

Practical Know-How

Organized Boat Casting

How to keep your boat from becoming a ship of fools.

THE STRIPER BITE WAS ON AND EVERYBODY wanted to go fishing. Ben, Greg, Ross, and I were in my 18-foot Maritime Skiff, and even though the boat is equipped with casting platforms in the bow and stern, it's still only 18 feet long. We had a spotty morning. The tides were right, the wind was light, the seas were flat, bait was around by the ton, and there were acres of stripers breaking the surface on both sides of the boat. We all wanted to catch fish, but we didn't have a lot to show for our efforts. With four anglers fishing, we simply didn't have our lines in the water enough.

PHOTO: MICHAEL MELFORD



With an organized casting rotation, two or more fly fishers can easily fish from an inshore skiff, and enjoy the thrill of double (or triple or quadruple) hookups.

We had a decision to make. One option was to take turns fishing, but we vetoed that idea. The only way to successfully fish four guys on my boat was to work in a rotation. Coordination is the easiest way to work a rotation, and it involves three simple steps, starting in the bow.

Step One: The first angler positions himself at the point position in the bow of the boat and begins to work out line. His turn ends when he casts.

Step Two: Once the first angler's line is on the water, he steps back. If the bow platform is large enough, he can simply move over a few feet. If the

BY TOM KEER

platform is small, the angler ought to step off the platform into the center of the boat. That angler then begins to retrieve his fly. Next, the second angler steps to the point of the boat and starts to cast. When he finishes his cast, he can start to retrieve his fly.

Step Three: The first angler usually completes his retrieve before the second angler. Next, he pitches the few remaining feet of line, his leader, and his fly behind the second caster and onto the water on the opposite side of the boat. The first caster then steps back onto the bow platform behind the second caster. He moves to the point of the boat and begins to cast and the rotation starts over.

This kind of organized fishing, with two casters on the bow platform and two casters on the stern platform, will enable four anglers to successfully fish in a relatively small boat. With a bit of practice and precision, the system works like a charm. Here are a few additional pointers that can help you fine-tune the on-the-water casting arrangement:

Use a stripping basket. Without a stripping basket, the lines of the two anglers fishing in the bow of the boat will probably become one tangled mess. A lot of fishermen don't use stripping baskets on boats, but when working a casting rotation, baskets are essential.

When using a stripping basket, a two-handed retrieve is generally the best way to work your fly. The strips ought to be syncopated so that the fly moves erratically and entices the fish to strike. Alternate a series of short and long pulls to make your fly look like a darting baitfish. Then you can strip-strike to hook a fish when it hits.

Adjust for the wind. Many times, the wind blows in a direction that will foul up your casting. If you are a right-handed caster, for example, and are casting from the stern and the wind is coming from your right, you'll be in trouble. Instead of making a standard right-handed cast, turn around so that your line is now downwind and pitch the fly on your backcast—it'll reduce the number of pierced ears. To that point, never cast over the center of the boat. Chances are you'll hook one of your buddies.

To deal with a crosswind, you'll need to alter your cast. Backcasts should be made sidearm, with the rod parallel to the water. As the line begins to straighten on the backcast, drift your rod tip up high so that it is directly behind you and in its normal casting position. Come forward in a standard overhead casting position. This sidearm/drift up/overhead cast is invaluable for keeping flies out of your back, neck, and arms.

Have a plan for landing fish. When an angler hooks a fish, he should drop the rod tip so that it is low to the water, and then steer the fish toward the unoccupied side of the boat. By controlling the fish's head, you can maneuver the fish away from the other lines on the water and fight the fish directly off the bow or the stern. With this kind of arrangement, the center of the boat is free so that if a quadruple hookup occurs, there is plenty of room for the two center anglers to land their fish without everyone tangling lines.

Keep commonly used gear handy. To reduce excessive movement on board the boat, I'll run a hank of line through a half-dozen spools of tippet material (usually from 10- to 20-pound fluorocarbon, and a spool of wire) and hang it from my center-console railing. I'll also hang a hook hone, binoculars, and a Boga-Grip off the railing. I stick a variety of flies in a piece of foam (big bait patterns, epoxies, topwater flies, and attractor patterns in a range of sizes) and leave them on top of the center console for handy access. Anglers won't have to

More Practical Know-How

Bag Your Flies

BY JAY "FISHY" FULLUM

Just about everything we use in salt water, including our flies, requires some maintenance after being exposed to salt. To keep my flies salt-free, I store many of my patterns in zip-lock bags. Then, as flies are lost or destroyed by toothy critters, I go through my inventory of bags and replenish the flies in my chest pack. In recent years, I've also discovered that zip-lock bags are a much better way to carry and organize my flies.

After fishing a particular pattern, I put it into a small zippered pocket in the front of my chest pack. It does not go back into the appropriate plastic bag; putting the salty fly in with the "clean" flies would contaminate them. At the end of the day, I remove from my chest pack the flies I've fished, wash and dry them, and return them to the zip-lock bags. Keeping the flies that were fished separate from those that were not also gives me a complete inventory of the patterns that were productive, or not, during the day's outing.

I organize my saltwater patterns in specific categories, based on the type of fly, the size range, and the color. I also label the tops of the bags. Separating and packaging flies in specific categories makes it much easier to reorganize my chest pack for each trip.

This system works very well when I don't know what the targeted species will be on a given trip. My time on the water is often tied in with a seminar or a fly-fishing show. Someone graciously offers to introduce me to their waters, but my host is not sure what we might be casting to during the trip. When the targeted species is vague, I pack bags of "might be a good idea to have" flies. These additional flies take up very little space, and weigh much less than flies stored in boxes. The only box I carry is used for crab and shrimp patterns, because they lose their shape if stored in plastic bags.

When I began to use zip-lock bags to inventory, categorize, protect, and condense nearly 500 saltwater flies, some of my fishing partners didn't think it was worth the effort. Most of them have now retired their heavy, expensive fly boxes, replacing them with zip-lock bags.

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rummage through a plethora of bags to find their gear, and more deck space remains free and clear.

Gear that needs to remain waterproof yet handy (cameras, binoculars, food) can be temporarily stored in zip-lock bags, provided that the seas aren't too rough. When you're moving from spot to spot, however, these items ought to be stored in protective watertight cases.

A variety of rods should be pre-rigged with different lines and flies for the times when you'll need to quickly

respond to the changes in fishing conditions. Rods should be strung up with floating, intermediate, and either Teeny or Depth Charge lines with poppers, small baitfish imitators, and large baitfish patterns. When fishing with a number of anglers, it's much easier to simply pick up a rod that's ready to fish than to take up time or space rigging up another outfit.



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