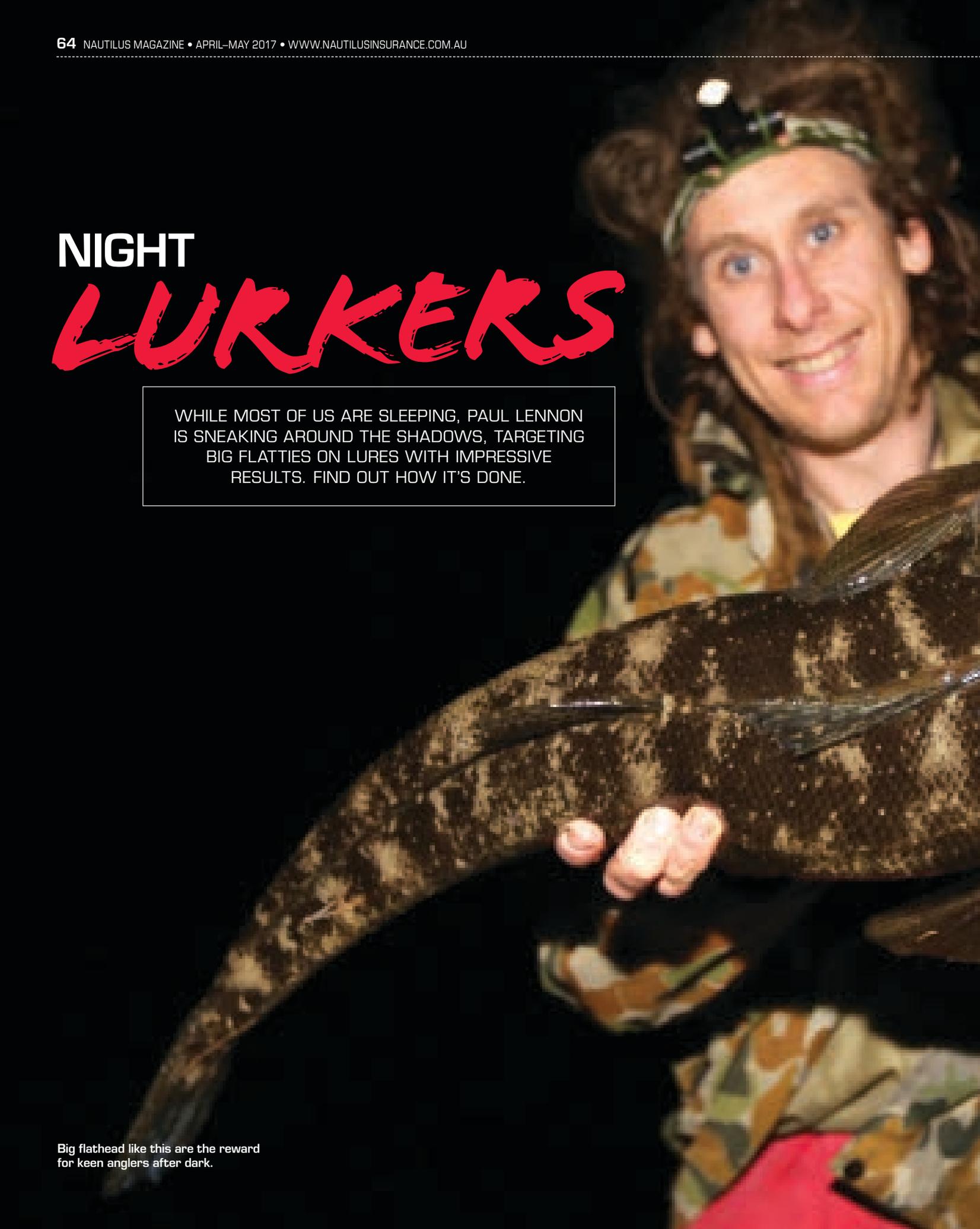


NIGHT LURKERS

WHILE MOST OF US ARE SLEEPING, PAUL LENNON IS SNEAKING AROUND THE SHADOWS, TARGETING BIG FLATTIES ON LURES WITH IMPRESSIVE RESULTS. FIND OUT HOW IT'S DONE.

Big flathead like this are the reward for keen anglers after dark.



FISHING TECHNIQUE: FLATHEAD AT NIGHT



The effectiveness of plastic and hard bodied lures on estuarine species has been proven without a doubt over the past decade. The idea of them simply being a fad has pretty much vanished. Now, more than ever, anglers young and old have come to the realisation that lures when used correctly often significantly out fish a bait.

While some anglers still argue this, there's one species where there should be no debate and that's the humble dusky flathead.

Unlike most other fish that are constantly on the move looking for food, flathead prefer to remain motionless on the bottom in ambush mode, waiting for tucker to come to them.

