Blue Fish Sustainable Fishing Hook Choices

There are literally thousands of styles of hooks on the market covering every possible fishing application. Surprisingly, few are marketed for their sustainability fishing benefits, and yet the demand for such hooks is growing around the world. Let's review what makes for a sustainable fishing fishhook.

Circle: Circle hooks were created to prevent fish from being hooked deep in the throat, and to make hook removal easier when releasing toothy fish. A circle hook differs from other hooks in that the hook point curls around 360 degrees to form a complete circle. The hooks are fished differently than other hook styles in that anglers set the hook using a slow and steady pressure. They are meant to be almost swallowed by fish, and then slowly pulled back out until the hook becomes lodged in the corner of the fish's mouth. Circle hooks have an incredibly high hook-up ratio, seldom come loose while playing a fish, almost never result in personal injuries to anglers, and are easier to remove because the main shank of the hook is always located outside the fish's mouth. No wonder then circle hooks are becoming the default hook choice for many anglers, guides, tournament organizers and regulators of both recreational and commercial fisheries.

Barbless: Hooks have two points; the main point and a smaller point called the barb that faces the opposite direction just back from the main point. The purpose of the barb is to prevent fish from coming loose while being played. The issue with barbs is that they result in a larger hook wound when the hook is removed and make hooks more dangerous for anglers and other animals like dogs.

Barbless hooks shorten the time it takes to release fish and minimize the need to handle toothy fish. Removing barbless hooks from fingers or the mouths of dogs is also made simple and, in most cases, eliminates the need to visit the hospital emergency room or vet. Barbs can be pinched down using plyers, but in areas where barbs are illegal, only hooks manufactured without barbs are allowed. Barbless hooks are slowly gaining popularity and are even being mandated in Canada's North West Territories, or when fishing salmon in the Yukon Territories.

Non-Offset: Hook manufacturers produce many styles of hooks that come in either an offset or non-offset style. The difference being non-offset hooks have the hook point and the hook shank are perfectly aligned. (Offset hooks have the hook point bent out to the side.) Offset hooks are said to have a higher hook-up percentage over non-offset, but they are also more likely to become lodged in the throat of fish. This is an especially important issue when using circle hooks that are meant to be first partially swallowed by fish before being pulled back out and lodged in the corner of the fish's mouth. This is the reason why non-offset circle hooks are mandatory by many saltwater fishing tournament organizers involving Sailfish, Marlin or Tarpon.

Rustability: It has long been assumed that hooks will quickly rust and dissolve if left in a fish. It's for this reason that anglers may choose to cut the line on a deeply hooked fish instead of trying to remove the hook itself. More recently, hook manufacturers have developed numerous systems for coating or treating hooks to make them rust resistant and have adopted the use of metals that are rust proof. These hooks can last months in freshwater and weeks in saltwater, or longer in the case of stainless-steel hooks. While these hooks may last longer in tackle boxes, their impact on fish health if left in the fish can be long lasting. It's for this reason that some tournament organizers and commercial long-line fisheries have now banned the use of stainless-steel fishing hooks.

Hook Removal: If hook removal is proving to be difficult, instead of cutting the line, cut the hook instead as close to the hook point as possible. This often results in the hook point itself being much easier to remove or coming loose on its own. Fish have the ability to pass indigestible things through their system such as fish bones, fin spines or rays, and smaller segments of hooks.

Fish Pain: Most of the sensory nerve endings on a fish such as taste sensors are located outside a fish's mouth. Fish use their mouth to crush or kill their pray. Much of what fish eat can cause pain to the hands of humans but yet don't seem to be an issue for predatory fish. The spines or rays on many prey fish may offer some defence, but that does not mean such fish aren't eaten whole by larger predators. All this to say, fish may not feel hooks the way we might imagine.