

DOES BAIT COLOUR MATTER?

It's a question that many anglers ask themselves but just how important is it really when targeting silver fish? We asked two match anglers to reveal all during a session on the River Soar.

Making the right choices when you go fishing isn't always down to luck – have you ever asked yourself why the top anglers always seem to be one step ahead of the pack? One of the biggest decisions you can make before you embark on a session is the type of bait you'll be taking with you. Unlike carp, roach tend to be more selective with the baits they eat; get it wrong and you can rule out any chance of a bumper day. When you're faced with a venue containing roach that can be caught on breadpunch or groundbait, how do you decide between the baits?

It's been said for many years that a dark feed works best in clear water, but bread is the complete opposite – so why does it work so well? It's also believed that roach don't like to feed over light baits when water visibility is good because it exposes them to predators – so why do they feed over bread and why is it such a prolific bait on some waters? To hopefully find some answers we've asked two seasoned match anglers to fish against each other on

the canalised section of the River Soar, in Leicester.

Adam Nurse and Dawson Holloway both fish for Mosella End Peg Angling and have performed well in a recent league run on the venue. We've only made one rule for the session, and that's regarding the baits they can use – Adam is to fish his favoured breadpunch while Dawson will pin his faith in a familiar, dark-groundbait attack.

The canalised section of the River Soar is halfway between a river and a canal – it's deeper than a normal canal and flows very slightly. Technically it's a river, but the anglers that regularly fish the venue use canal tactics. The stretch of 'river' we've chosen to fish runs behind Leicester City Football Club's Walkers Stadium. It's running at normal level and looks quite green and fishy. The first peg we choose is next to a railway bridge that's covered in very 'attractive' graffiti, and the second sits around 15 yards downstream. Neither peg has any huge advantage over the other, so it should be intriguing to see how each angler fares.



Our two intrepid anglers, at the ready to see just how much of a difference the colour of their bait makes.



The Bread Man

Adam is a big fan of using his loaf. He has fished this stretch of the River Soar for years and always relies on the bread to work its magic. As well as feeding bread, Adam takes a pint of hemp to every match because he's certain the seeds complement the punch.

"Using breadpunch at the start I usually catch quite quickly, as the fish are attracted to the cloud and visual appeal of bread. As the session wears on I tend to feed more hemp than bread and try to wean the bigger specimens onto the seed. It usually works, so hopefully today I'll see some of the river's larger roach, that I've had to over 1lb before," explained the neatly turned out matchman.

"You tend to catch big roach on bread and even bigger roach on hemp, but because bread is very selective you have to be certain that roach are going to be your main target. Dawson may catch other species that can boost his weight, while I'm likely to have a bag of just roach at the end," Adam remarks.

Like most bread anglers, Adam has his own way of preparing his feed. "The perfect feed has to be

very fine but needs to hold as much water as possible so that it sinks to the bottom quickly. I liquidise a loaf of Warburtons bread, shake it through a pinkie riddle, then bag it up and leave it in the airing cupboard to dry out. Once dry, it's liquidised again and passed through a sieve to make the particles very small. This is then wetted with an atomiser. The bread should bind together with a light squeeze.

"Just before I feed at the start, I add a handful of hemp to a couple of pints of the 'likky' bread. I'll feed more hemp as the day progresses."

A quick look at Adam's top kits shows he's very simple in his approach. "I've not felt the need to set up several rigs on the Soar, because I'm only fishing one line and bread is a positive bait that requires a simple rig to get the best out of it. The other rig is slightly lighter and used for hemp fishing. I use Fox Match MP6 floats on both – they're excellent for bread fishing because they have a fibre bristle that can hold up a piece of punch without pulling under and the shape means they exit the water cleanly on the strike."



The Groundbaiter

Dawson has fished for roach with groundbait for years. He's only recently started fishing the River Soar but his results so far have been brilliant. Beating local anglers fishing with their favourite bread is easier said than done, but Dawson believes that groundbait is the way forward.

"When I've fished punch I've caught just roach and odd skimmers. On most venues there are also perch, chublets and gudgeon that will take a maggot presented over groundbait every time. On days when the river is fishing hard and the roach aren't feeding, I can catch other species on my baited line without having to set up any more tackle.

