

# SOFT PLASTICS

Steven Neely

**S**oft plastics are becoming an increasingly favoured method when fishing for Bass but for many anglers it is an unknown world full of mystery and confusion and it need not be! There are a few simple tips and techniques which will open the doors to a whole new way of lure fishing.

The possibilities are endless but this should go some way to introducing

looking for Bass. Not only do they provide prime feeding but also allow you to tuck away from the weather when conditions prevent fishing on the open coast. This is quite often the case on the south coast of Ireland where many of the marks I fish are shallow reefs and although an onshore wind creates fizz and life in the water, a little too much can 'blow' a mark out. When this is the case the estuary systems are my first port of call, allowing me to ac-

hitting the fresh fish which push in, chasing food with the tide.

The first step is to determine the strength and direction of the current as this will effect where the Bass lie and how best to present your lure. This is the easy bit - determining the direction of flow is simple and of course will change direction as the tide turns. What is more complex is finding features such as drop offs, gullies or depressions on the estuary bottom which may hold fish. Locating these can be tricky, if you have the luxury of a boat then a drift with a fish finder will help you develop a picture of the bottom, if not, then it is a case of trial and error and just putting in the time and explore.

What we are ideally looking for are depressions and gullies in which the fish will be lying, waiting for prey or food to wash past. Therefore, if you can present your lure to a Bass holding up in one of these areas you are likely to get a strike. Not all fish will sit static and wait for food to come to them - as everyone is aware Bass are predators and have no problems staying mobile and on the hunt. It is key to cover as much water as possible in a controlled and methodical manner to maximise your chances of intercepting a Bass on the hunt.



Rookie Bass Angler

you to the method and explaining the basic principles and gear needed for your next outing.

## Easy ways to approach estuaries:

I am very fortunate to be able to fish some of the finest estuaries the south of Ireland has to offer. I am unable to pass comment on the estuary systems on the mainland but I am sure most of this can be transposed onto your local marks. Estuaries are a great place to start when

cess cleaner water - but don't be fooled into thinking estuaries are only a back-up! They are a fantastic mark in their own right if you can work out how to fish them.

## Reading the mark and deciding where best to fish:

Often the best time to fish estuaries is the last two hours of the outgoing tide and then the first hour or two of the flood. This means you are targeting fish which are dropping back towards the bar mouth and then

## Going nocturnal:

Night is often a great time to fish estuaries although caution and vigilance must be taken as it can be extremely dangerous unless you know your mark well and even then it is not for the faint hearted, so be cautious! However, once darkness falls the Bass will gain confidence and run very close to the edges and will feed in incredibly shallow water. There is something very ominous about any form of night time fishing.

# IN ESTUARIES

Casting into the darkness, hearing the lure land in the water and then tightening up to start the drift, feeling the lure bump along the bottom and then bang! The rod tip lurches over, you strike and the reel starts to scream and you start to wonder what size of Bass you have connected with. Your first reaction is to turn on the head torch but resist – this will only scare other Bass cruising the margins and in reality will offer little help anyway when landing the fish.

Below I talk about lure shape and profile in-depth but for night time I tend to use lures which omit good vibrations such as paddle-tails or deeply ribbed lures. This helps the Bass tune into the lure using its hyper-sensitive sensory system. As for colour, this is a whole new debate in itself which I will not delve into now, but I have found darker colours tend to work best at night such as black, dark green and brown.

I cannot emphasise enough that this is not to be taken lightly or to be attempted on your own, and even with company do not go out without seeing it in daylight first. Estuaries can be very dangerous places even during the day and are not to be treated with bravado and ignorance – be sensible and be safe.

## **Set-up and end gear:**

The rod, reel and line are all very much a personal choice. I prefer to use a rod somewhere in the range of 8 ft plus when fishing estuaries, with a casting weight in the region of 5-28g. For this style of fishing I will never need anything heavier. As for the line, I use a braided, low diameter mainline to ensure sensitivity/feel and a fluorocarbon lead-

er. The leader will be maybe half as long again as the length I use for plugging to ensure the soft plastic is presented as naturally as possible.

I recommend a jig-head weighing in the range of 7-12 grams as a base for your set-up. The weight used will be determined by the strength of the current. For example, I would use a heavier jig-head of around 10 – 12g when I start fishing two hours before low water but as the current eases off around slack water, I will switch down to maybe 7-10g and then increase again as the tide floods. Of course this all de-

pend on the mark and strength of currents. In some instances I will keep the same weight of jig-head on throughout the entire session. It is important though to maintain contact with the bottom but at the same time try and use as light a weight as possible to present the most natural bait to the fish. It is a fine line between contact and presentation but only trial and error can get this correct. I have found that a more rounded profile of jig-

head will allow your lure to bounce nicely along the bottom as the current washes it down. During the summer months when estuaries can become weeded up it is possible to use a 'weed-less' jig-head which will prevent stray weed catching on the exposed hook point. Weighted, wide-gape, weed-less hooks will also serve well in this instance. This will allow you to fish effectively for longer without the need to clean the lure of the cursed sea lettuce which plagues our estuaries in the warmer months.



