

VBAC Tips on Handling Dangerous Fish



Catching dangerous fish can be intentional, but any angler could find an unwelcome species at the end of their line. Dangerous fish may be large in size, have sharp teeth, or wield venomous protrusions. Learning dangerous types of fish helps anglers understand how to safely handle them for a harmless release for angler and fish alike. This article covers handling tips for catching dangerous fish and identifies a few common species to look out for.

Sharks. Most sharks are caught only if an angler is intentionally fishing for them and is experienced with handling them. If you happen to hook up to one, enjoy the fight and catch a glimpse, but don't try to grab them or put your hands near their mouth. Dogfish sharks, however, do not have such teeth.

Stingrays. The stingray's whip-like tail spine is rigid, and in some species, can pierce bone. The venom, contained in the mucus-like coating over the barb, is introduced into the body through the wound (a process called envenomation).



Catfish. Certain freshwater and saltwater catfish have venom glands and sharp spines on their dorsal and pectoral fins that can puncture your skin and cause pain and infection.

Alligator Gar. Their appearance is that of half fish, half alligator, characterized by their elongated mouth and rows of sharp teeth. The Alligator Gar can grow to more than 200 pounds and are known to spit hooks due to their tough mouth.

Muskies and Pike. These similar fish are known for putting up a fight. Muskellunge and Pikes have sharp teeth and sharp gill plates that should be avoided. They are called freshwater Barracudas!

Barracuda. Lively and powerful, Barracudas have a mouthful of sharp teeth and are known to jump out of the water. These fish are aggressive predators so handle with caution. Bluefish are also very "toothy!"

Lionfish. An invasive species with numerous long, venomous spines, lionfish are fairly docile, but should not be handled with bare hands.

Spiny Puffers. Not to be confused with the smooth puffer, this species is covered with hard spines and is also called a Porcupine Fish. Handle with care as I have caught several in NC's Outer banks recently!

Safety and handling Tips:

- Never put your hands near the mouth of a fish with sharp teeth or try to remove the hook with your hands.
- Don't attempt to pull large fish into a boat without a professional. They can often flail wildly on the deck and injure bystanders – especially Cobia and Sharks!
- Wear gloves and long sleeves when handling fish with sharp spines or teeth.
- Remove hooks with a de-hooking tool or long-handled pliers. When in doubt, break the line.
- Keep a first aid kit on board for minor cuts.

Intentionally or not, all anglers will encounter dangerous fish sooner or later. Rather than fearing or injuring a fish unnecessarily, arm yourself with knowledge on the safe handling of species in the waters you are fishing to assure a safe and enjoyable angling experience for you and the fish!

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