



Catching pike is the easy part – you must now unhook it safely and responsibly, and it takes practice.

THE SAFEST WAY TO UNHOOK YOUR PIKE

WHATEVER you think about the ferocious looking pike, they are among our most fragile of fish.

They react badly to warmer water with lower oxygen levels and are extremely susceptible to pollution and poor water quality. More seriously, they don't take well to being handled badly when caught.

To become a competent predator angler you have to gain experience handling them. Someone new to this will find it very difficult to manage what can be a scary few minutes.

Unfortunately even the very best, most experienced pike angler will occasionally be faced with a deep hooking situation, so it's not just beginners who have to deal with such problems. The big difference lies in knowing how to deal with difficult hook-holds or deep hooking.

Once a pike is in the net I have a regimented routine, and the only thing that will move me from it is the occasional difficult hooking situation.

MY SIMPLE PROCESS

1 Once it's in the net, leave the pike for a few minutes while you get your equipment ready. This allows the fish, and you, to calm down. Then place the fish on a large, wet unhooking mat.

2 Establish where the hooks are likely to be and ensure there are no loose trebles outside the mouth. Once you put your fingers under the gill plate, they need to be away from the trebles in case the fish thrashes.

3 If it's a big fish, kneel either side of it to provide support should it start thrashing around. Don't put any body weight on it. Once the pike has settled, slide your fingers carefully under the



Semi-barbed trebles are kinder to pike.



Steve Rowley
CATCH DRENNAN'S E-SOX CONSULTANT
EVERY WEEK ONLY IN **AnglingTimes**

gill plates and work them up to the top, to the point where your fingers can go no further. Now take a firm, but careful, grip and lift the fish's head. The mouth should now open, revealing the hooks. At this point you have to be totally committed, gripping the fish tightly. If it starts to thrash about, damage can be done to you both, so don't pussyfoot around!

4 With your long-nose forceps, grip the treble nearest to you. You will need to set this free before you can go deeper to release the second hook. Semi-barbed hooks are relatively easy to release and cause less damage to the mouth than fully barbed trebles.

5 In a deep hooking situation it is likely to be the second hook that is either in the entrance to the throat, or maybe even out of sight. Don't worry too much, because if you apply gentle but firm pressure on the trace, the pike's throat will start to gradually open and stretch towards you. Very quickly you should be able to see the hook. Now, while maintaining the pressure, put your forceps carefully through the gill plate and grab the main body of the hook, then turn the hook away from the throat and the hookpoints should pop out. Once this hook is released, make sure the fish's throat goes back down into its normal position. This might seem like a barbaric piece of work, but as long as you conduct the whole process with care, and don't pull too hard on the throat, all will be okay.

6 If the unhooking process takes a few minutes, always put the fish either back in the landing net or into a pike tube. This is a crucial part of the procedure, and allows the pike time to recover from the experience. Once you have everything organised and the fish has rested, get it out of the tube, quickly weigh it and take a few photographs above the unhooking mat before putting it straight back, holding it in the water until it can swim away strongly.

Secret mix to ball in for a big perch

IT PACKS A PUNCH – STRIPEYS LOVE IT

YOU don't have to fish lures for specimen perch. Scott Reynolds has been banking some huge stripeys on shop-bought baits.

The Dudley, West Midlands angler made the headlines in October with a 4lb 7oz fish and numerous others to over 2lb from Woodside Fishery. We met the 23-year-old on the banks of the Shropshire venue to discover the bait combo he used to take this fish of a lifetime.

"It's all about potency and attraction," said Scott. "I use an extremely strong-smelling and slightly oily feed mix. This attracts the fish but doesn't overfeed them."

"Most of the ingredients can be bought from the supermarket or collected from the garden but they come together in an irresistible combination which can help give you the edge on days when lure anglers might struggle."

LOCATION

Location is just as important as getting the mix right. Scott relies on a bit of homework and a short walk along the bank to find his ideal spot. "When targeting

This 4lb 7oz perch from Woodside proves how effective Scott's baiting regime can be.



Potent bait balls are introduced via a pole cup.



