

Angler's Mail

OUR EXPERTS

This week's Angler's Mail panel is...

SECTION EDITOR



RICHARD HOLROYD

Production Editor with 20 years fishing experience is the contact to send in all your questions. richard_holroyd@ipcmmedia.com



DAVE COSTER

Mail contributor for two decades, owned a tackle shop and now produces tackle.



IAN WELCH

Our fishery scientist is a top big fish all-rounder with an eye for hi-tech baits and watercraft.



DUNCAN CHARMAN

Specimen fish all-rounder who is never afraid to scale down when the target species demand it.



MATT SPARKES

The Dorset-based all-rounder knows his fishing tackle – both old and new.



ANDY BLACK

Lure fishing expert, and all round predator angler, who knows what's worth using for pike, catfish, perch and zeds.

PICTURES BY ROY WESTWOOD

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ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LURE FISHING

Q How do I correctly use different types of lures?
Alastair Smith, Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

Andy Black says...

Lure fishing is a great way to target predatory species, but it was not always thought so. Only a few years ago lure fishing was often considered as a small fish only method, no doubt due to the restricted lure size available at the time.

Even today some anglers regard lure fishing as a last gasp method, something to chuck on a day when nothing else is working.

A lot of anglers, though, have realised the potential in lure fishing, and are reaping the benefits with lots of very big fish falling to this technique every season. Maybe this could be why it is now one of the fastest growing aspects of the sport?

What I personally like about lure fishing is the direct contact you have with the lure, making it work in the right location at the right depth in the right way to 'lure' the fish into taking it. You really do get the feeling of working for your fishing, and it's extremely satisfying when you are rewarded for your efforts as a predator strikes takes your lure.

Here's my guide to help you get the most from your lure fishing...



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SPINNERS, SPOONS AND SPINNERBAITS

Spinners and spoons are really the most basic of the lures you can cast. They have been around for donkey's years and most anglers have some in their box.

Spinners are very under-rated - they still catch a lot of fish, but probably due to the size of the spinners commonly available, most of the fish tend to be on the small side. For bigger fish try and get some larger versions that are used for muskellunge (musky) fishing in North America.

Spinners are very easy to fish with. Simply cast them out, let them sink to the required depth and wind them in. You can introduce faster winds and pauses, but a standard slow retrieve is normally all that is needed.

Spinners in the smaller sizes are also very good for perch. Obviously you will need delicate tackle when targeting perch, but make sure you use a wire trace as they will attract pike.

Spinnerbaits are a weird looking lure with an appearance of a coat hanger with a blade at the top and a hook at the bottom. Some anglers swear by them.

Spoons are a great fish catcher. Simply cast them out, let them sink and wind them back in, with a few spurts and pauses to add attraction. One benefit of spoons is that you can get some nice big heavy ones, so you can fish them as deep as you want, by counting them down before retrieving.



JERKBAITS

Jerkbaits are one of my favourite lure types. Generally they have no inherent movement, so the angler has to impart action directly on them by using the rod tip. There is quite a skill to this, and different lures will act in different ways depending on how you are working the rod. Sometimes they want a fast twitch retrieve, others they may want a slow glide of the bait with plenty of 'hang time'. Jerkbaits are also one of the most aesthetically pleasing of the lure types, with many manufactures making bespoke baits with creative paint patterns.

To get the most out of jerkbaiting you do require a specialised rod designed for the task. Jerkbait rods need to be very stiff-actioned because it is the movement of the rod that imparts action into the lure. Too soft a rod, and the action is absorbed by the rod.

CRANKBAITS

Crankbaits used to be more commonly known as plugs, but due to the Americanism encroaching on this part of the sport, now most anglers call them crankbaits. A crankbait is any lipped lure that is generally cast out and reeled back in. The lip on the lure creates the movement in the bait, with the shallower the angle of the line, the deeper the lure will swim. In general, they are good for waters around 10 to 15 ft deep or waters where you expect the fish to be in this depth, as most crankbaits will only get to 5 to 8 ft deep on retrieve.

You can get crankbaits in all shapes and sizes, from small 2 inch lures designed for perch to massive 14 inch jobs designed for trolling for big pike. A good example of modern crankbaits are the herring lures from Savage Gear, which have the advantage of a jointed-body which enhances the swimming action of the lure.

Again, simply cast them out and wind them in - the harder you wind the deeper the lure will get. Whenever you pause when using floating crankbaits, the lure will gently start to float to the top and this is often the time any following pike will strike!



REPLICANTS AND BULLDAWGS

These have taken some waters apart, and in their larger sizes they are usually my number one choice for trout waters.

Some of these large rubber baits are real heavyweights and weigh in at 6 to 8 oz, so it can be hard work casting them all day long. Also, because of their size and weight, you won't be able to chuck them on your normal spinning gear, so you will need specialised 7 ft rods and heavy-duty reels to throw them around.

Multipliers with 80 to 100 lb braid are the minimum for this type of heavy-duty work. I know it seems over the top, but you really don't want to be cracking these things off on the cast.

