

Catching Tripletail 101

Few fish come as close to the delicacy of tripletail. In fact, when many anglers see a tripletail, the sport of catching them it is the last thing on their mind! What they want is to land a big, delicious fish for the dinner table. On the other side of things however, is the fact that tripletail are also excellent sport.



When hooked, these large fish can really pull, and only do so for pretty short runs. At a common size of 10 pounds and above, this makes for an extremely fun fish to catch. The tripletail also has a relatively small mouth for its very large body, making it an excellent candidate for fly fishing.

When to Find Tripletail

The tripletail is one of those fish that fishermen and scientists haven't really figured out completely, but we do know quite a bit about them. They generally spend a large amount of their time close to shore between the months of March and November, where they can be found nearshore, within the inlets, and well inside the estuaries, bays and lagoons. In the winter, most of the fish either move offshore to seek stable water temperatures, or move further south. Being a fish that loves warm water, fishermen in south Florida can enjoy tripletail essentially year round.

Where to Catch Tripletail

Where ever they are found, tripletail are usually associated with structure. This isn't always the case, as many of them are spotted just floating out in the middle of nowhere, but it is in the majority of cases. Inshore, the fish can be seen floating next to channel markers, crab trap buoys, bridge pilings, and any other hard or manmade structure near relatively deep water. Offshore, the same structure-loving behavior applies, but most of the structure will be floating. Look for them near floating sargassum weed or floating debris such as wooden pallets, branches, or coconuts.

Tackle for Tripletail

Reaching up to 40 pounds, tripletail are relatively large fish, requiring some heavy tackle. On top of their size, tripletail have razor sharp gill plates on their gill covers, which will slice right through thin line, which adds to the necessity of heavy tackle. When hooked, they generally make some very hard runs, and although short-lived, can be more than enough tension to break thin line if not appropriately handled.

Spinning Tackle for Tripletail

In general, you want to use medium tackle capable of holding 15-to-20 pound line. The leader you will use will be much heavier because of those sharp gill plates mentioned above, but using line in this weight class should be plenty to pull up the majority of the tripletail out there. For the rod, use one with a strong backbone and fast action, as this will give you more sensitivity for feeling the subtle bite, as well as the quick hook-setting ability you will need before the fish spits the hook out.



Conventional Tackle for Tripletail

Conventional tackle is very beneficial for tripletail fishing, because these fish are almost always near structure. The reason conventional tackle is good in this situation is that it has greater leverage over spinning tackle, which allows you to turn the fish more easily, preventing it from running you into the structure, cutting your line. This is especially true when fishing inshore, where the structures will always be lined with sharp barnacles.



Fly-Rods for Tripletail

Two things make tripletail great for fly-fishing. For one, they have small mouths compared to their large bodies, making the size of a saltwater fly very similar to the size of prey they naturally eat. The other thing is that tripletail love crabs, and there isn't much fancy work that needs to be done to present a crab fly – natural crabs don't exactly display the greatest acrobatics underwater. In general, anywhere from an 8-to-10 weight fly-rod will be appropriate for catching tripletail.

Baits for tripletail

The natural diet of tripletail includes small crabs, shrimp, and small fish such as anchovies and scaled sardines. One of the best live baits is a small live shrimp, hooked right under the horn. Small blue crabs are also extremely effective, as well as fiddler crabs. When it comes to fish, pretty much anything that is generally small – about two inches long is perfect – will catch the eye of a tripletail, including small pinfish, sardines, mojarras, or anything else you can get your hands on.



Lures for Tripletail

Just as live shrimp is a top choice for natural bait, an artificial shrimp is one of the best lures for catching tripletail. Many natural looking shrimp are on the market – perhaps the most famous and effective is a small D.O.A. shrimp.



Other lures that work great are soft plastic lures mimicking anchovies, pinfish or sardines. For flies, the best flies that work are ones mimicking small blue crabs or shrimp, as these look the most realistic.

- See more at: <http://theonlinefisherman.com/tripletail#sthash.whWkmMmg.dpuf>

10 Tripletail Tips and Tricks

Tripletail, or "Trips" as we sometimes call them, are a big, primarily dark green-and-stripped fish that you can find anywhere from 10 feet to 1,000 feet of water, depending on where in Florida you're fishing for them. Here on the west central coast where we're writing this story, they're normally found in relatively deep water. They show up in the early springtime and you can find them in a host of places both inshore as well as offshore as far as you care to (or can afford to) run. 10 Things to Remember When Tripletail Fishing:

1. Fish where the fish are:

You will normally find tripletail near structure. The structure can be any of the dozens of markers and pilings and bridges found in our bays, or it can be flotsam floating in 100' of water. If there's a shadow, you have a good chance of finding tripletail.

