



TECH BULLETIN

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

FISHING THE CRIPPLED HERRING® LURE FOR SO. CAL & BAJA BIG GAME FISH

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.



BY RONNIE KOVACH

Ronnie is the founder and owner of Ronnie Kovach's Outdoor Enterprises, Inc. including: "Fishing Expeditions TV"; Radio Fishing University KRLA 870, Los Angeles; FX Radio; FX apparel; angling books and publications as well as a comprehensive fresh and saltwater seminar series. He has written five best selling books on bass, trout and saltwater fishing and has over 500 articles and columns published in outdoor magazines including Bassmaster, Bassin', Western Outdoors, Pacific Fisherman, South Coast Sportfishing, Marlin, In-Fisherman, and Big Game Journal & Saltwater Sportsman.

Anglers often ask if there is one single lure that will be effective on all these different species? The answer is clearly YES! Luhr Jensen's *Crippled Herring*® spoon. This simple, yet beautifully-designed lure can be trolled, cast, yo-yo'd or bottom-bounced by even the most novice anglers. The *Crippled Herring*® is a year-round lure. Here are some of the inside tips on how to fish this spoon for these diverse West Coast species.

BONITO

This miniature member of the tuna family can provide terrific sport on heavy freshwater or light saltwater tackle. "Bonies" will readily attack the bright flash of the *Crippled Herring*®. If bonito have been feeding near the surface, make a

The coastal waters off Southern California and the Baja peninsula offer some of the finest sportfishing found in the world. Anglers can challenge a myriad of species here including bonito, calico, sand and white sea bass, barracuda, halibut, ling cod, yellow tail, dorado, tuna as well smorgasbord of rockfish.

long cast and let the lure slowly sink from 10 to 30 feet. At times they will strike as the *Crippled Herring*® slowly flutters down.

Use a fairly fast retrieve with either casting or spinning outfits. Bonito are extraordinarily fast and you really cannot outrun them with the spoon. Be prepared for a vicious strike! If the bonito are holding at deeper depths, let the *Crippled Herring*® sink all the way to the bottom. Once it's there, wind up the slack and follow with a steady retrieve back to the surface.

You might consider slow-trolling for bonito with the *Crippled Herring*®. Troll the spoon with 12- to 20-lb. monofilament at three to five knots. If the schools of bonies are scattered, trolling will often help in locating them. The best Bonie-size *Crippled Herring*® to use are 3/4- to 1-oz. *Chrome, Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back, Nickel/Neon Blue Back* and *Nickel/Neon Green Back* are the most effective colors.

CALICO AND SAND BASS

Both of these popular inshore gamefish will strike a spoon. Look for calicos and sandies to be either on the bottom or suspended at mid-depths. If the bass are deep, let the spoon sink to the bottom, then bounce the *Crippled Herring*® by lifting your rod tip from the three o'clock to twelve o'clock position. Continue this lift-and-drop sequence, allowing the spoon to flutter down to the bottom each time. Many of the biggest calico and sand bass tallied each season are caught while bouncing the *Crippled Herring*® in this manner.

At other times, the bass may be stratified from 30 to 60 feet. In this situation, lower the spoon down to the desired depth but be prepared for strikes to occur on the fall. Any subtle "tick" or excessive slack in the line as the lure is sinking may signal that a bass has inhaled the spoon. Wind up your slack, swing and set! Continue with a lift-and-drop rod tip motion while



Crippled Herring®

working the lure for suspended bass. As an added enticement, put a small 1 x 3-inch piece of cut squid on the spoon's prominent single hook. This "teaser" will get even the most sluggish calico or sand bass to strike!

For salt water bassin', try the *Crippled Herring*® in 1 1/2- to 3-oz. models. Popular calico and sand bass colors are *Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back*, *Nickel/Neon Blue Back* and *Metallic Perch*.

WHITE SEA BASS

In contrast to calico or sand bass, these giant croaker are very difficult to fool. They will, however, attack a larger *Crippled Herring*® bounced on or near the bottom in depths from 40 to 120 feet.

One important trick is to pin either a whole live or frozen squid onto the spoon. Sea bass prefer a large offering and this spoon-'n-squid combination can be deadly at times. The weight of the lure helps take the squid down to greater depths but with a slow, fluttering action. The *Crippled Herring*®'s brilliant finish also generates a lot of flash which helps to make the spoon-'n-squid a potent lure.

