

Bait — Narya’aq

IQSAKA NARYA’ALIYAQA. – I’M PUTTING BAIT ON MY HOOK.



Photo: Historic halibut hook from Old Harbor.
Purchased with support of the Old Harbor Native
Corporation.

We often think of bait as something fishermen use on hooks to catch fish or in pots to lure crab, but Alutiiq hunters once used bait to capture birds. In Prince William Sound, hunters placed sinew nooses on the surface of the water, filled the centers with tempting pieces of crushed clam, and then made gull noises to attract diving birds. A quick tug on the noose secured the line around the unsuspecting bird.

A gorge was another simple and effective bird-hunting device. A hunter sharpened a sliver of bone or wood on two ends, then attached a length of sinew near the middle, and baited the sliver with something tasty. Then he placed the baited gorge in an open spot and hid behind a rock, holding the end of the line. When a bird swallowed the bait, the gorge became stuck in its throat, and the hunter had his prey on a string.

Alutiiq people also hunted birds with snares, staking loops of leather or baleen in spots where birds congregated. The loops would catch the head, foot, or wing of a bird, tightening as the animal struggled. People even caught eagles with snares, using salmon heads as bait.