


Bait Droppin'



A bait dropper to me is every bit as essential as my rod and reel, if I ever find myself at the riverside sans dropper I might as well pack up before I even start. That's how important it is to my barbel fishing

The only exception is if I'm rolling a piece of meat around and as I rarely do that these days a dropper is always in my rucksack or pocket.

I can still recall the very first time I used a bait dropper, it was a long time ago, back in the early sixties and I wasn't fishing for barbel.

The River Lea or to be precise the Navigation Canal was my usual haunt as a lad, and I had recently become the proud owner of what was affectionately called a Roach Pole.

Living in Tottenham my local tackle shop was Charlie Rew's, this was also the place where the Broadwater Angling Club's LAA team hung out, and they were the kiddies!

A bit like Manchester United, they were the team to beat and were the Challenge Shield Champions . . . they knew their stuff and to an aspiring angler like myself these were the guys to tap into if I was going to progress as an angler.

Using a bait dropper was the way to cut out the gudgeon and bleak to find a way through to the goer roach, the stuff of dreams to us back then.

An eight-inch silver bar with blood red fins on our special rule that was the dream every time we went down to the Lea.

So that was how I started, a bait dropper off the end of my roach pole and then laying on with a quill for lots of lovely eight and ten ounce roach.

So when the time eventually came for me to start using one for barbel, primarily to get a bed of hemp down, in my deepest subconscious I was already a convert.

What I want to do in this article is to explain all the whys and wherefores involved with the use of a bait dropper and give you a few additional tips that

might just give you an edge at certain times.

So let's start right at the beginning.

In most instances you will need a dedicated rod, set up for the sole purpose of bait dropping.

The only time I would dispense with this is when travelling light, roving, moving from swim to swim. Ideally this rod should be an old carp type, twelve foot with at least a 2lb test curve; strong enough to cope with most circumstances. The one I use is more than capable of hurling a full dropper halfway across the Severn. An old fixed spool reel loaded with good strong line 15lb bs. completes the set up.

Here's a selection of the droppers I'm using at the moment. I tend to lose them regularly because they get so much use and abuse! I'm quite happy to substitute most similar makes and sizes. You should get a decent overview of the different types available from this selection.

To make things easy, we can split the many types of bait droppers that are widely available into four categories, Big, Medium, Small and Tiny.

So starting off with the Big ones, at this moment in time I have three droppers that conveniently fit into this section.

Seymo Large



This is a mean ole machine, it gets a gallon of hemp onto the riverbed with just twenty drops but it has its drawbacks.

It would be my choice on a flooded Severn where I just want to fish off the rod top.



Casting is easy in that situation with a careful underarm swing, it's a heavy load when full of hemp!

You don't want to lose one of these, they cost about £8, and it gets pretty expensive if you get snagged.

This is a specialist tool, and I only use it for depositing large quantities of hemp very close in.

Seymo Medium



This is a brilliant piece of kit, the dropper I use for the bulk of my big river fishing. It costs about £7 so once again be careful, you don't want to lose too many!

Four and a half dropper loads puts down one pint, so a gallon of hemp needs 36 drops which time wise equates to about an hour on the Severn fishing a couple of rod lengths out. I'll often carpet an area of twenty five square yards, that's one hundred or so dropper loads and takes a couple of hours, it is worth it I assure you!

Barbel anglers at times put far too little bait into a big river and far too much into a small one!

Home Made



Back in my Barbel Catchers days it was all the rage to make your own. Hard to believe I know but it really has only been these past fifteen years where barbel anglers have been able to pick up anything they want from their tackle shop, back in the eighties it was tuna tins, sieves, coat hangers and plenty of lead!

The one I still use has certainly seen better days but then again it has great nostalgic value. It was made by Chris Binge; the man who I still believe holds the record for the biggest brace of barbel ever caught. I've actually lost this dropper on a number of occasions but for some reason I've always been able to retrieve it, even when it's been on the Severn bed snagged up for a month! You can see why it is held in such affection, plus, it has helped me catch some of my biggest Severn barbel!

Three payloads from this one and you'll put a pint down, that gives you some idea of the capacity of these fish tin droppers.

