Finesse fly fishing: bream on fly
Wayne Kampe | June 2015 » Regular Features / Flyfishing /

Bream are a fish so common, so widespread, that they are a bread and butter species for many anglers. And they are a fish that are all so easy to catch on bait, especially a bait that can withstand a bit of ragging before it passes the many molars in a bream’s mouth.

Yet, tournament anglers have a far different view of the humble bream: the successful among the tournament team understand just how difficult they can be at times and grant them plenty of respect. So too do anglers who have targeted them with fly tackle. I for one regard bream as quite tricky on fly gear.

Around the estuaries and other shallow habitat bream are, in my book, the king. Where flatties can be fools, tarpon temperamental and tailor tons of fun, bream are wary, scary and quite contrary with hook ups hard to come by. That said, there’s a lot of satisfaction when one takes the fly.

Does it all sound a bit tough? It is, but if things are done correctly bream can be very worthy opponents.

Habitat
By way of change I’m not putting tackle first, instead I’m giving the top billing to choosing the right place to fish for these fastidious fellows. Pretty obviously, bream schooled up in ten metres of water are best left for plastic or bait anglers as it’s hard to work a fly in that sort of depth where there’s lots of current.

Instead, the smart angler will look for shallower areas to fish, places where the fly can be delivered right to the bream’s doorstep, so to speak. Edges of mangrove banks, rock walls, jetties, even tidal creeks that run to brackish water are all good starting points. The tidal creeks with their over hanging foliage and bits of growth along banks can be some of the best of it, especially with the dry fly.

All round success usually comes with choosing an area where cover is obvious, as bream use cover to their advantage while waiting for tucker to come by.

Fish light or forget it
On the face of it, this should make bream a push over, but remember how I described them as wary? This means that while bream will take a fly, the angler needs to consider a few important things.

Bream around southern Queensland and northern New South Wales are not what we class as ‘big’ fish with a real beauty weighing around 1kg, so a 5-6wt fly outfit is fine. Both a floating fly line or a slow sink one have their place in the fly angler’s arsenal but whatever gear’s in use, the most important thing is to understand is that bream require a very fine tippet in order to be fooled. Forget the 3kg stuff, that’s going to be too obvious to a bream. I’d consider 2kg tippet as maximum, and if the angler is experienced enough 1.5kg tippet is far better.

For success, it’s mandatory to fish ultra fine and that’s the big issue as a solid bream is no slouch on any tackle. So let’s talk tackle.

Trout rods ideal
A trout rod will do the job and depending on whether the angler is fishing surface or sunken fly, the fly line should suit the choice.

What is important in this situation where fine tippet is connecting the fly to the remainder of the 3m leader is the efficiency of the reel. Whether the reel in use is of salt water or fresh water standard the drag must be both light and smooth, with minimum start up inertia and able to handle a few decent rips and head shakes as the bream tries to rid itself of the fly. Trust me, when working around decent cover this is one tricky game because the bream will be doing its utmost to get back into whatever it reckons will set it free. Fly reels are not exactly renowned for the sorts of drag we see on modern 2000 size spin reels so a lot of the ensuing success or failure sits squarely on the angler’s shoulders. In many respects, with the gentle way that a bream will pick at a fly it’s finesse fly rod fishing all round.

Wet fly fishing should see the fly landing close to structure and with minimal slack. Bream like to grab things as they are falling so there should be no slack.

Fly talk
Wet flies such as Clousers, Crazy Charlies and even skinny bass Vampires will work fine on bream so long as the fly is kept small, around size 1-2. Another fly that can be very productive is the good old Toad, in similar size. The hook must be sharp. Due to their small and bony mouth, bream are not overly easy to hook on a fly and the angler’s reflexes play a big role in success or failure. Remember, bream won’t rag a fly – they pick it at. Colour is important with many anglers favouring red as a primary fly colour.

Bream, especially fish in brackish and semi tidal waters (and there are many such places around our estuaries) are suckers for dry flies as
well. One very easily tied fly that definitely works well on bream is the good old Gartside Gurgler, which, of course, also works on everything from bass to barra. Remember that with bream, less is more. Keeping the fly small is essential and again size 1-2 is ideal.

Last but not least is the use of berley. There’s nothing like a bit of berley scattered within casting range to get bream up and on the job. They still won’t be easy but at least there’s a visual element to the fun.

**Images**

Every rule has an exception. The author picked up this bream under a school of working tailor on 8wt tackle but a lighter fly rod and smaller flies will be far more productive.

Tidal or brackish water with plenty of cover are great places to take bream on dry flies.

A selection of the author’s small bream flies. They also work fine on bass, which is very handy.