2. Fish live bait first,

3. Carry a relatively light spinning or casting rod when you're fishing for tripletail.

4. Consider drifting past structure.

5. Consider a bobber and a live shrimp:

6. Fish early in the morning or at dusk.

7. Pinfish are best.

8. Remember where you catch one.

9. Tripletail can be found in very deep water,

10. Like cobia, tripletail are curious fish.

- See more at: <http://theonlinefisherman.com/tripletail/10-tripletail-tips#sthash.DLUF0Jdn.dpuf>

Line and Leader for Tripletail

The Atlantic tripletail is as unique of a fish as you can find. In terms of body shape, you can think of this fish as a supersized bluegill – they are incredible strong swimmers, but only for short dives, making it a fun, short-lived fight. Behaviorally, they float next to other floating debris, mimicking the debris carefully by changing colors to match, waiting for small fish and crustaceans to swim near. Growing up to 40 pounds, and very commonly found in the 10-to-20 pound range, tripletail aren't exactly small fish, which requires a medium-sized tackle to start with. Tripletail do not have a vicious set of teeth like some fish do, however they do have a razor sharp gill cover that can cut right through line if the fish runs in a certain direction over light line.

Fishing Lines for Tripletail Fishing

In general, a line between 10-and-15 pounds is recommended to start with. Because tripletail do not have numerous sharp teeth, the line can be directly tied to the hook, or to a 20-to-40 pound leader. Because tripletail float near the surface, a floating line is recommended to keep the bait up for free-lining. Some types of fishing lines are more buoyant than others, but this can always be overcome using a floating cork to keep the bait in view of the fish.

Monofilament Line for Tripletail

Monofilament line has one major advantage over all of its competitors when it comes to fishing for tripletail – it floats better. Whereas this would be a disadvantage of using this type of line for a deeper-occupying fish, the floating nature of a tripletail means that you actually want your bait right there at the surface with them.



Also, because you will not be casting out an incredible amount of line, the stretch in the line that monofilament has will be minimal, and will not greatly impact your hook-setting power. Monofilament line is also clear, and can be simply tied directly to the hook – no leader required – for better sensitivity. This does run the risk however of getting cut off on those sharp gill covers, so a strong leader (up to 40-pound test) is recommended.

Using Fluorocarbon for Tripletail

Fluorocarbon is recommended as a leader at the very least for basically all intents and purposes, because it is virtually invisible underwater. The downside to fluorocarbon line in regards to tripletail fishing is that it has the fastest sink rate of all the line types, and since you want your bait near the surface, this is a bad thing. Fortunately, this can be easily overcome with a floating cork, attached about 12-to-24 inches up from the hook, so that your bait will remain in view by the floating tripletail.



As a leader, use a size between 20-and-40 pound test, because although tripletail do not have numerous sharp teeth, they do have those sharp gill covers that you have to worry about.

Using Braided Line for Tripletail

Braided line has many benefits, but many disadvantages as well. In regards to tripletail, braided line can increase the sensitivity and hook-setting power because of its smaller diameter and complete lack of any stretch. Although you aren't fishing very deep water, or casting out extremely far, the non-stretch factor is not as important as it is for say, grouper fishing, but it does nonetheless have better sensitivity, and the slightly better hook-setting power may mean the difference between a caught and a lost fish.



The downside of braided line is that it is not very resistant to abrasions. Since tripletail are almost always near structure, avoid casting near bridge pilings and channel markers using braided line, because if the fish makes a run behind one of these structures, the sharp barnacles along the edges will easily shred the line. If you are going to use braided line, make sure to use at least a 24-inch monofilament or fluorocarbon leader, between 20-and-40 pound test, as the sharp gill plates will easily slice through the thin braid.

Fly Line for Tripletail

When fly-fishing for tripletail, there are several basic rules to follow. In general, use a forward-weight fly line, allowing for a longer and smoother cast. You also want to make sure to use a floating line – remember that these fish are visible floating on the surface of the water, so you don't want your fly to sink too fast. Lastly, and similarly to the other types of fishing, you want to end your line with around a 30-to-40 pound tippet due to the large size and razor sharp gill covers of these fish.

