



SHAUN HARRISON BAIT QUEST



PELLETS *KILL* CARP?



There are so many different pellets out there nowadays. Shown here are Halibut Pellets, Hemp Pellets, Low Oil Content Trout Pellets, specially manufactured pellets to complement a boilie range, and in the centre, predrilled large Halibut Pellets.

Pellets are banned! Don't use pellets in the winter! Pellets kill carp! Pellets seal the water's surface and deprive the lake of oxygen! Mmm, where do I go from here?

All four statements in the above can be classed as true. The biggest problem we have is the word pellet. It is so vague that the mere word has created a problem on so many waters.

Pellet is simply a word describing a small parcel of food; food turned into pellet form; food which has generally been compressed under huge pressure then dried. Yes, there are pellets which can cause problems, but there are an awful lot of pellets which can benefit a water and its inhabitants by their inclusion. The problem comes in controlling what is, and what isn't, used on any given lake. So, on some waters pellets get banned, which is such a sad state of affairs.

Many different types of pellet are available, from animal feeds through to pet foods and fish feeds, and there are absolutely loads to choose from. On top of this we also have many other pellets manufactured or commissioned by the various different bait companies, which are also numerous. So, as I said, the word pellet hardly covers the many different forms of food turned into pellet form.

Let's run through a few different types of pellet which are commonly used and look at them in turn.

Animal Feed Pellets

Pellets are such a convenient way of storing food and are so easy to feed that most people in the animal, bird or fish farming industry rely on the simple convenience of pellets (sometimes referred to as nuts, but not to be confused with what we term as nuts in layman terms). Many of the pellets fed to animals and poultry can also be useful fish-catching aids.

A lot of these pellets tend to be quite low in oil content, so can be useful additions to your winter pack. Pellets such as hemp, CSL, molasses and cereal-

based varieties can all be used as useful carpet feed (groundbait in old money). None of these are going to harm a fishery or the fish as long as they are used in sensible quantities. To be fair, I have usually found the aforementioned pellets to work more effectively in small amounts rather than ladling them in. I tend to mix this type of pellet with other pellets rather than using them on their own.

Most of the vegetable-type pellets, such as hemp and CSL, will generally break down

and soften up much more quickly in the water than the fish pellets. The less oil, the quicker they will break down.

Carp/Coarse Fish Pellets

There are lots of different varieties available. Once you look into the koi carp trade then the lists are amazing. Koi carp, although prettily coloured, are simply cyprinus carpio – just the same as the specimens for which we fish. The top koi keepers have the feeding off to a fine art and an awful lot can be learned from them. Remember, most koi carp only ever get to eat what they are actually given.

None of these are going to harm a fishery or the fish as long as they are used in sensible quantities

Caught out by a large bed of Sticky Baits Bloodworm Pellets, the hookbait being artificial pellet.



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They can't supplement their diet with a few snails or bloodworm, etc. They live in a very sterile environment and no one wants to spend thousands on stock, only to see them looking unhealthy in their clinically clear water.

You will see, if you bother to look into the koi-type pellets, that there is a vast difference in price. Some of them appear almost unaffordable compared to normal fishing pellet-type prices, but, as with most things in life, you very much get what you pay for, in much the same way as you can produce a kilo of one type of boilie for £1.00 whilst a kilo of another type could cost £15.00 – and I know which bait I would rather be using.

One of the useful things about the koi market is that it supplies pellets specifically designed for different times of the year. One must be aware, though, that a lot of these pellets float – brilliant for getting difficult summer fish going before introducing a more affordable conventional bait. Indeed, this is something I tend to do myself – utilising some of the very high quality pellets when the carp aren't feeding quite as hard as I had hoped. Once they get a taste for the pellets you can often start introducing conventional pellets (more affordable) and generally the carp will continue to feed. It is all about whetting their appetites and stimulating a feeding response. I say it so often but I can't find a simpler way of explaining this other than it is like us eating a single crisp or peanut or even a piece of chocolate. You weren't particularly hungry but suddenly you need more.

Floating pellets can be made to sink quite easily by putting them in an airtight container with a little water, then sucking out all the air from them with a 'Pellet Pump' (which you can buy from most tackle shops these days). This draws a little water into the pellet, which in turn, causes them to sink. The match anglers were quick off

the mark with these pumps, but carp anglers seem to take a bit of convincing. I can tell you a slow-sinking Chum Mixer can be an incredibly successful way of catching carp that may be a little spooky of feeding off the top. Pellet Pumps are definitely a worthwhile addition to your armoury if you enjoy floater fishing or want a totally different bait scenario. I have experimented and found most of the cat and dog biscuits can be made to sink in a matter of seconds. I won't dwell on floater fishing too much here because it is still a little early in the year to be talking about this and I want to cover the subject in greater depth in the near future.

