

Confessions of a Bite Junky

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Confessions of a Bite Junky

There are bites. There are also sips, hits, nibbles, runs, and rolls. These are regular occurrences for any fisherman. After all, it's why we fish.

If you are fishing with bait that isn't alive, you can have nibbles and bites. Nibbles usually come from fish that have too small a mouth to get the whole bait at one time and are satisfied with tearing off small pieces. Bites occur when the fish takes a big enough grasp of the bait to give it a good tug or flutter, and if line is pulled off the reel or can be seen or felt to move, you have experienced a run. When fishing with live bait, nibbles are extremely rare and any bites you get can turn into bite-offs, resulting in either half a bait or no bait at all. There can be runs, however, that might result in getting your bait back but frequently not in very good condition.

If you are fishing with artificials that float, you can have sips, hits, runs, and rolls. A sip is when a fish moves directly under the floating artificial and sucks it into its mouth by expelling water out of its gills, and it's much more common in freshwater than in saltwater species, because of what they feed on. A hit occurs when the fish puts its mouth around all or part of the artificial and pulls it underwater; the fish might either be taking a bite at the artificial or just mouthing it to see if it's food. A run occurs when there is a hit and the fish pulls the artificial underwater and moves off with it. A roll occurs when the fish nudges the artificial to see whether or not this thing that looks like food but either has no smell or the wrong smell is really food it wants to eat.

When using an artificial that is submerged, the terms "hit" and "bite" are used virtually interchangeably, but I prefer hit because the fish might be biting with the intent to ingest or just mouthing it to see if ingestion is indicated. You usually only know when you've had a hit or bite, or one of those in combination with a run, even though you might be getting runs or rolls that you can't see or feel. This happens primarily in water having strong currents or when using fishing techniques that result in slack line. Good examples of this are when you are fishing a nymph in a mountain stream, fishing artificial salmon eggs to rainbows in Alaska, or fishing a light jig with a plastic grub at the inshore edge of a bar where you're hoping the next ocean wave will sweep your artificial like a stunned baitfish into the slough's rip.

The various reactions of fish to things fisherman place at the end of a line, as defined above, are part of the regular experience of fishing. These experiences do not necessarily result in catching fish. To catch a fish, you must first experience a hookup. If you are lucky enough or skillful enough to get the hook into the fish, you must again utilize luck or skill to get it to the net, the boat, or the beach. Then you've caught a fish, whether it goes in the creel, on the stringer, in the cooler, into the sand, or gets gently released back to its most recent environment.

After all this careful parsing of definitions, most fisherman can be caught regularly using just the word "bite" for what they are experiencing. They seem to be focused more on the immediate experience than on a logical breakdown of its description. And rightly so.

But this lack of discrimination for the use of the word "bite" can be confusing if careful attention isn't paid to its use in conjunction with the parts of speech known as articles, specifically, "a" and "the." When either of these articles are combined with the word "bite," as in "a bite" or "the bite," new vistas of fishing experience are added to the definition of the word "bite."

This combination of article and verb masquerading as a noun is most frequently found in conversation that sadly goes like this: "There was a hell of a bite for two hours yesterday. You should have been here. They were almost jumpin' on the beach." Or like this: "The bugs were rising so heavy yesterday it looked like it was snowing in reverse, and the cutthroats were making the stream look like a washing machine. I got my limit in thirty minutes, but I would have had it in five if they hadn't been so big it took a while to get 'em in."

This kind of talk is the fisherman's worst nightmare. In his heart, every fisherman knows that there is no excuse for him not being there when the bite is on. He could'a been there. Being tired from the previous day or even being *old* and tired from the previous day just doesn't cut it. Nor does having to cut the grass or even having to do the taxes. It is a simple matter of priorities.

So the only thing to do when you hear this kind of loose talk by your angling compatriots is to steel yourself for redoubled effort and determination to BE there for the next bite. You focus on one more cast, because you're certain that it will result in a hit, a hookup, and a run that will start the bite that happens while you're there.

