



## **SALTWATER FLY FISHING BASICS**

**Welcome to a program designed for the novice as well as the person who is well versed in the field of saltwater fly fishing. Contained in this handout is some very basic knowledge on how to go fly fishing in the saltwaters of Virginia. Each area will cover basic information needed to get out and enjoy some fantastic sport. You may not totally agree with this information, but please keep in mind it is only suggested info that has been tried and proven to be effective in catching fish in Virginia waters.**

### **EQUIPMENT SELECTION**

**When selecting equipment to fish in the salt bare in mind that you are subjecting it to a corrosive environment. If you plan to use freshwater equipment in the salt do some preventive maintenance on it prior to fishing, such as oiling reels, waxing rods, or wiping down with WD-40. Upon return from a trip wash everything down with a mild soap solution, rinse well, and allow to dry before stowing it. Some manufacturers have designed fly fishing equipment that is intended to be used in a saltwater environment, and that is great, but it is still good practice to do preventive maintenance before and after each trip. Spending well-earned money on equipment and not taking care of it will only cause you to spend more money.**

### **RODS**

**Rod selection is relevant to the type of fishing you plan to do. If you are only going after larger fish then select a rod designated in the heavier line classes and vice versa if going after smaller fish. You can select a rod that will pretty much suffice your needs when fishing in the Chesapeake Bay. Personnel preferences may vary, but a fly rod that is designated as an eight or nine weights, will catch most every species in the local waters. This selection process is recommended for the average fishing situation, and you may find**

**selecting a lower or higher rod weight to be more beneficial to your fishing style. Examples of this are, if fishing for Cobia I would use a 10 or 12 weight fly rod, and for Speckled Trout I would go with a six or seven weight rod. There is no specific guideline. It is a matter of how much sport you are after in the catching process. The most common length found in the previous rod weights is a 9-foot version, and usually in two pieces. The number of sections in a fly rod varies from a single piece rod to a five piece rod with the two piece being the norm. Action of the rod is determined by the manufacturing process as to what type of material it is composed of and the taper that has been used in construction. Generally speaking, for saltwater usage a fast action/tip flex type rod will give the angler an advantage in casting and fighting a fish, and in a windy environment will allow the angler better control when casting a large fly. There are dozens of companies that make fly rods for fishing in the salt and they will all tell you that their rod is the best. Remember that you get what you pay for not only in performance, but also in service, and money well spent will serve you well. The warranties of most companies may vary and I recommend selecting a manufacturer that will give you good service when you need it. Prices of a good quality rod to be used in a saltwater environment range from \$125.00 to \$900.00, and the best recommended companies making rods intended for saltwater usage are Orvis, Loomis, Sage, St. Croix, Reddington, Winston, Thomas & Thomas, and Lamiglass.**

## **REELS**

**There is an array of fly reels on the market that will make your head spin trying to select one that will do the job. Keep in mind that the main purpose of the reel is to hold line and apply resistance to a running fish. When selecting a reel make sure you match it to the rod you have chosen. Most companies make reels that have a numerical designation that corresponds to the rod weight and it is a good idea to stay within those guidelines as too heavy or too light a reel may cause an unbalanced outfit. Construction of the reel is vital to how it will perform and how long it will serve you. Select a reel that is made of a non corrosive material, or is easily maintained through maintenance. Aircraft grade aluminum, graphite, and composite alloys have been somewhat perfected to not corrode badly and yet remain light and strong. When selecting a reel for saltwater fly fishing keep in mind that most fish caught will try to run away from you, therefore an adjustable type drag system is preferred over a single click and pawl system. The majority of the**

