



BONEFISH

BEST PRACTICES FOR CATCH & RELEASE

These tips are based on scientific research supported by Bonefish & Tarpon Unlimited.
Be a responsible angler – use Best Practices for Bonefish Catch & Release.

Hooks

- Use barbless hooks or hooks with crimped barbs. They cause less tissue damage and are easier to remove, so reduce handling time.



Fight Time

- Tackle should match conditions and size of fish such that fish can be landed quickly.
- Shorter fight times increase survival because a fish fought to exhaustion is more vulnerable to predators.
- However, a bonefish horsed in too quickly may thrash about, increasing chances of injury to itself
- Land the fish as quickly as possible, but not until their head can be lifted slightly above the water surface, so their movements can be controlled
- Always land a bonefish before it is exhausted and loses equilibrium. If bonefish are losing equilibrium as you land them, revive them until they are swimming upright, then shorten the fight time on future fish.



Predators

- The survival of released bonefish drops severely when predators (sharks, barracuda) are abundant because these predators often attack a bonefish soon after they are released
- When predators become abundant and appear to be attracted to your fishing activity, move to another fishing location.



Final Tips

- Warm water temperatures have the potential to negatively impact bonefish condition and survival. In warmer water, reduce fight time and handling time.
- Nets, mechanical lip restraint devices, and wet cloths can cause injury to the fish, so must be used with care
- Fish that lose equilibrium after release are 6 times more likely to be attacked by predators. Following these Best Practices will help ensure that bonefish do not lose equilibrium, and survive release.



Handling

- Minimize handling. If you handle a bonefish, use clean wet hands. Bonefish slime and scales can be easily damaged and removed with excessive handling.
- Have your camera and pliers ready and available to facilitate a quick photo and release
- Use hemostats or pliers to quickly remove hooks while holding fish in the water.
- If removed from the water for photographs, the bonefish should be gently supported from beneath the head and the belly.



- Reduce the bonefish's exposure to air – **maximum 15 seconds**.
- To revive fish, hold them upright and ideally facing into current and in clear water.



- Keep your fingers away from the gills to avoid damaging the gills
- Recent research has shown that mechanical lip restraining devices can cause damage to bonefish mouth tissue if the bonefish struggles against the device, so their use is best avoided. If these devices are used, it's best to use them 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, suspending the sling from the device.

