

Issue 16

May - Jun 2017

Off the
Scale



Casting a new eye on angling

Editorial

I hope this issue finds you in good form, that you have caught plenty of fish so far this season and that you have plenty more to look forward to. Hopefully in some small way this magazine can help, inform and or inspire you to get out on the bank or water and enjoy what we all love most. It's been a strange few weeks, with unseasonably dry and warm weather. Our rivers desperately need rain, and soon, to avoid further deterioration in water quality. Flowing waterways and their fish stocks take a massive hit in general, with most agricultural run-off ending up running through them (pollution) and barriers like ill-conceived weirs and dams blocking migratory pathways. Gary Robinson pips in with a very poignant, as usual, article in this issue about the latter (pg25). If we want any fish left for the next generation then things must change radically at both political and planning level.

Add to these issues above, we have seen in recent days the discovery of a growing population of coypu, a large rodent, the size of a medium dog, on Corks River Lee. As if that river, in particular, didn't have enough problems! They had previously been sighted on the nearby Curraheen, a small tributary. From a scientific point of view, non-native species such as coypu will generally (not always) become naturalised in time as nature is highly adaptable. However, it is the often enormous initial shock the ecosystem that causes big problems. Sometimes it never recovers and is certainly never the same again. Coypu are able to reproduce at a phenomenal rate, burrow large tunnels into riverbanks encouraging erosion and siltation and, being herbivores, consume not insignificant quantities of vegetation. None of this is good news for a river already so heavily impacted by invasive species (like Japanese knotweed & Himalayan balsam) and human activity.

We also have had desperately worrying confirmation of an outbreak of crayfish plague on the River Suir, one of our last remaining great Brown trout rivers. White-clawed crayfish are native to Ireland and Irish waters represent perhaps the best environment remaining for them in the whole of Europe. They are an integral part of healthy natural ecosystems, basically cleaning up and recycling dead and decaying vegetable and animal matter in lakes and rivers. Through what can only be classed as a lack of national biosecurity, a

fungal infection has spread and threatens to wipe out the entire Suir population. This would be a travesty and although work is underway to contain the outbreak, the words "horse" and "bolted" spring to mind...

As anglers we are often the only custodians of waters, fresh and salt. Very few others will care about a creepy looking crayfish, a giant river rat or a slimy old fish that can't get upriver. But we know different, and realise the importance of all of this in the overall context of life. Nature is life, of course and without it we wouldn't be here. Worst of all we wouldn't have anything to fish for! (joke)

We have another super issue for you with material on carp, sea angling by boat & shore, how and what fish hear, a fish artist, one of the UK's shining coarse match angling stars (and it's a girl!), tackle reviews, a great piece by Jim Clohessy on how anglers and scientists can work together for the greater good and an excellent story of adventure in Iran, of all places. Where else would you get it? Enjoy!

Peace,



Off the Scale

CASTING A NEW EYE ON ANGLING

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Acknowledgments

A huge thanks and well done to Issue 16 contributors Alex Chew, Gary Blake, Gary Robinson, Angela Patchell, Barry Murphy, Katie Crooks, Chris O Sullivan, Jim Clohessy and Sam Wadman.

As always, thank you to all the people behind the scenes and to our advertisers for their continued support. And lastly, thank you, valued reader, for your interest.

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

Cover shot: Sam Wadman with a stunning and enigmatic King Barbus from Iran

Photo credit: Sam Wadman

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ISSUES 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 AND 14

IRELAND'S #1 ANGLING MAGAZINE

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84 (A5) pages of the best material from the past year of digital issues - **PRINTED!**



The antics of a *carpaholic*

Pt.1

BEING A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE NORTHERN IRELAND CARP SOCIETY (NICAS) DOESN'T LEAVE MUCH TIME FOR SERIOUS ANGLING BUT THIS WINTER **ALEX CHEW** DECIDED TO START A CAMPAIGN ON A NOTORIOUSLY TRICKY WATER. LET'S JUST SAY HIS RESULTS WERE PRETTY OUTSTANDING, BUT WHY?