But why this steely determination? Why this self-recrimination over poorly sorted priorities? To answer this requires going back to the simple "bite" we started with—going back to the reason we fish at all.

It has to do mostly with the psychic nature of fish and the whole process of evolution. Fish, like most other creatures that live in water instead of air can make only rudimentary sounds like grunts and clicks. Aquatic mammals can make more sophisticated sounds but not sufficient to develop a language with real syntax that anyone has been able to detect. But mammals are not our subject.

Fish have a tough time surviving in the wild where they are an integral part of a ravenous food chain. This is a fact. Charles Darwin's research led him (and others) to the conclusion that evolution was the result of each specie's struggle to survive. When environmental change or just the chance combination of male and female chromosomes brought about a change in offspring that was new to the specie and that change was beneficial to survival of that specie, more often than not, the new trait was passed on by the more likely to have survived parent.

If you're a fish, particularly those smaller than a large shark, your chances of being eaten before you can procreate are very high. Even the largest of salmon are no more than a snack for an Alaskan brown. Consequently, your need to survive would be greatly enhanced if you could converse with your fellow fish in ways that could alert the group to danger or help them find food.

As a fish, you could click, grunt, or wiggle in particular patterns to do this, but the message would be confined to the small area of your immediate surroundings. This level of communication would probably be inadequate to ensure your survival as a species.

But the fact is that a vast array of fish species have survived and continued to evolve for millions of years. They have obviously done so by developing a higher order of communication capabilities, and these capabilities are regularly demonstrated in an observable manner.

Take for instance when there is an abundance in the ocean of your favorite table-food fish, probably caused by some migratory pattern of the specie. You want to get some fresh to fry up for the evening dinner and as many more as the law will allow to go in your freezer for eating when the fishing for this specie is poor. The previous day the fish had hit little other than shrimp and here you are with water and sand swirling around your feet, line held tight against the weight of the sinker, and you can't get a bite, while the tourist family beside you fishing with K-mart gear is steadily filling its styrofoam cooler.

They are fishing with bloodworms, which clearly shows that the fish have communicated among themselves that eating shrimp was resulting in continuing losses to their school, and that it would be better to eat bloodworms today. This is a rather sophisticated message that couldn't be passed on by clicks, grunts, or wiggles.

Another good example is found in almost any of the underwater exploration specials that are popular on television. They are invariably filled with pictures of dense fish schools moving at high speeds and going through coordinated twists and turns like they were mentally linked with one another.

Many fish species, if not all, have obviously evolved the psychic ability to send mental signals to each other. But what does this have to do with why humans fish? One must remember that we evolved from the same sea creatures as the fish. This shared ancestry gives us a commonality at some level that allows us to experience the psychic energy of fish.

I have a theory of how this works. As a great disciple of Niccola Tesla, I am well aware of his discovery that very high frequency electrical current readily flows on the outside of any material, whether that material is an electrical conductor or not. The psychic energy of at least some fish species must be similarly capable.

Here is the proof of my theory. All true fisherman (that excludes tourist families using K-mart gear) know that a true bite sends a psychic shock right to the cerebral cortex. The bigger the bite, the bigger the jolt. When there's a hookup to go with it, the jolt can be significant enough to cause hook-setting responses in the arm that are far beyond normal synaptic-to-muscle speeds and intensities. When so many have direct experience, its truth is undeniable.

I must, however, be truthful about the limitations I have discovered in my theory of psychic energy transmission from fish-brain to human-brain. Careful analysis reveals that no transmission takes place when the fish bites while moving directly toward the fisherman. How could this be? Tesla's discovery relies solely on free surface electrons, which are still there, even if the fish is moving toward you.

