The slow glide beneath a weirpool – fly water!

And Now For Something Completely Different

Those immortal words from Monty Python will doubtless conjure up images of dead parrots, cheese shops and naked piano players, especially if you're as old as our chairman, but my early attempts to catch a barbel on the fly were every bit as farcical as anything from Cleese, Gilliam et al.

'd read that it could be done, and was aware that John Bailey was running barbel-on-the-fly guided trips on the Wye, but couldn't find out how it could be done. Being a few pennies short of booking a day with angling's tousledhaired Adonis, I had to find out for myself. What follows is a simple guide to what I've learnt so far - success wasn't easy in coming, and I won't pretend to have perfected it yet, but this summer did yield a few barbel to this unconventional approach. Here's how.

Rods and Reels

I started with a cheap 8weight rod, a ten-footer I'd kept in the attic for those days when only a brain-dead rainbow trout will bite. It was sloppy in the action, and casting was a chore. A trip to Sportfish at Theale with a much-abused credit card did the trick, and I left with a rod and reel outfit that would, I was assured, be ideal for both pike and barbel on the fly; I bought a Hardy Sirrus, the nine-foot 9-weight model, and a Redington CD 9/10 disc reel. When you do hook a barbel on fly gear, you'll want a clutch you can trust, and the Redington has proven itself very reliable. The Sirrus is quick-actioned, perhaps slightly too quick for the nymphs I've been using, and if I bought another rod I'd go for something a little more forgiving. It has been superb for pike, though, and also for grilse in. Scotland (I do like

to get my money's worth).

Lines

I bought two – a floating line for fishing the shallows with a long leader, and a quick sinking line for deeper water. Once again, hindsight is a fine thing; I've rarely needed the sinking line, and could instead have used one of those braided leaders to create a sinking tip.

Leaders

I've used two types; a Leeda tapered leader with a tenpound point, and straight mono right the way through. The former cast and turned

Flies

Given the biological reluctance of barbel to get their noses out of the silt to rise to a Greenwell's Glory, it's sinking nymphs all the way. A small box of weighted goldheads will suffice, in olive, black, brown and goldribbed hare's ear varieties. De-barbed hooks in sizes 6-8 have proven most effective to date. This is not match the hatch fishing, but rather an attempt to offer something approximate to the assorted bugs that barbel gorge on when there are no halibut pellets around. I'm sure that patterns will vary from water

trips slowly along the bottom. I've used tiny shot, olivettes and sinking putty (Loon Deep Soft Weight) on the eye of the hook. The latter does get bumped off, but seems preferable in terms of presentation and snag-avoidance. It casts better too. Do also coat the last few feet of your leader with a sinking agent — permasink or similar.

Where?

Look for gravels, shallow bends, deepening pools and the like; all the usual haunts of our favourite quarry, but preferably not somewhere

"What follows is a simple guide to what I've learnt so far – success wasn't easy in coming, and I won't pretend to have perfected it yet, but this summer did yield a few barbel"

over far more easily, as one might expect, but both were equally as good in terms of presentation and fishplaying. I found a longish leader to be necessary, given that I was fishing clear, shallow water to fish unaccustomed to fly lines. About nine feet seemed adequate.

to water, and I've only flyfished the Bristol Avon, so have a root about in the margins of your own river and see what's lurking.

Rigs

The only variation on the usual fly-fishing rig has been to add weight to the fly / leader to ensure that the fly

too deep or too fast. It's important that your fly gets down to the noses of the fish, and trundles along the bottom rather than whips through. I chose a beat of the Bristol Avon absolutely stiff with medium-sized barbel, so that I was confident of covering fish. Of course, this sort of nonsense might not



apply to the tidal Trent or other big rivers, but in more intimate surroundings, you might surprise yourself.

Methods

This is essentially no different to deep-water nymphing for trout, so don't worry if you're fishing upstream, downstream or across; just make sure you're covering the area you want to fish...and slowly. In my favourite weir pool I had to cast directly upstream to get the fly down; elsewhere, I usually fished 'across and down'.

Why bother?

