

9. Returning Fish

Return the net and fish to the river and allow it to fully recover its strength. During this period of recovery, hold the head facing upstream in a flow of clean water and making sure the body is kept upright. Watch for steady working of the gills and the ability of the fish to maintain its balance. It is imperative that the barbel is not released until you are absolutely certain that the fish can swim powerfully back into the main river. A fish not ready for release will go belly up straight away, ensure you have your net at hand so that you can retain the fish again quickly. 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 barbel fishing altogether until conditions improve.

10. Retention

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.

We recognise that barbel are retained in keep nets 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.

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.

Prepared by Julian Taylor of the National Federation of Anglers on behalf of the Fish Welfare Group and in partnership with the Barbel Society and the Specialist Anglers Alliance.



Barbel Playing & Handling Guide

(Issued on behalf of the Fish Welfare Group and adapted from the 'Handling Code' as set out by the Barbel Society)

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. Barbel fight extremely hard and are often tired at the time of landing. This makes them prone to going belly-up if they are returned too quickly and not held in the water until they can swim off strongly. It is the duty of all anglers to protect this exciting and powerful species and ensure that it is returned, after capture, in the same or even better condition than when it was hooked.

We recommend that you adopt the following code when fishing for and handling barbel:

1. Tackle Requirements

Always use well balanced tackle, accept the objective of landing barbel as quickly as possible, thereby causing minimum distress and exhaustion to the fish. A protracted fight does the fish or your swim no good at all and increases the chances of losing it. No one rod, line strength or hook size will suit the variety of methods and situations that will present themselves to the versatile barbel angler. However, as a general guide a minimum of a through action 1¼ lb test curve rod matched with 8 pound line should be used, with much heavier tackle advisable in snaggy swims or flood conditions.

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.

2. Striking

When you first get a bite lift the rod to set the hook. You don't need to use such force as to try and pull the fish clean out of the water!

When fishing close to the bank, where there are more snags, aim to stop the initial run to lower the risk of the barbel getting the line tangled on a snag. The rod should be kept low to the water to stop the line getting caught on snags & snapping. Try to get the fish out into open water as soon as you can.



3. Playing

Once it's moved out to open water keep the rod high to allow for sudden lunges by the fish. Set the drag so that the fish can take line when it makes a run, this will also help prevent the line snapping and losing the fish.



4. Landing

Before starting to fish ensure you have located a safe place to land the fish and also an area where you can hold the fish in the water while it recovers before returning. 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' the fish as considerable damage can be caused to fins, eyes and scales. Do not allow it to rest on stones, gravel or hard ground. Use wet hands to handle the fish.

5. Unhooking

Barbless hooks, or those with barbs squeezed flat are easier to remove than barbed ones. All types should be removed with good quality forceps. If the hook is difficult to remove then cut the line and thread the hook out, point first, if necessary. Carefully examine the mouth for other hooks and remove any that are present.

6. Fish Care

Mouth sores and wounds can be treated with antiseptic creams and solutions like Kryston Klinik. Damage on areas other than the head can be treated with the same preparations and also adcortyl-in-orabase available from leading chemists. Dry wounds with a clean towel before treatment and use sterilised cotton buds to apply the treatments.

7. Safe Unhooking & Weighing

Always use a large net for landing and use an unhooking mat to stop the fish's scales from being damaged on the bank. Ensure you have your scales to hand so that you can weigh it quickly before returning to the water. If you want to take a picture, again ensure you have everything ready before removing the fish from the water. Preferably get someone else to help you.



8. Weighing & Photographing

If weighing and photography are required, leave the fish in the water in the well staked out landing net meshes, with plenty of room to breath, while you prepare your equipment.

Decide where the weighing/photography should take place, preferably close by and on a flat area away from sunlight.

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

Set up the camera ready for taking the picture.

Check that all is ready before transferring the barbel to the required place, whilst still in the landing net.

Weigh it in the sling with the unhooking mat underneath. Remove it and then hold it (carefully but firmly) low to the ground, over the net for photography; never stand with a fish.

Return the barbel to the water whilst still in the landing net and allow it to fully recover in the water and net before releasing it.

NB If the fish is not required for weighing or photography it should be released when fully recovered. Do not retain barbel without reason.

