

TACKLE AND TACTICS FOR BIG CATS

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Fifty pound plus is Henry's definition of a 'big' catfish. This one weighed 53lb 8oz.



I have been a keen eel angler for almost 40 years. For me the ultimate predator challenge is to consistently catch big eels. Before you say anything, try it for a few seasons and then tell me what you think. Knowing they are in a water is one thing but putting them on the bank can be quite a different story. By comparison targeting cats is relatively easy. Find the water, get the method and baits sorted and given the rod hours you will catch. How many times have you heard of the same cat being recaptured (even on the same day) yet with eels it rarely happens. They are totally unique. Cats, it has to be said, are big, mean and fight like nothing else in freshwater and they present their own set of problems to solve and deal with. Having read and then heard from friends about their early UK cat exploits I became very interested and started fishing for cats in 1981. Almost straight away I was fortunate to meet and subsequently fish with Bob Baldock who was even then a very experienced and successful catfish angler. I have fished with most of his contemporaries at one time or another and was privileged to be a CCG founder member in 1984. Since that time I have enjoyed fishing for what has now justifiably become another cult species.

Never before have there been such widespread opportunities for serious catfish anglers to fish for big UK cats. For me the definition of a big UK cat is over 50lb. The last CCG magazine (number 28) lists 44 waters that contain cats in excess of 50 pounds and the number of waters has since grown to over 50. Whilst some have restricted membership, many are fishable on a day, club or season ticket

basis. So fish a water that contains them if you want to specifically catch such fish.

Over the last few seasons, Andy Mickleburgh (my angling colleague of 30 years) and myself have landed 13 cats over 50 pounds, with 10 of those being 60lb plus. Andy has caught fish of 50lb plus from three different UK waters on three different baits which illustrates that you have to be versatile and adapt to circumstances to keep being successful. Our catches are based on identifying suitable venues, solid preparation, using the correct tackle/bait for the job and plenty of hard application. We both work five days per week so we have to fish effectively when we can get on the bank. As with all big fish species, you need to be fishing when the fish are feeding or are about to come on the feed and be suitably focused on achieving your objectives. I'm afraid that just being on the bank, lobbing out some baits and hoping for something to come along is not a productive technique where big fish are concerned. Our experiences of fishing a wide range of waters and talking to other catfish anglers plus what we've both seen, heard and read (for example the CCG forum) has made us think that a lot of anglers are being seriously handicapped by their approach to big cats. I will try to offer advice based on our experiences.

We all know that cats of any size pull like crazy. Big ones simply do it with extreme attitude and try to pull your arms out! Whatever tackle you could use, there is simply no way that you can stop a big fish in its tracks. Once a big fish gets a head of steam up it is frightening at the power they can generate and

sustain. I have known instances where the only reason they have stopped is that they have crashed into the bank at the far end of the lake! All you can do is try to slow them down. The key is to apply as much pressure as you can from the moment you hook one and get the fish to work hard for any line that it takes. Use a clutch set as heavily as possible, don't expect to be able to have the time to re-adjust the clutch once a big one is hooked. Use a combination of rod, reel, line, trace and hook that you know does the job and not one that you hope will do the job. Equally use gear that you have complete trust and confidence in. When playing a big cat is no time to wonder if the hook hold is okay, a knot will hold or if the trace material is up to the job. Don't experiment with line, hooks and trace materials when fishing for big cats. They are unforgiving and will exploit any weakness and that includes those of the angler himself. Try different tackle on waters where the fish are 20-40lb to give you that confidence. Always take the approach that any pick-up should result in a fish on the bank. Whilst missed runs and other mishaps happen, always take the time to analyse why a fish was not put on the bank. Learn from a single mistake and not after a series of them. After all, once is once too often. Keeping an open mind is part of being successful but aim to fish with confidence (which comes with experience). Never change just for changes sake and as a wise man once said "If it ain't broke, don't try and fix it!"

