

Try small baits for **BIG CHUB**

ALAN STAGG looks at chub fishing in the autumn and winter using small baits like maggots in a feeder or PVA bag. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages - here's what he uses and why.



Once the evenings start to draw in and the temperature begins to drop I like to turn my attention to my local rivers. This fishing ideally suits the short session approach that I like to base my fishing around throughout the winter months. I see little point in sitting out all day in the cold, targeting big fish, when the few hours either side of darkness are, for me, the most likely times that a big fish may put in an appearance. This is not to say that big fish cannot be caught throughout the daylight hours, but this is the time of the day, when I look back over my records, that has produced some of my biggest fish to date.

When winter is upon us and the stars are clearly visible in the sky there are very few species that capture my imagination as much as big river chub. They are an ideal species to target when barbel fishing is out of sorts. However, this is not always the case as last season I found myself targeting

maggots, casters and small pieces of worms, gives the chub very little option – if they want to eat them they have to enter the mouth to be tested, giving the angler a chance to hook them.

Throughout the winter months I have found chub to be much more receptive to and caught more easily using small baits. When feeding correctly chub can become preoccupied and big fish can be very competitive, especially when joined by a few friends. You should make the most of this competitive instinct as each fish tries to dominate any feed introduced.

The Magic Of Maggots

Maggots are my favourite chub bait when fishing in this manner. For me they are one of the best big fish baits around and they have everything going for them. If fished in the correct way they can be devastating when targeting big chub. When presented over a gravel bed their movement is a massive attractor and once the maggots wriggle

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specimen chub even when conditions for barbel fishing were favourable. It seems that the canny ability of chub to distinguish rigs, feel resistance and easily eject hook-baits makes targeting these species comparable to a game of cat and mouse. I have spent many frustrating evenings on the bank targeting chub, however last winter everything seemed to click into place and after experimenting with a couple of techniques 'borrowed' from carp anglers I came across what I felt was a winning combination which culminated in catching a brace of chub weighing 7lb 9oz and 6lb 12oz during a short evening session.

Are Small Baits The Answer?

There is no doubt in my mind that during the winter using big baits can cause problems when trying to regularly catch big chub. In clear water I have watched them time and time again test and mouth big baits with little or no registration on a quivertip. If any resistance is felt, large hook-baits will often be immediately ejected. Using smaller baits, such as

in among the small stones and start to burrow away trying to hide, chub can work themselves up into a frenzy as they try to search them out.

White maggots are my favourite. I don't know whether the colour really makes much of a difference, but it is certainly a confidence thing. I like their visibility as they stand out well over the riverbeds I fish.

Feeders And PVA

When fishing maggots I tend not to use a float and instead favour a big block-end inline feeder or a PVA bag which better suits the big fish stretches I often visit. They are often fairly deep and bites can be infrequent which makes using a float impractical. When fishing a small bait approach for chub, inline block-end feeders and PVA bags can have devastating effect. They offer a great way to feed maggots and other small baits accurately onto the riverbed.

When fishing this style I favour a two rod approach and will introduce a bed of feed before I begin fishing. How much feed I choose to introduce is dependent on the weather. If the conditions are

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HOW TO ...

Make A Mag-aligner



1 Strip the outer coating of a coated braid to create a combi link. Mono can also be used.



2 Tie a simple knotless knot and pull tight ensuring it beds down correctly.



3 Using a needle push the sharp end through the first groove of a plastic grub.



4 Push through the centre of the grub and come out at the last groove in the blunt end.



5 Thread the grub down the hook-link and over the eye of the hook. Tie a double overhand loop.



6 Add a couple of blobs of heavy putty along the hook-length to pin it down.



favourable I will feed a couple of pints of hemp and small pellets with a few handfuls of maggots mixed in. As accuracy is vital in all forms of feeder fishing I always introduce my feed via a baitdropper. This gives me the peace of mind knowing that the feed is where I want it to be and not scattered over a wide area. If conditions are poor then I rely just on a feeder or PVA bag attached to the rig. This allows me to gauge the fish's reaction and can give the best chance of a bite in cold conditions.

Feeder Options

The size of feeders or PVA bags is important. When using a feeder my preference is for the inline versions from Drennan. I tend to use a fairly heavy feeder between an ounce and a half and two ounces which can hold plenty of bait. Sometimes I wrap electrical tape around the feeder to cover some of the holes, controlling the release of maggots. When bites are at a premium I want to leave the feeder in for an hour or so, especially when I get indications that fish are in the swim. Wrapping the feeder

Above: The PVA bag might look large but some of the maggots will get washed away in the flow.

in electrical tape helps give a steady release of maggots over a period of time, ensuring that a small amount of constant feed is introduced around the hook-bait. Feeders can be used running or inline. However, when fishing a tight line to the feeder I feel that an inline version gives a better hooking ability as the fish hits the weight of the feeder more abruptly, especially when fished in a semi-fixed style creating a bolt effect.

