

Catching Tarpon

by

Jack Miller

The actual catch and release of a tarpon is the result of a lot of preparation and practice and experience with hook-ups and losses. To begin with, the angler must be comfortably able to handle a 10 wt. rod and line. This requires a lot of practice, practice and more practice. Long casts are not usually necessary, but accurate immediate casts with no more than one, or at most two, false casts to a distance of 60 to 70 feet. As the fish is moving, you must make the cast where the fish will be with the fly at the depth of the fish. The fly must be presented so it is moving away from the fish as tarpon are not use to bait attacking them.

The fly is held with the fly line in the off-hand with about 20 feet of line out the rod. Usually, the guide sees the fish before the angler as he is up on the poling platform and more adept at sighting fish. He will direct the angler to the fish stating the distance, direction and which way the fish is moving. The direction to the fish is indicated by the hands of the clock with 12 o'clock being the bow of the boat. The angler must then point immediately at the fish, make a backcast pulling the fly from his fingers, make one or at most two false casts to the approximate distance. If he is off, a quick backcast and corrected forecast is made. As soon as the fly is in the water, the tip of the rod is placed in the water or at least very near the water and the fly stripped as the guide directs. When the fish hits the fly, the angler must immediately execute a strong strip-strike to set the fly in tissue the texture of a concrete block. **DO NOT RAISE THE ROD TO SET THE HOOK.** If you raise the rod to set the hook all you will do is pull the fly from the fish. It is very hard to learn not to raise the rod especially if you only have fished fresh water fish. Immediately after hooking the fish it will jump several times. The angler must then "bow to the King" by pushing the rod at the quarry and put the tip in the water. Pressure is then applied to the fish and the game is on. Each jump requires bowing to the fish. Pressure is kept on until the fish is exhausted and brought to the boat. My guide on this last trip required me to break off the fish as it was going to be eaten by a large Lemon shark. Not only is the tarpon in danger but also the person trying to release the catch.

Tarpon fishing is very addictive and a release is very satisfying. It does require persistence as in 4 days I had hooked 7 fish and didn't boat any, but what fun.