



Matt Rand may be an East Anglian boy – but the sight of running water really gets him wanting to wet a line. Here he tells how to target chub from the upland reaches of rivers, with maggots his bait numero uno...

If you've read some of my past articles you'll have gathered that most of my fishing is done in and around the Cambridgeshire Fens. The majority of these venues have very slow flow or none at all – but there are exceptions to the rule.

I am not the sort of angler who likes to have things handed to him on a plate. True, there will be times when the desire to catch a specimen fish of a certain species may have me searching busier waters but, on the whole, I much prefer to get out and do the groundwork myself. Searching out different waters for various species is just as much fun as catching them, after all!

Chub On The Grub

“For me there was only ever going to be one species to target on these stretches – the chub.”



A Passion Is Born

During my early teens, I had a great week's river fishing in Yorkshire with my Dad. I was amazed by the features – deep gravel glides, streamer weed and extremely fast flowing water.

The far bank was packed full of fish-holding features such as overhanging trees and severely undercut banks. It was truly a million miles away from any of my local Fenland venues, or so I first thought.

What made this trip even more special was the way we went about fishing the river. After a bit of information from a local angler in the know, we found ourselves in waders, standing out in the middle of the river, trotting a float down past far bank features.

The experience was awesome and ended with me landing my first, and so far only ever barbel, a cracking fish of 7lb 14oz.

Below:
Upper Fenland rivers have a lot more features than you would imagine.



Time To Go Adventuring

Not having this sort of fishing locally used to really annoy me. Although the Fens are a beautiful place in their own right, there was a lot more mystery and character in these more natural-looking waters.

And this is when I started thinking about the Fen rivers I had close to me. Though some of them appeared to have little flow, there was some pace nonetheless.

It occurred to me to start working my way down from the river's source. On went the nettle-proof pants and off adventuring I went, quickly discovering that the upper reaches of my local Fenland rivers had a lot more character than I first imagined.

I soon had all the rivers close to me well and truly scouted, and had broken them into sections. I soon learned that the sources of a few of these rivers were home to wild brown trout, with fast flowing, gin-clear water the norm.

This was interesting in itself as wild brown trout that close to home was certainly news to me. These sections were, and still are, exclusively owned and run by fly fishing clubs, so fishing them was out of the question.

However, it was past these sections, downstream, where my interest really lay. The river still had good flow, but also widened out a little, creating pieces of water that had all the characteristics of the waters I had longed to fish.

Lovely Chubbly

For me there was only ever going to be one species to target on these stretches – the chub. They are a species that love areas of fast-flowing water, so these sections were always going to provide the ideal habitat for them.

These faster stretches on Fen rivers are not usually very long and can often end rather abruptly at a man-made object such as a sluice gate, for instance. They also seem to be a lot more overgrown, possibly something to do with not being visited very often, due to them not being navigable.

Whatever the reasons, though, it was obvious that the lack of attention to these spots was indeed a feature in itself.

Maggots Spell Mayhem

In my last CF article about chub back during last January, I wrote about stalking this species from tiny Fenland streams and one of the baits I briefly touched on was maggots.

Now in terms of its fish-catching potential, I don't think the humble maggot can be beaten. It is a bait that is pretty much guaranteed to produce a response from something even on the toughest of days.

The only downside to maggots is small fish tend to pounce on them well before anything of a decent size gets a look-in. But whether you class catching small fish, as well as the larger specimens, a problem is totally down to the individual.

I don't mind this, as all I am really doing with this method is fishing a peaceful, picturesque piece of water in a way I wouldn't be able to on a more run-of-the-mill Fenland venue.

Under these circumstances, catching



Above:
Look for bits of river with far bank cover.

fish really is a bonus, and even though I love catching specimen-size fish, I get just the same enjoyment out of doing something different every now and then.

At this time of year, chub aren't at their heaviest for the year anyway, so I really don't do it to catch any record breakers. The more serious specimen chub fishing takes place right at the back-end of the season, when they really have piled on the weight and are at their winter peak. But big chub fishing requires a totally different approach – one that I will hopefully expand on during a future article.

Look For Features

A typical upper river chub swim for me will have some form of far bank feature that the fish live near. But, more importantly, the swim should have some

sort of 'form', in short be somewhere I have caught from previously.

A brief stalking session with one rod should be all that is needed for success. I prefer fishing a swim with decent depth, ideally two to three feet deep, with just enough flow to make trotting a float the best option.

Having a bit of extra depth usually means that the fish aren't quite so spooky, and multiple catches will be more likely. Where possible I look for a swim where I can get in the water wearing waders.

This isn't at all necessary to catch fish, but it just makes it more fun. I don't know what it is, but standing in a river, with water rushing past your legs, is just a much more enjoyable experience.

So now you have decided on a swim, what next?

Below: You've got to find them first.





“ Things to watch out for are boils on the surface, flashing under the surface and the most common one – big white lips engulfing every maggot in sight! ”

Give 'Em The Gear!

My favourite approach is to trot maggots downstream, but this isn't actually as simple as it sounds. The most important part of fishing with this method is the way you feed the swim. Chub are an exceptionally greedy species and can eat until they start spewing maggots!