My interpretation of how anglers approach fishing for cats is that it is based on their previous background in angling terms. Consequently a catfisher who has fished extensively for pike will have a different view of what is required to an ex-carper who has started to fish for cats. Equally anglers experienced in eel fishing or zander will most likely also have different views of what tackle is required for big cats. Coming from an eel angling background where tackle strength is paramount (you don't play them you simply overpower them), I have no hesitation in fishing as heavily as possible provided that bait presentation is not compromised. For me 20lb mono would be the bare minimum I would use and that would be for a venue with plenty of open water and such line would be coupled with a through action rod of no less than 3lb test curve. If snags are present or the water is more restrictive due to features such as islands, extensive weed or reed beds and even other anglers, then I would use a minimum of 25lb mono coupled with a heavier through action rod. As you increase the line strength you must similarly increase the strength of your trace material and rod so that your whole set up is balanced. It's ludicrous to use 25lb line with a 2.5lb test curve rod and especially a carp rod which will have completely the wrong action. A fast taper carp rod of 2.75lb TC and 18lb line is not appropriate for big cats believe me. Equally anglers who attempt to fish for

At 85lb this catfish was the Darenth Lake record when captured in 2006.



A margin caught
50 pounder for
Andy Mickleburgh.



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both carp and big cats with the same gear will get caught out. If you are targeting big cats then forget about carp except as possible livebaits.

With reels we have gone through the standard Baitrunner types and as we have not yet found the need to fish at great distances, have settled on the Shimano 6500B. They are strong, reliable and have all the necessary qualities plus (unlike some reels we could name) they don't make strange sounds whilst playing a big cat. They can hold over 200 yards of a decent strength mono and have a clutch that works, something that is critically important. They are the same size and weight as most big pit reels and nicely balance our main choice of rod. This is the Fox Pellet Master which has a test curve of 4.75lb and is specifically designed for big cats. They bend through to the butt and have masses of power available when necessary. We frequently use the Fox Power Pad to assist whilst playing a cat. The Pellet Master rods have a relatively short handle and coupled with this pad, allow you to fully lean into a big fish. Make the fish work hard and it helps shortens the fight. It also prevents it simply dropping to the bottom and sulking. If that happens then you are in real trouble, especially if it's in weed. Yes we use 'heavy' gear but it's both balanced and for a reason. That reason being to land the fish we are after. Not play them (or be played) for ages and then lose the fish after a long fight. Don't worry, you'll still get one hell of a fight from any big cat irrespective of the gear that you use. Using heavy gear is analogous to having a sports car. You

don't drive it at 150 mph all the time but you can put your foot down when you need to. Having a big cat trying to pull you off your feet and fast heading up the lake is not the time to realise that your gear simply isn't up to the task in hand – which is to land the fish. Incidentally we always fish with the same combination of line strength and rod. I have never understood why some anglers use various permutations which only serve to complicate matters should a big fish be hooked.

As with piking, your trace material should be stronger and more durable than your main line as this is the important connection between you and the cat. Granted if you can guarantee that you hook all your fish in the lips then durability is not so much of an issue. But who can make such guarantees? Be prepared not only for any fish to get your bait well into its mouth but also remember the possibility of having the trace (and maybe line) around the pectorals. These are very sharp and abrasive and can be extremely damaging in the wrong circumstances. For trace materials we would always recommend the Kryston Quicksilver and Ton-Up products when using bottom baits. For popped up baits and most importantly livebaits, we have found Seaguar (a clear fluorocarbon) to be the most reliable. Being stiff it has the required anti-tangle properties and is available in a wider range of breaking strains than Amnesia. It also has an extremely high abrasion resistance and is recommended for other big fish such as tarpon, sturgeon and Nile perch.

For the waters that we have fished, although pike have been present, catfish have always been the dominant predator. With livebaits we have only encountered problems in daylight and not after dark. Deadbaits and fish sections have attracted the attentions of pike after dark but have not caused great problems with bigger pike being hooked in the scissors. If we do miss runs then we are confident that the culprits are small pike or eels. In our experience, when a feeding cat grabs the bait, provided it senses nothing abnormal, they don't let go. Available now are several pike-proof trace materials and we recommend these to anglers who encounter bigger problems with pike. Please don't use bare wire as this damages cats.

When it comes to hooks there are now many on the market that are reliable. Whichever type you chose they must be strong, sharp and of a size matched to the bait. Never be afraid to use a large hook. Maruto Eagle Wave, Owner and Gold Label Continental Carp & Catfish

are all brands that we have total confidence in. Swivels are always Berkley McMahon size 5 (80lb).

