

Among the many achievements the Society can lay claim to in its first dozen years – and one that unites both members and dissenters – is its Handling Code. Adopted by angling clubs, individual anglers, websites and others, the Code has done as much to protect barbel welfare as any other single act in the history of the sport. And yet, there are still occasions when anglers return fish prematurely, pose in potentially dangerous situations for the all-important trophy shot, or – in the heat of the moment of capture – forget to allow the fish to recover in the net before removal from the water. Worse still is the scenario where a barbel is returned before being fully rested, or is dropped when being held too high off the ground.

The Society can feel

proud that its efforts are leading to positive change, and yet the message needs reinforcing every time a newcomer joins the sport.

One such newcomer is Mike Lapin, who has the misfortune to be a student in my year group at the large Swindon school where I teach. Mike is already, at fifteen, a talented and successful carp angler, with many ‘twenties’ and even bigger specimens to his name. During our many fishy conversations during lessons (don’t tell Ofsted), Mike had repeatedly expressed an interest in barbel fishing, and so yesterday I took him to a quiet, prolific stretch of the Bristol Avon. It seemed an ideal opportunity to take a few snaps to illustrate our Code, providing of course that the young man could put a barbel on the bank.

I needn’t have worried – conditions were poor, but

within a couple of hours Mike was staring admiringly at his first barbel, and putting in to practise all the fish welfare steps that are already second nature to many carpers, and which are becoming equally common on the riverbanks. Following his own instincts, and the sound advice offered in the Code, Mike’s first barbel swam away strongly after a brief rest in the deep, soft mesh of the landing net – and a barbel angler was born.

A little later, while Mike sat back and reflected on the capture, and I enjoyed a celebratory cigar, the tip flew round once again – this time it was a chub, a fat winter fish of about 4lbs. The captor, to my delight, took as much care with it as he had with his barbel. There, for me, lies one important and overlooked point about our Code; not only is it a fine

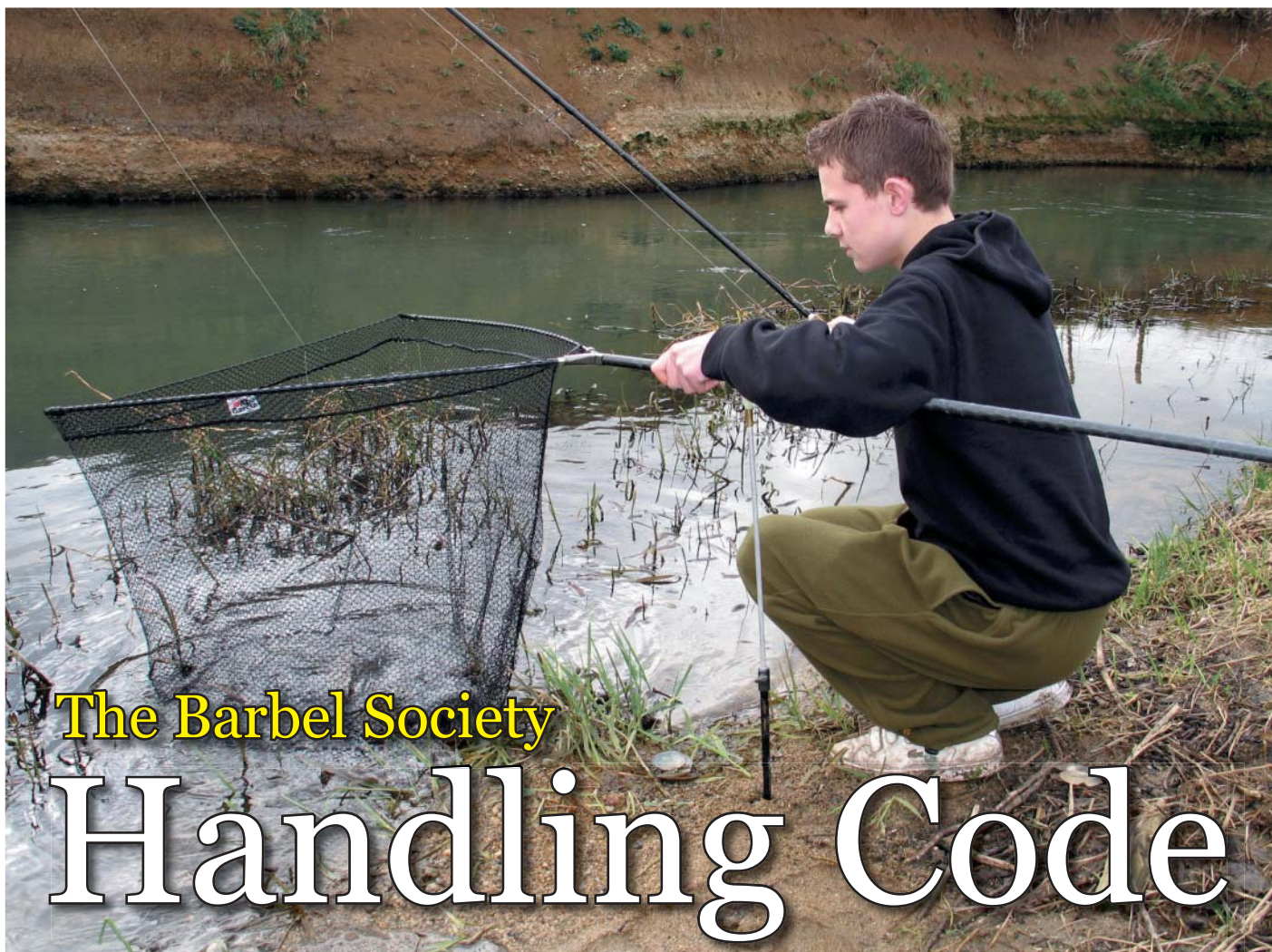
way to treat barbel, it is also a pretty damn good way to treat any fish.

