

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM

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At 62lb this cat was part of a brace of pellet caught 60s.

I started to write this article for *Whiskers* last year. Unfortunately the not-so-smart phone I was writing on lost it all and there wasn't time to re-write it. Over the last twelve months, certain captures and occurrences have reinforced my thoughts on the practise of pellet fishing for catfish in this country. Over the last few years, there's been quite a few references, mainly on the CCG's forum, that pellet caught cats' don't count' and that it's considered 'carp fishing for cats'. Everyone's entitled to their opinion of course but I really don't understand their logic, or lack of it!

Now anyone who knows me, knows that I'm an avid catfish angler and I like to think that some of my contributions to catfish angling have put a few good cats on the bank for others. Most of these contributions, the winch for example, are based around live baiting and most sessions I'll probably have at least one vivo out. However, if I had relied solely on the live baits, my catch rate over the last few years would possibly be around half of what I've actually banked! I know it's difficult to quantify, but I know when to shift a couple of rods to pellet. If a good vivo attached to an equally good rig

doesn't get taken after a couple of nights, it doesn't take a genius to work out that the cats don't want to chase live fish around! Even if I had limitless time on the bank, I would still try other baits, after all, I'm there to catch not camp. A couple of examples of this occurred on two different waters during the 2011 season. On the first water, an old gravel pit on which I'd been invited to fish as a guest of a member. The member who I'll refer to as M, had already been there for a few nights with three livos and a chunk of meat out every night. No takes on any bait so far. As I used to catch on this water several years ago on live bait, it initially felt right to put a couple of rods on them. Half a tin of meat and a chunk of mackerel was put on the other two rods with a couple of handfuls of 21mm pellets thrown around them. The night passed without a bleep to either of us. As my session was to be just another night, I decided to trickle the pellets in throughout the day next to a weed bed, where I'd had the mackerel the previous night. Hook baits were two heavily soaked 21mm pellets hair rigged on to a Gold Label 1/0 catfish hook. Hook link was 45lb Quicksilver in turn tied to 60lb braided main line. Not exactly carp



tackle is it? Two good live baits were winched into position for the night and a couple of pellet rigs were added over the baited areas. Just after dark the right hand pellet rod was away and a low thirty was quickly banked. "What did you catch that on" asked M. When I told the old fella it was on pellet he muttered something unprintable about carp baits! About midnight, the same rod was away again, this time the culprit was a lovely 46lbber. I offered M some of the going bait but he said something about he'd rather blank. Well yeah, he's doing that ok! I awoke at dawn as I had to get the stuff packed away early because I'd got a long drive home, then be at work for 9am. As I was getting off the bed chair the same rod was again away! This one gave a proper scrap, taking many yards from a tight clutch. I couldn't wake old M so once I'd netted the cat and secured the rolled up net in the deep margin I ran round to wake him. As M opened his eyes, he asked if it was the pellet rod again. "Yes" I replied, "Proper cat bait"; some expletives followed with M saying he wasn't going to get out of bed to photograph another pellet caught cat! I did persuade him in the end and that fish weighed in at 54lb, a whacker! Strangely enough, no carp were caught that session! What I really couldn't understand was the point blank refusal to using the going bait! All those nights without a run on livos and not wanting to use a working bait because it was pellets. It defies logic!

A similar story occurred a few weeks later on a Northants pit. M, Chris and myself were down for three nights. Historically the pit has always been a good live bait water so all three rods were put out on live roach and perch. On the first night Chris caught a cracking mid-forty on a live roach. I didn't have a touch. On the second night M had a nice upper thirty on a livo. I didn't have a touch again! For the third night, although the others had caught on live bait I knew I had to try something different so baited an area throughout the day with pellet. A rig similar to that described earlier was cast over the free offerings and a couple of livos winched out. The live baits once again remained untouched but the pellet rod produced a nice low forty. Again, the pellets saved a blank. I do wonder how many I could have caught if I'd used pellets from the start. Funnily enough, no carp were caught that session either.

The same thing happened this year, 2012. I was on a rare four nighter on a day ticket lake. The first night was totally uneventful using the allowed two rods on live baits, so I started to bait an area with



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pellets. That second night produced a 47 on the pellets and nothing on the live bait. On the third night, the cats really switched on to my baited area with a 60 And a 62, my biggest ever UK brace! Did I feel bad about that catch being on pellet and not lives? Did I hell! The last night once again failed to produce on the livo but a mid twenty had the double pellet. If my memory serves me correctly, no carp then either.

I could go on recalling times when pellets have out-fished everything else including live bait. There has of course been plenty of sessions where livos are king. For example, the new syndicate water I joined in the spring of 2012 has produced all of my fish to live bait, including my UK PB of 82lb!

I know there's plenty of other bottom baits which can be used instead of the dreaded pellet, but few work for me anywhere near as well. How two, three or more 21mm pellets can be regarded as anything but a catfish bait is beyond me. Quite often my hook bait is bigger than some of the 'purists?' 'proper' cat baits! I can honestly count on one hand the amount of nuisance fish I've caught on my pellet rigs. If we're going to go up the nuisance fish route then I can recall plenty of unwanted species I've had on luncheon meat, including pike and carp taking a half tin sized chunk! Pike, bream and loads of carp have taken my mackerel and sardine baits. Tench and carp have hung themselves on my squid! I've lost count of how many pike I've caught on live baits. On many waters it's almost impossible to use livos because the bait's not in the water for more than a few minutes before its snaffled by a

This 46-pounder ignored two good livebaits, preferring the pellet rig.

Jack. The same can be said on some highly stocked carp waters, to use pellet baits of whatever size on those sort of venues is just asking for trouble.

As I said at the start of this piece everyone to their own. If someone doesn't want to use a particular bait then don't just don't decry it or try and ridicule another anglers catch because of the bait he's using. I dare say some of this ridiculous bait snobbery has come about from some of the stories coming from the rivers Ebro and Segre. Rumours of anglers and guides throwing in many, many sacks of pellets per cat fisherman prevail.

In my limited experience of Spain, this certainly doesn't seem to be the case. I digress! If used sensibly, I can't see any reason not to use such a good bait. Is it, I ask, that these guys who mock the pellets have too much time on their hands? Are they too tight to buy a sack of pellet? Maybe they don't have the confidence? Is it that they can't tie an efficient rig? I just can't understand how a piece of luncheon meat about the size of a matchbox is ok, or a piece of sausage, roughly the same size as a few big pellets is deemed acceptable, when a few pellets, about the size of a matchbox is not ok! None of these can be described

Another pellet caught whacker.



This high forty fell to a pellet fished over a baited area.

as species specific but nor are live baits. What we must remember is, that wels catfish are not full time predators, they are omnivorous fish and spend a lot of the time scavenging. If they come across a bed of nutritious food, they will more than likely eat it.

If someone can give me a valid and sensible reason why we shouldn't be using such a good fish catcher and actually catching a few more fish instead of blanking then please tell me!

