

BI-BAIT BAGGING!

In the first of a new series, Tom Scholey catches up with **Jon Whincup** on the banks of his local Decoy Lakes, to find out why he thinks two baits are all you need for a brilliant winter session!

Even venues as prolific as the lovely Decoy Lakes, where you join me today, can be tricky to tackle come wintertime. Pegs that in summer would be almost guaranteed to catch 100lb or more can struggle for a bite, but I actually find this more challenging fishing – a lot more enjoyable than a winter bagging race!

The biggest weapon you can have in your armoury in winter is definitely confidence. You have to believe in what you are doing and be confident that it is going to work, because patience is often the key to getting the most from your peg. You need to settle into a feeding regime that you believe to be right, and stick to it; with the size of the fish in places like Decoy, when they turn up it doesn't take long to put a serious weight together.

Pole fishing on big, open-water lakes like Beastie, where you join me today, is somewhat easier to plan than, say, tackling snake lakes in winter. This may sound a strange thing to say, but what I mean is the fish that don't want to feed can get away from you. On snake lakes, for example, you often find that tactics like dobbing come to the fore, which is essentially trying to catch fish midwater that don't want to feed.

Fish that don't want to feed here at Decoy will more than likely be sat further out, beyond pole range or near the central island – basically as far away from any bankside disturbance as possible. So your brief as a pole angler is to try and draw feeding fish in and then catch them – something far more positive and up my street than dobbing a piece of bread against a feature in blind hope!

CATCH EVERYTHING

With this idea in mind I think it is first important to consider what species of fish we expect to be feeding. Roach, skimmers and F1s will all happily feed in the cold, but carp can be conspicuous by their absence. It is also worth saying that the colder the water, the fewer fish you

can expect to feed, and the later in the day you can expect to catch them.

I generally look at feeding a short pole swim by hand, and a long pole line more negatively – which gives me two areas of my peg to catch from. It also means that I can experiment by feeding my peg in two different ways, which gives me a good idea of how the venue is responding, and if necessary I can adapt my plan accordingly.

In the vast majority of pegs, I attack my swim by fishing pellets on the long pole, and maggots short. Indeed, these two baits are all I take to my peg in the vast majority of situations in the winter. Before I talk you through how I feed and fish with each of these respective baits it is important to think how they work together.

What I mean by that is that feeding and fishing with maggots is quite an aggressive method. Bait is constantly falling through the water, roach are darting in and out and, depending on where and how the fish are feeding, a volume of bait will be spread over an area on the bottom.

By contrast, on the long pole I will pot in a small amount of pellets, then sit with a bait over the top in a very small »»



A slim-bodied float for fishing on the drop (left) and a rounder-bodied pattern for bulked-down rigs.



ANGLER FILE

JON WHINCUP
Age: 49
Lives: Peterborough
Sponsor: Frenzee, Bait-Tech
Pole: Frenzee FXT Precision

VENUE FILE

DECOY LAKES
Location: Drybread Road, Whittlesey, Peterborough PE7 2AD
Day tickets: £7; concessions £4
Website: www.decoylakes.co.uk

area, almost like setting a trap. If the fish are feeding more warily, I would expect this line to be the most productive. I also expect this to work the best in the early part of the day, while fish gain confidence over my more aggressively fed swim.

MAGGOT MEAL

Both the best and the worst thing about fishing with maggots is that they appeal to all sizes of fish. From a tiny roach to a giant carp, everything will wolf down a well-presented maggot. So the key is you have to adapt your feeding to try and catch the biggest fish that are in front of you.

There are two ways you can do this: the first is through your rigs, and the other is through your feeding. Feedingwise, I always like to start by throwing in 20 maggots every two or three minutes, and just read my way into the session from there.

Rigwise I set up two patterns: firstly a 0.2g Frenzee F04 tied to 0.14mm line and shotted with a string of No11 shot, starting at the base of the hooklength and working up from there. Hook choice is a size 18 Drennan Wide Gape Maggot, to a 6in 0.09mm hooklength.

