

The Bait & V

As many who receive this magazine will be aware, I write a diary style blog www.barbelblogger.blogspot.com about my on-going pursuit of specimen fish of most species. Within that blog I wrote about the 'bait and wait' method for barbel and knowing that not all read the blog I decided to submit it for inclusion in the magazine.

The blog covers the barest details of the method and anyone approaching this idea thinking it is just a matter of buying bait and you'll catch loads of barbel is in for a disappointment. As with most angling techniques, it takes time

and practice to get the best out of the method but once mastered it can be, and is a deadly tool for catching a lot of fish.

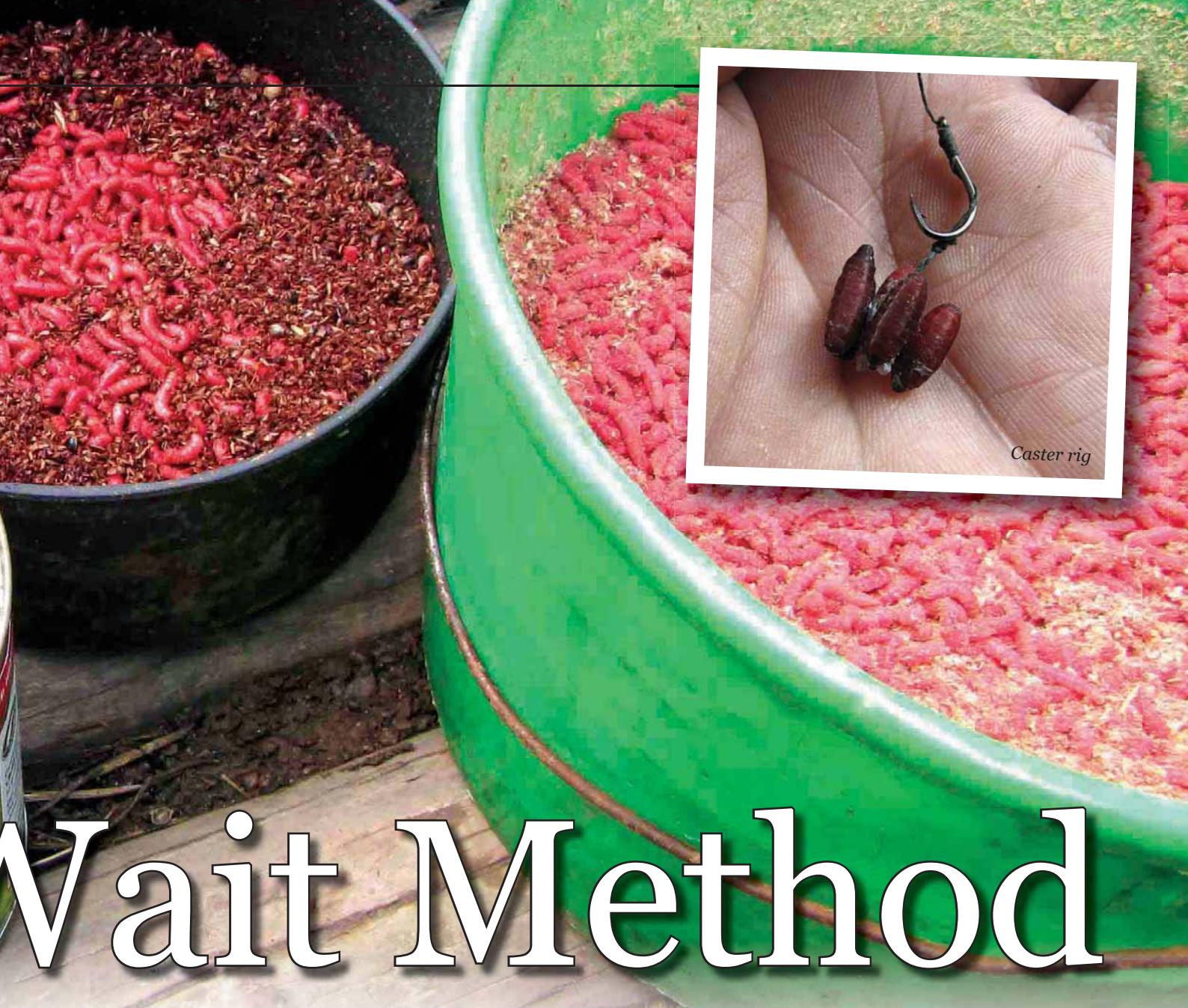
That last bit is an important part of the equation, lots of fish. This is not the method to try for just one fish unless that fish is a particular specimen that you are trying to catch. Then again, this can be the tactic to fool that ultra-wary specimen that refuses to look at all the normal pellet/meat offerings.

Under the best of conditions, it can be useful if the initial practice to get familiar with the method can be done on waters where the fish can be seen. This would give the angler the chance to observe the results of his

efforts and then transfer them to the more normal situation where the water is too deep or coloured to be able to see into.

So what do you need to start with? I would suggest that in an ideal world you begin in a swim you already know or suspect that there are a reasonable number of barbel present most of the time. Now you decide on whether you will use maggot or caster. Both can work well, though the caster has the advantage of being heavier and hence hold in the swim more easily. Whichever bait you choose, they will be introduced into the swim along with the hemp via the use of a bait dropper. There are many models on the market

and currently I prefer the Dinsmore copy of the older Thamesly version. These are a small plastic dropper that does not have the weight of the metal models and hence I find I can cast and control them better. I do wrap a length of extra lead around the stem in order that they drop through the water more consistently, lighter models can be affected by the flow. Here it is worth noting the length of the stem is also important, too long and the body of the dropper is too high above the bed of the river and when the particles are released they can be washed well downstream rather than into your swim. This is especially true for maggots as they are by far the lighter of the two baits.



