



Double hook-up on whiting with poppers? Believe it!

MINI POPPERS

■ The best poppers for this caper are 3.5-6 cm long and weigh 3-6 g

■ The best small poppers I've used are River 2 Sea's relatively expensive Bubble Pops, and the budget-priced Wilson's Surecatch Poppers that come in a small, plastic tackle box and work out to about \$3 each

■ I like the Surecatch models in calmer conditions and the Bubble Pops when there's some wind chop

■ Juro's Rack Poppers are okay when the conditions are calm

■ Rebel's small Pop-R is another contender that also works best in calmer conditions

■ You'll improve the fish-catching performance of most of these poppers by replacing the trebles with No.10 or No.12 chemically sharpened models from Owner, Gamakatsu or VMC, although the original hardware on some of the more expensive poppers is good straight out of the pack

■ Bushy is working on a popper designed for this caper and it will be released later this year as part of his Squidgy Stiffy range of hard-bodied lures. I've used the prototypes—keep an eye out for it!

top include injured or scared baitfish, and insects that have fallen onto the surface. That's half the reason poppers work. Another reason is that the 'bloop' of a cup-faced popper closely mimics the 'boof' actually made by those feeding predators. So, when Wally Whiting hears 'bloop, bloop, bloop' he figures his mate Wayne, or maybe Billy Bream or Trevor Tailor, is on the tail of a prawn cocktail. Being hungry, aggressive and competitive, Wally is there in a flash, looking to muscle in on the action.

Did I say muscle in? Are we really talking about a whiting here? You better believe it! I guarantee you will see things when you try this lark that will leave you gob-smacked: such as lit-up whiting racing in from 10 metres away like Exocet missiles to crash a popper; or throwing themselves completely clear of the surface in their crazed attack; or packs of four and five whiting and bream shouldering each other aside to grab a bobbing lure.

The biggest jaw-dropper for me is seeing 60, 70 or 80 cm-plus flathead doing an imitation of the great white sharks in *Air Jaws* as they launch themselves out of the shallows with your popper down their throats. If that doesn't make you jump, laugh like crazy, then shake your head in wonder, you're hard to impress!

How it works

Believe it or not, this technique is easier than you might think. There's nothing tricky about working the lures and all the gear needed is described in the fact boxes accompanying this feature.

Most days, a steady, reasonably aggressive popping style seems best. Use downward stabs of the rod tip to bloop the popper; pick up slack with the reel as the tip comes back up and then bloop again. Keep the lure moving rhythmically and try to keep a little bit of spray in the air at all times: bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop.

With whiting, it's best to keep right on trucking if they start slashing at the plug and wait for one to

pin itself. On bream and flathead, you'll sometimes do better to pause, wait a heartbeat, then bloop again. But you'll learn all this pretty quickly. The most important thing is to get on the water and start popping your cork!

When it works

This seems to be a summer/autumn lark on the south coast of NSW. Returns are scarce in winter and early spring, although you'll still catch the odd bream. For red letter whiting action, you generally need a water temp over 21 degrees Celsius and, as Captain Kev says, when the water tops 24 or 25, they go off the Richter Scale!

Times of greatest prawn activity are also ideal, and Kev really likes both the full and new moon periods and a few days after each. Early mornings can be fantastic, but they'll hit all day if the boat traffic isn't too bad. A small wind chop seems advantageous, making the fish less cautious.

The technique also works at night, but that's another story for another time.

Where it works

My hunch is, this technique will work anywhere decent quantities of sand whiting, bream and flathead are found in water shallower than three or four metres—that's a lot of places! Switched on anglers were already taking good bags from NSW north coast estuaries, at Port Stephens, around Sydney, Wollongong and St Georges Basin (near Nowra) by the time I sat down to write this. The whiting-on-poppers birthplaces and Kev Glead's main stomping grounds, which stretch from the Clyde River at Batemans Bay to Mallacoota, just over the Victorian border, keep firing.

I'm convinced the technique will work in south-eastern Queensland and on the slightly different sand and silver whiting species of SA and WA. As more anglers get out and give it a go, some amazing discoveries are sure to be made.

I've caught fish from water not quite deep enough to cover their backs, up to about three metres. Kev and Bushy have pulled them in over four metres of water. Flathead are a more viable target in the really skinny stuff. Sand and mud flats, weed beds and even rocky areas are all prime locations and bream are especially abundant near snags and amongst oyster racks.

If the fish are there and they're feeding, and the water is reasonably warm, then they're catchable on poppers. The more you do it, the easier it becomes, and the faster your scepticism ebbs. But trust me, you'll never stop shaking your head, grinning like a maniac and muttering, "I'll be damned!" when elbow-slapper whiting rocket up from the depths to blast a chugging popper off the top in a welter of flying foam. It's too damn good to be true!

Please note: Starlo and Bushy are paid consultants and designers for Shimano Australia and Squidgy. 