So, despite my reservations, I've finally taken the plunge and I'm back behind the keyboard, this time writing for Off the Scale. Really, I'm still not sure how Bill talked me into this one! Okay, this isn't me blowing smoke up anyone's rear end, as those that know me will tell you that ain't my style - I'm straight to the point and quite often straight to the jugular, or scrotum, whatever comes first to hand - but every issue Bill and the contributors put their heart and soul into making this a great read, diverse, conducive and impartial. I respect that and for that reason solely I have agreed to provide an input. So, I may up my game, get my creative hat on, keyboard warmed and kettle on.

So, as you can guess from the title, my writings each issue will be purely carp orientated. I must add that this is not going to be the usual in-session narrative that we read all too often these days. Quite honestly that type of literature has grown old on me and I suspect most of you too. So, what the hell am I going to do? Well, hopefully, over the coming months you'll get an insight into my piscatorial life, a holistic overview of everything that I do to bring success in my own angling and that of others through my trials and tribulations as Chairman of the Northern Ireland Carp Anglers Society (NICAS).

Let's roll back the calendar a little, to Christmas Day morning 2016. Location: my living room, with my good lady. "What the frig is that?" says the bride with a face like a well-spanked spaniels ass. Unfazed, I continued unwrapping a self-bought angling item of pure indulgence, totally unnecessary but I rationalise my purchases by telling myself that we all need a little bit of a treat now and again - don't we? "New pod" I replied in a hesitant tone but with a grin like a Cheshire cat. Next question is one we males are all too familiar with and dread. "How much was that?" "A small fortune" I replied, still grinning. She reads the card statements so there's no point in lying, plus she'll read this article anyway! "What's the point in having all that fishing gear when all you do is society work for others?"

As always, she was right! Her words sunk deep within my angling sole, shuddering me to my core and

brought home the realisation that I spend more time facilitating NICAS than I do actually going fishing! As I ogled my new toy my brain ticked over, full of doubt, and a question burned from within me; do I still have it? The drive, determination, and skills necessary to put some of the most elusive carp in Ireland on the bank! Before leaving to beautify herself in readiness for the festive day she kindly told me to grow some balls and get out there. Much like me, my better half is a straight-talker, although she has a better right hook so I sat quietly admiring my new angling gadget and pondering my next move.

My winter proving ground

Christmas Day was obviously a wake-up call and after much deliberation I had convinced myself to start a winter campaign, which for those of you that haven't done the long, cold, lonely, dark nights of winter, honestly, it's brutal! Even the most hardened angler can become disillusioned with the monotonous inactivity that winter brings, but the rewards are there for those that persist and I am one seriously persistent person when I get something in my head. On Boxing Day morning I was, as usual, doing my bailiff rounds at Swanhole Lake (one of our club waters) and was deep in thought, trying to justify my decision and contemplating where to start and how to go about my winter adventure. As I plunged my hands into the frigid water, clearing weed from the sluice gate, I peered across the wind-swept lake in the hope that one may just poke it's head out in defiance.

Now, for those that aren't familiar with Swanhole, or Swanny as it is affectionately known, it's a smidge under 11 acres, has an average depth of approximately 5 feet and is choked with weeds of all types, which makes fishing virtually impossible for almost 8 months of the

year. Above all else, it's a formidable opponent for even the most seasoned carp angler. In truth, nobody has ever got amongst the carp in any great number, although they are present in reasonable quantities. The stock consists of approximately 150 residents with sightings of the occasional lump and a lake record of just under 22lb, which incidentally hasn't graced the bank for years!

Typically, I didn't see a single carp during my rounds, just the fifty odd swans that so aptly give the lake its name. They seemed quite content massacring the last of the standing weed and churning the water to a light brown in their quest for food. Their feeding frenzy does have its benefits, as they expose the bloodworm, snails and rich silt, which forms the majority of the lake bed, thus presenting anglers the opportunity to present a bait amongst the natural food. Now, carpers have historically done well on this lake in late winter, however, due to work, family and NICAS commitments I have never been able to dedicate enough time to reap the rewards. It was at that point that the cog turned in my head and the pieces fell into place; Swanny would be my new winter home and self-proving ground.

