Practice on carp
Toby Grundy | April 2009 » Area Articles / New South Wales / Freshwater / Canberra /

Test your light-tackle skills on these ferals before moving to native fish, urges TOBY GRUNDY

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I leaned back into the biting Autumn wind and stared intently at the light spin stick sitting in a metal rod holder. The bell at the top of the rod had indicated a touch a few seconds earlier.

The slight bow in the line suddenly pulled taut and the reel drag screamed to life. A large fish pulled metre on metre of line and darted for a weed bed to the left of the swim.

The 2kg monofilament stretched to breaking point under the weight as the fish slowly started to turn. After 20 minutes and four powerful surges, an 8kg European carp reluctantly surfaced near the net.

Carp are noxious pest fish but are excellent to catch to develop light line skills to use during the Summer months on native fish such as golden perch and Murray cod. Carp bite all year round but especially well during the cooler months when natives rarely bite.

They are also extremely common (an understatement!) and can be found in almost all inland rivers and dams across NSW. This article will outline how to catch European carp on extremely light tackle and to hone your light tackle skills to apply on our native fish.

SPOTTING

The easiest way to spot European carp is to wander the shores of a lake and wait for a carp to jump. Murray Cod and golden perch rarely jump, nor do redfin, but carp will often throw themselves out of the water.

Once a carp has been spotted you can safely assume that it is not travelling alone; these are schooling fish. Other indicators that fish are present include large bubbles or evidence of mud rising to the surface.

Carp can be found near structure but can also be found in open water so it is best to look for jumping fish rather than heading straight for structure.

TACKLE

Carp can be incredibly fun fish to chase, especially when using light spin tackle. The initial run can be compared with a freight train.

I first started chasing carp on light spin tackle after a difficult native season in which I hooked several large cod on light line and lost all but one.

So I spent the following Winter chasing carp on a Daiwa Regal Z 2000 matched with a 5’10” Daiwa Procaster X and a Daiwa Laguna 1500 matched with a Daiwa Heartland.

I began with 2kg line accompanied by 3kg leader and as my confidence grew, I switched to 1 kg Maxima Tournament Monofilament and 2kg leader. Provided the reel has a good drag system, a light spin stick can handle fish up to 10kg.

It is also important to purchase a bite indicator (bells attached to rod tip) and a rod holder.

BERLEY, BAIT

Once a likely ‘swim’ (coarse fishing speak for carp spot!) has been found, it is incredibly important to berley the area. I use a mixed berley that I make myself which comprises stale bread, linseed oil, chopped garden worms and canned corn.

Ensure that you berley the area on the hour to maintain the fishes’ interest and to attract other fish to the area.
When carp fishing it is important to bring a variety of baits to a location because, believe it or not, carp can be picky.

I use garden worms, canned corn and bread but obviously not all on the same hook.

It is very important that the hook is always showing slightly on all baits to ensure that the chance of a hook-up is maximised.

**RIGS**

I do not subscribe to the European philosophy that carp are incredibly intelligent fish and require complex rigs to trick them into biting.

However, these fish are both surface and bottom feeders and can therefore be found at almost any depth of a dam or river.

Therefore, it is important to take two rods when chasing carp. One should be set with a running sinker rig and the other with a quill float, each with a 2/0 chemically sharpened Mustad Baitholder hook. These hooks won't often bend under the pressure of a large carp. In this way almost all the layers of water can be covered.

I use a Paternoster rig with my quill float and attach bread to one hook and corn to the other. On the running sinker rig, I use a large bunch of garden worms.

Also, I will often attach a swimfeeder (purchased at any tackle shop) to the top of my running sinker rig and into this I place both corn and bread.

**BITE AND FIGHT**

Carp can at times be tentative biters and it is important not to lunge for your line as soon as the bite indicator rings.

A carp needs to be given time to suck in the bait and move off.

I make sure that there is a slight bow in the line when I place the set rod and the I have the drag right off to allow the fish to pick up the bait without feeling tension.

Carp tend to drop the bait if they grab at it and it doesn’t move.

Some carp, though, will just swallow a bait in one hit and bolt. When this happens it is truly exciting.

Many anglers have failed to loosen the drag when chasing carp and have been sitting pondering their existence when a large fish has grabbed the bait and made for a snag, taking hook, line and rod with it.

Once hooked on light tackle, a large carp fights similarly to a Murray cod in that the first run is awe-inspiring.

Large carp tend to dive and swim along the bottom in search of a snag. Stopping a large fish from doing this is very difficult on light tackle and it is important not to panic and tighten the drag too much.

Learn to use the drag to slow the fish on the first run but do not try to fight it. It’s a no-win situation.

Aside from the head shakes carp, like Murray cod, tend to slow and tire after the first run and it is in this situation that the fish can be contained.

Allow for two or three short bursts of speed after the first run but ultimately, if the fish has not busted off after the first run it can be landed on even the lightest line.

Carp are a great way to develop light-tackle skills during the off season and are great fun on light spin tackle.

Natives can be very difficult to catch at times on anything other than very light lines so to develop the skills required, carp are an excellent, freely available practice fish.

Sessions in which 30 or more carp find their way to the net can be the norm during the cooler months so this type of fishing is also an exciting way of initiating anglers to the sport, due to the fast-paced action.

After a little practice on carp, the panic when a large cod takes a lure on 3lb line will be reduced a little.

You will also be doing the environment a favour should you choose to dispatch a large catch of European carp.

**Facts**
KNOTS

Large carp break bad knots with ease. Therefore, it is important to discard the popular conventional blood knot and use a reverse twist blood knot or a palomar knot, which have a higher breaking test.

Every now and then even these knots will break, but it is a rarity if they are tied properly.

Images