Jon Berry

The Barbel Society Handling Code

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:

1. Always use well-balanced tackle, aiming to land your barbel as quickly as possible, but without undue pressure or bullying. Playing fish to



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exhaustion on light tackle causes unnecessary stress. A minimum of a through action rod of 1 ¼ lb test curve and eight pound line should be used, with much heavier tackle advisable in snaggy 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 for a few minutes before being unhooked.

2. A more powerful rod will require stronger line to maintain balance; a rough guide is to multiply 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 a few minutes to recover in 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 it a few

more minutes of recovery time before release. Never attempt to beach a fish, or allow it to rest on stones, gravel or hard ground. 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 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 Clinic, available from good tackle shops or antiseptic creams such as ad cortyl-in-orabase, which is available from chemists. Dry wounds first before applying treatments.

6. Release the barbel as soon as it has fully recovered, retaining it in the meshes of the landing net until it is upright, and breathing 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 for barbel altogether 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 then transfer the fish to your chosen area. Gently lower the barbel onto your wet unhooking mat, ensuring all fins are folded backwards to prevent damage. Carefully remove the fish from the net into the wet weigh sling. The fish should be held close to the ground for photography; never stand with a fish.

8. Return the fish to the net and carry it in the net to the water. Position it facing up-river and then allow a long period of recovery. 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 balance. The fish must not be released until you are certain that it has sufficient strength to swim strongly in the current.

9. Exceptional fish may need to be retained in barbel tubes or tunnels for witnessing but this should be for the shortest possible time period and only place one fish in each tunnel or tube. Carp sacks and keepnets 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 could cause internal damage.

General recommendations:

- After your own safety, always consider the welfare of the fish above all else.
- Keep them out of water for the minimum time.
- Always use adequate, but balanced, tackle.
- Only pursue barbel in rivers, we are opposed to their stocking in stillwaters.
- All anglers are advised to join the ACA.
- Take all your litter home, and enjoy your barbel fishing in wild, clean river surroundings!

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