You can get away with using coarse/carp pellets as well as low-oil trout pellets, which are often sold as coarse fish pellets, at any time of the year.

High-oil Content Trout and Halibut/Marine Pellets

Generally speaking it is the high-oil content pellets which cause the problems on many waters. Halibut pellets and high-oil trout pellets are probably the two most commonly used pellets, which can create a problem if lots of anglers are using them or if a particular individual is using them in huge quantities. The problem we have with this type of pellet is that the fish love the things during the summer months. The bobbins

fly so they remain popular. High-oil/fat diets don't do any creature any good. It is difficult, but surely we owe it to our beloved carp to help them along a little with a semi-healthy diet rather than just simply trying to catch as many as possible.

It amazes me each time I see someone put out a bed of pellets or, indeed, hempseed, and then comment, "Look at the slick coming off those – they're oozing attraction."

Well, actually they aren't – well, not in the way you perhaps think they are. These lovely oil slicks that people seem to like to see coming off their bait are generally rising



Brrr – freezing conditions early in the year. Caught in the margins over a mixture of pellets.



Early winter and still a good time for the right type of pellet.

to the surface and drifting off, rather than spreading a scent around the bait. It is possible, if a lot of high-oil content pellets are used, to seal the water surface with a thin oil slick. This can soon prove fatal to the fish. Clear water surface/maximum surface area is essential for the fish's well-being. Fish require the oxygen the surface water gives them. This is why you will struggle to keep fish for long in a deep narrow tank rather than a shallow wide one. It is the surface area not the volume of water which fish need, seal that surface and the fish are in trouble.

A little thought also needs to be applied as to the time of the year for certain pellets to work to their maximum, as is the case with boilie and paste fishing, which I covered in the previous couple of issues. High-oil/fat content pellets should be avoided at all costs during the cold winter months. You will not do yourself, or the fish, any favours by using them. I think it was Gary Bayes who first told me that his carp wouldn't eat halibut pellets in the winter. Gary has a carp/koi pool with a clear window installed so that you can look in, as well as down, on the fish. He told me that if he put high-oil pellets in there during the winter they simply turned very pale and started to rot – the fish left them totally alone. Me being me, I needed to confirm this for myself and in my pool I have a shallow area where I sited a couple of large paving slabs. I feed the fish off here whenever I



Large pre-drilled Halibut Pellets like these are a good choice for a single hookbait for carp.

want to test food items on them. Because my pool is totally natural, the water clarity is never that good, as any movement from the fish causes the silt on the bottom to cloud-up the area. By feeding the carp on the slabs I can just about reach off the side of a tiny bay into the water and feel with my hands how much bait/food has been eaten. I must say that what Gary had told me was happening with my fish too. Halibut pellets were left alone in the cold weather. I still hear people telling me they catch on them in the cold weather but I can assure you that more fish would have been caught with a different bait. Yes, they may take the odd mouthful, but they aren't going to feast on them. As I said, do yourself a favour, and the carp an even bigger favour; leave out the oily/fatty foods in the winter.

Pellets Produced Specifically With the Angler in Mind

Now this is going to be a bit of a difficult one to cover as each company is going to have its own little secret regarding what they put into their own pellets. The only ones I can vouch for, and be 100% accurate about, are the ones I have produced for Quest Baits. I supply our pellet manufacturer with the ingredients premixed and the liquids premixed, so obviously I know everything that goes into ours.

A big percentage of the pellets offered are simple pre-formed pellets which have been oversprayed with colour and flavour

After spending 25 years behind a fishing tackle shop counter selling all types of different bait, you tend to get a feel for what most companies are supplying and how they came up with certain products. It certainly seems to be the case that a big percentage of the pellets offered are simple pre-formed pellets which have been oversprayed with colour and flavour.

I wanted to go along a different route to this. I wanted a pellet which was a proper match to my boilies – and a pellet which would break down rapidly and could be used at any time of the year, a pellet which would quickly turn to soup, rather than lie around for ages. Give them a smell, not only from the attractors used but also by allowing the individual ingredients to break away, leaving a subtle soupy aroma but not a feast. I wanted pellets which would encourage feeding on boilies rather than being a substitute. I didn't want to buy a cheap wheatgerm-based pellet and simply squirt a flavour over it to try to convince everyone, and the fish, that it was part of a nutritious meal.