Caster rig

Wait Method

You have cast the dropper out, it went straight down and opened; now you hold the rod low and just flick the tip in order to encourage the bait still left in the body to come out. If you lift the rod straight away the particle left in the body will rise into the flow and be washed downstream. It might be that with perhaps one drop in ten you lift on purpose in order to send some of the feed downstream to leave an extra food trail, this will be added to the scent trail of the hemp that is the main attractor to bring the barbel from downstream.

Now to look at how much bait to use and here is the most difficult aspect of the method to identify. I could say "how long is a

piece of string," but that would be no good to the reader trying to get to grips with the method so I'll try to be more expansive. As always, cost must be an important part of the equation, general hemp is not too expensive especially if bought by the sack load and cooked yourself. Expect to pay about £1.50 per kg dry weight, and this will near double in weight when it swells and takes on water when cooked. The maggots and casters vary in price depending on your location, but generally casters will be £3 plus per pint.

My normal comment on this point is that the most valuable thing you use on a day's fishing is your time. Once that day has gone you

cannot get it back, you can replace money so in that sense it is less important. Of course you need the money in the first place, but surely it is better to do one day fishing with good tactics, than to spend the time and fuel costs going three times with inferior tactics. So how much bait? I would suggest that a good day with a reasonable catch rate could be gained with 4 pint of caster or maggots. I would take extra hemp since it is less expensive and can be frozen if left over. This is another factor in the caster/maggot choice, casters need to be used with say one week of purchase if they are looked after, maggots will last for weeks if kept in a bait fridge set about 2C. That

said you can try less caster well mixed into the hemp, say twice the hemp to caster rather than equal parts. At a push this could be taken to three times hemp to caster but eventually the results will definitely suffer.

Now you have arrived at the swim with enough bait for a full days sport. No rush to tackle up since this method is the most social system it is possible to try. Put the bait dropper rod together first and drop out say ten drops of hemp and ten of caster [assuming your using the Dinsmore model]. Now you can go for a walk, read a book, have a chat with your mate a little way back from the river, it does not matter. There is no set time table for the pattern that

The Bait & Wait Method By Phil Smith

follows, experience, practice, gut feeling all play a part and this is where the top lads in the method show their skill. Many anglers over the years have said that this is just buying you fish, get a gallon of caster and you will bag up, but nothing is further from the truth. A gallon or even two or three gallons of caster in inexperienced hands will not have fish jumping onto the hook and all they will be doing is feeding the fish.

You need somewhere to start, so try and use say forty five minutes as a guide interval between the initial baiting. Following that first drop you wait the forty five minutes and then drop again, but this time slightly less, say four droppers of each and then wait again. Following that you can either do a further bait drop and wait, or you can bait drop and follow up with a first cast in straight away. Either way, when you do cast in then be prepared for an early take, often the fish are now well on the feed and

even though a dropper has landed between them they will perhaps move away but they quickly return. If it does not happen like that, don't worry just follow the pattern and watch for the slight movements on your rod tip that would suggest the fish are in the area and feeding. As a guide if you see this tip movement and you wait a long time before you get the take then maybe you have put too much feed into the swim so when you next bait drop use just two droppers instead. Whatever the case, you do a bait drop after each fish and at least consider resting the swim after three fish are landed. Complete the drop as normal following the capture but then just leave the swim for thirty minutes or so to give the fish the confidence to return without disturbance. The days are long and you will definitely reap the rewards of this rest period rather than just catch, catch and so on.

Last, let us look at the tackle, mainly right at the hook end since behind that does not matter too much just as long as it is strong enough. Much has been written about the hook length to be used for barbel and other than the fact that generally the short hook links used for chub and



Low water barbel bait

roach don't seem to work, I would be fairly open minded as to what you would favour. I use between 12" and 18" and for maggot /caster work I would use a strong size 10 hook, currently I use the Pallatrax pattern but there are many others that will do the job. I prefer to use about 10" to 12" of 15lb heavy

mono to act as a stiff rig and to this I attach my 15lb braid with a loop to loop fixing. For the loops I use a figure of eight knot and this has not let me down. The bait is put on a hair and generally I would attach four casters in a torpedo style figure. This will provide proof against most attacks from the small

fish since it just moves out of their way when they try to grab it. Should they still prove a problem then just slide one artificial along the hair and superglue two or three naturals to that. Now if the small fish attack you always have a hook bait that the barbel will pick up. If possible, I will still use casters on the hook even when maggot fishing, the maggots are just too difficult to stop the small fish attacking them, leaving just skins when you reel in. As a rule once I cast out I will use a straight lead with casters and leave it for 30 minutes or more, whilst when maggot fishing I would use a swimfeeder and recast more often say every 5 minutes to start with and going to 10 or 15 minutes intervals later in the session.

There you have it then, catch fish you can use lots of bait, less fish will use less bait, no guarantees but when you get it right the sky is the limit and you can empty a swim of barbel. Practice makes perfect and trial and effort will give a timetable to suit your situation.

If this is of interest then you can find much more in my latest book 'Targets set and Achieved' easily obtained through www.philsmithangler.co.uk



Above: Superglue shows but fish dont mind

Right: Drop as separate particles or together, it does not matter

