



## Float Fishing for River Carp

by Paul Almanza

Float fishing for carp has become increasingly popular over the last few years. By using the same delicate floats and light lines that are designed for targeting river steelhead, many float fishermen are having phenomenal success on bruiser carp throughout the summer months. Carp might lack the amazing speed and acrobatics show of steelhead, but they certainly make up for it in size and power.

Using the techniques and gear featured in this article we have produced upwards of forty carp in a single day, including several monsters in the thirty pound class and plenty of twenties. The single biggest carp we've landed on float fishing gear topped the scales at forty four pounds - and, of course, we've lost a few that were undoubtedly bigger.

The keys to successful float fishing for carp in rivers include:

- (1) choosing a productive venue
- (2) preparing groundbait (chum)
- (3) chumming effectively
- (4) using the proper float setup
- (5) drifting the float correctly
- (6) landing the fish

## Selecting the Venue

When selecting your venue, it is essential to do some research ahead of time. More than likely you've already seen carp cruising along weed lines, jumping below dams or lurking in deeper pools of meandering rivers. Go back to those places and look for structural elements that will concentrate carp within or close to those areas. Hot spots in rivers tend to be the top end of large pools, the river mouth, around feeder creeks and along the edges of large slow eddies. Spend some time observing different areas on bright sunny days, carp will often sun themselves, jump or simply cruise along the surface, revealing their favourite holding areas.

Once you've found a good spot (or several spots) with plenty of fish, you can prepare your groundbait to suit the venue you have selected.

## Groundbait

Carp have one of the most acute sense of smell of any fish and are quick to locate and exploit any new sources of food in their environment. By feeding groundbait (chum) in to your spot, you both attract carp to the area and acclimatize them to your bait. Effective groundbaiting can make the difference between only getting a few nibbles and hitting fish non-stop all day.

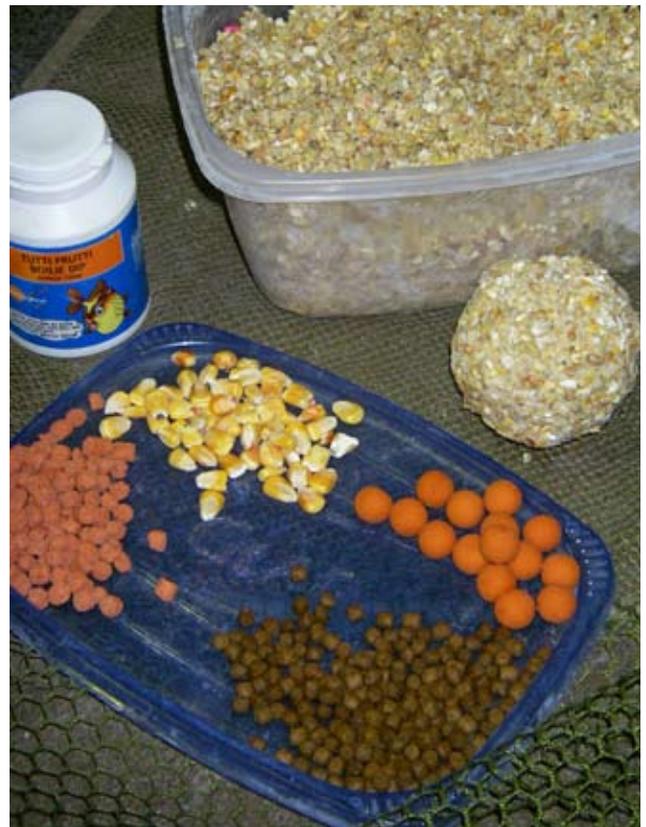
One of the simplest and most effective baits is sweet corn. Corn nibbles can be thrown in as the groundbait (referred to as loose feeding) and also used on the hook. However, more complex groundbaits are much more effective, dispersing scent further downriver, drawing carp in quicker and holding them longer.

Groundbait is generally composed of two parts: the base mix and the particle bait. The base mix of the groundbait is usually finely ground particles that bind everything together so that they can be formed into balls and thrown into the water. It has little feed value but creates a good scent trail and cloud as it breaks down in the water. The particle bait is what actually feeds the fish, holding them in the area.

