

# Lower Zambezi

## Catch & Release Initiative

## GUIDELINES

### Circle hooks

Circle hooks have been proven to reduce the frequency of gut-hooking fish when bait-fishing. They do however require a slightly different style of fishing to the conventional J-hooks that most fishermen are familiar with. In this article Craig Thomassen, who has many years of experience fishing in Southern Africa and presents of 'Inside Fishing' on DSTV's Supersport channel gives some tips on how to successfully use circle hooks to fish for tigerfish.

### USING CIRCLE HOOKS FOR TIGER FISH

By Craig Thomassen

When fishing for tiger fish with bait, live or dead, one of the most effective methods is using a circle hook. These hooks ensure a good hookset, and also enable fish to be released in good shape after the fight.

#### How Circle Hooks Work:

Circle hooks look odd, with the point facing inwards, and for this reason many people are not that keen to try them out. They are designed to hook fish on the way out of the mouth, after the bait has been swallowed, and line tension pulls the hook back out of the mouth from the throat of the fish. The in bent point prevents the hook from hooking the fish in the throat, gills or stomach, but swivels into place and penetrates the fishes jaw as it exits the mouth.

#### Choosing the right circle hook:

Using the correct circle hook for the job is the first step. I recommend a circle hook that has its point in line with the shank of the hook, as opposed to offset. Also the hook should be strong while being made from a light gauge wire, ensuring good penetration. The best hooks for the job in my opinion are the VMC Tournament Circle hooks in size 4/0. Others that will also do the job well are Gamakatsu Nautilus circle hooks while Eagle Claw, Mustad and Owner all make good hooks as well, as long as they fit in with the above criteria.

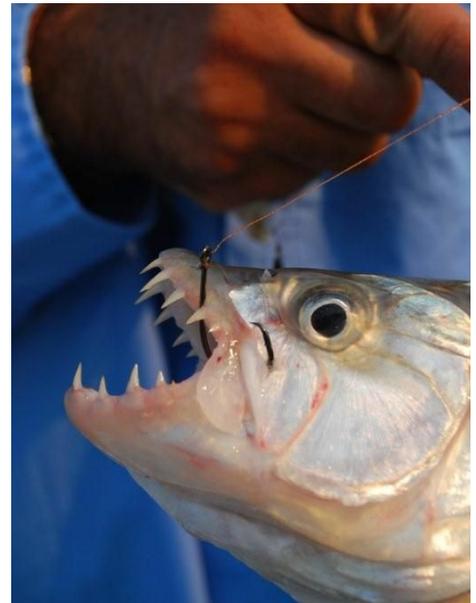
#### Rigging Circle Hooks:

The best way to rig a circle hook for tiger fishing, is to do so using knottable wire of 40lb. Any Nylon coated or carbon coated wire can be used for this job, as well as uncoated knottable wire. Piano wire is not ideal for use on circle hooks. The best way to join the hook to the wire is by snelling it on, with the trace coming into the eye of the hook from the point side.

It is best to use quite a long trace for circle hook fishing, so make the length of the wire around 50cm long, with a power swivel attached to the other end.



A circle hook that has been snelled on to heavy mono-filament. When snelling a circle hook onto a trace, the wire should enter the eye of the hook from the point side (Photo by Craig Thomassen).



*Circle hooks may look odd, but they are designed to hook fish on the way out of the mouth after the bait has been swallowed.*

*The orientation of the hook-tip prevents the hook from catching in the throat or gills but rather sets the hook in the jaw as it exits the fishes mouth.*

*The important difference in technique when fishing circle-hooks is **not** to strike, but rather allow the line to tighten so that the gradual tension on the line pulls the hook into place and sets it*

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### Baiting circle hooks:

The important thing when baiting a circle hook is to not choke the gape of the hook. For this reason you want the bait to simply hang off the hook, leaving the hook gape open. Live bait can simply be hooked through the top lip and out between the nostrils, while fillets and dead bait should be hooked on similarly, so that the bait hangs from the hook. While this does not look pretty, it is effective.

Another option for rigging livebait is to attach a small J-Hook to the circle hook, using soft wire and hook the livebait with the small hook.

### How to use the circle hook:

The two most important points when using circle hooks are firstly to allow the fish to swallow the bait before attempting to set the hook. The hook and bait need to have been swallowed for it to work. The second important point is **not to strike** at all, but to allow the line to tighten and the hook to be pulled into place by the line tightening. Striking will most often simply pull the hook and bait out of the fishes mouth, while a gradual tightening of the line will allow the hook to swivel into place naturally. Once the line is tight, and the fish is on, then you can further set the hook by giving the rod a couple of firm nods.

Once the bait has been picked up by a fish you should allow it sufficient time to eat the bait properly while the reel is giving line freely. When decide that the bait has been swallowed, then tighten up and only give a couple of firm nods to the rod once the line is properly tight and the fish is pulling hard on the other end. Simple!

By using circle hooks you will seldom gut hook, or throat hook fish, and the chances of your fish surviving the experience is so much better than using any other method of bait fishing. Also, because the hook will not set in the guts, you can allow it to feed a bit longer before deciding to set the hook without concern that it is going to be hooked too deep. This cuts out some of the anxiety of striking too soon which can happen when fishing with conventional J-hooks and not wanting to kill the fish.



A circle hook baited with a piece of squid. A fish fillet would be put on the same way. It is important that the bait does not choke the gape of the hook, so the bait should just hang off the hook leaving the gape open (Photo by Craig Thomassen).



An alternative way of rigging a circle hook for livebait is to attach a small J-hook to the circle hook with soft wire and hook the livebait with the smaller hook (Photo by Craig Thomassen).

*(This article was originally published as a Guide Fishing Report on [www.fishtube.tv](http://www.fishtube.tv). The text and photographs have been used with the kind permission of the author, Craig Thomassen. To read the original, go to [http://www.fishtube.tv/index.php?option=com\\_myblog&show=using-circle-hooks-for-tiger-fish-109.html&Itemid=877](http://www.fishtube.tv/index.php?option=com_myblog&show=using-circle-hooks-for-tiger-fish-109.html&Itemid=877))*

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