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# **---SEA BASS ON THE FLY---**

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**--Photos and illustrations--**

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"Allowing the fly to sink to the fish's level, the angler makes a retrieve. The fly comes directly at the fish, which suddenly sees its approach. As the small fly gets nearer, the fish moves forward to strike, but the tiny fly doesn't flee at the sight of the predator. Instead it continues to come directly toward the fish. Suddenly, the fish realises intuitively that something is wrong—it's never happened before—so it flees, until it can assess the situation. An opportunity for the angler has been lost."

Lefty Kreh

"No art has ever been learned from books.  
Fly fishing is no exception..."

Gem Skues



## PREFACE

Four o'clock in the morning, my alarm clock rings. I get up quietly so as not to wake my wife, and the good smell of coffee helps me finish waking up. Darius, my dog, gets impatient in the garage. He hears the sounds of my footsteps in the house, feeling that something is brewing. I finish my breakfast while watching the weather forecast on my phone. I raise my eyes up at the window and look outside. The treetops in my garden are swaying slightly, my unconscious begs Aeolus not to have too much changing wind during the day. The thermos of coffee and the sandwich with the fresh morning bread are ready. I open the garage door, a sweet smell of spring wafts through. My dog welcomes me with a wagging tail, he turns around and makes me share his joy. A small caress on his back, and he accepts. I head to my SUV, open the trunk and as usual. Darius does not need to be asked, he jumps into the car. I check one last time that my skiff is well secured, and the trailer is safely hooked up.

I take the road to the port, thinking about which fishing spots to choose for this day. It doesn't take me long to get to the port of Flamands in Tourlaville, which is only a quarter of an hour from my house, the advantage of living not very far from the sea.

The sun rises and begins to light up the ocean. I look into the distance to pick up some signs that could betray the presence of fish, like the calls of terns and black-headed gulls. As I push the boat through the water, my fishing dog jumps on board. We sail quietly out to sea towards the spot that I know perfectly well, and on which it is easy for me to see the silver-colored fish feeding on small crabs and shrimps in very shallow water. The tide is rising, the tidal coefficient is good

today. Seventy, there will be current. The old adage that goes "no current, no fish" will not be at the order of the day!

I arrive at the shallow shoal near the harbour of Cherbourg, in Normandy. I observe this military fort bruised by war wounds, which once again resisted the onslaught of the incessant breaking waves during the last winter storm.

I kill the petrol engine and silently lower the electric motor at the bow of my skiff. Travelling on the water will be much less noisy and will not scare the bass on the spot, should they be present. I take my fly rod, check the knots. I opted for a mullet-colored streamer tied on a number-two hook. I throw it in the water and see if the action suits me. The silvery blue reflections cast by the crystal flash that I incorporated in the pattern as well as the long white saddles (cock hackle feathers) which imitate the tail of a small fish, allow me to think that the fly looks perfect for this situation.

I climb onto the skiff's casting platform, Darius lies down at my feet and watches me out of the corner of his eye, wagging his tail. It seems he's telling me that he is happy to be here with me. The watching and waiting begins. After a good half hour, an explosion tears the surface due to small fish, terrified by the pursuit of hungry predators. I draw some line from the reel and start to give rhythm to my rod, moving it back and forth to propel the line. I shoot, the line slides in the rings with a slight hiss, the fly lands delicately without noise in the crash of the tails of fish rolling over their prey on the surface. I begin to retrieve my line with long jerks of the left hand, while the other hand holds the rod firmly but assuredly, to animate the streamer. I feel my heart beating faster and faster, the adrenaline is at its maximum. Finally, the long-awaited bite occurs, the line tightens in my hands, I pull back hard, the fish sucks in what seemed to be food for him. It turns away

from me, followed by a long rush that makes the reel sing, which is very often the case when fishing for bass in shallow water.

After a fierce fight, I end up sliding the fish into the landing net. I am overjoyed, and my dog sits up to observe. He gratifies me with his joy by licking my face. I unhook the bass without too much difficulty, thanks to a barbless hook. I contemplate for a few seconds the silver colour of this majestic fish with a raised dorsal fin, armed with spikes. He is clearly angry with me. I gently release it into its element, and watch it return to its natural environment. I stroke my dog with a feeling of sheer well-being.