Prior preparation prevents poor performance, the five P's. Life lessons, in my opinion, and something that we should all adopt in our piscatorial pursuits. Well, if we want to be successful, that is. The bait for my little campaign was, strangely, possibly the easiest decision I would need to make. Maggots had been the go-to winter feast for the carp - easy! Now for the hard bit, location! There is absolutely no point in turning up at a lake and just chucking in bait, you need to do your homework and my God I was going to make sure that I did mine. Over the next four to five days leading up to the New Years celebrations, I walked the lake looking

IN TRUTH, NOBODY HAS EVER GOT AMONGST THE CARP IN ANY GREAT NUMBER, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE PRESENT IN REASONABLE QUANTITIES



for any sort of signs that would give away my quarry's location. Nothing. As always during this investigative period I had my marker rod with me, loaded with braid, a big 6 oz lead and my wrap sticks and, despite a lack of carp sightings, I was beginning to build a picture of the lake topography, all of which was being logged in my little red book.

By the 30th of December, I had worn both the soles of my boots and a hole in my finger stall. Reality dawned, this was going to be a challenge! I watched the swans bob up and down, asses in the air, feeding quite contentedly on the weed and invertebrates that lived amongst its masses. The areas where they were arsing about were relatively weedy. In fact, some of the weed was still green and contained a host of natural food, even in the depths of winter. The penny dropped - the swans were feeding on the fresh weed, which just so happened to contain the majority of the natural food! I needed to follow the swans around the lake to discover the honey spots, so that's what I did. My evenings over the next week or so were spent in the pissing rain, stalking the swans. Obviously, I made a note of the areas that the swans frequented and recorded it all in my ever faithful logbook. What quickly became apparent was that the richer areas of weed were generally in the slightly deeper water in close proximity to the swans honey spots. These areas are approximately 5.75 - 6.5 ft and most importantly too deep for the swans to reach. Eventually I found 11 areas in three swims that

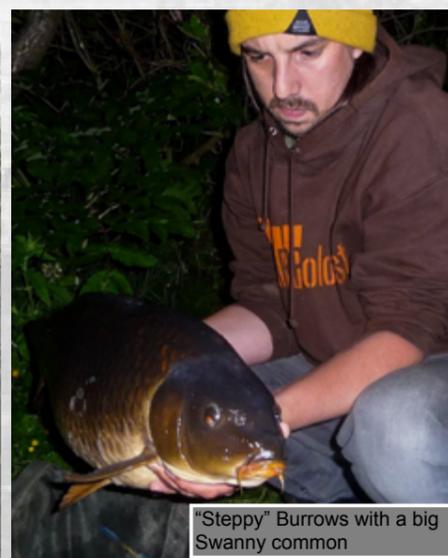


I WANTED TO BE SURE THAT I WAS ON THE SLIGHTLY WARMER WINDS AND OFF THE BITING COLD WINTER NORTHERLIES THAT POUND THIS COASTAL LAKE, OFTEN MAKING IT UNBEARABLE TO EVEN THE MOST DETERMINED ANGLER.

tool in the box, blonde hair and all that, but even I know that no matter what bait I'm introducing, it's better to do it on a little and often basis. Softly, softly, catch the carp, if you get what I mean. For whatever reason, this is especially prevalent when using any sort of natural bait, in this case, maggots. I personally think this is to do with how naturals populate an area of the lake bed. After all, they don't normally appear overnight, do they? I wanted to replicate how they form their colonies, natural feeding spots for carp, maturing in readiness for harvest. By mid-January, it was just me, the swans, rain, cold, wind and at times snow on the lake, oh and my little wrigglers. By now they were being introduced between my three swims three pints at a time, three times a week. On each occasion, I spent half an hour watching and listening for carp activity before unloading the wrigglers as it's best not to disturb the carp whilst there having a munch, if possible! Over the next four weeks, I persistently fed all three swims, slowly increasing the quantity by a pint per swim per week. Further to this, I leaved around in each swim once a week which told me what I wanted to know; the spots were getting clearer and my tactics were working. The secret squirrel in me was in full motion by now and all my activities were restricted to night time whenever possible, and always on my lonesome. This consciousness of other anglers watching me and potentially twigging onto my areas made me super paranoid. Make no mistake though, paranoia is a good



Simple Scale at 21lb, uncaught for 4 years!



