

# SURF FISHING TO RIG A SNAKE

by Mike Campanelli

As the eel came through the water, moving along the muddy bottom in a slow S movement, it was stopped short by a good sized bass. But the bass, not the eel, was surprised as the head hook of a rigged eel completely pierced its lower jaw. After a short struggle against the old conventional, the large fish lay at the fisherman's feet on the bar. The rigged eel hanging from the beached fish's mouth was still in good enough shape to fish the rest of the night.

It is a well known fact that live eels are a top bass bait, but a rigged eel fished slow with a rhythmic raising and lowering of the rod tip as the eel is retrieved can be deadly. Used from jetties or on the quiet back bays and especially at the Cape where it is a favorite, this half-plug, half-bait works wonders.

You can buy rigged eels at some tackle stores, though most don't want to bother and if they will make them for you the eels will be expensive. The price is due to the time it takes to rig them plus cost of hooks and eel. To get you through a night of fishing or a trip to the Cape you should have at least a half dozen eels. So it's a lot cheaper to learn to rig your own. Once you know how and have the right equipment, you can rig them any time and anywhere.

The first thing needed is the eel. Pick out eels about 14" to 17" long and the skinnier the better. The

finished eel with hooks should weigh approximately four ounces. To be sure, use a small kitchen or mail scale, weighing both eels and hooks before rigging. You may not be able to use half the eels you buy, but keeping them in an aerated tank for a week or two will starve them down and help achieve the right weight. If you're using conventional gear the eel can be heavier than four ounces. In fact, the 542 Harnell conventional blank is ideal for rigged eels.

After picking out the eels, put them in a plastic bag with a couple of crushed cigarettes and some water; this will kill them in a short time. Take the eels and lay them in some salt which will help remove most of the slime and make it easier to work with them. The salt can also be used to clean your hands when finished.

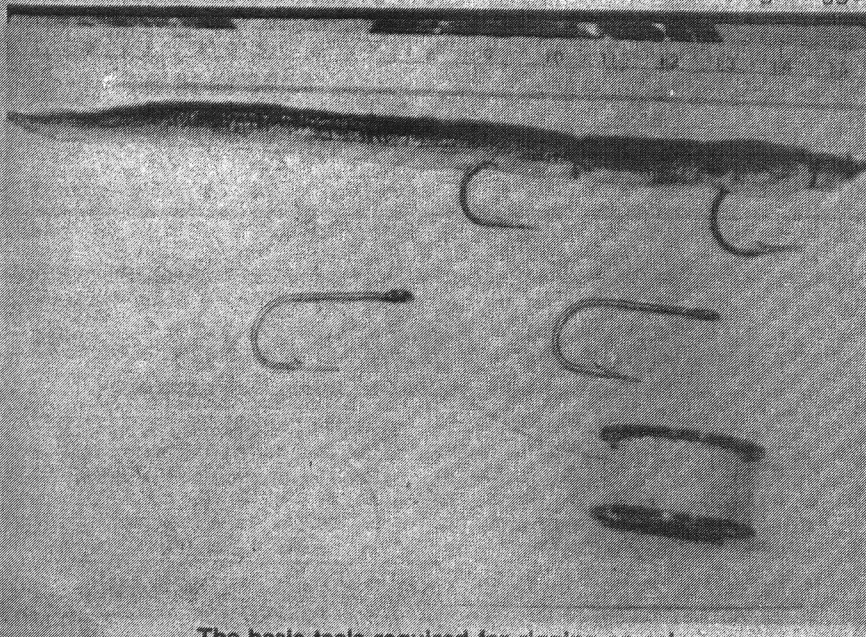
The hooks to be used are two 8/0 siwash, Mustad #9510XXX, but larger 9/0 hooks can also be used, especially for the head hook. Place the hooks one at a time, eye flat on a table, and check to see if the point is straight over the shank. If the hook is crooked, use a pair of pliers to align it (Fig. 1). The hooks will act as a keel, so it's important to do this to give the eel the right swimming action. Also make sure the eye of the hook is completely closed. If not, use a vise and without breaking it, slowly close the eye. Then sharpen the hooks before you rig them in the eel. When using a rigged

eel it's a good idea to check and file the hooks if need be between casts.

Fifty pound dacron will be used for the sewing and rigging, a small spool of it is all you need. I use the rear half of the line stripped from my conventional reels at the end of the season.

A large bait needle, about 12" is needed. You can simply make one from the straight part of a coat hanger, by sharpening one end to a point and flattening and drilling a small hole at the other end for an eye. Curved upholstery needles are needed to sew the eel; these can be found in any sewing department of most stores or even your wife's sewing kit.

