

Q I've just joined an angling club that has a gravel pit with carp up to 20lb in it. I've been told that imitation baits work well, fished up in the water, but I'm not too sure about which baits to try and the rigs to use. Can you help?

Bill Gittins
Hometown: Wokingham
Age: 47
Favourite species: Tench

A Imitation baits do catch a lot of carp, and one angler who catches plenty on fakes is Alan Stagg – he's only too pleased to help.



CFA EXPERT
Name: Alan Stagg
Sponsors: Gardner Tackle, Enterprise Tackle, CC Moore
Personal-best carp: 41lb 2oz

FAKE IT ON THREE LEVELS

Words and photos: **Steve Martin**

Alan Stagg looks at the three simple fake-bait rigs you'll need if you want to catch carp at any depth.

imitations, or fake baits as they are called, have a big advantage over natural baits in that they are less likely to suffer from the attentions of nuisance fish. Plus they have the advantage of being buoyant, so they can be fished at any depth.

Plastic imitations like corn and grubs have been around for ages, and in the past were used to help pop up sinking baits and add attraction.

However, take a look on the shelves of your local tackle shop now and you'll see how modern technology has taken over. There are fakes of most natural baits, plus more besides.

Do they all catch fish? It's difficult to say, but whatever fake you choose, it's essential you get the presentation spot on and use the right feed.

We join Gardner Tackle's Alan Stagg at Thorpe Lea Fishery, in Surrey, for the lowdown on how to fish imitation baits on three levels: bottom, midwater and surface.

Before even setting up a rod, Alan explains that you need to establish a mark where you are going

How often should I feed my zig line?



Ideally, after each cast, as that's when most bites will come.

ASK AN EXPERT
Your questions answered

ALAN'S TOP 10 FAKE BAITS

- 01 Buoyant and sinking corn
- 02 Mag-aligner grubs
- 03 Zig rig/surface baits - mixed colours
- 04 Maggots
- 05 Casters
- 06 Niteglow sweetcorn
- 07 Sinking pellets
- 08 Imitation mixers
- 09 Tiger nuts
- 10 Maize

corn, plus CC Moore's Sweet Nut Cloud Mix and Response & Cream Bait Booster Dip. Then to make the sloppy mix give off a bigger cloud in the water a tin of condensed milk goes in. Once all the ingredients are mixed it might be a little dry, so Alan advises adding some extra water.

That's the sub-surface fishing covered, but often, even when fishing a zig, carp will come right up to feed off the top, especially if it's warm, so Alan's third rig is for catching fish off the top. Again, it's a simple setup consisting of a Gardner Flatliner inline-style controller to help cast and an Enterprise Tackle Zig Rig bait as a hook bait positioned tight to the shank of the hook on a short hair.

The critical thing with this rig, Alan explains, is to not fish it with too short a hook link, because although the fish will come to the controller →



This 20lb lunker fell for Alan's imitation dog biscuit – one of many taken off the top on his simple surface setup.

FAKE BAITS ON THE HOOK

1 Soft-type imitation mixers work best when hair-rigged tight to the hook shank.

2 For best zig bait presentation use a small piece of foam with a slit in the side...

3 ... that you then push over the hook shank once it's tied on a short hair.

4 One of Alan's best bottom setups is hair-rigged corn with a size 16 hook on the hair...

5 ... to which he adds five maggots for attraction, pushing the hook into the corn.

WHAT TO FEED

1 Fast-sinking particles like hemp and pellets create an oily feast to pull carp to the bottom.

2 Alan's zig feed recipe is a mixture of particles, cloudy feed and milky liquid.

3 Once mixed you get a sloppy mix that looks a bit like watery porridge...

4 ... that once in the water creates a milky, particle-filled column of attraction.

5 Pet-food mixers are soaked in sunflower oil to give them more pulling power.

splash, its shadow might spook them. He recommends a minimum length of three feet..

His feed for the surface is a large bag of dog mixers – he bought his in bulk from a pet-food shop – and to give the biscuits an added pull he soaks his in a little sunflower oil, which creates a milky haze on the surface and ‘flattens’ the water, so you can see the controller and hook bait.