"Steppy" Burrows with a big Swanny common

just screamed carp. So, with the spots found it was now time to let the baiting begin!

Now, it's important that you never put all your eggs in one basket, no sir, keep your options open, especially when you're starting a baiting campaign. One-mindedness can spell disaster for a number of reasons which we will cover later on. The three swims that I had chosen all lay on the southern or western shorelines. This was not coincidental; I wanted to be sure that I was on the slightly warmer winds and off the biting cold winter northerlies that pound this coastal lake, often making it unbearable to even the most

determined angler. Additionally, they were not the closest to the car park either, nor the most comfortable and so this would perhaps provide relief from the still active carper's that by this stage of the year were seriously struggling for results. There had been just two carp out in three months. Tough going, for sure. Was I bloody mad? Pondering my own sanity did creep in, I won't deny it. The doubt was very real, although short-lived, and despite my demons I knew deep down that my efforts would reap the rewards, I just had to move onwards to stage two of the plan, applying some bait.

I may not be the sharpest



My approach was maggots, maggots & more maggots!

thing (sometimes!) and by the end of four weeks baiting I was most definitely that. In the words of Joseph Heller, "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you!" Believe me, this attitude will pay dividends, as all anglers are dirty pigs and we all want to catch, or perhaps that's just me, Mr Paranoia!

Picking the perfect moment

Now I am sure we can all relate to this activity, weather watching. I spent most of my time doing just this between meetings in work, so what was I watching for? Now, as much as I love bright, sunny, calm winter days this is not what my scaley opposition enjoy, not at all. They love nothing more than a big dirty southerly wind with intermittent showers and when I saw the long range weather maps and the start of what became known as Storm Doris, all the pieces of the puzzle were coming together nicely. The weather was going to be perfect for a first hit. A big south westerly was coming, low air pressure, lots of rain and relatively mild air temperatures for that time of year, with 7°C during the daytime and 3°C at night which for the middle of February is rare this far north. The date was set for my first session.

Five weeks or more of pre-baiting over 70 pints of wrigglers and I had an issue, which friggin' swim? They all looked prime! Remember, two are located on the south western shoreline and one just off the western corner. All had about six feet of water, so the swans can't get at my rigs and all had evidently become clearer as a result of my prior preparations. Oh decisions, decisions. What I can tell you is that in all my time preparing the areas I never once saw a single fish show, not one! My mind was in overdrive, torn by the options presented and so I decided to have a lead about in daylight. My inner secret squirrel was foraging away but I had to be sure of what was out there, perhaps I could even disturb a few fish whilst thrashing water to a foam with my marker lead, as at least this would provide me with an indication of their location. Well, I need not have worried, as one swim, in particular, stood out. It wasn't that it was clearer than the rest, nor was it identified



A stunning, scaley Swanny mirror - a story for next time...

HHZ I SAW THE LONG RANGE WEATHER MAPS AND THE START OF WHAT BECAME KNOWN AS STORM DORIS, ALL THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE WERE COMING TOGETHER NICELY. THE WEATHER WAS GOING TO BE PERFECT FOR A FIRST HIT.

by disturbing fish or sighting them. My once numerous spots had now combined, forming one big forty by fifteen yard patch, and around the fringe of this area was massive natural bloom of invertebrates, snails and bloodworm, possibly due to the fact that the swans can't reach them. Additionally, the weed was a beautiful light green colour telling me that even at this early stage of the season new growth was present and I was surely on the money.

