

TACTICAL CARP ANGLER – Shaun Harrison

A Right To Reply

Air-Drying And Rehydration Of Boilies

Highly-respected carp angler Shaun Harrison takes up a right to reply on the subject of rehydration and air-drying bait!



Part of a record
Mangrove brace, 32lb
12oz of common carp



On the Mangrove and my confidence is so high that the weigh hook is at the ready

Right To Reply

It was with great interest that I read the 'Experience Talks' section on air-dried and rehydrated boilies in the January edition of this magazine. I certainly don't want to criticise any of the contributors' answers as they all had valid points, although I did feel that there had been an awful lot overlooked on what is quite a complex subject in its own right.

There were several mentions of an article I wrote elsewhere on the subject but having read the various views put forward I couldn't help but think a lot of my original comments had been overlooked. Some of the big edges in rehydrating baits had not even been

touched upon.

I guess it would raise a fair few eyebrows among the readership if I told you that it is now several years since I last used a conventional, freshly-frozen or preserved shelf life boilie. What is more, I can't see myself using conventional boilies in the distant future either.

All the boilie-type baits I use are air-dried then rehydrated. Why? Because I get a lot more takes on them than I ever did on conventional baits!

So, give me a right to reply and I will give you a bit of background into the reasons I go to such lengths in the preparation of my bait rather than the simple option of delving into a freezer and opening a bag.



Loads of bait, drying out in the sun ready for a trip to France

Grey Matter

Although I have messed around air-drying baits in the past I must admit, like a lot of anglers before me, it was simply to try and produce harder baits or to semi-preserve them on a longish session, rather than use preservatives that I don't really understand.

All the boilie-type baits I use are air-dried then rehydrated. Why? Because I get a lot more takes on them than I ever did on conventional baits!

It wasn't until I joined the infamous Mangrove Syndicate in deepest Shropshire that I came up with an idea that I thought might just give me a bit of an edge over the other members. I was struggling. Yes, I was catching carp, but not as many as some of the other members. This is when my old grey matter usually starts to bubble away at its greatest capacity.

I was racking my brains for an edge. It had been years since I had last fished such a silty lake. The whole of the lake bottom seemed to comprise deep silt in the clean areas or mega-deep silt in the other bits.

To give you an idea of just how deep this silt is, the first job I was given during my first work party was to go and cut a few willow branches of around 20ft and push them into the silt around the edges of the wooden platforms. As I set sail to

TACTICAL CARP ANGLER

the far bank, I thought to myself: 'Someone doesn't know how long 20ft is'.

I cut odd ones to around 12ft and 15ft then dragged them out to one of the stages (wooden platforms). In around 18 inches (45cm) of water I started to sink one of the 12ft branches. When there was only around 18 inches of the willow branch still protruding out of the water, I thought I had better stop pushing. Yes, I had been told right. I needed 20ft branches to actually reach any sort of firm bottom and still leave a little protruding out of the water!

I don't follow the over-flavoured, in-your-face route with hook baits (although I have been known to use in-your-face coloured hook baits).

I guess I have now made the point that the Mangrove is thousands of years old and is very silty indeed.

But what has this to do with rehydrating bait? Well, just bear with me a little longer if you will.

Confidence

As I didn't know any of the mini-hotspots that every lake has, I didn't know if I had fished the right areas or the wrong areas of each swim. One thing that really got to me though, was constantly winding in baits that stank of silt.

I know the carp aren't particularly bothered, but I was. It wasn't doing my confidence any good at all.

I don't follow the over-flavoured, in-your-face route (although I have been known to use in-your-face coloured hook baits), and it was starting to get to me that my baits were becoming less detectable the longer they were sat waiting for a carp to find them.

This was particularly worrying, as all of my fish had so far fallen on the second night of my usual 36-hour sessions (a day with a night tagged on either end).

Give Your Boilies A Drink

All boilies are dehydrated to a certain extent during the usual drying/cooling process. This is why they shrink a little

Another confident session – note the wet mats and sacks



when first taken out of the boiling water. Alternatively, if you don't actually make your own baits, this is why the boilies swell up after being cast out for a period.

They are simply drinking the water up and rehydrating themselves to full level.

I had quite a few kilos of air-dried Formula One boilies prepared for a forthcoming

French trip. It had suddenly dawned upon me that I had done no experimentation to find out how much liquid and how much time I needed to convert my air-dried baits back to conventional-looking baits.

So, with air-dried Formula One boilies in three separate buckets I introduced three differing amounts of water from my pond. (I never use tap water for any part of my bait preparation be it cooking particles or simply soaking baits.)

