

Light Line Bream

*Chris Dunham explores finesse tactics for fussy bream.
Images by Peter Morse.*

I don't like clouser deep minnows – that's not to say I consider Bob's creation to be a poor pattern, far from it. The clouser deep minnow is perhaps one of the most productive flies we know of and certainly one of the most widely used here and abroad.

So what's my beef with this innocent little collection of fluff and flash? It's generally just too heavy for the given line weight chosen to deliver it, presents like a small tactical nuclear explosion and for the most part commits the caster to the use of fairly short leaders and a jig-like action that must be retrieved at pace in shallow water to avoid fouling the bottom.

There's also a fundamental aesthetic reason for my shying away from the clouser. As a system for delivering those tasty looking morsels we call flies, fly fishing has at it's very core (no pun intended) the piece of equipment around which the whole plot balances – the fly line.

We can substitute some of the other hardware and still be fly fishing. But remove the fly line and your left with? The meat of the matter is that the fly line carries the weight of the fly. The rod just casts the line and the reel provides storage and a brake. In light line fly fishing for bream the line weight is both our undoing and our advantage.



Flies designed to land gently are an essential component of light line tactics. Mono eyes replace lead eyes for a more subtle presentation.



Wading needs to be careful and methodical. Fish the edges of channels, only ever wade into the current and minimise false casting.



The maximum weight and bulk of the pattern to be presented is limited by the weight in the first thirty odd foot of line or 'head section' - if the head section of a four weight line won't carry the weight of the fly without bucking and bouncing at the end of each casting stroke you're in a wee bit of bother. This sort of bomb chucking will drive the caster (bomb hurler) to use ever decreasing leader lengths in order to control the situation. And that, folks, is just giving away the light line advantage.

Okay, so what are the advantages? It's all about presentation. A relatively light line weight allows us to insinuate the fly into the bream's domain. It's not so much a delivery as an opportunity for seduction. A weight forward floating line with a front taper that has 'presentation' qualities and a long leader with a light weight fly allows us to target bream in estuary locations where virtually no other method of fishing or even moderate line weight fly lines can hope to compete. An unweighted pattern like Muz Wilson's Estuary BMS can be hovered in thirty centimetres of water given a slight current. But more on flies later.

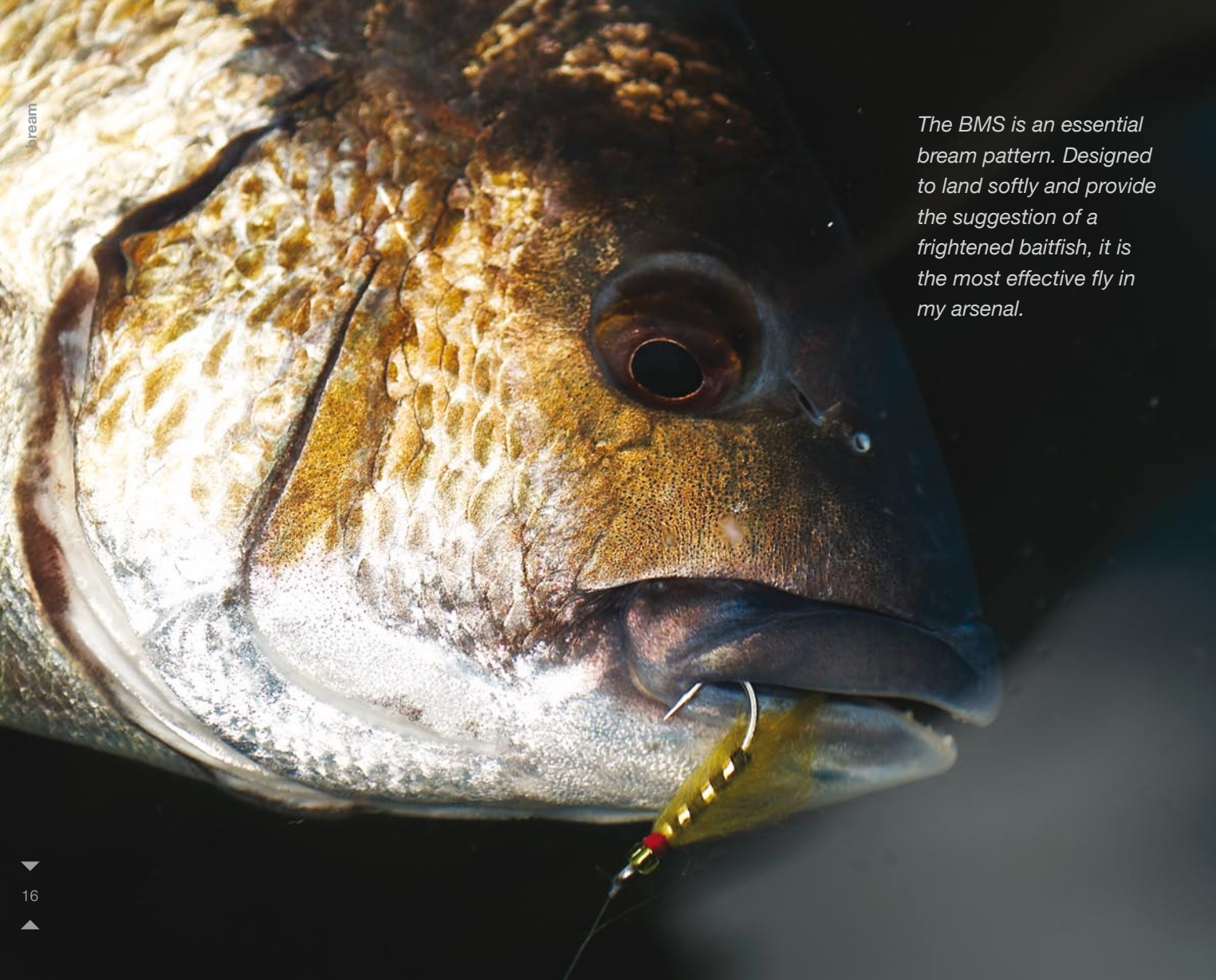
The light line and fly advantage is not just in the relative lack of disturbance to the water surface but also in the length of leader that can be employed. The longer the leader the further your fly is from the fly line. Assuming the cast went okay of course.