February 16th would be the start of my first three night session. Storm Doris was on her way. Baiting had to continue, I couldn't relent. My shoulders would ache as I walked up the path back to my car from the repetitive workout, however, despite my discomfort I knew that I was getting closer to the moment of truth and I couldn't wait to wet a line. By the evening of the 9th I was confident of my swim choice, for a few reasons. Firstly, I had been focusing 80% off the wrigglers in my now first choice swim and secondly, upon my arrival a massive show of carp was taking

place. It lasted 20 minutes or so and in all thirty or more carp had been sighted to upper doubles, perhaps even low twenties. Obviously no pre-bait went in that day and instead I opted to top up the other swims and return the following morning before work to replenish the now special spot.

Well, that saw my prior preparations close out on a high. Little did I know what "preventing poor performance" was about to bring and for now neither will you. Part 2 will follow in the next issue, so you'll all just have to wait to then in anticipation!

Alex Chew



For more information on NICAS membership & their carp waters please click the logo below



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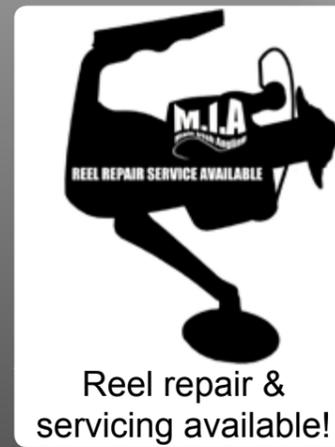
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So it's that time of year again; the Twaite shad have made their annual run up the River Barrow, the first of the Smooth hounds on the east coast have started to make an appearance and thick lipped mullet have already been providing anglers with great sport around the estuaries in west Cork. Finally we appear to be over the harshest part of the year and on the right track for summer.

I had plans to try out a few new things this year and maybe venture into some coarse fishing but there's one species that I just can't get off my mind this time of year and that's the stingray. Every angler has that one species they just can't get enough of, and the stingray is mine. I don't know what it



Left: The spectacular backdrop to Fenit pier, Co. Kerry

Every year the local club, Tralee Bay SAC, hold an event called 'Tag-a-ray', its main purpose being to tag as many rays as possible to try and track their movements. The goal of the project is to hopefully get some protection from commercial fishing established in the bay

Fickle Fenit

WORDS: GARY BLAKE

Images: Gary Blake & Michael O'Reilly

is, maybe it's the danger involved in handling them with their venomous barbed spines on their tails that adds to the excitement, or maybe it's the way they put up such a brutal scrap till the end. I don't know, but one thing I do know is that the venue has a huge part to play in why I keep going back for more.

Tralee Bay is a magical place; it's hard to describe its beauty in writing. I'd gladly sit on one of the beaches for hours without catching a single fish, just taking in the views of Brandon head in the distance, the Slieve Mish mountains on the south or just the small town of Fenit on the north side of the bay. This part of the country really does hold a special place in my heart.

The oyster beds in the bay have created a haven for four different ray species, namely Thornbacks, painted rays,

undulates and, of course, the stingray. The shallow warm water offers an ideal spawning ground for them. It also has top quality tope fishing and good spurdog fishing just outside the bay towards Brandon. In the not-too-distant past Tralee bay was famous for its monkfish (a.k.a. angel shark) fishery but sadly over-fishing has depleted the stocks to be almost non-existent in these quite unique, rich waters. I was lucky enough to be on board a boat when somebody caught one about three years ago but no one has seen one since. Apparently skate were also a regular catch in the past but nobody seems to fish for them anymore.

TAG-A RAY

Every year the local club, Tralee Bay SAC, hold an event called 'Tag-a-ray', its main purpose being to tag as many rays as possible to try and track their movements.