What type of line to use, irrespective of actual breaking strain, is frequently an emotive subject. Most people use mono but a lot of anglers are turning towards braided lines. Our criterion is always to use the optimum strength for the task in hand. Coupled with this is the requirement to have a minimum of 200 yards of line on the spool. This means that for a Shimano 6500B your maximum line diameter is around 0.50 mm to

achieve this. With this in mind I have carried out an intensive series of strength tests on monos and braids that enabled a choice to be made. After evaluating the test results it was clear that we should use a heavy mono rather than a braided line. With standard mono the actual breaking strain is directly proportional to the diameter. Also we are firm believers in the stretch factor of mono being a substantial plus point for big cats. It absorbs the shock better and also stops your arms and shoulders being pulled off!

TESTING OF LINES AND HOOK LENGTH MATERIALS

Both Andy and I are scientifically trained professional people (Chemical Engineer and Industrial Chemist respectively) and we work daily with real data and not assumed facts. With our significant eel fishing experience where tackle strength is paramount, we have always used balanced tackle where we know the actual strengths and limitations of each tackle component. Part of my job role is that of material testing and performance validation. Consequently I am able to carry out tests on lines, trace materials, swivels, hooks etc in order to determine their actual strengths and assess their suitability in specific angling situations.

My testing is carried out using a computer controlled Hounsfield H25KS tensile testing system that use various loads cells relevant to the work being done. It cost over £20,000 and is serviced and calibrated annually at a cost of £900. The calibration is carried out by an accredited organisation using certified and traceable standards and international testing protocols. The tabulated results shown are the mean (average) results of many individual tests all carried out using precisely the same reproducible conditions. This would include using the same 'pulling' rates for each test. However to fully mimic real life angling scenarios, I also tested some lines and braids at both slow and very fast rates. No real differences were noted in the results obtained with those found at the standard pulling rate. All the data relates to knotted material where the failures occurred between the two knots (ie, the main body of the test material). The tested samples were brands that I already had and use myself or were supplied to me by friends. Some were obtained from tackle shops or direct from retailers and all tests were on virgin materials and conditioned at 200C for 24 hours prior to testing.

A limited number of braid samples were tested after immersion in water and an approximate 5% reduction in strength was noted when compared to the same tests carried out on dry samples. You should also be aware that the Tackle Box in Kent have included the results of their own line tests in both their catalogue and on their web site. I have spoken with the person who carried out their tests and we are in general agreement as regards the results that we both obtained. I also have first hand knowledge of several other anglers who have carried out their own testing and although they have not used equipment as elaborate as my own, their results are no surprise to me (nor mine to them).

Please note that my tests only look at the respective strengths of each material. They do not consider the durability aspect which would include abrasion resistance amongst other characteristics. Personally my own line of reasoning has been whilst playing a fish, the line is under extreme tension and stress. Only the trace material is likely to be subjected to extra problems and these could be abrasion over a cat's jaw/teeth/pecs as well as contact with weed/snags/reeds etc. Hence for me the trace material is the one item that must have extreme abrasion resistance and not necessarily the line. I accept that for some very snaggy waters the abrasion resistance of your main line may be a bigger factor and that's something that you will have to make a decision on. The column marked '% of claimed' in the results is not meant to imply that you should be using the material with the highest percentage. I put this in to save anglers having to work out the relative merits of each material for themselves.

Study the results very carefully and then make your own minds up as to what is good and what is clearly not good. In pure strength terms, braided main lines are not what they claim to be and certainly not what people think they are. Now you know why we use heavy mono and not braid. Never blindly believe what you read on a label!

