

Pellet Perfection!

Lee Kerry shows you how to catch more on pellets, the number-one bait these days.



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Pellets are perhaps the best bait for carp there is, and each size has a use!

With water temperatures on the rise I will soon be going to White Acres for what I consider the start of my commercial-water fishing for 2013. By this I mean you can actually start to feed some bait rather than dob a piece of bread about (don't get me started on the skill debate again...).

One thing is for sure, I would not even consider going to a commercial fishery without pellets. It's not that long ago that pellets weren't even a consideration in my fishing, but having used them to achieve some great catches they now are the staple bait on my side tray whenever I set up on a commercial.

The power of the pellet should come as no real surprise; they are basically made from dried fish mulch and proteins formed into various sizes, presenting a complete easy meal for nearly all coarse fish. The key as a match angler is to try and establish how to get the best from these irresistible fish treats and win more matches!

To try and explain my thoughts on pellet fishing, I have broken this piece down into the various sizes of pellets available, and related it back to some of my own learning experiences; hopefully this will encourage you to think about how you are making the ultimate commercial fishing bait work for you!

Most fisheries these days insist on you using their own pellets. I don't blame them for making the most of this lucrative business, but when the majority of fishery coarse pellets come from the same supplier it does amaze me how much the cost can vary from place to place.

However, without digressing too much, for this piece I want to focus on the most common type of pellet, loosely referred to as a coarse-fish pellet.

The first consideration when going to any venue has to be the size of the fish. Coarse pellets come in 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 11mm sizes, so your target species is a key consideration when assessing which to put out on your side tray. I have a few simple rules for each size of pellet, which is essentially how I try and simplify exactly what I have on any given match.

1mm Pellets: I have been using these tiny pellets as an addition to the Method mix. Not many companies supply them, but the Sonubaits Fin Perfect samples are as good as any and they become quite sticky when soaked in water. I have carried out some tank experiments, and if you are looking at using purely pellets around the Method feeder, the addition of 1mm pellets seems to fill the gaps around your bigger pellets, and bind the whole mix onto the feeder.

I have used them in several matches, but came to the conclusion that they add to the confusion of Method fishing, so generally if I want to bind my pellets I will add

Groundbait and pellets can be a killer...



... but a mix of 1mms and 2mms can be better.



Don't be afraid to use 4mms on the feeder.



a little extra Sticki Pellet powder to my bigger pellets.

2mm Pellets: These are the Method-feeder angler's best friend. In this size you can catch anything from 6oz skimmers to 20lb carp. In recent years they have consistently outperformed groundbait around a Method feeder, but their use does not stop there. Most of the top anglers will use 2mm pellets as a holding bait in their pegs – it gives the fish something to graze over without becoming preoccupied with something you cannot put on the hook.

I like to soak my pellets well in advance, this way I can mould them around a Method, or into small balls as well as cup them in loose. I have yet to find any advantage in feeding

them dry, so just to save time I submerge them for two minutes when I get on the bank, then place them in a bait tub with the lid on until the match starts.

I mentioned before that pellets generally outfish groundbait on the Method. This got me thinking about the craze of feeding groundbait down the edge. Last year I always fed one of my margin swims with 2mm pellets, and although it seemed to attract less fish they were much easier to catch over the pellet than the groundbait. Keep that one to yourself for this season's campaign, though!

4mm Pellets: For a long time I wasn't convinced that 4mm pellets had a place on my side tray. I felt that loose feeding was always better with 6mm pellets, and if you

4mm pellets around a Method feeder accounted for this carp!



Lee's Expanders!



1 Add your expanders to the pump.



2 Fill the pump with lake water.



3 Pump the pellets several times.



4 Soak the pellets for five minutes.



5 Drain off the water.



6 Put in a bag and tighten down.

were targeting small fish then 2mm would be the way to go.

However, recently I have found myself using these pellets for numerous different methods and the best way is once again to soak them in water so they swell in size. Once they have taken on water they become the size of your hook bait, so whenever I am looking to use a 4mm expander or similar on the hook I always add a few soft 4mms in with my 2mms. Maybe this fools a few extra wary fish, maybe it's just in my head, but it has certainly not done my results any harm, so I usually soak up 750ml of 2mm pellets and 250ml of 4mm together in a bowl. However, it might be worth trying the complete opposite!

I actually won a match on the Method feeder down at White Acres last year, where I changed to putting just 4mms round my feeder. The response was instant, and the carp were fighting over themselves while anglers around me had fish in their

pegs but were struggling to convert them into fish in the net. I would say that 95 per cent of the time the Method feeder is cast in with 2mm pellets around it; breaking away from something the fish have seen many times before could make the difference!

6mm Pellets: 'Pinging' pellets is without doubt a devastating technique, and the 6mm pellet has become the angler's primary weapon when this method of catching fish starts to work. My opinion is that these pellets are big enough to create an attractive plop when hitting the surface, then they can be eaten by nearly all species of fish, creating competition in your peg and often enticing the bigger fish to come up in the water to get to the bait first.

I would go as far as saying that if I knew nothing about a venue, pinging 6mm pellets would be my starting approach to try and make the best of my peg. Twice last year I went to a venue where pinging was not generally used and came away with a fatter wallet!

My setup for this method is simple. I always use a size 18 PR 36 hook with a small latex band mounted on a

hair rig. The strength of line will depend on the size of fish I expect to catch, but 0.13mm Reflo Power would be a great starting choice. I have all these hooklengths tied up at 30 centimetres long, and I will not put a shot any closer to the hook. The reason for this is because I am convinced the fish watch your pellet as it drops to the bottom. I have sat waiting with my bait on the bottom, not getting a bite, when a 30cm lift and drop will instantly yield a fish.

