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SparWolf crab (underside view) ready to be eaten by a permit.



didn't call the bite. Less than an hour later, next good shot at one, Ray connected and eventually landed a very nice permit.

Having moved location as the tide changed, I found another feeding permit and Ray cast the fly on top of it. It spooked and then circled around and scoffed his crab. I was warning Ray to keep a good bend in the rod, but then the fish lunged and he snapped it off on 20-pound tippet.

However, in those few hours, we had made serious inroads into catching our local permit. I was really nice to Ray and scored a prototype Grand Slam Crab to be our tying model, plus he even gave me the pages from the magazine where he'd first read about it. But, you know how it is — we always want to improve on something that already works. I worked hard on studying how the local shallow-water crabs look and behave and adapted my wonky crab ties to suit. My clients were catching permit.

The next time I went mud crabbing, I strapped my fly rod to the kayak alongside the icebox. I scooped my limit of five mud crabs in no time at all, anchored the kayak and went on a permit hunt. It wasn't long before I spotted a nice fish in very skinny water, made the cast; the permit tilted and I was on. I had beer to celebrate yet no one to take the photo — but I was very happy.

# The SparWolf Crab

Brett Wolf shares a genuine permit catcher.

When we first uncovered bonefish on the flats inside Ningaloo Reef, we were so excited that we ignored the many permit (and big GTs) we were seeing while targeting the bones. We dismissed the permit as too hard to catch, and a waste of opportunity when there were big bonefish potentially available. We would offer the permit a fleeting and dismissive cast in favour of keeping an eye out for a double figure bonefish.

Eventually we got lucky when one of our customers caught a nice permit on a bonefish fly. It was from that day on that we started to think outside of the

bonefish square and into the permit circle, and we started to catch them.

We moved our efforts into Exmouth Gulf, where there is a prolific population of *Trachinotus blochii* (permit) and even a few *T. anak* (another permit) and no big bones to distract us from the task at hand, just metre plus queenfish and more GTs!

It all got really serious on a mud-crabbing mission with my mate Ben Knight. Having scooped our full quota of mud crabs from the shallows on the low tide, we were heading back to my 4WD while trying to wrestle a refreshing beer from amongst the angry mud crabs in the icebox on

my kayak. Permit were darting everywhere in front of us, and no fly rods — just mud crabs and beer!

## GRAND SLAM CRAB

A few days later, Ray Reed arrived from the UK to fish with me for a week. Ray had found an article in an American magazine, about tying the Grand Slam Crab. He showed his version of the crab to me — it looked a bit wonky.

Knowing where the permit were, I suggested he give his wonky fly a go. First permit he showed it to went nuts, and probably ate it, but I was a novice permit guide back then so

IF WE FOUND A BETTER PERMIT FLY,  
IT WOULDN'T REALLY BE PERMIT FISHING.



Bertrand putting some heat on a Ningaloo permit.

## HAVING THE RIGHT FLY IS A MASSIVE POSITIVE IN CRACKING THE PERMIT PUZZLE.



The SparWolf crab is a deadly fly, but it still requires a good angler to make the shot and land the fish.

## The SparWolf Crab... continued

### THE CHARDONNAY CRAB

In this day of social media, nothing is a secret and the word was spreading about our permit catching success. I had one French client catch 13 permit in one week, including both *blochii* and *anak*, and we didn't fish for permit every day. I had two clients each book a week just to catch a permit, ignoring all other species, and they both caught three permit on the first morning of their trips.

My proudest moment was when Peter Morse and Fish Philliskirk joined me to catch their first *T. blochii*. I was a young student at Uni when Morsie had his *WildFish* series on TV. I didn't

miss a show (no SBS On Demand back then), including the one where Fish caught that permit (*T. anak*) on film. But here I was, a former trout guide taking my heroes fishing for permit and trying to tell them how to do it.

In those days we called the SparWolf Crab the Chardonnay Crab as it took me about half a bottle of Chardonnay in the evening to complete the crab. Back then we didn't have Scotty Sparnon onboard. Anyway, I tied up a couple of Chardonnay fuelled permit crabs for my saltwater fly fishing heroes.