reels on the market today have a disc drag system that works much like the disc brakes on an automobile, are easily maintained, durable, and provide enough resistance to tire most all fish in Virginia waters. There are large arbor reels and standard sized arbors, both of which will provide you with a functional outfit. Large arbor reels will hold more backing if needed on a long running fish. Most of the fish caught in the Chesapeake Bay type waters rarely will take out any more than 150 yards of backing, but it is comforting to know that you have extra backing if you need it. Try to find a reel that will hold at least 200 yards of 20 pound braided dacron type backing, and put no less than what the manufacturer recommends. When pricing reels do not get sticker shock and try to find a reel that is so economical that you end up trashing it after a nice fish has burned it up during a fight. In general, the prices are about one half of what you spend on a rod if you purchase a packaged outfit. A good performing reel can be found in the price range of \$80.00 to \$800.00 and some very reputable names are Orvis, Lamson, Scientific Anglers, Tibor, Abel, Islander, and Loop.

## **FLY LINES**

The next element in the equation of getting an outfit together is the fly line, and there are enough different types available to make a person want to cry. The most important factor to consider in selecting a fly line is to make sure it matches to the rod weight, too light will cause poor casting and too heavy may cause damage to the rod. An example of what to look for is; 9 weight rod should have a 9-weight line. The next thing to ponder is what type of fishing are you planning on doing, surface or sub-surface. Once you have decided your fishing style you will be able to select the right line for your fishing conditions. Floating lines will work for surface feeding fish and fish just below the surface to a depth of about 6 feet. Intermediate or very slow sinking lines work well for fishing below the surface to the bottom, but remember the current will pull a line along with it so it may only be effective from the surface to about 15 feet. A slow sink line will sink at about 1½ inch per second and if fished in still water it will take about 80 seconds to descend 10 feet. ( with no fly on the leader ) There are other sink rates available on faster sinking lines that range from 1½ inches to 8 inches per second, and this means that you may want to have more than one fly line for different fishing situations. The serious fly fisherman usually will take three different lines, on spare spools, with him on any given trip to be prepared for encountering different feeding situations. When shopping for a fly line, you will notice on the

package an alpha numerical sequence which will identify the type of line you are looking at. The box may have WF9F written on it and this translates to mean a weight forward taper, nine weight, floating line. You may also encounter WF8S which is weight forward taper, eight weight, sinking and it may have a sink rate printed with it. For most situations in the local waters an Intermediate/ slow sink, fast sink, and an extra fast sink line will catch most all fish from the surface down to 30 feet of water. Now for the term " taper", which simply means, that is where the heaviest portion of the line is located throughout the length of the fly line. This means in a WF9 type line the first 30 feet of fly line has the heaviest section which allows for easier casting in wind with larger flies. To give a full and complete explanation of the tapers would require several pages, so for the sake of simplicity we will leave it alone and you can research more on this on your own. Best recommendation for fishing in saltwater around the Virginia area would be a WF ( weight forward ) taper, matched to the rod weight , and a medium to fast sink rate. Fly lines come in a variety of colors, weights, tapers, lengths, and sink rates and you should seek professional guidance if not sure what to purchase. Modern science has developed lines that have outer coverings that will provide protection to the line and give you many years of service if kept clean and not abused, and this means keep it clean, out of sunlight when not in use, and stow it dry. Some reputable manufacturers of fabulous fly lines are Orvis, Cortland, Teeny, Rio, and Scientific Anglers.

## **LEADERS**

Leaders are simply defined as a piece of line attached to the tip end of a fly line that has a fly attached at the other end. Hopefully the following explanation will be easily understood, but if confused then again seek professional assistance. Since the waters of Virginia are somewhat stained and not as clear as in Florida there is not much need to use long leaders. Most fish in stained water are not leader shy so you can shorten up you leader length and still catch fish. There have been people who reported catching fish with a fly attached to the end of the fly line, but I do not recommend this practice as toothy fish will chew up your line quickly. You can make your own leaders or purchase pretapered ones with or without knots. If you want to make your own leader select about 2 feet of 40 pound mono, 2 feet of 25 pound mono, and 2 feet of 16 pound mono and you will have the beginnings of a leader that I use for most all fishing in the Chesapeake Bay. Attach the separate lengths using a blood knot and put a loop knot on the end of the 40 pound piece. The