Fish white sea bass with the larger 3- to 4-oz. lure. Stay with *Pearl White, Pearl White/Flo Red Head* and *Nickel/Neon Blue Back* finishes. Casting outfits with 20- to 30-lb. test mono are recommended.

BARRACUDA

Pacific 'cudas are a favorite target for veteran spoon anglers. If you see barriers boiling on the surface, try a slow-to-moderate retrieve with the *Crippled Herring*®. Occasionally stop and pause, then start to wind again. This stop-'n-go play

can be very effective when the barracuda are sluggish. Expect strikes to occur as the lure starts to sink.

At other times, 'cuda can either be bounced off the bottom, fished while suspended at mid-depths, or slow-trolled. Here again the *Crippled Herring*® proves to be one of the most versatile lures in your tackle box for catching these Pacific torpedoes.

For barracuda, the 1- to 2-oz. size is most effective using lighter 12- to 20-lb. test line. Favorite 'cuda patterns are #0013 *Chrome*, #0599 *Genuine Gold-Plate*, #0172 *Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back*, #0087 *Pearl White*, #0306 *Nickel/Neon Blue Back* and #0307 *Nickel/Neon Green Back*. DO NOT use a wire leader with this spoon as it will greatly inhibit the *Crippled Herring's*® built-in action. The spoon's long shape and prominent single hook actually serves to keep these toothy gamefish from biting through the line where the knot is tied.

HALIBUT

West Coast anglers are somewhat remiss in not using spoons more often for halibut fishing. The fact is that these members of the flat fish family will indeed grab a *Crippled Herring*® as it is slowly dragged along a sandy bottom. This can be done from a boat, while casting off a pier or even when wading in the surf. A brightly colored *Crippled Herring*® flip-flopping in the sand appears to be a wounded anchovy, smelt or grunion to an otherwise hook-shy halibut. Work the sandy bottom using a 3/4- to 2-oz. lure. Overwhelmingly, the best color for halibut is solid Chrome.

LING COD

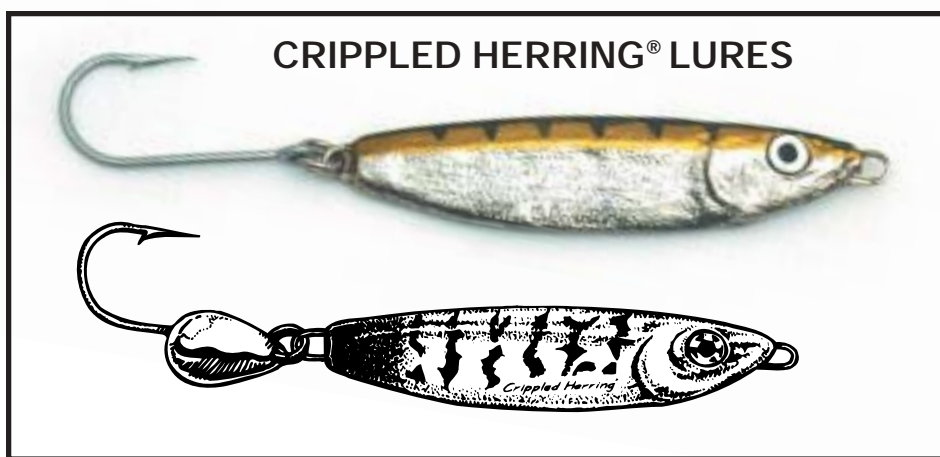
These voracious bottom dwellers are highly attracted to a shiny spoon such as the *Crippled Herring*®. Like the white sea bass, lings prefer a big bait. Here too it pays to add either a whole squid or a strip of cut mackerel to the lure. There are times, however, when ling cod are in an active feeding mode and they will eagerly attack a large *Crippled Herring*® bounced off the bottom without the trailer.

The large single hook configuration makes this an excellent lure for ling cod -- notorious for hanging out on the rockiest of bottoms. Snags are minimized with the single hook and you can apply a lot of leverage to pull the fish out of the rock.

The bigger 4- to 10-oz. *Crippled Herring*® spoons allow you to work 60- to 240-ft. depths. It is critical to maintain good bottom contact with the spoon so do not hesitate to fish the heavier models. You will need to use 30- to 50-lb. test mono or one of the newer braided lines to minimize line stretch. Popular ling cod colors are *Chrome*, *Pearl/Fluorescent Green-Blue Back* and *Nickel/Neon Blue Back*.

