

Although catch & release fishing is a valuable conservation tool that can lead to more and bigger fish in the fishery, just because a fish swims away doesn't mean that it lives to be caught another day. The tips below for increasing the chances that a released fish survives are based on scientific research focused on experimental angling for bonefish. Be a responsible angler – use Best Practices for Bonefish Catch & Release.

## Hooks

Hooking location and time to remove hooks affect survival rates

- Always use barbless hooks.
- When fishing with bait, use circle hooks.

## Fight Time

Shorter fight times increase survival because a fish fought to exhaustion is more vulnerable to predators. Conversely, a bonefish reeled in too quickly may thrash about, increasing its chances of injury.

- Tackle should match conditions and the size of fish so that fish can be landed quickly, but not until their head can be lifted slightly above the water surface and their movements controlled (see photo at left).
- Always land a bonefish before it is exhausted and loses equilibrium when released (cannot swim and nose dives or rolls over).



Lift the head to control the movement of the fish.

- If a bonefish loses equilibrium after you land it, revive it until it can swim upright, then shorten the fight time on future fish.
- High water temperatures may negatively impact bonefish survival after release; in warmer water, reduce fight time and handling time.

## Handling

Minimize handling all fish; slime and scales can be easily damaged and removed with excessive handling, thereby greatly increasing risks of infection. In addition, Recent research has shown that mechanical lip gripping devices can cause damage to mouth tissue if the bonefish struggles, so their use is best avoided.



Although it is better to hold the fish in the water with wet hands for a photo, the *best way* to release a bonefish is by using pliers to remove the hook without ever touching the fish

- If you have to handle a bonefish, use clean, wet hands and gently support the bonefish from beneath the head and belly; nets, mechanical lip gripping devices, and wet cloths can cause injury to the fish, use only with great care
- Use hemostats or pliers to quickly remove hooks while keeping the fish in the water, and have your pliers ready and available to facilitate a quick release.

More detailed information and updates based on continuing research can be found at [www.tarbone.org](http://www.tarbone.org)

BAD



Minimizing air exposure helps increase the chance of survival for bonefish

- Avoid exposing bonefish to air, even when taking a photo; if they must be held out of the water, limit it to a maximum of 15 seconds.
- Touching the gills can cause damage and impair the ability of a bonefish to breathe



Avoid holding a bonefish vertically and only by a lip-gripping device

- If lip gripping devices are used, it's best to use them only to restrain a calm fish in the water while removing the hook; if a fish's weight is desired, cradle the bonefish in a sling and suspend the sling from the device.

## Predators

The survival of released bonefish decreases severely when predators such as sharks and barracudas are abundant because these predators often attack a bonefish soon after it is released. In fact, fish that lose equilibrium after release are six times more likely to be attacked by predators.

- When predators become abundant and appear to be attracted to your fishing activity, consider moving to another fishing location.
- If you have caught a fish and potential predators are near, consider using a live well to hold your fish for a short time to allow releasing it some distance away from them.



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*BTU is a 501.C.3, not-for-profit organization  
 committed to sustain and enhance bonefish  
 and tarpon fishing around the world.*

*This mission is pursued through research,  
 education, rehabilitation, regulation, and  
 regulation enforcement.*



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# BEST PRACTICES FOR BONEFISH CATCH & RELEASE

**A GUIDE FOR RESPONSIBLE ANGLING**