My second rig is far more positive – a 0.4g float with a bulk of No8s 14 inches away from the hook, and three No9 droppers.



Keep bait simple, but think extra carefully about how you feed.



Loose-feed and potting-in pellets both have their days – be prepared to try both methods.

After feeding the swim regularly, I almost always start on the strung-out rig. This allows me to really search the water column and find out at what depth the fish are feeding, and more importantly what fish are in my peg.

An important thing to remember with regard to this is that different species of

fish can hang at different depths, so it might well be that you have FIs feeding on the deck, and roach or skimmers swimming above them, or vice versa.

The bulk-down rig only comes into play when and if I establish that the stamp of fish that I want to catch are feeding hard on the bottom, and I know that getting my bait down there quickly will get me a bite, and ultimately a fish in the net, quicker.

PELLET PERFECTION

For pellets, a positive rig is also the order of the day as the intention is to get the bait down and nail it dead accurately over the neat pile of pellets that I have fed via the pole pot.

Again, I use a 0.4g Frenzee F04 tied to 0.14mm Frenzee Precision, though this time my hook is a size 16 Drennan Silverfish Pellet.

The size of pellets that I choose to feed depends entirely on the temperature. If it is relatively mild I like to feed softened 4mm pellets. I tap just six or eight in, then present a 4mm expander pellet over the top. If I expect the fishing to be tough, though, I will generally feed micro pellets instead. I always like to carry both kinds of pellets with me, which gives me the option of changing my feed bait if I get things slightly wrong at the start of the session.

Likewise, I also like to take 4mm and 6mm expander pellets, as 4mm pellets are best

when the going is tough, and 6mm if a few more fish are moving and feeding.

THE SESSION

Getting the most from your winter session is all about reading how the fish are feeding, and adapting your approach accordingly. After tapping a few soft pellets in on the long line and fishing a 4mm expander pellet over the top, I soon find that I am into a run of small skimmers – not the target species, but at least I know some fish are feeding. Five small stamp fish like this have me thinking that I need to change my feeding regime to bring in some better carp and FIs.

I start loose feeding some bigger 4mm pellets, and this has the desired effect with the odd better F1 putting in an appearance, and a lone 6lb carp. That said, the small skimmers are still a nuisance, and I really feel that my maggot line will be more productive today as I am feeding more aggressively here, so I expect that the fish will come in and settle, as they are obviously responding to bait.

After an hour on the long pole, I drop in short and my suspicions are confirmed with a near 4lb F1 on my first put-in! Some nice stamp roach follow, and a pattern soon emerges. I seem to catch a few roach, then



Building-up a loose-fed maggot swim for the later stages of the session is a great ploy in winter.

bites go quiet, before I latch into a quality F1.

Another notable pattern is that bites only come when my rig has settled, which prompts me to switch to my bulked-down rig. Now I can really motor, it is quite literally a good-stamp roach, F1 or crucian every put-in.

One word of caution, though: when you start bagging up like this be sure not to get too giddy with the loose feed. It is very easy to get a bit gung ho, which can bring the

fish off the bottom if you are not careful.

I finish the session with well over 80lb, comprising of about 50lb of FIs, two carp for 10lb and 20lb of mixed silver fish, including some cracking roach and big crucians. Today the fish have fed well, but if they hadn't and the going was tough I know I would have had my options covered with my longer swim, and a negative approach would have guaranteed a few bites on a tough day. ■

Different species of fish can hang at different depths, so it might well be that you have FIs feeding on the deck, and roach or skimmers swimming above them...



Jon uses fine 0.09mm hooklengths for FIs, but with balanced tackle and soft hollow elastic he never gets broken!



You often catch a big F1 on your first drop-in on a new swim!



You can enjoy a day catching silvers, FIs and carp with Jon's approach!