Sample	Colour	Claimed) BS (lb)	Measured BS (lb)	% of claimed BS	Measured diameter (mm)
Monos					
Drennan Double Strength	Clear	6	6.3	105.0	0.200
Daiwa Sensor	Brown	6	8.3	138.3	0.230
Daiwa Sensor	Brown	8	9.5	118.8	0.260
Daiwa Sensor	Brown	10	12.2	122.0	0.320
Korda IQ Xsoft	Clear	10	7.8	78.0	0.285
Sylcast	Black	11	14.2	129.1	0.335
AN40 Silver Thread	Green	14	14.1	100.7	0.347
Suffix Titanium	Clear	19	20.3	106.8	0.405
AN40 Silver Thread	Green	20	20.3	101.5	0.420
AN40 Silver Thread	Green	25	24.2	96.8	0.470
Fox Soft Steel	Camo	25	25.5	102.0	0.455
Fox Salt Water Soft Steel	Blue	20	24.5	98.0	0.455
Gold Label Pro Clear	Green	36	33.1	91.9	0.520
Amnesia	Clear	30	21.4	71.3	0.610
Amnesia	Black	30	21.3	71.0	0.610
Amnesia	Clear	40	27.3	68.3	0.695
Seaguar fluorocarbon	Clear	66	54.6	82.7	0.770
Rio Saltwater hard mono	Clear	44	28.4	64.5	0.785
ESP Stifflink	Clear	15	22.1	147.3	0.440
ESP Stifflink	Clear	25	27.0	108.0	0.515
Wychwood Stifflink	Clear	30	31.7	105.7	0.550
Braids					
GT Gudebrod	Black	15	10.3	68.7	Not measured
Kryston Quicksilver	Natural	35	29.5	84.3	Not measured
Kryston Quicksilver	Natural	45	38.2	84.9	Not measured
Kryston Ton-Up	Brown	85	83.2	97.9	Not measured
Catfish Pro Catlink [24 Kg]	Black	52.9	33.5	63.3	Not measured
Catfish Pro Catlink [54 Kg]	Black	119.1	61.0	51.2	Not measured
Catfish Pro Catlink [54 Kg]	Natural	119.1	61.4	51.6	Not measured
Fox Tooth-Proof Hooklink	Camo	100	69.1	69.1	Not measured
ET Drifter	Dayglow Yellow	17	12.1	71.2	Not measured
Nash Bullet	Dark Green	20	21.5	107.5	Not measured
Berkley Fireline	Dark Grey	30	29.8	99.3	Not measured
Berkley Fireline	Dark Grey	50	40.7	81.4	Not measured
Dynon SK Camo	Camo	34	25.2	74.1	Not measured
Fox Torque	Dark Green	65	50.8	78.2	Not measured
Dynon 3000EF	Green	50	22.6	45.2	Not measured
Dynon 3000EF	Green	65	25.8	39.7	Not measured
TFG Grunt	White	80	42.4	53.0	Not measured
Dynon MCT	Dark Green	50.7	18.8	37.1	Not measured
Catmaster Dyneema [25kg]	White	55.1	31.9	57.9	Not measured
Catmaster Dyneema [50kg]	White	110	71.7	65.2	Not measured
Power-Pro	Green	30	20.6	68.7	Not measured
Power-Pro	Green	53	19.1	36.0	Not measured
Power-Pro	Green	65	30.3	46.6	Not measured

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We have taken 50lb plus cats on livebaits, pellets, leeches and liver. Almost everything else has been tried at one time or another and we are constantly evaluating new approaches. As cats locate prey primarily by vibration and then smell, this should influence your thinking in terms of bait choices. Of course cats will take most baits when feeding avidly however they can very soon wise-up to certain scenarios; pellets

and boilies being one. In the right circumstances they can be deadly but the cats soon get wary of them. We prefer to offer whatever we feel is the prime food source in the water concerned at the time of fishing. Some baits will always perform (livebaits) whilst others can be very seasonal or have short life spans. Given the opportunity our first bait choice would always be a decent sized livebait. This is their most

natural food choice and one that they would encounter on a regular basis. Hence they would normally take them with total confidence. 61% of our big cats have been taken on livebaits. Our second choice would be something very smelly (especially if your chosen water is highly coloured). Probably the most successful British cat angler we are fortunate to know and fish with has taken the majority of his big UK cats (25 over 60 lb) on large balls of smelly pastes. He chooses not to use fish baits, live or dead (he comes from a carp fishing background) but his alternate approach has most certainly not hampered his results. Eel and lamprey sections, mackerel, squid, liver and dead coarse fish are all excellent baits that are effective when presented correctly. Luncheon meat and Bacon Grill are tried and tested baits that still maintain a great track record and can be used with confidence provided that a suitably large piece is used. Compare the mouth size of 50lb cat with a whole tin of meat. Enough said!

