

Issue 14

Jan - Feb 2017

**Off the
Scale**

Casting a new eye on angling

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of 2017! I hope you all had a nice and relaxed festive and New Year period and got out fishing at least once! The winter of 2016/17 will be remembered for not really being a winter; it has been so unbelievably mild across Ireland, and the UK, too. So much so in fact that as I write this (mid January) daffodils are blooming everywhere weeks ahead of schedule and the poor old insects don't know what's going on. I even saw a bee collecting nectar from an ornamental flower on Christmas Day, which I can't remember ever seeing before in my lifetime. Things all around us, our world, is certainly changing...

The world of Irish angling is in a state of change, too. Some good, some bad, some very bad. We are seeing no signs of the seas or their fish stocks being afforded the protection they need and deserve, although people are beginning to rally together for the greater good. Salmon runs continue to decline in our rivers due to overfishing, pollution and salmon farming, which have been proven yet again recently (for the bazillionth time) to cause serious harm to wild fish stocks in the vicinity due to sea lice infestations. Salmon farming has to move inland to become remotely sustainable but we will touch on that matter another time...

The pike culling issue is still at the forefront of many coarse angler's minds, with certain (not all) factions of Inland Fisheries Ireland showing no sign of giving into logic, rational thought and opening their tiny, bigoted minds to the fact that pike eat all fish, inevitably some trout and that they are NOT the cause of trout stock declines nationwide. As so many of us know, it is largely pollution, loss of good spawning habitat and, dare I say it, lack of angler conservation that has caused that...

Good news for any open-minded, intelligent, coherent angler is that several people have been extremely busy behind the scenes for a long time now building a scientifically-backed study into the relationship between pike and trout, one that proves clearly that pike are not the sole cause of trout stock declines in the Western lakes. Irrefutable proof, using IFI's own

data gathered over decades that shows pike do not cause trout declines. Revolutionary? No, but to many who don't understand it just might be. The end is nigh for indiscriminate Irish pike culling (at least officially anyway). The winds of change are blowing strong...

Condemnation of such attitudes can only get you so far - not far at all, if truth be told. It does nothing but serve to dishearten the condemner and spur on the ignorant. Many people far greater and smarter than I have debated this philosophical argument throughout human history - how to change people's opinions when they are so fundamentally flawed. I don't know the answer either but I do believe starting from the ground up, with the next generation, and educating them in the proper ways will be infinitely more beneficial to not just angling and the environment but society as a whole. The only problem with that approach is that it is long-term.

With the mild winter many have experienced great fishing. Bass are still being readily taken on lures all around our coasts for those who venture out, the pike fishing is off the scale (sorry!) in many areas although we still await the first fresh-run salmon of the year, and look eagerly forward to the start of the trout season across the country.

We have some superb material in this issue, despite the occasional bad spell of weather in December and early January (we did have a bit) ruining several of our big plans for some great on-the-bank features. As anglers we are always at the mercy of the weather, especially when cameras are in hand! They will just have to wait until next time.

Until then enjoy the mag; let us know what you think, what you want to see more or less of, spread the word, keep supporting us and keep in touch. This is all done for you!

Be lucky and happy hunting,

Bill Brazier

Off the Scale

CASTING A NEW EYE ON ANGLING

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Acknowledgments

A huge thanks and well done to Issue 14 contributors Ant Glascoe Jr., Harry McKee, James Stokoe, Gary Robinson, Karl Bohan, Ronan Steele, Gary Blake and Nathan Edgell.

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Let's all cast a new eye on angling together...

Cover shot: A nice mid-double winter pike lays in the net on a large, unforgiving Irish lough

Photo credit: Bill Brazier

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The boring fine print...

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HUNTING PELAGIC
PIKE



By Ant Glascoe Jr.
Photography: Ant Glascoe Jr. & friends

My mate Martin Lewis with one of two big pelagic lumps in just minutes!

ANT GLASCOE JR. EXPLAINS A LITTLE ABOUT HOW TO USE MODERN SONAR EQUIPMENT TO TRACK DOWN AND CATCH BIG PIKE IN OPEN WATER SCENARIOS. IT'S NOT AS EASY AS IT MAY SOUND BUT WITH SOME CAREFUL THOUGHT REGARDING TACTICS AND FISHING AREAS, IT DEFINITELY HELPS PUT FISH ON THE BOAT.

Pike, and in fact all other predators, love cover, somewhere they can lie in wait ready to ambush any unsuspecting passing prey fish. Often this means obvious features like margins, weedbeds, islands, overhanging trees etc. but what about those fish which are in more open water, following and chasing down bait fish shoals? Modern technology makes it far more possible to find these pike and, sometimes, to catch them!

TRACKING THEM DOWN

When hunting pelagic pike using vertical jigging tactics on big, open waters, I use up-to-date sonar technology to help me along the way, in my case the new Lowrance HDS Touch 9. I first start by looking for prey fish or structures, where there is a chance of pin pointing a fish arch on screen that could indicate a pike. Once I spot what looks to be a pike, I then present a soft bait (shad on a jig head) to suit, for example the Westin *Hypoteez* or the HTO *Mega Stick*. Both patterns have proved their weight in gold on my last trip.

With the arch displaying on the screen the shads are sent down, and the twitching or jigging is then imparted in the soft bait. The idea here of course is to provoke the pike to take, or even torment it into striking out of frustration. Just like all lure fishing though, this does not always go to plan! I remember one time it took two full hours for a particularly big pike to finally hit my lure, even though I could see exactly where she was sat. All this may sound easy; spotting pike on the echo sounder and then dropping a lure on its head. Well, far from it – it's not as easy as it seems or sounds but over the years this method has produced some awesome pike for me and even big zander on deep slow stretches of river.

GEAR CHOICE

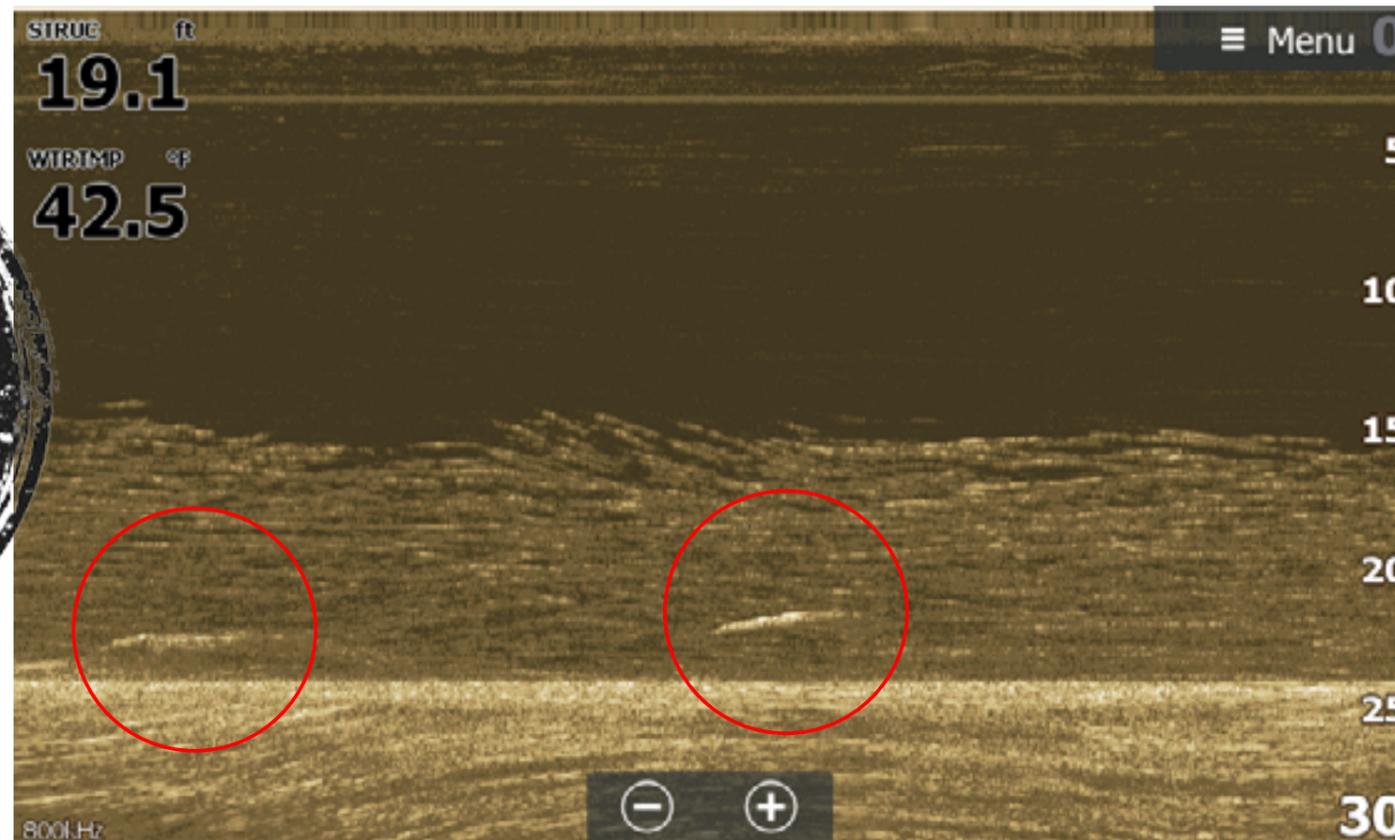
So what gear do I use when hunting these pelagic pike? I like to use rods which are short and stiff, especially to set the hooks at depths in the hard, bony jaws of a pike. I have been using the Westin W8 vertical jigging 6ft4 28-52g rod over the last few trips. This was the rod I took for walleye whilst filming over in Canada recently and it's perfect for my fishing but there are lots out there on the market to choose from. Just remember you need the back bone in the blank... As for a reel, well this is really down to personal choice, but many anglers, myself included, feel either a multiplier or bait caster the ideal partner for such short, stiff rods, especially for control. You can use a fixed spool reel but a bait caster is simply much better! I use the small Okuma Citrix or Hart Absolute C1 – again, all down to personal choice.

For braid I use top quality stuff such as Real Sports G-SOUL WX8 from YGK in 20lbs. This 8-strand braid isn't cheap but it's fantastic, and has a very low diameter (even for braid) and cuts through the depths quickly to the pike, depending on the drift and wind. I think a hi-viz braid is also essential, especially when drifting, just so you are aware where the braid/lure is.

one time it took two full hours for a particularly big pike to finally hit my lure, even though I could see exactly where she was sat

LURES

Lures! Christ, there are so many out there nowadays that this can get very confusing, particularly when it comes to catching pelagic pike. Normally you would use non-action style soft baits such as Westin *Twin Teez* and *Slim Teez* (pictured left), but I have been catching my recent pike using paddle style baits, with 6, 8 and even 10 inch lures being killers. I incorporate a stinger treble on these baits which definitely helps to hook more fish and fish them



mounted on a 25-35g jig head.

Over on the continent, where this method is popular for zander, they would use fluorocarbon leaders but in my case all the waters where I take my boat I use nothing but a fine diameter wire; still strong but supple enough not to interfere with the action of the lure. A perfect wire in my opinion is Wolframs and I tend to use the high breaking strains such as 12kg/26.4lb, in a length of 40cm. You can get these readymade traces from most leading tackle shops, like SNAPBAITS.CO.UK

THE TAKES

Looking back over the years this method has put lots of pike over the 20lbs mark in the boat for me and it has even been very successful on freezing cold days when other anglers around me have struggled. In some cases it has actually out-fished dead baits. When you locate a pike arch/shape on the sounder – which is getting

ABOVE

Fish found! A very revealing screenshot from my Lowrance HDS, showing just how accurate modern sounders are. You can clearly see two pike (circled) holding under a big shoal of bait fish. I caught one of them!

BELOW

A paddle style bait on a 25g jig head that was hammered by a pike found on the sounder





LEFT

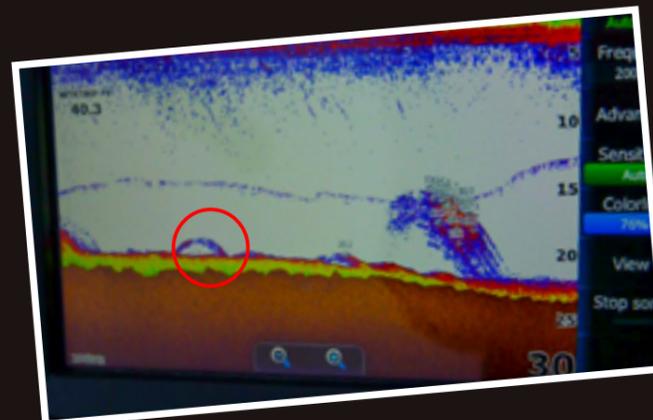
One of the most memorable pelagic fish to my boat - my niece with a 20lb+ fish of her own. Awesome!

more and more feasible as equipment advances - the adrenaline and blood pumps with such excitement that once you crack the method it gets very addictive. You can sometimes spend more time watching the sounder screen rather than wetting a line but it does make you fish more effectively, no doubt. The takes can be very aggressive depending on the water temperatures, but over the last few trips I've had the takes have been huge, dull thuds. The rod bends and the head shakes start and at first you can mistake the take for a snag. I am proud to say that I have introduced this method to lots of other anglers that want to try something different, and this sure is totally different and exiting! Last year I took out my niece and her husband to try this killer method, and instantly she beat her PB pike. In fact, we had two Pike over 20lbs on the same day, again spotting them on the screen. One pike in particular took a couple of hours before she took the soft bait. She just lay there in the mid-layers until she finally hit the lure. It's not only big pike that lay up in the pelagic layers (sadly!), sometimes small jacks can give you a surprise but I find these hit the bait with much more force. Still, whatever the size it's great sport and fun. >>

You can sometimes spend more time watching the sounder screen rather than wetting a line but it does make you fish more effectively

Ant's quick pelagic TIPS

On the much older sounder units pike and the arches can vary. Some older units don't show the pike at all! Here is a shot from about 5 years back with the Lowrance Touch. The arch is not clear as my latest unit but still you can tell it could be a pike



With lures I use I like to make them stand out from the prey rather than match. Often I'll use bigger 8-10inch baits, but sometimes it can go the opposite way and the pike want small fry-style baits. You just have to play around on the day and see what works



MORE PELAGIC SUCCESS!

Just recently, days just in to the New Year, my good mate Martin Lewis wanted to learn the art of this pelagic method, as he heard all my stories over the festive period whilst out fishing together. So, a trip was planned on a huge still water. The weather was terrible, -4°C and parts of the venue were freezing over. We just about got to the lake, as blizzards and high winds got in our way, but we still kept at it, arriving safely. We headed out on the boat to a well-known winter hot spot for prey fish, where there is a little structure in 23ft of water - the perfect hunting ground for pike. I started by scanning the screen for bait fish and almost straight away I spotted a shape which I knew, due to experience, was a huge pike. I already had a Westin Hypoteez 9cm rigged on a jig head, so I told Martin to lower the shad slowly down to the shape. Incredibly, the braid went slack almost instantly, followed by a huge thud; the fish was on! I grabbed for the net as Martin was busy fighting the fish. There were some slow head shakes and the pike made a dive back down to the depths, taking some serious amount of braid. As the fish came to the surface I knew straight away it was a 20lb'er. Now, Martins biggest Esox at this point was only 9lbs,



I started by scanning the screen for bait fish and almost straightway I spotted a shape which I knew, due to experience, was a huge pike



so this by far was his new PB. The single jig hook fell out in the net which makes this a lot easier on you and the pike, no fuss. We weighed the her and took a quick couple of photos. Martin was over the moon!

Just as we returned the big old girl, to my surprise I noticed another big shape at a different depth just yards away from where we hit the last pike. Martin sent the Hypoteez back down, gave it two jigs and WHACK. I could not believe this; he still had slime on his hands from his last fish and now he was into yet another big pike! Again he got a good fight as the pike stayed deep. I knew this was even bigger than the last. I reached for the still wet net, and again I noticed the pike was hooked very lightly in the scissors so I made a careful plunge for it. As I thought, this pike was much bigger. I said to Martin "you've just done two PBs within a matter of minutes of each other, crazy!" I think then it sunk in for him. For the record, the pike weighed over 25lbs and made an old friend very happy.

Happy hunting!



TOP LEFT

Even though I caught this big chunk a few years ago, I was still able to use my echo sounder of the time to pick this actual fish up lying on the bottom, so don't think you *have* to have the latest equipment to find fish

ABOVE

The first of Martin's amazing brace, at just over 20lb+. This smashed his PB to bits. Little did we know that a few minutes later he would hook and land a 25lb fish! A privilege to witness

LEFT

Although today's sonar gear isn't good enough (yet!) to pick up smaller individual fish like this good perch, it is invaluable in tracking down structure and shoals of fish. Vertical jigging for perch is becoming more and more popular and it's easy to see why - it's deadly!



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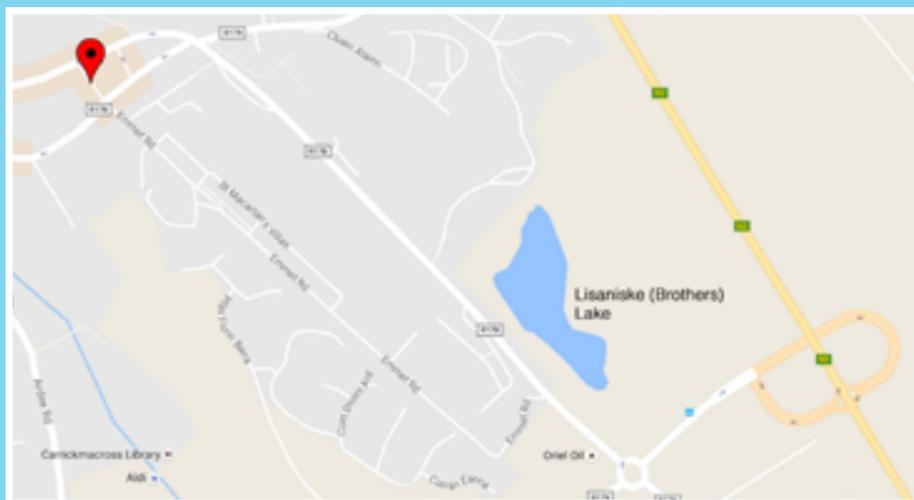
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Ireland recently hosted the World Shore Angling Championships - and won them! Incredibly, both the Mens and Ladies teams took gold with Irish anglers taking silver and gold individual medals, too. Silver medalist was Belfast's **Harry McKee** and we wanted to know a little bit more about what goes into such an achievement...

A QUICK CHAT WITH...



Q. HARRY, ANOTHER MASSIVE CONGRATULATIONS ON GRAUVELL TEAM IRELAND'S GOLD MEDAL IN THE 2016 WORLD SHORE CHAMPIONSHIPS HELD IN WEXFORD IN NOVEMBER, AND OF COURSE INDIVIDUAL SILVER FOR YOURSELF – AN AMAZING ACHIEVEMENT! BEFORE WE GET INTO THE ACTUAL EVENT, CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT THE PREPARATION THAT GOES INTO FISHING ON SUCH A HIGH STAGE SUCH AS HOW MUCH PRACTICE, GEAR UPGRADES ETC? YOU ARE BASED IN BELFAST WHICH MEANS IT IS A FAIR OLD SPIN TO WEXFORD!

A. Thanks! Preparation (for the anglers) starts months before the championships. Nothing is left to chance; all spools are stripped and new line put on, with different diameters loaded onto the spools to cover every eventuality. My rig boxes were completely stripped down and I started building all my traces from scratch. That way I knew all my traces were untouched and were fresh. The rods that I fished with during the championship were all checked before every match, looking for any hair line cracks or splits within the delicate ceramic eyes. This makes sure that when you are reeling in that the line passes over the guides without it being damaged and weakened. All my reels were stripped down as well, oiled and greased with a new line roller bearing fitted to each one. A good variety of clothing was packed as you can never be too sure of what the forecast will actually bring! We practiced for a couple of weekends on the Wexford beaches but with the team we had, and having fished these beaches a lot of times over the years, we were fairly confident on what the plan of attack was!