To answer this question requires a new or augmenting theory asserting that psychic energy can travel on surface electrons only if the transmission surfaces are in a tensegrity structural arrangement. I'll pause here to give credit for defining the basic elements of tensegrity structures and then go on to find uses for such structures well beyond those previously envisaged by Buckminster Fuller.

Tensegrity structures are those that are designed to have their elements, as much as possible, dedicated to carrying either tension or compression loads. Doing this allows the use of shapes and materials that are the most efficient for the loads they must bear. More common structures are made of shapes and materials that must shift from tension to compression loading for normal use, and this can be significantly less efficient in structural mass requirements.

The fishing pole is a fine example of a tensegrity structure, with one slight difference that actually helps to make my case. The fishing pole takes primarily compression loads, as do the bones of the arm, shoulder, neck, and skull. The line takes primarily tension loads, which travel from the bait on the hook to the spool of the fishing reel. However, when the fish is traveling toward the fisherman, there is no tensile loading on the line and no psychic energy is transmitted. Only when the line is taut do we have the required tensegrity structure in play.

And now for the slight difference. Unlike the ideal tensegrity structure, a fishing pole flexes. But this very difference makes the point, because when a pole flexes, less psychic energy travels up the line and into the fisherman's brain. This is regularly experienced by fishermen significantly skilled to note it.

Of course the pole is designed to flex for two reasons. First, to keep the fish from stressing the line beyond its breaking point by the dynamic loading the fish is capable of creating. That is, it acts like a damper or shock absorber. The second reason is to allow the fisherman to make longer casts by using the flex of the pole to add to rod-tip speed just before releasing the line. So the ordinary fishing pole is a design compromise, like most things, that seeks a balance between avoiding the loss of hookups, maximizing casting distance, and transmitting psychic fish energy to the fisherman's brain.

Every good fisherman knows that using a stiffer rod delivers more psychic shock up the arm and to the brain, but to do so makes it less likely the bait can be delivered to the proper location and more likely that the line will over-stress and break during hookup. It's one of the most difficult tackle decisions a fisherman must make.

One more point that proves the tensegrity transmission theory without a doubt. The new braided fishing lines made from high-tensile micro-fibers have very little stretch. The older style of line was made of mono-filament fibers of various compositions, but all exhibiting a significant amount of elongation before reaching their elastic limits—that is, they stretched a lot before they broke. This stretch reduced the efficiency of the tensegrity nature of the line, rod, and bone pathway to the brain and commensurately reduced the flow of psychic energy. Any fisherman that has tried the new braided lines, having almost no stretch, can tell you that the feeling of immediacy with the fish during hookup is significantly higher.

Do I need say more to convince you of the psychic nature of at least some fish species or the psychic connection that is made between fish and human when fishing is taking place? I think not!

That takes us back to “a bite” or “the bite.” What are these extra dimensions I have alluded to that characterize this phenomenon? For a full answer, we will have to return to Mr. Tesla—a truly remarkable man. But first let me describe the physical and observable characteristics of a bite and, in doing so, relate a few examples from my personal experience.

Bites can be large or small. They can be as short as a few minutes or as long as a few weeks. They can involve small fish species or large fish species and in either case might occur with any size range of the particular specie. While some species seem to be more prone to participating in a bite event, this might simply be a reaction to the fact that the fishermen themselves have a higher interest in some fish species than in others.

This specialized interest might be for the ferocity exhibited by that specie when a hookup is achieved, or because it has more culinary appeal, or because it is more readily available, or for some other more mundane reason. Whatever the reason, a bite by some species seems to generate more excitement and participation by fishermen than a bite by other species.

A bite works like a fisherman magnet. Before the advent of the cell phone, participation in a bite was limited to those who were close enough to observe the event itself or some other visible sign that a bite was underway. Of course, if the bite was of sufficient duration to allow the use of land-line communications to spread knowledge of its happening, the number of participating fishermen could be counted on to rise in direct proportion to that duration.

