

Autumn often sees carp anglers looking for a change of bait for the colder months. **Shaun Harrison** asks why and offers an alternative perspective.

A confusing issue that crops up every year is when anglers start talking about changing over to their 'winter baits'. But why do they change their baits? I must admit that I have never seen the sense in using a bait all summer and autumn, piling it in and establishing it, getting the fish used to seeing it, only to stop using it when the fishing naturally becomes a little more difficult. This, in my mind, is hardly the time to try and establish a new bait at a time of the year when the carp's metabolism is slowing down.

Total Tip

If you do want to use a different bait in winter, start to introduce it alongside your summer bait early in the year. Don't use it on the hook, though, let it establish itself as a 'safe' food source first.



Before going any further, let's skip back to the question: But why do they change their baits? It is generally accepted that fishmeals are baits to use in the summer months and bird-food-type baits during winter. This is very much an oversimplification of a rather complex subject but I will continue and attempt to cover these issues in relatively simple terms.

So, why do anglers in the know generally stop using fishmeal baits during winter? Well, it basically comes down to the oil and fat content in most fishmeal-type baits and the subsequent difficulty that the carp can have in digesting this type of bait during the cold winter months. The main problem occurs with some of the cheaper types of fishmeal that people use in their baits and the fact that many anglers add bulk fish oils to these, which heightens the problem and reduces their usefulness in winter. During the summer months these types of bait can be highly effective and the carp certainly like to eat them. However, in cold-water conditions the baits end up very different to the ones that you may think you are using. Basically, the oil and fat content in these baits congeal and end up sealing in most of the attraction that they leached out during the warmer months.



It can often be a toss-up as to which bait to choose, but it needn't be.

I like to put these things into human terms wherever possible and this is an instance where it is easier to explain what is happening with the bait in this manner. If we are going to get all up to date, imagine a simple potato chip, or even a piece of kebab meat. When warm, the chip and the meat are arguably quite tasty things. Leave the same chip and kebab meat on a plate and revisit them in the morning and you have totally different items of food sat there. As they have cooled off the fat content has seemingly increased. It hasn't, but the cooler air around

Lay off the oils for cold-water baits.

them has congealed this fat and totally changed the appearance and taste of that same food. Try eating some (if you can stomach it) and you will find that it is more difficult to eat and swallow, as well as tasting very different to the food that was on the plate the previous evening.

This illustrates quite clearly why the baits generally give off much less in the way of food signals in the colder water – suddenly everything is trapped and unable to escape. More importantly, however, the carp have immense problems digesting oil and fat in cold water. We must remember that carp are cold-blooded creatures and the colder the water, the colder they are, so the slower their metabolism. Don't get me wrong, there are some excellent fishmeals, extracts and proteins out there that the carp will eat throughout the winter months and be able to digest easily enough when blended with the right sort of ingredients. On the whole, though, many other fishmeal baits are best left alone during the cold weather.

So, what do anglers in the know use when the winter weather starts to close in? There seem to be two chains of thought on this one. A lot of the 'old school' anglers tend to start using what are generally referred to as milk-

protein baits. The other chain of thought is the bird food and cereal ingredient users, and maybe even a combination of the two. I guess that one of the most commonly used bird-food-ingredient suppliers in the UK is Haith's. It supplies its own ingredients, which are actually its own unique mixes,

Summer action on Shaun's all-year bait.



and some of these names have become almost legendary in bait-making parlance; Robin Red, Nectarblend and Red Factor are just a few examples.

There are many more bird-food suppliers out there who offer their own versions for those of us who like to be a little different. I can only speak from my own findings, but when I used milk proteins in quite high quantities I never did so well during the colder months as I did on baits with a

much lower protein content.

Because of this I only use small amounts. Anything over about 80 per cent protein content in a bait and the carp invariably get a little bound up, taking longer to digest the bait.

