

Angler: David Coakley**UK PB:** 34lb 12oz**Sponsor:** The Bait & Feed Company

David has a decade's experience in the bait industry and he's been a carp angler for far longer!

PELLET PUZZLE

THE REALITY

Are trout pellets really dangerous to a carp's health? Pellet expert DAVID COAKLEY gives us his take on this, the most controversial of subjects.

Low-oil, high-oil, marine, bloodworm, shrimp and salmon; these are just a few of the various words used to describe the pellets that most of us use, or have used, to enable us to catch carp. Pellet choice consisted of just trout and salmon pellets at the outset. This type of pellet is principally made for fish-farming purposes (aquaculture), as are marine halibut and carp pellets. However, all types of fish like them and because of their convenient nature, the pellet market is booming. These pellets are manufactured with the correct levels of vitamins, minerals and oils to promote healthy, profitable growth.

It really gets my blood boiling when I see people extolling the virtues of ewe nuts and other animal-feed products for fishing purposes. Yes they are cheap, yes they can look and smell like other types of fishing pellets, yes they contain some fishy ingredients but, and this is a very big but, they are made for animals, not fish. I recently read on a forum how good sugar-beet pellets were and at £8 for a 25kg sack, what a bargain. One of the uses of sugar-beet pellets is to supplement horse feed, especially in the winter months. It quite clearly states on the bag that they must be soaked for 24 hours before use; they swell to five times their original size when soaked in water. What on earth possesses an angler to use these for fishing?

My fascination with carp started in July 1975. I chose a nice, easy water called

Billing Aquadrome, in Northampton, for my first serious carp fishing expedition. Armed with various rods, reels, Heron bite indicators (these were the only things that matched) and masses of cheese paste, I enjoyed weeks of serious carp fishing – bliss.

During the first week I caught tench and bream and even more tench and bream and then I hooked something monstrous. Alas, it wasn't a carp but a 24lb pike on static cheese paste. On the second week two anglers turned up with gear far better than mine, they even had matching rods and reels that both had handles on the same side! They were using a foul-smelling paste on the hook made from cat food and piling in a loose feed that consisted of paste, breadcrumb and little, oblong brown things. Now, I would like to tell you that these gentlemen passed on all this information but I gathered all this via a good pair of binoculars! As far as they were concerned, their efforts were top secret and not to be passed on to anyone, especially not a long-haired 18-year-old. The paste was easy to work out because I saw the tins of Kitekat but the oblong brown things became known to me three years later – they were pellets. By way of comment, they blanked as well.

Fish-feed pellets have been in existence for many years, but how and when did anglers decide to use them in any quantity? Initially, groundbait was used as the principal feed attractor and, although pellets were available, the main

problem was how to use them. Sure, you could catapult them out, but that confined you to only fishing the margins, which was fine on small waters. I remember moving away from a two-acre lake that I'd fished for years to target this vast ocean – well, a 20-acre lake actually. To start with I only fished the margins, which rather defeated the object of being there, then I discovered the spod and PVA. To infinity and beyond went my baits, my groundbait bowl was consequently buried and my pellet bucket was born.

Fish-feed pellets can be put into two categories, extruded and pressed. The extruded types include marine halibut and pressed include the carp pellets. Pressed pellets are normally longer and thinner than extruded ones and break down much quicker. Over the last few years, marine halibut pellets have probably become the largest-selling pellet on the market, although recently I have seen a drop in our sales of them. The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, anglers are beginning to diversify into using other types of pellets, secondly they've suffered some bad press concerning their oil content and thirdly, the market is being flooded with cheap 'marine halibut pellets'. I can assure you that a 25kg sack of 'marine halibut pellets' at £25 is not marine halibuts. They may look like them, but they are made from substantially inferior products.

