

# How to catch a BIG fish... easy and often!

By Mark T. Scott





*A Shredded Wheat biscuit.*



*Shredded Wheat and strawberry JELL-O® dough ball.*



*Whole kernel corn on a circle hook.*

Steve Shaluta/WV Dept. of Commerce

**A**re you having trouble hooking up with that monster fish of your dreams? Do you want to be able to catch big fish easy and often? Of course you do, what angler doesn't! Here in West Virginia, we are blessed with some great rivers to fish and lots of different fish species to pursue. However, even the best anglers have trouble consistently catching those "slungers" throughout the year. Well, almost everyone! Some of us have a blast catching big fish all year long! The first and most important thing you need to do is drop any purist attitude you may have and learn to just love the pull of a big fish, no matter what it is! Once you have this mastered, the rest is a piece of carp, I mean cake! Looks like I let the secret slip! All you need to do in West Virginia to catch big fish consistently is target carp.

Carp were introduced into U.S. waters in the 19th century and have become common everywhere. They are highly prized in Europe and Asia but many of us have ignored the challenge of fishing for this species. Anyone that has ever caught one, however, will tell you there is nothing lowly about them. They are hard-fighting fish that will strip-drag and burn up gears!

The first secret to carp fishing is to find the fish. In West Virginia, they can be found in all the state's large rivers, reservoirs and lakes, and even

some smaller streams. In short, they are found just about everywhere. But just casting a line in the water won't always do the trick. They tend to congregate in certain areas so you may need to do a lot of moving around initially. Look particularly for shallow areas with aquatic vegetation. Here are a couple of my hot spots to get you started: the tailwaters at the base of Bluestone Dam at Hinton and areas on the New River

around Sandstone Falls. Both of these spots typically have carp year-round, but you may have to move around a little to zero in on them.

Now that you know where to go, the next step is how to fish for them. Here are a few tips to consider for carp fishing. Let's start out with what gear to use. I know lots of folks who break out their surf rods and big reels to subdue these big carp. But, if you don't have this kind of heavy gear, you can use most of your everyday fishing tackle.

I use my regular bass spinning gear with 12-pound test braided line. Sometimes I will use a 12-pound fluorocarbon leader if the water is really clear. I don't use big sinkers either. My rig consists of a circle hook with the size matched to the bait I'm using and a couple of small split-shot sinkers. That's it. I can't cast halfway across the river, but I don't actually need to cast that far!

The next step is bait selection. I guess every carp angler has a secret bait but I'd like to suggest a

---

**The first and most important thing you need to do is drop any purist attitude you may have and learn to just love the pull of a big fish, no matter what it is!**

---



Steve Shaluta/WV Dept. of Commerce

*Anglers display a carp caught along the New River near Sandstone Falls.*

couple that have always worked for me. The first and most common bait is a doughball. I have heard of folks making them from bread, oats or cornflakes and adding in flavors like vanilla extract, peanut butter or jelly. My favorite doughball concoction is made by using Shredded Wheat and strawberry JELL-O®. Here's how to make one.

First, buy the large "biscuit" Shredded Wheat, you know the ones that each is the size of your hand. Then break off about half of a "biscuit" and pour some of the dry JELL-O® mix on the Shredded Wheat in your hand. Immerse your hand in the water just for a second or two to get it slightly wet. Now comes the tricky part, but a part that is very important. Before you compress this concoction, put your hook in the middle of it! Then begin to squeeze and work it into a doughball with your hook inside. Be careful not to stick yourself! A big help in this instance is a circle hook. It's hard to stick yourself with one when you make a doughball! For doughball fishing, I usually use a decent-sized hook.

I have caught lots of carp on these doughballs, but my all-time favorite bait is whole kernel corn. Start out with a smaller circle hook, one that you would use for bass or trout. I have a specific way of putting the kernels on the hook, though, because those big carp can

be spooky sometimes. The first kernel is threaded on from the cut end and pushed up over the eye to hide it. Then I start putting on more kernels until I'm near the barb of the hook. The last kernel I put on is stuck from the top end of the kernel and pushed just past the barb. This hides the barb and tip well.

Now you have your spot picked out, your gear ready, and your hooks baited, what's next? This last step is the most important for consistent success. Before any carp trip, I make a trip to my local grocery store to get bait, Shredded Wheat and corn, but I don't leave without something else. That "something else" is a couple cans of creamed corn! Why you ask? Remember I said that I didn't need to make long casts? Why is that? Because I use the creamed corn to chum the area. You don't need much because it has lots of smell, and it gets any carp in the area in a feeding mood and will attract carp up the river to your spot!

So there you have it. My sure-fire way to catch big fish easy and often. You may not catch carp every time, but you will catch a carp most of the time. Often you will catch several! So get your gear together, visit your local grocer, and hit the water for some of West Virginia's biggest fish.

*Mark T. Scott is the District Fisheries Biologist stationed at Beckley.*