Next we move on to the Medium size droppers, the

ones with a capacity in the region of eight drops per pint. This size is probably the most popular and it is the one I would use for most of my small river barbell.

Metal "Thamesley" Type



I have a number of these and will be adding to them when Alan's in Worcester get the plastic Dinsmore Thamesleys in stock. The metal version has just the right length stem, which ensures the payload is deposited accurately on the riverbed and not a couple of inches above which then ends up way downstream. It takes about seven drops to get a pint down and this size dropper costs around the £4 mark. When I'm fishing casters in the summer months, I would have six pints to eight pints, plus a gallon of hemp as well.

Over a twelve hour day it takes just over 100 drops to deliver that quantity, say ten drops per hour which is three every twenty minutes or so. That gives a good idea of the rate at which you should use this dropper and it's very important to keep the dropper going in, that's why the dedicated rod is so important. You can even feel the barbel knocking the dropper about on the riverbed when the method is working well.

Seymo Small



The smallest of the three Seymo droppers and a useful piece of kit, which I use

mainly for putting pellets down. Ten drops will put down a pint and there are times, when fishing the right venue, when it pays to work hard dropping a good bed of small mixed pellets.

This dropper will set you back about £6, so as always make sure you go easy and don't get snagged!

The next group of droppers are classified as small; their capacity is in the region of twenty drops to a pint. They are very useful for the little and often technique and being light are easily cast as long as you are careful.

Fred Crouch



These are brilliant little plastic droppers, which surprisingly when you look at them first time, can deposit at a decent rate. It takes eighteen drops to put down a pint. They cost about £4 and are available from Fred direct. The design is exceptionally good with the weight in the right place and a door that springs open close to the riverbed to ensure the bait is where you want it. I always keep one in my pocket when roving about on a river like the Teme, much preferring to put a dozen or so pellets in via this dropper than throwing them in.

Middy Medium



The photo shows both the medium and small version because you buy one; get one free as it were! They come as

a pair for less than £4.

The larger one has a capacity of 20 drops to the pint. The longer stem makes it more suited for the times you want the bait to come out just off the bottom and drift along for a bit. The cost means there's always a place in my bag as a back up if I lose too many Thamesleys!

Free Spirit Small



Free Spirit do a full range of droppers from £6 to £8, this one has the same capacity as the Middy Medium. They come with interchangeable weights and are very good droppers. An alternative to the Seymo.

Fox Small



Fox also do the full range but I have to say that a design fault with the door means I would not use one of these in preference to the other makes, certainly not in the larger sizes. I just know too many people who have lost the door!

It is possible to fix this but shouldn't be necessary.

This small one takes 24 drops to deposit a pint and comes in at around £7.

The last category is Tiny, you would get severe tennis elbow trying to put a gallon of bait in with one of these, it would take three hundred or so drops, you would be dropping all day long!

Middy Small

Well as they come as a pair you get a tiny dropper that has to go in 38 times



to put down a pint, so obviously it's not used in those circumstances when speed and quantity is of the essence! As a back up or for delivering tiny payloads, ten small pellets, it has a use.

Next I'll run through a few dodges you can use with the dropper that can at times give you an edge.

The Blast!

All credit for this little trick goes to the Caster Master himself, Stef Horak. Basically it entails putting in twenty or more droppers, Thamesley size, at around three in the afternoon to remind the rest of the shoal that have not been caught that this is their final dinner bell! The sudden increase in food on the table can often drive the barbel mad resulting in very quick captures. This technique works well with casters but you have to make sure you have enough bait because you'll certainly need it!

Wafra Droppa!

This is a last resort tactic, something to use late in the day, an hour or so before close of play and will often result in bonus fish. You need to lift the dropper as soon as it hits the riverbed, just two or three inches and then let it hit the bottom again. This too works well with casters and maggots, the sight of them wafting down the current a couple of inches above the gravel can prove too much of a tease and the barbel often find it hard to resist it and so make a rush for your bait!

Fifty Fifty

There's no need to fill the

Right: Laying a carpet of hemp on the Lower Severn. On a two day session I will put somewhere in the region of three gallons of hemp over an area fifteen to twenty feet square. It often takes a good few hours for the barbel to find it. I fish boilies, big pellet or meat over it.

dropper with just one type of bait, you can mix and match, hemp/casters, maggots/hemp, pellets/hemp, crushed boilie/hemp, etc.