Groundbait can be mixed to range from pure base mix (for attraction only) to pure particle bait (for feeding and holding fish), depending on what is needed.

The simplest recipe for groundbait is breadcrumb mixed with some frozen or tinned corn. Mix about two parts breadcrumb (you can buy it at your local grocery store or bulk food store) to one part of corn. Add water, a little at a time, until the mix binds together just enough to form a ball that can be thrown out the desired distance and will break-up on impact - or shortly after in deeper water. To make a harder binding groundbait add a little white flour to the mix. See the end of the article for a list of groundbait ingredients that are proven fish catchers.

Many serious carp addicts use maize (field corn) as the groundbait. It is extremely important to boil (for about 20 minutes) any dry grain or seed baits and allow them to soak overnight. This allows them to swell and soften, and ensures that they won't germinate. A note of caution, never use any dry grain or seed baits as groundbait as they will swell inside the fish and potentially cause internal damage. Remember to use groundbaits ethically,



making sure not to use large grain baits (such as corn/maize) in areas heavily populated by trout and bass. Both species have trouble digesting corn and may be seriously harmed if they eat too much.

As far as hook baits, sweet corn is one of the best. Tinned corn is easier to use on the hook than frozen corn and has more scent. Many anglers have success using boilies, dough balls, cheeses, worms, maggots, crayfish, bread, etc... Just make sure that you include plenty of free offerings in with your groundbait. Carp will accept the hook bait with confidence once they've had a few freebies to start.

## **Chumming Effectively**

Once you arrive at your fishing spot, it's time to chum the area. I usually do this before setting up my rod and reel, to give the fish time to start feeding on the bait. The most important things to remember about chumming are to feed in bait consistently while you are fishing and to feed it in with the most accuracy possible. Scatter the bait and you will scatter the fish, concentrate the bait and you will concentrate the fish.

This lesson was driven home while fishing with a British match angler, John Perkins, on the St. Lawrence river near Cornwall, Ontario. His groundbait was hitting the same spot, a small two foot by two foot area about ten yards out, with uncanny accuracy. My feed was landing in a five foot by five foot area. Not too bad I thought, until I did the math. His bait covered a four square foot area, mine covered a twenty five square foot area. That meant that the carp needed to search six times harder to find my hook bait. The final score at the end of our four hour match was UK 19 , Canada 6 - he averaged a carp landed every 12.5 minutes! My average was one every 40 minutes, and I even stole two carp from his spot while he was busy fighting some of his bigger fish. We were using the same bait and gear, fishing less then ten yards apart. Needless to say, my baiting technique is far more accurate now.

To ensure consistent and accurate baiting in rivers, it is best to use a firm groundbait and feed it in slightly upstream. This gives it a chance to drop to the bottom before breaking-up instead of scattering bait throughout the water column. The groundbait will draw carp from a long distance, as they follow the scent line washing downstream. We generally start off with a few good handfuls and continue feedig every 10 to 15 minutes to keep the carp feeding actively. As the number of carp following the feed increases, you can occasionally set off a feeding frenzy as they aggressively compete for food washing downstream. Although feeding frenzies rarely last long, we've had more than a few times where it was a fish a cast.

## **Float Setup**

While the groundbait is doing its job, attracting carp to your spot, its time to rig up your float.

In all but the slowest rivers, use a float that attaches top and bottom with silicone tubing or with a removable stem. Use the smallest float that can be fished effectively and have it shotted down so that only the slightest tip of the float sticks up above the water. In general we start with the Raven SS series of floats and upsize to the SM series if required. It is usually best to spread the shots out along the line to offer a natural presentation - in the standard shotting pattern. Bulk shotting is typically reserved for deeper holes and faster water. We usually run a 12" to 18" fluorocarbon leader (typically 4-12 lbs) behind the last split shot and tie on a top quality hook size 4 to 16, depending on the conditions.

Carp will sometimes be hesitant to hit a moving bait (even if drifting naturally along the bottom) and will only take something sitting motionless on the bottom. A good indication of this is frequent line bites where the line is bumped by fish but the bait is not taken (and you are constantly missing strikes!). Switching your shotting

pattern to Strett-Pegging or Lollipopping (see shotting article) will usually pay big dividends on these finicky fish.

