



Neil finally lured a Kennet chub after switching to a single red maggot.



Mr Reliable

In the first part of a new series, Gardner Tackle's Neil Wayte reveals how it's possible to catch chub in the harshest of conditions. All you need is a little patience...

ANGLER FACT FILE

Name: Neil Wayte

Age: 48

Sponsor: Gardner
Tackle

**Personal-best
chub:** 7lb 10z

With lakes and canals frozen solid by some of the coldest temperatures for years and most of the country covered in a blanket of snow, you would think it impossible to catch in the extreme conditions. You would be wrong, however, as there is one species that loves the cold and puts up a scrap that will soon get the body heat rising – and that is the chub.

River regulars will know this, but if you've never fished a river before and you need your fishing fix, why not grab a pot of maggots and head for your nearest venue.

Gardner-backed Neil Wayte never misses a chance to fish the River Kennet in Berkshire, whatever the condition. Even on the coldest of days his scaled-down approach has reaped reward, so deputy editor Steve Martin joined

him on a day when the mercury had hit minus 6°C overnight to put his tactics to the test.

As they walked the half-mile from the car park between some lakes towards the river – a great way to warm up before you start – the ground underfoot crunched with each step and every so often you could hear the ice crack. This was not a day to go without a large flask of coffee.

PRIME LOCATION

Once at the river, Neil walked a few yards downstream to a swim that had overhanging branches upstream, which created a nearside crease in front and another about three-quarters of the way across. There was also a fallen tree below that covered half the river. This was prime chub territory!

Neil explained that you need

to seek out the featured swims where the chub are likely to lie, but sometimes you can draw fish to your hook, as once they get a taste of the bait they will travel some distance to find its source. So to help get the fish in his swim interested, he fired two small pouches of red maggots across the river.

THE RIGHT GEAR

Neil is confident that his scaled-down approach is the reason why he has plenty of success on the Kennet. However, with so many potential snags around him he did set his rig up with Gardner HydroFlo 6lb main line and a 4lb hook link. It's the business end where he makes the reduction. This is a size 16 Drennan Super Spade hook. It's a strong hook that takes the single or double hook



When targeting winter chub, look for a swim with plenty of fish-holding features.



The rod bent as a welcome fish had finally put in an appearance to warm the angler up.

bait he planned to fish, and to start with the hook was tied to a 3ft hook link.

Chub can be quite wary when they feed – especially in winter. If they feel the slightest resistance when they take a bait, they are likely to drop it, so Neil fished with a running-feeder setup. This consisted of a run ring with a quick-change clip fitted and a large buffer bead. He attached a Preston 50g quick-load feeder for the session, stating it was heavy enough to hold on the riverbed in the flow, but not so heavy that it wouldn't budge once a fish had taken the bait. Neil liked the feeders because of the flat-bottomed profile they had. He carried a selection of different weights, so he could chop and change, depending on the strength of the flow.

ULTRA SENSITIVE

Neil used a 12ft Hardy Marksman Specialist feeder rod for the session.

This was loaded with its lightest tip – 1oz – as he fished with the rod high in the rod rest and a slight downstream bow in the line. By fishing this way Neil made his rig ultra sensitive, so once a fish had picked up his bait and moved off, this would dislodge the feeder, causing it to drop downstream and the quivertip to bounce back indicating a drop-back bite. Nine times out of 10 there would be no need to strike, as the weight of the feeder would set the hook. By fishing this method, rarely do you get a fierce pull-round bite like you would from a barbel.

FEEDING FACTS

Neil cast his feeder to within four feet of the far bank, into the crease, slightly downstream, but above the fallen tree. On each cast – this was repeated every 10 or 15 minutes – he filled the feeder with red maggots, leaving plenty of room so they could escape easily. Although the flow does help to wash the

NEIL'S HARD- GROUND TIP



A frozen bank can be a nightmare when it comes to pushing a bankstick into the ground. Neil always goes armed with some threaded spiked models, which drill into the earth with a little downward force.

wriggling bait out, maggots don't move much when it's really cold, so they can take some time to evacuate the feeder. Having encountered this after the first few casts, Neil enlarged some of the holes in the feeder with braid scissors. This resolved the problem, as each subsequent retrieval resulted in an empty feeder.