Take a towel and wet it down, working on a wet surface will help keep the eel damp and easier to work with. Cut a piece of dacron three times the length of the eel being used. Double the line and taking the two ends, pass them through the eye of the hook. Now pass the ends of the line through the loop on the side of the hook eye and pull tight. Since this will be the tail hook, make sure the hook does not come free of the line (Fig. 2). Put one of the free ends of the line through the eye of the bait needle, and make a square knot with both ends. Push the point of the needle into the vent hole of the eel and through the body and out the mouth. You will have to do a little pushing to get the eye of the hook into the vent. Pick up the second hook and put its point into the eel's mouth so that it passes over the top of the eel's tongue. Pinching the bottom of the eel's throat will form a crease just in front of the pectoral fins. Force the point of the hook out of this crease, leaving just the eye of the hook showing at the eel's mouth. Take care not to pierce the two strands of line. Cut the line from the needle and pass the ends through the eye of the head hook, then back around the shank and through the eye again securing the rear hook to the head hook (Fig. 3). Don't cut the line yet. Check the eel to see that you didn't make the line too short or too long. You want the rear hook to exit the eel at the beginning of the head. Once you have that right, hold the head hook by the eye and push the eel's head back exposing the shank of the hook. Using both strands of line you tied to the head hook, now make a series of half hitches along the shank for roughly 1 1/2", adding extra hitches at the end and middle. Finish with a square knot (Fig. 4). Push the



The basic tools required for rigging an eel.



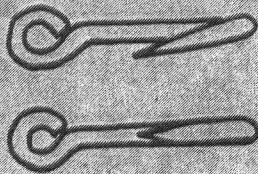


FIGURE 1

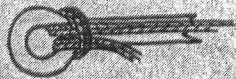


FIGURE 3



FIGURE 2

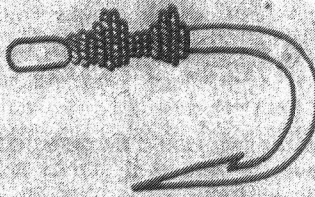


FIGURE 4

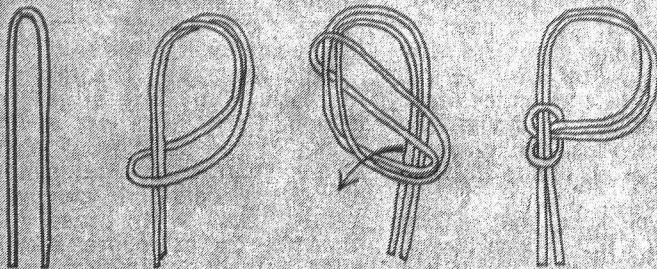


FIGURE 5

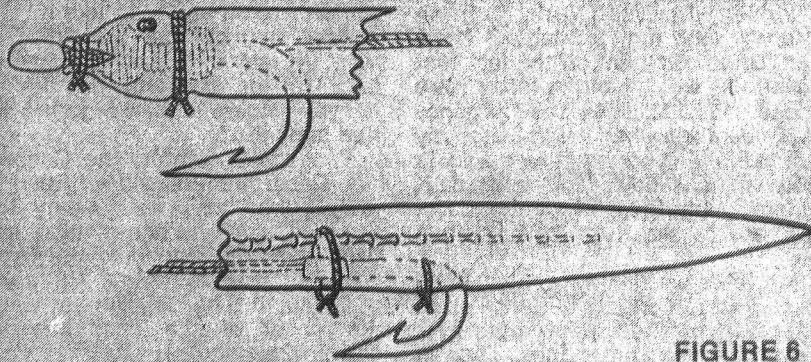


FIGURE 6

hook back into the eel's mouth so that the first bump (formed by the extra hitches) is positioned at the eel's eyes. Those two bumps on the shank will keep the eel attached and in place on the head hook cast after cast.

Cut a length of line and make a butcher's knot (Fig. 5). Slip this knot over the mouth of the eel and tighten, separate the ends and wrap them in opposite directions; finish with a square knot. Repeat again, but slip the knot behind the eyes this time. When done right, the eyes should have popped on the eel and all knots should be on the bottom of the eel (Fig. 6).

Now you'll need a couple of lengths of line for sewing the eel with the upholstery needle. Turning the eel over, straighten and center the tail hook. Push the needle into the eel's stomach and through the eye of the hook and around the backbone and out one side. Tie a square knot. Repeat again but on the opposite side using the same hole for the needle entry through the stomach. With one more length of line sew the shank of

the rear hook, by the vent, to the eel. This will keep the hole from tearing and getting bigger.

To help make sure all knots are tight and avoid cutting yourself, cover your fingers with medical tape. If you have trouble getting tight knots, try a pair of pliers instead of your hands. The first time you rig an eel should take about an hour; with practice you can do a rigging job in twenty minutes.

Once you have the eel rigged, take it and bend its tail till it cracks; do this from the tail hook all the way to the tip. This little trick will impart a better swimming action when working the eel.

To keep the eels fresh after rigging, just put them in a cooler on ice. You can also keep them in the freezer between trips and remove them as needed. When the eel gets damaged or starts to come apart, just cut the hooks out and rig a new eel.

So if you have a favorite jetty, point, or bar try working it with a rigged eel.

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