Bream being the moody, cunning brats that they are can go from charging, if not actually eating, almost anything thrown at them to running a country mile at the suggestion of a shadow. Unfortunately, or fortunately (depending on how

you like a challenge), the latter is more often the case. They are after all a long-lived species and the older they get the more caution they display, which is why in my book a large bream capture is a real achievement and anything over forty centimetres is worth crowing about.

The charge-anything situation is usually found near the mouth of an estuary system with resident fish that are virtually silver and live in pure sea water around the constantly flushing and fast moving water channels and braided sand flats. They also have some sort of attitude or identity problem that means they'll chase a fly in a pack like a school of tailor. While this is good fun on a three or four weight it doesn't really make use of the light line and can often be done better with a six weight, especially when the wind kicks up. It's further up the estuary where the wee twigs and light lines do their delicate, deceptive thing.

Even if you're a fairly experienced bream fly fisher chances are that there's a whole lot of fish being spooked by casting or simply being 'walked over' as you move about. Wading in particular is a common blunder and our approach needs to be carefully taken into consideration especially if we're going to get that crucial first cast in with the three weight. Next time you draw a deep bath pinch your nose closed with one hand, slide your head under the water and with your free hand drop a small object (fly with point cut off) into the water - the sound has to be experienced to be believed. And when you consider that bream are built to hear/feel in water you'll begin to appreciate the amount of disturbance produced by even the most cautious



The BMS is an essential bream pattern. Designed to land softly and provide the suggestion of a frightened baitfish, it is the most effective fly in my arsenal.

wading. I'm not saying don't wade but just wade to your advantage. Wade into the current rather than with it.

If you've come to Mr Sneaky Bream from an offshore fishing background then you'll gain the most by going trout fishing in rivers and streams with an experienced partner or guide. An understanding of holding water, how to read water and where fish prefer to hold station in shallow water is invaluable, and once back out chasing golden trevally you'll be putting this understanding to good use.

Surprisingly, rods aren't all that critical and anything from 2-weight through to a 4-weight have become popular around the country for light line bream work. Ron Pearson, who lives in the south west of WA, has been using an 8' 2-weight rod on bream for a couple of years and has managed a 41 cm black bream in his local waters. A super fast action is not generally required and medium fast rod will suit most folk and the longer leader lengths used.

I've not found short rods to be much fun, especially when wading, but generally lengths from eight to nine foot work just fine. I can hear the mumblings of 'Too bloody light mate, just buggers the fish' and other choice phrases. And sure that's a concern for all of us – however it's more a matter of what you do when hooked up that makes the difference and the time taken to land a forty centimetre fish on a four weight should be the same as with a six weight. The main difference is that when you get 'hit' by a big bream on light line it's like you've been caught.

The first thirty seconds is something of a seesaw battle of wills, strength and strategy. Throwing the fish off balance at every opportunity is critical and attempting a casual, high stick trout attitude to playing a good bream near rocks or structure will have you broken off in double quick time. So bring the butt of the rod to bear on the fish and don't be shy of testing that tippet.

