

Lose Your Net—Save Your Life

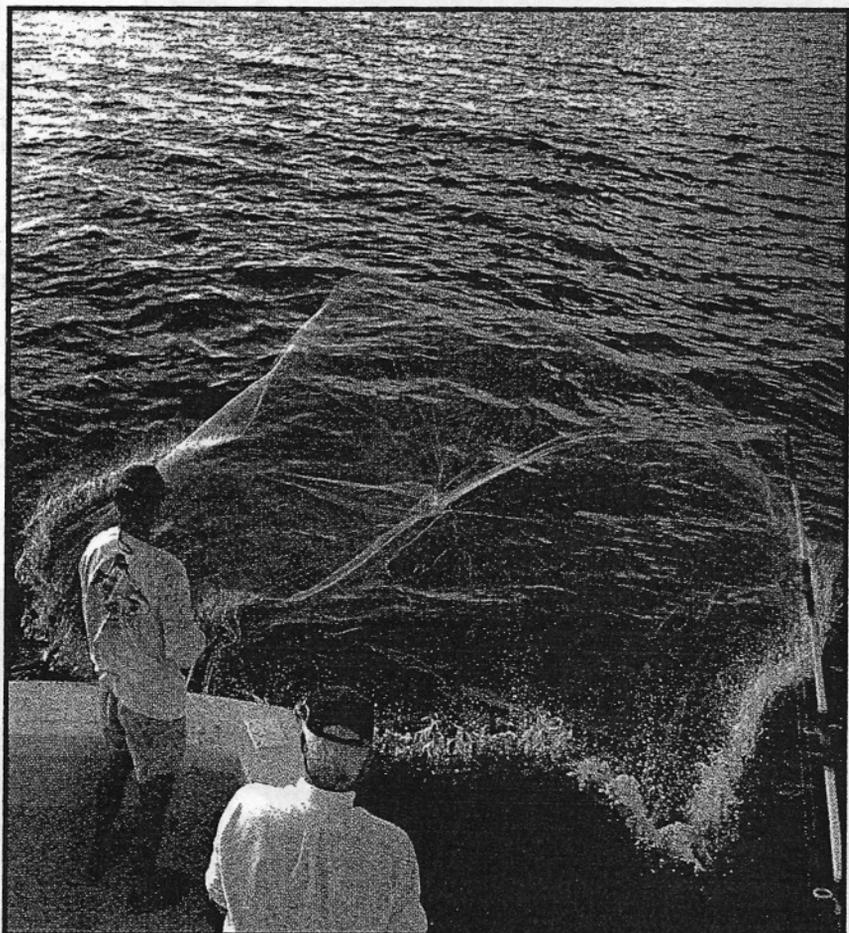
Rescue yourself from a castnet snarl.

By ARIEL CABRERA

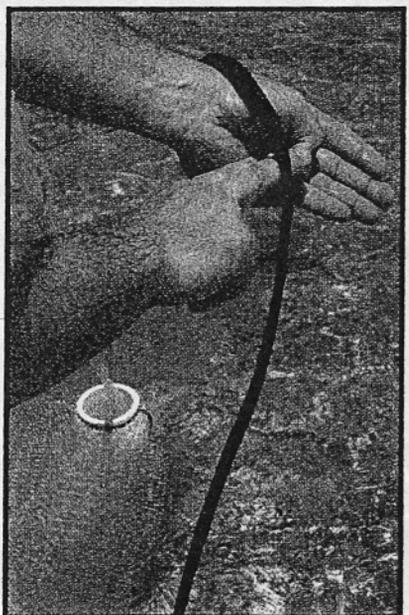
When throwing a castnet there are always strings attached, so to speak, and this can have very serious implications for the angler whose wrist is secured at the end of the line. Throw a castnet often enough and you'll find you don't always end up with bait in the net. You could catch something much larger. What if the net engulfs a rock, branch, piling or a shark or a jumbo ray and sends you for an unexpected swim?

Falling into deep water or swift current entangled with the weighted net will put the castnetter's life in peril. In an emergency, could you free yourself from a tangle to save your life?

Most castnets have a loop in the hand line intended to fit the wrist of the thrower. Some anglers hitch the loop around their wrist, such that it tightens like a noose when pressure is applied. It's a secure way to keep from losing your expensive net, but if it tightens up suddenly, you'll need a free hand—and possibly the blade of a serrated knife—to loosen the knot. If you're a "hitcher," be sure to pack that knife in a quick-access sheath on your hip. Better yet, with some special ef-



It can be risky looping that castnet line around your wrist: If the net becomes snagged, and the boat is moving, you may need to free yourself, pronto. At right, slide two fingers beneath the loop, and cup your hand to squeeze out.



Pack a serrated knife in a quick-access sheath.

fort and preparation, you can skip the hitch altogether, and still reclaim your net almost every time.

First, if your net is caught on the bottom, but you're not entangled in the line, there are a few things you can do to salvage it. Grab the circular ring, or horn, and lift. This releases the braille lines, opening the mesh and freeing

whatever is caught in the net. Additional pulling of the net may help. If the net is still jammed in the underwater jungle, try idling or walking around the entangled part. Leaving a net underwater will cause harm to fish and wildlife, therefore it is important to recover it. If you have to forcefully extract your net from a snag, don't fret: Most of the

time, the damage is easily repaired. As a last resort, cut the net as close as possible to the snag.

Things are quite different if the net has a snag on one end and your trapped arm on the other. You must act quickly

to save yourself, but a simple maneuver usually does the job. Insert the index and middle fingers from your free hand between the rope and the wrist loop of your cinched hand. Now, fold your hand to make it small enough to slip

through the loop releasing yourself. Presto, you're free. If the loop is not cinched down tight, this works every time.

Choosing a net with a built-in safety wrist cuff is a good idea. There are several manufacturers that make these, including cushy neoprene models. The wrist loop on Calusa nets leaves enough open space for one to remove their hand; it has a "stop" built into it. Try before you buy. You might even custom build your own safety cuff, using marine Velcro, elastic cord, surgical tubing or speargun bands. With a Velcro strap, you simply wrap the Velcro around the loop of the net and snugly around the wrist of your retrieving hand. Make sure to leave a tag end of Velcro for easy opening with the free hand. With some stitching the Velcro can be permanently attached to the loop, if desired. The loop no longer goes around your hand, and a quick pull on the Velcro frees you in an emergency. The same principle applies to bungee or elastic cords; with bungee material, attach by using stainless hog rings and cover with a piece of heat shrink tubing. If the net snags, the material stretches enough to let you pull free. ➤



A Velcro safety cuff keeps your net secure but allows you to easily get free in an emergency.

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