I find these baits are worked best with a slow, steady retrieve. You can, of course, add extra twitches and pauses but a steady retrieve has always worked the best for me



JIGS AND SMALL SOFT PLASTICS

Jigs are plastic bodies, often called shads or tailers, that are fitted to a lead headed hook. There are multiple combinations of jig head weights and body shapes and colours that you can choose from - it's just a case of choosing the right weight for the situation you are fishing.

They are a very versatile lure. You can cast them and reel them in, hop them along the bottom, or even let the flow pull them around. Jigs can also be fished vertically from a boat, and they often account for a lot of zander when fished in this manner.

For pike, I find it's best to use a fairly large body, say 6 in., with a good sized jig head, and do a straight slow retrieve once it has sunk to the correct depth.

For zander and perch, it's better to hop them along the bottom, and I would normally use a 4 inch shad for these species.

I nearly always wire another treble hook, known as a stinger, to the body of the lure, as it helps with the hook-up rate, especially when targeting zander that often nip on the vent area of the lure.



SWIMBAITS

Swimbaits are a relatively new type of lure, designed to have the same swimming action as a real fish in the water. They accomplish this by having multiple sections that move under water pressure, and they really do look like swimming fish in the water. I find they can look too realistic sometimes, and need to be twitched to give the impression that the fish is injured.

Although some of these lures can be very expensive at over £30 each, I've had some massive fish on these and wouldn't be without a couple in my box.

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THE TACKLE YOU NEED FOR LURES

TRACES

No matter what type of lure you are throwing, you need a trace for it. Not only will a trace prevent the pike biting through your line, the correct trace material can also help the lure work better, prevent tangles and affect the sink rate of your lures. There are numerous trace materials that you can use, from standard steel wire to titanium.

Trace length will vary depending on the type and size of lure you are going to be casting, but in general a trace should be no shorter than 10 inches with 12 to 14 inches being better. The last thing you want is a bite off because your trace is too short, and to leave a lure in the fish. Along with the material of trace, be sure to check the swivels and clip links at each end, and make sure they are man enough for the lures you are going to chuck.



READY-MADE TRACES

Most tackle shops now sell ready-made lure traces, and some are quite good. If you are going to use ready-made traces, just make sure they are long enough, and always check the clip links. Some ready-made traces have appalling clip links, though they can be made perfectly useable by replacing them with something more substantial, such as a stay-lock clip.

I will use ready-made traces if the area I'm fishing is very snaggy and I'm likely to lose a few lures as I don't want to be losing expensive titanium leaders!

SEVEN-STRAND WIRE

Seven-strand wire is what I usually use for light lure work and for nearly all my jiggging work. It's a nice fine wire that doesn't affect the running of the lure too much and is relatively cheap, which is a good thing as it does kink easily so you will need to replace them quite often. Don't fish with a kinked trace, not only does the kink weaken the wire but it will also hamper the effectiveness of the lure.

SINGLE-STRAND WIRE AND TITANIUM

Single strand wire is usually used with jerkbaits and the larger soft plastic lures. Being one single stiff bit of wire there is no flex in it, so it helps impart the rod-top-action directly into the lure. Another advantage is that it helps to reduce tangles, especially on the retrieve with the side-to-side action used with jerkbaits. You do need to use heavy breaking strains with 100 to 150 lb being the norm.

Titanium single-strand has the advantage over steel in that it is almost impossible to kink it! It is possible to get Titanium leaders in 30 lb to 50 lb. These are suitable for casting medium sized lures, such as jigs and crankbaits, and again it reduces tangles. The downside of titanium is that it's expensive, a single trace is around £6, though, if you don't lose it, it will last for a very long time.

FLUOROCARBON

This is a relatively new material to use for lure fishing, and it's still a bit up in the air over the rights and wrongs of using it. Obviously being made of 100 percent fluorocarbon it is less visible in water, but you do need to use it in 90 to 100 lb breaking strain to prevent bite-offs. Another stated advantage is that it doesn't hinder the lure's action so much, giving longer 'hang times' for jerkbaiting. Some anglers are concerned that pike can bite through fluorocarbon, and I am sure they can if it's not pure 100 per cent fluorocarbon, and it's too low in breaking strain/diameter.

I have seen tope landed on fluorocarbon, so it's unlikely pike will bite through it if used correctly, but pike can damage the trace so, after each fish, you need to keep an eye on it and trim and re-crimp the trace if required.



RODS

For one-off trips you can get away with your standard pike gear, but for the long-term you'll find it heavy and cumbersome for this mobile technique. To get the most out of the sport you will need to get a suitable lure rod. There are several manufacturers, such as Fox, Greys and Savage Gear, that produce a range of lure rods at quite reasonable prices. Unfortunately, when you really get into it, you will find that one rod does not fit all types of lure methods and, like me, you will end up with multiple rods.