Within the fish-feed-pellet market there are pellets that have been designed to be

BOOST YOUR PELLETS



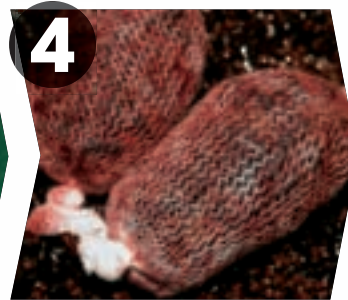
1 To give his pellets a kick, David adds a slug of spicy Red Devil Extract.



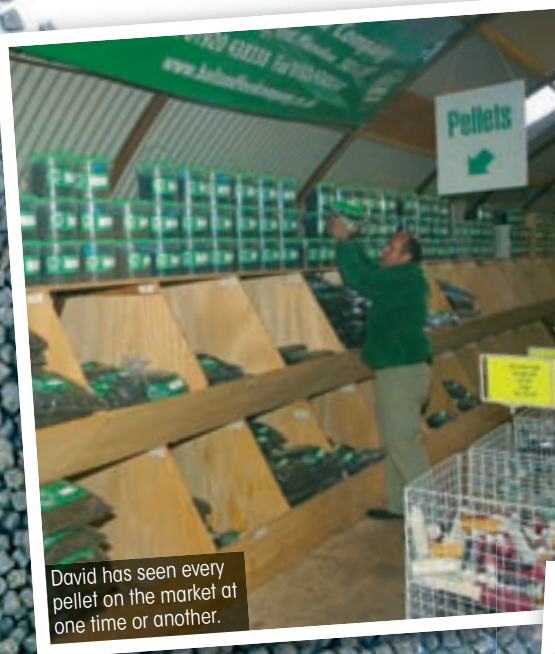
2 He then gives the whole mixture a thorough stir to coat the pellets.



3 The finished mixture looks like this. It'll release a spicy red cloud in the water.



4 Because the Red Devil Extract is PVA friendly, you can use it in PVA mesh.



David has seen every pellet on the market at one time or another.

fed to specific fish, that is, trout, salmon, carp, halibut and sturgeon. Then there are pellets designed by bait manufacturers solely for the angling market. In my view, pellets made for fish-farming purposes are superior in quality to any other pellets on the market. The most popular from the first category are trout, salmon, halibut, shrimp and carp pellets. Trout pellets come in various guises from high-oil, amino-enhanced and many other varieties. The make-up of these pellets is such that they keep the fish healthy and make them grow. Standard trout pellets are usually one of the cheapest on the market, which reflects the dietary requirements of trout rather than them being sub-standard pellets. Carp pellets again are

an inexpensive pellet; marines, salmon and shrimp pellets, however, are at the top end of the price range. You have to remember that we anglers principally use pellets to attract fish into our swim and not to feed them for dietary reasons. I therefore tend to lean towards the higher-quality pellets because the ingredients appear to be more attractive.

So, what quantities should we use? Which size should we use? Should we use high oil, with betaine or without? The questions are endless. All I can advise on is how I do it over a two-rod day/overnight session. I'll break this down into spring, summer and autumn together and winter.

My hook baits are always boilies, therefore my feed will always include some, or a lot of, boilies. In spring, when the water is still cold but the fish are beginning to feed, my pellet mixture will consist of Micro Shrimp Meal pellets (sometimes called grubber pellets), Betaine Pro-Action pellets and Red Devil pellets. The Micro Shrimps are only 1.5mm and are fantastic quality – I'd quite happily feed these all year round. The Betaine Pro-Actions are a pressed pellet and therefore break down quickly, as do the Red Devils, which are similar to the Pro-Actions but with the inclusion of Robin Red. I would quite happily use 2kg of this mix because there is a huge amount of attraction but not that much actual feed. Once the fish start rooting around, there will be loads of tiny bits of food in the swim and the real feed will be the boilies. As the water warms up I keep to the same basic three-pellet mix and then start adding 7mm or 10mm Salmon or Shrimp pellets. Carp love them, probably because they are one of the highest oil-content pellets on the market, but the water needs to be warmer in order to see the best results. The warm water enables the oil to leak off, whereas cold water tends to congeal it. I would quite happily use 4kg of this mix per overnighter during summer and sometimes the same in autumn. Come winter, I revert to my spring mix and keep to PVA bags.