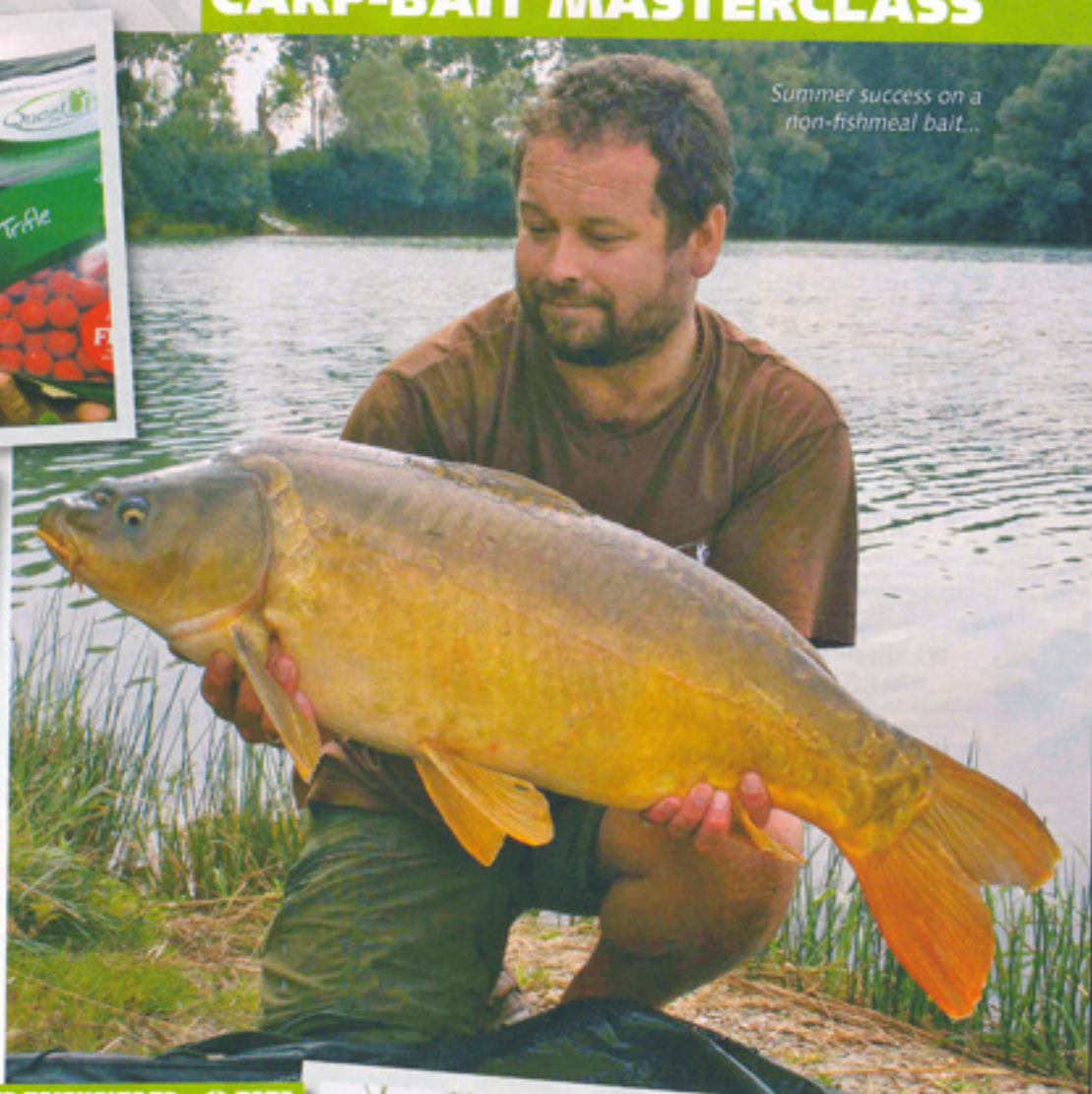
Ever since first diluting my milk-protein recipes I have never looked back as far as my winter baits go. I've experimented with many ingredients over the years, in an attempt to produce baits of a pretty loose texture that will not only leach flavours and attraction into cold water but will also be easily digested once eaten.

The sooner the bait passes through the carp, the sooner that carp is going

to need to feed again. Remember the phrase 'need to feed' rather than 'encourage to feed'. Certainly don't confuse this with giving the fish diarrhoea, though, because this will quickly ensure that the carp will soon totally avoid your bait. We have some excellent enhancers and stimulants available, but having the carp needing to feed is always going to be an easier situation to be able to catch than having to try and encourage it to feed. Think about that one.

Carp have little difficulty in passing through most of the bird-food-type ingredients available, making them ideal additions to boilie mixes, and this is why so many bait companies offer bird-food-based baits. Most are low in oil content, making them the number-one choice for many come the cold-water conditions of winter. Without a high oil content, the subtle, natural attractors from the ingredients are free to escape the bait and, so long as you choose your flavours sensibly, these will also be allowed to leak freely.

Bait application is as important as the bait itself.



I FEEL THAT I'M BETTER OFF WITH SINGLE HOOK BAITS.

So, there is a brief outline on the thinking of many anglers behind their winter-bait choice. However, one thing that I have always struggled to understand is why so many anglers simply do not bother to use what are termed as bird-food-based baits during the warmer summer months. I use this type of bait for the majority of my fishing.