This certainly makes it



Loading my favourite Severn dropper with hemp.

easier for you to make the bait last, especially when using casters which are not cheap!

Half Empty Or Half Full?

Likewise there's no need to fill the dropper. When I'm into a baiting rhythm I often only half fill the dropper,

especially when droppering over my baited hook looking to induce a take.

Bait And Wait

The start of a session always means laying the table. Often I'll put in a pint of maggots or caster and a pint of hemp and then leave well

alone for an hour at least, sometimes longer.

This allows the barbel to settle and gain confidence. It can be very easy catching the first barbel, it often comes on the first cast, the second can be a little trickier but the third should mean you're in for a good day!

Give 'Em A Rest!

Very important this one. After you catch that first barbel put half a dozen droppers in straight away, bait/hemp, and then leave well alone for half an hour. This helps to settle the rest of the barbel who will have been agitated by the fact



Casters, barbel love 'em! In the summer you'll need a gallon but as the days get shorter you can cut down. In October six pints is fine together with at least the same amount of hemp.

that you've just caught one of their shoal! Sometimes it pays to rest the swim at various times in the day even when you are not catching.



I get through lots of hemp in a season. Buy it in from animal feed stores in bulk bags, its much cheaper. The jars of Dynamite hemp are brilliant for short sessions and are always worth keeping in the boot of your car for emergencies.



Baitdropping with a Thamesley type close in on the Kennet. A devastating method when using maggots/casters and hemp. The key is to keep it going in all day long.

One, Two, Three . . . We're In!

A brilliant dodge this one when fishing casters. You leave your baited rig in the swim and drop just above. As the name implies after the third dropper you need to be quick because more often than not you will get a take. Then it's a matter of ditching the dropper rod and grabbing the baited rod PDQ!

When anglers see this happen they can't quite believe it, there is this thought that the dropper frightens the barbel, er no!

For some reason it works better with casters than maggots. Just be sure you're set up ready to grab the rod because it all happens very quickly!



Fifty fifty, a fantastic combination for summer/autumn barbel fishing.



Hemp, the best barbel attractor you can buy.



The next best attractor, mixed Dynamite pellets. I get through lots of these as well. Be careful not to over feed on a small river but be aware that a gallon may be needed for a session on a big river. Use your loaf and always consider the effect your baiting will have not only on the fish but your fellow angler.

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeep Droppin'!

As Brucey always says on Strictly, well not quite, but the sentiment is much the same. Get into a baiting rhythm, don't forget to drop, don't get lazy. The key to successful droppin' is to keep it going. One of the main reasons I see people fail with the technique is because they simply forget, remember, bait till you drop!



Notwithstanding the picture above, try and ensure you cast the dropper out cleanly and that it enters the river with the minimum of splash. Not so much because it may scare the fish, it doesn't usually, but you may find the door opens on the surface scattering your feed.

For close in work there should be no splash at all, the dropper should enter the water just like

Tom Daley.

Likewise when your dropper hits the riverbed, keep everything steady and clean. Lift it out almost immediately so the bait is on the bed and not drifting off downstream.

Another important point, be aware of the depth, current speed and type of river bed, all of these will impact on just where you put the dropper.

You have to make an educated guess and

remember that the flow on the bottom of a three feet deep gravel swim on the Kennet will differ from an eight feet silty bed on the Lower Severn. Also remember that the speed of flow is far greater on the surface than it is on the bed.

I always tend to drop well above my hook bait. This distance will vary and can be thirty feet or three feet above taking onboard the factors I've mentioned.

Right: Me and my rod . . . baitdroppin'!

Summary

As I said right at the start I consider a bait dropper to be an essential part of any barbel fisher's armoury. Use one well and your catches will go up significantly, use one poorly, well you know the rest!

Many thanks to Dr. Paul Garner for allowing me to use one or two of his shots.

Thanks also to John Found for pointing me in the right direction.

This article first appeared on Steve's website www.stevepopebarbelfishing.co.uk.