Carp like fish oils but do fish oils like carp? I am no scientist and various groups have done studies on the pros and cons of high-oil pellets in a carp's diet. The lowest oil content of the aquaculture-type pellets is carp pellets (seven per cent oil content) and the highest oil content are salmon



Mixmaster! David getting the pellet blend just right.

PELLET ALTERNATIVES



1 As an alternative to pellets, David turns to a simple PVA-stick mix.



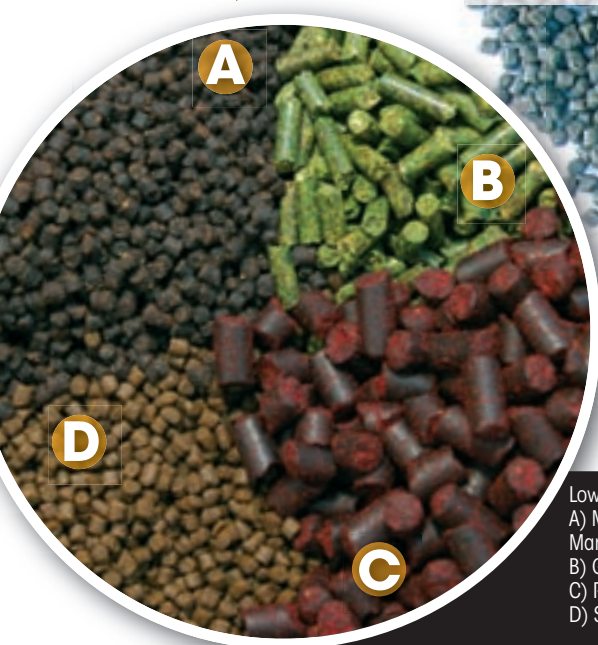
2 David adds Juicy Pineapple Extract to some Particle 42 groundbait.



3 He keeps adding the extract until the mix holds together when squeezed.



4 The finished mix will work fine with PVA products for sticks and bags.



Low-oil pellet selection.
 A) Micro Dot Betaine Marine
 B) Green-Lipped Mussel
 C) Red Devil Pellets
 D) Shrimp Meal Micros

So why on earth are we carp anglers using pellets that can contain five times that amount of oil?

pellets (33 per cent oil content) with most other pellets containing between 15 to 25 per cent. Now, some would say that therein lies your answer, carp farmers require low-oil-content pellets for their stock's dietary needs, so why on earth are we carp anglers using pellets that can contain up to five times that amount of oil? My simple answer is to point out that (a) anglers are not using pellets in anywhere near the quantities that fish farmers do, (b) fish farmers feed their fish 12 months of the year, carp anglers use pellets in any quantities for only maybe five months of the year and, probably the most relevant, (c) carp are cheaper to buy than salmon, therefore the fish farmer can feed carp a cheaper but nutritionally balanced pellet in order to guarantee healthy fish while still making a profit. The higher-oil-content pellets are usually 100 per cent more expensive – therefore the dietary needs of a carp are partially governed by profitability.

In my view, pellets should be sold responsibly. You can always rely on the big bait manufacturers to produce a quality pellet. However, as the volumes in the pellet market have increased, so have the number of outlets selling them. For example, there are pellets being sold as betaine,

bloodworm, and marine halibut pellets, which I know is an outright lie. There are people selling animal-feed pellets as fish-feed pellets, there are people selling pellets that are way past their sell-by dates and can be rancid, especially in the case of high-oil-content pellets. Choose your pellet supplier with care, my own company, The Bait & Feed Company, Hinders, Bankside, Heathrow Bait Services, plus all the pellet ranges from the major bait manufacturers are, in my view, reputable suppliers. Yes, they may cost a little more, but what is the point of spending hundreds of pounds on tackle, only to use a PVA bag full of 'betaine pellets' that are actually horse nuts.



Pellet power. David with a 30lb-plus common.