Many anglers are surprised when I point out that I have only actually used fishmeal-based baits for my fishing for just three separate summers over the past 30-odd that I have carp fished. Yet, talk to most carp anglers and they seem to feel that they can only catch with fishmeal baits. I'm happy for them to go along with this chain of thought because, come the cool-water conditions of autumn when their baits are becoming less effective, they are in the situation of having to wean the fish onto another type of bait. I am able to carry on introducing a bait that the carp have seen over a long period and already recognise as a food source.

If conditions get really difficult and I feel that I am better fishing with single hook baits, then I am offering a

food morsel that they have eaten loads of times before. They know that it's food and are expecting it to be safe. The more of one type of bait you can get the fish eating, the more confident they become eating that bait. This results in easier to catch fish.

You might well say: "But I have been using fishmeal baits all summer and have loads of confidence in them." This is fine but I strongly urge you to follow a route that I have done several times over the years and that is to start introducing your proposed winter bait from as early in the season as possible.

I have never made any secret of my love of mixing different baits in my baited areas – giving the fish a bit of a feast rather than one source of food. Introduce just a few of your proposed winter bait all through the season and don't use it on the hair. Try and refrain



from ever having a cast, or, more importantly, getting a bite on it. By the time winter arrives and you feel that the time has come to change baits, you have one that the carp have been finding for several months but have never had reason to be scared to pick up. In effect, by simply adding the odd handful of 'winter baits' to your bucket of free offerings each time you have been fishing throughout the year, you have carried out a long-term baiting plan and established a new bait that's ready to move on to.

Total Carp

THE UK'S BIGGEST-SELLING CARP FISHING MAGAZINE



EDITOR
MARC COULSON

Hello once again and welcome to the October issue of Total Carp, the UK's biggest-selling carp fishing magazine.

I hope that you enjoy this month's issue; it's packed with loads more hints and tips to help you catch more carp.

How many of you fish with a mate when you go carping? I spent a day on Linear Fisheries' Brasenose One last year, along with another mate who writes for us, Tony Makepeace. I asked Tony to look around and tell me what he noticed about all of the anglers on the water. After a minute or two, and following one or two failed efforts to come up with the answer, Tony realised that I was referring to the fact that they were all fishing in pairs. It was an interesting observation and one that I have made many times on lakes all over the country.

I like to fish with mates, and I am generally a bit of a social creature, but sometimes I prefer to fish on my own. When I do fish with someone else we pool our resources in a bid to ensure that we both catch. It's rarely a head-to-head affair.

Herein lies a mistake that I see many anglers making. Rather than seeing who can catch the most, why not fish as a pair and work together to catch more carp? Try taking a couple of different methods each next time

you go, and don't put all your eggs in one basket, so to speak. Should one of you find a tactic that works on the day, share the knowledge and you can both benefit. This is exactly what pairings like the awesome Rob Marsh and Lee Merritt, and Tony Makepeace and Jason Green do. Rob and Lee will feature in next month's issue and both pairings can definitely help you and your mate catch more carp next time out.

Finally, you might have seen some extremely negative press regarding former TC writer Nick Helleur and a piece that he wrote in another magazine. The feature included Nick recounting some moving of fish many years ago; a practice that was rife at the time. Nick has been hammered from all corners and it seems that every man and his dog has jumped on the bandwagon. I won't.

Nick is not a bad bloke and has made, I think, two key mistakes. Firstly, he moved the fish, but as I said this was not frowned upon back then. The only real mistake he has made is in printing the tale.

I know for a fact that there are many big-name carp anglers, fishery owners and people involved in carp fishing who have moved plenty of fish in their time, but they have not made the mistake of writing about it. I am not going to judge Nick on this one incident, so those who are should give him a break.

After all, you know what they say about people who live in glass houses...

Marc Coulson

THE EDITOR'S PICK

One question that's often sent in to me at this time of year concerns which bait to use in the winter. It's an interesting question and one that evokes varied replies. I asked this of Shaun Harrison, a man who has forgotten more about bait than I will ever know, and he came back with some brilliant thoughts. Shaun also outlines a rather different theory behind whether or not it is actually wise to change your baits at all. Anyway, I don't want to spoil it for you; take a look at Shaun's feature on page 122 and read what he has to say on this thought-provoking topic.



Meet the team





ANGLER FILE

SHAUN HARRISON

Age: 43

Nickname: None

UK PB: 40lb 6oz

Sponsors: Quest Baits
and Free Spirit

There are lots of summer and winter baits available to the modern carp angler, but Shaun believes that you don't actually have to change yours as the temperature drops.

WHY CHANGE BAITS IN WINTER?