

# TWO WAYS WITH BUZZERS

*Peter Hartley offers some no-nonsense advice for the start of the reservoir season*

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW ROBERTS



▼ Peter Hartley is an Angling Trust level 2 coach, a member of the Game Angling Instructors Association (GAIA) and the current President of the English Fly Fishing Association

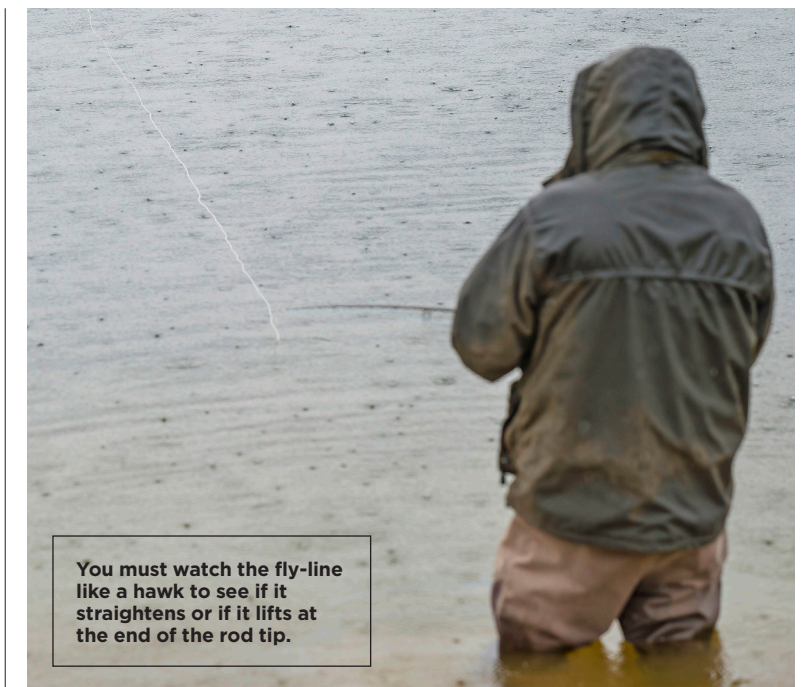
Peter Hartley casts a team of Buzzers at Pitsford Water.

**A**T THE START of the reservoir season bank fishing and, in particular, buzzer fishing can provide some of the best sport of the season. The annual stocking of rainbow and brown trout is underway, supplementing a stock of prime grown-on fish that during the mild winter will have continued to feed and pack on weight. The introduction of stocked fish stirs these resident trout into action. They will be rested and, with the current high water levels, cruising and feeding in deep water close to the bank. In most places wading will not be necessary and a floating line and a team of three - or in some cases four - buzzer imitations are often all that is required to catch them.

### Straight-line set-up

To explore the depths and find the feeding depth you can use the classic straight-line set-up. This consists of a long leader (20 ft plus) and sufficient weight in the flies to plumb the depths.

Big stillwaters have currents and undertows and just because you are fishing in, for example, 15 ft of water with a 15 ft leader, don't assume your flies will touch bottom - you may have to add another couple of feet of leader to allow for the tow. You cannot add the extra length between the flies, because this length is restricted to allow you to land a fish on the



You must watch the fly-line like a hawk to see if it straightens or if it lifts at the end of the rod tip.

*“There is much argument about the best fly colour but early in the season smaller, black natural buzzers dominate”*

point fly without snagging your top dropper in the tip ring. It must be added between the top dropper and the end of the fly-line.

Typically, the Buzzer pattern on the point should be tied on a larger (size 8-10) heavyweight grub or wet-fly hook to help reach depth. The flies on the droppers are typically smaller in sizes (12-14) and sometimes tied on a lighter wire hook. There is much

argument about the best fly colour, but early in the season smaller, black natural buzzers dominate. I find that cheek colour makes little difference, though in my box I have several sizes in black and olive (for later in the spring) with different-coloured cheeks (orange, yellow and green).

Fishing three Buzzers, 4 ft-4½ ft apart is the norm and if you achieve the depth you need, this is

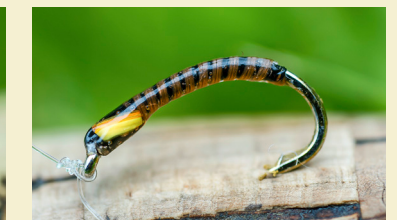
### WRIGGLE AND REST: UNDERSTANDING THE CHIRONOMID'S LIFE CYCLE

TO FISH Buzzer patterns successfully it is important to fully understand the behaviour of what you are imitating. A Buzzer imitates the pupa stage of the chironomid (non-biting midge), undoubtedly the most abundant and significant part of the reservoir trout's diet. Trout consume so many pupae that they respond instinctively to a correct combination of presentation and fly pattern.

