

HARD IS SIMPLE!

If you were to ask me what single aspect of angling has helped me catch more fish over the years, it would be the ability to keep things simple. Conversely, if you were to ask me what has prevented me catching fish in the past, it would definitely be overcomplication! I like to remind myself of these facts every time I head out onto the bank, simplifying each small aspect of my approach as much as possible.

You join me at the luscious Climax's Wold View Fisheries near Claxby, Lincolnshire, where I can hopefully refresh and simplify your thinking behind fishing with hard pellets.

Andy Oldham's biggest angling edge is to keep things as simple as possible. Here, he strips pellet fishing back to its most basic but deadly form!



WHICH PELLETS?

Deciding what bait to take to a swim is the first part of simplifying my attack. I don't like to have any more than two main sizes of pellets with me. I'm fishing for a mixture of carp and FIs in the height of summer, so I've opted for plain 6mm and 8mm pellets.



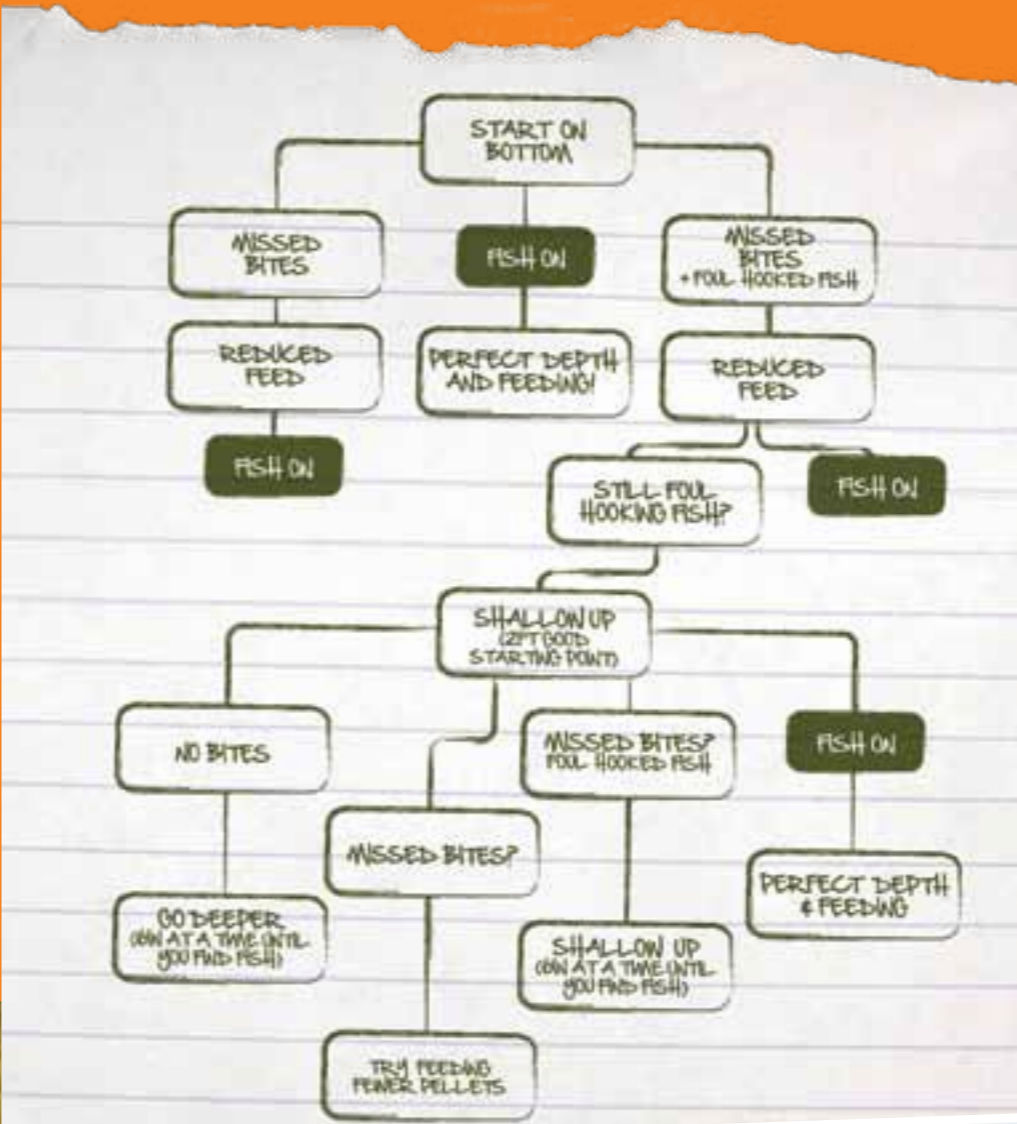
WHEN 6MMS?