Q. TALK US BRIEFLY THROUGH YOUR THOUGHT PROCESS WITH REGARD TO RIGS AND BAITS FOR THE WORLD CHAMPS. DID YOU HAVE IT SUSSSED BEFORE YOU FISHED THE ACTUAL EVENT (THROUGH PRACTICE) OR DID YOU GO INTO THE EVENT WITH AN OPEN MIND, READY TO CHANGE AS NEEDS BE? WHAT RIGS/BAITS/TACTICS WERE SUCCESSFUL, AND WHICH ONES WEREN'T AND MOST IMPORTANTLY WHY DO YOU THINK THIS WAS?

A. As you might expect, to keep things fair, all bait for the World Championships is all supplied and each angler receives the same amount of bait for each match. For each one we got maddies, black lug, mackerel and sandeels. We had loads of bait and running out of bait was very unlikely! Bait management was important though as the maddies we were provided were farmed and brought in from Wales. They came in sea peat wrapped in newspaper. They were very good, nice and plump. However, if they were exposed to the air for any length of time they shrank very quickly making them too small for the hook! A couple of the days were really mild and one day was 15 degrees and sunny, which was mad for November, so any frozen bait had to be kept nice and cool in a cool bag with only small bits taken out on a regular basis. Rigs were fairly straight forward to be honest. It was either a standard 3-hook flapper or a 3-hook clipped-down. The most successful baits for the flounder were black lug tipped with a small piece of mackerel and a few maddies. Small sections of sandeel fished at distance also worked well for the whiting and dabs. One of the most important things in match fishing is to just keep going; it's really easy to lose interest if nothing is happening. You may have had a couple of blank casts or you are not catching anything at all. These are the times when you need to make changes, do something different, try a different rig, fish different distances, change your lead. Sometimes it's the smallest of things that can make the biggest difference!

Q. WHY FISH MATCHES, HARRY? IS IT SOMETHING YOU HAVE ALWAYS DONE OR A MORE RECENT DIRECTION YOU'VE TAKEN IN YOUR ANGLING? WHERE DID IT ALL START FOR YOU?

A. Good question. When I was around 4 my Dad started me off game fishing, mainly for salmon and Sea trout. We also did a small bit of sea fishing from the rocks and occasionally from the beach. This was all usually tied in with our salmon fishing and more often than not it was to actually kill a few hours while the spate fell off the river! Then when I was around 11 we started

doing a bit of coarse fishing, soon joined a club and began to fish different club matches around the country. I really enjoyed it and got a great buzz from the competitive side of it. In my early twenties Dad and I started doing a bit more shore fishing and fished the odd open match. We then joined a local club (Glengormley) and that has been pretty much it ever since! People often ask me how I can enjoy catching small flatfish, whiting, rockling etc. Well, my answer is simply that I enjoy figuring out how to catch them and when you have it sussed out and win a match you get great satisfaction from it. Anyone can put three big baits out and go for a 20 minute chat with their neighbouring angler and then reel in a couple of fish - that doesn't do it for me!



>>

Q. THE EVENT IN WEXFORD WAS FISHED ACROSS SEVERAL DIFFERENT LOCATIONS/BEACHES. DID YOU MAKE SURE TO PRACTICE ON EACH, GET AS MUCH INFORMATION AS YOU COULD OR DID YOU SIMPLY TRUST YOUR OWN ANGLING ABILITY?

A. Everyone on our team knew these beaches inside out! As I said previously we did fish the beaches a couple of weeks before the event and sat down and went through everything and made sure we were all happy and confident with what we were doing.

Q. I KNOW YOU ARE DELIGHTED WITH SILVER AND THE OVERALL TEAM RESULT BUT IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY GIVEN THE CHANCE REGARDING TACTICS, APPROACHES, PREPARATION ETC.?



A. No, nothing at all! I went to the Championships 100% prepared for anything and was very confident we would get a result!

Q. THIS YEAR'S CHAMPIONSHIPS (2017) WILL BE HELD IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH IS QUITE A PROSPECT. WILL YOU BE AIMING TO QUALIFY FOR AND FISH THAT?

A. Absolutely, I will be trying my best to qualify for South Africa, it looks unreal!

Q. AND FINALLY CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE QUALIFICATION PROCESS FOR THE WORLD CHAMPS. HOW WOULD A BUDDING YOUNG ANGLER, OR ANY AGE FOR THAT MATTER, GO ABOUT CHASING THEIR DREAM OF MAYBE ONE DAY BEING CROWNED WORLD SHORE FISHING CHAMPION?

A. Basically every club that is registered with the IFSA (Irish Federation of Sea Anglers) fishes a series of competitions throughout the year. The winner, or winners, depending how many members the club has, go to the Master Angler event that is held once a year in one of the four provinces. These are different each year. Usually there is around 100+ anglers at this event. It is fished over a weekend and there are three sessions. Whoever wins this automatically captains the Irish team. There are still another 5 team places up for grabs so the top 36 from the same event fish a separate competition later in the year, known as the "fish offs" and the top 5 from this make up the rest of the team. Anyone coming into this side of the sport should definitely join a local club and fish as many competitions as you can. Remember; never be afraid to ask any questions, it's the only way you will learn.



2016 FIPS-M WORLD SHORE ANGLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mens Individual medalists

- 1ST ALAN MULCAHY 
- 2ND HARRY MCKEE 
- 3RD HELIO CHORA 



Mens Team medalists

- 1ST IRELAND 
- 2ND ENGLAND 
- 3RD SPAIN 

All involved at Off the Scale would like to again congratulate Harry, Alan Mulcahy and both the Mens and the Ladies teams for their great efforts. Roll on South Africa!



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**DON'T
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Chaos in Costa Rica

By James Stokoe

After my amazing experience on BBC's "The Big Fish" last year it was inevitable that I'd catch the travelling bug, especially having never fished abroad previously. The decision was made and a new adventure was on the cards, and after no deliberation at all the destination could only be one place - Costa Rica and the phenomenal fishing resort of Crocodile Bay, to settle an old score with a sailfish among other dream catches! Of course I couldn't go alone, so my girlfriend Vic and my fishing partner in crime and Big Fish buddy Phil would be joining me on this adventure.

After what felt like a lifetime the big day finally arrived and we were on our way to foreign shores and the fish of our dreams. After a strangely enjoyable 6 hours on the plane, filled mostly with fishing talk and the usual movies & tiny uniform meals, the pilot began talking over the Tannoy and by the tone of voice we should've known it was going to be bad. Low and behold he made the announcement none of us wanted to hear - we'd made a U-turn and were on our way back to London Gatwick; 6 hours into the flight! We were more than half way across the Atlantic & the excitement of landing on Costa Rican shores was very real. An apparent volcanic ash cloud has closed the international airport in San José and the decision had been made by British Airways to turn back, as we were told there was no possibility of diverting to any of San José's neighbouring airports. And so the soul destroying 6-hour journey back to sunny old England began - the most heartbreaking part of it was, as I learned from my good mates on the ground in the Costa Rican capital, that had we continued on our journey we'd have been able to land at our scheduled arrival time without a problem.

What unfolded after that was the most extreme string of pure bad luck any of us had ever encountered - a painful 3 days of searching & searching for redirection flights, endless queues, missed planes, frantic taxi sprints across London that wiped us right of pocket, unapproved visas, lost baggage & missing passports and a lot of stress & tears. Finally we managed to grab a late night flight to Mexico and then on to Puerto Jimenez in Costa

Rica's south-eastern corner where we were met, a dishevelled 72 hours later, by bright blue skies & stunning scenery.

No sooner had we walked through the doors and met Todd Stanley, the fisheries manager, who was also one of our judges from the show, the conversation as always turned immediately to fishing - how's it been? What's been caught? And most importantly, when do we start fishing?!

The hardest choice on our first day would be between heading offshore to target big game or stay inshore and go in search of roosters and jacks, but we eventually decided on the latter as we were desperate to start fishing - typical anglers! We'd leave heading offshore 'til later. We hadn't been fishing more than 10 minutes when myself and Phil were straight into a double hook-up of rooster fish, which are an incredibly hard fighting and spectacular looking fish, with vivid black stripes and a huge feather like dorsal fin which they can fold down to make them more streamlined or stand up to show their emotions. As the day went on we encountered some other brutally strong fish including jack crevalle, Spanish mackerel and moray eel. The

biggest surprise of the day though came from Phil's rod when he hooked into something colossal, which we all thought was a cubera snapper. After an epic battle we were proved wrong as a familiar looking shape appeared from the depths; it was a nurse shark of around 6 feet which wasn't happy at all! We somehow managed to calm it down enough at the side of the boat to release it safely.

Our next day started with dark skies and a bad chop on



Within 10 minutes of fishing we had a double hook-up of roosters. I got mine in first!

We thought Phil had hooked into something truly colossal but after an epic battle it proved to be a very unhappy nurse shark



A nice triggerfish in the sun before the weather turned!

a painful 3 days of searching & searching for redirection flights, endless queues, missed planes, frantic taxi sprints across London that wiped us right of pocket, unapproved visas, lost baggage & missing passports

the water but today just had to be spent offshore and in search of Costa Rican big game, which is something I'd already experienced last year with no luck but was something new for Phil, so it would be his go in the hot seat first. After trolling around for about an hour we spotted the biggest pod of dolphins I've ever seen, there had to be hundreds of them and where there's dolphins there's usually yellowfin tuna, so we set our sights and headed over. We wouldn't



This yellowfin tuna may have only been small but it gave me a simply unbelievable fight, taking almost all the line off my reel!



have to wait long before Phil's reel lit up with a yellowfin smashing a lure and heading out to sea but after a short but hectic fight he managed to bring it back in & boat our first tuna of the trip. We carried on following the pod of dolphins picking up another 4 yellowfin up to around 20lb which was fantastic, but as always the sport fisherman in me wanted to get the light gear out and try some popping, which thinking about it now was a bit risky due to some of the 100lb lumps we saw smashing the surface.

By now the skies had opened and the rain was torrential but we still had time for one more fish, and my popper was hammered right off the surface instantly tearing 100's of yards of line in just a few split seconds which I thought were never going to end. Quickly, thoughts of how the hell I was going to stop it came to mind but fortunately (surprisingly!) the fish turned out to be small and only around 6-7lb so I managed to get it in, but what an adrenaline packed 5 minutes it gave me.

As the days passed the weather deteriorated with unusually strong winds and the heaviest rain I've ever experienced, resulting in over 30 inches of water falling in 4 days. After missing two whole days of fishing due to the weather we were down to our last resort, and last day, so again the decision would be hard to make. After observing birds hammering the water further out to sea it was like a sign from God so the skipper put the motors into overdrive to get us to the action, but after a while trolling backwards and forwards we had nothing to show for our efforts. All was not lost though as in our mad dash we spotted a huge scum line absolutely littered with debris and just on the edge, where the water colour

We had some brilliant sport with dorado. What an incredible looking species!



changed, as any saltwater angler knows, is not only a perfect ambush location but also sanctuary for bait fish so always a good place to catch. The heavy gear got put aside and the light spinning gear came out with poppers and minutes later Phil's reel went ballistic as a huge bull dorado well over 20lb cart wheeled across the surface like a golden jewel being skimmed across the water. The fight seemed to last for ages with the fish constantly taking line in seconds that had taken Phil minutes to retrieve, but we wouldn't have to wait long as before we knew it the fish was in the boat showing off his stunning electric colours. This was the first time I'd seen one of these fish up close and they are truly amazing.

The sport carried on, totaling another four dorado including

A stunning dorado. The weather was quickly worsening but the fishing was still great



the light spinning gear came out with poppers and minutes later Phil's reel went ballistic as a huge bull dorado well over 20lb cart wheeled across the surface like a golden jewel being skimmed across the water

We also had plenty of brutally strong Jack crevalle



Phil (the jammy sod!) with the biggest rooster of the trip at 20lb. These things never know when they're beat and just go ballistic!



another large bull for me around 16lb, with all fish falling to poppers with the subsurface lures having no luck at all. It was time to head back inshore but not without having an hour's fishing around the rocks for a trophy rooster. Phil (the jammy sod) again hooked up first and instantly knew it was a big rooster - they fight totally different to the jacks that inhabit the same waters and just when you think they're beat they go ballistic. Still, it didn't take to long for Phil to bully the fish to the boat and again the deckhand did an amazing job bringing it onboard. And what a fish it was, the biggest rooster of the trip estimated around 20lb.

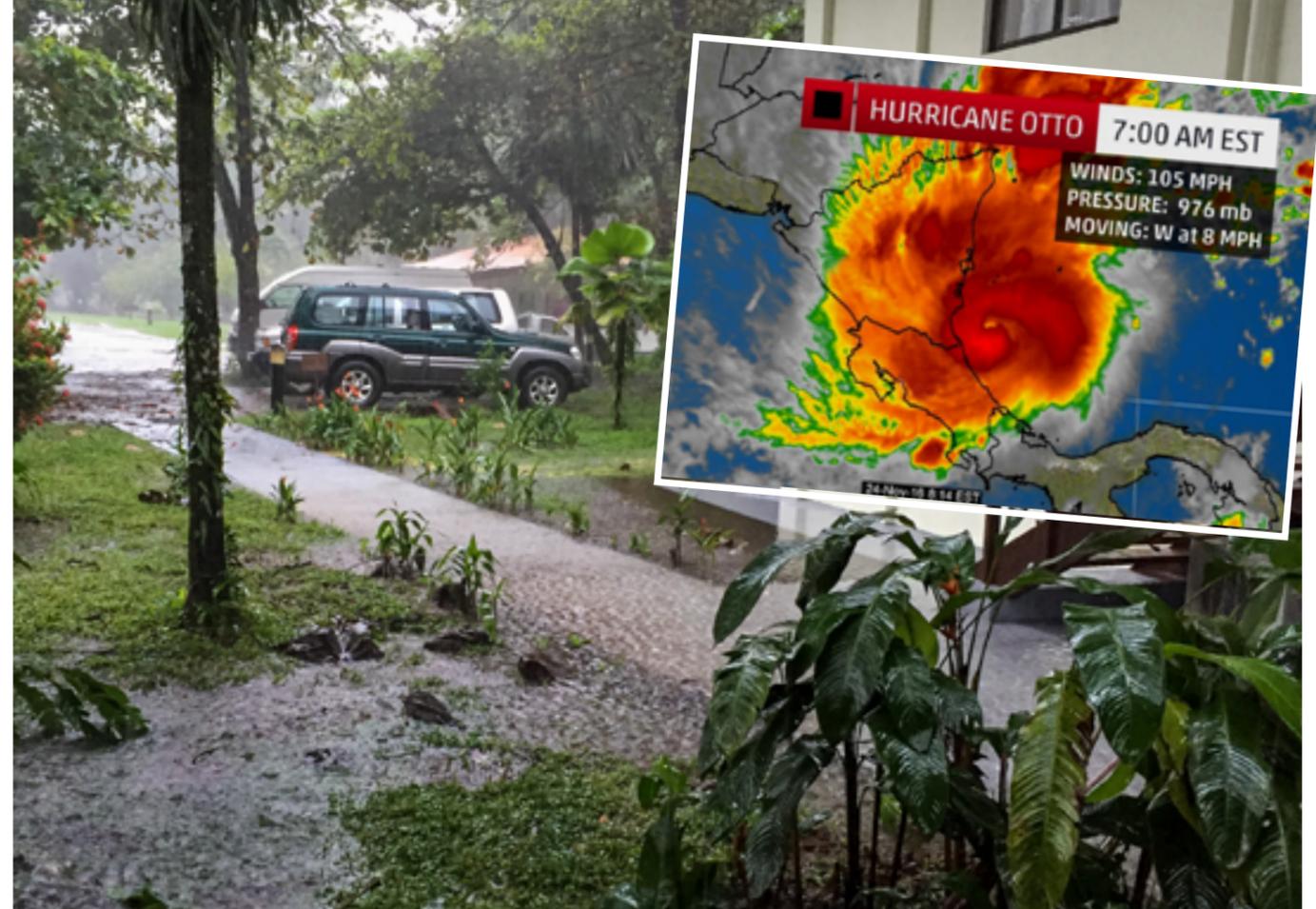
No sooner had Phil's fish

Just after Phil's big rooster I had the last fish of the trip, another fish of about 15lb



been returned my reel started screaming with another big rooster heading for the reef, trying every trick in the book to shake the hook but when a circle hook gets a good hold they don't come out. Minutes later my big finned friend was ours, not as big as Phil's but a good 15lb and sadly our last fish of the trip as it was time to wave goodbye to

Otto hit just as our trip ended, with ridiculous amounts of rain falling. It caused chaos and meant it took two whole days to get home



the rich waters of Costa Rica. It was good timing as it turned out, as hurricane Otto was starting to take hold of the country and bring even stronger winds and somehow even more rain! This ended up causing absolute havoc, flooding all the roads and closing the local airport so without going into much detail it took us another two horrendous days of travelling to get home...A journey I'd rather forget!

Although we'd faced the most ridiculous bad luck with the travelling and weather, the fishing in Costa Rica was absolutely off the scale (pun!) and we literally just scratched the surface with it. I'd advise anyone looking for a world class fishing experience and a stunning Costa Rican adventure to look no further than Crocodile Bay.

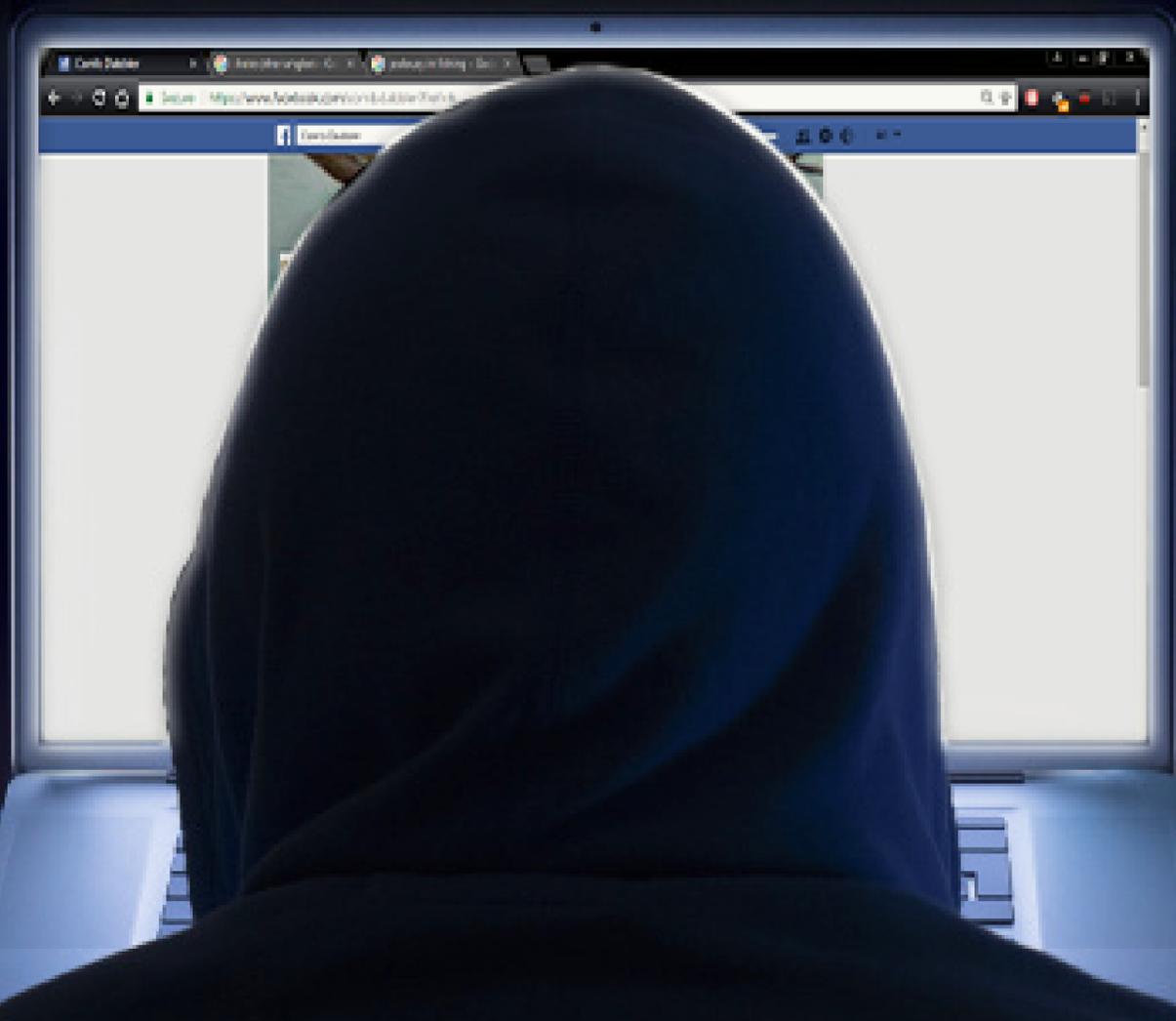
Thanks for reading,

JS



hurricane Otto was starting to take hold of the country and bring even stronger winds and somehow even more rain! This ended up causing absolute havoc, flooding all the roads and closing the local airport





Gary Robinson

THE DARK SIDE OF IRISH ANGLING

have been asked on more than one occasion as to why I think that there are less children and teenagers taking up the sport. There is a myriad of reasons and some of them are obvious, others not so much. An increasingly sedentary lifestyle coupled with the allure of computer games seem more appealing to youngsters; the 'wrapped in cotton wool brigade' don't let their kids outside because it's 'too dangerous'; they hear older anglers fondly recall with rose-tinted glasses the fantastic catches of yesteryear and conclude that the best of it has passed. Society has created a need for instant gratification and angling does not deliver. A diminishing respect for the environment has seen outdoor activities take a back seat for a lot of people. Some or all of these reasons are no doubt contributing factors towards the issue of low uptake of new anglers but a worrying trend has been observed creeping into angling circles and has undoubtedly left a sour taste for many.