The pupa will start its journey from the silt on the lakebed to the surface where it will hatch into an adult

fly. As it does so it will periodically hang vertically and motionless in the water. This can be at any depth. Then, every few minutes, it will wriggle and then rest again. To the angler this migration can often go unnoticed and despite an active hatch you will not see any fish surfacing. Instead fish can be taking the pupae at a depth of 12 ft (or more), 2 ft or anywhere in between.

The key to success is getting your Buzzer imitations to the depth at which the fish are feeding.



Getting your Buzzers to the correct depth and fishing them very slowly is more important than their appearance.

fine. If not, you can either add another dropper (you'll need to reduce the space between flies) and fish four flies, or replace one of the lighter flies with another heavy one. If you're still struggling to reach bottom, you could swap your floating line with a midge-tip line (a floating line with 3 ft-6 ft sink tip) - you'll be amazed how much difference this style of line makes in very deep water. Whatever line you choose, the golden rule is that you should always be looking to snag the point fly on the lakebed. Only then will you know you are covering all the depths.

As soon as you've hooked and landed your first fish you will know at what depth they are



Slowly does it with the retrieve.

feeding. If the fish are coming to the top dropper, you know that they are high in the water, though this is usually when the water warms up. In this instance you can take off the heavy point-fly and put on a lighter one so that the flies fish nearer the surface. You could also try a small Booby

***"If you are still struggling to reach the bottom, you could swap your floating line with a midge-tip line"***

on the point (known as the washing-line technique) to help suspend the Buzzers on the droppers at the correct level, though on a floating line this will keep your flies in the top few feet of water only.

If you take a fish on the point fly, which is more likely early in the season, the fish are obviously deep and you must continue to get your flies down. To do this, a very slow or static retrieve is critical. Static means that you may still be using a very slow figure-of-eight retrieve to gather slack line if it drifts towards you, but not enough to make the flies move in the

water. Most of your takes will come when the flies are static or sinking slowly and these takes can be obvious and arm-wrenching, or may just show as a small lift or jolt in the loop of line between your rod tip and the water. To see takes you must keep in touch with your flies (no slack fly-line on the water's surface) and watch the loop like a hawk when the fish are less confident.

As you prepare to re-cast, the flies will rise in the water and a fish may follow. Therefore, don't be too anxious to lift off: it's worth raising the rod to the ten o'clock position and then "hanging" the flies so they are static. Many think it is only necessary to "hang" the flies when boat fishing, but it works from the bank, too. Try adopting an approach of lifting the flies off the water as if you're "reluctant" to re-cast. You'll be surprised at the number of takes you'll get near your feet. For this reason I prefer a 10 ft rod (6- or 7-weight), which enables me to hang flies for just a little longer and a bit further away from me.

**FISHING WITH AN INDICATOR FLY OR BUNG**

THE straight-line method of fishing Buzzers is a classic technique, but in recent times the use of an indicator "fly" (or bung) attached to the top dropper, the leader, or on the braided loop has become common practice. Many anglers frown upon this technique, which they consider akin to float fishing, but it can be staggeringly effective and if you are new to fly-fishing or struggle with casting long leaders and teams of flies, it does make Buzzer fishing easier. You will also detect the most delicate takes with an indicator that you would not see with the straight-line method.

You can buy bungs at most fly-fishing shops. They are usually made of foam, are highly visible (fluorescent) and be attached to a hook. This is because in stillwater competition fishing, under international rules, all flies (indicators included) must be able to catch fish. While it has been known for a trout to take an indicator, it is the static nature of the Buzzers hanging below it that is so deadly and almost impossible to achieve with a normal set-up - with the straight-line method the flies continuously want to sink.



**It's not to everybody's taste, but the bung is highly sensitive and it teaches you just how slowly you can fish your Buzzers.**

Fishing the bung enables you to fish flies at a predetermined depth. You may have to move the droppers up or down the leader to find the depth at which fish are feeding but once you find it you can sometimes expect a fish on every cast - it is that effective!

With a bung you still have the option of a very slow retrieve or a gentle sink-and-draw. The fish can sometimes respond to a slight movement or lift of the Buzzers, which is akin to the natural pupae wriggling upwards, before resting again. A long draw of the fly-line will lift the flies in the water and they will sink again when you resume the static retrieve. It is not uncommon for the indicator to shoot under as soon as it settles again.

Peter Hartley nets a fish taken on a Buzzer fished beneath a bung. The length of leader between bung and fish reveals the depth at which the fish was feeding.

