

The popularity of the barbel has exploded over the last few years and continues to grow into what is now the most sought-after river fish. It is the duty of all barbel anglers to protect this exciting and powerful species and ensure that it is returned, after capture, in the same or even better condition as that when it was hooked. Today's four pound fish may well be tomorrow's "double" or even record.

We recommend to you the following code when handling barbel:

THE BARBEL SOCIETY HANDLING CODE

1. Always use well-balanced tackle, aiming to land your barbel as quickly as possible, but without undue pressure or bullying by just hauling it out. Playing fish to exhaustion on light tackle causes unnecessary stress. A minimum of a through action rod of 1¼ lb test curve and eight-pound line should be used, with much heavier tackle advisable in snag swims or flood conditions.

Think about where you will be landing your fish before fishing, so that a played-out fish can be landed safely and left to recover in the net before being unhooked.

2. A more powerful rod will require stronger line to maintain balance; a rough guide is to multiply the test curve by six to calculate matching line strength. Line does not last forever, so check regularly and replace it if in doubt. Ultra-thin braids can cause damage to fish, so should be used with care.



3. When fishing for barbel, use a large, deep, fine knotless meshed landing net and always allow the barbel time to recover in a sufficient depth before removing the fish from the water. Transfer the fish, in the net, from the water and place the fish on a wet unhooking mat whilst you remove the hook. After the hook has been removed return the fish back to the water and allow further time for it to recover before release. Never attempt to beach a fish, or allow it to rest on stones, gravel or hard ground. Always use wet hands to handle fish.

4. Barbless hooks or those with barbs squeezed flat are easier to remove than barbed ones. Remove the hook with forceps. If the hook is proving difficult to remove then cut the line and thread out the hook, point first, if necessary. Check the mouth for any other hooks and remove any that are present.

5. Mouth sores and any wounds found on the body may be treated with solutions such as Kryston Klinik, available from good tackle shops or antiseptic creams such as adcoctyl-in-orabase, available from chemists. Always dry wounds first before applying treatments.

6. Only release the barbel once it has fully recovered. Retain the fish in the meshes of the landing net until it is upright, breathing well and swimming strongly. Take extra care in hot weather when water temperatures are higher, and the dissolved oxygen content is lower. In extreme warm and low water conditions, consider ceasing fishing altogether for barbel until conditions improve.

7. If weighing and photography are desired, leave the fish in the water in the landing net meshes with plenty of room to breathe, while you prepare your equipment. Decide where the weighing and photography should take place, preferably close by and on a flat area away from bright sunlight.

Wet the weigh sling, which should be large enough to contain the fish easily, and zero the scales whilst weighing the wet sling.

Prepare your camera equipment and only then, and only then, once everything is ready transfer the fish to your chosen area. Gently lower the barbel onto your wet unhooking mat, ensuring that all its fins are folded backwards to prevent

any damage. Carefully remove the fish from the landing net into the wet weigh sling. The fish should be held close to the ground during all photography which with the modern technology available today should take no time at all. Never stand with a fish as should you drop it severe harm could be caused to the fish

8. On completion of weighing and/or photography return the fish to the landing net and carry it, in the landing net, back to the water. Position the fish facing up-river in the landing net and then allow a suitable period of time for recovery. This will take as long as is required and could take much longer in extremely hot weather conditions. The fish should be allowed to breathe freely, with a good flow of water around the mouth and gills. Encourage the fish to position itself upright and maintain its own balance. The fish should not be released until you are certain that it has had sufficient recovery time and regained sufficient strength to swim away strongly in the current.

9. Exceptional fish, may need to be retained in a landing net for witnessing, but this should be for the shortest possible time period. Carp sacks are not advised for the retention of barbel.

10. The Barbel Society recognises that barbel are retained in keepnets during matches. However, we appeal to match anglers to use the largest barbel friendly nets they can and to position them where the fish can obtain maximum through flow of water and minimum overcrowding. Staking the closed end of the keepnet up-river will greatly help in this matter.



We also ask that a weigh and release policy is considered where large fish in particular can be weighed individually and released soon after capture. We would also ask that soft slings are considered and used for weighing and that all barbel are nursed so as they are fully recovered before release.

11. The use of plastic tubing or other mechanical devices to try and release what may be perceived to be trapped air in barbel is not recommended. Fish are invariably able to rid themselves of air naturally and poking around with tubes or massaging fish without real knowledge could cause internal damage.

General recommendations;

1. After your own safety, always consider the welfare of the fish above all else.
2. Keep them out of water for the minimum amount of time.
3. Always use adequate, balanced tackle.
4. Only pursue barbel in rivers: we are opposed to their stocking in still waters.
5. Take all your litter home and enjoy your barbel fishing in wild clean river surroundings!
6. All barbel anglers are encouraged to join the Angling Trust
7. The BS supports the Predator Action Group and recommends all anglers do the same.

EXTREME HOT WEATHER ENHANCEMENT

Note, this is an enhancement to, and does not replace the Barbel Handling Code.

The BS has adopted and supports the following EA advice during extreme hot weather:

- Individually, you cannot easily check dissolved oxygen levels, but you can check the water temperature. The EA have river temperature monitors that provide online 'telemetry temperature data' for a number of rivers around England. You can also use a handheld thermometer to measure the temperature where you fish.

- If river water temperature in the margins exceeds 19°C by 9am you are requested not to fish or to target a less-sensitive species. However, a barbel is as likely to take your bait as will a bream.
- If water temperatures are likely to have fallen overnight, consider fishing earlier in the morning and going home earlier. Keep an eye on the water temperature and be prepared to change your plans if it gets too high.
- Avoid targeting more sensitive and larger fish where water temperatures are likely to be in excess of 19°C. Salmon, trout, grayling and large chub, pike and barbel can be particularly vulnerable to high water temperature and lowered dissolved oxygen levels.
- Minimise your use of ground-bait. As it decomposes, this can further reduce the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water.
- Handle all fish with care, using wet hands when holding and unhooking fish. Further, and in addition to the Barbel Society Handling Code, wherever possible, keep fish in the water while unhooking and release them as soon as they have recovered.
- If you really feel the need to take photographs, take them with the fish still in the water. Some great photographs, that can be more pleasing, are possible by doing such.
- Should you need to retain a potential record fish use your landing net, but hold this in deeper water, rather than parallel to the bank. Deeper, cooler water holds more oxygen than shallower marginal water.
- Where possible, release your capture into deeper, faster flowing water where it is safe to do so, remembering your own safety! Such water will hold more dissolved oxygen and speed up their recovery.
- To help your capture to recover, hold them upright with their head facing into the current. This will allow clear, oxygenated water to flow across their gills. You are strongly recommended to also hold the fish for sufficient time in the river current until they show strong signs of movement. This may take much longer than normal, but it is best if the fish is fully recovered before being released. Remember, whilst a fish may initially seem OK when it swims off it could become distressed several minutes later, so remain observant for an appropriate period of time after release.