In recent times many aspects of our lives, this publication included, have

Online angling carries with it a wealth of advantages but is also viewed, quite rightly, as a double-edged sword

located or relocated online. Sharing of information has never been more widespread and the resources for seeking out new and potentially bountiful waters is now unparalleled. Access to anglers and interaction with people from across the country has never been easier. Planning trips has been better facilitated with a mine of rain, wind, barometric pressure and temperature forecasting sites available. Online angling carries with it a wealth of advantages but is also viewed, quite rightly, as a double-edged sword. There is an insidious undercurrent of begrudgery and mean-spiritedness that proliferates on online angling sites. It's not even hidden just below the surface; it is there for all to see, in all of its glory.

I steer clear of a lot of Facebook angling pages now due to unprecedented levels of cyber bile that mounts up on them. I have been disgusted to see children as young as ten proudly posting images of their first captures only to be ripped apart by self-righteous fully grown adult 'experts' who go to town on the child - yes, a child - for improper handling/ no unhooking mat/ not using a particular brand/style of clothing/ all of the above. I have seen threats of violence dished out to children who dared to have the gall to go fishing and then hold their first capture up for a photo with a towel. Granted, there are ways to go about fish care and all budding anglers need to learn the right way to go about it, and call me old fashioned but threatening broken limbs to children online is not the right way. Is it any wonder kids are turning away from the sport? Young anglers need to be nurtured and encouraged not

verbally attacked online and ridiculed for not knowing what somebody who has practiced for 20 years knows. Practice makes perfect and that includes online bullying.

Stories from the UK press came to light a few months back regarding the capture of a potential record carp. From all accounts the captor went into hiding after a tsunami of vitriol and downright disturbing comments were directed at him. I don't know the details of the capture, the fish or the captor and I don't really care to know them but what I do know is that the online treatment of this angler was nothing short of horrific. From threats of beatings to death threats, threats of a sexual nature against the man's family members, threats to kill his pets and promises of seeking the angler out for altercations; the reaction of the digital online angling community was disgusting. The lad was out fishing and caught a big fish; get over yourselves.

Facebook and similar platforms



Your fishing trips are exactly that - yours

are somewhat transparent – user profiles can be reported and you generally know who you are dealing with, moving into the online angling forums takes us into murkier waters. Online pseudonyms guarantee anonymity for cowards where they feel free to articulate things that they would never say to your face. I personally have been the victim of what can only be described as an orchestrated case of cyber bullying by a relatively new angling fraternity in Ireland that for reasons unknown took an instant disliking to me. Concerted efforts were made to suppress work I had produced pertaining to the sport and the little scamps went around telling all and sundry all sorts of nonsense about me. The anonymous nature of the online forum saw some of these morons creating false online accounts to back themselves up in arguments and to out vote club and site suggestions that did not suit their *status quo*. Spelling and syntax errors gave the game away, coupled with the decency of some who were rightly disgusted with the behaviour they were witnessing from grown 'men'.

Rather than being weak enough to swallow what they were told without questioning, they had the decency to ask me whether or not the things they had heard were accurate. Ireland is a small place and angling circles within Ireland are even smaller; the truth gets out and surfaces in the end.

The spite and bitterness can result in a gang that seeks out the smallest perceived mistake and tries creating a holy show. A case in point was the posting of a picture featuring a kayak with a baby seat in the tankwell. The image was part of a joke with a family member who was wondering how long it would take to get the little man out on the water. A joke. Four members of the aforementioned Irish plastic boat fishing club rounded on me and immediately chastised me for something I had not even considered. I think the fact that the hundred other interactions were all able to see the post for

This is the only type of muppet you should encounter when fishing!



exactly what it was, humour, says more about the intelligence and intentions of these four than it does mine. The really nasty nature of this group also saw multiple members in their ranks contacting different media outlets that I have written for and different companies that I have represented to request that they drop me and stop using my work. Said companies had enough respect for me and the work I have done for them to not entertain this group of sour individuals and were able to pass on the details of the contacts that had been made. That is what we are dealing with in some sections of Irish angling.

I'm an adult and I am thick-skinned enough to not be bothered by nonsense so I just let them at it and did my own thing, which caused consternation. You can't please everybody and only a fool tries to so I'm not at all bothered, I'll just keep doing what I do. However, a 12 or 13 year old child that is trying to take up the sport generally does not possess the 'don't give a shit what you think' attitude that I do. Younger minds are a lot more impressionable and in an era where

praise is gushed upon even the most pedestrian of accomplishments a lot of children are finding it increasingly difficult to accept criticism. In an Ireland where we are supposed to be championing mental health, death threats over how a fish is handled by a child is response reserved for the infinitely stupid and callous. The really astonishing thing is generally those that are making the most noise are those that are fishing the least but a newcomer to the sport, especially a child, won't be able to know that. Internet anglers – lads who don't fish telling lads who do fish how to fish; good for you!

Those other anglers that observe the abuse and do not interject are just as culpable. Silence is consent and by saying nothing not only do you endorse the vitriol but you

also demonstrate to others, especially youngsters that this type of behaviour is acceptable. I would ask them the question – would you be happy if it was your own child/niece/nephew that was being subjected to the same nonsense? Whether we like it or not, the first point of contact for a lot of budding anglers is the internet and by firstly having a section of the angling community engaging in this cyber bullying and by secondly having a section of the angling community not intervening we are scaring off some anglers of the future and teaching those that remain that this type of behaviour is acceptable. Use the resources in whichever way you see fit but remember that for every helpful individual you come across there will be a clown to match them. Increasing numbers of anglers turning their backs on the fishing pages and online fora stand testament to this. A wise man can usually be found wandering alone, a fool can usually be found following a crowd...

Angling is slowly descending into a battleground where the aim of the game is to try to outdo (in your own mind) everybody else. For me, angling is pure escapism and allows release from the pressures of everyday life. Angling allows us to reconnect with the wilderness, to appreciate the sights, sounds, smells and absolute wonder that Nature and the outside world has to offer. Angling



You won't find trolls in this kind of setting

Young anglers need to be nurtured and encouraged not verbally attacked online and ridiculed for not knowing



teaches us respect for the countryside and an appreciation for calm and tranquillity.

Angling can then catapult us into a state frantic excitement, fulfilling all our dreams or crushing all of our expectations in seconds but we wouldn't change it for the world. In a world where outside activity is increasingly discouraged we should be embracing newcomers to the sport and showing them this type of magic that drew us to the sport, not slagging them off for using the wrong type of unhooking mat.

Introduce a friend or a youngster to fishing, just not the online sniping that can go with it. And, above all, enjoy it!





#askOts

We ran a special pike version of Ask the Experts for this issue on our Facebook page, with our expert none other than **Nathan Edgell**, one of the UK's top pike anglers and river specialist.

Below is some of the most helpful, thought-provoking and entertaining material that resulted...



PIKE Nathan Edgell



Donan O Domhnaill I've been pike fishing a long time and have noticed a huge difference in fishing dead baits in a river compared to a lake. Are there any pointers you could give for pike fishing rivers? I've had a lot more success trotting dead baits down a river but is there a specific way to fish static?

Nathan Edgell Hi Donan, like you most of my success with deads on rivers has come from a simple float rig with one treble. I hook the bait in the back so it presents a horizontal fish rather than a vertical bait and gives off a more natural silhouette. I believe the key to river piking is mobility therefore trotting, as you say, certainly covers the water. That said though I mostly find the fish in the slacks and near features. On certain areas that I expect to produce

fish like large slacks or weirs then I have fished a simple running ledger set up with the bait fished hard on the deck as natural as possible. The problem with free roving floats (baits suspended off bottom) occurs when you use more than one rod and you constantly have to recast, as with rivers you tend to fish smaller areas and have flow and eddies to deal with. In these situations a float ledger or paternoster helps to keep the baits in position and allows me to use more than one rod. Hope that helps a little and best of luck

Ronan Steele In your own opinion what is the best way to find out whether a spot/swim has a few pike there before starting to fish?

Nathan Edgell Keeping this to do with rivers... Pike are in pretty much most rivers although their populations can be very specialised to specific stretches due to various reasons. Also you really have to keep in the forefront of your mind that river pike are true experts at evading detection and yet can exist in the shallowest of waters whilst still reaching excellent weights. There are rivers I have fished that have done fantastic fish yet some days if you didn't know you simply wouldn't believe any pike were present at all such is the nature of river piking on certain rivers. The standard approach to this question is do your homework before ever casting a line. Google, old fishing books and magazines are great ways to research waters without asking another person. When asking someone else be it tackle shops, fishing clubs, dog walkers, friends, facebook or other social media groups or forums be careful as obviously your intentions become known. Listen out for those golden words "it used to be good" as most things in nature are cyclical and may become good again.

My own approach, after the homework's been done, is to simply fish it and learn about it. By being on the bank you get a "feel" for the type of river and its potential. The type and amount of other species possibly present and other predators that may or not be active, including humans. Lure fishing is a great way to learn about a new water immediately as you can stay mobile and cover it quickly. Different times of the day can also be significant so mix it up a bit and just have short sessions. Keep a look out for fish holding features that would be worth fishing with baits and taking more time and care with, such as deep corners/holes, weirs and large slacks. Finally a castable fish finder like the Deeper Smart sonar can help as well to locate possible pike and other fish and to discover quickly underwater features. Bottom line though, get on it and fish it hard, have some faith and confidence in your own ability and put the time and effort in and you might be pleasantly surprised. My own experience is that "pioneering", as we call it, is fantastic fun and a great adventure and when you find some fish after genuine hard work regardless of their size there is no better feeling. Good luck!

Paul Williams Nathan, do you believe that actual spinners are a good way of exploring a new section of river if the weed level etc allows? Or what other method would you recommend as a first port of call?

Nathan Edgell Yes Paul, spinners, spoons, small shads and jigs are great what I call universal lures as they potentially can catch you lots of different species. So all of these would be my first port of call when exploring a new stretch, definitely. Another and underused method would be jig flies...



Dave Moody If you had an opportunity to go hit a river today but could only take one lure, what would it be?

Nathan Edgell If it's a new river the good old Abu Atom chrome spoon 35g as it searches out all species quickly, when I next leave my house though it will be the Fladen 105g Maximus conrad softy in blue and white

Conor King Lowry What have you found to be the best feeding times on rivers **Nathan**? Or does it vary? I've found in a small river near us that the fishing is poor in morning/afternoon but the evening is great, and on another river only 15min away the mornings seems to be better. Weird! Have you found certain times when pike feed better?

Nathan Edgell Definitely. I have the same; one particular river and stretch is rubbish at first light and early morning, afternoon to evening though it's great. No rhyme or reason to it **Conor** and just when I think I might be working it out I'll catch the other way round and it throws it all out again, lol! Perhaps that's why we love it so much, always learning and it's rarely the same day twice

Glenn McCormack What would be the best method for fishing deep water for pike in the winter months, and does wind direction really have an affect on the feeding pattern for pike?

Nathan Edgell Simple running ledger rig with a big bait hard on the bottom **Glenn** with a big bait would be my choice or a simple float set up and try differing depths. As for the wind, as with an earlier question my wife dictates when I go not the wind, moon etc. but I think it possibly does, but with pike I believe you can trigger them or induce them to take and I've caught in all wind directions. One thing is for sure WE WON'T CATCH AT HOME!

Sean Kelly I've noticed if you catch one pike in a swim then there's a good chance you're only a few casts away from another one. Do pike congregate in packs? Is there an average number of pike in a pack and is it true if your catching a few small 1lb pike thats there's a hen nearby?

Nathan Edgell That tends to be the case in rivers because safe locations and prime locations are scarce so if you find one fish you tend to find more. Obviously time of the year plays a huge part in all your questions. I've taken 5 pike in 5 minutes including a brace of twenties but you also get the more nomadic single ones. So, again, there is no definitive answer, but if you find one never move immediately. Fish it again, would be my advice. I had a small jack grabbed by a twenty which I got on video last year and landed both, so big and small can often be near. As rivers flood sometimes they don't have a choice where to lie up

Lloyd Lynch It definitely seems river piking is your speciality **Nathan** and certainly your favourite type of fishing. If you don't mind me asking, why that mate?

Nathan Edgell Very simply the lack of still waters where I live **Lloyd** pushed me on to the rivers, which I then fell in love with. Hand on heart I'd rather get out and catch a wild 7lb fish that has never seen a hook than fish managed places. I love the wildness, variety and challenge that river piking offers and as for the fish themselves, second to none IMO

Sean Kelly How do you determine the age of a pike? And the sex?

Bill Brazier I'll pop in on this one before **Nathan, Sean**. Pike actually don't live that long, as coarse fish go. Like all species, generally the faster they grow the shorter their life. There have been many documented fish of 30lb+ or more, even in Irish waters, being just 8 or 9 years old. If the food supply is there, they will grow big & quickly, especially if it is high in protein like trout or salmon (controversial to some!) I think some pike have been reportedly aged at almost 30 but that would be very much the exception, most live far less than that. The only way to determine age is via scale or otolith (ear bone) readings, and as growth will change from water to water, season to season it's hard to simply guess the age based on size or length. Sexing them is very difficult except at spawning time. Female pike always grow much larger than males (sexual dimorphism) unlike most other species, and it is safe to say any fish over 10lb or so is almost certainly a female. When they are young and immature it's anyone's guess!

Nathan Edgell I don't think there's an exact figure really **Sean**, it depends on location and food supply. Some take longer than that, it's another reason why river fish are held in a higher regard than others, as to reach good weights they have to do it in a natural environment and survive the harshest of conditions when compared to the trout reservoir fish, for example

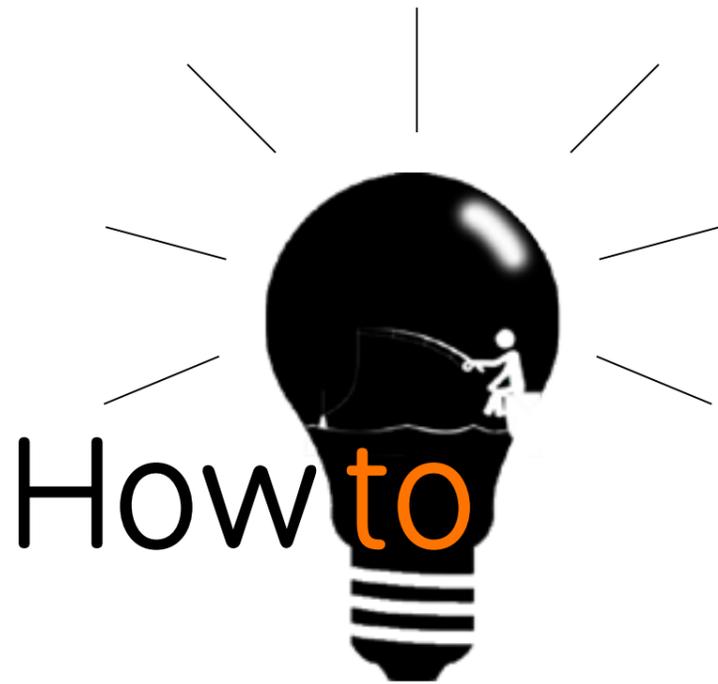
Sean Kelly Excellent responses, I learnt a lot from that, thanks!



Many thanks to Nathan for his time and insight! We hope you found that interesting and maybe learned a thing or two in the process. Be sure to keep an eye out for the next round of our Ask the Experts on our social media pages during February.

Why not get involved?





Our new **How to** section helps you to catch more fish! Hints and tips, tricks and edges for game, coarse and sea anglers.

Want us to feature something in particular? Then just get in touch on social media or drop us an email at editor@offthescaleangling.ie and let us know!



LEARN



DO



FISH



CATCH!