Hook size depends on the size of bait, the carp's activity level and their average size. When carp are feeding actively, hook sizes from 4 to 12 (matched to the bait) will hold strong and perform very well. However, carp can be incredibly finicky, hitting and dropping the bait so lightly that there is barely any indication on the float. That's when down-sizing to a single kernel of corn on a size 16 hook will start producing results. When fishing where monster carp are likely to be caught, it is better to go a little bigger than too small. This ensures a good hold under the heavy strain of a prolonged fight.



Make sure to use a long rod (11'6"+) to provide good float control and help keep your line off the water - the same way you would for steelhead. However, in very slow water you might have to let your main line onto the surface and mend it upstream occasionally to allow for a proper drift. Running a good light weight centrepin reel makes the presentation unbeatable and fighting the fish incredibly fun. It is quite an experience to have a huge carp tear line off the reel so fast and for so long that your drag fingers feel like they are burning.

Now that you're all rigged-up and the fish have moved in on the bait, it's time to start fishing.

## Proper Presentation

Simply cast your float out on top of your baited area and let it run along the chum line. Keep your main line out of the water as best you can, allowing the float and bait to travel naturally downstream to the fish. Hold the float back slightly, so that the tip is just barely pointing upstream. If your cast is off the mark, reel in and cast again, don't waste time fishing off of the chum line.

Make sure that your bait is always close to the bottom and the moment the float pulls under, or off to the side, set the hook. Carp can be extremely quick at dropping the bait and a keen eye is vital for success. Typically, big carp will hardly move for the first second after the hook set, making you wonder if you snagged bottom, then they explode. Have your drag set perfectly if you're using a spinning reel and don't even try reeling up any line until they stop their first run. On the centrepin, just back-off your finger pressure on the spool after the hook set and let them run.

Be ready for them to turn and rush straight back at you, forcing you to reel up as quick as you can to keep the line tight. Once they start to tire, steady pressure will bring them in - don't rush it or the hook might pull out. In general, if you survive the first run you have an excellent chance of landing them, as long as you can keep them out of snags and have a big net. One effective trick to keep the carp away from a snaggy bottom to fight them using side strain and keeping the rod tip close to the water

## Landing your catch

Once you have your carp under control and ready to land, draw it in slowly over the net and scoop the net up around the carp. Don't try chasing them with the net, your more likely to spook them in to a snag or break the line. And once they are in the net, don't try to lift a big carp out of the water with just the net handle, as most will break under the pressure. Simply draw the net in to shore, holding the carp half out of the water, reach in and remove the hook. To release the carp, just drop the net back into the water and let carp swim out. We avoid lifting fish to shore, and when we do, we always place them on grass or mud, never on rocks.

When holding carp up for pictures, keep your hands out of their gills. Just put one finger in their mouth to control their head (don't worry, they have no teeth) and support them under the belly with your other hand. Kneel down and just lift them to knee height, so that they won't get hurt if they fall. As far as nets go, try to find something with a soft knot free "Catch & Release" mesh netting, with a 24"+ width and a six foot or longer handle. Avoid knotted nets, as they tend to knock the scales off of carp.

After catching a few carp, their sheer power and size will earn your respect. In return, treat them as gently as possible before returning them to the water. We once had an onlooker, seeing us put back all our carp, ask us to give him one for dinner. When we politely refused, the onlooker took offence and yelled at us, asking we were wasting our time and just putting them back. My British friend just smiled back at him, proudly proclaiming "because we love them" as he gently returned his carp to the water.



## THE GEAR

### Float Rods:

Long powerful rods help present floats properly and control big fish. One of our favourite rods is the Raven 11'6" IM6 Steelheader. It has a soft tip that helps in presenting the float and has loads of power in the butt section to put serious pressure on any big carp. It is rated for 6-12 lbs line and will perform perfectly for all but the toughest conditions. The standard 13' to 14' float rods are great for average size carp, but lack the power to fight really big carp effectively - that where the Raven IM9 series rods really perform, they have enough power to handle just about anything. In snaggy situations, we run the Raven 11' IM6 Specialist rod with heavier line and large hooks, as it can turn all but the biggest carp from cover.