The following morning, the baits in bucket number one were still hard in the middle. Bucket number two looked no different than they had prior to being air-dried and, finally, bucket number three looked as though they had been on the lake bottom all day. I had overdone the water in these – or had I?

Soak It Up

Being a northerner, I am naturally tight. So, not wanting to waste these experimental baits, I took them along with me on my next Mangrove session. It was during the usual laborious two-hour drive to the old Shropshire mere with my brain jumping from one subject to another when my thoughts tuned into the waterlogged baits. Now, surely, if I were to force-feed my boilies into drinking as much liquid as possible before introducing them into the lake then surely they would be less able to take on the surrounding silt smell. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea. Would more liquid in the bait alter their sinking rate as well? Would they sink faster or slower? My brain went into turmoil.



Rehydrated baits at different stages of soaking – soggy and standard



I was right – my soaked baits took on very little silt smell.

After returning from the session mentioned above I started to experiment by force-feeding my dehydrates with different liquids. As you would expect, the thicker the liquid, the longer it took to rehydrate the bait.

Hemp Talk

Now, everyone knows the effectiveness of hempseed. Carp absolutely love the stuff. It is brilliant. I have definitely used more hemp over the years than any other bait. The problem is though, that it can be a little too good. Get the carp feeding on it heavy and it can become frustratingly difficult to encourage them to pick up a larger hook bait and move off fast enough to prick themselves.

I used to think that carp weren't bothered about eating anything else when a large carpet of hemp was introduced. I have now changed my view on this one though. I think it is more a case of a mass of hemp discouraging the carp to move off fast while hoovering and chewing bait, thus

rendering your average self-hooking rig useless!

Once a lot of the hemp is cleared then you stand a better chance of pricking a fish still browsing and truffling around the area.

Anyway, I'm starting to get a little sidetracked as I usually do while writing. So, back to the rehydrates. As you will have gathered, I have great confidence in hempseed as an outstanding attractor to carp.

Now, everyone knows the effectiveness of hempseed. Carp absolutely love the stuff. I have definitely used more hemp over the years than any other bait.

Many companies have tried to cash in on this phenomenal bait but no-one has yet come up with anything that attracts like hemp itself. The various hemp mixes – hemp oils, hemp flavours and so on – just don't seem to live up to their names.

Yet, if I pour the oily water from freshly-cooked hemp into my pond at home the carp seem to be instantly triggered into feeding mode.

Big Hitter

Naturally, one of the first liquids I experimented with on completely air-dried baits (rock-hard and dry all the way to their centres) was the water from a freshly-cooked batch of hemp.

The results staggered me. I found that two pints of air-dried Nash Bait Formula One barrel-

shaped (10mm sausages rolled out on a 15mm table) boilies would drink one pint of hemp juice and still look and feel like a standard boilie.

Formula One boilies with a third of hemp content! I simply knew they would work before I ever used them.

I had tried various forms of hemp in my bait over the years but always ended up with rolling problems due to the oily nature of the stuff. If only it had occurred to me years before to introduce

it afterwards! It was at breakneck speed (okay, I know I drive a Land Rover but I do have a writer's licence) that I drove to the Mangrove for my maiden voyage with my beautiful little hemp barrels.

This session was to turn into my most productive since joining the Mangrove. What is more, I even caught on the first evening. I had only introduced the oversoaked baits the first evening and by the second evening I had made sure that I had presoaked the rest of my bait.

With carp of

The mirror of 38lb 4oz, the other half of the record brace



TACTICAL CARP ANGLER

19lb, 29lb 12oz, 22lb 4oz, 32lb 7oz (Conan), 16lb, 25lb 4oz, 19lb 14oz and 24lb 12oz, as well as losing a fish, it had turned into quite a hectic session for me – nine chances in 36 hours on a new bait!

The last two takes came with the buzzers packed away and the rods laying on the deck. I had to leave a swimful of feeding fish to start the two-hour journey back to work. A 'satisfying sickener' I guess. I obviously had an alternative presentation to start working upon and developing further.

The hemp juice is still the most effective rehydrating liquid I have used. To be honest, it has been that good for me that I have hardly messed around with anything else.

I certainly don't want to turn this piece into a 'look what I caught' article, so I won't carry on listing the numerous multiple catches which were to follow this first one – other than to say that my fishing took a complete turnaround from this day on.

Suffice it to say that three nights in a swim in France produced 44 carp to 43lb on their debut outing.