An exception to this gathering of fishermen for the bite occurs when you are fishing in truly remote areas—the preferred location of all fishermen. The most memorable time I personally experienced a bite in a remote location was on a fishing trip with my son to Wyoming. We were fishing up a small creek that we had entered by wading up a small river to its entrance. As we worked our way up the creek in the morning, we caught large and numerous cutthroat trout, a few of which were destined for the dinner table that night. It was a great morning of fishing, and we were happily following the edge of the stream back toward the creek’s junction with the river. As we got to where we could see the creek emptying into the river, we noticed a large hatch of caddis rising from the creek, and we started to stop and catch a few more cutthroats.

However, as we were tying on the right size caddis to match the hatch as closely as possible, my son saw what was happening in the river. As the current from the creek swept out into the river, the larger body of water turned the creek flow and kept it close to the downstream bank. The caddis flies were being swept into the river as they struggled to unfold their wings and fly.

We climbed over some deadfalls cluttering up the creek mouth, got down on our bellies and crawled towards the river. When we were getting close, it became obvious that it would only be possible for one of us at a time to fish the compact roil of fish that were sipping, biting, and rolling the creek-water-borne, caddis flies. We could see that the fish were significantly bigger than the ones we had caught up the creek.

I lay in an agony of unfulfilled excitement while I watched my son inch across a sandbar left along the bank by high spring waters to get closer to the roil. Finally, lying on his back and whipping his fly-rod back and forth across his body, he got a cast into the middle of the action. The first hit was a hookup and while I had no direct connection, there was a spill-over of psychic energy, like an aura, that twisted my stomach into a knot. He caught three fat cutthroats about twenty inches long and released them without spooking the fish.

When he had wriggled his way back to me, I took my turn and managed to get two big cutthroats in the same size range. Both of these fish delivered a flash of psychic energy up my rod that made it difficult to breathe.

Whether the fish were spooked or whether the hatch was played out, we will never know. The water smoothed out and no amount of perfect casting could produce another sip, hit, or roll. The bite was over, but our nerves were dancing the whole time we were making the long wade back to the car.

As previously mentioned about the pre-cell phone era, a fisherman-rush toward a bite of visible magnitude when fishing from a boat would be limited to boats close enough to have seen the same

signs you did or the few that had marine-band radios. An example of such a rush to a bite happened to me while fishing with two of my brothers-in-law on the Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the Potomac River on the Virginia-Maryland border, known as Smith Point. The lighthouse at Smith Point was about five miles down-river of my beach house, and the three of us set off in my 21-foot swing-keel sailboat to do a little fishing for the large bluefish known to populate the area. The sailboat was not a convenient vessel for fishing, but it was all I had available at the time.

It was mid-summer, in the mid-nineties, and nearing high tide, which happened to be about mid-day. The only breeze was what we generated with the 9.9 horsepower outboard that took us the five miles to the lighthouse. The sails stayed in their sail bag. We had both cut-bait and tackle boxes full of artificials, and we stopped and tried the cut-bait first.

The humidity was so high that the flat waters of the bay were shrouded in a sun-fluoresced haze. We weren't catching anything on the cut-bait, and there was no breeze without the motor, so we decided to try trolling artificials for awhile. By sheer luck, we motored close enough to diving seagulls to know there was some sort of action not far away. I pushed the tiller over to head toward the gulls.

Ahead of us we watched more and more seagulls join the dive, and when we were close, we could see the water under them was in a froth. It was a bluefish blitz—a bite nickname given to bluefish because of the visible ferocity they exhibit when feeding on the surface. I shut the motor off as we got close enough to use our spinning gear and cast into the fray. If you looked closely, you could see that the bluefish were feeding on thread herring that had hatched out somewhere upriver and were trying to make it to the ocean without being completely consumed. Obviously, enough make it each year to continue the cycle, but it's a mystery how they do it to anyone that has seen the bloodbath we were witnessing.

