

Fall Tips for Corbina

By Bill Varney Jr.



When footballs are flying, days are shorter and kids are back in school you know it's fall. Corbina know it's fall too and begin to prepare to move on to safer grounds before winter. Most corbina leave the open beach when sand crabs become scarce. South of Santa Barbara that's generally around October when you have your last good chance at hooking a fat trophy slider.

Fishing for corbina in Fall is a bit different than during spring and summer. The bigger fish are generally around now and tend to be a bit more wary of the average angler. By using the correct rod and reel combination, rigging up and pitching the right baits you are sure to have a better shot at catching corbina before most of their stock disappears for winter.

No matter if it's the middle of summer or the end of fall the rod and reel combination that seems to work for corbina is the same. I like to use two setups depending on where I am fishing. If I'm tight to rocks, near a dock, very close to shore or in a restricted casting area I prefer a seven-foot rod. On the open beach and in wide-open areas (where I want to cover as much

surface/bottom area as possible) I like to use a longer nine-foot rod. Both rods are line rated 4-16 lb, with a lure weight of less than one ounce. The longest trout rod in your garage is a good place to start. Then if you get the itch--go for a Cousins, Shimano or Lamiglas rod with the same rating.

As for reels, try the Penn Battle II 2000 or 3000 series-spinning reel. With it's sealed bearings, it's designed to take a salty, sandy splash once in a while. Also Shimano makes several good surf spinners. Because your reel will eventually get sand in it and seize up like an old jeep, keep the price in the \$40 -\$100 range.

When it comes to rigging that's simple. I like to employ two different setups. The first is a very light and stealth rig that I would use on the shorter spinning rod. With this rig, tie your main line directly to four or six pound fluorocarbon leader. Use a uni to uni knot and be sure to pull it tight. A two foot leader works great with a #2 Gamahatsu split shot/drop shot hook or an Owner Mosquito hook tied to it. The second rig is the Carolina rig. This is a simple rig made up of a sliding sinker, a bead, swivel, six-pound flouro leader and a hook. This setup works best when fishing the open beach and trying to cover as much area as possible. Be sure to follow these rules when using the Carolina Rig: In larger surf, swell or current use a *heavier* sliding sinker and a *shorter* leader. In small surf employ the opposite.

When it comes to baits---there are some changes for fall. When spring rolls around corbina key in on sand crabs that become their main diet throughout the summer. But when the water cools in fall and sand crabs disappear, corbina turn to other baits. Late summer has always had good fishing with mussel and ghost shrimp. Not that the sand crab won't work but corbina are ready for a new diet and these baits represent those they find in back bays and estuaries during winter. Once fall is in full bloom and we make our way toward Halloween, corbina key in on clams and other bivalves. Recently, biologist from Fish and Wildlife in a Orange County beach study found that 99% of corbina had clams in their stomachs. Especially those caught in the fall months.



As the summer wanes into fall try some different bait for corbina. Pull a few mussels from the rocks, suck a few ghost shrimp from the bay or gather a few clams from under rocks in intertidal zones and try those for bait. Certainly, one of the secrets to catching surf fish is having a variety of baits with you, so you may try each to see which works best.

Now we come to the most important part: Where to find corbina. This time of year is busy for corbina as they are beginning their transition from the open beach into protected areas like back bays, harbors and local estuaries. They are also filling up on the last bits of “easy” food and won’t be reluctant to bite when they find the right bait.

Fall corbina can always be found in the stock areas like along the open beach, near rocks jetties, surrounding piers and also transiting harbor and estuary inlets. When fishing the open beach I survey the sand at low tide and try to find two distinct feeding grounds. The first is any hole or trough that develops along the shore. Find these long shore troughs at low tide and match them up with a permanent landmark. Come back at high tide and line yourself up with the landmark and fish here as this is where the corbina will be feeding.

The second and most productive area to be found at low tide is out on the sand bar found between the inner and outer trough. Look for aggregations of sand crabs that produce a bed about the size of a car's hood. Line these groups up with something permanent and come back once they are covered with water and cast there. This is where corbina will be feeding at higher tide. A ten-foot cast to the right or left can leave you without a bite, so it's important to mark these areas carefully.

Take a short walk on a long pier but stop right above the waves and look for corbina. This is the best spot to see them and watch their behavior. Get a feel from the pier as to what they are eating and where they are moving. Fish from that spot or move down onto the beach and fish the surf line adjacent to the pilings. Corbina commonly forage for sand crabs near a pier because structure that inhibits the movement of sand causes it to pile up under the pier and provide a perfect nesting area for sand crabs (Ok, that was also a tip as to where to find sand crabs 365!).

Lastly, don't forget that during winter many corbina, spotfin and the largest perch make their way back into inner bays to forage, spawn and find relief from winter storms. As you make your way deep into fall try to concentrate on these entrances where hard bottom created by jetties meets sand. You are sure to find the biggest corbina here as they make their last trip up the channel for winter.