

VERSATILITY GETS VARIETY

Many an angler who goes fishing strictly for one type of fish, returns empty handed, but I think that this number could be greatly decreased; if the angler concerned were a little more versatile.

We have all heard the tailor-fisherman often reply to the usual question:- "No good, the bream ate the bait as quickly as you could throw it in". I agree that tailor fishing is very rewarding when they are biting, but any angler knows this is not always the case, so why not catch these bream that are biting.

The versatile angler is always prepared for this eventuality. He has brought gear suitable for other types of fish and also a variety of bait, unless he knows where he can catch crabs, octopus, worms or some other suitable bait that will enable him to try for other varieties of fish.

It is seldom that a versatile angler can't find fish of some kind and he will invariably land home with a nice bag of mixed fish that would make the specialist green with envy.

Bream fishing can provide terrific sport especially if light gear is used. Personally for daylight fishing I like and 8 or 9 lb. line and a light 12 ft. cane or glass rod. The reel which I think is a must is the 6" Alvey "Estuary Champion" and when bream fishing I always carry a spare spool with a 12 lb. line, just in case there are a few school jew, drummer, or even tailor biting.

Bream are a fish, which are about all the year round, although the numbers may be smaller during the summer months. However, it is better to take home two or three nice bream than no fish at all.

The rocks are the favourite haunts for bream, especially where there is foamy water, about six to fifteen feet deep close to rocky shelves and cunjevoi. There is still much controversy about the best bream bait. I believe it varies at different times of the year. Yabbies, mullet gut, pippies, fresh white pilchards, fresh tailor or gar etc.

Crab and cunjevoi will, however, usually entice them to bit, and these can be found by the enterprising angler at most headlands. The size of hook depends, naturally, on the size of the fish and the type of bait. However, a 1/0 is generally accepted.

Bream are also caught in good quality and quantity along the ocean beaches, especially where there are small rocky gutters. The rock training walls at estuary mouths also provide prolific bream fishing. Although heavier lines are sometimes used here, the lighter the line it is possible to use, the better will be the catch.

After bream fishing the versatile fisherman should be able to master the art of flathead fishing. In my opinion, this is one aspect of fishing that is greatly underestimated as a sport, and it is surprising the number of otherwise good fisherman who are unable to catch good numbers of them.

The old method of catching flathead was like pulling in a bag of sand. Well, this can be true if the line used is too heavy, but if fished for in the right manner, they can provide excellent sport, and fishing for flathead is in fact my personal favourite.

The gear used should be very similar to that used for bream as long as the tip of the rod is very light and sensitive. Again I recommend a 6" Alvey side cast with the spool well filled with line. This gear enables you to cast sufficiently while using very small sinkers. The rig used should be similar to that used for bream with a trace of the same line (about 12 to 18" long) and under no circumstances should wire be used.

A flathead will not bite your line while his head is under water, and by keeping your rod in a semi-horizontal position, once the fish is in close his head can be kept beneath the surface. However, once on land the fish may chew your line slightly and it is advisable to check it every two or three fish just in case it needs renewing.

Flathead are caught in rivers and creeks and in the surf. The greatest numbers are generally caught in the rivers while the best quality are taken mostly from the beaches. When fishing the river (or creek) the best spots are on a sandy (or mud) bottom where the water runs off shallow spits and into gutters or deep channels. The deep water should preferably be on the downstream side of the spit as the fish will move into it as the tide drops.

The best tide is generally the beginning of the flood although in some places I have found that the tide makes very little difference. The presence of weed growing along the edge of the shallows makes conditions even better.

In one particular spot in the Tweed river, during January, of this year, I caught 230 school flathead (from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb.) in three days from standing on a sand-spit and casting over the weeds into deeper water. The fish would mainly take the bait just before it would reach the weeds as I moved it slowly in towards me.

The three things which I class as the most essential after gear and fishing spot are, bait, the way in which the bait is moved and the detection of the bite.

There are two baits which I class as essential and unless I can get one or the other I seldom go flathead fishing. They are pilchards (white) and fresh prawns. Of these two I prefer the white pillies and again not just any pilchard will do. While salted ones will still catch fish and are easily obtained, unsalted ones are by far the best, and of course harder to get.

When the pilchards are running I usually buy ten to twenty pound and put them in $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. bags and freeze them. They will keep indefinitely this way and when they thaw out are as good as new.

Prawns must be fresh and live ones which are as hard to get as live sea gar are especially good. There are several other baits such as yabbies and cut baits but unless the fish are really thick I seldom go fishing without one of the above.