Never overlook the attractive powers of the humble leech (aka 'The Wafer Thin Mint'). This amazing bait is highly recommended (despite the price tag) and has provided us with some massive fish during both day and night. A big plus point is that it can be used with great confidence due to its apparent cat-only attribute. Pellets and boilies have their place in the big catter's armoury however we have to say that we have had far more success with pellets than boilies despite trying both extensively. This includes using large halibut pop-ups fished over a bed of pellets. We can but assume that due to their mode of production, the pellets leak off scent and ingredients at a faster rate than skinned boilies. That cats of all sizes love boilies is not in doubt. Thanks to their quaint habit of evacuating their digestive system when you try to get a decent picture, we all know what they consume avidly when they get the chance. They are opportunist feeders and will readily capitalise on easy food sources.

Most UK big cat waters are either die-hard carp waters or else contain a significant head of carp or tench and bream. Once over 50lb, cats will readily eat fish in the 2-8lb range; fact! I'm not advocating that we all fish with livebaits of that size but it shows what their natural preferences are. That's why they grow so big and fast. When big, a cat will prefer say a 12oz bait to the more 'normal' 6oz one if it can get it. It's a simple case of expending the minimum energy for the greatest return. Most good cat waters

contain large populations of small silver fish yet frequently when these are offered as bait, they remain ignored. It's the 'blade of grass in a field' syndrome. Use a bigger 'blade of grass' and it will get noticed more easily by a feeding big cat.

Unless you come from a carp background, you will want to avoid all nuisance fish so that means using big baits to deter carp - irrespective of their size. Pellets for example can be obtained in far bigger sizes than the standard 21mm or the more recent 28 mm pre-drilled variety. Try looking on the Internet and you should be able to locate 40 mm pellets and also 80 x 60 mm ones that weigh around 7 ounces each. Now that's what we call pellets and certainly help discourage most carp! Never be afraid to use a big string of pellets and a good tip is to use an imitation one (or a lump of soaked foam) on the end to help stop the carp/silver fish whittling them away.

A tactic that we have used to great effect is to fish adjacent swims and then fill in an area between us with pellets, boilies, particles, maggots etc. The basic idea is to attract everything in the lake. Fish on each side of the baited area with a bottom bait and then have livebaits fishing over the edges of the baited area. If you're fishing a narrow water or bay, then fish on opposite banks and fill in the space between you. Feeding cats that come past will then not fail to detect your baits. Be patient and when the cats start feeding you will catch.

With the exception of pellets and boilies, we have been far more successful using baits fished off the bottom. This applies to all waters that we have fished, be they weedy, silty or hard bottomed. Presumably a cruising cat can locate a bait easier when it is fished off bottom especially if the water is deep. Certainly the odour permeation from an off-bottom bait is far greater than one hard on the bottom. All baits can be fished popped up by using a simple polyball rig attached to the hook shank and tidied up with a rubber/silicone sleeve. We normally use a stiff link material of around 15 to 25 cm. Paint the polyball dark to prevent pike becoming interested but have the top half white so you can locate it on the surface in the dark and then wind down to your chosen depth. We always use a Fox type pellet stop to retain the polyball on the hook link. This is then both easily changed if required and importantly, lends itself to being easily pulled off the link by a cat if it enters snags so preventing a tether.

Pellets are fished using a heavy duty safety bolt rig setup using a lead of at

Comparison of
21mm, 40mm
and 80mm pellets.



least 3oz for a small pellet and up to 6oz for a large one. Our livebait rigs are adaptations of ones published several years ago by Phil Aylett and they are deployed using his invaluable winch system (credit where it is clearly due). For big livebaits we frequently use 8-10 ounces of lead, usually of the gripper type. Leads are used via a short link of 8 lb line and tied to a ceramic run ring. We used to trim down small rod rings but Catfish Pro (CFP) has now made this task obsolete. I like to use a long trace when livebaiting of at least 3 feet (Andy prefers his slightly shorter) and we now always use a circle hook. Plenty has been said and written about them so we took advice and talked with experienced anglers. We have used them extensively in 2007 and have not missed a run. Consequently we have total confidence in the use of Circle hooks for both livebaits and leeches.

To suspend livebaits we use a stiff link fished on a swivel off the trace. It is positioned using beads and Powergum stop knots and fitted with a rig rattle. We then use a polyball on the end of the stiff link that will just keep the livebait up. If you use too big a ball it will restrict the activity of the bait and it will also partially neutralise the mass of the lead. When a run occurs the lead should not move about. You need to balance the need to keep your bait at the required depth against the size of lead that is required. Using the pellet stop on the end of the stiff link allows for permutations of polyball sizes to be easily used. Remember that as you double the diameter of a polyball you increase the

volume by 8 times. So a 1.5" ball has over 3 times the volume (and buoyancy) of a 1" ball. Again remember to use a white top to the end ball so that you can see it in the dark and set the bait to the required depth.