With this in mind, as you can probably imagine, for a day session you will require a large quantity of maggots, with five pints being the absolute minimum.

This may sound excessive, not to mention expensive but, believe me, you need this amount to stand any chance of extracting more than just a couple of the shoal members.

Chub are a very spooky species at the best of times, so having one of their shoal members splashing around trying to avoid capture in front of other chub really isn't going to help your chances.

This is where having a shedload of maggots really comes into play and suddenly makes you realise that five pints really isn't a great deal after all.

Sussing It Out

As mentioned, baiting up is really the trickiest part of this approach. You need to first judge where the chub are in your swim and at what depths they are holding up in.



Maggots. Take plenty, you'll need them.

You then need to take into account the depth and flow speed, so that your loose-fed maggots will be literally drifting past the chub's noses as soon as you start to feed.

Depending on whether I'm standing in the water or sitting on the bank, I will make sure that I have everything I need to hand for baiting up. This will include a bucket of maggots and a catapult.

Now is when you need to be patient. Past experience has taught me that generally chub will instantly start to feed on the maggots, but make a cast too quick and you'll spook the shoal straightaway.

This is why I don't make a cast for at least an hour, with maybe 90 minutes being the norm before having a look. During this period of time I will be doing nothing but feeding maggots constantly, gradually trying to gain their confidence, making them feed in such a manner that they soon throw caution to the wind.

Wind Them Up

I will kick the feeding process off with around twenty or so maggots every twenty seconds, stepping this up to around fifty maggots every ten seconds, after about fifteen minutes.

To start with, you may not see any fish feeding on the loose maggots as they may be feeding on them closer to the bottom.

For me it's all about being confident in your swim choice. If you know they are there then you just expect them to be feeding on the maggots.

If, however, you have never tried this technique and you have yet to see any signs of fish, it could be well worth introducing less maggots for a while.

This should then make the chub come up in the water, competing for them and hopefully make their presence known. Things to watch out for are boils on the surface, flashing under the surface and the most common one – big white lips

engulfing every maggot in sight!

Once you gain confidence in this method, you'll soon just expect chub to be happily feeding on the loose offerings.

Then, when you're happy the fish are feeding well, just keep a steady stream of maggots going in. Don't worry in any way about over-feeding.

Feed Them Away From Danger

The chub will gorge themselves near to bursting point when it comes to feeding on maggots. But there's one tip I will give on this subject: If you're fishing close to snags, and have some open water downstream, try gradually feeding the fish into this area. The chub should follow the feed and in a relatively short period of time you should have them confidently feeding in more open water, well away from snags.

This will increase your chances of success because once hooked, you can turn chub away from the shoal in double-quick time, which causes a lot less disturbance.

When you do start to fish, this doesn't mean the regular feeding of maggots should stop – far from it.

You should try to master the knack of feeding the swim even as you play a chub.

This is not easy without practice, I know, but you need to maintain the fish's



Above: Feed ...

Below: ... and keep feeding



confidence in order to continue catching steadily.

In all honesty I usually fish like this with a friend, taking it in turns to make a cast. One fishes, the other constantly baits.

After a fish is landed the swim is then rested for a few minutes while bait is trickled in to keep them feeding.

Floats And Tactics

For float fishing I will usually opt for a one to two SSG shot loafer float, attached via a float rubber at the top of the float. I fish 6lb to 4lb main line with a foot-long hook-length of lighter Fox match rig line, tied to a Kamasan Animal hook in sizes ranging from 10 to 14.

The shot for the float is placed directly above the hook-link. This is the rig – easy to set up and easy to fish.

All you need do is cast upstream and let the float run down the swim. When you get a bite, strike and do your best to apply side-strain to the

hooked fish to steer it well away from the feeding shoal.

Once the fish is landed, it is then put in a well staked-out keepnet. Putting chub straight back on small rivers will more often than not kill your swim as the fish will bolt and spook the other shoal members.

Just Enjoy It

This style of busy maggot fishing for chub can be very rewarding and big bags of fish can be taken. You'll probably find that you will end up spending more time baiting up than actually fishing, but you will catch more than if you were to just cast straight into an unprepared swim.

If you have never seen chub feeding on maggots before, then you really have been missing out.

It is one of the most successful methods I have used and is, without doubt, very exciting! It is also a method that will work brilliantly on any venue that holds chub, autumn is perfect for it. Why not give it a try – I guarantee you'll love it! **CF**



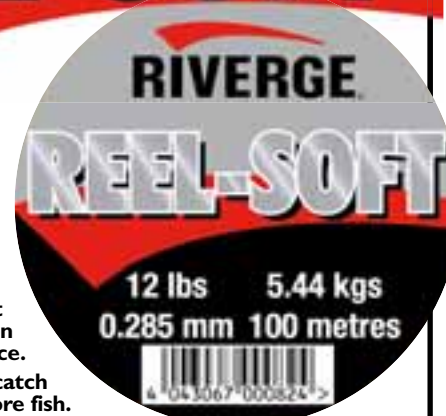
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Fax: (01892) 770355