

Chasing Rainbows
Or
Trying to Catch Mullet on Fly
By Ian Cox



Christmas was spent at home this year which meant that my fishing efforts were concentrated on the harbour. Now I am a bit of a neophyte when it comes to fly fishing in the salt especially large deep water venues such as the harbour. Even so it does take many outings to work out that for the most part this type of fly fishing is a bit of a hit and miss affair. You drive down there around low tide, walk out to the edge of the exposed sandbanks and fling a fly as far out as you can in the hope that something, preferably something big, will eat it. And most times it doesn't, or at least not in my meagre experience.

Again while fly fishing beats a day at the office, chucking and chancing it is not exactly my idea of unalloyed joy. That happens when I can see what I am fishing for and even better when the fish likes what I am casting at it. Now, although the harbour is a hell of a lot cleaner that it was when I sailed there in the early 70's, I wouldn't call the water pellucid. But when the tide is right and the sandbanks are submerged you can cast to sighted fish cruising the flats that are created when those sandbanks submerge. The trouble is that the vast majority of those fish, at least those of a fishable size, are mullet, and trying to catch mullet on fly is a bit like wooing a girl by taking her to a rugby match. That is to say that it can be done, but most girls wouldn't find this attractive. In fact she would have to be pretty desperate.

So it is with fly fishing for mullet.

You see mullet feed on really small stuff, far too small to be imitated or even vaguely represented with a fly. And even if you could mullet food hangs around in the millions so getting a fish to choose your imitation of a tiny piece of whatever over the other million or so tiny pieces out there is a bit like trying to win the lottery.



You can cheat, like the Australians do, and chum the water with bread, throwing in a bread fly in the hope that your piece of bread will get hooked up in the ensuing feeding frenzy. I believe marlin can be caught on fly employing similar techniques. But that kind of takes the point out of fly fishing. You may as well stick a piece of bread on a hook.

Another way is to tie a tiny fly, size 16 or less and throw it out there hoping for the best. This is best achieved by suspending your fly, New Zealand Style under something that floats. You present this gently into a shoal of mullet and leave it there hoping that one will take it. And most of the time they won't which is no doubt why the Poms call mullet, the English bone fish. Sounds exciting but you remember that you are dealing with perfidious Albion. And when you are dealing with them nothing is as it seems.

You see the truth is that unless you are chumming with bread, whatever you throw at a mullet is unlikely to be regarded as food. This makes fishing for mullet bloody difficult.

But there is another way. My standard response when fish don't want to feed or are feeding on such abundance that your fly is one of millions is to aggravate the hell out of them. So faced with a large mayfly or caddis hatch and I reach for a red eyed damsel. Give me trout feeding in the weed beds and I'll strip a large papa roach over the top of them. And I can tell you it works nearly every time. If you can't fool them, arouse their curiosity or, even better, still piss them off.

It is the same with mullet. I have immeasurably increased my success rate by using a modified



Leiseiring lift technique. You will need a long leader as mullet spook easily. Gently present your fly, I find a small white fritz works really well, into shoal and slowly retrieve the fly by lifting your rod. At the end of the lift cast again and repeat.

The idea is to provoke a mullet into attacking your fly and once you get the speed of the lift right they will. Not that often, mind you. Mullet still remain difficult to catch on fly but I

have had more success using this method than any other. Also, as fishing techniques go it is a lot less boring than watching a float bobbing around.

And if it all becomes too much for you, just drag your fly through the shoal. Chances are you will foul hook one of the little blighters.