While waiting for a bite, Neil would also catapult some free offerings directly across to the overhanging branches. The thinking being that the maggots would travel beyond the fallen tree to attract fish from further downstream to his hook. This was done about four times in the first hour.

Also during the first hour Neil fished double red maggots on the hook, but after he failed to attract a bite switched to a single bait, as this looked more like the loose feed that drifted downstream. If that didn't work, he could drop down a hook size.

BOING! TIME FOR CHUB

The air temperature finally started to rise – it must have reached at least 1°C by mid-morning, and



BAIT BITS



01 Red maggots are an excellent choice when the cold weather bites.



02 To encourage the bait to evacuate the feeder, try expanding the holes.



03 When targeting chub, don't be shy on the free offerings to get the swim going.



04 Start the session with a double-red-maggot offering on the hook...



05 ... but if bites fail to come try a single bait. This often brings results.

after he suffered a few 'stick fish', Neil's rod tip suddenly sprung back sharply. The bend in the rod was no snag this time, as a welcome fish had finally put in an appearance to warm the angler up. Having identified that it wasn't a monster, Neil still had to steer the fish away from the fallen tree. This is his reason for keeping with a relatively strong setup. Carefully, he imparted a little upstream pressure to ensure the fish was guided upstream to the waiting net. The fish – estimated to be about 4lb – was still lively once out of the water, and Neil commented

that it felt like a block of ice. Once unhooked, the chub was quickly returned to the water a few swims upstream to avoid spooking any other fish in the swim.

SHORTEN UP

Neil had waited about 90 minutes for that first bite. That's the great thing about chub fishing. On some sessions you can get a bite within minutes, even on the coldest days, whereas another time you can wait for two or three hours before they switch on.

Having bagged that first chub, Neil was confident that more would show. However, the next hour ended biteless. Were there more fish around? Neil felt that there were, but they might be

ignoring his bait, as it was some distance from the feeder. Were the chub feeding close to the feeder? Chub can actually attack a feeder once they turn on to the feed. To test his theory, Neil shortened his hook link by half to 18 inches – in the summer he would even fish with a shorter one.

An hour later and that first fish seemed like a long time ago.

UP THE FEED

With the temperature now starting to fall again, Neil decided that another plan was needed. The fallen tree at the tail of his swim was a recent addition, and he felt that this might be the reason for his lack of bites. The fish may have moved downriver having

NEIL'S CHUB RIG

50g Preston Quickload feeder on a running rig

3ft, 4lb hook link

Single or double red maggot on a size 16 Drennan Super Spade hook





been spooked when it fell in. In an effort to try and draw the chub back, Neil started to increase the amount of loose feed to every cast. It's a good tactic in the summer to get fish competing for food, but it's a bit of a gamble in colder conditions.

NOT TODAY

By mid-afternoon the cold rather than the fish had started to bite, so reluctantly Neil called time on the session. Although disappointed not to add to his 4lb fish, he explained that the tactics he had fished would not change while the cold weather persisted. The River Kennet rarely goes clear, so red maggots would always be his first-choice bait. However, on a clear-running river, he would use mashed bread and flake using the same setup, but with an open-ended feeder. **totalcourse FISHING**

TACKLE TIPS



01 When targeting chub, Neil uses 6lb line on the reel and clear 4lb line for the hook link.



02 There's no need for big hooks in the cold. A strong size 16 Super Spade is the ideal choice.



03 Take a selection of different-sized flat-sided blockend feeders when fishing maggots.



04 As you never know about the flow, take a choice of feeders of different weights.



05 For a resistance-free feeder setup, fix your blockend to a run-ring system.



This 4lb chub couldn't resist Neil's maggot-feeder tactics.