"I like my mix to be quite dark, but not 100 per cent black. I don't think any canal bottom is completely black so my mix is dark brown, just like silt. I combine equal parts of Mosella Select All Round and Mosella Eurocup to give me a fine but quite sticky mix," says Dawson, as he mixes his groundbait.

As agreed, Dawson is allowed to use any natural baits that are

associated with groundbaiting. He commented: "As you can't fish with groundbait on the hook I've got to have other baits that I can feed and use as hook baits. I'll always have some white squatts, fluoro pinkies, big maggots and casters with me. If you want you can also use chopped worms, as these will bring in a bigger stamp of fish on harder days. Groundbait is so versatile that you can add lots of different baits to it depending on how the session is going. Why would you ever want to fish with another bait?"

Dawson also has two rigs set up for the session and agrees with Adam that simplicity is always best. His heavier rig is the one he wants to be catching on because it has the bigger hook and would mean he was in bagging mode! The other rig he describes as his light rig, for when he has to work for bites.

"I'm a big fan of slim floats for a lot of my slow-moving water pole fishing and the ones from Browning (Europa) are excellent," he comments. "They have a slight shoulder that prevents them from riding out of the water. Both of my rigs utilise this pattern."



A study of concentration, Adam's bread attack was geared towards big fish.



Dawson's groundbait approach would cope well with boat-traffic disturbance.

The Session

Once our anglers have set up their respective tackle and finally settled into the surroundings, the 'match' gets started. Both Adam and Dawson decide to cup in their bait, as it's expected to be a prolific day and too much bait fed via a catty would spread out and could ruin the swim before it's even started. Adam cups in two tangerine-sized balls, whereas Dawson pushes the boat out a bit and cups in three balls about the size of a tennis ball! Interestingly, Adam cups his balls in at the surface so they make no noise, whereas Dawson tips his cup about a foot off, to make a splash.

"The extra noise will alert the fish to my swim," Dawson explains. "My bait doesn't have the visual appeal like bread does, so I need this attraction boost."

It's going to be interesting to see who draws first blood. The wise money is on Adam because bread is well known as a fast starter. Both anglers have an indication first drop-in but nothing materialises. Adam has to ship back and rebait, whereas Dawson just lowers his pinkie-baited hook back in. The time saved by fishing tougher livebaits certainly pays off – it's Dawson who's first on the score sheet as a small roach finds its way into the keepnet.

Using a 3mm Preston Q-Punch, Adam quickly rebaits and attempts to get back on level terms. As expected, his float buries positively and he's connected to his first roach of the day.

For the next couple of hours both anglers put on a great show. Fish are constantly being hooked, with Adam edging it because

of a few better-stamp roach. Dawson is getting hammered by small chublets that intercept his pinkie hook bait almost immediately the float settles. Loose feeding some casters soon prevents this problem from escalating.

Whenever Adam's bites slow down he cups in a small, walnut-sized ball of bread to regroup the roach. Hemp is regularly fed over the top and this seems to be

"In one session I had 38 roach, all between 12oz and 1lb on hemp, together with another 10lb on the bread."

holding the roach in a small area. Dawson, on the other hand, is searching his swim for bites and gets them from above, on top of and below his initial feed.

The difference is clear to see, because when Adam gets a bite it comes from a small area no more than a metre square. Dawson is getting a fish every run through but the bites come from all over his swim. Fortunately, both anglers are catching fish so it's turning into a really good battle.

With little over an hour left Dawson is now getting very few bites. He decides to top up with a couple more balls and hope they bring the roach back in. "The

'river' flows slightly so all the feed may have been eaten or moved downstream. A couple more balls should bring the roach back and settle them down for the final stint," he says.