Good point! Sport is unlikely to be fast and furious, but there is unquestionably some pleasure in catching with a new method, and the fight on fly tackle will be extremely satisfying. I've had nothing over six pounds on the fly, but I remember each one very clearly; the same fish on my usual twelvefooters might not have made it in to the diary. Pike, Carp and Chub anglers have all caught on to using a fly-rod, so there's no reason why we can't follow suit.

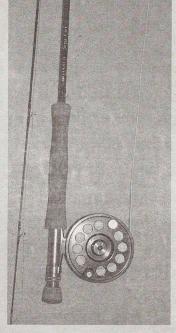
So there you have it; nothing revolutionary, but hopefully enough to get you started if you want to give it a try. As I said earlier, I'm in the early stages with this, and it's unlikely to ever replace my more usual methods. But, for sheer enjoyment with small shoal fish, it really is a joy. Perhaps some readers have been trying this themselves? If so, do write in and tell all! And, if you have a good flypattern for an elips pellet imitation, I'd be very grateful...

Some Cautionary words:

- Do check your license to ensure fly-fishing is allowed on your water.
- Don't go below ten-pounds breaking strain for your leader; the fight should last no longer than it would on your usual outfit.
- Fly-fishing by its very nature does cause more water disturbance than conventional barbel methods, so be aware of other anglers' personal space.
- Don't expect too much too soon you'll need to be covering fish, with an effective pattern, at the right peed

and with no drift to get a take.

- Feel and watch carefully for takes; I've had some 'slams', but more usually a flash from the fish is the best indication – tighten up and enjoy.
- Check your leader regularly for wind knots
 they will weaken it.
- Always wear glasses or sunglasses when fly fishing.
- If you're fishing the shallows, please watch them to ensure they're not spawning.
- Take care on the backcast, and NEVER whip a cow's backside in the process. They really don't like it.



Peregrine



56 Haydon Industrial Estate, Haydon, Radstock, Bath, BA3 3RD Tel: 01761 436900 Fax: 01761 434866 www.peregrinerods.co.uk

Peregrine Barbel Rods

For the last ten years our core business has been to build high performance fly fishing rods for the discerning. However, as barbel anglers ourselves, we have recognised the need for true specialist barbel rods for some time.

The market place has been flooded with 'off the shelf' rods many of which are lacking in one respect or another and the real specialist demands the need for performance without compromise. Hence the demand for our custom built rods.

The Peregrine GTi 11 ft, 2 piece, 1lb 12oz T.C.

This rod is certainly one of the best all rounders money can buy. Sensitive, yet at the same time powerful enough to subdue any barbel. Price: £175

The Peregrine SU Avon 12 ft, 2 piece. 1lb 10oz. T.C. The SU has a powerful, smooth, progressive action that makes playing big barbel a breeze. This rod is at home on virtually any river, big or small and will handle leads from a single swan shot up to and over 3oz. Price: £175

The Peregrine Flood Rod 11ft 9ins, 2 piece

No test curve on this one! This is a real floodwater specialists dream come true. A soft (?) top to allow the build up of debris without prematurely displacing the lead, but this is no quiver tip! This rod will cast up to 8 ounces! Yet again, by choosing the right materials the rod, is powerful yet still has the right 'feel' for playing barbel. We are indebted to Chris Ponsford for his help in developing this unique rod. Price: £185

11ft 4 piece Avon, 1lb 8oz T.C.

Slightly more powerful than its 2-section counterpart, but still retaining that lovely sweet "Avon" action. Versatile, smooth power, four section portability and not a flat spot in sight!

Price: £175

GTX 12ft 1lb 8oz T.C., 2 piece

Made from woven graphite, this rod is as stunning to look at as it is to use. Power, sensitivity and lightness all add up to this new concept in rod design for the specialist barbel angler. Finished in black with subtle gold trims and available with full cork handle or abbreviated style.

Price: £185

The rod fittings described below are incorporated on our 'stock' rods, but we can finish your rod to virtually any specification.

Full cork handle with Fuji DPS reel seat. Seymo 247s three leg rings tied in black, tastefully trimmed in gold.

Hook keeper fitted as standard

Black Aluminium Wye Button fitted as standard.