This means if you simply throw out a bait and leave it, the chances of you catching that fish are pretty slim.

Dusky flathead also love the hunt. They get excited when something moves past them and this is why they usually won't react to a motionless bait sitting on the bottom.

The secret to catching flathead is covering ground and while slow rolling a ganged pilchard or white bait across the bottom is an option for bait fishos, it's nowhere near as effective as casting the right lure. With a lure you can fish a much larger area in a shorter amount of time. This equates to more ground covered and a lot more flathead.

While you're probably starting to think this is going to be another run of the mill, done to death "flathead on soft plastics" article, this story will focus on something a little different by way of how to target them with plastics and hard bodies during the night.

When I tell people I target dusky flathead with similar success during the night as I have in the day, they often don't believe me.

Flathead have great eyesight and the ability to feel and judge the presence of prey through vibrations in the water. A good example of this is how they can be caught way up in the back of river systems where water visibility is very

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"I'M A BIG

BELIEVER IN USING LARGER LURES FOR FLATHEAD AND RARELY THROW ANYTHING LESS THAN 120MM "

poor. With that in mind it becomes much easier to fathom these fish smacking a lure at night in clear, shallow water, especially with the aid of natural and artificial light.

WHERE AND WHEN

Many areas where I target night time flatties are the same places I chase them during the day. A lot of other spots, however, will only fire once the sun goes down. This is because night brings with it a whole new range of factors that change the environment and attract flatties to areas where they wouldn't have been drawn to during the day.

There are a few things that make the ideal environment for luring night time flathead and one of the most important is to be fishing in relatively clear, shallow water less than a couple of metres deep. This will usually mean focusing your efforts towards the entrances of systems where you have clear oceanic water pushing into the estuary.

The other crucial factor you need is a small amount of light over the water.

This will come in two ways – either by the moon or artificial light sources. Each will need to be fished in a different manner for success.

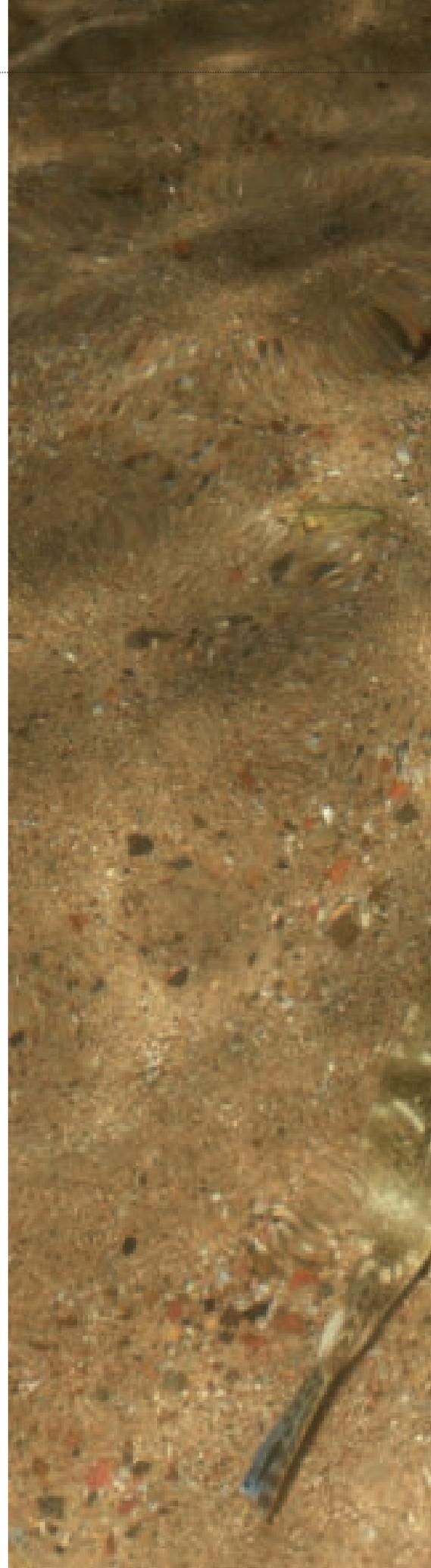
Around the full moon you'll find there's enough light for flathead to feed in the shallows. This is very similar to how they hunt during daylight hours.

This means you're looking for typical shallow water flatty habitat around the edges of two contrasting bottoms. For example, where sand meets rock or weed can be just as productive at night, provided there's plenty of moonlight.

I find the window for success around this time to be three days before through to three days after the full moon. The longer outside of those days you are, the increasingly tougher results become.

After this the approach to targeting flathead at night needs to change. You now want to switch your focus from those usual flathead locations to areas with man-made light sources. This can be anything from reflections of street lights over a large stretch of shoreline to a single isolated light hanging over a boat ramp or entrance to a jetty.