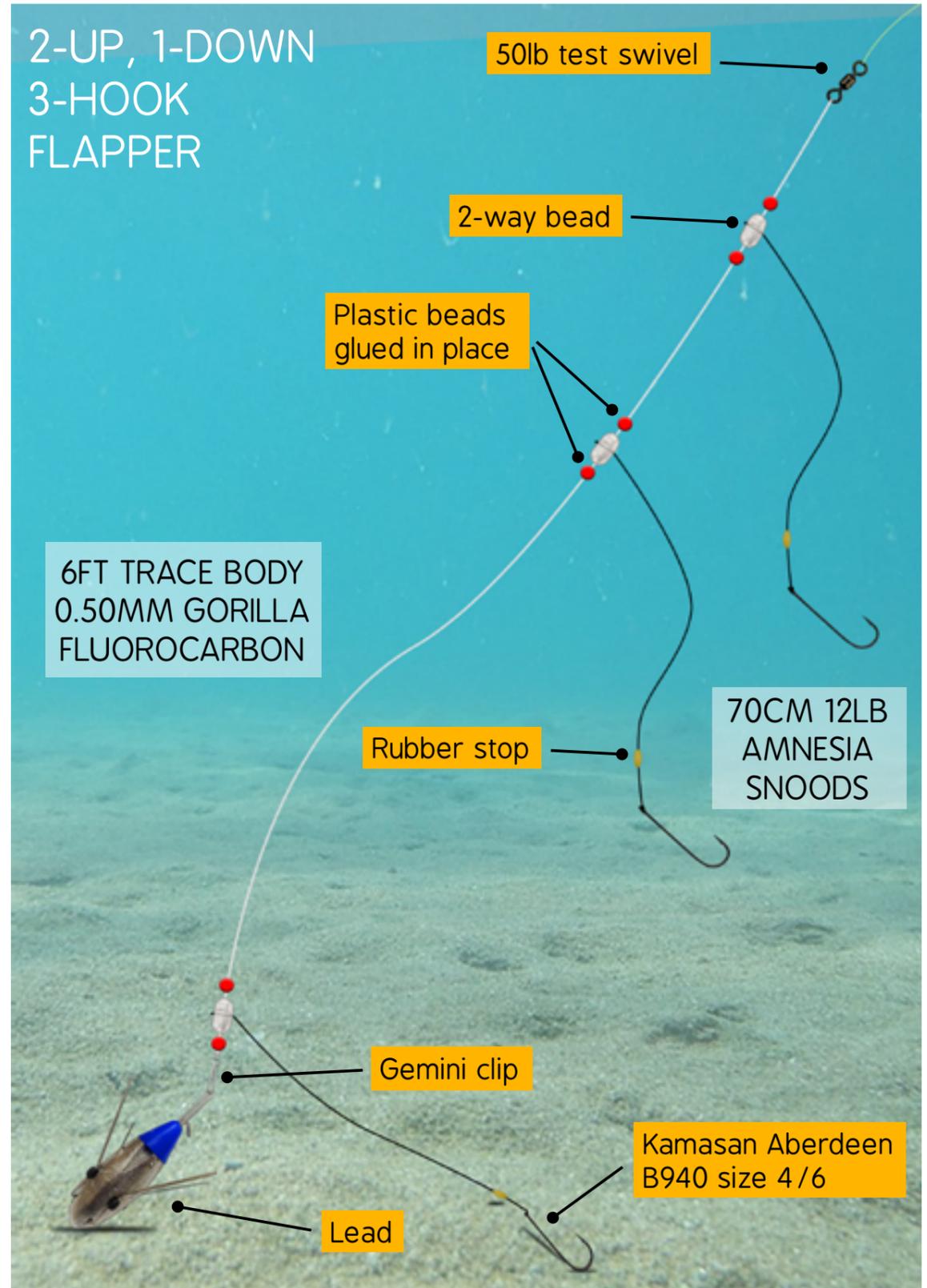
TIE A WORLD CHAMPION'S 2-UP, 1-DOWN FLAPPER RIG

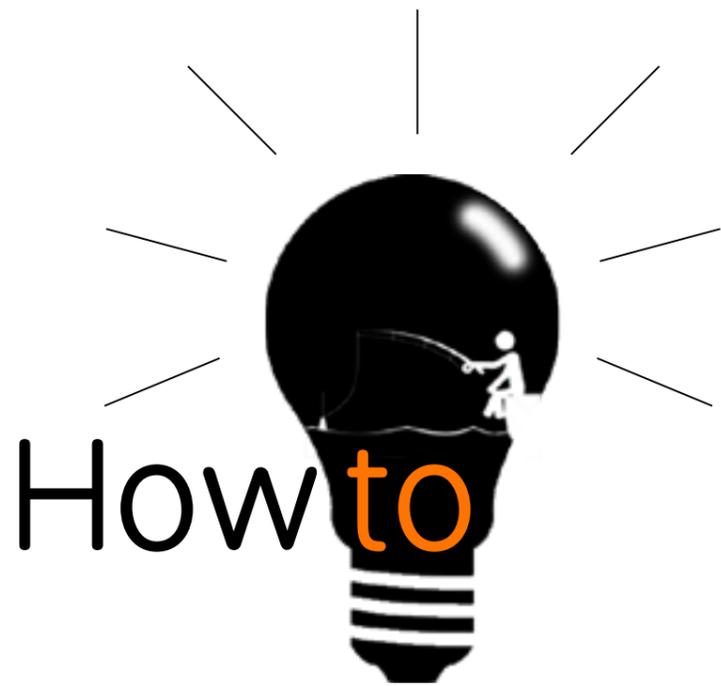
with Harry McKee Jr.

This is the same rig I used successfully in the World Shore Championships back in late November. Like most sea rigs, it's very simple, being a slight variation of the familiar 3-hook flapper. It is still a 3-hook flapper but one of the three snoods is fished right down the trace body near the lead. This is usually better for picking up more bottom feeding species like flatfish, with the other two hooks flapping around to attract other species like whiting. This set up is a good way of maximising what's in front of you fish-wise, which is why we use it so often in shore competition situations.

It will catch pretty much anything and can be tailored to suit a range of different scenarios. The components are fairly standard and easy to put together although I do change the snood material and hook size based on what species I'm after.

- Use fluorocarbon for the trace body as it is tougher than most monos, and you want your trace to be as strong and robust as possible
- Amnesia may be an old snood material but it's great stuff. It doesn't kink, lasts ages, is supple and strong and comes in wide range of strengths and diameters
- I glue plastic beads in place above and below the 2-way snood bead instead of crimping. This doesn't damage the trace and is more than strong enough for most situations
- 2-way snood beads do away with the need for extra swivels on the trace body. Push your snood material vertically through the bead, tie an overhand knot (or melt with lighter) and it's not going anywhere
- Like many anglers I incorporate a rubber stop on my snood above the hook to stop my baits flying back up on the cast, which can ruin your presentation. This is especially needed when fishing worm baits like lug





LEARN



DO



FISH



CATCH!

▶ TRACK DOWN RIVER PIKE

by Nathan Edgell

Finding river pike is all about location. Whilst this is important in all types of fishing, for all species, prime ambush, resting and feeding spots are often at a premium in flowing water which means, unless you know where to look, you could be literally miles from some decent fishing! This map is a very generalised guide and no doubt your river(s) will be quite different but it will hopefully give you guys a few pointers in the right direction. Remember, think like a pike and you won't go far wrong!

1 WEIRS are probably my favourite feature. They almost always hold pike. Focus on the slacker water around the edge of the weir and also at the tail (downstream) end of the weirpool itself

2 ISLANDS are rare enough on most rivers but if you find one fish it! Look at the downstream end of the island, in the slack water. A great ambush point for any pike

3 SIDE CHANNELS include ditches, tributaries, inflow pipes etc. Where two flows meet is almost always a hotspot. Small ditches are especially worth a look during floods, as pike (and prey) will move in to shelter from the main flow

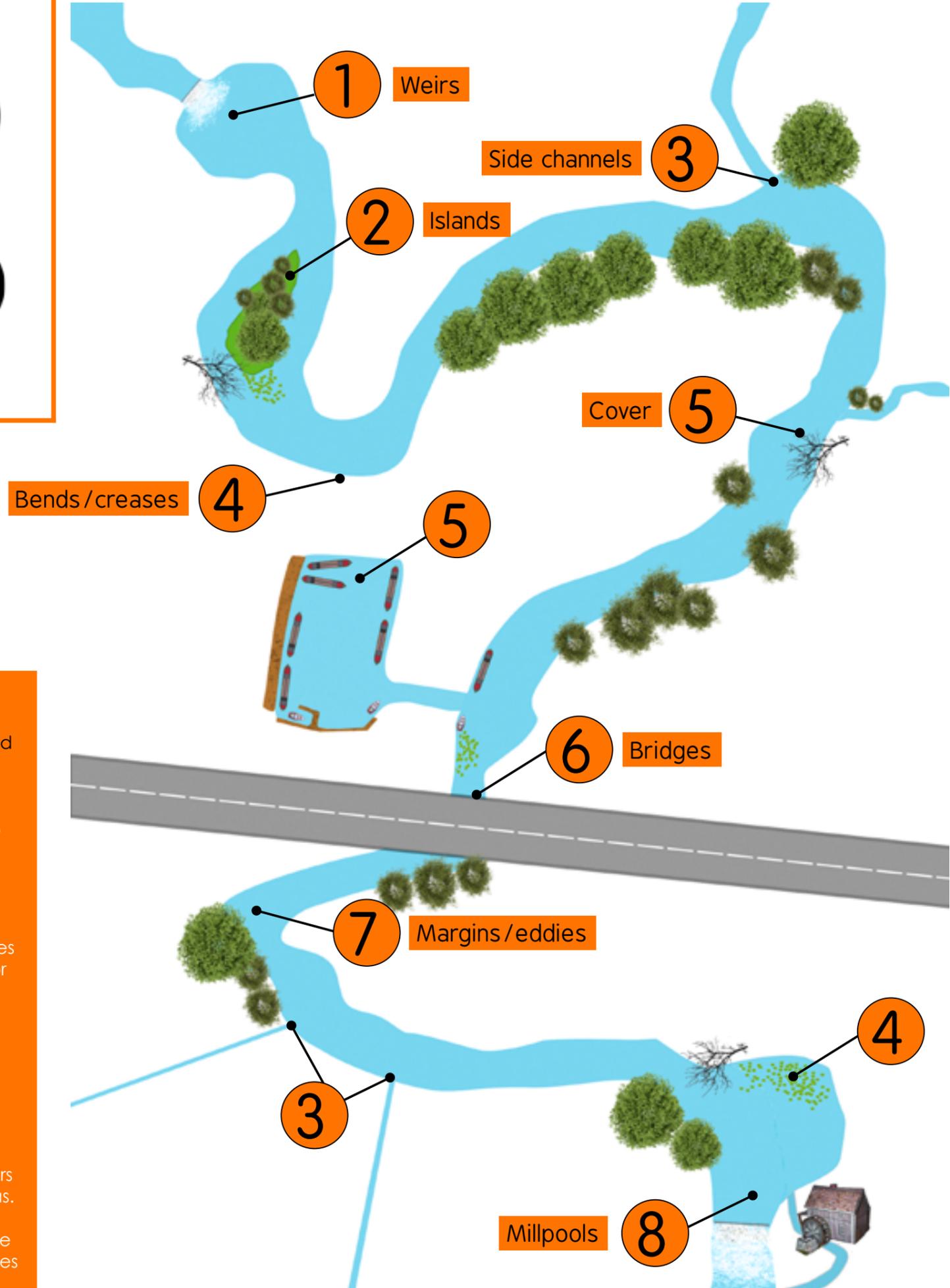
4 BENDS & CREASES are another great area. The outside of bends can mean deep water/holes which is where so many river pike will be at certain times of the year

5 COVER can be anything from weedbeds to fallen trees to boats. As ambush predators, pike need cover, so find this and find some pike!

6 BRIDGES are something every river has. Ones with in-stream pillars are the ones to look for and the slack water downstream of these

7 MARGINS & BACK EDDIES are where you'll find more pike than anywhere else. Deep marginal slacks are usually a goldmine. Tread gently and quietly and never ignore the margins!

8 MILLPOOLS are not found on too many rivers but again they are great pike holding areas. Pike are often "lazier" in calmer water and may not be so aggressive, so you may have to find work harder to find their feeding times





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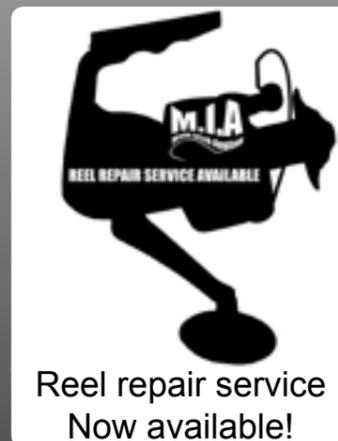
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THE DIARY OF A FISHING FANATIC

By Karl Bohan

Photography by Karl Bohan & friends

FINAL
INSTALLMENT

LESSONS FROM 2016

INSTEAD OF THE USUAL AND PREDICTABLE SUMMARY ARTICLE TYPICAL OF MANY DIARY SERIES AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, I FELT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO INSTEAD REFLECT BACK ON MY EFFORTS OF THE PAST YEAR AND NOT ONLY INVESTIGATE WHY AND HOW THINGS WORKED OUT THE WAY THEY DID BUT HOPEFULLY PASS SOME INSPIRATION AND TIPS ONTO YOU TO HELP YOUR OWN ANGLING...

It is the 10th of December as I begin to write this, and since you have last heard from me I have only managed to get out once more. I think a combination of working six days a week and the effects of a high intensity season has taken its toll on me! Either that or I am simply lacking motivation... I am leaning towards a feeling of burnout I have decided to abstain from angling for the coming weeks and to start 2017 with renewed vigour!

For those of you who

have been following my journey throughout 2016, I think it is fair to say that things went pretty well. It's hard to say exactly what caused things to click into place. For me, though, there are three key factors that come to mind. 1) a deep passion for our pastime; 2) relentless determination and 3) good old watercraft. I believe the first two of these are either born or bred into us, whereas watercraft is something that unfortunately cannot be bought from your local tackle dealer. It is

“watercraft is something that unfortunately cannot be bought from your local tackle dealer

something that can only be acquired through time spent on the bank. Starting at grassroots level, how to set up a float, how to plumb a swim, how to feed a swim, how to present your hook bait, how to combat wind or tow. All of these things we experienced anglers take for granted but these are, in my opinion, the building blocks for developing “watercraft”, which itself is hard to define. I see all too many anglers these days with all the gear and no real connection to their quarry. I don't think peoples angling ability should ever be judged on how big a fish they have caught but rather how they manage to consistently catch fish while others around stumble. In saying that, specimen hunting and blanking do generally go hand in hand!

To backtrack a little in my own angling journey, by 2014 I felt the three boxes had been ticked. I felt relatively confident at tackling most freshwater species, but unknown to me, I was about to step it up another notch in the form of joining The Tenchfishers. Having never read an angling magazine until Off the Scale launched, and being fairly low key in my angling, I was pleasantly surprised when a member of the TFs suggested to me about joining. “No I'm not up to that level” I think was my response, but after some thought I decided to go for it. I can honestly say that, angling wise, it was one

of the best decisions I have ever made. A bunch of fanatical bivvy tramps, collectively the most skilful group of specimen hunters on this island, in my opinion. Just being in their presence would sharpen your outlook. As I mentioned already, I considered myself somewhat competent at catching fish consistently, but these guys are specialists in catching big fish. Each and every one boasting a C.V. packed with big fish. Specimen angling was not something I had really done before, but in order to merit my place amongst this group, I decided that 2016 was the year in which I would attempt to step up. And so, in January '16 I set myself the modest



yet personally challenging target of a 5lb hybrid, 6lb tench, and an 8lb bream. I think before I go any further I should state, that joining the TFs doesn't entitle you to "secret swims" or lakes where you catch 6lb tench a chuck. Venues are never disclosed, and out of respect for one another, you don't ask....ever!

HYBRIDS

I don't think I need to bore you anymore with another account of my hybrid campaign. Instead I will try to list a few things that I have learned that may help you in your own quest to catch them. These are only my thoughts, not facts! I think it is fair to say that hybrids are a peculiar group of species, whether they are mix of bream, rudd, roach or a combination of all three! What follows predominantly applies to my fishing for roach x bream hybrids in particular. They fight a lot harder than true bream, especially upon reaching specimen sizes. It's possible that their behaviour varies from venue to venue, but I have my doubts. They can be targeted almost all year round, with spring and autumn seemingly being the best. Standard tench-style bolt rigs work well, with bunches of maggots fished on a helicopter-style bolt rig being popular for the larger fish. In my experience they seem to have a real soft spot for pineapple boilies, especially early season, but whether this is due to colour or the flavour/ attractor chemistry I don't know!

I quickly learnt that roachxbream feed primarily at night early season, to the extent that at first light the rods would be wound in and not recast until last light. The quiver tip was brought out during the day to pass the time, with tench occasionally making an appearance. Once darkness descended, I'd assume my position in the bivvy

facing the rods, and just like Yuri Gellar with the spoons, I'd attempt to use my mind to make the bobbins move! That is until sleep deprivation took hold and everything began to move... I know people's opinions will surely differ but in my experiences of trying to catch them, I discovered that strangely enough the weather conditions had very little effect on their feeding patterns. What I mean is that no pattern emerged that I could see. High pressure, low pressure, rising barometer, falling barometer, cold, wet, stormy, dry, or calm, even during torrential rain, with flooding imminent, they seem unconcerned and fed regardless. Wind direction had little effect on them either, which to me makes them an even more fascinating species to target, as you will always have a chance.

The only conditions that they didn't show themselves on the

surface, when I didn't get a run or catch a hybrid at all, was when the stars were on display. Clear cloudless nights were certainly the kiss of death for me. Once there was partial cloud cover I felt that over 2/3 nights you would get one chance at least, and when they come around you have to be ready, as I discovered. For five



which was yet to come would most likely prove the toughest challenge yet, but it was one I was relishing!
BREAM

I had caught enough shoal sized bream in my time to know where to go to warm up for what I knew could turn out to be a painstaking fruitless campaign chasing these truly mythical slabs of bronze. Although I had seen pictures of doubles before, I always had a niggling doubt as to whether or not I would ever come face to face with one in my lifetime. They are rare creatures in Irish waters... I had always said to close friends that to catch a double figure bream was my ultimate goal in angling. Unbeknown to me, I was about to embark on a campaign that would change things forever. I will outline some of the tactics I've used to catch bream over the years, tactics which I ultimately carried

“ I don't think peoples angling ability should ever be judged on how big a fish they have caught but rather how they manage to consistently catch fish while others around stumble



nights I suffered after losing a huge fish right at the net in order to make amends, and finally got my first 6+ into the net. But it was time well spent I can tell you.

In summary, my hybrid campaign spanned from the 7th of March to the 7th of May and in that time I spent 13 nights chasing these elusive creatures. My most notable fish during this period were as roachxbream hybrids of 6lb, 6lb 6oz, 6lb 8oz and my current PB of 6lb 9oz. Along with this I managed my first 6lb+ tench of 6lb 1oz, and a roach which tipped the scales at 1lb 15oz. Three new species PBs achieved during this campaign made it time very well spent in what can only be described as generally horrendous conditions. And so, three weeks into my campaign I had managed to meet two of my targets for 2016, which was a dream come true. Deep down I knew the bream



TOP LEFT
Another huge hybrid graced my net in the spring, this time at 6lb 9oz

TOP RIGHT
It was incredible fishing. A PB tench of 6lb 1oz (top), a 6lb 6oz PB roachxbream and a 5lb 9oz tench for good measure!

LEFT
My usual prebait: flaked maize, corn, hemp and molasses steeped overnight

ABOVE
It was dream land again as another huge hybrid slipped over the net. The huge frame on this fish suggested it was my biggest ever but it went 6lb 8oz. Truly the fish of a lifetime.



LEFT
Rodney keeping a lookout in a prebaited swim; it is such a massive edge and definitely worth all the effort!

BELOW
I generally keep hooklinks short when fishing baits like boilies with heavy bolt rigs...

BOTTOM
Modest sized bream like this can get through a hell of a lot of bait quickly! If there's not enough, they won't hang around

RIGHT
A fantastic trip to Canada in July truly made 2016 a dream year for me



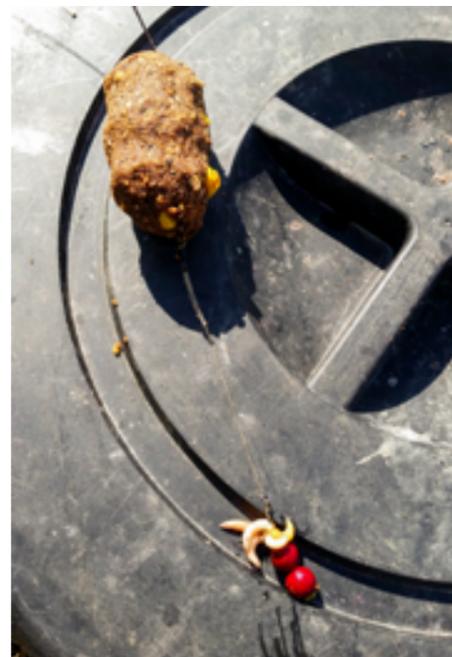
through into my "specimen hunting" in 2016. Again, I want to clarify that these are only my opinions and findings, not facts!