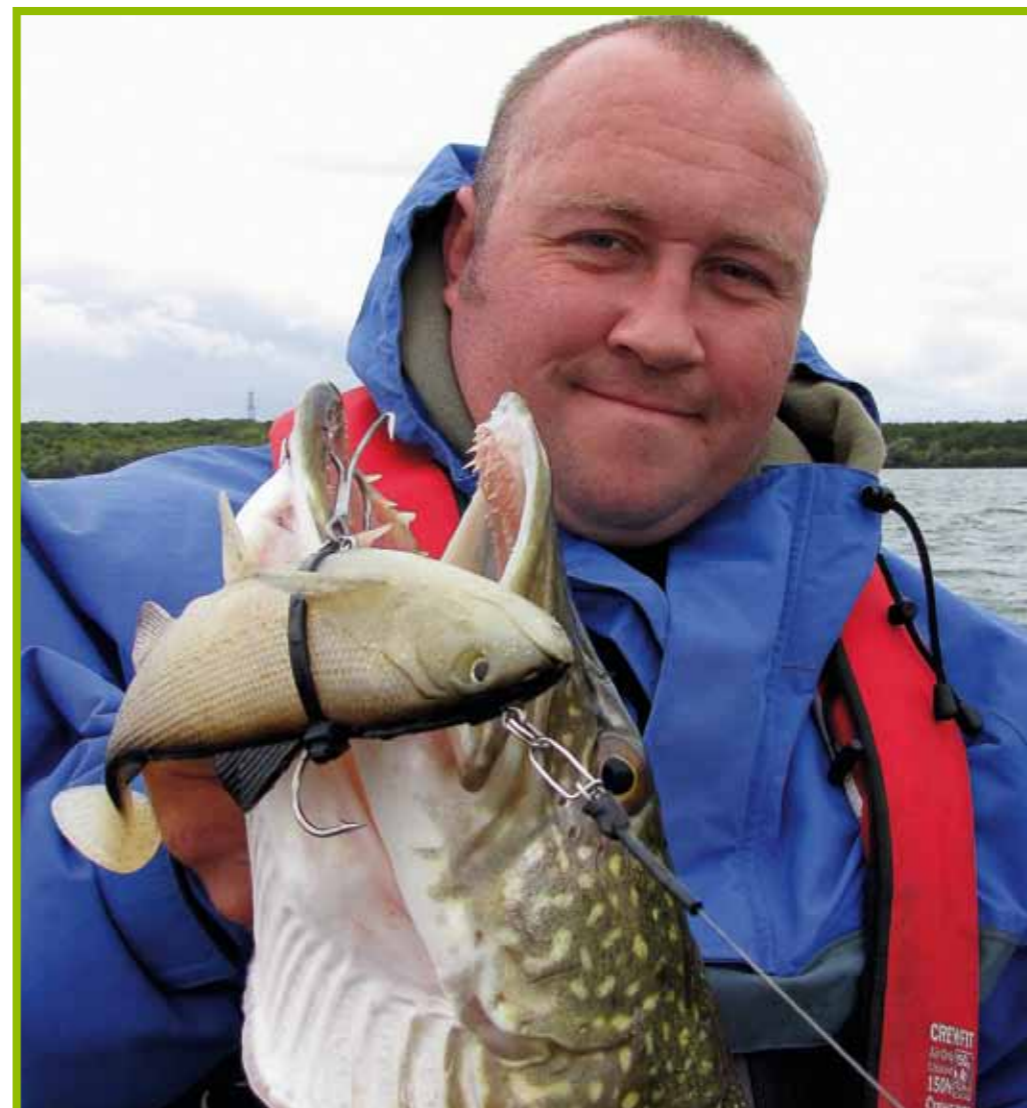


LINE

Forget monofilament as it's past its heyday. Braid is the only thing to use, anything in the 30 lb test range will do for casting lures up to around 50 to 60 gr. I like to use Power Pro as I think it handles well. Braid of 30 lb test does, on the face of it, seem excessive, but it's only the equivalent diameter of 12 to 15 lb mono. The bonus of braid is that if you get your lure snagged, it's likely you will be able to get it back as you will have up to 30 lb of direct pull before it snaps!



REELS Any small fixed spool is normally a good start, but make sure it's up to the job as the constant casting and retrieving of lures can wear out reels in quick time! I prefer using a small multiplier but, with the exception of very big jerkbaits, a fixed spool will do just fine.



MOBILITY

There you have it, some of the top lures that I wouldn't be without, but which ones to use where? One of the major benefits of lure fishing is that you cover a lot of water often in a quick space of time, and chuck different lures into likely-looking places. It is a highly mobile method of fishing, so you don't want to hamper yourself by lugging massive boxes of lures around. Though it can be tempting

to carry a colour and size for every opportunity, it's going to be hard work lugging them all around, unless you have a pack mule or are in a boat, as I was when I caught this pike.

What I like to do is pick a handful of lures that I think will suit the water I'm fishing and take those, but I will always have a back-up selection in the car in case I've got it all wrong. Obviously you will still need to carry your net, mat and unhooking tools as well, so reducing your lures to a sensible number is good practice.