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Catch-and-Release Guidelines for Proper fish handling practices

These recommendations are for those who are experienced at catch & release and who would like to know more, and for those who have less experienced and want to practice catch & release. Please note: to further expand the knowledge base regarding catch-&-release, the MFA strongly suggest that the people download the full and complete MFA policy on catch-&-release.

Angling Techniques

Barbless hooks are recommended or bend down barbs on ordinary hooks, as they are easier to remove and therefore reduce handling time. The use of artificial lures should be encouraged and fishing lines used should be of adequate strength, as this will prevent the line breaking and or reduce playing time. If you plan to release your catch during very warm water conditions (over 17 c - 63 f) remember that recovery times will be longer if the playing times are protracted due to inexperience.

Handling and Photographing a Fish

Keep fish in the water as much as possible to minimize air exposure. Never place your fingers through gills or in the eyes. Do not hold heavy fish by the jaw as this may damage the jaw nor by the tail as this will damage its vertebrae. Hold large fish horizontally and support its body to avoid damage to the internal organs. Use wet hands or wet cloth gloves to handle the fish. Have camera ready before landing fish to minimize air exposure. If possible, photograph the fish while in the water.

Unhooking a Fish

Have long nose pliers available to take the hook out. Remove the hook quickly, keeping the fish underwater. If the fish is deeply hooked and results in bleeding from the throat, do not release the fish, otherwise, cut the line and release the fish as quickly as possible. Avoid using stainless steel hooks, as they take longer to corrode if left in the fish.

Revival

If there is current, hold the fish upright, facing into the current. If there is no current, gently move fish back and forth in the water until gill movements return to normal and it is able to maintain its balance. When the fish begins to struggle, let it swim away.

(E.J.)