

Are barbel PSYCHIC?

How do they know we have taken our eye off the action?

I ask that you bear with me for a moment to explain the title. I don't for a moment believe that any fish, including barbel, can read our minds; nor do they have magical powers. If they did, I honestly believe we would never catch them at all, as they would be aware of every bait with a hook attached, and where it is.

There are times however, when we may feel this, as we finish the session without a bite or sign of fish in the swim! So what am I alluding to? It is those moments when we take our eye off the rod tip and a bite arises; pulling the rod off the rests if the clutch isn't set correctly or the free spool isn't engaged. For those of us using centrepin reels the drum goes into overdrive as the barbel powers away downstream.

This happens more often than most of us would acknowledge and some occasions are laughable, however a positive outcome still prevails. Others bring about rage as we see the rod

being dragged through the water's surface. The capture that led to this article being written will wait to the end; I will reminisce incidents in the past before bathing in the glory of a personal best.

Before fishing seriously for barbel I spent many years on the gravel pits of the Colne Valley angling for carp. Very often did a take come while relieving myself in the bushes or boiling a cup of tea on a small stove! A particular situation comes to mind, not on a Colne Valley pit, but a small Cambridgeshire lake in the depths of winter. To fish the swim in question it was only possible to get a bait in the correct position by wading out to the edge of the reeds and gently casting underarm along their edge to a small bush. The rods; one would go along the reeds and another would be fished to open water, would be placed on tall rests in the water allowing for the tip of the reed rod to be far enough out to be past the leading edge of the reeds.

The swim had a very high bank behind you and not wanting to be far from the

I was texting my wife when the reel screamed, resulting in this new PB of 15lb 15oz



rods to prevent a snagged carp in the reeds, I would place my seat just behind the rods and at that time of year get cold feet in my waders. Every so often I would stand up and move back onto a small dry patch of gravel. At about three in the afternoon I had done so and with unzipped winter clothing to relieve myself, the reed rod tore off with the buzzer that was turned up too loud screaming, alerting me to action. Turning to face

the rod I am still unsure of what happened; the rod had been dragged forward and the reel appeared lodged in the buzzer, which was being pulled out of the ground too! I managed to stop the rod and rest going out into the lake, untangled the rod tip out of the extremities of the reeds and began playing the carp. Well, I would love to say I landed a beast of thirty pounds plus, but alas it was a fish of just over ten pounds.

We would all like to



12lb Ooz St Pats. One I didn't take my eye off!

believe that each mistake would enable us to learn and grow, however I still have this happen. No doubt each of us also suffers the consequences of taking our eye off the action. When I first started fishing for barbel again in 2007, I used fixed spools for the majority of my fishing. After a few trips of missing takes when using a baitrunner, the decision was taken to fish with a tighter clutch setting on the reel instead. The bites being

received were not the usual three foot twitches, which seemed to be the reason for not setting the hook. My mind set was to strike and set the free spool in one action; but the shorter takes meant that I was not resetting the spool on the strike. This then created problems of its own.

During the following two seasons, the high population of barbel on the stretches of the river Kennet I fished meant that on regular

occasions a take would come within minutes of the first cast. Now many of us only fish the one rod, or have everything set up before that first cast. Unless we are fishing a particle approach, baiting with bait droppers, our bait is placed quickly if we only have a limited time to fish. So on a regular basis I would be messing around with my tackle, setting up my chair, moving tackle about so it was within easy reach; when the movement of the

rod dragging over the bank or being hit in the leg as it swung round would bring me back to the action. If we all had a pound for each time this has happened, some of us would be rich men, but nowadays it appears to happen less on the stretches fished.

For all the right reasons, I remember the capture of my previous personal best caught in November 2009. Arriving at a swim that I had looked at many a

time but never fished, I put out some loosefeed, hemp and luncheon meat, before deciding to start elsewhere for an hour or two to let the swim settle. The river had been over its banks for the previous two weeks and to get to the sitting position I had to squish through sticky reed beds when I came back to this swim. I sat on a slightly raised area of bank to take in the river in front of me. A steady flow of water ran through to the willow thirty feet downstream. The decision was to cast the already baited tackle level with the outside of the branches. Resting the rod on the bank while I sorted out the right rod rests, I was taken aback as the butt of the rod crashed into my thigh,

followed by the forward movement of the rod and the tip sinking into the bank high water before I managed to grasp the reel seat.

As I lifted the rod a solid weight was felt, no movement was evident yet it appeared the line was cutting further upstream towards me. Turning the handle of the reel, I kept in touch with the unseen leviathan. It didn't show itself until popping up ready to be netted. Fifteen pounds and nine ounces of barbel lay in the folds of the net and yet again it was another that seemed to know that I didn't have my eye on the action.

