

The Ultimate Slug Fest: MANGROVE JACK

As most F&B readers know, PM John Howard is a cricketering 'tragic' so it's only fair we call F&B's fishing & tackle editor Aaron Concord a 'Jack tragic' . . . 'coz he just about lives, breathes, eats and sleeps dreaming about this little Aussie battler. A sportfish with a heart as big as Makybe Diva, the aggression of Costya Tszu, the cunning of Shane Warne and the speed of an FA-18 at WOT . . . this is arguably the toughest fish of 'em all. But be warned - once you start trying to catch them, and get a BIG hit - you'll be hooked for life! And we'll all blame Aaron . . .

If you have done plenty of estuarine fishing in the tropics and sub tropics of Oz, there has probably been a time when, like a bolt from the blue, something has grabbed your lure or bait, reefing your rod downwards with amazing force, only to have your line snap before you could even react.

Your offering has been dragged through the most convenient snag, bridge pylon or rocky shelf with blinding speed. You have just been blitzed, smoked and busted up.

What the . . . ! What was this unseen adversary?

It all points to a thug called a mangrove jack.

There aren't too many estuary dwellers that can do this with the same unflinching attitude. The speed of the attack and subsequent bust off, leaves many fishermen with legs like jelly, and has many people searching for the best tactics to try and survive an encounter.

Jacks have a personality that can have you on edge.

A landed jack usually has its eye follow you, watching every move, until you get too close to their maw . . . then snap! They chop their jaws like a rabid dog.

I must admit I have had reservations doing an article that is focused on jacks, since they are a favourite fish. They have qualities that turn most who

chase them into ardent admirers for life.

In reality, they need less pressure than more, to sustain the population.

However, as special as they are, I will divulge some tactics and places as a starting point. From here, it is up to you - and may you be lucky enough to end up with a crimson red mangrove jack in your landing net.

Whether you decide to keep it or release it, is your decision, although fortunately, more people are releasing release them to fight another day.

Aussie Tough

To understand my feelings towards jacks, I just wanted to share a couple of interesting encounters.

No other fish has broken hooks, bent or broken lures, snapped lines and leader material or stuffed rods and reels like a serious run in with a large mangrove jack.

No other fish shows as much disdain towards anglers and their gear, which is why, when you do land one, it is perfectly normal to do a victory dance!

A Bit of Biology

The mangrove jack (*lutjanus argentimaculatus*) belongs to a group of fishes known scientifically as the *Lutjanids*, which include coral trout, red emperor, red bass and fingermark bream.

Lutjanids have a worldwide

distribution in tropical and sub-tropical waters, where they are usually described as snappers, due to their reflex chopping nature of their jaws. Their ability to snap their jaws is unbelievable. The popping, chopping noise is very distinct and if a lutjanid is doing this once caught, make sure your fingers are well clear, as the teeth they possess will puncture right through a fingernail.

All possess large, prominent teeth, muscular body, large eyes and a powerful tail.

This group of fish are well known for their fighting abilities as well as being some of the best table fish in the sea.

The colour of a mangrove jack can vary from "uniformly bright reddish pink to olive brown", according to Ern Grant's definitive *Guide to Fishes*.

Smaller fish exhibit vertical pale white bars and electric blue lines around the eyes and snout.

Depending on the location from which I have caught the jack from, most fish from shallow, dark areas exhibit darker colouration, where jacks pulled from deeper snags and rock bars have been pale in comparison. Most night time caught jacks have been fairly dark, so it seems they have the capacity to blend their colour to suit their chosen ambush point.

Jacks taken from the fresh water reaches of rivers are usually a rich,

Aaron's Mum, Teresa Concord, is a highly respected fisherperson in her own right, and naturally enough, points out that she and husband Ed Concord taught Aaron just about everything he knows !! (Ah, don'tcha luv inter-family bragging!) including explaining to Aaron how he could catch this superb 53 cm 'Jack from a well known Gold Coast tributary in the F&B Trailcraft 475 Pro Fish. (Um, Teresa, could you teach me too? - PW)