loop knot will make attaching it to the fly line an easy process. You can vary the pound test of each length, but I suggest using a 40 pound butt and taper down from it in increments of 10-15 pounds until you have achieved a length of from 4-8 feet in length. The leader that is used most often is a 6 foot long one that has a 20 pound tip. If, however you are fishing for smaller species drop down in tippet test to about 10 pound test. When going after toothy fish or fish that have sharp gill plates it is a good idea to attach a shock tippet between the fly and the leader. This can be either made from wire or heavy (40-80 pound ) mono. When fishing primarily with a fast sinking line it is very simple to attach a leader. You can tie a 3-4 foot piece of 20 lb. material onto to your fly line and the fly at the tip. As fast sinking lines are intended to go deep you want the leader to go down with it and not cause a belly in the leader. Remember that if you catch a possible world record or want recognition from a tournament you may want to have a leader that conforms to IGFA regulations. There are numerous companies making both leaders and leader materials and within each there are usually ones designated for game fish and even some who tell you the fish they are designed to catch. The cost of a good quality leader is worth it as this is the section where the action is and is also the weakest section of the rig. Some notable companies who sell good leaders/materials are Orvis, Cortland, Rio, Maxima, Climax, and Mason.

## **FLIES**

With more than 100,000 different fly patterns you may ask yourself which ones catch fish? The answer is, they all probably will given enough opportunity and presented to a fish who is willing to grab it. For the area of Virginia there are three basic patterns which have been used that catch fish on a regular basis, the Clouser Minnow, Lefty's Deceiver, and surface poppers.

## **CLOUSER MINNOW**

The Clouser minnow pattern was developed by Bob Clouser to catch smallmouth bass in rivers and lakes. It came into usage in saltwater from a close friend by the name of "Lefty" Bernard Kreh, who claims he has caught more than fifty different species on this single pattern. This pattern imitates minnows and baitfish that are prevalent in all waters holding game fish. It has weighted dumbbell shaped eyes at the hook eye of the fly and an overwing/underwing of hair or other similar materials, and if tied properly the fly will ride with the hook point in an upright position. ( making it somewhat

snagless ) The size of the fly depends on the fish you are seeking to catch, with a 3/0 used for Stripers and a #1 for Speckled Trout. In general you can fish for most all species in the Chesapeake Bay using a 2/0 size hook, with a 1/0 being the second choice. Best colors to choose for most all the species are; all white/silver flash, chartreuse over white/silver flash, olive over white/silver flash, red over white/silver flash, blue over white/silver flash, all chartreuse/gold flash, all black/silver or gold flash (nighttime), green over yellow over white/gold flash, and black over green over white/pearl flash. Of course there are other colors that will work but these seem to catch fish on a regular basis.

### **LEFTY'S DECEIVER**

The namesake of this fly pattern, "Lefty" Kreh developed this pattern trying to imitate common baitfish found in saltwater. It has been an effective pattern for many years and there are variations of the original pattern out there that work very well. The pattern can be weighted to sink faster or not weighted at all, but the hook rides down on this pattern. Select the flies again according to the fish and use the same color schemes as in the Clouser patterns.

### **POPPERS**

The popper is a surface type fly that is used to attract fish that are feeding on the top or just under the surface film. When cast to feeding fish and slowly jerked and sometimes quickly stripped it will provoke an attack from the feeding fish. They are usually constructed of cork or foam materials. They may have concave faces that make noise or tapered faces to slide along and dive up and down. The only color considerations are bright light- bright popper, and dark light-dark poppers. The hook size again depends on the specie with a 1/0 and 2/0 being the favorite for most fish found in the Chesapeake Bay waters.

In summary select equipment that will work for you without breaking the bank, but do not try to cut cost so severely that you end up not catching fish because of poor equipment performance. If lost and confused seek professional advice, read some books, or watch some videos all of which will help answer your questions and make sound recommendations.