**Megabass X-Layer**

## **Soft plastic lures:**

Soft plastics such as the Megabass X-Layer and the Lunker City Sluggo are ideal sand-eel imitations and anything from 4.5" up to 7" will work well. For the 4.5" baits I would use a 2/0 hook size and for the larger plastics anything from a 3/0 to 5/0. The famous Ayu X-layer is a favourite of many anglers however I have found the Arkansas Shiner colour of Sluggo to be just as effective.



### **Fiiish Black Minnow**

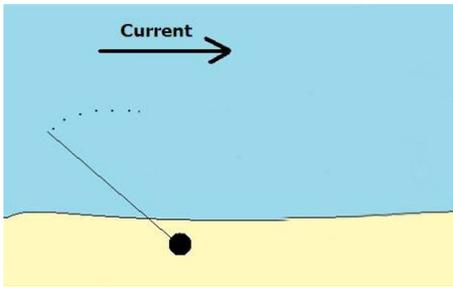
Delalande GT, One-Up Shads, Black Minnows, IMA Melty Nymphs or Megabass Spindle Worms are also perfect for this application. The moulded tail provides extra vibrations in the water and will appeal to **the Bass's sensory system**. Perhaps these types of plastics are best used when there are small Sea Trout and Mullet in the estuaries which the

swells and obviously presents a bigger meal to a hungry Bass.

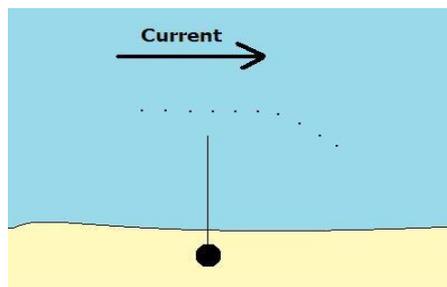
#### **Key to success:**

The key to this style of fishing is maintaining contact between your lure and the bottom. As the plastic works in the current you should feel it bumping along the estuary bottom – adding the occasional twitch will

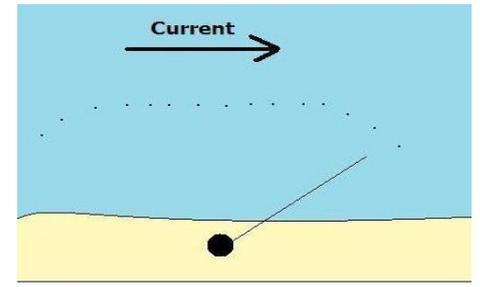
**stream, past 12 o'clock with your rod tip high and, if needs be, slowly turn the handle to keep the line tight and maintain contact. Allow the lure to swing downstream until it comes to the end of its drift which will be around the 2 o'clock position.** Then you can hop the plastic back in towards you and re-start the process.



**Make cast upstream around 10 o'clock. Allow lure to sink and close bale arm. Tighten slack line and start drift.**



Lure is now bumping along the bottom, kicking up puffs of sand. Expect a strike at anytime!



The lure has now finished its drift. Instead of simply straight retrieving the lure, hop it back towards you - this will cover the ground between 2 and 3 o'clock.

Bass are more than likely feeding on? I have also found paddle tails to be more effective than standard 'senko' or 'slug' style lures when the water clarity is poor or at night (as mentioned earlier). This is due to the increased vibration given off by the tail which helps the Bass track down your lure in coloured water.

My personal favourite however is the Waveworm Bamboo Stick. There has been much discussion about this lure on the forums and it was my most successful soft plastic of 2012. However I put a lot of this success down to my confidence with the lure. I think the thicker profile helps it hold up in stronger currents and

impart more action to the lure and hopefully induce a strike. The weighted hook will kick up puffs of sand as you impart life, imitating the movement of sand-eels and other small baitfish darting around seeking cover.

Stand facing the water so the current is running perpendicular to you. Cast the lure up-stream around 10 o'clock, **allow the lure to sink and touch bottom**. Close the catch and tighten up the slack until you regain contact with the lure.

You should now feel the lure bumping or bouncing on the bottom. Follow the drift of the lure down-

If you find the current too strong and you can not get the lure to hit the bottom, try increasing the weight of the jig-head. Be careful however, not to go too heavy as this will feel unnatural to the fish as it picks up your lure and may result in **the Bass 'spitting' the lure out before you have a chance to set the hook.**

This style of soft plastic fishing is in many respects quite like fly-fishing in that maintaining contact is vital and everything is subtle. This form of bumping plastics down an estuary is similar to Czech-nymphing with weighted nymphs for Grayling or Trout in chalk streams, the same



*Wave Chart*

**Steve with a lovely Wexford five and a half pounder**



basic theory applies using current to move and work the lure.

For most of us who have never tried this method it will all be an unknown but really it isn't complicated - in fact, it couldn't be simpler. It is however a matter of confidence.

**It's all about confidence!**

Until you try a specific technique and succeed you will always remain sceptical but I assure you this does work. You will be amazed how natural these lures look in the water and the versatility they can provide us.

**Another Wexford bass for Steve**



Get your hands on some soft plastics lures, jig-heads or hooks and get out there and give this a serious try - persevere and add another string to your Bass fishing arsenal.



*Sawamura One Up*