A 30lb common, caught using a very small PVA bag of pellets, fished over boilies and hemp. A plastic boilie was used on the Hair.

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The 'Maximum Action Pellets', as I christened them, are made out of exactly the same ingredients and flavours (although at a slightly higher rate due to the rapid breakdown and dilution into the surrounding water) as the matching boilies. The only thing not in there are the eggs. I could have the pellets produced so much cheaper but decided to stick to my guns and go in with my full bait beliefs. Perhaps some of the expensive ingredients used are going to waste, but at the end of the day I have maximum confidence in the ingredients within.

I'm sure there are other bait companies out there offering similar. The price will usually reflect what ingredients have been included. The high value, money-saving pellets are cheap for a reason.

Pellet Bans

So, having briefly skipped through four vague pellet categories it should now be apparent that the word pellet is not a very accurate description at all. Some clubs ban pellets – every type of pellet – simply because they are called pellet, and this is indeed a little short-sighted. The fish and the fishery can benefit enormously by being fed with pellets. After all, it isn't merely coincidence – or a way to save money – that all fish farmers feed pellets. Fish trade pellets are designed for healthy fish growth. No farmer in the world wants unhealthy stock. All clubs with pellet bans in place, think again. Your precious fish could actually benefit by certain pellets being allowed. Generally speaking, it is pellets with a high-oil content which could



Shaun very often uses an imitation pellet on the hook, fished over natural pellets.

cause harm in the long term. It isn't rocket science to check if an individual angler's pellets are oily or not. In fact it is one of the hardest things in angling to disguise. As soon as you throw oily pellets in, an oil slick/flat spot appears if there is even just the slightest breath of wind. Don't get me wrong, I am not anti-halibuts and high-oil trout pellets as long as they are used sensibly, and I am totally opposed to needless out-and-out bans.

Fishing With Pellets

All non-predatory fish in the UK enjoy feasting on pellets. Pellets can return absolutely devastating results if the fish haven't been hammered on them. Even if they have seen a lot of them, few anglers actually present pellets on the end of the rig. This is one of the main reasons why they are, in fact, so successful (apart from the obvious fact that the fish enjoy eating them anyway). The fish generally get fed a lot of pellets, so they eat a

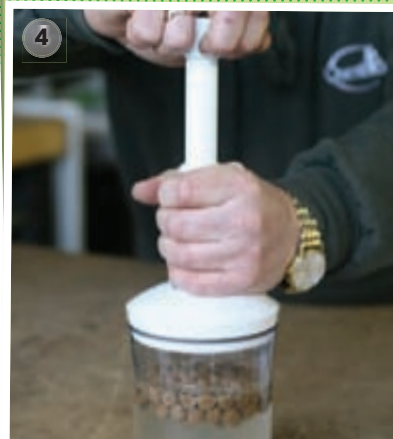
Pump Up Your Pellets



Match anglers have been using pumps like this to make floating pellets sink.



Just select the floating pellets that you want to use and place them in the pump.



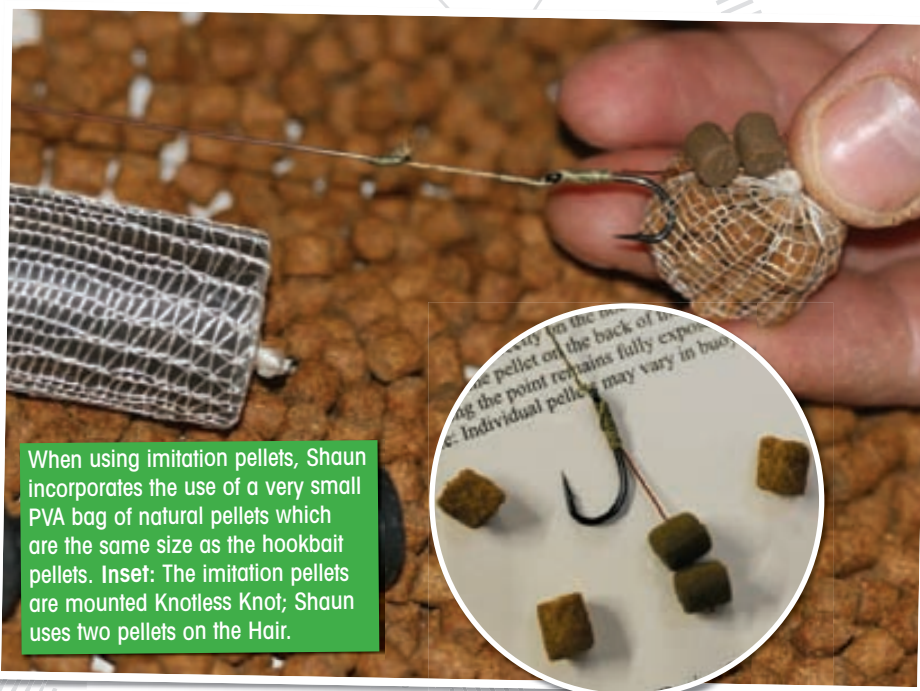
Screw on the lid of the pump and start to pump out the air from the chamber.