If you are struggling to cast a team of three flies at water level find higher ground and cast with an open casting loop to avoid tangles. Cast as far as you can to help your flies reach deeper water.





This Pitsford rainbow took a Buzzer in the point position, indicating it was feeding near the lakebed.

*“The droppers do not need to be very long: in my view, five inches is quite long enough”*

**Avoid tangles**

The ability to avoid tangles when you fish with a long leader that has flies on two or three droppers is important for your enjoyment. If you do get a tangle, rather than retying the whole leader every time, you can tie a blood loop (see diagram, below) on your leader at the desired spacing, to which you tie your dropper. This knot is not to everyone’s taste, as it looks bulky. However if the dropper

tangles, and this happens to us all, it is easy to snip it off at the loop and tie on another length. It is certainly a great deal easier and much quicker than retying the whole leader. The droppers do not need to be very long: in my view, five inches is quite long enough.

The main reason for tangles is poor casting. Many anglers blame the wind, but the reality is you can cast effortlessly with three or four flies and you will catch more fish. This applies not only to Buzzer or wet-fly fishing, but also to dry-fly fishing, too. It is definitely worth persevering until you master fishing a full team of three or four flies. Slowing down your casting stroke, forming a wider loop of fly-line and casting a manageable length of line are the keys to reducing tangles in a multi-fly cast. Concentrate on presentation rather than distance.

**Use stiff leader**

The quality of the leader material is also significant in reducing tangles. Try to avoid buying the most expensive brands. While they have a smaller diameter and are very strong, they are also more supple than the less-expensive and stiffer makes I prefer for bank fishing. Stiffer, thicker leader is not nearly as likely to tangle as state-of-the-art fluorocarbon. The fish are not line-shy early in the season so use a leader material of 8 lb -10 lb breaking strain. It is common to hook two fish at once in the early season and one of these could be a big over-wintered fish that WILL snap you if you go too light. **T&S**

**EARLY SEASON AT PITSFORD WATER**

PETER HARTLEY fished at Pitsford Water in Northamptonshire. Pitsford was built in 1956 to supply water to Northampton, which is six miles to the south.

The reservoir (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) is split in two by a road causeway. The small part at the northern end and nearest to the fishing lodge and shop is an excellent place to start in the opening weeks of the season as fish are always stocked here. Because this part of the reservoir is largely a nature reserve, space is limited and you can only really fish from the bank on the right-hand side of the boat jetty. Fish the whole length of this bank up to the line of buoys in the Walgrave Arm. This is shallow in places and you may need to wade.

The deeper “bung-fishing” water is in the bigger part of the reservoir. From the Gorse Bank, the Cliffs and at Stone Barn Bay, you have at least 8 ft-10 ft of water in front of you. The water is brimful at the start of the season and you do not have to wade in these areas - the fish will come in quite close to the bank. When you land a fish it is worth getting your flies straight back in the water as the shoals usually keep on the move, swimming along the banks.

If you purchase an Anglian Water season ticket you can drive your car to all of the places mentioned as well as being able to fish at Rutland Water, Grafham Water and Ravensthorpe.

The 2016 Pitsford season starts on February 27 (finishes January 31, 2017). A full eight-fish day permit from the bank is £26 (catch-and-release/one fish limit, £22).

**For more information contact Pitsford Water Fishing Lodge on 01604 781 350 or visit [www.anglianwater.co.uk](http://www.anglianwater.co.uk)**

**How to tie the Blood Loop**

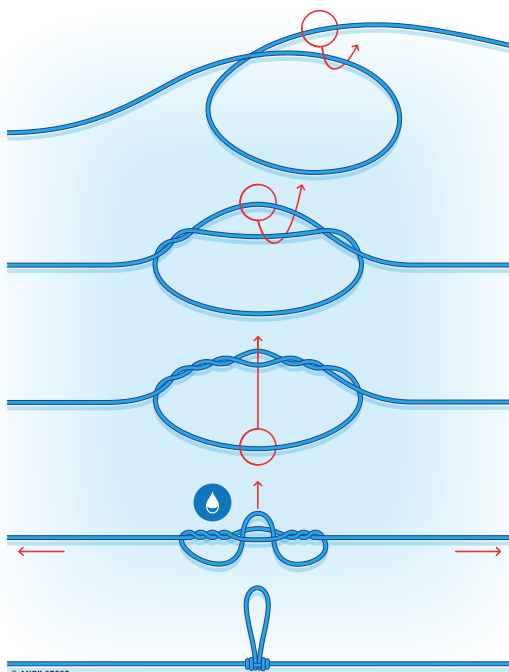


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