YELLOWTAIL

Long considered one of the prize gamefish of the Pacific, yellowtail will definitely strike a spoon fished near the bot-



tom, especially in colder water or when schools of baitfish and squid are holding deep. Interestingly, the further south you travel into Baja waters, the deeper the yellowtail are found. It is not uncommon to catch 'tails in 90- to 180-ft. depths in Mexican waters. These are perfect conditions for using a *Crippled Herring*®.

Bounce larger 4- to 10-oz. models in Chrome, #0172 *Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back*, #0306 *Nickel/Neon Blue Back*, or #0307 *Nickel/Neon Green Back* patterns. Using stout baitcasting outfits, spooled with 30- to 50-lb. test line to minimize line stretch and to ensure a good hook set at greater depths. Again this lure's large single hook helps the angler get a solid hook set on these gamesters, especially when fishing deep.

DORADO

One of the most spectacular gamefish found along the West Coast is the dorado or mahi. These brilliantly-colored speedsters are capable of making sizzling runs with an incredible aerobic display. Usually found in schools underneath offshore floating kelp paddies, dorado are a particularly difficult fish to hook and land on artificial lures. But not the *Crippled Herring*®! The hard, bony mouth structure, combined with aerial fireworks, makes it tough to hold a fish like this using a lure with conventional treble hooks. However, here too, the large single hook featured on all *Crippled Herring*® spoons minimizes the chances of losing one of these terrific fighters. Dorado will hit this lure on a fast-cast-and-retrieve, or on the fall as it sinks beneath the kelp paddy. You can also slow troll for these offshore mahi. Use 1- to 4-oz. models in *Chrome*, *Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back*, *Nickel/Neon Blue Back*, *Nickel/Neon Green Back* and *Mother-of-Pearl* finishes. Both spinning and casting outfits with 12- to 30-lb. test mono are perfect for dorado.

TUNA

Bluefin, yellowfin, big eye, skipjack and albacore tuna are excellent sport when fishing the *Crippled Herring*®. Like dorado, all of these tuna might be found on the outer banks under floating kelp paddies. The key is to think DEEP. A majority of the tuna -- and the bigger specimens at that -- are located not so much near the surface, but more commonly at 90- to 150-ft. depths. Using a heavier 3- to 5-oz. model, it will still take

some patience in waiting for the lure to drift down to these deeper strike zones. A medium to fast wind back to the surface without pausing is the preferred retrieve for tuna.

All of these tuna will also strike a trolled feather or plug. The trick here is to fish the slide. Immediately following the trolling strike, make a long cast with the *Crippled Herring*® and let the lure sink for a few seconds. As the boat slides to a stop, invariably school tuna will follow the jig fish to the stern. Wind the *Crippled Herring*® in quickly and be ready for a jolting strike. *Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back*, *Nickel/Neon Blue Back* and *Nickel/Neon Green Back* are excellent tuna colors. However, quite often a more subtle lift-and-drop sequence with your rod tip will create strikes from very lethargic yellow and bluefin, as well as albacore tuna.

ROCKFISH

The *Crippled Herring*® is an outstanding lure for shallow-water rockfish. Species such as reds, chuckleheads, salmon grouper, sculpin, starry, olive, blue and copper rockfish jump on it as it is lazily bounced off the bottom in 60- to 240-ft. depths. Depending on current, plan to use anywhere from a 1- to 6-oz. model in *Chrome*, *Pearl White*, *Mother-of-Pearl*, *Nickel/Neon Blue Back* or *Nickel/Neon Green Back*.

To spice up the lure, add a small piece of squid, cut mackerel or thread on a tiny soft plastic grub. Always monitor your line and be prepared for rockfish to strike the spoon as it flutters toward the bottom.

MORE HINTS

This lure has terrific action, especially when teamed with lighter monofilament. Every once in a while add a few twitches with the rod tip without pausing during the retrieve. This will make the spoon dart and dive in an erratic fashion often generating strikes from sluggish gamefish.

Don't bend the *Crippled Herring*® or alter the shape of the lure. It has great built-in action and works on practically any species found in Southern California and Baja waters. Vary your selection of size and color depending upon the different gamefish you are targeting.

You can add trailers such as soft plastic grubs or strips of cut bait for bottom-grabbers. But fish the "Herring" clean for surface feeders.