Now fill the base of the pump with cold water, allowing the pellets to float.



Once the air has been pumped out, you will be left with sinking hookbaits.



When using imitation pellets, Shaun incorporates the use of a very small PVA bag of natural pellets which are the same size as the hookbait pellets. Inset: The imitation pellets are mounted Knotless Knot; Shaun uses two pellets on the Hair.

lot of pellets but very rarely get hooked on an actual pellet. Lots of free baits but no sting in the tail, so to speak.

Another major plus for the angler deciding to fish pellet over pellet is that it is a comparatively cheap way of fishing. 5kg of pellets – even the slightly pricier Marine Halibut Pellets, are going to cost you considerably less than 5kg of boilies. Just think about it, 5kg of cheap bait with which everyone baits up but which doesn't spook the carp – or very rarely anyway. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

There are pellets available in every size you could possibly need. From tiny crumb right through to some monstrous 28mm Catfish Specials – well, Halibut Pellets actually, but we anglers often get the wool pulled over our eyes!

There are a few minor drawbacks to using pellets on the Hair, the main one being that small fish whittle away at them and eventually manage to remove them,

particularly once the water has penetrated and softened them up. However, as always, with a little forethought these problems can be easily overcome. The three methods I have used in the past to avoid the problems are, firstly, meshing them, utilising stocking mesh (I like the vision the word 'stocking' conjures

up in my mind, rather than tights). You don't need extra strong mesh if you don't have crayfish or poisson chat problems, normal close weave stockings will do. The second method I have used is to shrink wrap them then melt it down over the steam of the kettle whilst fishing. This gives the

pellet a slight armour coating but still allows flavour release, as does the stocking mesh method. The final method, and the one I find myself using more and more these days, apart from when using my 'Rarmey Sticks' (more of which later) is artificial pellet. Although I have my own bait company I have never made a secret of the fact that I am a lover of plastic artificial baits, so much so that I even stock plastic artificials.

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32lb+. Winter. First fish out for two months, again over small PVA bag of pellets.



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Enterprise Tackle led the way with these and since day one I have enjoyed some incredible success with various different artificial baits. The beauty of them, to my mind, is that the smaller fish species seem to suss them out more quickly than the poor old carp so the rig stays intact for much longer. As long as you have easy to eat food in the area you shouldn't suffer too much from unwanted attention. If you do, simply step up the size. The carp, once they come along, simply Hoover up the whole lot, not generally expecting to get hooked on pellets.

Some anglers varnish their hookbaits to give them a longer life but personally I am more than happy with the three methods mentioned.

Methods

There are many ways to utilise pellets in our fishing. My favourite way, and the way I use pellets most often is to draw a fish to a hookbait rather than feed a load of them into a swim. Most of the pellets I introduce go in PVA bags or stocking mesh sticks. It surprises a lot of anglers when I tell them it is unusual for me to use a PVA bag much larger than a 22mm boilie.

When fishing with PVA bags I like everything to get hoovered into the mouth (hookbait included) in one suck. I know carp slip up on large PVA bags of bait. In fact most of the anglers I see using PVA bags to catch carp do so with a lot more in the bag than I am happy with. There can be no doubting the effectiveness of such setups but I don't want the carp having to take two or three mouthfuls around the hooklink



before the hookbait is taken. To me, you are encouraging the carp to sense something is wrong before the hookbait is taken. I don't want them getting a mouthful of hooklink before the hookbait is in there.

I certainly favour the stocking mesh-type PVA rather than solid bags and try to get the pellet in there as tightly as I possibly can. The tighter you get it, the bigger the explosion of pellets once the PVA melts – I like this scenario rather than a tight clump of bait. Certainly the loose texture of my Maximum Action pellets creates a proper volcano-type effect if you can crush the pellet into the bag. The pellets really erupt with bits rising and sinking if you can get them into the PVA tight enough.

