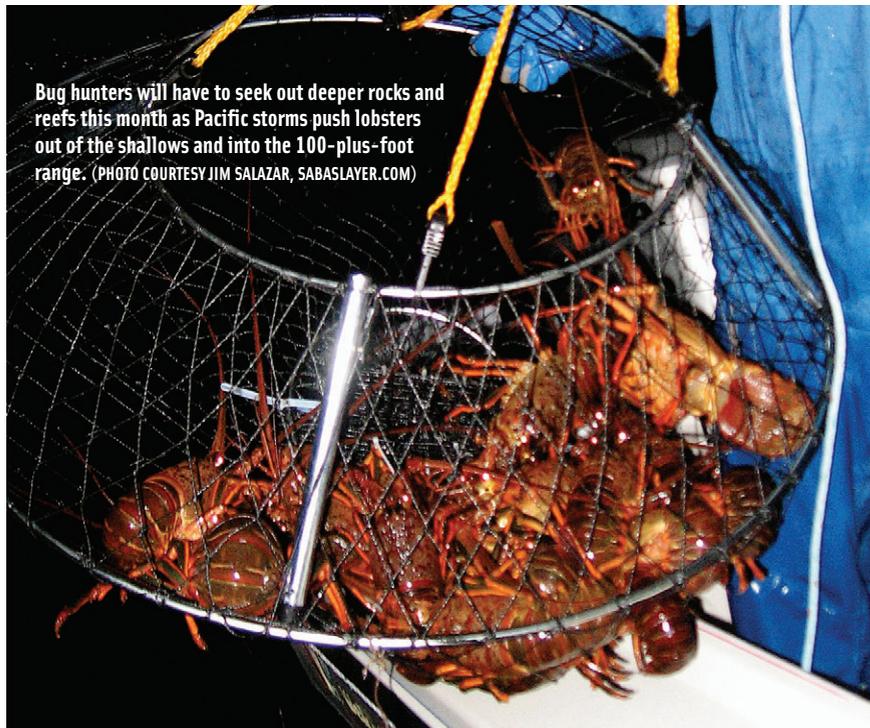


# THE WINTER CRAWL

## DEEPER REEFS KEY DECEMBER SPINY LOBSTER FISHERY



Bug hunters will have to seek out deeper rocks and reefs this month as Pacific storms push lobsters out of the shallows and into the 100-plus-foot range. (PHOTO COURTESY JIM SALAZAR, SABASLAYER.COM)

**SAN PEDRO**—If you're a veteran lobsterman, you probably grind your teeth a little harder in October and early November than you used to — a squadron of hoop-netters in your favorite areas will do that to you.

You can stop grinding now and start shopping for a line hauler. The early-season pressure crush is gone now as weather chases most newbies off the lobster grounds, and pushes lobsters out of the shallows and onto deeper offshore structure.

"All bets are off as far as shallow lobstering when the first real storms come in," says Jason Morton of Promar ([www.promarnets.com](http://www.promarnets.com)). "They can

sense they can get beached in the bigger waves, so they'll move out and really load up on the deeper reefs. Early in the season, you might not get anything in these spots, but as soon as the first storms come, you'll start to see them in the 50-, 100-, 150-foot tier."

**Digging deeper:** Promar pro-staffer Jim Salazar ([www.sabaslayer.com](http://www.sabaslayer.com)) — author of "Hoopin' It Up, A Guide to Lobster and Crab Hoop Netting" — had already heard reports of Catalina netters finding bugs as deep as 120 feet by mid November. That trend will continue through December and January as lobsters hunker down on structure

points as deep as 200 feet.

Finding those structure points — which can include basically anything that provides cover — will be the key to filling a seven-bug limit.

"You'll find 'em in rocks, around wrecks, in eelgrass fields ... basically anything that can hide and protect them," Salazar advises. "Most people have a habit of just netting the same few places they're familiar with, but there are SO many places to find bugs from about Ventura south. There are some really good books out that show you the rockpiles and reefs — those same places where people are fishing for rockfish are going to have lobsters."

Salazar advises netters to find structure spots in varying depths, and to set your nets in a fairly wide depth range.

"You're hedging your bets by setting at more than one depth," he says. "One guy might get lucky deep, the other guys might get lucky a little more on the inside. You just want to give yourself a chance to find them in a wider range of places."

**Bait heavy:** Salazar compares winter lobstering to shark-fishing.

"You want to chum them in," he says. "They have a smaller set of antennae that's keyed into smell. The big ones are their feelers, but they have hundreds of smell receptors in their smaller antennae for finding food. You really want an oily bait — the oilier they are, the more they're going to chum."

**Winter gear:** Salazar has two pieces of advice about gear for the winter deep-water drill: an Ace Line Hauler is a necessity, and the newer rigid-style eclipse nets are far easier to manipulate than the old-school nets when you're working in 150 feet of water.

"The rigid nets are just way more effective than the old style — probably 50 percent more," Salazar says. "They're much more forgiving in that you don't have to worry as much about being straight vertical when you're pulling them." —**JS**