These are the main pellets I plan on using. I can feed them accurately due to their size and they also make a fish-attracting noise when entering the water. I also feel that 6mm pellets offer greater selectivity than the smaller versions

that many anglers use. I don't want to be pestered by small fish and I'm confident that even small FIs will eat a 6mm pellet, especially if that's all I'm feeding and there's nothing else for the fish to munch on.

WHEN 8MMS?

My 8mm pellets form my back-up plan. If the FIs aren't feeding, these bigger pellets give me the option of drawing big carp into the swim. I wouldn't expect to get as many bites when using these but hopefully the FIs will ignore them and the fish I catch will be bigger munters! Changing to feeding just three or four 8mm pellets and fishing an 8mm on the hook can transform what you catch!



It's COMING UP!

Another common situation when fishing with pellets is that fish begin to come off the bottom to eat them as they fall through the water. Again, if you're fishing on the bottom, a sure sign that this is happening is missed bites. However, along with missed bites, you're also likely to foul hook and lose a lot of fish. You may strike and hook them off the bottom where they're feeding on the free-falling pellets. This is when fishing shallow or up in the water can work well.

FINDING FISH SHALLOW

Once fish start to feed off the bottom it's your job to find them. Again, this is very simple, in the sense that they tell you where they want to be. When I first try shallow, I often start at two feet. If I come to this depth and don't get any bites, it's obvious the fish are deeper! Simply deepen up six to eight inches at a time until you begin to get bites.

Sometimes, however, the opposite happens, and even when you're fishing shallow you will miss a lot of bites and even foul hook and lose fish. This tells you that the fish are feeding above your chosen depth and you need to shallow up.

WARNING!

Fish move around at different depths during the day. You may catch well at two feet for a spell, but after half an hour they might come even shallower and you need to be prepared to follow them up. Just because you catch well at one depth at a certain time doesn't mean that's right for the full day!

I can't stress enough the importance of changing your feeding to how the fish respond. When fishing shallow and on the deck, the same key rules apply. Hopefully the chart opposite will help guide you through my simple feeding plan. The general rule is that if you're missing bites, cut back on the amount you're feeding. Then, based on how they respond, try and fish where the fish are in the water column. >>>

KEY RULES

A lot of anglers seem to get confused about feeding but, for me, there's one simple rule to follow. The fish will tell you how best to feed – you need to base how you feed on what they tell you. Here are a few simple but key rules to follow.

ALL MOUTHS ON DECK

An ideal situation is to be fishing on the bottom, feeding regularly, and cleanly hooking fish. This way, the fish are telling you that you're fishing in the right place, with the right bait, and feeding the right amount. However, sometimes you're faced with other outcomes.

TOO MUCH FEED...

If you are getting a lot of bites on your float but not connecting with many fish, there are two things that could be happening. The first is that you're feeding too much, and the fish are too busy eating all the other pellets in the swim rather than yours. This tells you that you need to cut back on the amount of pellets you are feeding. This way, there are fewer particles for the fish to take and hopefully they will pick out your hook bait quicker. You can often tell when this is happening if the swim starts to bubble and fizz as fish bury into the bottom.



ANGLER FILE

ANDY OLDHAM

Age: 79
Lives: Maltby
Sponsor: Frenzee, Bait-Tech
Pole: Frenzee Precision FXT

VENUE FILE

CLIMAX'S WOLD VIEW FISHERIES

Location: Just off the A46, near Claxby LN8 3YR
Day tickets: £7; concessions £5
Contact: 07742 220204/01673 828827
Web: www.woldviewfisheries.com

SINGLE SWIM

I like to fish just one main swim with pellets on the pole at this time of year. The foremost reason for this is that I can understand what is happening in the swim all of the time and adapt tactics accordingly to catch more or bigger fish. I also feel that feeding one area of the swim creates a hotspot of activity, and other fish in different areas of the lake will be more inclined to come and investigate what is happening in one single spot than in lots of little ones. All methods, whether it be short, margin, or long-pole fishing, have their day, but for my simple pellet attack I like to fish between eight and 13 metres straight in front of me in open water.

RIGS

I always need a valid reason for each rig to be set up and, as you will see, each one has a job!