Arriving at the flats the next morning, everything was perfect: tide, wind, best anglers, novice permit guide...

but no permit. Two hours drifting and scanning with the finest polarised sunnies available... nothing! Finally we caught a glimpse of a permit and then another came within range. Morsie made a great cast; the permit was hungry and accelerated towards his crab, when for some weird reason Fish dropped his fly about five metres away and to one side of Morsie's fly. The permit deviated from the perfect cast and scoffed Fish's Chardonnay Crab! I told him to hit it, but he was already on the same wavelength.

Shortly after we'd landed Fish's permit and photographed it, Morsie hooked up another very nice one, but this fell off close to the boat. The mood in the boat suddenly changed. Fish had landed his first *blochii*, but Morsie had lost his first at the boat!

We moved with the tide and it wasn't long before we found a permit heading across and away from us on the flat. We pursued it for about 150 metres, finning and tailing in very shallow water, before it finally turned, Morsie made a great cast and the permit pounced on the Chardonnay Crab.

Big permit take a long and nervous time to land, especially if it is your first of a sought-after species. By the time Morsie had landed it, the depth of water had increased significantly on the flat. Morsie pointed out some shallower water nearby, where we could photograph his fish. I fired up the



Double trouble: Philliskirk and Morse show off a couple of nice Exmouth permit.

Yamaha and cruised slowly towards the shallow area, keeping his permit in good health in my very large landing net alongside the boat. On the way, Fish and I spotted another one. I swung the boat while Fish cast the Chardy Crab in front of the permit; it tilted, he set the hook, and a while later we had a double permit photograph.

### THE SPARWOLF CRAB

Soon after, Scotty Sparnon from Saltwater Fly Workshop contacted me about tying some crabs for my clients. I sent Scotty a few prototype Chardy Crabs that had been chewed by permit. He improved them and sent me a bunch back. We released the SparWolf to the general fly-fishing public and Scotty was flat-out trying to keep up with demand.

They are now responsible for catching many permit in Exmouth, Weipa and around the world, as well as accounting for quite a few other crab-munching species. We have had black spotted tuskfish charge them from two metres away and scoff them.

Having the right fly is a massive positive in cracking the permit puzzle. However, the rest of the equation comes down to knowing where the permit hang out at various stages of

the tide; having good eyes for spotting them (at least a full cast and a half away); making the cast when you're all nervous about casting at permit; letting the crab sink to the bottom and making it look like a crab that is worried about being eaten by a permit; and judging when the permit has eaten your fly.

If the cast lands in the zone and a permit slides over to the fly and looks busy, set the hook! If you don't, it will suddenly spook — that is the permit spitting out your fly in disgust.

I have lost count of the number of occasions I've told my clients to set the hook, but they haven't because they didn't feel the bite. The permit spooks and swims off and the Sparwolf Crab comes in, crushed!

There may be better permit flies around, but the SparWolf has been a very serious permit catcher for us. I now have so much faith in this fly that we've stopped modifying it. If we found a better permit fly, it wouldn't really be permit fishing.

Although... we have come across some huge permit digging holes for clams. Now and then they grab a crab, but they're focused on a better meal and are very tough to catch. Any ideas Scotty? **FI**

An earlier Chardonnay fuelled version of the crab in action.



### SPARWOLF CRAB FLY

**HOOK:** Gamakatsu SL12 1/0

**THREAD:** Danville's Flat Waxed Nylon 210 Denier colour yellow

**KEEL:** 40 lb mono; 2.8 mm brass beads

**DUMBBELL EYES:** Large lead

**CLAWS:** Yellow barred grizzly hackles

**KRYSTAL FLASH:** Pearl or Chartreuse

**BODY:** SWFW Tan Synthetic fibres or EP fibres

**EYES:** SWFW Epoxy mono eyes or EP mono eyes

**LEGS:** Black n Yellow Sili legs

**COMMENTS:** What makes the SparWolf like no other is the lifelike 3D Crab shell and the fight stance mode due to the keel. The SparWolf beaded keel has been balanced with the dumbbell eye, which makes it sit upright in defence mode.



The SparWolf crab, tied by Scott Sparnon.