

Bating shrimp on a worm hook for catfishing

Submitted By Frank Blaszcak

September 6, 2005

Orange ☐ Fishing information can be pretty thin unless it is mixed with actual time on the water. That fact came into play this past August when Irvine Lake's resident expert, Marlon Meade, invited me out to the lake for an evening of crappie fishing. With daytime temperatures regularly hovering around 100, I looked forward to experiencing something else besides the din of the air conditioner.

As it turned out, even with the benefit of Meade's formidable knowledge of the lake, the crappie fishing was, in a word, ☐crappy.☐ We couldn't buy a bite, even with thousands of fry circling our floating crappie lights. Fortunately, we had brought catfish rods and shrimp for a backup. Unfortunately, we forgot to bring any bait hooks! We had enough min-jigs to supply an army, but they were useless for cats.

A wise man once told me that luck is the thing you have more of the harder you work. With that in mind, we worked hard to find something to use. Ultimately, we located some 2.0 offset worm-hooks, and after baiting them with shrimp we discovered it was just the luck we needed.

These offset worm-hooks are perfectly configured to match the curl of the shrimp. By threading the shrimp on the hook and pushing the barb through the tail, we found the bait was held firm while exposing the barb for a good hook-set (see illustration).

On the east bank of the lake, there's a partially submerged tree approximately 100-yards north of the boat dock. Directly adjacent to the tree is a fairly large hole sitting in 16-feet of water. We anchored on its rim and flylined the baited shrimp towards the tree.

Flylining for stocked cats is generally superior to using sinkers. That's because these catfish are often suspended when they're feeding and are not sitting on the bottom as many people think. This feeding pattern makes sense when you consider the fish are reared in hatcheries and imprinted to feed on suspended food. After using a barrel sinker most of my life, it finally sunk in that flylining is a far more successful approach.

The nice part about fishing is that it gets even better when there's catching. Once we started casting we were nailing a cat about every ten minutes and made our limits in short order. Most of the fish came in lip-hooked, so apparently this baiting technique fosters that kind of hook-set making unbuttoning a snap, the largest went 4-lbs.

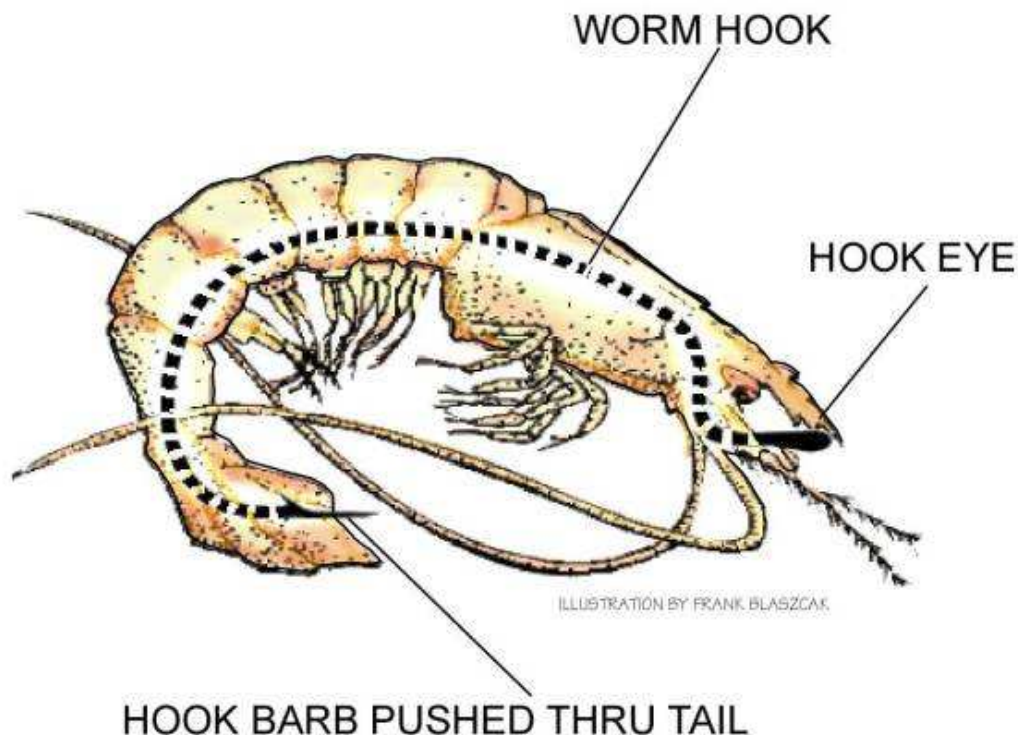
This shrimp rigging also avoids the mess and the lost baits you get into with other catfish enticements such as mackerel or cheese concoctions. Here the shrimp stays on the hook for a long time because once you penetrate the hard tail with the barb it remains in place for many casts. In fact, we were often able to use the same bait after catching a fish.

Another benefit of this rigging is that the exposed hook point doesn't appear to spook the fish. My guess is that the cat ignores the hook because it feels a lot like the tail shell. We also found that if the bite gets finicky you can improve it by making the bait softer; just remove the body shell while retaining tail's shell. However, that will shorten the bait's hook life.

Catfishing in the evenings at Irvine Lake during late summer can be very pleasant. You'll usually find temperate conditions with an occasional cool breeze to move the still air. Although the evening gnats will always be around, the mosquitoes are mostly gone by this time.

If there's one thing I have learned in life it's that it is far better to borrow some experiences than to suffer through them. Hopefully, this incident of being perfectly unprepared will be of benefit on your next trip.

BAITING A SHRIMP ON WORM HOOK FOR CATFISHING (MATCH THE SIZE OF THE WORM HOOK TO THE SHRIMP)



Forget the Barbie □ Use a 2.0 offset worm hook (or larger) for baiting a shrimp and have some catfish hushpuppies instead. If the catfish bite is finicky, try removing most of the outer shell for a softer feel to the bait, but keep the tail shell on the shrimp. Removal of the body shell will somewhat shorten the bait's hook life.

Frank Blaszcak is a former associate editor of WON®