# Introduction

This book was written in a particular context. The lockdown due to covid did not allow us to fish, so I dedicated myself to writing this book to share my knowledge, as I have already had the opportunity on social networks. Sport-fishing is far from being an exact science, but I hope that this little unpretentious guide will allow you to progress and improve your technique.

Fly fishing for *Dicentrarchus labrax* is a booming sport. This art requires accuracy, understanding, observation, and patience.

Like many fly fishermen, I cut my teeth fishing for trout near my parents' house in Normandy.

I started experimenting with different sea and freshwater fishing methods and techniques, be it casting, spinning, surf casting, coarse fishing, as well as carp fishing, I then extrapolated these techniques for bass fly fishing.

These experiences have greatly contributed to increasing my understanding of fish behaviour and the marine environment, to

create and design streamers, and to understand fish holding spots in order to improve my chances of success.

I wanted to share with you through this literary adventure, my knowledge and observations acquired over all these years fly fishing for seabass.

What is great about saltwater fly fishing is that you never stop learning with each fishing trip, with each human encounter, with each journey...

These experiences help us to progress, whether with fishing technique or with the understanding of new elements related to this sport.

Saltwater fly fishing in France has experienced a huge rise over the past ten years, and we have seen many articles flourish in specialised magazines and on social networks.

Fly fishing for bass would certainly not have had this boom without the publication of magazine articles by these great specialists and precursors in saltwater fly fishing, such as Franck Ripault, Régis Founigault, Philippe Dolivet, or Jean Pierre Lagathu, to name a few.

Saltwater fly fishing is, in my opinion, a way of fishing with a future. Our French rivers are becoming poorer in quality and in fish. As a result, many fishermen are looking for new playgrounds. Rods, tying materials, lines and reels have evolved enormously over the past twenty years, offering us countless possibilities.

Many testimonials from fishing guides in specialised magazines reflect this development very well. Professionals receive more and more requests from all over France and Europe, fishermen sometimes travel far to come and try this new sporting technique. The posts on social networks dealing with the subject are overflowing with amateurs publishing their exploits, blogs are being created across the web at an incredible speed. I allow myself to believe all this helps the evolution of this sport.

Sharing and discovering our sport is the very foundation of what drives us, wouldn't you agree?

Searching my memory, which sometimes fails me, guiding in France would have started in the 1990s.

Much later, in the early 2000s, fishing guides noticed the enthusiasm of fishermen eager to discover the technique of fly fishing for bass.



These new followers call upon the skills of experienced guides. Brittany is renowned for having good bass fly fishing guides, and some of them have been practising for several years. In Normandy, like in the Mediterranean and Atlantic coast, there are no specialised guides in this field... yet.



*Seabass flyfishing by R. Henrion*



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## COMMON SEA BASS



## 1.1. BIOLOGY



*Illustration by Romain Dieul*

Describing the complete sea bass ichthyology in a scientific way would require an entire book on its own. Many specific articles in this field have already been published on the Internet, and not having a scientific background, it is not an easy subject to write about.

The information that helped me to write this chapter comes from several sources: *Ifremer*, and the *FAO fisheries department* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

The sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) belongs to the *Moronidae* family, order *Perciformes*. It inhabits the marine environment along the entire French coast: the French Channel, Atlantic and Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Baltic Sea.

Sea bass, also known as simply bass, gather in schools to spawn from the beginning of September to the end of March, depending on the seas or oceans in which they live.

We know of some distant cousins, which are the speckled bass (*Dicentrarchus punctatus*), the striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), and the Japanese bass (*Lateolabrax japonicus*).

The sea bass grows slowly; it takes on average about seven years to reach sexual maturity, i.e. a size of 42 cm.

It can reach a weight of 10 kg for 110 cm or more, to my knowledge. The capture of a specimen of this size is very rare, and never recorded on fly. Imagine a fish over twenty-five years old caught by a fisherman! This remains very rare, and is the dream for some of us.