



# PIKE SCENE

Seasonal advice from predator experts

WEEKLY PREDATOR SERIES

**THIS WEEK:** Midlands ace Andy Black discusses deadbaits.

# DEADBAITS

## - the pros and cons

IT'S fair to say that deadbaiting is arguably the most common and simplest way anglers catch pike. But why are they such a popular choice? The answer is because deadbaits are easy to use and easy to source, whether you go to the supermarket, fishmonger or tackle shop. Another reason is that they catch a lot of fish. It wasn't long ago that pike anglers would only fish deadbaits under two

circumstances: when they ran out of 'lives', or if they were on a water where livebaiting was banned.

But I feel that deadbaits, when used in the right situations, can be just as effective as livebaits. The trick is to knowing when to use them and how. Pike on certain waters can be more susceptible to deadbaits than other methods. These are usually commercial waters, or trout waters where there's a high mortality rate in prey fish, so the pike becomes used to picking up dead fish from the bottom.

### Fresh V frozen

THERE'S a common misconception that frozen baits are inferior to fresh ones, probably because we, as humans, like the freshest fish.

However, pike are not as fussy, especially those that have grown fat

scavenging deadbaits! Additionally, there are benefits to using frozen baits. Firstly, they are convenient. Anyone can pop into their local tackle shop and buy a couple of packs of the latest going bait.

Secondly, the actual freezing process enhances the smell and taste of the bait in the water. This may seem strange at first, but what happens during the freezing process is that small ice crystals form in the cells of the fish, and these ice crystals grow and eventually split through the cell walls. This has two effects on the bait.

Firstly, it makes it soft (so you have to be careful that it doesn't fly off the hooks) and, secondly, because the cell walls have broken, the bait will leach amino acids and other body juices at a faster rate in to the water.

This is why I prefer frozen baits - they are such a good fish attractor

that I don't bother with fresh baits.

### Keeping them attractive

THERE are some disadvantages to using frozen deadbaits. The main one is that you have to keep them frozen, if you don't you will soon end up with mush in your cool bag.

Due to the quantity that I normally go through in a season, I usually get a couple of big deliveries throughout the year, so I have a separate bait freezer to cope.

It's important to make sure you go through your bait and get rid of any old packets, there's no point in fishing with two-year-old bait. Yes, big fish do get caught on old bait, but this is an exception rather than the rule, and remember that even if your

bait has been kept fully frozen, it still deteriorates over time.

You also need to look after it on the bank as well. I transport all my bait in a small eight-litre Coleman cool box. I find this to be an ideal size for a day's fishing but, if I need more bait, I take a larger coolbox and keep this in my car with lots of ice packs in it. This will normally last around three days before the bait goes past its best.

Another rule I have is never to refreeze bait. Once it has been defrosted, the bait is already starting to break down and it won't be as effective. Bacteria will have started to breed too which can be harmful to the angler should any get accidentally ingested or into a cut.

I always throw my leftover bait in - this way I am not only baiting my swim for next time, but hopefully giving the fish a good feed as well.



I prefer frozen baits over fresh, but you have to look after them.

## MY TOP THREE DEADBAITS



### Coarse fish

I LOVE coarse fish as baits. They are usually my number one choice on any venue if they're allowed. They are the most natural bait a pike will see, and they have been naturally pre-baited! Another plus is that you will also catch zander using these, so it's always worth having at least one rod with a 'silver' on it.

Coarse fish baits cover a whole plethora of different species, but if I had to pick two it would be roach and bream.

Roach are a tough bodied bait and are a nice golden colour that I think the pike like. Bream for whatever reason catch fish, though it's important to keep them fresh.



### Smelt

THESE are another of my 'don't leave home without them' baits. They seem to work everywhere. They can be hard to get hold of, especially in the largest sizes - it's often a case of stocking up in April / May when they are more available.

They are a soft and pale bait that has a unique smell, and the pike love them! Occasionally I pop them up, but I am sure the pike find these by smell rather than sight, which is why I fish them tight on the bottom.



### Herring

IT'S STRANGE, I never used to bother with herring until a few seasons ago, preferring mackerel. But then I started using them and caught a lot of good fish, and now they are one of my top baits. They are readily available - you can get them from most bait companies as well as fish counters.

They are a big bait, which is one of the reasons I think they work so well. I normally fish them with the head cut off and legered hard on the bottom, or fish them whole under a drift float.

IN the right situations, deadbaits can be just as effective as livebaits; this fat 20-pounder took a smelt.