Location

Firstly you must find a water in which they are plentiful. This sounds silly but it really is a key factor. Personally I find the lakes which don't have tench present (or at least have low numbers) are far more likely to produce a "ton plus" bag. Logically if there is less competition from other species then the bream will have the chance to grow bigger and maintain larger populations, all things being equal. Once you have settled on a water, do some surveying. The use of a boat and sounder is the way I like to survey waters, but if the chosen venue isn't overly big then a simple "leading around" exercise will suffice. Try to find a weed-free silty area, preferably of uniform depth. Generally the bream will be found in areas of open water which contains these features, or rather lack of them. If you keep dragging weed in from open water then keep looking around, as there is a 9/10 chance that there is a clear area there to be found somewhere in every lake. Trenches of deeper water along with shallower plateaus are also definitely worth investigating. Ideally the northeast corner is the best place to start as bream are said to feed well

in a southwesterly wind (invariably brings mild weather). However, as we all know, we don't live in an ideal world and luckily bream don't read books so don't get hung up on this! Check the forecast before your trip and try to position yourself with the wind coming into you. Bream like most fish do usually follow the wind, but not always so again don't follow this approach religiously. In my experience it's all about trying to present your prebait/hookbait in an area that both easy for the bream to find on their patrols and also easy for you to extract them once hooked.

Prebaiting



If possible do some prebaiting. It really does give you the edge, a big helping hand. Typically I will visit a venue two or three times before wetting a line. I've learned that simply rocking up, filling in a swim with bait and waiting for the bream to arrive doesn't always work. Get active and map the lake as much as you can. I will always bring a pen and pad and literally draw the lake out and include key features like depths, sudden depth changes, weed beds, lake bed composition and so on. Once you have this info you can start to envisage where the bream are most likely to be. My prebait generally consists of plain and simple (and cheap!) flaked maize, which I steep in cold water overnight. Although it's not necessary to add anything I would usually include a good helping of molasses and any frozen bait I had left over from previous trips, like old groundbait, corn, maggots etc. Living in Kildare as I do means a 2+ hour drive to most good waters and so my prebaiting is restricted

to sneaking out at 4am on Saturday mornings to deposit up to 20kgs at a time. Obviously the amount needed depends on both the time of year and the stock of fish you are targeting. There is no point in filling the swim in if it's only a handful of big bream that you are chasing. If you already know the stock size in the chosen venue (from other anglers etc) then the amount you can use becomes clearer. If it's a new venue then 10kgs two weeks running before fishing should be enough to have at least some bream show the following week.

Rigs

Rig-wise I will generally fish a swim feeder on a quiver tip during the day. This helps gradually build up the swim and keeps you busy while waiting on the bream to show. Usually the roach will appear first. Keep casting regularly at this point,

as even if the bream haven't made their presence known, the chances are they have been alerted to the commotion and should return as the light begins to fade. If you are comfortable fishing the tip during the night then do so; if you'd prefer to relax a bit, then switch over to either a running or bolt rig on an alarm.

I have often heard what the ideal length a hooklink is discussed regarding bream, and in my opinion there is no right or wrong. Depending on the style of rig I am fishing, and the type of hookbait I am using, I will change it accordingly. When using artificial baits or boilies on a bolt rig, for example, I will shorten down to 3-4 inches, whereas when using a natural bait on a bolt rig I could extend the length up to 12inches. If I had to choose one general length to stick with using bolts, it would probably be around 4 inches. It doesn't give the bream

“ Try to find a weed-free silty area, preferably of uniform depth. Generally the bream will be found in areas of open water which contains these features, or rather lack of them

time to realise its chewing a piece of plastic or odd tasting boilie; they are pricked before they know it and the indication is immediate. With a longer hooklink your bait could be sampled and ejected ten times over before a bream gets pricked by the weight of the lead or feeder and gives you any indication. With a natural bait like worm or corn, the longer link can work better at times. It's wise to fish two rods at opposite ends of the scale to try and determine which length is the optimum on the given day. Of course, sharp hooks are absolutely imperative. Check your hooks regularly, the slightest dulling and I change mine, or at least sharpen them up with a file. The basic principal of a bolt rig is that they rely on very sharp hooks, so don't allow your hook to let you down after all the hard work. I know in the modern age the power of marketing is overbearing at times, with brands and products being rammed in our faces everywhere we turn but try and be sensible. Fancy rods, reels, bite alarms bivvies and baits don't really catch you more fish. Good indication and a basic working rig is all that you need.

Baiting

In my experience, the real key to this is the baiting of the swim. Just like match angling, the idea is to get the fish competing and grubbing away. This can be achieved only through trial and error and experience. Knowing when is too much and knowing when is too

“ Try and fish during periods of falling and low pressure systems. Overcast, damp muggy days with a good chop in the water seems to be favourable with our slimey friends

is vital. When you have killed as many swims as I have through incorrect baiting (!) you soon learn the amount needed to keep them grubbing and competing for the bait. I will add a spombfull every 20mins once I know their heads are down. This may need to be increased or decreased. Again, stock size is key here. If you're fishing for big shoals of average sized bream then you need to think big. If the bream you're after are of a larger size, then the chances are the number of fish in front of you is smaller, so be mindful. I will always bring enough bait to keep them going for two nights if they are feeding well; 20kg of crumb, 2-3 gallons of maggots, a gallon of caster, 2kg of worms, 5kgs of corn, 5 litres of hemp and a few kilos of mixed pellets. This may sound like a lot

- and it is if your swim is a good hike from the car - but you'd be surprised just how

quickly this can and does get consumed. I'm not suggesting that in order to catch bream you need all this bait, but on more than one occasion I had to cut my trip short as I was cleaned out with over 100lbs of fish already landed. Once the bait stops going in, the bream wont hang around, so keep plenty to hand, and lots of Red Bull!

Weather

The weather is arguably the most important factor to consider when targeting bream. Their enigmatic habits are tougher to crack than attempting the Rubik's cube blindfolded. I think it's fair to say that bream don't feed well during sustained periods of high pressure, so try to plan your timing accordingly. I'm sure you're all familiar with the falling barometer theory. Try and fish during periods of falling and low pressure systems. Overcast, damp muggy days with a good chop in the water seems to be favourable with our slimey friends. A good SW wind along with a drop in pressure and high single digit

night time temps are about as good as you could wish for in my experience.

As mentioned before, try and position yourself with the winds blowing into you. These are only guidelines; it is possible to catch bream in almost any conditions so, again, don't get hung up on waiting for the "perfect

conditions". The more time spent on the bank equals more knowledge acquired, which will ultimately help put more fish in your net.

My 8lb target - smashed!

By spending lots of time chasing bream, often blanking, I had finally had built up a picture of how to catch them with some consistency. I was able to carry this knowledge through to 2016 in my pursuit of my 8lb target. On one of my many recon' missions surveying an unknown water, I happened to stumble upon what I thought was a series of big bream rolling. Drifting along in the dinghy with pen and pad in hand, I caught a glimpse of a big back slice through the water, followed by several more. I followed these rolling fish, watching their huge backs break the surface, in disbelief. They disappeared from sight almost as quickly as appearing, but a fire had been lit. I returned the following weekend, after analysing my



ABOVE

It's unsettled conditions like this that usually bring about the best fishing, at least where bream are concerned anyway. I've found hybrids feed in pretty much any weather!

LEFT

As if my season couldn't get any better I went and landed another PB tench of 7lb+ on my first trip to a new water. Are some people lucky or do you make your own luck?

BOTTOM

A lifetime goal achieved with possibly the biggest bream I will ever catch. 11lb 10oz. I still can't believe it happened, even months later! A story for another time, perhaps...



little



KEY LESSONS FROM 2016

- Roach x bream seem to feed best at night early season, so I would concentrate my efforts on fishing effectively for the hours of darkness
- Clear, cloudless nights were unproductive but they fed well in almost all other conditions I was out in, come rain or shine. So remember, there is always a chance, at least with hybrids!
- It may sound obvious but for good bream fishing first find a water with good stocks and then focus on locating them in that water. Try to find a weed-free silty area, preferably of uniform depth
- Prebait, prebait, prebait! But be sure to adapt baiting levels to the stock of fish; less is more when targeting low numbers of big fish, whereas you may find waters where you physically can't put enough bait in!
- Generally the heavier my feeder or lead the shorter my hooklink. Bolt rigs work on the principle of a fish getting pricked as soon as possible after mouthing the hookbait
- Generally try and fish during periods of falling and low pressure systems. Ideal conditions for me would be overcast, damp muggy days with a nice warm wind and high night time temperatures but there is always a chance!
- Be prepared to put in the effort! Watercraft - the ability to read the water, conditions and fish behaviour - only really comes through experience. There are no real shortcuts to success I'm afraid!

“ As I nestled into my freshly cut swim I could hardly believe what I was seeing... Huge backs sliced the surface as bream bigger than I had ever encountered before rolled playfully over the baited channel



map of the lake, with a location in mind to try and intercept them. For the next three weekends I visited the lake in the hope of seeing them again, but they never showed. I continued to strategically bait a channel I had discovered on my first trip, an area bordered by shallower weedy water, my thinking being that it would be the chosen patrol route for bream heading into one of the many large bays located at the northern end of the lough.

Some may find this strange but only on my sixth and final visit to the lake did I bring my gear with me. Conditions were not textbook; 1024mb air pressure and rising, coupled with a very slack easterly wind and clear, cloudless skies. I had placed my faith in the hands of the Gods once again. Two nights I had at my disposal, along with more bait than your average tackle shop. As I nestled into my freshly cut swim I could hardly believe what I was seeing. The flat oily surface at 40 yards range began to move before my eyes. Huge backs sliced the surface as bream bigger than I had ever encountered before rolled playfully over the baited channel. My heart was in my throat as I clumsily fumbled with

my rigs to ensure they were ok. Just as dusk descended I cast my two rods into the channel. What happened in those next 36 hours was, and still feels, completely surreal. Bream of 6lb 10oz, 7lb 8oz, 7lb 10oz, 8lb 1oz, 8lb 4oz, 9lb 12oz and 11lb 10oz all fell

to my rods, the 11.10 being my first bream after less than 3 hours fishing. Accompanying them were over 20 tench, some good sized hybrids, roach, eels and even an 8lb pike that took a liking to my fake corn. But that session is a story for another day. And so, with that I had smashed my three species targets with less than half the year gone... I am still finding it all hard to take in!

THE REST OF 2016

The next few months were spent mainly fishing for tench and rudd. I felt the pressure was off after my personal achievements as such, and so I set about exploring some new venues. I managed good sized rudd to 1lb 14oz along with a surprise new PB tench in the shape of a 7lb female near the end of July, something I am extremely proud of. That one will take some beating I think! Sturgeon took centre stage in late July with a fantastic trip to Canada to battle freshwater leviathans. Perch and pike then took over after I finally stopped fishing for tench. The 2lb perch I was seeking never materialised with a fish just under that weight the best I could manage. I'll just have to try harder next year! All in all 2016 has been a roaring success for me, not just in terms of the fish I have been lucky

enough to catch and the new friends I have made but in the knowledge I have gained. I was fortunate in that not one blank was registered all year; 33 nights on the bank to be precise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the time here to thank those who helped me become a better angler in 2016. Firstly the Irish Tenchfishers, for had it not been for me joining this wonderful group of gifted anglers I certainly wouldn't have enjoyed as much success in the season just gone. I won't mention any individuals, but you know who you are, and I wholeheartedly want to say thank you. I would like to thank the editor, Bill Brazier, firstly for harassing me into committing for the year. You obviously saw something in me that I didn't see! By committing to the mag for 2016 it gave me the kick I needed to go out and chase those really big fish. I hope I have fulfilled your expectations! Last but not least I would like to thank you, the reader, for without your continued support the magazine would cease to exist. On a personal level I would like to say thanks to all those who relayed messages of support and appreciation for the articles I have written and the fish I have been lucky enough to catch. I hope my

LEFT

I had some nice perch fishing in 2016 but failed to land the monster I hooked. One to tick off the list this year for sure!

BELOW

Kicking off 2017 with a bang!

ramblings have helped you in some way.

I feel that having spent so much time sharing my every fishing move in 2016 that now is the time I take a break from the magazine to focus more on my targets for 2017. I plan to lay a little lower and hopefully break a few PBs along the way. A 6lb+ hybrid, 7lb+ Tench and 11lb+ bream in one season... has it been done before? I don't know. One thing I do know is that every free minute I can conjure will be spent planning and plotting to try an emulate it! One can dream, I suppose...

I hope 2017 is the year that all your angling dreams come true. That's it from me, thanks for reading and good luck chasing your dreams.

KB



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Kingfisher

Scientific name: *Alcedo atthis*

Perhaps the most iconic bird of our waterways and a particular favourite of anglers. Kingfishers eat small fish (up to 80mm) and consume 50-100% or more of their body weight per day. Species like sticklebacks and minnows are very important to the species, particularly in nesting season (April-May) when parents can bring as many as 50-60 fish a day back to the nest for their young. Rarely seen by the general public, they fly low and fast but may be seen perching on branches as they look for their next meal.

Wikipedia

By-the-wind-sailor

Scientific name: *Vellela vellela*

An increasingly common sight around our coasts due to climate change, By-the-wind-sailors are not actually a jellyfish as many believe but a hydrozoan. *Vellela* is shaped like a sail and uses the surface wind as transportation. It is frequently washed up on beaches. Their striking blue colour acts as camouflage and also protection from the sun. They are carnivores and catch prey (like most jellyfish) with toxin-containing tentacles. Despite this they are not poisonous to humans although some may develop and itch on contact.



Off the Scale

#otslookout

On the lookout...

Some wildlife to keep an eye out for when fishing this January & February



Great diving beetle

Scientific name: *Dytiscus marginalis*

One of our largest aquatic beetles, reaching up to 35mm in length. The larvae (nymph) can grow very large indeed, up to twice this length and to some may look like an underwater scorpion. They are fierce predators either as larvae or adults, and will prey on small fish, tadpoles, even each other. As a true beetle, adults are capable of flying (usually at night) as so are found across a wide range of aquatic

Wikipedia

habitats, from rivers and lakes to ditches and puddles, even livestock troughs and water barrels. Adults must come up to the surface for air periodically.

“ Adopt the pace of Nature; her secret is patience ” ~ RALPH WALDO EMERSON



Snowdrop

Scientific name: *Galanthus nivalis*

One of the first flowers to bloom in late winter/early spring, even as early as January. It is frequently found in damp places and alongside streams and rivers. Found all across the UK and mostly in the NE and SE of Ireland.

Wikipedia

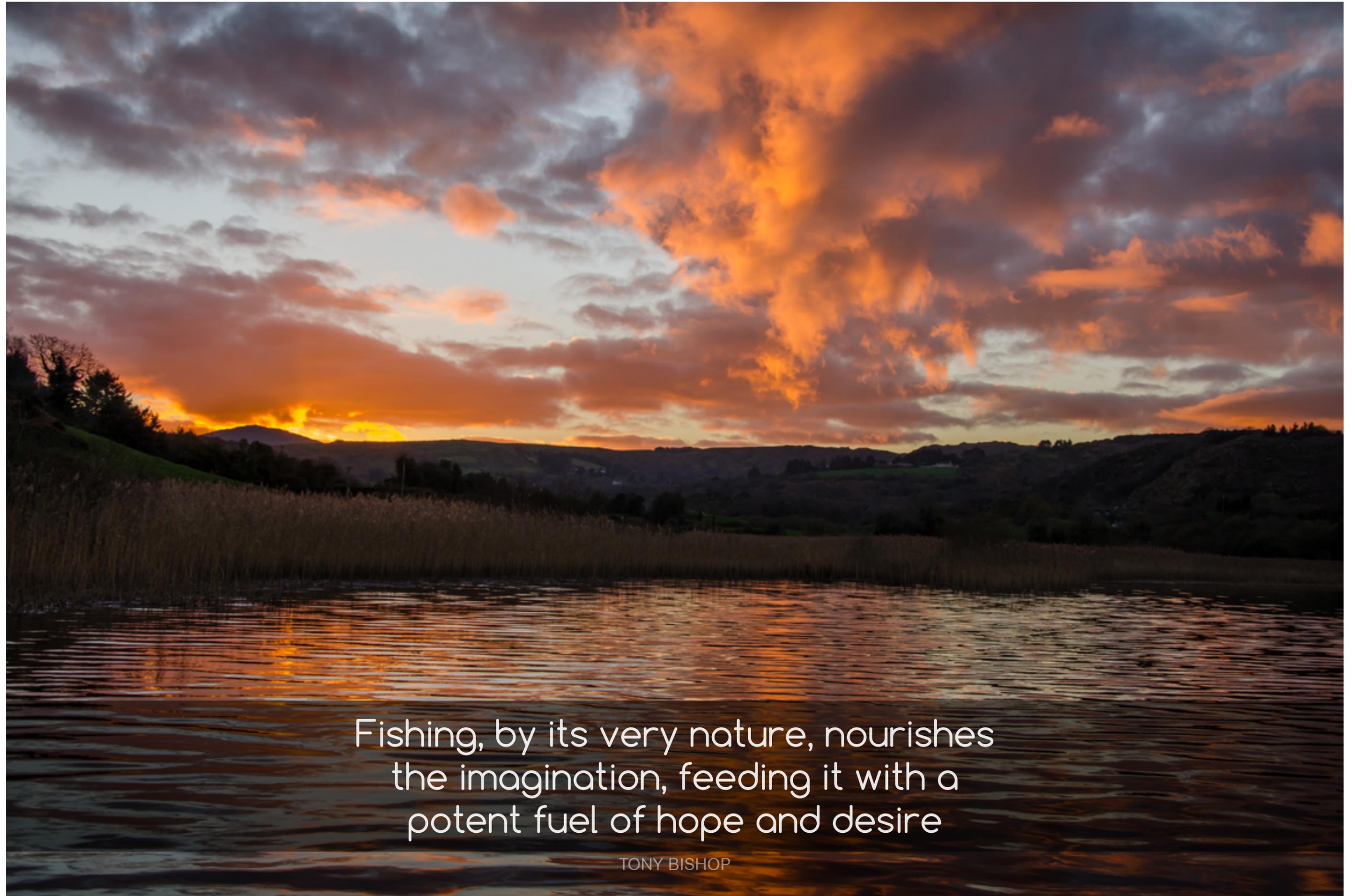
Small Tortoiseshell butterfly

Scientific name: *Aglais urticae*

A very common butterfly throughout all of Western Europe, found in all types of habitats. They are also often found hibernating in houses. A lover of the so-called “Butterfly bush” (Buddlia), with their caterpillars feeding mostly on nettles. The very mild winter of 2016/17 so far has meant that many insects are waking from hibernation very early so expect to see these butterflies soon. They usually don't become active until March or April.



Wikipedia



Fishing, by its very nature, nourishes
the imagination, feeding it with a
potent fuel of hope and desire

TONY BISHOP

THE FUTURE

“TRULY THE BEST WEEK OF MY LIFE”

Written by: Ronan Steele (13)

Photography by: Ronan Steele, Glenn Steele & Bill Brazier

567.347.789.63456

It started on the 12th of August 2014 when my father took me down to the Lough in Cork City to have a little taste of fishing, something he used to do a lot of in his younger years. He taught me the basics of carp fishing that I needed to know, he lent me a few bits and pieces then sent me on my way. It took time and patience and fishing almost every day but it was still roughly two weeks before I even caught a decent sized carp. The wait paid off and within two or three hours of starting that day in our favourite spot I had a ripping run on the rod cast to the island. I brought her in and she weighed in at fourteen pounds eight ounces – it was massive, especially as all I had seen before that were small rudd and a few small carp! I was absolutely delighted with myself and how far I had actually come within just a few weeks of obsessive fishing. All it took to catch this beauty was a little cube of spam. After that moment, I never looked back; I took to it like a duck to water. I had finally discovered a sport I genuinely loved so I dedicated a lot of time, effort and

most importantly patience into it.

It wasn't long after (it might have been that same day) that we met a man called Bill Brazier, the owner of this fantastic magazine “Off the Scale”. Bill was



Catching rudd on the float is great fun but I just love carp!

