

# PROBLEM SOLVER

## FOUL-HOOKED FISH

**Stu Conroy** passes on some excellent advice on reducing a problem we all experience from time to time – foul-hooked fish!

Over the years I've heard lots of anglers comment on the amount of fish they've lost due to being foul-hooked. This can be a really frustrating experience and one I've also sampled. It is a particularly common problem with larger species like carp and bream. My tips and advice will not totally eliminate the problem, but they should help to reduce it dramatically. I hope they work for you!

### ANGLER FILE

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**1** **How much to feed?**  
Feeding too much bait can often result in liners, so try to feed on a little and often basis and aim to get just two or three fish in the swim at a time. This will reduce the amount of activity in the swim and increase the chances of a fish finding your hook bait.

**2** **Leave plenty of tip showing**  
It is common to feed a decent bed of bait at the start when bream fishing. The bream will then move over this area and command it. They tend to up-end to feed and then right themselves, blowing or expelling air through their gills. This activity produces lots of false bites. This is where you have to be clinical as foul-hooking just one fish could result in the whole shoal moving off. The answer is to leave a good amount of your float tip showing. This enables you to read the bite and watch it develop. Bream are positive feeders, so be patient.

**3** **Use the correct floats**  
Line bites are usually associated with fish of a decent size and big fish will often take large baits, giving very positive bites. With this in mind, use a thickish bristle to reduce the sensitivity of your rig. This takes away the temptation to strike too soon and at the wrong kind of bites.

**4** **Pick out the right bite**  
When talking about the 'right bite' you have to look at how your quarry feeds. For instance, bream tend to feed in a positive but slow and lethargic way. This results in them holding on to the bait for quite a while, so often a 1 or 2 count can be made before you strike. On the other hand, a carp will often suck in a large bait and then immediately try to eject it when it feels the hook or line. The strike then needs to be more immediate.

The problem is knowing what species you expect to hook on the other end and tailoring the strike to suit! For best results show plenty of float bristle as explained in Tip 2.



**5** **Feed then try another swim**  
Refeeding a swim can result in the fish getting excited as they immediately compete for position. More dominant fish will try to command the area and bully smaller fish away. This can cause fly-under bites that you cannot do much about. If this is happening on a regular basis and foul-hooking is occurring, try feeding the swim then fishing elsewhere for a couple of minutes to let it settle down. Resting a swim never does any harm anyway.

**6** **Fish at the right depth**  
Line bites can occur more frequently when a float rig is set too far overdepth. If conditions are good with not too much wind or tow I like to plumb up very carefully and fish no more than an inch overdepth.

Also, if you are fishing on any kind of slope it's good practice to mark the butt of your pole at the correct distance with a correction pen or a piece of tape as a reference point. This will ensure you are fishing exactly where you plumbed up.

**7** **Don't strike too hard!**  
Very often a small lift is all that's needed to hook a fish when pole fishing. In some situations feeding around the float regularly can result in fish rising up in the water. This can happen even when you are still getting bites on the bottom. This can be a problem as fish intercepting loose offerings off the bottom can create line bites.

To keep foul hookers to a minimum you don't want to strike upwards too hard or fast. Instead, just lift the tip about four or five inches rather than bring the entire rig out of the water. This is a really good tip and one I use to great effect.



**8** **Fish shallow**  
This is probably the most obvious tip but one many anglers ignore. When fish compete for food they often come higher up in the water. If foul-hooking keeps occurring, try shallowing up your float until the problem stops. This can work equally well in open water but also on snake-type lakes when you are fishing towards the far bank. Some of the biggest fish will often feed in really shallow water.

On many occasions I will set traps in this shallow water for one or two lumps at a time. These traps are often set where I can see the telltale signs of fish, such as swirls, tails or heavily coloured water. Priming this area is something I do on a regular basis and it wins me many matches!

**9** **Fish tight to cover**  
When fishing in the margins or to any far-bank cover it's important (providing you have a reasonable depth) to get as close to any reeds, shelves or structures as you can. This helps to prevent the fish from getting behind your rig, which is a major cause of foul hookers.

**10** **Feed on the deeper side of the rig**  
This is probably my favourite tip and one that has transformed my margin fishing! By feeding around six inches away from the float, in slightly deeper water, the theory is that the bulk of the fish stay there with only one or two at a time creeping up the shelf where only your hook bait awaits.

On many occasions I have had a great last hour down the margins with this approach and put almost every hooked fish in my net. Give it a go!