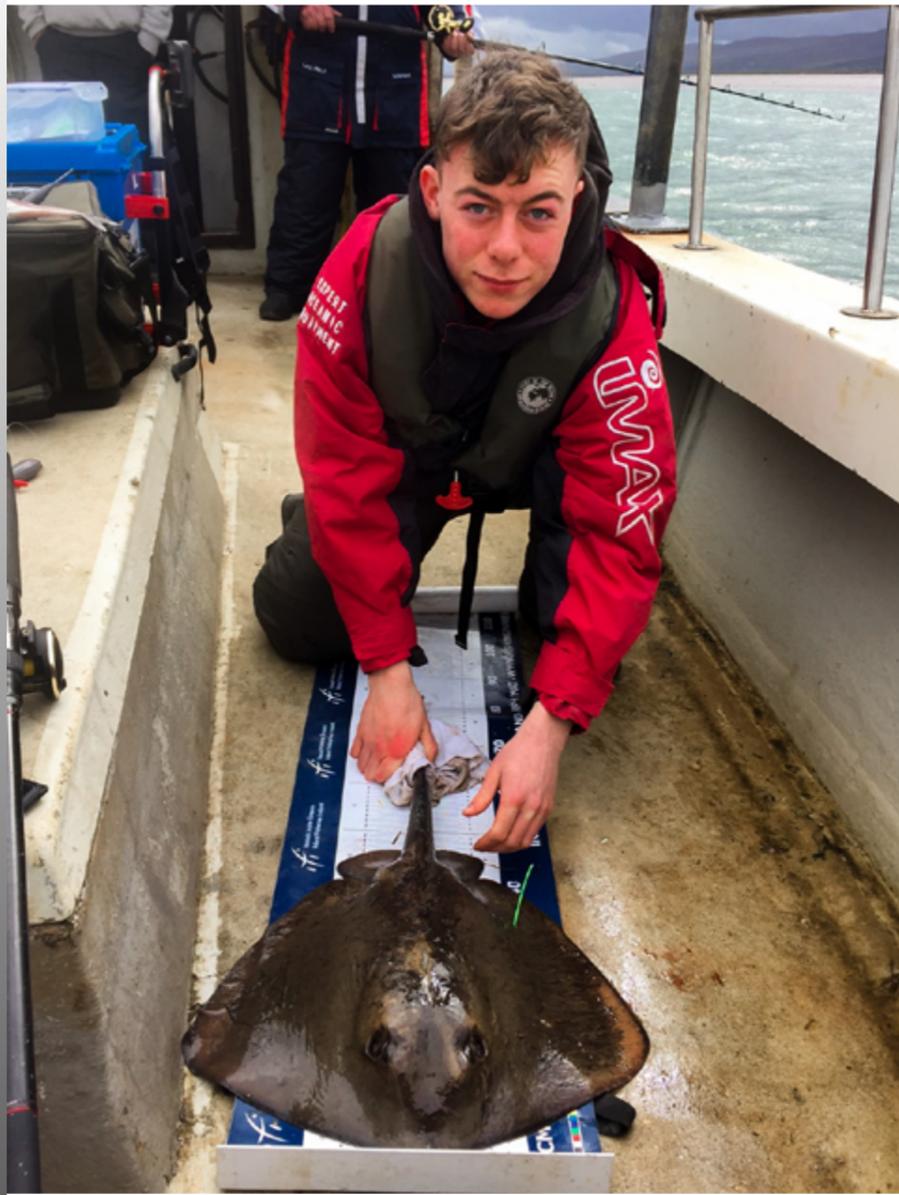
The goal of the project is to hopefully get some protection from commercial fishing established in the bay and to raise awareness amongst the public, as not many people (even locals) know just what a special little fishery Tralee Bay is or how rare the species that call it home are. So, every year since it started (2014) I've been making the three hour trip from Dublin down to Fenit to take part in the event. I stay with my good friends Eugene and Susan Farrelly who are almost like a B&B for anglers every summer; we all say they're our Kerry family. I honestly don't know how they put up with us! There's also a competitive side to Tag-a-ray, with some great prizes up for grabs which attracts many match anglers from around the country.

This year was no different, with my pal Mick O'Reilly and I making the trip down on the Friday night and heading straight to

the Tag-a-ray HQ, 'The West End'. I had a few pints with Eugene (just to be sociable, you understand) and picked his brains on how best to approach the fishing the next day. He gave me the usual great advice and then it was off to bed and up early for a long days fishing.