Leaders need to be loooong; sixteen foot is good and I usually build mine starting with a ten foot saltwater tapered leader and then tippet out with freshwater fluorocarbon to suit. On the flats the tippet might be as light as five pound, though eight pound is more the norm.

On the flats in shallow water large fish, when hooked, can make a couple of fairly short but very determined runs. Fish over 45 centimetres can even burn a finger or two.

For my own light bream set ups I've found that really lightweight super large arbour reels to suit my fishing style. They don't have to be really flash bits of kit or made of unobtainium but the really large arbour reels allow you to pick up a lot of line quickly, in a good house keeping line management way.

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Flies are the second most important consideration after presentation and in my experience there are few patterns better suited to light line bream fishing than Muz Wilson's BMS variations. These are the standards which live in my fly

box: estuary BMS olive, estuary BMS PA olive, estuary BMS PA chartreuse, estuary BMS PA black, estuary BMS tan, fuzzle olive #8 with bead chain eyes, and fuzzle chartreuse and the KBF in size 4. The PA within the pattern name stands for either 'pink arsed' or 'purple arsed' in the case of the black BMS.

In keeping with the fickle nature of bream a half day fishing with estuary BMS patterns might well see me going through every colour or tonal variation several times as the available light and the bream tastes change.

Ok, so what are we looking at here? There's a light breeze just catching your left shoulder and taking the skin off the water but leaving a small glassy wind shadow of about two rod lengths out from the river bank. The cloud cover is broken and constantly changing.

You're a right hander and looking to ease forward to your left with the high bank behind you to kill your outline. Life's good – the scene is set and your ready for action. Now's the time for restraint, so hurry and wait. This

is where the light line advantage starts so don't go throwing it away by wading into the water or casting.

Study the edge described by the wind that runs parallel to the bank. How deep is it there? Where is the drop off and what is the bottom made of? Is there any movement along that line, or the telltale flash of rolling bream taking larva or scud of rocks or sand? A small change in the surface pattern imparted by the wind? Are there any tiny baitfish or shrimp, and how do they move when calm? How far out is the edge of the main current and how fast is it flowing? Does it coincide with a slightly darker stream of silty water?

Knowing the water ahead and any subtle depth changes is key as this is where our bream prefer to shelter and ambush. A drop off in the sand shelf of just ten centimetres is all it takes to shelter bream, especially if there's plenty of water flowing across the sand.

It's a waiting game at this point and you're using the time to start logging all of this data; for this





Targetting large bream in shallow water is where the light line advantage excels. They allow softer presentations that are less likely to spook fish. Coupled with correctly tied flies that hover in the shallowest of water, this is classic sight fishing.

trip and for the next. Since movement is the first warning sign for the bream, and our first indicator of their location, just remain still and watch for a good five minutes or longer.

Cap pulled low and polarised glasses on you've got the lay of the land sorted for at least the available casting area ahead and to your left. There's a fairly firm, gently sloping sand bottom that breaks to scattered rough sedimentary stone at about eight metres out and a dirty water line two metres out from there. Knee deep at the rocks and twice as deep at the dirty water line, which is also where the current influences the slower water near the shore.

The bank is too high to get in a comfortable cast so ease yourself into the water and out to knee depth. The weight forward floater was stretched in preparation for the day's fishing and leader de-kinked and now lays back down stream parallel to the bank.

There's the slightest surface disturbance a comfortable casting distance out at the dirty water line. One flat (one metre off the water) false cast up parallel to the bank to feel the weight of the line, change of direction at the completion of the back cast and then place the fly in the 'tease zone'. This is a non-specific distance out from the target area that hopefully lets the fly sink to about thirty centimetres down and not so close as to alarm the bream.

Put the rod tip in the water and retrieve enough line to keep in hand-to-hand contact with the fly. It's the present-away-from-the-fish approach. As you retrieved the fly within a metre of the disturbed area a flash of silver zips out of the darker drop off in true ambush fashion and nails the BMS on the run. He's struck himself on and U-turned back to the drop off.

As you apply some pressure and feel the weight he flips close enough to the surface to create a splash. This is your chance to get some control so before he decides where to charge next. Apply pressure to his 'off' side and then almost immediately turn the pressure to his other flank.

The next, smaller, run is toward the shore and away from you and you feel like it's all yours. With constant pressure and changes of direction the bream is back to within a couple of rod lengths. Typical to large bream a last fling-come-flip sees your fly pulled and he's off back to the drop off. It's okay, you felt the weight, had his measure and that's about the best release you'll ever get.

There is no saltwater fly fishing just as there is no freshwater fly fishing; it's all fly fishing. If your having trouble with that idea then come light line fly fishing for bream where the two sects meet. It will demand the most from you and your skills but the rewards are considerable.