When fishing livebaits and leeches we use a line clip on the rod above the Delkims. The bail arm is left open and the line held by either a clip above the reel or a small stone on the spool. With livebaits the line is tightly held by the rod clip above the indicators as this maintains the whole set-up at the required depth. With leeches the line need only be very lightly held at each of the retaining points.

Just like eels, we have taken big cats near the surface during all types of weather, light levels and phases of the moon. Provided the water temperature is not too cold we would always have at least one bait near to the surface. If the temperatures are low with minimal nuisance fish activity then we would have the livebaits at mid-water depth. During colder temperatures another productive method is to fish with two small (6") baits on the same hook and opposing each other. This further maximises bait activity and ensures that a cat knows about its availability.

We would normally fish with different baits on all three rods. As with other predators, cats can be fickle feeders on occasions so offering a variety of options is logical. It also helps indicate what bait they don't like or are wary of in a particular water. Usually, we also fish these baits at different depths, i.e. just off bottom, mid-water and sub-surface so that all possibilities are covered. Once a

pattern emerges, baits and presentations can then be fine tuned to help improve catches.

Like other big fish, cats do not like bank side disturbance or excessive numbers of lines in the water. Unless we are fishing sub-surface livebaits we always use backleads and frequently several per rod. This not only minimises cats detecting the lines but also helps avoid wipe-outs when fish are hooked (by both us and particularly adjacent anglers). We also employ ESP sink tubing (and not lead core) when using bottom baits as this again helps reduce detection and improve presentation at the business end.

Unless you are able to fish a water that holds a large head of catfish of various sizes, (normally something might be feeding on most days) you should be targeting a big fish water. Such venues generally hold a small head of big fish and this then means that the issue is being able to fish when one of them is feeding. Consequently the chances of a single nighter coinciding with a big cat feeding are then small. However your chances increase if you do more consecutive nights. On most venues we would always try to be fishing at least a three day session and on a difficult water we would frequently put in eight day sessions. The longer the better as it would then take in weekdays when disturbances and angling pressure are generally reduced. As an example, in 2006 I fished a day-ticket water for an eight day session and had two chances. They resulted in cats of 60lb and 85lb being banked. Both caught in daylight and when minimal disturbance was occurring. Less disturbance also means that you can fish the margins where big cats are quite happy to frequent when the conditions are right.

Until you are fortunate enough to have landed a big cat, it may come as a shock when you try to land and handle such a fish. Their width, length and depth

become significant and they need even more careful handling and treatment than normal. Always use the biggest landing net you can get hold of and use a large net float as well (especially if you fish alone). A good tip is to attach an isotope (fitted in a section of protective clear tube) to the ends of the landing net arms. This helps you position the net at the critical stages and also negates the need for illumination to be used. A 50" landing net is barely big enough for a 50lb fish and above 60lb you need a 60" or 72" version. You don't simply lift them out in such nets. Their purpose is to capture and retain the fish and you can frequently unhook them whilst still in the water. This then allows you to ensure that you have the necessary unhooking mat, weigh sling, scales etc. to hand before the fish is carefully lifted out. For a very big fish it is a two man operation to ensure that the fish gets onto the mat and is removed from the net with due care. Most anglers use a mat that is simply not big enough. A sixty or seventy pound catfish is considerably longer than any carp so don't use a mat designed for carp. Get a dedicated cat mat and preferably one with an additional flap as this greatly helps, especially when returning the fish. In our opinion even the largest available unhooking mats for cats are barely adequate for some UK fish. Get the biggest net, mat and sling that you can as a big cat is worth it. Always keep a suitable glove available as well. They assist with handling and unhooking and act as an emergency landing aid if required. If you need to retain a big fish for photographic purposes be warned! Check that it is allowed on the water in question and don't use a sack. Use the biggest tube or tunnel that you can get and make sure that it is well staked out in deep water. Also be warned that a just-caught cat is far easier to handle and photograph than one that has had several hours of rest!