It's damned hard to cast from a sailboat with the mast, boom and stays blocking every direction, but we did it. And as soon as any kind of lure hit the water, we had an immediate hookup—big time. These were fifteen pound blues, which pound for pound is as fighting a fish as there is on the planet. The psychic jolts traveling up our lines were undeniable. Our brains were cooking.

We managed to get four or five into the cooler before we were joined by two other boats that were trolling close enough to also see the diving gulls. The magnetism of the bite was in full flux.

These were real fishing boats in the twenty-five foot range and they had no obstacles to casting, but the fishermen on them were either not very smart or they had consumed way too many beers trying to combat the stifling heat. They immediately plowed right through the middle of the feeding bluefish, turned around, and came right back through— and again and again.

We ended up catching a few more before our obviously crazed visitors succeeded in killing the bite. My brothers-in-law draped themselves across the foredeck and in the cockpit against the cabin, while I supported myself on the tiller and steered for home. We were emotionally spent, but the psychic energy being released that day was so strong it clung to the rigging (a tensegrity structure, by the way) like St. Elmo's Fire.

The strongest calls of the bite I've seen were once in Alaska and as a regular occurrence on Hatteras Island. The one in Alaska is interestingly different in that the salmon involved are so regular and predictable that fisherman feel the psychic tug from thousands of miles away. It's a call so strong that it turns otherwise intelligent fishermen into idiots. I saw this while in Alaska on a non-fishing trip with my wife. We were drifting down one of the thousands of small rivers near the sea on a sight-seeing raft trip. We came around a sweeping bend and there they were—a hundred of them, shoulder to shoulder, grown men thrashing the water with fly rods sporting giant, multi-colored flies that looked like nothing produced by nature.

The float guide called it combat fishing, and he was right on target. They had been whipped into a complete frenzy by the psychic power of the king salmon. Their arms moved like automatons, their eyes were glazed, and their teeth were clenched so tightly you could see the jaw

muscles jutting out along the sides of their faces. They were enraptured, even though we saw not a single hookup as we floated slowly past them.

On Hatteras Island, one of many making up the Outer Banks of North Carolina, fall is the season of the bites for surf fishermen. While spring and summer can produce a bite by lesser species or smaller members of the more desirable species, fall brings large blues, stripers, and speckled seatrout. For me, the blues are fun but second class on the table. The stripers or rockfish, as they're called locally, can be very big for surf-caught fish but also come up short as table fare. It's the speckled seatrout or just "speck" that holds the greatest attraction for me.

Specks seem to trigger all the synapses of fishermen's brains like no other fish I have encountered. These are the synapses that evolution built into us humans for survival as hunter-gatherers—survival by the aggression of the hunter and the determination of the gatherer. This is a fish that requires more than ordinary skill to catch but rewards the hunter with a flesh that is white, flaky, and flavorful. It is a fish that requires the determination of a genetically designed gatherer in order to show up day-after-day in hopes of a bite.

A bite engendered by a school of specks can be just as sudden and just as ferocious as a bluefish blitz but without the intense surface roiling. Because there is usually no visible surface activity, you can't know if there is likely to be a bite of specks until one is hooked up and landed. This creates a psychic anticipation that builds with every unsuccessful cast, every lure change, and every slap of the breaker you ventured too close to for that little extra distance.

That doesn't mean you can't catch specks with surface lures. On the contrary, they hit ferociously on the surface when the conditions are conducive to seeing the lure on calm ocean days or in the Pamlico Sound on the other side of Hatteras Island. That's a treat I don't talk about too much, because I want to keep it to myself.

When you are standing in the surf on those days that have the right conditions of wind direction and speed, water quality, surf size and direction, tide, and the growing light of morning or the fading light of evening, there is no doubt in your mind that today is the day of the bite. It's only a question of which cast you make that will get that first big speck onto the beach.