Carpet Feeding with Pellets

Carpet feed seems to be the in-vogue terminology rather than groundbait, so for once in my life I will try to get all modern.

I have certainly found over and over again, not only with pellets, but with boilies and particles too, that they appear to work to the maximum effect when combined with different types

When I do put out a carpet of pellets, I very much like to mix up the pellets, not only in size, but in type as well. I have certainly found over and over again, not only with pellets, but with boilies and particles too, that they appear to work to the maximum effect when combined with different types.

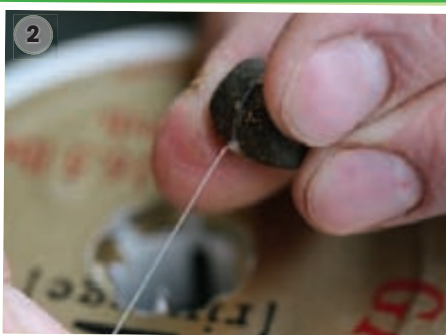
For summer use I am happy to mix every type of pellet I have, and now that I sell a lot of different pellets this really is a mixed pot. I started to sell mixed bags, not expecting them to be all that popular, but I was very wrong. It certainly saves a fortune by not having to buy a bag of everything in the first place and mix them yourself. I'm not sure if it confuses the fish or not, but certainly the mixed feast seems to be most acceptable to them and, of course, very different from the norm.

A little trick I often employ when the carp are being particularly awkward is to incorporate a few boilies into the baited patch – usually pretty obvious, brightly-coloured ones, but fish a pellet on the rig. It is a simple case of using their intelligence against them. They are very aware of the boilies, and chances are one of them is going to have a sting in its tail. They channel their thoughts into avoiding the boilies, and the pellets (or particles) get hoovered up. As long as you are presenting one of the medium-sized pellets rather than one of the larger ones, then chances are the

Hookbait Pellet Security



Shaun uses a loop knot, to secure the pellet in place, before tying on the hook.



With the pellet trapped, the loop is closed down tight to ensure the pellet stays securely in place.



Shaun now takes the length of fluorocarbon and starts to form a Knotless Knot, with a 10mm Hair.



Here's the finished presentation, hard to detect when fished in amongst a small PVA bag of pellets of the same size!



Shaun will often revert to using an imitation pellet like this bright yellow egg-shaped pellet, made by Enterprise Tackle.



Shaun also carries a tub of pellets that have been soaked in oil. These are for hookbaits where attraction is the key.

carp is going to slip up. When fishing with pellets on the Hair I use a Slip Knot so that the pellet is lassoed rather than pierced. Pellets stay on and last so much longer this way. See the step by step picture sequence showing how I tie this knot. It is one of the few times I fish straight through with conventional nylon (or fluorocarbon in particularly clear water) when pellet fishing.

One little tip for making the hookbaits last even longer is to keep them in a tub of fish oil. This basically waterproofs them so the water takes much longer to soak through and soften the pellet.

Very often I make my own pellet boilies to fish over pellets as these certainly stay on a lot longer. It is something I have done hookbait-wise on and off since the early '80s. I now call them my 'Rarmey Sticks'. It all

started out of idleness and the hatred of rolling bait. I have generally always made my own hookbaits, preferring to be in charge of the most important bait. I used to boil my boilie sausages then chop off whatever sized bait I required rather than roll them into individual balls. This gives you a boilie resembling a sausage roll, sealed around the middle but open ended to allow a greater flavour release.

The 'Rarmey Stick' bit came about after Ruth (my better half) caught quite well on Peperami. Ruth has always insisted on using her own baits. She doesn't like to use conventional things – she's always experimenting. I think she simply gets a kick out of catching on something I haven't produced. We had been fishing quite an easy runs water and she was outfishing my conventional boilies with her bits of Peperami.

So, for the next session I made sure I had some of my boilie sticks and waited until we were setting up before announcing that I would catch more than her that day because I had got my Rahja-Rarmey and Fruity-Rarmey with me. Well, the name stuck after that, so whatever boilie I am using I simply add 'rarmey' to the end. I'm pleased to say I did catch well on that trip. Whether it was the change in shape or more flavour being released, I don't really know, but what is important is they seemed to want the pellet-shaped baits more than conventional sealed-in flavour boilies.

There are so many things you can do with pellets. I have simply outlined my own ways, the methods that have worked best for me, a few things to avoid, and a few things to try.

Until next month, once again I will wish you all very best fishes.

A pellet-caught 29lb+ carp caught over a small PVA bag of pellets, using the imitation pellets on the hook.

