

# October Surf Fishing

By Bill Varney Jr.



October is one of my favorite months to surf fish. Day after day filled with empty beaches, clear water and a warm breeze blowing over my shoulder and out to sea. Corbina and spotfin feed in the shallows this time of year and work the beach in hopes of finding the last food of summer. For both of these fish, it won't be long until most of them move into coastal harbors and estuaries for winter.

Fall signals changes at the beach. Bait availability has changed and fish are transitioning over to a new set of forage. Summer brings billions of sand crabs and fish key in on that bait. But as the water begins to cool in fall crabs disappear and fish seek a new favorite food.

Bloodworms, Ghost Shrimp, Lug worms and clams all meet the high expectations of surf fish in fall. Bean clams (*Donax*) spawn in October each year just off the California shore. During the



spawn billions of clams come to the surface and open, which makes them easy for fish to find and eat. One study along the Southern California coast showed that corbina sampled by the CA DFW, over a 90-day period, all had clams in their stomachs.

Along with clams, worms and ghost shrimp also work great in the cooling water months of the year to entice fish to bite. You may purchase all three at selected tackle stores. Ghost shrimp and clams can also be found in some of our estuaries and harbor areas.

When it comes to rigging and tackle I like to use two different size rods this time of year. When fish are close to shore or near structure (sight fishing corbina, under docks and near rocks) down size your rod to a 7-8' trout/surf/steelhead style rod. I match that with a spinning reel loaded with fresh 6lb pink or red monofilament. For longer casts on the open beach and to cover

more surface area, up-size your rod to 9'. Both work well matched with a 2500 size spinning reel.

For rigging, a slightly modified Carolina rig works great. First, start with an egg sinker. For big surf use up to one ounce. For small surf and near rocks as little as 1/4<sup>th</sup> ounce. Below that place a 6mm bead; I prefer clear, orange or red. Then a black #12 barrel swivel, 18-24" of 6lb fluorocarbon leader and a very sharp hook.

Having your leader and hook set up correctly for the type of fishing you are doing is very important. For days with wind, big waves and surge—shorten your leader to as little as eight inches. On calm days a longer leader up to thirty-six inches will perform fine. Surf fish always feed on the bottom, so be sure to keep your bait there too.

When it comes to hooks they remain one of the most important parts of your rigging. With surf fishing you don't have the luxury of being over the fish. Because the fish is out in front of you a very sharp hook is a must if you expect to connect. There are several great hooks on the market for the surf but my favorites are Owner Light Mosquito Hooks, Gamakatsu Drop Shot/Split Shot hooks and Mustad sproat worm hooks. I carry three sizes 1, 2, 4.



**Mustad Sproat and Gamakatsu (50409) or Owner Mosquito Light Hook**

Now that you're all rigged up let's try to find some fish at the beach. By the time fall rolls around the beach has been scoured by southern swells all summer. Troughs and holes have developed and become semi-permanent parts of the beach. These areas act as food collectors and safe water for inshore fish.

When I reach the beach these troughs and holes are what I'm looking for. I may find them at low tide. Line them up with something permanent on shore and come back later and fish them at high tide. Or I may just watch swimmers and surfers as they come in and out of the surf. If they drop down and then rise up again as they walk into waist deep water—bingo, I know there is a trough there.

Being successful at the beach requires that you move about and look, cast, and drag the bottom for bites. In addition to the troughs and holes I am always looking for areas of off-colored, swirling, foaming water. This is where bait is being churned from the bottom and where fish congregate to feed and hide. If you fan cast an area (to the right, straight out, to the left) and don't get a bite after ten minutes, move one hundred yards down the beach and start again.

Now, with all that said, the true road to success is by preparing for the upcoming day, the night before. Start by making sure your rod and reel are ready to go. I like to change out my surf line about once per month. Lines cheap and losing a big fish is hard, so use fresh line. Turn the handle and make sure your reel spins freely. Check your guides and make sure you have all of them.

Next, look at your tackle and rigging. Make sure you have enough of each component and that you've taken time to tie several different lengths of leader. You don't want to be fumbling at the beach tying leaders during the bite of a lifetime—so do it at home in advance and place them on a leader holder so they don't tangle and are easily accessible.

Gather your bait--Be it Gulp! sandworms or live baits like ghost shrimp, clams or lug and blood worms. Have them ready and keep them cool until you reach the beach. Last but not least, figure out what you want to wear (layers are the best) then check your camera for batteries, hop in bed and try to get some sleep!

There are not that many moving parts to surf fishing. Good timing, tight rigging, great bait, conditions and a little luck will go a long way toward success. So if we've learned anything here, it's to prepare in advance. We all need a little luck but with a bit of preparation you will increase your chances to catch fish and certainly bigger fish--by a sizeable margin.