Then it happens, one of the guys on the beach gives that wide-eyed jerk of the arm that signals a hit. The rod tip curves over as the hit turns into a run, then flutters a few times to show a hookup, and the other six pairs of eyes fishing the same slough are glued to the reeling fisherman, waiting for whatever is going to come up on the beach.

But nobody stops fishing when the hit occurs. If anything, fishing intensity goes up, as those that weren't maximizing time-on-target with their baits make sure they are in the play. They just aren't looking at the spot where their line enters the water, which is the normal focal point for speck fishermen.

If it's an experienced fisherman that has the fish on, you also watch for a smile. A speck is usually identifiable by the way it feels on the line and the amount and quality of the psychic energy that comes up the line and into the fisherman's brain. When this energy surge contacts the capacitor-like build-up of anticipation in the fisherman's brain, it is almost impossible to suppress a smile.

The smile or a visible trout in the wash confirms only that one speck was in the area. But then another rod arm jerks, with its tip flexing into a run. Then another. Then that energy surge comes up your own line and slams you. You jerk and you reel, but not too hard or too fast, for the speck takes finesse to get reliably to the beach. The soft mouth of the speckled seatrout gives it the lowest percentage of hookup-to-cooler of any species with which I'm familiar. This is a prey that tests the skills of any hunter.

The bite is on, but some fishermen have backed up the beach slope and have their cell phones jammed in their ears. They're calling their fishing buddy, who was working today—up until the time of the phone call, that is. Natives on the island have no problem with priorities when the bite is on.

But you stay focussed on getting the fish you have on the line into the beach, burying it in the sand to keep it out of reach of the seagulls, and getting your bait back in the water. You want as many as possible in the sand before the invasion begins.

There is a torrent of energy going up your line to your brain now with each fish you catch—an intensity that seems impossible for a single fish, particularly one that must be caught on light, flexible rods that are not efficient in the conduction of psychic, fish energy because of a speck's soft mouth—an intensity that spasms your stomach, flushes adrenaline into your bloodstream, and pumps enough endorphins out to lift your feet right off the sand—or so it feels. How could this be?

Ah! We finally get back to Mr. Tesla for the answer to the fisherman-experienced power of the bite. The answer is simple in the light of Mr. Tesla's discovery of the heterodyning circuit, the same circuit that made the improvements to the radio, which he also invented, a practical reality. A heterodyning circuit takes electrical energy and feeds it in a loop until it is cycling fast enough and has power enough to break through a resistor gate as a powerful and higher than normal frequency current.

It is my theory that this same heterodyning occurs within the school of fish as the bite is on. The energy being released with every bite, whether that bite involves one of the baitfish the specks are feeding on or one of the artificials the fishermen have put in their path, creates a psychic field-effect that eventually engulfs the fish school. The pulsing of this psychic energy field with each bite causes a heterodyning of the individual energy of a single fish, building energy levels well beyond those normally achieved. When such a highly charged fish bites a fisherman's bait, the psychic impact is stunning.

If you're lucky, the bite goes on, even after the beach has filled up with fishermen, and you have reached your ten-fish limit for the day. You look for people you can give some to, or you just start releasing those you catch. What you don't do, what you can't do, is stop fishing as fast and as furiously as you and your tackle can function.

When you or your tackle fail from exhaustion or wear, you still can't leave because there are small but detectable eddies of psychic power flowing like an aura up the beach, and you can't not bathe in them while they're available. If you're lucky enough to have to make the gut-wrenching decision to leave for sustenance or to avoid filling your waders because you have ignored your body until well after dark and it looks like you'll have to be back before dawn the next morning, you do it with the greatest reluctance that you are capable of experiencing.

You know you'll not really sleep and that there is no reason to set the alarm, but you do it for insurance. They might be there tomorrow morning before dawn. And if not at dawn, maybe when the tide is right, or when the wind comes around, or when you try that new lure, or . . . whenever it might happen. No matter when, you'll be there.

You'll be there because you live for that next psychic jolt coming up the line—even when you realize it's not only the fish that's hooked.