

A DAY ON THE URBAN KENNET

I am sure when the people of Newbury saw me fishing the River Kennet that runs right through the town centre they must have thought I was probably mad. Watching me wade through the waist-high, icy cold depths to get to an unfished stretch must have removed any remaining doubt!

The river here is free fishing but is surrounded by private land, so access can sometimes be difficult. I have fished it from a nearby piece of public land but the line lay and presentation has always been poor and I always felt it could be fished better if I could just stand somewhere else.

So, despite the cold rain the night before I decided to wade the length of the river to put myself where a small side stream entered the main river. I must add that I used a storm pole to check every step for safety reasons.

So why would I put myself through all this to get to this exact spot? Well this area could not be any better. I was stood in the main

flow facing downstream. In front of me I had a raised sand bar to my right with a depth of only 2-3ft of water on top of it and minimal flow. To the left of this was a deep channel of at least 7-8ft, which was really pushing through due to the extra water from the night before. The left hand margin was very snaggy and would undoubtedly hold fish. Finally I had a large weir pool behind me. All the small food items being pushed downstream from the weir would be channeled into the water in front of me and then hit the slow moving water and the wall of sand to the right. It would then hang around out of the flow causing an almost constant conveyor belt of food items for the fish.

I had decided to target the dace and a 15lb bag was the target. I would be fishing the stick float and feeding mainly maggot.

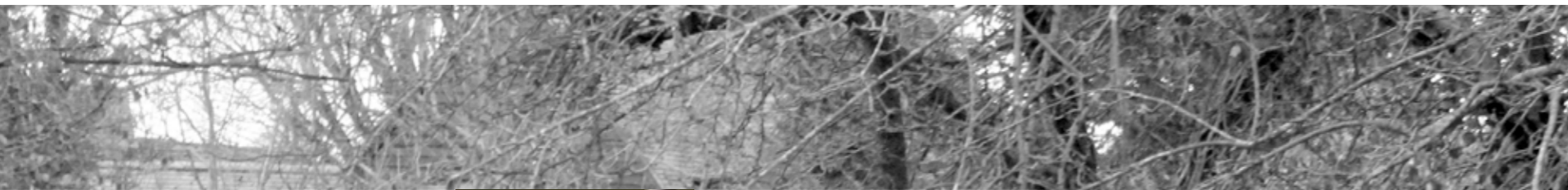
Stu Lennox looks back on an eventful session he's just spent on an urban stretch of the River Kennet that flows right through the centre of Newbury.

ANGLER FILE



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DRENNAN



TACKLING UP

My rig consisted of a 6 No4 Drennan Alloy Stick set at around 7ft. This meant I had about six inches of line overdepth so my double red maggot hook bait would just trundle along the bottom giving the fish plenty of time for the fish to see it.

My shotting pattern consisted of a bulk of No4s set approximately 14 inches from the hook. This meant the bait would quickly plummet through the top layers but would take a while to reach bottom in the fast flow.

This was done because dace do not feed hard on the bottom, if I were fishing for other species where I want the bait trundling the bottom as quickly as possible I would have had the bulk shot lower and two No8 dropper shots further down the hooklength. My hook was a size 18 Carbon Match on a ready tied hooklength to 0.10mm (2lb) line.



FEEDING THEORIES

Arriving at around 10.30am, a lot later than I wanted to, I fed three balls of mashed bread and a couple of handfuls of maggots well upstream while I set up. I then started off catching fish very close in, in the deepest of water.

I was feeding quite heavily after each cast with the maggot. I was essentially feeding three swims by throwing them in at different points in the flow. I was actually throwing some behind me, which created a feeding area in the fast, deep water.

I also fed directly in front in the main flow, which would feed the very end of the swim near a snag and give the fish there time to gain confidence while I caught short. Finally, I also fed in the crease just off the end of the keepnet in the almost static water.

EARLY ACTION

After about a dozen small dace, the next cast was hit by a very good chub. I played it for a few minutes on the light hooklength before it made a bolt for some snags and was gone.

Undeterred, I retackled and kept catching some good quality dace. I had decided to replace the Carbon Match micro-barbed hook with a size 18 barbless Silverfish Maggot again on pre-tied hooks to nylon with a 0.10mm (2lb) hooklength. The barbless hook enabled me to substantially up my catch rate as the unhooking process was a lot quicker, especially on deeper hooked fish.

I decided to rest the deeper water and try the static water at the crease.

First put in I had a beautiful

perch around 6oz. This was followed by a few more of these stunners including a real warrior about 1lb.

These coldwater, river perch are absolutely beautiful. They were obviously tightly packed in this crease but I didn't want to fish it too hard so started to rotate the swims.

The near spot was yielding plenty of dace up to a great looking fish around the 10oz mark with a large deep body. The crease continued to throw up heavy perch and the very end of the swim produced four very rare Kennet roach, with one specimen just short of 1lb.



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CHUB TIME

The swim went quiet for about half an hour, but I kept the feed going in. I knew something big must have unsettled the fish and eventually hooked the culprit. As expected, it was a big chub. I played it as well as I could for about 10 minutes and luckily it stayed clear of the snags and was soon in the net. I was really made up to have landed it on such light tackle!

I recast and was shocked to hook another chub straight away. This fish again charged into the snags and sadly cut the light hooklength. I assumed the disturbance would have spooked any remaining chub in the area so decided to remain on the light hooklength, as dace were still my main target. I was proved completely wrong and in total I lost three chub in a row before I decided enough was enough!

I decided to fish straight through with my 0.16mm (3.2lb) Drennan Floatfish main line and replaced the hook with a size 18 Wide Gape Pellet hook. These are incredibly strong but still relatively small.

Next cast I hooked a really good chub but with the stronger tackle I had the added confidence to give it plenty of stick to keep it away from the snags. It was still a heavy, dogged fight and after about five minutes the fish was in the net and was weighed at just under 5lb!

After this run of chub the dace returned and the perch were still in the crease, including a big, fresh looking fish of almost 2lb. As it approached 4.30pm I ran out of maggots having fed three pints in total. I could have moved onto bread but standing in the icy water all day convinced me to call it a day and see what the keepnet held.

I was absolutely shocked to see I had amassed over 38lb in six hours of fishing! I think that proves that our urban waters that run through most town centres in the UK really can throw up some surprises if you can find where the fish want to be.

HAPPY HOOKING

I do a lot of carp fishing and know a sharp hook is paramount. I always change my rig after a big carp and while that would be unrealistic in this scenario I find it equally important to change the hook if I have any doubt over its sharpness. A key indicator is if a maggot becomes harder to hook, or burst each time you try to hook them. Bumped fish are also a clear sign that your hook point is no longer as sharp as it could be. If I bump more than two or three fish in a row I will always change my hooklength. During this short session I changed my hook several times, which I am sure kept lost fish to a minimum. Having pre-tied hooks to nylon made this process a lot quicker and easier – especially with cold hands!