MARK PECK
Senior reporter

a fishery for the first time it pays to ask other anglers or the fishery manager where perch are being caught," he said.

"Match anglers often catch them by accident so it pays to read any match results too. Once I know where the fish are, I walk the lake looking for obvious features such as overhanging trees or semi-submerged roots, before testing the depth in the margins with a landing net handle.

"You want to be fishing in at least 2ft of water - any shallower and you'll struggle."



Scott tests margin depths with a net handle.

"This depth-finding is also handy when looking for deep holes or boulders where predators may be lurking - it's much quicker than plumbing up using a rod."

MAGIC BALLS

Scott's mix of prawns, dendrobaenas, dead maggots, tuna, groundbait, soil and Predator Plus liquid flavouring came about from trying different baits and catching perch while targeting other species.

"I know that perch love prawns, worms and maggots but the tuna idea came from carp fishing - it drew in perch too, maybe due to its oily, fishy smell," he explained.

"The groundbait is a spicy, meaty variety that I also use for barbel fishing but if groundbait is banned on your venue you can just use plain soil as a carrier."

Most of the bait is chopped up and pre-flavoured, and Scott often mixes it all up the night before so that the flavours have time to combine into a sticky, potent mush. If possible he will prebait a swim the day before, but on a normal day session he'll kick-start things by cupping two or three jaffa-sized balls into each swim.

"I use my pole and cupping kit," he said. "Most commercial fisheries don't allow you to throw in balls of bait and anyway, you'll only attract carp, which you don't want! Feeding this way also means that you needn't stand right over the edge of the bank so you spook fish in the margins."

TACKLE

While his rigs are kept simple, Scott always follows a couple of core rules when targeting stillwater perch.

He likes his rigs to offer minimal resistance and to do this his lead is as light as he can get away with and always running on the line. He's even picky about the end items of tackle that are used.

"I fish with E-S-P beads and cut-down tubing. They aren't tungsten and barely weigh anything. I don't want to spook the perch and I don't

want them to feel anything unnatural when picking up my hookbait. I believe big perch often feel resistance from the tackle or rod-tip and drop the bait before swallowing it," Scott said.

"With this in mind, I keep an open bail-arm so that the fish can take the bait without feeling any resistance from the rod.

"I know when I have a take by using an alarm, a bobbin or both," he continued.

"My hooklengths are quite long for stillwater fishing, at around 2ft, and

are made up of 4lb Drennan Double Strength which again helps with the zero resistance concept.

"The hook is a Drennan Super Specialist size 8 baited with a whole lobworm, but this can be changed if the fish are playing hard-to-get.

"Flavoured prawns and smaller pieces of worm often induce a bite. Perch are greedy fish and will take the bait and run with it once hooked, so fishing with the bail-arm open rarely results in lost fish. It's worth trying different baits, but lobworms are the best!" Scott concluded.

SCOTT'S SIMPLE PERCH RIG

ANTI-TANGLE DEVICE
The lead is attached to the rig using an E-S-P running rig bead and a cut-down piece of sleeving to stop the hooklength tangling.

RUNNING LEAD
A free running lead of around 1oz or less offers as little resistance as possible to the fish.

FINE LINE
Scott likes to use a low-diameter 2ft hooklength - 0.14mm is ideal for commercials.

HOOKBAITS
A single lobworm hookbait is hooked directly on to a size 8 hook but Scott also tries prawns and maggots.

MAKE SCOTT'S SECRET PERCH MIX



1 You'll need worms, prawns, dead maggots, soil, two tins of tuna, Predator Plus liquid and groundbait.



2 Pour half-a-bag of Soubaits Spicy Meat groundbait into a mixing bowl and add a few handfuls of soil.



3 Mix soil into the groundbait and add half-a-pint of dead red maggots, pre-flavoured if you wish.



4 Chop up a packet of prawns with scissors and add them to the mix. Chop them as fine as you like.



5 Break up tuna chunks into a separate tub of water, and add enough Predator Plus to bind the mix.



6 Finally, add some chopped worms. Don't cut them too finely, you don't want to end up with a mush.

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