



PULL THE TRIGGER

This autumn has seen a massive increase in the number of triggerfish caught from ports along the south coast. Jim Whippy saw first hand just how good the sport is when he fished out of Poole.

Changing Times

Andy Adams' crew aboard 'Random Harvest' had caught 25 triggerfish in a morning session, close into Boscawen pier, before they asked to move off to try and catch something else for a change! Because triggers had been with a rarity and highly sought after until now, this shows how the hard-lighting species have invaded the south coast this autumn.

It was while this glut of triggers were in residence I took the camera down to Poole to get some shots and try to land my first one in the UK. Previously I had caught them at such places as the south of France and the Bahamas, but I was thrilled to have a chance of catching one so close to home.

The reason I was keen to get among the triggers is for their fighting qualities and willingness to take a variety of baits. Found for years they fight much harder than the black leaved, another species known for the spirited way it fights on light tackle.

Rigging Up

Rigs can be the same as for beam fishing with a lead boom and a hook fixed just off the bottom, the only difference is that triggerfish have teeth and can bite through mono. Many are led if they are not lip hooked. You can counter this by using a long-shank hook and hope the fish can only bite on the hook shank, or you can increase the breaking strain of the trace line to the hook, which in theory could reduce the number of takes.

However, increasing the trace line doesn't seem put triggerfish off, because they are a shoal fish, when they are feeding they will grab anything that passes in front of them as they compete with the rest of the shoal. This also means they take a range of baits including squid, mackerel and ragworm or a combination of these baits.

Location

So in theory if the triggerfish are around they should be easy to catch, but they only occur in certain locations where their natural food is located. These spots are usually near outfall pipes, weirs or large rocks and fairly close inshore.

They occasionally use the stiff trigger found in front of the dorsal fin to jam themselves into rocky crevices to prevent predators from getting them out. The first indication that triggerfish are in the sea is in crab pots, where they get trapped after going in to feed on the crabs caught in the pot.

On The Move

My trip on 'Random Harvest' didn't get off to a good start as Andy's hot mark didn't



That's what a triggerfish looks like! Andy



Skipper Andy and crewman Mick are always ready for a trip



Andy's first triggerfish caught close in to Boscawen pier



Mick sets Andy's fish



Lead man Cole supplied all the weight we needed!



All the fish went back safely

produce a single triggerfish in the morning. Being a shoal fish, when one trigger swims off they all go, so we had to track them down. We tried further east but eventually returned to the area where the fish had previously been most prolific.

Even then we kept catching beam but by a stroke of luck another Poole boat joined us to have a go at the triggers and within seconds of their anchoring within 40 yards of us they caught the first one. The fish had been that close all the time, and it was a great relief when skipper Andy caught our first one.

More To Follow

Andy had been using an ultra-light spinning rod and the fish certainly gave a good account of itself. I was not to get one and was really surprised of the furious fight it gave with powerful darting runs before it came to the landing net. Colin Conyers, widely known as the 'Lead Man' in Poole for the comprehensive amount of lead weights he produces for local tackle dealers, then caught one of about 2lb. The fish seemed to be congregating in one spot and we needed to cast to them, so once we had caught a fish we moved over to allow the next man up to have a go.

Closer To Home

A couple of weeks later I was fishing at Blythmouth in the Bournemouth Channel and a great number of triggers were caught there. It is still trying to find a location of Eastbourne where triggers can be caught, but apart from a rare one or two caught locally over the years I've not noted a hotspot yet.

Identification and Seasons

The triggerfish caught in UK waters is the Grey Triggerfish or Flatfish (*Pollistes caudimaculatus*). It is a slimline but deep bodied fish with a small mouth and sharp, slightly protruding teeth. The scales are large and form a mosaic pattern, while the tail fin is long with the outer rays the longest. Coloration is green or greyish brown with hints of blue and yellow on the fins.

The season for the triggerfish runs from August to October and every year the numbers are growing but it is noticeable a good summer, with the increased water temperature, increases the numbers caught.