When I woke up and looked out the window, the first thing I thought was "crap, the fishing is gonna be very tough!" The wind was howling up the Bay and it was raining quite heavily, unusually the first significant rainfall in more than a couple of weeks. The morale was low amongst most of the anglers around the place that morning but we were all here, so were the fish (hopefully) and we just got stuck into the fishing anyway.

Entrants can choose either boat or shore and we had opted for the boat, which



Left: Mick with a lovely stinger "pup" of 12lb. Note the green floy tag in its wing. It was a great start and we thought it was a sign of the really good fishing to come - wrong!

Below: The first surprise of the day was Mick's 5lb smooth hound, a very rare creature in this part of the country



Right: I went for Fenit for rays and got a specimen smoothie instead, not that I was complaining one bit!

we felt gave us a much better chance of getting amongst a few more fish. We soon anchored up in position and got the baits down the short distance to the sandy sea floor. Fairly quickly Mick was getting bites and before long he struck into a fish that started taking line - this had to be a stinger, we thought. Sure enough, after a nice fight we had a cracking little stingray of about 12lb in the net. This was a good start.

Next up, I was into a fish and knew straight away from the solid run that it was a decent stinger. Unfortunately, the fish spat the hook on that first run and we never got to see it but I wasn't too disheartened and was confident that there would be more fish to come so I sent another bait (mackerel) straight back down. A while later, after the usual patient waiting and boat-banter, I got some knocks on my rod

and struck into what turned out to be a fine undulate ray with a typically striking and unique pattern across its back. They really are an incredibly beautiful fish. I was using a light continental-style match rod with a fixed spool loaded with braid and it made for a really nice scrap, with any of the fish I hooked.

SMOOTHIE SURPRISES!

As the ebbing tide slackened off so, it seemed, did the fishing but as soon as the tide start pushing back in Mick was into another fish. It gave him a right good run around and we thought it surely must be another stinger; we couldn't believe our eyes when we saw a smooth hound of about 5lb break the surface! This was a really welcome bonus. We had heard reports of one being caught in the bay the year before and one small one being caught a week ago but

smoothies are still a very rare creature for this part of the country. They are certainly spreading across from the east though and I thought there must be more of them where we were anchored, so I immediately put three crab baits (*the* smoothie bait) on a three-down running ledger rig.

Within about twenty minutes I was seeing those familiar hound bites I'm so used to seeing from my fishing back home on the east coast. A fish was hooked and it gave an unbelievable fight on the light gear. When I finally got it to the boat we saw that it was definitely worth weighing. It actually turned out to be well over the ISFC (Irish Specimen Fish Committee) specimen weight of 3.5kg, weighing in at 3.68kg (8lb 1¼oz) and measuring 100cm long. I was over the moon! It wasn't the biggest hound I've ever caught - I catch hounds all the time on the east coast - but there was something very special about catching it down in Tralee Bay, most unexpected. If they do start to show up in numbers over the next few years they'll make a really nice addition to the already unbelievable ray fishing... After that surprise catch things went quiet and the only other fish caught on our boat was a small thornie by our new friend Ian O'Shea. >>





Left and below: The rays were scarce enough but I did manage a nice undulate on day 1, which was tagged for monitoring and conservation purposes

the sudden change in the weather; it must have turned the fish off the feed. That's just the way fishing goes sometimes though isn't it?

it? You have to take the positives from these times and I was delighted with my smooth hound sporting a Kerry accent. Of course, as always at Tag-a-ray, the craic was unreal amongst the 82 anglers in one small town.

