or to the side of its mouth, without drawing blood. If you are going for pics and you are in a boat then preferably use a net. Never hold him by the tail as the weight of the fish can dislocate his spine. Remember these guys come from an environment where they are never put under physical stress by their mass.

Also avoid sliding your hand into its gills as this can cause damage to his breathing apparatus.

The fish has a protective slime covering his scales. This is a bacterial prevention system that, if wiped off will leave the fish in dire jeopardy of picking up some ocean-going lurgy that could lead to infection and a fatal

disease. Also, as you know, they are cold blooded creatures and even the heat from your hands can burn the fish to an extent where infection will again take hold and the chance of survival is minimal. For these reasons, if you must handle the fish then use gloves or at the least some cloth. I find muslin cloth is good for the purpose. Again keep in mind the environment that he has come from and treat him as you would a baby.

The hook and its retrieval is probably the most common cause for fish mortality. Trebles are definitely out. They are extremely difficult to extract and if left in, can cause immediate problems to the fish. Stainless steel hooks should never be used, if a fish breaks off, he wears that jewelry for the rest of his days, which is guaranteed not to be many. Only remove the hook if it is no major task to do so. Gut hooked fish and those that are hooked in a way that major damage will occur during removal will certainly die from stress shortly after their return if they don't during the operation.

It has been found that fish with the hook left in will produce lactic acid that deteriorates the hook within a few days. However, as with stainless hooks, the fish will continue to activate its natural defense mechanism against impregnated foreign bodies until it self destructs through too much lactic acid in its body. The simple answer is to relinquish your comparatively valueless hook to the fish by cutting the line as close as you can to the hook.

Fish don't like being away from home too long so keep him out of the water for as little time as possible. You may find that when it is time to return him, he may be too weak to stay upright. Once they start back-stroke, they are terminally ill. You can prevent this and help him out by

swishing him through the water, (forward, not backwards) to resuscitate him by passing water over his gills. This will not take long, particularly in the well oxygenated surf, however it will work just as well over the side of a boat but may take a little longer. This all well worth while for the desired result. When you feel him pick up strength a want to swim away - let him go.

What a great feeling, you have just performed a task that is a major contribution to the welfare of the fishery!

I deeply apologise to our female counterparts and others who are offended by my sexist prose, I realise there are female fish that must also be returned but I thought it would drive you mad to continually read his/her.

Tight lines and enjoyable fishing with successful releasing.

Pete Ludlow.