I also use quite light elastic with this method, as it will often catch you all sorts of fish including skimmers, F1s and carp. A lighter elastic with a Pulla bung/kit will mean you can land everything when taking your time. The heavier elastics often result in bumped fish, general frustration and less weight in your net at the end of the match.

Big Pellets – 8mm and 11mm: If I could change one thing about match fishing it would be to ban these pellets! That may sound controversial because they are responsible for some of the biggest carp weights this country has seen. The problem is that each morsel represents an easy snack for any passing carp. They can be fired to a distance, and on venues where they

Get your pellet choice right and stunning carp like this will grace your keepnet!

are used the fish will sit at around 25 metres out from the bank where they know they can cautiously patrol and pick up many easy meals. The only way to target them at this distance is with tackle such as a bomb and pellet, or a pellet waggler.

Fish wise up to the waggler very quickly, and I am convinced your hook bait on the bomb is rejected many times before you actually get a take. In the height of summer, when the carp fishing should be at its best, anglers splash in the 8mm pellets and the result is four to eight fish for most, apart from those in the epicentre who may have a few more. A highly boring day!

With that off my chest, I am an angler who will travel the country in search of the best matches, so if I have to use 8mm pellets to compete then that is of course what I will do.

Last year I fished several matches on Larford's Specimen Lake where feeding 8mm pellets is a very popular tactic, but trying to get an advantage proved very difficult. One of the key considerations is keeping the bait tight. Many anglers try to outfeed their rivals, distancewise, which is all well and good, but when the bait spreads all over the lake you are dramatically reducing your chances of a carp finding yours. A good tip is to regularly fire bait a little shorter, keeping it nice and tight, then cast your bait two to three metres past. The fish will approach the area and hopefully pick your

bait out a touch quicker. Chucking short of your feed can also work, so don't be afraid to try something different to fool wary fish.

Hook Baits: Most anglers these days will simply hair rig a hard pellet, usually in a band. There is of course nothing wrong with that, and I have a simple rule: 6mm pellet, size 18 PR 36 with the band just touching the bend of the hook; 8mm pellet, size 16 PR 36 with the bait around 5mm from the bend. I have messed around with various other combinations but really struggle to find any definitive answers. All I know is that the combinations above have caught me thousands of pounds of fish, and rarely let me down, so in the interest of keeping things simple I have settled on this approach... for now at least!

So far we have not touched on expander pellets. If small fish are not a problem I always prefer a soft hook pellet. I am sure carp will eat soft baits more confidently than hard ones, so I nearly always try a soft pellet first before considering a change to a hard one. Fin Perfect Expanders are my preferred choice. I am not overly fussed about the consistency, but in my opinion the colour makes a big difference and these pellets are a light brown, which I believe helps them blend in with the coarse-pellet feed. I have tried other expanders that have a much darker consistency, but have never found them as effective.

Preparing expanders is something I find very simple (see the picture sequence). I have not changed this approach for years and it does not let me down.

I wanted this piece to be full of advice and learning in relation to pellet fishing, so to finish here are my five top pellet tips to think about next time you're out on the bank.

1) Fishing with a tight line to your pole tip is a must for any serious pellet angler. If you are not great at fishing with a short line, try 50 centimetres from pole tip to float, but with three No8 back shot at 15cm intervals; this encourages you to control the float at all times and will dramatically reduce your reaction time to every bite.



Try mixing 2mm and 4mm pellets together!

2) Generally speaking I will always fish dead depth when fishing pellets. Fish tend to pick up pellet baits and reject them very quickly if something is wrong. With line on the bottom you may be missing out on many valuable fish.

3) Up and down – with the crazy UK weather conditions you can never be sure whether the fish will be shallow or deep. I always set up rigs to cover all depths, that way I can figure out the best depth on any given day.

4) Double baits – most anglers will only fish a single pellet hook bait, yet won't think twice about mounting two or three maggots on a hook. I have had great success with double expander, or double banded pellet, often picking out the bigger fish in the peg.

5) Lighten up – pellets catch more commercial fish than most other baits put together. Fish are now very wary of them, so don't be afraid to drop down in float, line and hook size to ensure you keep on catching.

Kerry's Final Word

I was thinking recently about the amount of information that gets bandied around in fishing, and the reaction of other anglers if for some reason

I were to turn to that angler and say I didn't wish to discuss it as I have worked hard getting it right, he would walk back to his peg using a few rude words.

Of course I am happy to advise anglers where I can, I do after all share 2,500 words of information with readers of this magazine every month. However, I am going to stick up for anglers who do not want to share information, in a culture of angling where it seems unacceptable.

An angler I highly respect was once criticised for covering his bait tray while practising for a big angling event. The critical anglers were his fellow competitors who, rather than practising themselves, were watching others. I believe that anglers have a right to practise, or simply watch others in a bid to prepare for a big event, the choice is theirs. However,

surely those fishing are entitled to keep what they learn to themselves? And if that means covering the bait tray, then go for it!

I will tell anyone who asks anything they want to know, because I believe that information sharing makes ME a better angler, as well as helping others. However, I think those anglers who wish to keep information to themselves deserve equal respect. So in future, if someone is a bit cagey with advice, respect their concerns about improving their competitors' chances and concentrate on talking to those who are happy to discuss it instead. ■

an angler is keeping something to themselves.

Compare this with Formula 1, as an example. I very much doubt whether, at the end of the first race of the season, McLaren will nip over to the Ferrari garage and advise them on achieving extra downforce! Or Sir Alex Ferguson popping into Liverpool's dressing room and explaining how he will be playing three strikers!

Yet if an angler comes to me at the end of the match and asks how I have caught I am happy to discuss the finer points in a bid to help them catch more next time. If



Lee uses Sonubaits pellets for all his fishing.