### Reels:

Although you can get away with spinning reels, centrepins are our number one choice. There are few products in the fishing industry that enhance the angling experience more. Without a drag system and powered by a one to one ratio, mastering the centrepin reel is the pinnacle skill in the art of angling. We've fished every Raven reel available and they can all take the abuse of carp fishing. Choose the one that best fits you rod - the Matrix reel and 11'6" Steelheader make an excellent combination, light weight and very powerful. For deeper holes, the 15' IM9 matched with the Raven Classic is an ideal combo. Lightweight spools are a definite advantage on very slow water and the SST-2 and SST-3 are the perfect tools in those situation.

**Main Line:**

We will generally run 8 to 12 lbs Raven Main Line, going heavier for snaggy situations. Avoid all super lines, they tend to cut deep into the lips and fins of carp. Fluorescent lines are a real advantage to help keep track of the float when there is a lot of glare off the water. They are a huge benefit when fighting fish so that you can see when they are going for snags and you can try to turn them.

**Leader Line:**

Fluorocarbon has become our leader of choice. We usually run 4.5 lbs to 8.4 lbs leaders, but increasing strength to 10 lbs or 12 lbs, if we start losing too many fish to snags. However, lighter lines are less likely to put fish off of the hook bait, so you should always carry a range of sizes to match to the conditions. Our choice of leader is Raven Invisible in the light and mid-range and the Drennan Fluorocarbon for heavier work. We've only rarely go over 12 lbs line to handle very tough situations.

**Floats:**

Raven SS, SM and SX series of floats offer the perfect balance of control and sensitivity for most carp rivers. Use the lightest float that will reach the distance you require and hold enough shot to keep your bait close to bottom. Remember to shoot the float right down so that only the tip sits above the water. If you get lots of hits and drops, add a small shot below the float, or switch to a smaller float.

**Split Shot:**

Proper float presentation requires a good quality shot that holds tight to the line. Avoid split shot with ears, they spin when being retrieved and cause tangle-ups. Our favourite split shots are Sure-Shot and Raven Pro-Shot. Make sure to bring a split shot dispenser with you to make any shooting adjustments on the river.

**Swivels:**

We always use tiny swivels between the main line and the leader. Swivels reduce line twist when reeling in and offer more strength than a line to line knot between the main line and leader. Raven Ultra Micro Swivels are our hands down favourite, as they are tiny but extremely strong (20lb breaking strength).

**Hooks:**

A good quality hook is vital, as carp will strain it to the limit. Avoid poor quality hooks with big barbs or fine wire. The best carp hooks are micro barbed, medium to heavy wire and made in Japan. Our favourite is the Raven Specialist hook, it seems to hold better than any other hook we've ever tried - especially for big fish. The Raven Sedge Hook is ideal for smaller fish and delicate baits..

**Baits:**

Corn is the easiest and most convenient bait to use for carp, but there is an endless list of bait that will work - as long as there are plenty of free offerings for them to try. It is worth trying boilies, dough balls, cheeses, worms, maggots, crayfish, bread, pastes and any of the commercially available carp baits.

Following is a list of base mixes and particles that can be combined to make an effective groundbait:

***Base Mix:***

Bread crumb, oatmeal, bran, cereals, ground seeds, milled grains, ground pet food, tinned cat food mixed with breadcrumb and just about anything edible that holds together reasonably well enough when moistened. Binders can be added to help hold everything together more firmly if required. There are also a number of top quality groundbaits that are commercially available through many retailers. Sand or gravel can be added into the groundbait to help it get to the bottom in faster water.

***Particles:***

Corn, boiled maize, boiled seeds or grains, rice, chopped worms, maggots, crushed boiles, carp/trout pellets, dough balls, chopped bread, etc...

***Binders (to hold the groundbait firmly together):***

Flour, mashed potato mix, molasses, honey, peanut butter, maple syrup - anything that is sticky or starchy.

***Flavour Additives:***

Anise, curry, vanilla and maple extract, assorted spices, garlic, cooking oils (reduces stickiness and adds flavour), and almost anything else sweet, savoury or spicy (especially in cold water).