PVA Pointers

Both the style and quality of the PVA used are vital. When water conditions are cold it is important to use a good quality, fast-dissolving mesh style PVA. Micromesh from Gardner is ideal as the tight weave stops the maggots crawling through the bag once tied. Its melt rate is spot on for this style of fishing. Again, as mentioned before, the size of the PVA bag I use is very weather dependent but as a general rule I will make them 5 to 6 inches in length. It is important when making the bags that they are as tight as possible. This will help create a better presentation once it has hit the riverbed. When buying



maggots from your local tackle shop it is always worth asking for lots of maize to be added to the maggots. The maize will help to soak up the juice from any maggots which may have burst when tying a tight bag, thereby preventing the liquid melting a hole in the PVA.

Chub Tackle

I favour a main line of at least 8lb when fishing this style. A line that can stand the wear and tear of casting big feeders and bags is important. My favourite is GR60, however this winter I am going to start playing around with a pure fluorocarbon main line called Mirage from Gardner Tackle. I feel that pure fluorocarbon main lines could be advantageous in some clear water situations as they have reduced visibility compared to normal mono.

I also like to add a three to four foot leader of Plummet lead core, which ensures my main line around the rig end is pinned tight to the riverbed, which I feel is important. In all types of fishing, attention to detail is essential, especially around the rig. This set-up

can take practice to cast accurately but is well worth the hassle.

When fishing this style small bunches of maggots can be nicked directly onto the hook. I prefer a fairly thick wire gauge of hook, Talon Tips in a size 12 fit the bill perfectly and will help deal with any bonus barbel that you are likely to hook. Last winter I landed a barbel weighing 14lb 4oz using this method. I hooked it on light tackle in cold conditions and I suspect that if I was using a hook of a finer wire then the story may well have ended differently, so make sure your tackle is up to the job. Hook-links when fishing this style are made up of around 8 inches in length, although I have used much shorter of around 5 to 6 inches when fish are feeding confidently around the feeder. I favour a fluorocarbon hook-link made using a length of Gardner's Mirage in 5.5lb breaking strain.



Above: Simple but reliable tackle.

The Mag-aligner

Over the last 12 months I have been using the mag-aligner rig with some success. I have written about the mag-aligner in previous issues of CF so I won't go over it in detail here and I am still in the early stages of using the rig for chub in this way, but it has accounted for some big fish so far. It can be used in conjunction with a feeder or a PVA bag and both techniques have proved effective. I think the rig is successful because when the fish have been worked into a frenzy they start sucking up the maggots and are not sure how to deal with this hooking arrangement. As the grub creates a line-aligner effect it flips and turns in the fish's mouth hooking the fish

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in the process. When using this hooking arrangement it is important to use a coated hook-link such as Gardner's Sly Skin and Chod Skin and not mono. I like a coated braid in 10lb breaking strain, they make a

HOW TO ...

Use a PVA bag with maggots



1 Fill the mesh full of maggots and cut the top off leaving 2-3 inches at the top.



2 Place the lead in the top of the bag,



3 Tie the top of the bag with PVA String.



4 Nick the hook into the bottom of the bag



5 The finished item.





great hook-length for specimen anglers. Stripping back the last couple of inches nearest to the hook creates a supple section, helping to give the rig some movement near the hook aiding it to flip and turn once the rig has been sucked in. It is common to get regular line bites once fish enter the swim as they move across the feed and chub are notorious for dropping baits. This is why it is important to sit on your hands and be patient as the fish will often hook themselves, so wait for a positive indication.

There Is A Downside

This style of fishing can be very effective on the day, however it does have its drawbacks. It is not a tactic that can be used where there are an abundance of small fish as they will quickly ruin a well-

Above: This big 6lb 12oz chub fell to a feeder and maggot approach.

Below: A huge 7lb 9oz chub caught on maggots. Proof that small baits do catch big fish.

presented bait. A further drawback is the cost. Quantities of good quality maggots are not cheap and sometimes you'll need at least four to five pints to work the fish into a feeding frenzy. It is worth bulking feed out with hemp and small pellets to keep the cost down, but it is often the case that on the right day the more maggots you can afford the more fish you will catch in the right conditions.

Cold Water Success

Targeting chub can be great fun once the temperatures start to drop. A species of fish that is willing to feed in the harshest of conditions and one which is realistic to target when time is tight. So if you only have a few hours to put a fish on the bank, during the winter look no further than the chub, it has a lot to offer. **CF**

**Which One?
FEEDER OR PVA**



So when should you use a feeder instead of PVA, or vice versa?

I find feeders are better suited when you want to build a swim, trying to attract numbers of feeding fish and wanting to catch bags or multiple catches of fish.

A feeder is better suited to fast, shallow swims when PVA bags, which contain large amounts of feed, release all of the bait in one go. A situation where a constant trickle of feed being released from a feeder is better suited.

When fishing near weed or snaggy situations using a feeder can become troublesome, as this will often become snagged once a fish has been hooked. A situation where a PVA bag using a lead which can be released via a lead clip or by tying the lead onto a swivel using a weak link of light line, which will break when becoming snagged, can be advantageous and land fish that could otherwise be lost.

When targeting bags of fish the feeder can be awesome when regular feeding can make the most of a swim. However, when playing the waiting game, targeting big fish, PVA bags of maggots take some beating. It allows large quantities of maggots to be fed accurately around the rig without the need for recasting regularly.



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