

Surf Fishing: C,P,R (Catch, Photograph and Release)

By, Bill Varney



Photograph from below will highlight the fish and easily hide your surroundings

Catch, photograph and release is a great way to enjoy the beach and bring home memories. But what may be more important is the information it captures and how it can help to make you a better surf angler.

Each year, at least one month in advance, I review my photographs for the upcoming “fishing month”. Reviewing photographs from previous years gives me a great idea of what’s coming up that month. I can see what date fish were caught on, weather conditions, tides, moon phase, best bait, crowds and so much more...right from a picture!

I can guarantee you that by reviewing past year’s catches you will be able to employ the techniques that worked then, to be a more

successful angler now. Here are some tips on photographing and releasing your catch.

Every year as we work on the CCA Surf Fishing Calendar we go through thousands of photographs to find just a few that are perfect. Here are a few tips that will improve the quality of your beach photography immensely:

Phones have lousy cameras. Phone makers love to tell you that your iPhone or Android has a fantastic 15-megapixel camera. What they don't tell you is that unless you tether your phone to a desktop/laptop computer you will not be able to upload a photograph in it's original resolution. Why? Because phones compress images to allow them to be text or emailed. Thus, when you attach and text a photo to a friend it will come out on their end with a very low resolution. Pictures of such low resolution will be blurry (i.e. pixilated) and can not be enlarged.

Make sure your camera is ready the day before use. This seems to almost be too simple to even mention...but it's so important. Make sure your batteries are charged and ready for multiple uses. Take time to thoroughly wipe off your lens and make sure every spot has been removed from the lens glass. Test your camera to make sure it's taking photographs and the exposure, etc. are set correctly.

Composition is the key to success in photography. So let's first talk about secret spots. If you are taking a photograph of your buddy with a nice fish you know that if you spell out where the spot you caught the fish was, when you arrive back the next day the beach will be packed with Internet poachers. To avoid that, try these two techniques: First, as the photographer, kneel and shoot your shot up toward you subject. This will insure that your background is the sky. A second technique to keep your spot secret is to have your subjects back toward the rise of sand from

the water and use the sand as the background. These techniques both work great to hide your spot and don't require photo software that makes your picture look like a Salvador Dali painting.

So now that we know how to keep your "secret spot" secret let's work on making your subject jump out at your viewers. Fish that are sandy or covered in blood make lousy photographs. Not too long ago a friend sent out a Christmas card with a picture of a huge and very bloody salmon they had caught. A non-angler who saw the card mentioned: "Who wants to look at a dead fish!" And they were right. Keep your fish looking clean and alive and you'll have far more folks who enjoy the picture.

Enhance your subject with a few essential techniques. Always be sure to have the sun in your subject's face with the photographer's back to the sunlight. Use your flash to enhance the subject and bring out the colors of the fish—even during daylight hours. This technique is especially important in low light situations (sunrise and sunset) and will enhance the soft light that makes so many photographs memorable.

Lastly, present your catch (unless it's a huge fish you can't lift) in a horizontal manner. That is, hold the fish in front of you using both of your hands so the fish is horizontal, rather than vertical in the picture. Dangling, horizontal fish make the viewer wonder if you are afraid to touch them and does little to accentuate their color, size, texture and natural beauty.

With great photography also comes great responsibility. Wouldn't you like to catch more and bigger fish each time you go to the beach. Well, the best way to insure that is to practice catch and release. Now don't get me wrong...feel free to keep fish to make those tasty taco but be sure to release those you don't keep so they may spawn and grow to be your next big catch.

In order to release fish safely here are a few tips:

Wet your hands before touching the fish

Avoid grabbing and handling the fish body

Don't handle your fish by wrapping them in a towel

Avoid letting the fish fall to the ground, rocks, dock

If possible, keep fish in the water while removing the hook

Place fish gently back into water

Move the fish forward and backward in the water to force water through its gills.



This photograph is taken from above and highlights the fish while hiding your surroundings

Do you know this guy? Behdad is one of the best surf anglers of all time!