

Reef Fishing

There are many variables to take into consideration when embarking on a reef fishing trip,

The time of year will dictate what species are available in your chosen sea area, for instance,

It would be a futile exercise to tackle up for Whiting in July at Weymouth when we only get them during the Winter period,

Similarly it would be a waste of time trying to catch Tope during the Winter,

Other factors to consider are the type of ground to be fished i.e. Reef or Sandbank,

Sandbanks will hold a population of flatfish which could include Plaice, Turbot, Brill, Dabs, Flounder etc. so you would need to make up a rig that ensured your bait was hard on the seabed, a paternoster rig made up to catch say Black Bream would be useless on a Sandbank,

Reefs can be quite varied in their make up, from large rocky pinnacles to relatively flat slate ground, Pollack and Bass will be found haunting the rocky pinnacles of a deep water reef whilst Congers and Ling are at home in the base of the pinnacles and also on the flatter marks,

Fishing on the drift or fishing at anchor, depth of water, tidal flow, flood or ebb tide, wind speed and direction, water temperature all need to be taken into consideration,

So where do you start, Firstly dependant on the time of year I would recommend that you target a specific species and then adjust your tackle to suit the prevailing conditions,

I would personally set my sights on Bass, Whiting & Cod for my Winter targets and Bass, Black Bream and Turbot/Brill for my Summer targets,

Make sure you have sufficient tackle with you to be able to adapt when your skipper decides to move to another mark, or, if you are trying to catch Black Bream and are getting pestered by Pouting then you could change tactics and make up a Conger Eel rig using a Pouting as bait,

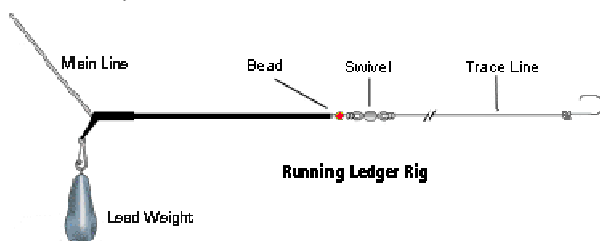
Tackle

Rigs can be divided into two categories,

Rigs that present a bait on the seabed and those that present a bait off the seabed,

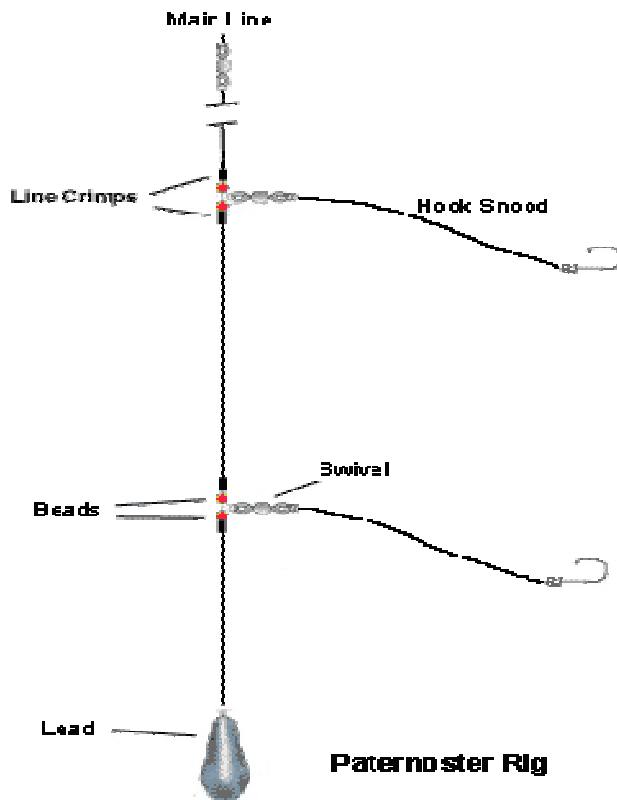
Of those that present a bait on the seabed the most popular must be the Running Ledger rig