Since 2010 I have done all my barbel fishing using centrepins and through trial and error have found

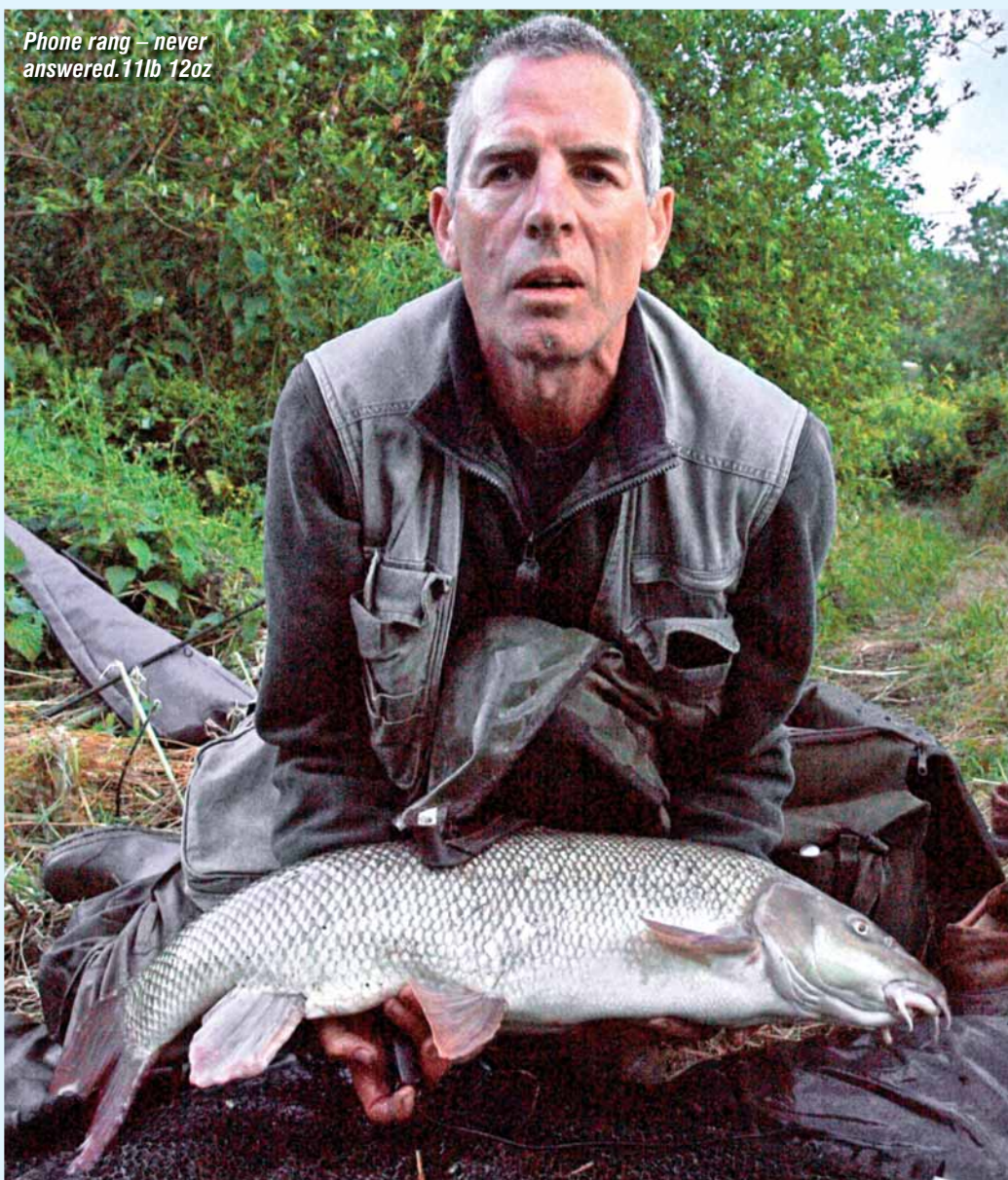
some reels better suited for legering than others. I have a couple of old Grice and Young reels and a Dave Swallow that gets regular use, however I am less inclined to use the Swallow for this purpose. It is a great reel however the lack of resistance in the spool has created problems when I have been distracted on the take. Several times this season and seasons before, a take has spun the spool so fast it has almost created a tangle. This has been due to what appears to be an overrun as the spool seems to stop after a short distance and then re-engage causing line to be peeling off the reel faster than the fish may be travelling. Fortunately no tangles have arisen, however

on more occasions than I would like when this occurs the fish doesn't get hooked. However using the older true centrepin reels the resistance is sufficient to not allow this problem to arise.

Sometimes the distraction is non-fishing related; nowadays this is more likely to be the ringing of your mobile phone. I feel a mobile can be a real pain: going fishing to have peace and quiet and the wife rings up to ask you a question. A few years ago I fishing a Thames weirpool on a short evening session; it is useful living within a couple of miles of some great barbel swims. I was slowly packing away as I had promised my wife I would be home before 9.30pm, even though in June the daylight would last for at least an hour more.

Standing by the rod, still fishing, I am distracted by the mobile's screeching tone; Marie wanted to know if I was packing up, but before I had a chance to answer the call the rod buckled in the rest and the reel went into overdrive. A long fight from an 11lb 12oz barbel ensured I would be late home. Fortunately, I had photographic evidence and Marie was understanding.

