

# As the light fades...

If you want a catch of clear-river bream, prepare yourself for a night session, says Korum's Duncan Charman.

**B**right blue skies have warmed the air to an unseasonably high temperature but as I look across the fields the conker-filled horse-chestnut trees remind me that autumn has arrived.

I am only too aware that, with the nights drawing in, warm days are usually followed by cold, misty nights. This session is no exception.

I can't wait to get the rods out. The middle reaches of the River Thames, running alongside the rolling Chiltern Hills, are simply breathtaking. I would love to spend more time on its banks, but my angling today is so diverse that it

leaves me very little time to relax in its calming atmosphere.

It must be two years since I last fished this swim and as I load up my trolley, I recall past sessions when rods had to be reeled in, or huge baits had to be employed as vast shoals of sizeable bream intercepted my intended carp baits. On the odd occasion when the bream did stay away, I remember catching some gorgeous big-plated mirrors as well as my best carp to date from the Thames – a common of 31lb 15oz.

Today's session, though, is all about bream.

## NIGHT FEEDERS

Bream fishing on the Thames is a nocturnal pastime and if you were to fish here during daylight you'd almost certainly leave fishless and never return. If I were to fish during the day then either early morning or evenings would be best and my tackle would be a complete contrast to the scaled-down carp tactics needed after dark.

It's only a short walk from the car park to the river, but my luck seems to have run out as the only moored boat in sight has settled right in the swim I want to fish. I've tried to fish this swim twice in previous weeks

but on both occasions I found the complete area occupied by boaters keen to make the most of the free 24-hour mooring.

The swim that I was hoping to drop into has a vast snag on the far bank, home of some monster carp and chub. Still, I'm here and not about to abandon ship, so instead I settle a few yards upstream. Past experience here tells me that the bream always start rolling at dusk upstream of the snag, slowly moving down until they are right on it but never moving below it. Fishing above the snag seems a great area to intercept them.



## ANGLER FACT FILE

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**Hometown:** Aldershot, Hampshire  
**Occupation:** Photographer

Two rods are used to make the most of the swim, each with different baits.

**MONO HOOK LINKS**

As I am unable to fish tight against the snag, I opt for mono hook links rather than the abrasion-resistant coated braid that would be my first choice in areas containing underwater obstacles.

I'm glad in a way that the swim is taken as it allows my terminal tackle to be refined so that I can enjoy catching bream while still having a chance of landing any carp I might hook.

The rods are the ever-reliable Korum Twin Tip Neoteric with the more powerful 2.2lb tips added with a 10lb Gardner GR60 reel line running through. Rig wise it's simple running rigs consisting of 3oz gripper leads buffeted by Korum large Buffer Beads, a 10lb Korum advanced reel line hook link with strong sharp S3 barbed size 8 hooks.

I love mono or fluorocarbon hook links, especially when bream fishing, as after trying a knotless knot you are left with a great angle of the hook which increases the hooking properties of the rig.

The colour of the mono hook link also makes a difference and I prefer a dark mono like Korum Advanced reel line today. Bream aren't fussy feeders and on rivers they have developed huge underslung mouths

so that they can rummage around on the riverbed, so I have no problem with a stiff mono hook link.

**FADING LIGHT**

The gentleman in the boat to my left introduces himself and after a brief conversation heads back to his boat and puts the kettle on – good man! My next job is to place my rods on rests using stabilising bars to ensure that if a carp screams off the rods don't twist, eliminating any chance of catching one. My free-spool reels are then tightened up so they will give line only under extreme pressure. This also helps pull the hook home into the bottom lip of any fish that takes my bait.

I use the two hours before dusk to mix up my groundbait, which is made from six kilos of dry Sonubaits Hemp and Hali Crush. To the mix I add around a kilo of crushed halibut pellets, to create a stickier mix ideal for catapulting a fair distance without the balls breaking up in flight or on impact.

A good helping of different-sized pellet particles are also added, which will help keep the shoal occupied for longer once they turn up. To create the best consistency I add water a little at a time, mix well then leave to stand so it absorbs the



**DUNCAN'S TACKLE TIP**  
A sliding stop knot is tied with pole elastic just in front of the rod tip to help casting distance accuracy.

moisture. It takes quite a lot of time to mix this lot, but after half an hour the texture feels perfect and I start to mould balls from it around the size of small tennis balls. Another 20 minutes pass and finally I'm left with around 70 balls of groundbait to catapult in. The light's beginning to drop now, as is the temperature, so it's time to cast in.

**PVA BAG**

I make a couple of quick casts to the area where the groundbait fell and then, close to the rod tip I tie a small stop knot made from pole elastic so that I can be consistent in my casting.