These illuminated zones draw schools of baitfish close to the shoreline and also offer flathead improved night time vision for hunting. They fish best on those really dark nights



BELOW: Paul with a slab of a flattie ready for release.

LEFT: Masters of disguise, the humble flattie lays low waiting for prey to pass by.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Artificial light attracts flatties, although it requires a different approach to natural light.



around the new moon and because they're concentrated in a small area you can often rack up big numbers of duskies from the one spot. However, this doesn't always mean every light is an instant night time honey hole for flathead. There's still a few key factors you need for the lit up spot to have potential.

Very bright, unbroken light that blasts across a featureless sand bottom will not produce because the flathead need somewhere to hide. A good starting point is to focus your efforts around the fringes of where the light fades to darkness. This is where the flathead will be lurking, right on the perimeters of the light, smacking any baitfish that venture close to the edge. Another point to note while fishing these areas are shadows cast out over the water by objects in front of the light. Bottom that is featureless and unproductive through the day can often morph into a flattie hotspot just by a simple tree or telegraph pole shadow thrown over the water which creates an ambush point. The ultimate environment for a night time flathead is to have all of the above and then have a bit of patchy rock thrown in, especially when it comes to catching fish over 80cm.

FISHING TECHNIQUE: FLATHEAD AT NIGHT

Another very productive night time flathead haunt is the boat ramp. These are almost always lit up to some extent and where the concrete ramp meets the sand creates the perfect contrasting bottom for a flathead to lay in wait.

While certain areas will produce on the low tide, I find the high to be the best as it brings with it the clearest water and pushes bait fish right up in the shallows. It also offers more reach for the shadows to extend as the shoreline becomes closer to the light source.

LURES

I'm a big believer in using larger lures for flathead and rarely throw anything less than 120mm. These fish have big mouths for a reason and whilst at times they will gorge themselves on smaller baitfish, their preferred

diet is larger prey like poddy mullet, juvenile whiting, silver biddies and blackfish. In my opinion, even smaller flathead from 35-50cm prefer a larger type lure as larger prey means less effort for more reward.

This theory is even more important at night. Bigger lures send out more vibration through the water, along with being an easier target for flathead to see in the dim light.

Lure colour plays a big role with natural patterns that are usually my go to in clear shallow water being replaced for something that will stand out. Around the full moon I prefer to use big paddle-tailed soft plastics or Sebile magic swimmers in darker colours like blacks, purples and dark greens. The reason for this is a flathead's eyes are on top of their head so they are always looking up and a dark colour



against the moonlit sky will silhouette and be easiest to see. I've always had good success around the full moon with chrome and gold hard bodies, usually the Bomber 14s which dive to around the metre mark. These are reflective enough to give a slight flash off against the moonlight to capture a flathead's attention, and I think the rattle also helps.

On the dark moons I have most success with white coloured lures with my favourite of all being the Sebile Magic Swimmer 110 in Ghostessence colour. This particular colour has a small lumo green line running along the centre of the plastic, which I think also aids it being seen on those dark nights. Interestingly, I've never done any good when I've tried using full coloured lumo lures. It seems they just like that subtleness.

OUTFITS

Nothing really changes here with typical flathead outfits for me being a pokey 3-5kg graphite rod around 7 foot matched with a 2500 reel. I prefer something a little stiffer than some people's idea of a flathead stick as I think it allows you to better work larger plastics and hard bodies as well as giving better hook setting power. Larger flathead have quite a hard mouth especially on top and sinking those hooks in properly on the initial hook-up is very important as they will easily rattle hooks out with a few head shakes if it's not done right. This is also why I like to have a fairly tight drag when fishing for flathead to really drive those hooks home. Doing this I find I rarely drop a fish once connected.

While you can use 4 and 6lb braid for flathead, I prefer to go a bit heavier. I fish 8lb, mainly because it will pop my 14lb flurocarbon leader before my leader knot.

This means if I snag up I just need to retie another lure on rather than going through my tackle bag, finding my leader, tying it to my mainline and tying another lure on.

While most of the time you will get away with lighter I like to use 14lb flurocarbon leader. By going any lighter you risk being rasped off by a big fish if he's taken the lure deep.

In closing it should be noted that a lot of my biggest fish I've caught have come from fishing lures at night. So if you're lucky enough to land a big girl (80cm plus) be sure to handle it with care, get a quick photo and send her back for someone else to enjoy.



MAIN: Gear doesn't need to be complicated. Keep it simple for hassle-free night fishing.

INSET: Big mouths mean big lures.

LEFT: A pair of solid fish taken after dark. Night fishing is a good way of catching big fish in otherwise crowded spots.