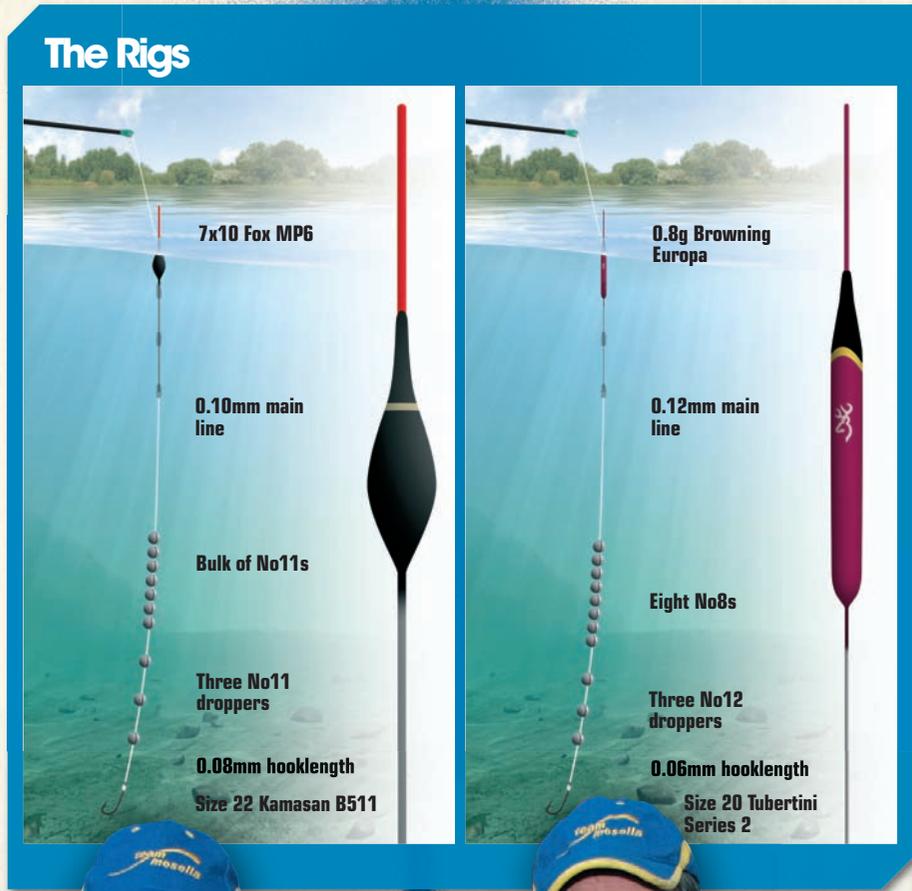
Adam keeps slipping a grain of hemp on to the hook to try to get into some of the bigger roach, but it doesn't get any quicker or better for him. He then carries on catching smaller roach on the bread, saying: "In other matches I've caught roach to over 1lb from this stretch before, and normally when they are in your peg they take a grain of hemp immediately. I had one session where I had 38 roach, all between 12oz and 1lb on hemp, together with another 10lb of smaller roach caught on the bread!"

Dawson's decision to top up brings him the rewards, as a spell of bigger roach and a couple of dumpy perch boost his weight and possibly put him in the lead. The lighter rig is bringing him more fish but the bigger fish are caught on a caster on the heavy rig. He finds that swapping and changing is the best way to continually put fish in the keepnet.

As the match enters its final few minutes Adam decides to stay on the hemp in an attempt to catch at least one big roach for the cameras. His dreams come true when, right on the whistle, a 12oz roach falls for his seed hook bait. Although Dawson's rig was already out of the water, we decide to let it count because he'd given up early for a chance to have a cup of coffee from his flask!



Adam always feeds hemp with bread to entice big fish towards the end of the session.



The Result

Although it's hard to draw conclusions and discount one of these methods totally – both will be devastating on their day – in the end there was no chance of calling this match a tie. Dawson weighed in a respectable 11lb 5oz, with Adam trailing behind on 9lb 2oz – the groundbait had triumphed!

Both anglers agreed that the 'bonus' perch and chublets that Dawson had caught were down to his groundbait-and-pinkie approach. Bread is all very well and good if you're faced with a venue that contains lots of roach, but where other species are in abundance groundbait is a probably the best alternative, especially if you prefer plenty of bites over quality of fish. Adam was slightly disappointed that the hemp hadn't really worked on the day, because this can sometimes be the difference between winning and coming second. "There are so many big roach in this stretch that you can put 10lb in your net from 15 bites," he commented.

It's safe to say that bait colour – dark or white – can have an effect on your catch, but it's how you capitalise on what a certain bait offers that's most important. Fishing livebaits in conjunction with groundbait has proved to be the winner today, but if you combine both tactics then you're surely onto a bumper day on the bank!