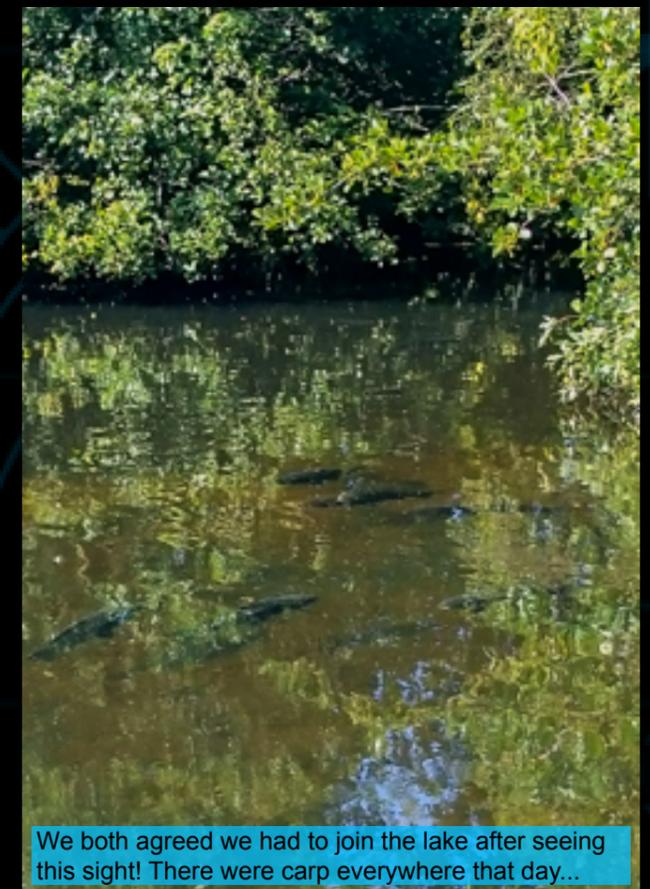
living in Cork at the time, fishing the Lough a great deal and became very close to me and my father. To be honest it was as if he was part of the family, he fitted in perfectly. We spent a lot of time together fishing, what we all loved best. He kindly taught me along with my father Glenn all I now know about this sport. They both answered all

Simply put, kids are the future of everything – politics, business, sport, the environment and, of course, fishing. It is up to current generations to nurture them, to encourage them and to teach them. However, some young anglers appear to need little coaching and are already way ahead of their years in terms of ability and knowledge.

Ronan Steele is one such young angler, already obsessed with fishing, particularly carp. Although finding fishing later than some his passion, enthusiasm and love for this wonderful pastime shines through. He has been lucky enough to catch some great fish in the past few years but Ronan wanted to write about one particular trip when he feels all his learning and knowledge came together... Take it away, young man...

my silly questions which has made me grow as a fisherman.

Anyway, I better get back to my fishing experiences... There came a time when my father Glenn and I were getting a bit tired of fishing the Lough trip after trip, and we knew the fish were over-pressured. We came to realise we needed a change of venue for a while; different waters, different sceneries and somewhere more peaceful was what we needed. We looked for new places for quite a while and my Dad made a magnificent discovery whilst on a day trip out in Cobh. He had discovered a magical piece of water, a small private lake that held carp. He told us the news and we shot down to have a look. As we walked in we were taken by surprise at the place, it was small and intimate just perfect for our style of close-in fishing. It was really pretty, with patches of weed, snaggy corners and shallow areas glistening in the sun light. It had a beautiful little island sitting proud in the middle of the lake; it was picturesque with lots of lovely lush trees all around. Our first instinct was to have a stroll around the lake to try and spot some carp in the water. Only half of the lake can be walked around but we worked with what we



We both agreed we had to join the lake after seeing this sight! There were carp everywhere that day...



One of my favourite fish from the Lough, a 13lb+ scaley mirror

had. We climbed trees (or tried to anyway!), snuck around bushes, sprinkled in a bit of bait and we only saw a few fish cruising on the top.

After some time we then made our way around to the other end of the lake known – for obvious reasons - as the Shallows. It also had a nice bit of weed, unlike a lot of other areas. We did initially think the fish would be down there basking on the surface as the sun was beaming down to that area of water. We stuck on the Polaroid's and went for a look and we were absolutely amazed with the amount of fish that were there, shoals and shoals of them, with a few chunks in that mix as well. We paid our membership and tried to get down to the lake for our first session as soon as we could.

FIRST TRIP TO A NEW WATER

I was so excited in the lead up to that first trip! I had all my bait prepped and freshly tied rigs with 100% effort put into them on my rods. We got down there and decided to fish the Point swim, where you can cover about half the lake from if no one else is fishing. I had one rod under-armed to a nearby bush, one rod very tight to the left of the bush, and a pop-up rig with my home-made milky toffee pop-ups flicked to a gravelly spot I found

while leading about in open water – something I rarely had to do at the Lough. I helped set up camp, threw on the burgers and lay my head down to sleep, I was actually very confident for the night ahead.

I awoke to a single beep (or two) on my middle rod tight to the bush. I checked my watch and it read 1:30am, I sat up and kept my eye on the rod for a little bit. I then got another double beep, I knew there was something sniffing around my tiger nut. A few seconds later my alarm burst into life and the line fell slack as the fish ran away



Slowly I started to get amongst the bigger fish...

from the bush (no baitrunner on). I jumped into my boots as quick as I could and ran over and struck into my very first carp from the lake. My heart was racing! I shouted my dad to get out of bed and get me the net, and few moments later I had a lovely sized common at the bottom of my net. We left her there for a bit to resuscitate while we got the mat, sling, and scales ready. I popped of my rig and got my rod out of the way, and carefully removed the fish from the water to the safety of the mat. I slipped her into the sling and threw her up on the scales. She weighed in at twelve pounds and ten ounces. A lovely sized carp for my first fish from this lovely lake. That night I had one more fish weighing in at 7lb 6oz. I reluctantly packed up my kit (school the next morning...) and went home that night a happy chappy!

Two weeks had passed since my last session and I was back down on the club lake for my second session. Again my Dad and I decided to fish the Point swim with the exact same method and the exact same spots – we were confident in it so why change. This time the night was a bit more productive. I had four carp in the night weighing in at 11lb 6oz, 7lb 2oz and then the next two were only small two pounders. All were taken all on spam with a bit of fake corn on top, like many of my early Lough fish. I was well chuffed and felt very confident for my season of carping ahead.

LEARNING CURVE...

As time went on I decided to use my brain a little more figure out what the carp were doing, trying to work out their feeding spells and movements, use more advanced rigs and most importantly – as I was told many, many times - be very precise with my spots and casting. For example, feeling down the lead, feathering the rig on the cast to prevent tangles, casting very tight to bushes, clipping up (I've hit the trees a lot!), just making and learning little adjustments to my methods to try and bring



I might slag him off all the time but my dear old Dad can catch fish, too!

some better sized fish. During this process I've also had to take risks and learn from my mistakes (just like in my other hobbies such as motocross), like baiting heavily and not baiting up at all, using different hook baits, different rigs etc.

A good few sessions passed and my changes didn't seem to have worked as I was still nailing relatively small carp. During one of those sessions I sat on my chair and thought what am I doing wrong, what do they see that I don't, I was missing something that I couldn't put my finger on. After a good hour of thinking the idea I thought of is maybe trying a longer session, like four to six days solid. This way maybe the fish wouldn't be so spooked from the noise we made setting up for an overnight or weekend trip? I didn't know if it would work but it was worth a shot so I ran it by my Dad and he also thought it was an excellent idea so we planned in the summer to do a five day mammoth



Sitting, thinking, waiting...



Main: Back she goes...
Inset: I owe so much to my Dad for getting me into fishing



when I couldn't control it at all and I just had to hope it didn't snag me. I excitedly called over Bill, who was in the next swim on that occasion, to witness this moment with me, and after an epic fifteen minute fight my dad swooped the net underneath this beautiful fish. We had a look at her and she was an absolute chunk, it was like it was made of pure muscle and a very big fish for the water. I couldn't believe what was happening. We moved her over to the mat and put her up on the scales. Bill looked at me with a big grin on his face and congratulated me as I had just landed my new PB weighing in at 17lb 14oz. The three of us were ecstatic! I threw on my waders and hopped into the water with my lovely prize that I

special to me I could have cried -I think I almost did to be honest!

I couldn't have asked for anything more that week but it just got even better. I bagged five more fish in that week; the biggest was 12lb 10oz and the smallest a lovely little scale-perfect three pounder. The fish were great but so was the banter, chats, laughs and experiences in the bivvy that trip - it was truly the best week of my life and it will certainly never be forgotten. It just shows how much patience and effort pays off. From day one of me starting carp fishing to this magnificent moment of me catching a brilliant sized carp, I have, in my own opinion, come on leaps and bounds with my rigs, baiting up tactics, with how long I can be patient for, and I owe a massive, massive thank you to the Editor and my dear old father Glenn for teaching me everything they know about fishing and talking me through the dark times of me losing fish, not catching anything and sometimes failing.

So that is how carp fishing started for me. Lots of highs but also, like anything, lots of lows! But I push on through those times and I hope to have a long and successful life of carping (and fishing in general!) Thank you for reading, tight lines and wet nets...



session. I was very excited as I didn't know what to expect... I certainly didn't know how special this week session was going to be to me!

THE BEST TRIP OF MY LIFE!

22nd of the March 2016, Easter holidays and the time had come for our week-long session. We arrived down there at about 11:00am on the Monday morning; again our favourite swim the Point was free so we jumped in there. I set up my rods and put my new advanced rigs to my usual spots. One under the bush, one tight to the left

of the bush and my milky-toffee pop-up in open water. This time I spoddied out quite a bit of particle over each spot as I knew I was going to be there for longer and it would give the fish a chance to home in on it. We had nothing that day as it was quite sunny and the majority of the fish were sunning themselves down in the shallows but I was very confident for that night ahead. Very early Tuesday morning at about 3:00am I had a ripping run from the bush, and it turned out to be a lovely 12lb 9oz common. Not the monster I was hoping for but a great result all the same and something I know many Irish anglers would give their right arm for. I chucked the rod back out and collapsed into bed, completely unaware that the next run was going to be very special indeed!

I woke up at about 6:00am just as it was coming light so I could see the sun rise and maybe a few fish showing themselves. After a while I did notice a few fish rolling silently out over my left hand rod in open water and it was only about half an hour later that my rod there absolutely burst into life. As soon as I picked into it I knew I had something special on the end of my rod, it was fighting much harder than any fish I'd hooked here or anywhere else before. It went on mad bursts

had so worked hard for since the previous summer. We got some really wicked snaps and I released her back to scrap another day. My Dad and Bill ran over and give me a really tight group hug and said "well done lad, you deserved it!" This moment was so



A stunning fully scaled



The fish that made it the best week of my life so far! A PB of 17lb 14oz

LimeLight

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Want your fish or photo to appear in the LimeLight? Then either get our attention by posting it with #offthescale #limelight to our social media, send us a PM or email us at editor@offthescaleangling.ie with some brief details!

THE PLACE TO PROUDLY SHOW OFF
YOUR CATCHES AND ANGLING IMAGES



DEAN CONNOLLY landed this monster 27lb 2oz pike on a recent trip to a new water thanks to a bit of preparation. Dean "leaded around" to find a deep hole before casting out his rainbow trout deadbait and received the take from the beast after just an hour. It was a new PB for the Monaghan man. Well done, Dean!

Killinarden Angling Initiative graduate and volunteer **DEAN WARNER** landed his first pike from Lough Ramor in Cavan just before Christmas. The 14lb 12oz fish took ledgered mackerel and was a great early present!



13 year old **RONAN STEELE** made the best possible start to 2017 with this well-conditioned 14lb 6oz pike on New Year's Day. The fish roared off with a ledgered roach and fought long and hard. This is his new PB but he assures us he'll catch a bigger one soon. Good luck, lad!

PAUL MADDEN from Clare has had a great start to 2017 with the capture of this cracking 19lb 12oz river pike. The fish took a jerkbait in 15ft of water and put up a serious account of itself. That's a great fish for anywhere Paul, least of all a small river!



SINK or SWIM?

In-depth, honest and independent product reviews by anglers, for anglers

L Baits scented lures

Scented soft plastics could well be the next big step in modern lure fishing, for certain species anyway, such as perch. Whilst baits infused with some sort of chemical wizardry like Berkley's PowerBait and Gulp! have been around for years, it's safe to say that many have tried and been unimpressed with their results; you certainly hear relatively few anglers proclaiming that they wouldn't go fishing without them, but these handmade lures from L-Baits genuinely do seem to be a bit different.

Latvia probably isn't the first place you think of when it comes to fishing innovations, perhaps until now if results from across Europe are to be believed. The L Baits range comes in a multitude of colours (12), in a number of small (5-6cm) sizes and across

HEAVILY SCENTED SOFT PLASTICS THAT COULD CHANGE YOUR PERCH FISHING!

6 base patterns – loosely described as being worm, paddle tail (Fat Minnow), grub, nymph (creature), frog or fry (Minnow) type imitations. Each purchase gets you 10 baits in a handy re-sealable, airtight plastic pot,



which is just as well because these baits absolutely stink. And therein lies the stand-

out element for the L Baits range – the scent, which is of course a closely guarded trade secret. The official word is, without being cynical, what you'd expect, "natural oil-linked amino acids, enzymes, pheromones, extracts, salt and taste enhancers" In truth this doesn't tell you a whole lot, the secret additive could be almost anything, but it does seem to work!

Apparently the baits are fully digestible to fish.

Independent tests across Europe, including Ireland and our good selves here at Off the Scale, really do think L Baits are onto a winner here. When stockists like Snapbaits, who have a huge variety of baits at their disposal, choose one particular bait for their own fishing over any other you have to take notice. Likewise, our own results,



although certainly not exhaustive, do suggest that these baits can out-fish regular un-scented soft plastics.

We have trialled them on a few short perch sessions, fishing them against our favourite go-to lures, and were honestly surprised at the results. So far they have caught two to three times more perch on average than other lures fished drop-shot

style, but again we would like to clarify, in the interest of fishy science, that we want to do a longer-term test

in different conditions, venues, methods and times of the year to draw any concrete conclusions. Early indications though are promising! The worm pattern in particular seems to be especially good for small pier-dwelling pollock, again when fished against "standard" patterns...

Even for soft plastics these baits are flexible, with good action and are fairly durable, although they won't last forever. We did try these baits out for big wrasse

and whilst we caught fish they absolutely destroyed the baits in one hit, so maybe don't use them for that purpose! In fairness, L Baits market these lures as dedicated perch baits and that is what they are designed for.

The lures don't half hum but what is perhaps more impressive and important is that the baits keep their smell really well. On most scented lures these



days it just washes off! Most soft plastics rely on two things – action and visibility – to attract fish. L Baits add a third dimension to that in the form of scent (for want of a better description; fish don't smell things like us), which means you sort of get the best of both the artificial and natural bait worlds rolled into one. Do they guarantee you catch fish? No, nothing does in fishing but we can't wait to using these more over the coming months, and we will report back on our findings.

Available from:



Elliott the eel book

If you are reading this magazine then chances are you already know the joy of angling; the enviable contact it gives us to the great outdoors, the peace, serenity and excitement it can bring. Chances are you will also be well aware that we need to pass this love and understanding on to the next generation, so they can not only enjoy it but also because anglers are one of the chief protectors and custodians of the aquatic world and all that surrounds it. Sadly, the modern education system places little emphasis on environmental issues and awareness, least of something wet and slimy that swims around.

It is so refreshing then that people like Jason Morgan, author of "The Incredible Journey of Elliott the Eel", have realised this fact and done their best to educate and inform the younger generation. After all, it is evidently very difficult to change an adult's opinion of the world but if people have exposure to



Beautifully illustrated throughout

Nature from an early age then it is ingrained in their minds, forever.

This short children's book seeks to tell the misunderstood story of *Anguilla anguilla*, the European eel, from the fish's point of view. Eel stocks have collapsed across their range in the last few decades (some estimates suggest by up to 95%), due to various factors such as overfishing, pollution, disease, migration barriers and climate change. What

Jason does brilliantly in this book is

A GREAT PRE-SCHOOL AND EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOL BEDTIME STORY THAT CAN'T BE RECOMMENDED HIGHLY ENOUGH

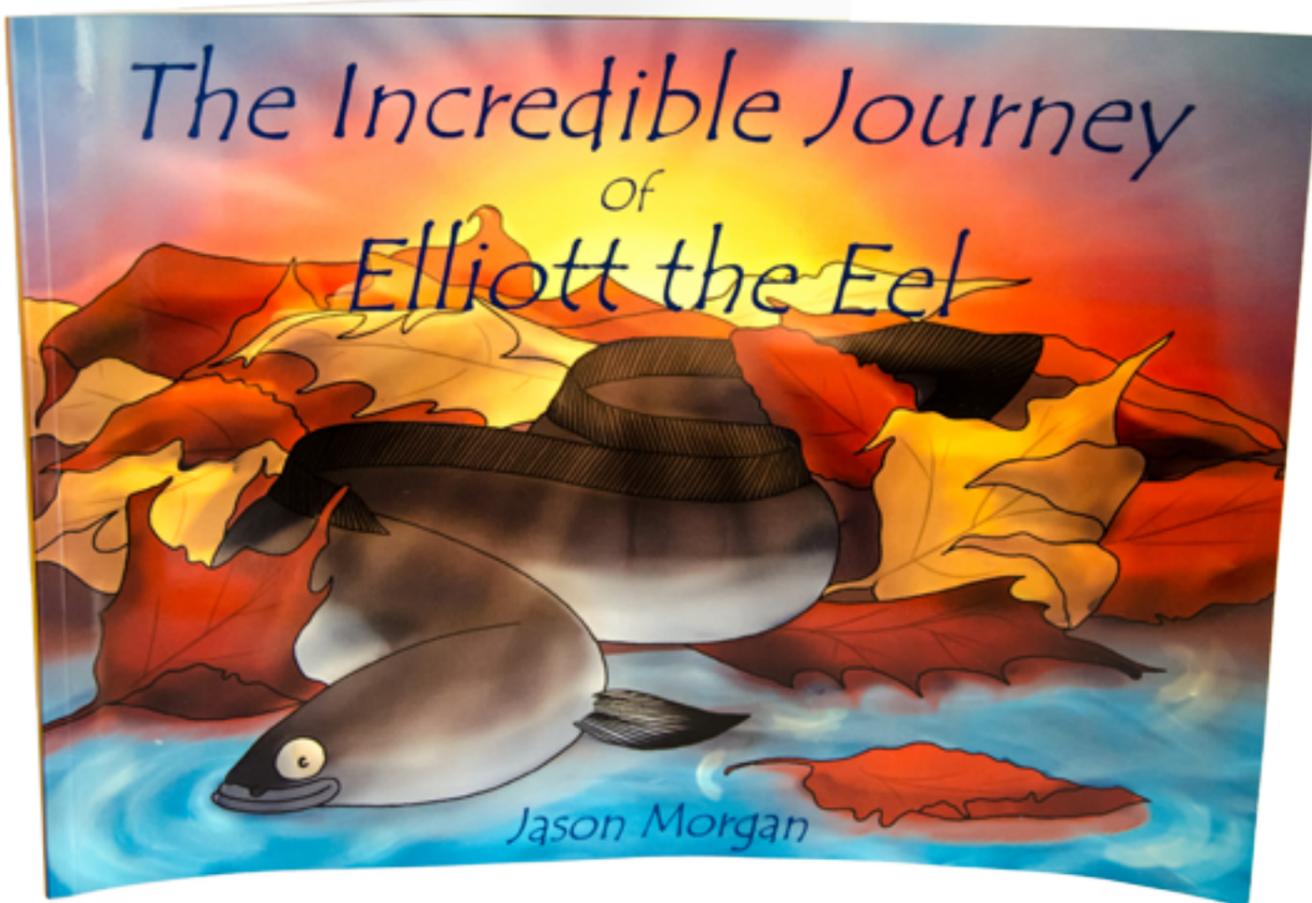
anthropomorphise a much maligned, sometimes feared, serpent-like fish and by doing so bridges the gap that is perhaps most responsible for the lack of care and attention to the species.