I mentioned that the lightest of sinkers should be used but again unless you have a light line you may not be able to cast sufficiently. The line should be cast at least twenty yards and should be pulled back by a series of slow drags along the bottom. The best method of doing this is to cast and then once the slack has been retrieved, gently pull the rod to one side very slowly, point the rod again in front of you and repeat this. Each throw of say twenty yards should take about one minute if the line is being moved at the correct speed.

The reason I think flathead are not caught in the big numbers that they could be, is because a lot of fishermen cannot recognise a flathead bite when they get one. The fish will take the bait when it is moving but you will find that most flathead bite just as you drop your line slack before moving it again. Then, when you go to move it again the fish will have hold of it. If you move it too suddenly you may frighten him and he will not bite again.

They can be very hard to feel at times and when you do recognise a bite it is advisable to let it be for about four or five seconds so that the fish will take the bait properly. They have a big mouth and will usually get hooked if time is given for them to get the 2/0 well inside it.

When fishing the beaches look for small bottle neck gutters, say, 30 ft wide and ranging from 18 inches to four feet deep. If the gutter is calm the angler must not stand too close to the edge as the fish will often follow the bait right in before taking it, and shadows on the water tend to frighten them.

The Whiting is another fish which can provide excellent sport for the versatile fisherman. I have often been along the beaches looking for flathead gutters and come to one which is visibly full of whiting. The usual thing happens; no worms. But the versatile fisherman can find a few pippies or equarie on the beach, or even catch a few worms and have quite a good time catching whiting, whereas that was not what he originally expected to catch. You should always carry various sized hooks in your creel as you never know what will be about. Four to eight pound lines should be used for whiting, but the eight to twelve pound line you are carrying will do in an emergency.

The rocks have far more scope for the versatile fisherman because there are usually many varieties in different types of water and kinds of bait available.

What water the different varieties are found in and where to obtain bait for them is the next essential.

Around the rocks you can usually get crabs, octopus and cunjevoi for a start, and with these you can usually catch a kelp fish or some such "nuisance fish" for cut bait. Crabs are readily obtainable from rock crevices on most headlands along the coast. They are excellent bait for bream, snapper tarwhine or blue groper, while drummer and turrum Jew will often take them.

The octopus is found in similar places to crabs, except where there is an octopus there are very seldom any crabs, for the reason that they eat the crabs. An octopus leg makes excellent snapper, jew or turrum bait and occasionally a tailor will take it.

The cunjevoi is perhaps the most popular bait of the lot and it is usually the hardest to get. However, it is an excellent bait for drummer, and bream, snapper, turrum ^{and} tarwhine will readily bite on it. In fact there are times when bream will bite on little else.

Snapper are usually found in deep water with a rocky bottom and good exits to the open sea. Octopus or fish baits are the best. Snapper are easily hooked and are terrific fighters, but unfortunately they are very seldom caught in reasonable numbers.

The drummer prefer similar haunts to bream, although they are never caught on the beaches. They like foamy water and usually lie very close to rocks covered in cunji. They are also terrific fighters but are not held in high esteem as a table fish. Fifteen lb lines and 2/0 hooks should be used, but that spool of twelve lb line will do if you handle them with caution.

Turrum prefer deep but foamy water and are usually caught on fresh pilchards, live prawns, live bait or octopus. They provide excellent sport for the angler when hooked. They are a school fish and when about can be caught in good numbers. The average fish is from two to eight pounds but you may hook a monster up to twenty pounds, so the line preferred would be about 15 lb.

The Jew is another fish which likes foamy water, however, it does not have to be really deep. Worms, yabbies, pippies and fish baits are successful but live bait are usually accepted the best. The size of gear and hooks etc. again depends on the size of the fish. Hooks range from 2/0 to 10/0 while lines range from 10 to 30 lb, depending on the run of the fish. Jew are also caught on the beaches and in the rivers.

Besides these regulars and of course tailor the odd fish will sometimes make an appearance. Such fish are Tuna, Mackerel or Mackerel-Tuna. These fish are not common and it is seldom you can go fishing with any real confidence of catching one. However when they do come in the versatile fisherman should be able to catch them. They are usually caught by spinning and every fisherman should have at least a couple of spinners in his creel.

The versatile fisherman should be able to "read" the conditions and in a few minutes be able to decide what types of fish he may be able to catch and where to catch them. If his first choice does not turn out he can then change and fish for something else. He should also be able to economise by using the baits which are readily obtainable on the rocks, beaches, or rivers as the case may be.

Once he can do this he will undoubtedly catch more fish, and can then call himself a versatile fisherman.