Back in England an invite to fish another incredibly silty lake produced a 36lb mirror, a 31lb common and a couple of twenties the very first time I fished the place (whoops! I wasn't going to go on about what I have caught. Sorry).

This was the summer of 2001. I am writing this in January 2004 and I have



A stunning winter thirty caught on the rehydrates

yet to take a step back and use a conventional boilie. The hemp juice is still the most effective rehydrating liquid I have used. To be honest, it has been that good for me that I have hardly messed around with anything else.

Dehydrate And Rehydrate

In its infancy on the Mangrove, my fishing either experienced multiple catches or absolutely nothing at all. When they were on the bait they simply couldn't seem to get enough down them.

I am certain that the odd blank I experienced was simply down to me cocking up the location of the fish or simply being unable to get on them.

You can have the best bait in the world but you ain't going to catch the carp if they aren't there.

During the lead into winter that first year (pre-Christmas), I was still catching over big beds of bait. This was at a time when others were seemingly only getting takes over minimal bait.

So, why do my dehydrated/rehydrated baits work more effectively for me than conventional baits and what conclusions have I come to after their continued use?

I don't think I can narrow it down to just one reason.

I started off by simply trying to fill them with liquid so as to try and keep the silt smell/taste out. This in effect gives a bit of a washed-out texture.

A lot of the unsafe baits carp come across are pretty dry in the middle. Leave them a couple of days and eat them when the angler is gone and they will be soft and wet in the middle. So, I am giving the baits a relatively safe texture.

I have tried speeding the bait preparation process up by simply adding hemp liquid to conventional frozen boilies. Yes, they drink a little bit of the juice, but they don't take on anywhere near as much as they do if air-dried first.

These baits have caught fish for me but not in the same numbers or as consistent. This would indicate to me that the hemp juice itself is

The last two takes of the session came with the buzzers packed away and the rods on the deck



Voted Britain's best carp magazine by www.rmcancling.co.uk

not, surprisingly, adding to the baits overall attractiveness. For what it is worth, the subtle Formula One smell still shines through the hemp juice. Both complement each other.

The baits I have had the most success

The softer I have made these baits, the better they seem to have appeared to work.

with were air-dried for a full 12 months, so bait life is not an issue here. I have used all of those now and it would obviously take me another year to duplicate that scenario.

Texture

The softer I have made these baits, the better they have appeared to work. These days I completely water/hemp-log my baits rather than try to revert them back to a conventional boilie. Ideally, I like to be able to squash my baits between thumb and forefinger easily.

I guess nuisance species ought to be a nightmare on my soft, paste-like baits but they don't appear to be. Yes, I catch the odd bream and

tench but having those feeding in your swim isn't necessarily a bad thing. Feeding fish attract other fish. Drop one of these baits in the edge and they spit out rings of oil for ages.

As far as baiting up is concerned, you

will obviously struggle with a throwing stick. I use the spod, a bait rocket or a catapult.

Many anglers air-dry baits for foreign sessions in order to be able to carry more bait and preserve them at the same time. Most then introduce them into the lake in an air-dried state.

I have done exactly the same in the past and have caught carp remarkably quickly while doing so. The carp will crunch up air-dried baits. However, they will take an awful lot of lake water/smell into them, thus masking any flavour the bait may have once had. If you go to the

trouble of rehydrating them first, even with just a little water and your chosen attractors, then I can assure you your baits will work more efficiently.

The beauty of rehydrating is that it allows you to use so many things that you would usually struggle to use in a bait. If they have never previously

The results of my first session on rehydrated baits



been used on the water you are fishing, then you could be in for a treat. A rehydrated bait is so different in so many ways to the things that carp have, in many waters, become paranoid about – that is dry-centred boilies.

Afterthought

Dehydrating, then rehydrating your baits is also the perfect way of sinking heat-damaged flavours such as the ethyl alcohol-based ones into your bait. Lots of attractors are destroyed at the boiling stage, so why put them in?

After all the plus points, I will end with a couple of bad points to watch out for. I've found that rehydrated boilies generally go sour/off much quicker than conventional bait. You don't really want to be using them much more than 48 hours after rehydration. And finally, if left in liquid and in the sun, then they will start to float after a couple of days. Well, my Formula One's do! Similarly, if boiling hemp water is used for rehydrating then the baits again sometimes float.

I boil my hemp in the evening, then leave it to cool overnight and then I pour the liquid over the bait the following morning. Twelve hours later and they are ready to use.

Give it a try, I did!

Shaun Harrison

Give it a go, you just never know

Subscribe

Advanced Carp Fishing – to subscribe call the hotline number below:

0845 345 0253