This is a great pre-school and early primary school bedtime story that can't be recommended highly enough. An eel's journey, as Elliot himself describes so simply and poetically, is nothing short of amazing – truly one of Nature's great stories. And this book, too, is a great, enjoyable story. It is a tale of adventure, overcoming adversity and the circle of life. Lovingly illustrated, it captivates, educates and inspires children with curious minds. My own daughter (4 years old at the time of writing) loved it and even though I had (as one might expect!) told her and shown her the mysterious eel before, there is nothing quite like seeing a story played out on the pages of a book.

Bankpac portable power station

Like it or not, one of the biggest concerns for many anglers in the modern era is keeping their electronic devices charged up and keeping in touch with the family, friends and work whilst on the bank. Finally we are seeing the end of trudging back to the car to plug our phones into the cigarette lighter socket as portable power becomes more affordable and reliable. Whilst there is now a huge range of convenient (and cheap) power packs and banks available, many are built around lithium ion (Li-ion) and lithium polymer (Li-po) batteries which whilst they provide a quick charge and can themselves be recharged quickly, they are not the best solution to long-term charging demands. Think of laptop batteries, as an example; they are not renowned for lasting more than a couple of years (at best) before they deteriorate and lose their ability to hold a decent charge. Plus, many of the small power banks on the market, whilst definitely useful in emergencies, feature small capacity batteries which might only give you one or two (at best) full phone charges.

So, what's the affordable answer to this problem? Change the battery type from



Available on Amazon
RRP £5.99

Contact Jason Morgan on



lithium ion and so on to good old lead acid, the very same type you have in vehicles. They might take longer to charge and be much bulkier but you will get many more charges for your devices per cycle.

The Bankpac is the brainchild of Cork carp angler Martin Heaney, who was sick and tired of unreliable power solutions. This power pack has been some two years in the making, fine tuning and tweaking not only the design but also the size, to make it as portable as possible. The result is a small 2.6kg lunchbox-sized unit containing a 12v 7Ah motorcycle battery. The box is tightly sealed and provides an IP56 water-resistant rating. It must be noted that whilst the Bankpac is splash and shower proof is it not waterproof! Like any valuable electronic device, try and protect it as best you can. And if you don't then it is fused just in case of disaster.

The Bankpac comes with a dual USB-B socket as standard, with a 1A port suitable for Android devices and 2.1A port suitable for Apple devices, but either will work either device. Pretty much any device with a USB charging port will charge and run off the Bankpac, such as DVD players, tablets etc. Laptops obviously require far more power than such a battery can deliver and are not supported, as with most other packs. There is a single cigarette lighter socket as well, suitable for any device you can plug into one in your car – except an actual cigarette lighter!

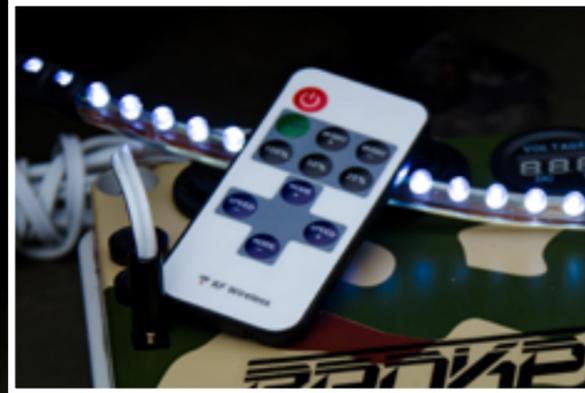
A momentary push on/off LED voltmeter handily displays the remaining charge left in the battery, so you know when to charge it up again. Recharging the battery is via a simple car battery charger or similar (remove battery first) and it is recommended to run the battery down until it won't power any device before charging – the battery's lifespan will be greatly increased with this approach. The Bankpac is powered on or off with a simple sealed rocker switch.

Perhaps the best thing about this product, other than the fact that it is produced here in Ireland, is that custom builds are

A PORTABLE POWER PACK THAT LASTS AND LASTS, BUILT TO YOUR SPECIFICATIONS



You can also purchase a super bright, long lasting LED light strip, complete with IR remote (inset)



available to suit your needs. Think: two batteries for increased power, more charging ports etc.

The version we received for testing also had an optional (at extra cost) inbuilt auxiliary power socket for an LED bivy light strip, which comes complete with a 15m range infrared remote to turn the lights on and off and change the brightness, which on a cold winter night spent in a bivy is a Godsend! The LED strip is seriously bright, too, and not only lights up a large area but also draws very little power meaning even after

the Bankpac is unable to power/charge your devices it can still function as a light.

Early indications are that this unit will provide your smartphone and other devices with many charges. We will be giving the Bankpac a serious workout over the coming weeks and will report back with some exact

CHARGE YOUR PHONE, TABLET, SAT-NAV OVER AND OVER AGAIN ON THE SAME CHARGE



Rated to IP56, the Bankpac is splash-proof, not fully waterproof so be sensible!

charging stats but so far we have had half a dozen full charges (Samsung S5 & Apple iPhone S6), it has run the light strip for approx. 12 solid hours overall and has even acted as an emergency replacement fish finder battery (battery swapped out, obviously) and it still has approx. 70% charge left! The Bankpac charges a Samsung S5 (2800mAh) from flat to 100% in a little over 75 minutes, which is impressive. Whether it comes with you on the bank, boat or just stays in the car there are very few anglers that won't find this product invaluable.

The Bankpac is a great, well made

piece of kit, designed and built by an angler for anglers. Considering this, the customisation options available and the simple longevity of this unit, it is very reasonably priced at €130.

Price from €130; LED lights & remote +€35 extra

Available from:
Martin Heaney
087-6919877



The numbers game by Gary Blake

There has been a growing trend in recent years with more and more anglers embarking on annual species hunts, the aim being to catch as many as possible. Whether as a personal or competitive challenge, it certainly hones your skills as an all-round angler, as **GARY BLAKE** - catcher of no fewer than 56 individual species in 2016 - can testify...

So with the Christmas dinner finally starting to digest, the end of the year is in sight. With only a few days left and not much hope of me getting out fishing until the New Year, it's time to take a look back at 2016 and some of the good fishing I had, to try and cheer myself up and act as a reminder that the nice weather, long days and decent sea fishing will roll around again soon! I competed in plenty of shore and boat competitions and chased the odd specimen-sized fish but what I got completely obsessed with in 2016 was species hunting. Twelve months ago I noticed some Facebook friends posting pictures of fish with a card labelled "Shore and Boat Species Hunt 2016", so I asked them to add me to the group so I could get involved for a bit of fun. Little did I know it would completely change the way I look at fishing and have a huge impact on the way I approached fishing for the rest of the year.

The first session I had back in January was down in Co. Kerry; my fishing buddy Stephen Gibson and I made a break for the Kingdom one Friday afternoon. We had both just had a crazy Christmas period in work and just wanted to get away for

the weekend, if we caught fish it was a bonus. The weather was awful and so was the fishing but I managed 7 species to start off my year species hunting; all small fish but size doesn't matter when collecting species. Looking back, it actually turned out to be a pretty successful weekend for me. I had many sessions like this throughout the year where I might not have caught the biggest of fish or the most amount of fish but I managed to pick up a couple of new species to add to the list. It always made coming home from a long trip a little bit easier whereas in the past I would have basically written it off as a blank.

The winter

was tough for us Irish species hunters in the competition, especially for me on the east coast where a decent fishing trip in winter is when you catch something other than whiting! We were competing against guys on the Channel Islands who were racking up species in January including all the wrasse species which we wouldn't usually get until around May/June time. It was very disheartening and made me think that there's no way I could keep up with them boys. They were even catching species I had never heard of, like Baillon's wrasse, which are a bit like a Corkwing and are more of Mediterranean species. These

guys were good anglers and they had extremely rich fishing grounds on their doorstep, so I knew I had my work cut out for me.

As the summer went on I kept building my species count and managed to take a good lead on the Channel Island lads but then realised that I had much stiffer competition closer to home with my two good pals Evan McGovern and Izaak Bradley from Cork, who were both creeping up the leader board. I spent a lot of time fishing with these two guys this year and became good mates. We had two very memorable boat sessions together in the summer; one with skipper Tom Collins in West Cork where we all caught skate, myself and Izaak

Charters; collectively we had about 40 tope to 30lb, plenty of Bull huss and Smooth hounds and a few Tub and Grey gurnards. That day on board Kit's boat we had the two guys from Cork, two lads from up north and two anglers from Scotland, all chasing species they couldn't get at their own local venues and everyone got what they were after. If only every day was that successful!

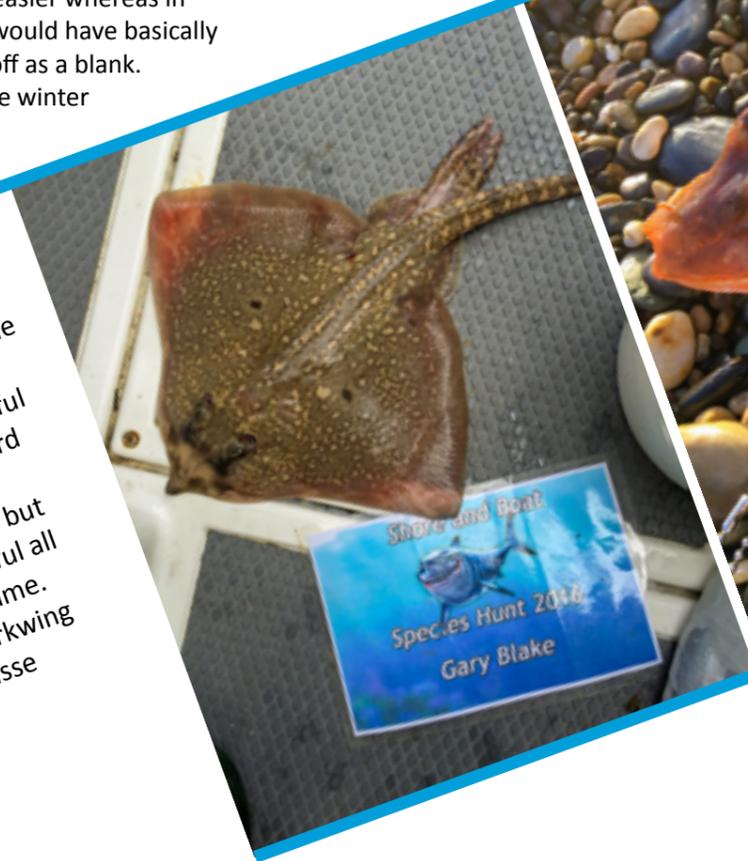
I also did a lot of my species hunting with Michael O'Reilly (previous "Future" contributor in issue 9, see [HERE](#)) who had been holding the 1st place spot on the junior

leader board for pretty much the whole of 2016. Even though he's a youngster I must take my hat off to him; his knowledge of LRF and mini species is second to none and I wouldn't have caught half the mini species I have without him. There wasn't a single session where I didn't hassle him for 'a bit of 6lb flouro' or 'a dropshot lead' or 'a size 16 hook' - he's a lot more prepared than myself

1. A nice boat-caught thornie

2. A beautiful tub gurnard

3. Small but beautiful all the same. A corkwing wrasse



managed 3 blue shark between us, I had a 33lb conger, a ling, mackerel and launce. They all added to the species count nicely. Another session we had was with renowned skipper Kit Dunne from Wicklow Boat

“The LRF played a huge part in my year species hunting. I always had an LRF rod set up in the back of the jeep ready to go... about half of my species were caught on my LRF rod”



4. A big highlight of my season for sure, a cracking Tralee Bay stingray

“ For most anglers, such a small fish would have no meaning to them whatsoever but we were both absolutely buzzing ”

5. A trip when it all went right! A West Cork blue shark caught with the help of skipper Tom Collins

6. Lover of shallow rocky ground, a tompot blenny



I must say! The LRF played a huge part in my year species hunting. I always had an LRF rod set up in the back of the jeep ready to go. As it stands (end of December) I'm on 56 species and just about half of them were caught on my LRF rod. It's very satisfying to go out and target a mini species and actually catch it.

On one marathon session Michael and I had, we drove for four hours to a mark where we suspected we'd find the very rare Red mouth goby. We had an idea where it was but the locals wouldn't give us the exact mark, so we had to pull a sneaky one and zoom in on some pictures and cross check them with the marks we knew. As it turned out, we were bang on the money and first drop down Michael was into a beautifully marked Red mouth goby, and I managed to land one as well just before it got dark.



7. The ever-reliable skipper Kit Dunne got me a smooth hound

For most anglers, such a small fish would have no meaning to them whatsoever but we were both absolutely buzzing. I have to say I've really fallen in love with the mini species around Ireland. Just knowing there are so many different species right down the side of pier walls and in little rock pools is amazing, and to learn

how to successfully target each one is more amazing still.

If you are thinking of taking up species hunting for 2017 be warned; it's extremely addictive! Every week the admin team in the group I was involved with would put up an update on the overall scores and if I saw someone getting near me or

creeping up the leader board I'd be straight out into my Jeep with the gear and gone out to chase something new. One evening I was sitting in with the girlfriend and Michael text me to say he'd found a nest of the elusive Corkwing wrasse. I asked the girlfriend did she fancy going for a walk down the sea front and when we got there I whipped the rod out. She just said, 'I knew you were up to something!' In fairness to me, we did go for a walk but I did also manage to get a small Corkwing after a couple of drops along the wall. I even bought her an ice cream, so everyone was happy.

After my first full year of dedicated species hunting, there are a few tips I would give for anyone looking to do the same, be it for themselves or for a competition:

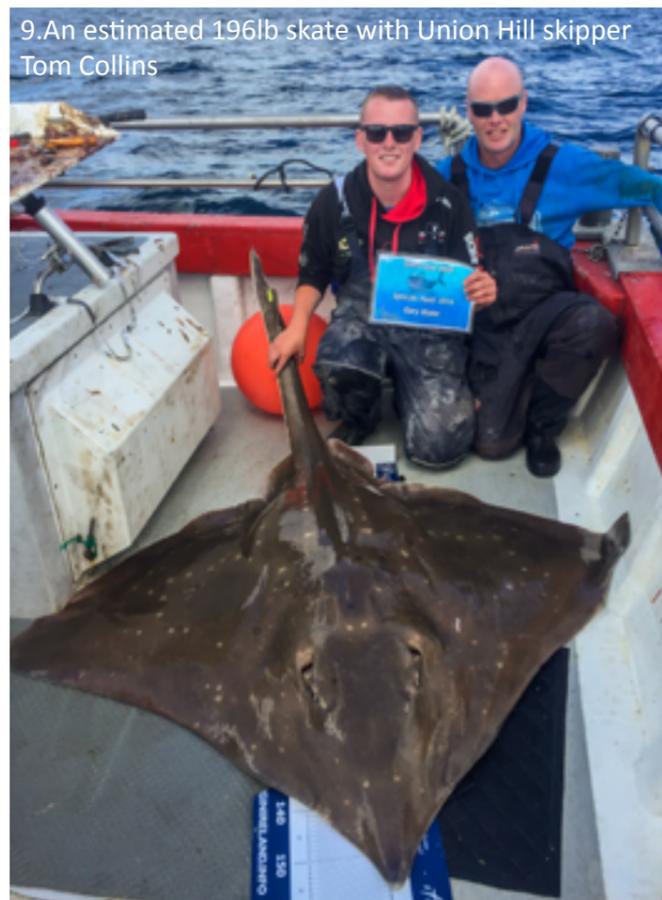


8. I was delighted with this baby porbeagle in September

1 MAKE A LIST! I broke my list into sections; white fish, wrasse, rockling etc. The easiest in each section would go at the top of the list and I worked my way down to the hardest. I think I have a bit of OCD and if I make a check list, I'm not happy until I've ticked everything off. I kept the list over the visor in my van so I could easily keep tabs on what I had caught and what I still needed, which made planning the next trip a bit easier.

2 ALWAYS BRING AN LRF ROD! I always had one set up with mini Sabikis. If I passed a harbour or rockpool I could just pull over and have a quick cast to see what's around. I also kept a small container in my main tackle box full of small hooks, 6lb flouro, small weights etc. That way I was always prepared to fish for mini species even if I was fishing a beach for species like bass and smooth hounds.

3 TALK TO OTHER ANGLERS! I actually found social media a great help. If I was struggling to find a certain species I would often put it out to my Facebook friends and usually the advice would pour in, in droves. Most anglers will pick up mini species and throw them back with no regard but they could be valuable for you in a species hunt scenario. I actually had lads who were actively supporting me by the end of the year, who were always asking how I was getting on and trying to think of more info they could give me, which was very much appreciated.



9. An estimated 196lb skate with Union Hill skipper Tom Collins

4 DON'T BECOME COMPLACENT! I spent a lot of time targeting the harder species and often forgot about some of the easier ones or just thought 'Ah I'll get them along the way'. I did this with the Weever fish, garfish and Painted ray, three species I was "obviously" going to catch along the way but left it too late!

5 TRY YOUR BEST TO FISH MORE THAN ONE ROD! If I was fishing a pier for example I'd have a beach caster out far, a boat rod tight to the wall for rockling and conger and I would be walking around with the LRF rod trying different spots for minis. If I was fishing a beach I'd have a rod out far with a pulley rig or 3 hook flapper and another rod in close usually with smaller hooks trying to pick up weever's, dragonnette's, flounder etc.

6 ALWAYS HAVE SOME RAGWORM! I always had a box of rag with me for the mini species. I found it to be the best all round bait. Many other species hunters always have some worms and other soft plastic lures which probably makes more sense as they are non-perishable but I just always preferred to use rag but you can decide that yourself

10. A rare Gilthead bream

11. A tiny sand goby caught on a size 20 pre-tied hook!



So with only two days left in 2016 as I write this, I may only get out for a few hours to try for a last minute Painted ray but if I don't my final score will be 56. I can't complain as my target back in January was 40 which has been well and truly smashed. My pal Evan is leading the way on 59 and Michael is leading the juniors with 46. I would advise anyone to give it a go whether you're a complete mackerel-bashing beginner or a seasoned match angler, species hunting will make you a much better all round, adaptable angler.

Until next time, thanks for reading,



Note: Gary did indeed finish on 56 species for the calendar year of 2016, a remarkable achievement but one that incredibly was bettered by Evan McGovern who managed to catch 59 individual species. Michael O Reilly managed to hold on to 1st place in the junior side of the competition, racking up 47 fish species.



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To find a **PIKE...**

Words & photography by
NATHAN EDGELL

...You must think like a PIKE



Left: Taking it all in on a glorious winter's morning. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else...

Right: I have been lucky enough to travel around the British Isles to talk about pike fishing! Like all of them, this talk I did in Northern Ireland inspires me in knowing that there are many anglers out there just as passionate as me

I always consider it an honour and a privilege to be asked to contribute to any magazine but I must admit I'm very pleased to be asked to once again appear in *Off The Scale* as I've been hugely impressed with the exceptional quality of every issue so far, so special thanks to the editor, Bill.

Firstly, I hope readers had a great Christmas and an even better New Year, I certainly did and here we are now in 2017 so for this issue I'm going to look at locating and catching river predators, notably pike as they are by far my favourite species.

So rivers then, well I absolutely love every single thing about them. Wild, harsh and challenging - and that's putting it lightly in my experience. They do, however, have some real untapped potential for truly great fighting fish and river pike are excellent at evading detection. I once read "*that rivers are the life blood of the land*" and I love that quote. Rivers are everywhere and historically people would always choose to settle near them which is why we find them flowing through our cities, towns and villages. Therefore, everyone knows at least one or drives over them, perhaps taking them for granted to a certain extent, but ask yourself how far are you from your nearest river? All too often when it comes to fishing flowing waters for pike I often hear "but there's no pike in them" or "we can't get access" or perhaps sadly in this day and age "the pike have all been eaten". Of course there is no smoke without fire, as they say, and this perhaps is true to a certain extent, but, obviously, depending on where you are, it may or may not apply. It's worth noting that all these same problems can apply to still waters as well. My experience

though is that pike are certainly in most rivers and, contrary to popular beliefs of the serious, dedicated and even pleasure anglers alike, guess what? - you can definitely catch them!