Final Notes about Flounder Lines and Leaders

Overall, there are a few general rules to follow for catching tripletail. Most importantly, you want to keep your bait, lure, or fly near the surface of the water because this is where the fish will see it. Also, you want to use between 10-to-15 pound line, but up to a 40-pound leader, because of the sharp gill covers that can easily slice through your line.

- See more at: <http://theonlinefisherman.com/tripletail/best-line-leaders-tripletail#sthash.6ANvmDWs.dpuf>

Natural Baits for Tripletail

Although the tripletail is not always displaying this odd behavior, most times you actually see a tripletail is when it is floating near the surface, looking like a big brown dish rag. When the fish is floating in this natural position, it is sitting and waiting for any small crab, shrimp, or fish to come its way for “security” under the shade of the fish.

Sometimes, there will be days when the fish just aren't biting artificial lures. Drifting a live bait near a floating fish nearly always results in a strike, as you don't have to fool a fish to do what it does everyday – eat the real deal!

The Best Baits for Tripletail

Tripletails are opportunistic predators and basically eat anything they can find. The natural diet of tripletail includes small blue crabs, shrimp, anchovies, menhaden, sardines, and any other small bait fish in the area. All of the aforementioned species are great baits for tripletail, but they tend to prefer certain baits over others. Here, we've listed the best baits for catching tripletail.

Shrimp

Probably the top bait for tripletail, shrimp is incredibly easy to find (almost every coastal bait shop carries it), pretty cheap when you find it, and is irresistible to a hungry tripletail.



Shrimp can be hooked just under the horn on the top of its head for free-lining or rigging under a float. Shrimp are the go-to bait for casting towards floating fish inshore, where they are most likely to naturally encounter a shrimp.

Pinfish

If a shrimp is not the best bait for tripletail, it's the pinfish. Pinfish are available at many bait shops, or can be easily caught in a cast net or sabiki rig inshore. Pinfish stay alive better than almost every other bait fish, and attract the attention of almost everything around, including a hungry tripletail. Pinfish are great for using offshore, where they cannot swim you into any pilings like they might inshore.



Small crabs

Juvenile blue crabs are a major part of the Atlantic tripletail's diet, so it is no surprise that they work great as bait. Although most anglers may think of blue crabs as being benthic (walking along the bottom), they are actually very excellent swimmers, especially the juveniles, which can be found swimming right at the surface at night. Although not a natural prey of tripletail, big fiddler crabs are just the right size as well, and work great when blue crabs cannot be found.



Sardines

There aren't many things that don't love sardines – heck, even we humans eat some of them! These small baitfish are as shiny as they come, and always attract the eye of any fish around. The downside of using sardines is that they need lots of water flow, and lots of aeration, or they won't last five minutes in your bait bucket.



Because of this, many bait shops will not carry them, and they even die pretty often just from the stress of getting caught in a cast net, so sabiki rigs are the best method for keeping them as healthy as possible. When using sardines, use a small float to keep the fish from swimming you into the structures inshore.

Other baits that will Catch Tripletail

As previously mentioned, tripletail are very opportunistic. If you catch a small baitfish on your sabiki rig or in your cast net, you should give it a try. There are many small baitfish that weren't mentioned, such as the small silvery mojarras, menhadens, which are abundant in some areas but not so much in others, and many others.

- See more at: <http://theonlinefisherman.com/tripletail/natural-live-bait#sthash.Gnx2VGBH.dpuf>

Artificial Lures for Catching Tripletail

As an ambush predator, the Atlantic tripletail sits and waits for the food to come to it. So although live bait is always going to work, the ambush nature of this fish makes artificial lures very effective if used properly. Anglers across the southeast very successfully use artificial lures for tripletail, ranging from soft plastics to flies. Here, we'll discuss the best artificial lures for catching this delicacy of a fish.



Lures for Catching Tripletail

The Atlantic tripletail consumes a diet composed mostly of shrimp, crabs, anchovies, menhaden, and any other small bait fish that seeks shelter near the structures they camp out near. In general, whatever bait is locally available, be it shrimp, finger mullet, sardines, or other small fish, will be what the fish are eating. Fortunately, there are many artificial baits on the market today that mimic the natural diet of tripletail, and some of them just look remarkably similar to the real deal.