The tale which set me off on the topic of writing was also a mobile distraction, however it requires a little introduction. I opened this article by asking if barbel are psychic, a question which is light-hearted, as I don't really believe in the stuff. However, how often do we feel that sixth sense that we should fish a certain swim or even to just go fishing, knowing something will happen? We leave our home in a positive unexplained mood, the journey to the swim is uninterrupted, the first cast is onto the perfect spot in the swim, the atmosphere is so heavily wired into the cosmic forces, the stars are all aligned, it is going to happen!



Phone rang – never answered. 11lb 12oz

Well, after a session the previous day, when I desired nothing more than a change of scenery, I chose to fish a stretch of the river that hadn't seen a bait of mine for over four years. The day had been pleasant, a slight downstream breeze and a hazy sky, suggesting the decision to fish was the right one. I started off by fishing at the lower end of the backstream. Two hours soon passed and I sat soaking in the surroundings; the sound of birds calling and the voices of dog walkers in the nature reserve opposite calling out occasionally to get the dog back to heel.

Early afternoon I chose to move downstream onto the main river to a swim that had always come good for me when I fished here regularly. I had only had a bait in the water a minute or so when the rod pulled round, resulting in a 12lb12oz fish. The swim is very open and can be observed by everyone walking the banks. Deciding not to risk being seen, I moved as soon as pictures were taken, returning to the backstream until dusk for one small chub.

That would have been enough, but the thrill received left me wanting more. How was I to get fishing again when I had suggested to Marie I would only fish on Saturday?! Sunday dawned expectantly and I was charged with energy from that unknown, unseen force. It was impossible to not respond, yet the barrier of my promise to Marie appeared to be solid and unbreakable. However I hoped, nothing that gaining a few extra brownie points might fix.

Marie had wanted to go to see a friend in the morning and I was roped into going with her being the good husband I am. However I persuaded her to let me go down to the river instead while she sat talking.

I quickly drove the two miles and went for a walk where I had fished the day before. No one was in the swim, the whole stretch was devoid of any anglers. Taking this as a good omen I hatched a plan that hopefully would get Marie to give me a pass later. A plan that didn't work at first, yet I pleaded, I begged, and she eventually caved in to my immaturity.

Leaving home at 2.00pm, excitement pumped adrenaline into my blood, a rush, light headedness swept through me. Normally I don't suffer with road rage, but today, every set of traffic lights were against me; eight sets across town and not one was on green! Not one car in front of me was being driven by a boy racer; all were filled with Sunday OAP drivers! Arriving at the car park that usually has plenty of space, no room was available. What else could go wrong?

A journey that normally takes twenty minutes had managed to take twice that amount time. I didn't arrive in the swim until after 3pm and things at first didn't appear to improve. The hair was snapped on the set up tackle, the cast took five attempts to get a bait where I wanted it. I was by this time questioning my sanity. Had I misread my feelings? Had the stars unaligned that quickly? Eventually after what seemed like an eternity I felt reasonably comfortable and settled in behind the rod to wind down with tea out of the flask.

Before I left home I had told Marie how I felt and she had wished me well on the quest. As I relaxed into the session, a quieter frame of mind began to rise again, slowly at first, a small still voice reassuring me of the victory to be, with only two hours till dark it would have to be soon though.

Very rarely do I text Marie while fishing, knowing that if I do she will reply and a text conversation will



begin. However today I was feeling at peace, so just after 4pm I started to write a text on the phone. `Hi, sitting here quietly, still waiting for a....` I never got to finish the text, I had taken my eye off the action and now the reel was shouting at me as the rod was pulled off the front rest, the take was that violent.

Picking up the rod a satisfying, heavy weight was felt. There was little movement yet the rod nodded to let me know a fish was attached. Slowly she moved upstream, occasionally giving a stronger pull taking line off me, stopping me from becoming complacent. It wasn't until several minutes passed before she turned anywhere near the water's surface, the boil suggested no more than a low double and as she slipped into the net for the second attempt, I still didn't have a clue to her true size. Only as I lifted the net after allowing her to rest and sorting out the scales and camera did I really appreciate what was before me. As she left the water, the width of the belly looked awesome, the length of the body folded into the deep mesh of the thirty inch pan net, giving the impression of a net too small.

As I lifted the weigh sling and scales I had a guess of about fourteen pounds already in my head, yet something inside was telling me it was more. Looking at the dial, the weight needed two glances to take it in; a new personal best of 15lb 15oz! Returning her to the net while I ensured the positioning of the camera was right, I finished the text to Marie, telling her of my success and letting her know I will be coming home early. I didn't feel the need to have another cast, I had achieved the goal that I had set and wished for no more, not wanting to dampen the euphoria that was bathing me.

Pictures were taken and I was walking away from the river by 4.30pm. Amazingly on both days no one walked past during both captures, no one saw me playing the fish, no one saw me weigh or photograph them; a dream of my own, no one else existed for those brief moments in time. Walking back to the car park I thought I felt a presence, a psychic power, a silent voice not heard or felt, yet calling

**UNTIL THE NEXT TIME,
REMEMBER, TAKE YOUR
EYE OFF THE ACTION!**