THE SESSION

Alan starts the day by firing 10 spods of his hemp/pellets mix over the 70-yard mark, but it is quickly clear, however, that the carp are up in the water – he can see their backs show above the surface as fish come to the splash of the spod. He decides to cast an exploratory bottom bait to see if the fish have followed the loose feed down, as well as his zig, set to fish at three feet. Not surprisingly, the first fish of the day comes to the zig and, as he plays it, Alan encounters a minor problem. Although he's found the weed-free patch – the area he's fishing – the weed bed in front of it is silkweed and his lead is clogged with the stuff... and so is the carp.

This makes playing the fish awkward and places a lot of pressure on the line. However, the carp is finally landed, together with about 20lb of silkweed. It's the same when he retrieves his bottom rig – it comes in choked with weed. The decision is made that the fish are going to be caught up in the water, so Alan swaps his bottom setup for a second zig, but this one is set at four feet above the deck.

This switch also prompts a change in feed, to the white-coloured slop, and when this hits the water it creates a slow-sinking white cloud of small particles, with plenty to gain the carp's interest. Alan also makes a small modification to his rig by just nipping the tail rubber over the lead clip, so that if the weight does get snagged in the weed, it will drop off. This will take the pressure off and allow him to play the fish without it being dragged down by the excess weight.

During the next few hours most of the fish – carp to 20lb – come on the 4ft zig, but more and more fish can be seen on the surface, with many coming a great deal closer to the bank.

The question is, would they take off the top? To find out, Alan spods two loads of his mixers at about 40 yards. The reaction to the feed is instant: with fish coming to the splash from all sides, and soon there is a mass of carp competing.

The two zig rods are retrieved and replaced by the floater rod. Another spod of mixers keeps the fish occupied, and the first cast of the controller is made.

Alan overcasts the rig and slowly winds back until the float and hook bait sit at the back of the feeding fish. Moments later there's a crash, as a hooked carp bolts, followed by a serious bend in Alan's rod, and after what seems an age – about five minutes – an upper-double fish is netted.

Safe to say that the rest of the session is spent catching fish off the top, but on another day the other rigs might have fared better, depending on the time of year and the weather. **FRANK**

GET GEARED UP

1 SURFACE SETUP

A 1.75lb-test-curve Avon-style rod, 10lb Hydro Flo main line, a medium Flatliner inline-style controller, fixed with a Covert Tail Rubber at the top and a size 12 Covert Flexi Ring swivel at the bottom.

Three feet of 10lb Zig Link hook link are fitted with size 11 Covert Mugga hook with an Enterprise Tackle Zig Rig bait as a hook bait on a short hair positioned nice and tight to the shank of the hook.

2 ZIG SETUP

A 3.25lb-test-curve rod, 15lb Pro Light Blend Main line, a 12in length of Covert Sinking Rig Tube – important, as this very short piece of tubing prevents tangles – a standard Covert lead-clip setup with the tail rubber pushed gently on to drop the lead on the take (due to the heavy silkweed) and Quick Lok swivel and anti-tangle sleeve that acts as a boom, reducing tangles.

Hooklength is 10lb Zig Link with a size 12 Covert Mugga, to which is attached a small, hair-rigged piece of Gardner Tackle zig foam with a small slit in the side to push the shank of the hook into.

3 BOTTOM-BAIT SETUP

A 3.25lb-test-curve rod, 15lb Pro Light Blend main line, three feet of Plummet leadcore, standard Covert lead-clip setup, Q-Ring, with five inches of 15lb Trickster braid as a hooklength. A size 8 Covert Wide Gape Talon Tip hook, short hair and a piece of buoyant Enterprise Tackle corn, tipped with five white maggots, mounted by tying a small size 16 hook to the hair and pushed into the corn.

The best action, and most fish in the session, came from the short line on Alan's floater setup.

Send your coarse fishing question to us at
myanglingquestion@dhp.co.uk