The running ledger rig has many permutations from simple one hook rigs as shown in the diagram to multi hook wishbone rigs (used when drifting for Plaice) but its effect is always to keep the bait hard onto or very close to the seabed,



The Paternoster rig on the other hand is designed to keep a bait off the seabed, this can be very effective when targeting such species as Black Bream, Pollack, Bass and Mackerel to name but a few, Species that find their food by smell will be most attracted to a bait presented on the Running Ledger rig and conversely species that hunt for food by sight will be more attracted to the Paternoster rig

Of those that present a bait off the seabed the most popular is the Paternoster rig



There are a bewildering array of commercially tied Paternoster rigs available from your local tackle shops ranging from humble Mackerel feathers to some exquisitely tied competitions rigs from specialist manufacturers, If you are planning to tie your own rigs then I would recommend that you spend a couple of hours sitting at home in the comfort of your favourite armchair to carry out the task, spend a few extra pence on good quality gear and keep everything as neat as possible,

In the case of Paternoster rigs one golden rule should be adhered to and that is "Make sure that when the rig is suspended vertically, The hooks cannot touch, each other, the lead or the main line connecting swivel" if when you test them, you find that they do touch then shorten the hook snoods until they don't,

If you fail to adhere to this rule your gear will end up constantly tangled and catching nothing.

Keeping your rigs as neat and simple as possible serves two purposes, Firstly, they will be less likely to tangle or break under strain, Secondly, they will create less drag to the tide and subsequently will require less lead to maintain bottom contact,

If you are planning to buy some Paternoster rigs, There are a few examples shown below including my own personal favourite the "Blitzer" rig manufactured by tackle giants –

The Shakespeare Tackle Co.



"Blitzer"



"Hockai"



"Shrimper"



"Hockai Variant"

I was "introduced" to the Blitzer rig a few years ago shortly after Shakespeare started marketing them, I was out with a mixed party onboard 'Lady Godiva' and we were targeting Black Bream, we were having a few fish coming to the net when a 12 year old lad pulled a brand new set of Blitzer rigs from his pocket and asked if they would be any good for the Bream, I told him we would give them a go after all if they didn't catch Bream they would do for the Mackerel,

Well this 12 year old lad had an absolute field day with the Bream, he just tipped the Blitzers off with a thin strip of squid and proceeded to catch Bream three at a time, the fish just could not resist them,

Since then I have always kept a few rigs in the wheelhouse for my Breaming trips.

Tactics

I could write a book or even a complete website on fishing tactics, but for now I will give some general guidance on basic tactics for enticing a fish to bite..

We have already looked at a couple of rigs for reef fishing and I have already stated there are dozens of different permutations based on the two basic patterns, you will need to experiment with these to see which works best on the day, however, once you have set up a rig for reef fishing there is still a lot you can do to make your chosen rig more efficient at catching fish,

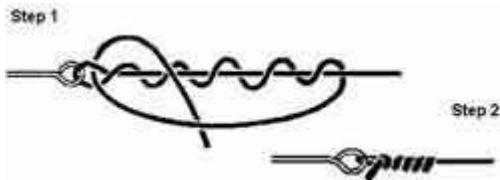
Bait is with out doubt the most important feature of any rig, and as well as the correct bait, correct bait presentation is a very close second in the importance factor,

You can have one of the neatest rigs ever to adorn a rod & reel and the freshest bait available, but, if it isn't presented properly then you may as well take up knitting because you will need something to break the boredom whilst waiting for a bite!

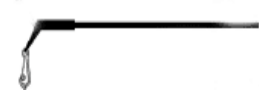
Running Ledger Rig

Lets make a start with the running ledger rig,

Assuming you have all the materials required to tie the rig, we start with a line swivel attached to your main line and lets assume that your main line is 30lb breaking strain, to attach the swivel we will use a clinch knot,



The Clinch knot is a variation of the half blood knot with the tag end passed back through the loop, use this knot for all your rig tying, Next we attach a length (6') of slightly weaker mono line say 25lb breaking strain, to this we thread on either a small tube boom or a zip slider to take our lead sinker,



