

TACTICS | HOW A ROCK-HARD SUMMER SESSION CHANGED MY WYE

AND SEVERN FISHING FOREVER...

PELLETS THE KEY TO BIG CHUB

The simple bait trick for big river catches...and there's not a maggot in sight!

DAVE HARRELL
UK'S NO1 RIVER ANGLER

If anyone had said to me a few years ago that I'd be going floatfishing for chub and barbel without any casters, hemp or maggots in my bait bag I would have laughed them out of town.

These are the three baits that have brought me numerous big weights and match wins over the decades, especially where chub have been concerned, so for me to not take any with me means I must have developed a mass of confidence in something new. That's what has happened.

Before I talk about the baits in question, let me take you back exactly 12 months to a

day when I did a feature for Angling Times' sister publication, Improve Your Coarse Fishing. I didn't realise it at the time but that day would change forever my approach to certain swims on rivers like the Wye and Severn.

The day in question saw the river very low and clear and I was joined on the bank by Editor Kev Green. On the phone the previous day I had assured him we would catch loads of chub on a combination of stick and Avon floats and probably have a netful by lunchtime. How wrong I was!

The river had been fishing well for chub from the opening of the season, but there had been a lot of colour in the water then, which was now missing. I was undeterred though - 'This is the Wye and I always catch big bags of chub from the Wye, looseseeding casters, hemp and maggots with bunches of maggots on the hook, whatever state the river is in,' I told Kev confidently. Can you believe that it took me about

FOUR hours to catch the first and only chub of the day?

The reason I struggled to catch anything that would

put a proper bend in my rod that day was because there were so many tiny dace and bleak in the swim. They were gobbling up every single maggot or caster that I threw in. I ended up catching lovely bag of dace, but was so disappointed that on the way home I decided a big change in the way that I fed these sorts of swims was in order.

Assuming that there were chub in the swim, I needed to find a better way to catch them if small fish were also present. I deliberated over which baits to use, but didn't just want one that was only going to be used on the hook or which was difficult to carry or prepare. I needed a bait that was easy to use and uniform in size to feed - and the only bait that seemed to fit that bill was pellets.

The big question was, which ones should I use? I'd used halibut pellets for a while as a feeder-only bait, but they always struck me as too heavy a bait to try and attract fish when using the float because they sink too fast. That left me with carp pellets as my next port of call.

I searched around for the right ones and found that many were totally irregular in shape and size. While this

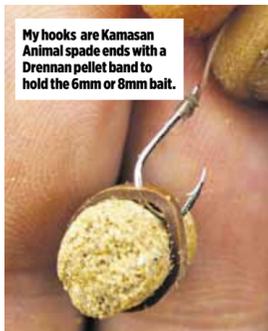
might not be an issue to the fish when they are in the water, it was an issue to me, as I wanted a uniform size to feed by hand and with my catapult.

Eventually, after much searching I found the pellets I was looking for in Bait-Tech's fishmeal Carp Pellets, and the 6mm and 8mm sizes that I now use are the best I have seen in terms of uniformity. Right from the very first test day with my 'new approach' it's been success all the way, and any time I'm now faced with, or likely to be faced with small fish problems, I make sure that the pellets are in the bag.

FLOATS AND RIGS

My float choices for fishing with pellets are simple. Because these swims are usually quite fast and boily I used my own design Alloy Stem Avons for top and bottom fishing and my Thick Speci Wagglers for bottom-end-only work.

In the case of the Avon rig, I'd normally use a No6 or No4 dropper with maggots, but with pellets I simply fix an olivette around 18 inches from the hook with no dropper at all. For the Speci waggler I still use a few No4 shot down the line, but no



My hooks are Kamasan Animal spade ends with a Drennan pellet band to hold the 6mm or 8mm bait.

shot at all for the last 2ft of line above the hook.

Line strengths need to be fairly robust so I go for 5lb or 6lb Ultima Power Plus with hooklengths of 4lb or 5lb in the same material. Hooks are Kamasan Animal spade ends in sizes from 16 up to 12, and on to the hook I mount a Drennan pellet band, which then holds a 6mm or 8mm hard pellet in place.

BOUYANCY

Because carp pellets are a much

heavier and bulkier bait than maggots it is important to leave plenty of float tip above the water or your float will be constantly dragged under as it travels down the swim.

With the Avon rig I leave the whole of the tip above the shoulder out, and with the Speci Waggler at least an inch is showing. You can leave even more than this if you know there are barbel as present, because this is a great way to catch them as well as the chub.

THE END OF MAGGOTS?

So, is the humble maggot dead as a river bait? The answer to that question is most definitely not as far as I am concerned, but for me they are now only used on the days when I know that I won't be faced with a situation like I had 12 months ago.

I'm also looking forward to seeing how well carp pellets will work for chub in winter. I'll let you know.



When fishing the 6mm or 8mm Bait-Tech fishmeal Carp Pellets, I use my Alloy Stem Avon floats for top and bottom fishing, or my Thick Speci Wagglers for bottom-end-only work.



Feed your swim according to the amount of bites you are getting.

DAVE'S RIVER FISHING Q&A

This week's question comes from Nigel Atkins from Leeds who asks: 'How often should I feed, and how much should I put in when I am float-fishing for chub, roach and dace?'

The main answer would be that you should always feed to the response you get from the fish, so if you're getting a bite every cast you know that all of the bait is being eaten - so keep it going in.

However, if bites are at a premium, you should always cut back the amount. That doesn't mean stop feeding, just feed very little and

often and feed more than once every run through, too, because you will eventually create a flow of bait going through the swim to draw in fish.

I have fed as much as a gallon of bait in five hours feeding like this, but I've also used around half a pint and fed just as many times. The key is to keep dripping bait in and increase or decrease the amount depending on how well the fish are responding.

Have you got a question for our resident river expert?

You can email Dave direct at: info@daveharrellangling.com

The switch to carp pellets ensures I catch chub rather than dace.

MORE INFO
Dave Harrell is recognised as one of the county's best ever river anglers and has devoted his life to learning different skills on running water. He has fished for England at World and European level and now owns his own tackle company, Dave Harrell Angling. For details of the product range go to: www.daveharrellangling.com