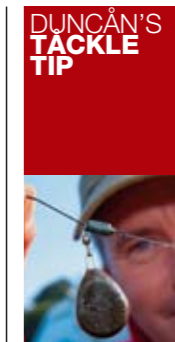
On the first rod I take a couple of hard pre-drilled 13mm pellets from my tackle box and add these to the hair, securing them with a pellet plug, making sure that there is a gap between the bend of the hook and the bait. I then glug the two pellets in Sonubaits Action Crab and Crayfish dip before adding a small PVA bag that contains a variety of small pellets.

To withstand the long cast as well as keeping the bag on the hook for a few seconds once it hits the riverbed, I hook it, twist it once and then hook it again. I then add some more dip to the bag for added attraction and cast it directly in front. As the

lead hits bottom I quickly add a small back lead to the main line and drop this some way out in the river as the near bank still has some dying cabbages around.

Back leads are vital when fishing rivers with boat traffic even in the winter, as all it needs is one boat to pass by while you're asleep and you'll lose everything if your line isn't pinned to the riverbed. Sinking your main line off the rod tips also reduces tow and weed build-up, which in turn keeps your bait in the water longer. Pinning your main line down also makes it less conspicuous, especially to a bonus carp.

The second rod is going to fish



**DUNCAN'S TACKLE TIP**  
The rig is a simple sliding-leger set-up.

two 10mm Crab and Crayfish Action boilies. Boilies are a bait that were, on so many occasions in the past, instantly pounced on by bream when I was fishing for carp, so it seemed the right option to have two different baits working for me. I glug the bait again, attach a small PVA bag and cast it downstream in the hope that a bonus carp might just be lurking away from the bream shoal.

**SURFACE SPLASHES**

With both baits in the water, it's time to sit down, chill, enjoy another cuppa and await the bream to arrive. Hopefully I'll see them splash on the surface. As darkness falls the surface



No fewer than 70 balls of groundbait are introduced to attract a shoal of Thames bream.

**HOW DUNCAN MAKES HIS PVA BAG**



**01** Add your chosen dry particles into the tube inside the knotted PVA stocking.



**02** Use a plunger to push the bait to the end of the stocking.



**03** Tie a knot in the end of the stocking to secure the particles inside.

# DUNCAN'S BAIT TIPS



01 Hard, pre-drilled 13mm halibut pellets...



02... and crab and crayfish boilies.



03 PVA bag and hook bait is dip-enhanced.

comes alive with fry along with the occasional pike chasing its dinner, but where are the bream? In the past by now the indicators would be dancing but something's not going to plan. Two hours pass without any signs and knowing that the pellets will be close to their breakdown time, I decide to have a recast.

Another two hours go by and the rods are once again repositioned. My mind wanders back to those horrendous floods of July 11th, 2007. Perhaps these have played a major roll in moving fish around.

Then, out of nowhere, I'm brought back to my senses as the boilie rod bleeps and lights up. Something's moving out in the depths of the river.

Moments later, at just after 11pm, the pellet rod does the same, only this time the indicator dances and upon lifting the rod I feel a heavy thud from a bream far out in the darkness. The cabbages are slightly denser than I'd first thought, but after a few anxious moments she

goes into the net. At around 4½lb she's well below the normal stamp taken here, but I retain her along with another of around the same size that falls on the next cast.

## STORMY HOURS

The weather then takes a turn for the worst and the southeasterly wind becomes a northwesterly. There's no more action for two stormy hours, but after several more casts, at long last more indications come to the pellet rod.

I get two chances... I miss them both. There must be something wrong with the rig. Indeed there is – the pellets have expanded and closed the gap between hook and bait, reducing the hooking properties and allowing the fish to pick up my bait without the hook pricking the fish.

The bream are clearly in a very fickle mood so instead of changing the hair I simply use a longer pellet

## DUNCAN'S TACKLE TIP



Attach a piece of PVA foam to the hook to prevent it snagging on weed.

plug which increases the distance between hook and pellet. Bingo! Straightaway three small bream come to the net, but the change is too late and as the light increases the bites disappear.

I'm thinking of packing my gear away when right out of the blue the boilie rod bursts into life leaving me in no doubt a carp is the culprit. The fish kites slow and deep downstream and into the nearside. Steady pressure keeps her coming up the margin, every now and again getting stuck in the cabbages until she's under the rod tip. I get a glimpse of some huge scales on her side revealing a typical large-plated mirror. Then the hook pulls. I leave the radio off on the way home to ponder what might have been... **WATERMAGAZINE**

Two fine old Thames bream, the results of a challenging but rewarding night for Duncan Charman.