Tube Boom



Zip Slider

Next we add a small plastic bead, the purpose of this is to protect the clinch knot from being damaged by the Boom/Slider, and then another line swivel to which we will add our hook length (4') of say 20lb breaking strain mono, the length of hook trace will depend on the tide flow with a longer one being deployed for a weak tide and a shorter one for a strong tide (generally as a rule of thumb),

Finally the hook itself, this must be suitable for the bait being used and the target species, if we are using worm baits for Bream we would choose a size 1 Aberdeen pattern hook, on the other hand if we were using whole Mackerel fillets for Ling we would choose a 6/0 - 10/0 O'Shaughnessy pattern,

Next the bait itself,

I would always recommend that your bait should flow with the tide, imagine a throng of bladder rack seaweed flowing to and fro in the tide, your bait should (if possible) do the same thing,

To achieve this when cutting Mackerel/Squid baits always cut long thin strips instead of chunks of bait,

When attaching the Mackerel strip (or Squid etc.) always put the hook **IN THE END OF THE BAIT** not in the middle like so many novices seem to do,

When you lower your bait into the water you will see the difference immediately, the strip of bait will wave in the tide like a flag, the chunk of bait will just tangle as it spins around the trace line,

Okay so now we have a nicely presented bait sitting on the seabed and attached to your rod by a beautifully tied running ledger rig,

Now we must wait for the scent from your bait to travel downtide and attract the fish towards your offering, after say 10 minutes if you have had no nibbles then change the bait for a fresh one, it will have become washed out and less attractive as a consequence,

If the fish are being a little coy and only nipping the bait, try teasing them by very gently lifting your rod tip, this will make them think the bait is getting away and often they will attack it with gusto, this is especially true of Black Bream.

You will notice that the breaking strains of the line we used to tie this rig was decreasing in strength from the main line to the hook length, the reason for this is that if a part of the rig gets snagged in the seabed, say its the hook for arguments sake, then the hook length will break before the others and you will only lose the hook, if the lead gets snagged then the trace will break before the mainline (very important when using expensive braid main line).

The generic term for such a setup is "Rotten Bottom", the lengths used will need to be varied according to conditions,

The Paternoster Rig

Once again lets assume you have all the necessary materials to make one up,

Take a length (3') of 25lb mono and attach a line swivel at one end using the clinch knot,

Next slide on these items in this sequence,

A line crimp,

small bead,

line swivel,

small bead,

line crimp,

line crimp,

small bead,

line swivel,

small bead,

line crimp,

finally tie a snap swivel to the other end,

it should look like this,



Now you can attach your hook snoods complete with chosen hooks to both swivels and then position each group of two beads, two crimps and line swivel so that the hooks are clear of the other parts of the rig and when you are satisfied that they are correctly positioned finish off by gently but firmly crimping the line crimps up with your crimping tool, if you can't get any line crimps then you can substitute them with a stop knot of some sort,

We have just made a 2 hook Paternoster rig but you could make up 1, 2, 3 or even 4 hook rigs using the same method,

As with the running ledger rig, bait is again the most important, always use the best bait that you can get your hands on,

If your bait supplier is selling you ragworm that falls apart when being handled, change your supplier or at least complain about it,

The Paternoster rig will generally out fish all others when targeting Wrasse, Pollack, Bream, Bass and Mackerel, they are most often tied up with small attractors threaded onto the hook snoods, attractors such as small sequins, very small coloured beads and even very small spoon blades will add to the attractiveness of these rigs,

The attractors do exactly what they say on the tin, They attract the attention of the fish, luring them towards your bait and will often work better on the drift rather than at anchor, this is because the fish we are targeting will be used to hunting there prey by sight rather than tracking down a scent,

Once again a simple lift of the rod tip will often entice a bite from another wise lethargic fish, one word of caution when using this rig, do not make your baits too big,

Large baits are often unnecessary and will only mask your hook and the attractors,

Remember that your chosen quarry will be hunting by sight!

This is proven by the fact that un-baited Paternoster rigs will often catch fish where as an un-baited running ledger will not!

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