STABLE DECK RIG

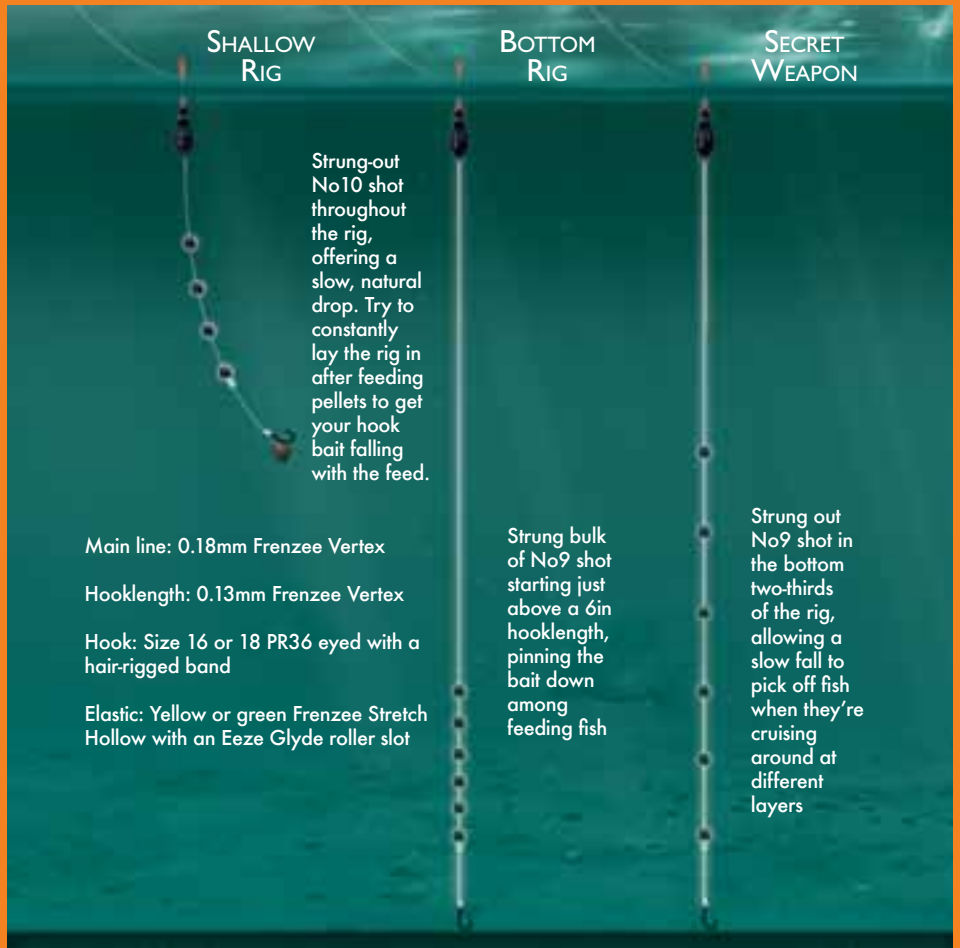
This is my rig when fishing on the bottom for fish that are feeding there. I need it to be fairly stable and because the fish are feeding close to the bottom I use a spread bulk of No8 shot starting just above my 6in hooklength. This ensures that the hook bait is supported in the killing zone where the fish are feeding, and I always set the rig around one inch overdepth. Shotting close to the hook here makes the rig sensitive and bites are always clear and positive.

SHALLOW RIG

I always use the same 6in hooklength and shotting is simply four No 10s spread evenly. This allows my hook bait to fall naturally. A lot of anglers favour short lines between their float and pole tip and use a bulk of shot to try and make the fish hook themselves. I much prefer to get the feeding right and will actually pick up at bites to try and hook the fish. This kind of rig gives me plenty of scope to experiment with the depth and I can focus on my feeding strategy to help me catch the fish.

SECRET WEAPON

My final rig is somewhat of a secret weapon and I use it during any iffy periods if the fish are moving up and down in the water a lot. You can often tell when this is happening because, whether you fish shallow or on the deck, you miss bites and foul hook fish. The rig is set at full depth but incorporates a shotting pattern of No9 shot strung in the bottom two-thirds. When I lay this out on the water, the shotting pattern allows the hook bait to fall slowly through the layers and there's an increased chance of a fish seeing the bait fall. Sometimes they'll take it on the drop and drag the elastic out, while other times you'll get a bite just as the hook bait settles when a fish has followed the slow-falling bait down to the deck and sucked it straight up!



HOOK BAITS

Nothing is simpler than a hard-pellet hook bait. There are, however, two vital considerations. You need to be using the right sized hook matched to the bait, and also have the bait presented on the hook correctly.

I stick to three hook sizes for most of my hard-pellet work. If my target is primarily FIs, I'll be using a 6mm hard pellet and a size 18 PR 36 hook is perfect. If the fishing is mixed, like today, and I'm catching a variety of FIs and carp, then I will up this to a size 16. I'm happy to use a 6mm or 8mm pellet on this pattern. However, if you were to use an 8mm pellet on the size 18, I believe the big hook bait can mask the point and lead to a lot of missed bites.

The size 14 hook comes into play when I'm really bagging, usually with big, proper carp when primarily using 8mm pellets. I believe these spend a lot less time examining the hook and I want maximum penetration and strength for hitting bites and when playing fish.

The way I present my hook bait is to actually hair rig a latex bait band. You can buy these already tied or easily make them yourself. This means that the pellet is free moving off the hook. I like mine to sit just below the bend so that when a fish takes the bait, the whole hook is free to catch it! ■