Artificial Lures for Tripletail

Tripletail love to eat small anchovies, menhaden, sardines, and any other baitfish that unsuspectingly swims under its nose. Some of the best products on the market today are the soft bait plastics mimicking fish – these small baits are the perfect size for the majority of inshore fish, and mimic a natural fish in so many ways over hard plastic lures based on the look, feel, and movement of these lures.



To use these small fish lures, you can either drift them under a float near structures, or cast them free and keep them generally close to the surface as you retrieve them.

Artificial Shrimp for Tripletail

There aren't many baits that work better than a shrimp (let's face it, everything eats the poor shrimp). Sometimes, the fact that everything eats them is the downside of using them for bait – you end up losing your bait to all the small pinfish and undersized snapper before your targeted fish even has a chance to see it! This is where the artificial shrimp comes in. With so many great products on the market, many of these shrimp come pre-weighted and hooked, and all you have to do is simply tie it on your line.

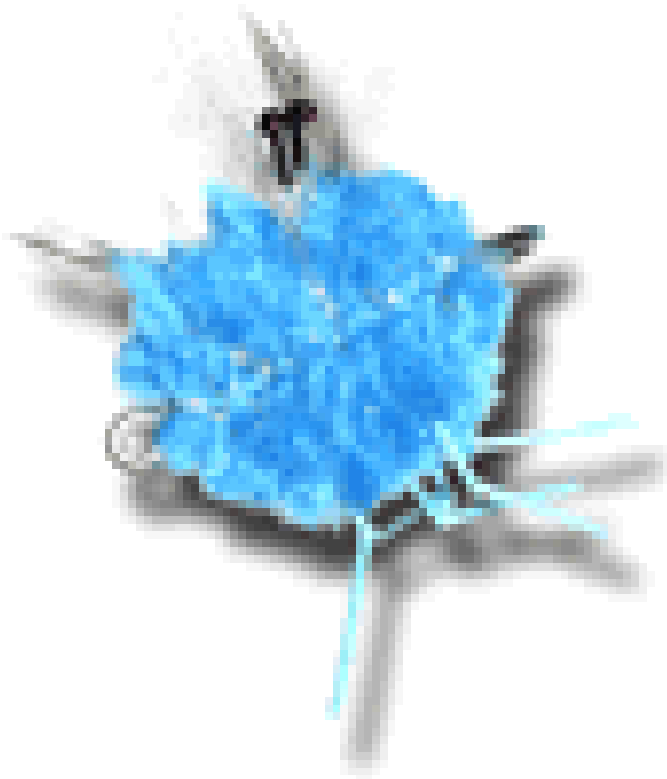


When using artificial shrimp, use it as you would a live one. If using a shrimp that has weight to it, use a float to let the shrimp drift in the current to catch the tripletail's eye. If using a non-weighted shrimp, free-line the shrimp or add a small splitshot to the leader to give it a little more casting distance.

Artificial shrimp can either be put together yourself using separate shrimp and jig heads, or purchased as complete lures. A free-lined non-weighted shrimp is excellent for drifting by floating tripletail near structures.

Artificial Flies for Tripletail

If you've ever practiced your fly fishing skills in the pond for bluegill, get ready to take on the tripletail. With the look and feel of a 20-pound bluegill, this fish readily takes flies, and can make some extremely short and strong runs when hooked. To catch a tripletail on fly, use a fly mimicking the natural diet of the fish, particularly a shrimp or a crab.



When choosing or tying your own flies, choose colors that mimic the actual color of the shrimp and crabs in that area, as this can change depending on the amount of dark tannins in the water inshore versus the clear offshore waters.

Many flies exist mimicking the natural prey of tripletail, such as crabs.

A General Statement about Tripletail Lures

Artificial lures are great. In fact, many anglers out there never bother to use live bait, because they are so successful with the artificials! The best thing about them is the fact that you don't have to spend the time re-baiting your hook with every bite, allowing you to always be ready for that important cast. When it comes to tripletail, so many great artificial lures out there mimic what they love to eat – shrimp, crabs, and fish – and so should never be overlooked.

- See more at: <http://theonlinefisherman.com/tripletail/artificial-lures-jigs#sthash.8bVNkqVh.dpuf>