Over the last three years I have, through my fishing, travelled pretty much the whole of the British Isles and completed twenty slideshow presentations for various pike angling clubs, including two in Northern Ireland and two in Scotland. I've loved every single road trip and the experiences I've gained really warm my spirit and inspire me as I know there are hundreds of people out there that are just as passionate about this beautiful game as I am.

The people I've met, fished with and spoken to have led to me conclude that the majority of people do not fish rivers, certainly not consistently anyway and this to a certain extent is understandable. The majority of anglers have limited time available to them (myself included) and due to other responsibilities such as family and work they are lucky if they can get one day a week. Therefore, when they get the opportunity to go they have to really capitalise on that opportunity and so most head off to managed still waters where the fishing is, dare I say it, "easier". Perhaps not easier in the sense of catching lots of fish but certainly easier in the sense of better conditions, parking, access, facilities,



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managed swims, clarity and an absence of flowing water, all of which makes for easier fishing - well in theory anyway! Rivers by comparison can be far more difficult to approach and more often than not aren't necessarily the place to turn up, throw out some baits and sit back and wait for a run. They are subject to more stochastic factors that bring a whole range of challenges and you rarely, if ever, get the same day twice.

So for this issue I decided to concentrate on three things that might really help readers catch a few more fish or that

extra special one. These three things are simply location, location, and, yes, location! However, before moving on to seriously look at location I wonder if I asked you what were your two best weapons to catch predators? What would your response be? Let's make the question easier; forget about rods, reels, braids, mono's and the tens of thousands of lures, baits and rigs that are available to us. Forget about fish finders, echo sounders, underwater cameras and all the latest must-have gadgets and gizmos, oh and the £400 sunglasses and branded clothing range.

What are the two most important weapons in the predator angler's armoury? For me the answer is simple; the two best weapons you can have are dedication and enthusiasm. I can't stress this enough, be dedicated and be enthusiastic because in my experience by being dedicated and enthusiastic you will produce that final ingredient that allows the same anglers to consistently catch fish whatever the species they target and that is luck. Luck, a small word but it means a huge deal and the dedicated, enthusiastic angler will make lots of it. Obviously it stands to reason that the more you put in then the more you get out, but it's the continual learning of craft and practice that is acquired along the way that separates the men from the boys.

Of course this sounds quite arrogant

and even egotistical, and I'm sure many of you are happy just catching fish of any size. Well, guess what – me too! Hand on heart, I only leave home with but one target and that is simply not to blank. I love catching fish of any size; I really do, big or small I love them all.

To be consistent then is the key for me and contrary to popular belief it's not always the person who spends the most time on the bank who consistently catches. After all, five minutes in the right place can beat the person who fishes for five hours elsewhere; but why? Very simply one word and that is location.

So let's look at location in detail as a huge part of my fishing is about reading the water and knowing where to cast and, just as importantly, where not to. When reading water, be it still or flowing, there are *always* signs to look for. Firstly, we should consider the needs of fish. These are very basic and these needs will always determine where they are likely to be found. Fish of any species, including predators, have three basic needs - food, shelter and a habitat which will support their physical needs – such as well-oxygenated water or somewhere to lie in wait without expending loads of energy unnecessarily, for example.

When I first started lure fishing my favourite lure was the Storm brand of *Wild Eye* roach, perch and pike and they used to have a slogan on the packet which read "*think like a fish, no matter how weird it gets*" It used to make me laugh but there is a huge deal of truth in that phrase and, joking aside, as anglers it is exactly what we should do. These basic requirements considered, the

“ What are the two most important weapons in the predator angler's armoury? For me the answer is simple; dedication and enthusiasm ”



Left: Big or small I love them all! This one fell for a 220g Fladen Trout

Right: Know your quarry; learn its behaviours and habitats and success will come

Bottom right: A very simple float rig for deadbaits. Despite what you are constantly told, rigs are not the be all and end all!



“ a huge part of my fishing is about reading the water and knowing where to cast and, just as importantly, where not to ”

wise angler will also consider and take into account the very character of *Esox lucius* and the time of year, both of which will have a significant bearing on location. Of course, no two still waters or rivers are the same and this is a subject that I would love to write more about in the future but for now it's suffice to say that you will have to take a logical approach of the waters that you fish and put the pieces of the jigsaw together yourselves. That in itself is great fun and part of a fantastic journey which will allow you to formulate a standard approach to locating predators on any water.

So overall, a trip to

a river or still water is then but a series of choices and it's natural to want to get the favourite lure or bait on and just cast out. However, I would urge patience, difficult I know with obsessed, fish-mad fanatics but maybe take five minutes and just observe the surroundings; it's amazing how much you can learn if you take a few moments to study your water. But, what exactly are we looking for?



Visual signs

Hopefully you've all seen a shoal of baitfish or fry exploding in all directions from the surface, which of course is a sure sign of a feeding pike attack - it doesn't get much more visual than that! Also, sometimes you can spot the wave created by water displacement of a moving fish. If you're quiet and stealthy enough you can also spot fish lying up and then you can cast directly to them.

Unlike with many other species, visual signs in my experience really don't give much reward in piking terms. If pike are chasing fry then they are normally so switched on to that food source that they tend to ignore everything else, unless you can "match the hatch", to coin the fly fisherman's phrase. Targeting a moving fish or a fish you've spotted doesn't tend to get a take as these fish aren't really feeding although it's always worth a try but be prepared to be frustrated.

Features

One of my pet hates is a statement I hear said and quoted lots, normally by "experts", who tell us that "pike will always follow the bait fish" Whilst this may be true to a certain extent on still waters it certainly isn't the case on rivers. Believe me it is extremely rare to even spot a pike in a river (and the ones I fish are probably clearer and shallower than most) let alone see one swimming up and down the river following bait fish.

River pike are opportunistic experts in ambush and the very best at evading detection, and the most important factor in their survival is a safe location. Once this location has been found a pike will sit in it expending very little energy except for the amount of energy expended in defending it against other predators. Safe places in rivers are limited which is why we often find pike grouped up, especially at certain times of year. Once the location has been found river pike will then wait for the opportunity to feed when it presents itself. After all, if I told to you to go and live in the wild right now would the first thing you look for be a Big Mac? No, it would be shelter, protection and safety from the elements and only once you had this only then you would consider food.

So, when targeting pike in rivers, features are really what we are after and there are so many different types, from standard ones in all rivers to specific and unusual features such as one mid-double pike I knew that used to lie up against an old washing machine that had been dumped in a town stretch of river I used to fish. Predators and prey use features for different reasons and at different times of the year so it's important to build up a working knowledge of your local waters. Reading, spotting and targeting features is vital if you want to consistently catch fish so let's look at some of the typical features to look for on flowing waterways.

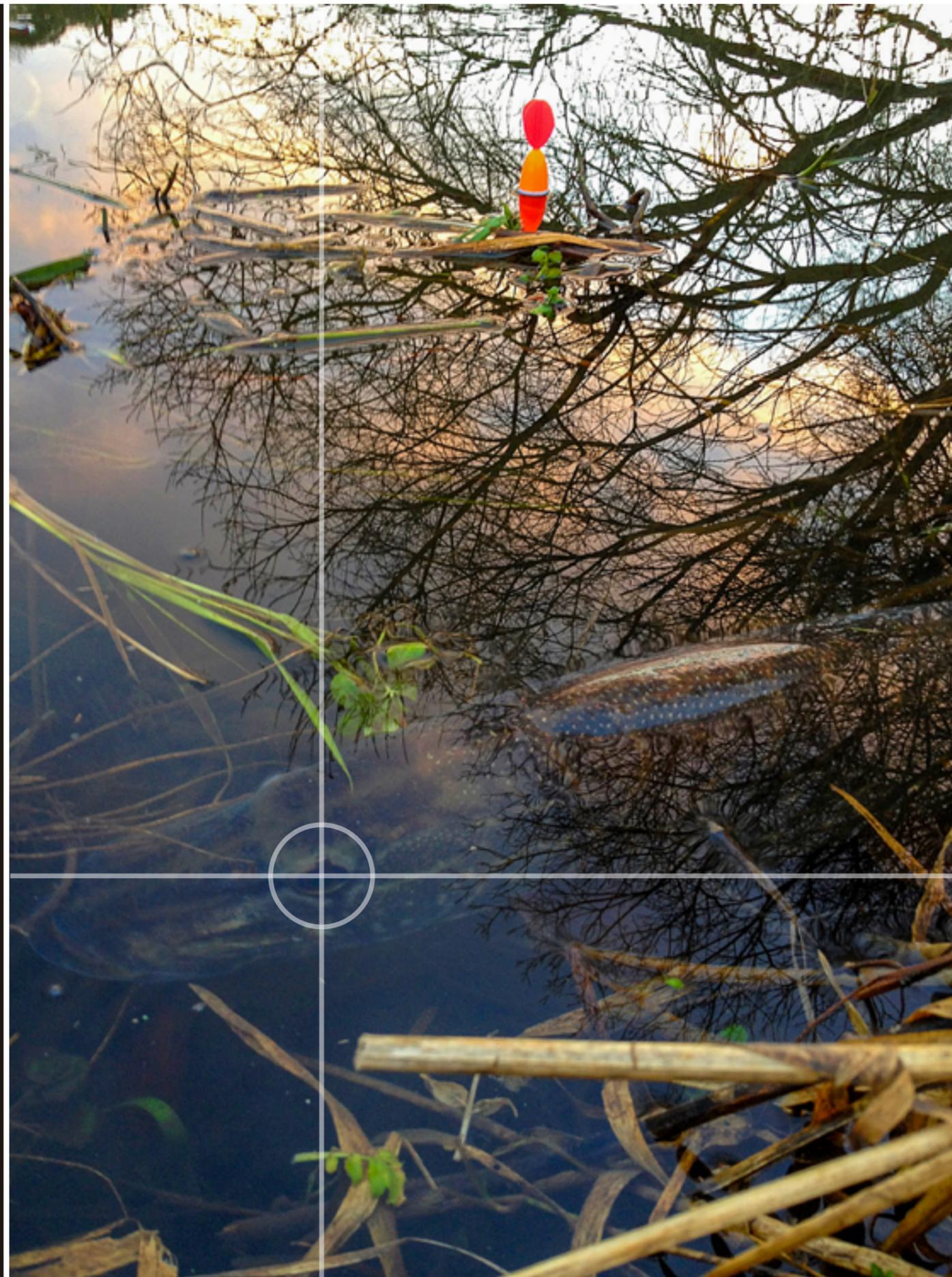


I love a weir! Weirs are fantastic features and probably my most favourite feature if I had to choose one. Weirs typically hold some resident pike most of the time but they also act as a bit of a "larder" as they tend to hold good numbers of bait fish and consequently different pike will move up the river at different times of the day to feed before returning to their safe location or haunt. They are one of the only places that I tend to fish statically for longer than five minutes or that I will return to later in the session. Well-oxygenated water sometimes with a fast flow can produce pike, or even the so-called white water (high flow areas, with surface foam) as they tend to predate on anything that comes over, or moves to go up, the weir sill. You will find pike everywhere but in particular the slacker areas of water around the edges of the weir. Another hot spot on weirs that I always tend to target is the area at the entrance of the weir where the river returns to its normal state - the tail end of the pool - as this is where pike also lie up waiting to ambush any fish moving into or down the weir.



Bottom left:
Weirs are probably my favourite feature. They are the classic pike swims and invariably hold fish

Right: A nice double resting up not far from where I caught her. Never ignore the margins, anywhere!





tend to hold up in the slacker areas near the main flow and bridges sometimes create these areas by funnelling the water so always be on the lookout for areas of calmer water.

“ If you take one thing from this article then it should be to fish the margins. Margins, margins, margins! ”



These are a classic feature and one that always screams pike. Pike in mill pools can often be lazier due to the fact that your almost fishing a still water and therefore fish will not only be located around the edges but holding bottom also, provided it's a pool with decent depth. In my experience, due to the lack of water movement the pike may be more likely to "switch on" in a feeding window rather than being opportunistic like real fast water river fish, so try different times of the day and see if you can establish a feeding pattern. Mill ponds can produce very big fish.



If you take one thing from this article then it should be to fish the margins! Margins, margins, margins! You will find more pike here than anywhere else in any river, so never overlook them. Approach every swim with caution, stay a rod length back and start from there. First cast for me is always left up the marginal line and then right again down the margins. I repeat this a couple of times before ever beginning to think about the rest of the river. Another of my pet hates is observing anglers who walk straight up



Bridges of any type are another good feature to always checkout but especially ones that have pillars within the waterway itself. They are also, classically, a real hotspot for perch and the first thing to note is the lack of weed under the bridge due to the lack of direct sunlight reaching the water, so presentation is always easier although the cast may not be! I've had some fantastic pike and perch from under bridges and if they have pillars in the water then the areas of slack water always created downstream of them will invariably hold fish. Pike, being ambush predators, typically

Left: Consider location seriously. Some places just scream pike, like this large weirpool which offers everything a pike could want, whilst others are more subtle

Bottom left: All bridges attract fish but ones with in-stream pillars are especially attractive. The slack water created downstream of these are the places to concentrate on

Right: Never, ever ignore the margins! Back eddies off the main-flow like this one are natural lies for any predator



Bends in rivers always have the potential to be prime pike lies because of the eddies and slack water on the inside and outside of the bends, respectively. They tend to have one deeper side and I know a fantastic river bend which in the winter is a real holding spot and has done numerous twenty pound pike in depths of 12-14ft in a river which probably has an average depth of 7-8ft along its entire length. A crease is a gentler area of water normally created by



Often a rarer feature in our rivers but still worthy of a mention as again they can hold fish, particularly at the head and definitely at the tail end of the island. The channels either side can hold fish if it's deeper and not too fast flowing but always concentrate at the downstream end of an island as again slacker water is created and provides a great ambush point for pike.



Wherever water enters a river from another source – be it a side channel, tributary or ditch - it creates a real hot spot and one to concentrate on. Usually it is a more oxygenated area and it will attract prey fish and you can bet that good old Esox won't be too far behind. Look for tributary streams and confluences (places where two rivers meet), outflow pipes and the like. Also, keep in mind that when the river is in flood the usually shallow side channels and tributary streams are where pike move up to seek refuge. Ditches and dead end back end channels are again excellent places to locate pike especially when the river is in flood but at all times of the year. Ignore them at your peril.



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Cover

A small word which covers (no pun intended!) a huge range of features which can include moored boats, over hanging trees and bushes, weed beds, lily pads, sunken trees, even old washing machines as mentioned above! Predators and prey will use cover for different reasons and as a rule of thumb pike will always be out of the main flow in the slacker area's just nudging into the main flow. Weed beds and lily pads will provide cover and even in the winter when the growth has died off they still provide enough of a feature (roots) to hide an ambush predator. Find what areas in your river have sufficient cover and target these areas and hopefully you will see some results.

“ as a rule of thumb pike will always be out of the main flow in the slacker area's ”

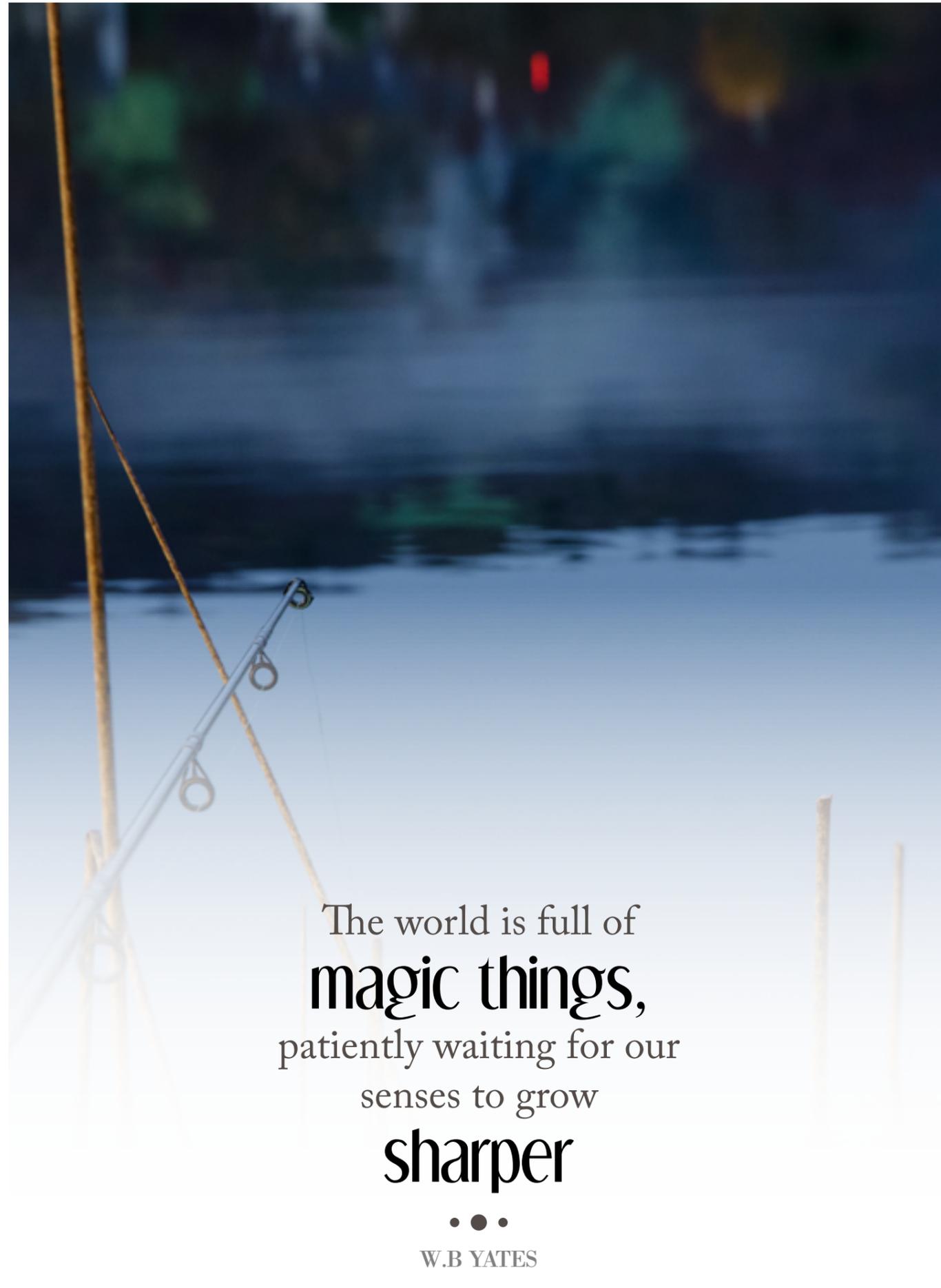
Finally I'd like to conclude by saying this is not an exhaustive list and it would be quite possible to write so much more on this subject. You may have noted already that the above are just common, universal features that can apply to most rivers. These are also obvious features that we can see with our own eyes but of course under the surface it's a whole new world and there is another host of underwater features that are obscured from our view. Deep holes and drop offs (in fact any sudden change in depth) could potentially be a prime lie for a pike. Rocks, depressions, sunken boats, old trees, channels and gullies; the list goes on. Hopefully I've got you thinking – thinking like a pike - about the features in your waters and how to search them out more thoroughly, methodically and successfully. I, for one, wish you all the best in figuring it out.

Tight lines,



Left: Any water coming into a river, such as this small tributary, are worth a look all year round

Below left: To catch the pike sometimes you have to think like and even become the pike... It worked for this nice mid double anyway!



The world is full of
magic things,
 patiently waiting for our
 senses to grow
sharper

• • •
 W.B YATES

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