When the final results came in we were surprised to see that there were two anglers, Phil Ord and Martin Reidy who managed to catch no fewer than 8 rays each from the boats, but Martin pipped Phil to the top spot with a greater overall length. The shore competition was won by Peter Bolger with 3 rays. The biggest fish of the weekend was a 30lb stinger caught by Dutch angler Dave Van Balkum. Overall, 82 anglers managed to catch only 68 rays and one small tope between them, not forgetting our smoothies. So, as you can gather the fishing wasn't great but as always I had a fantastic time in Tralee; the scenery, the pints, good friends and of course a few nice fish thrown in to the mix. I know it's a bit of cliché, but there really is so much more to fishing than catching fish. I'm already planning my next trip down when hopefully the weather and, in turn, the fish will play ball.

Until next time,

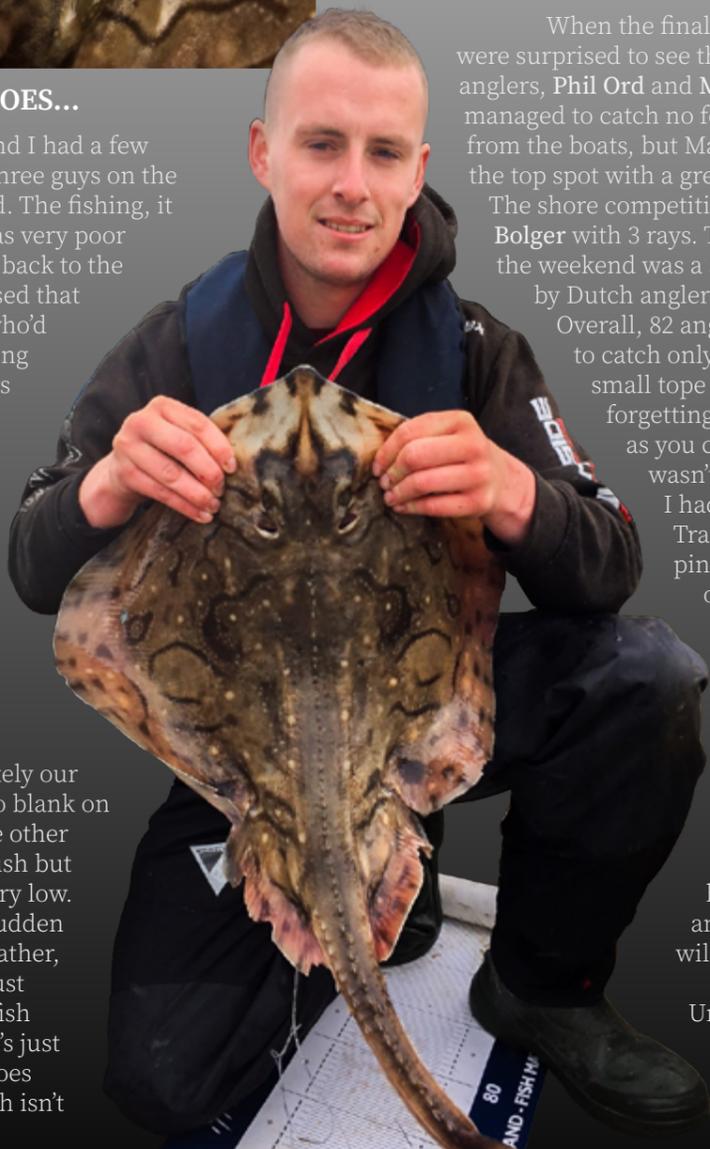
Gary Blake



THE WAY IT GOES...

Although Mick and I had a few fish, there were three guys on the boat who blanked. The fishing, it has to be said, was very poor and when we got back to the harbour we realised that it wasn't just us who'd had a disappointing day - many others blanked.

Optimistically, we thought that day 2 had to be better. There was a few fish out there and we just had to get them on the feed again. Long story short, unfortunately our whole boat was to blank on day 2! Most of the other boats had some fish but numbers were very low. It had to be the sudden change in the weather, we thought; it must have turned the fish off the feed. That's just the way fishing goes sometimes though isn't



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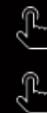
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TIME TABLE

- 8am: Registration
- 8:30am: Peg draw
- 10am: Rods in
- 3pm: Rods out for final
- 4pm: Presentation Weigh in,

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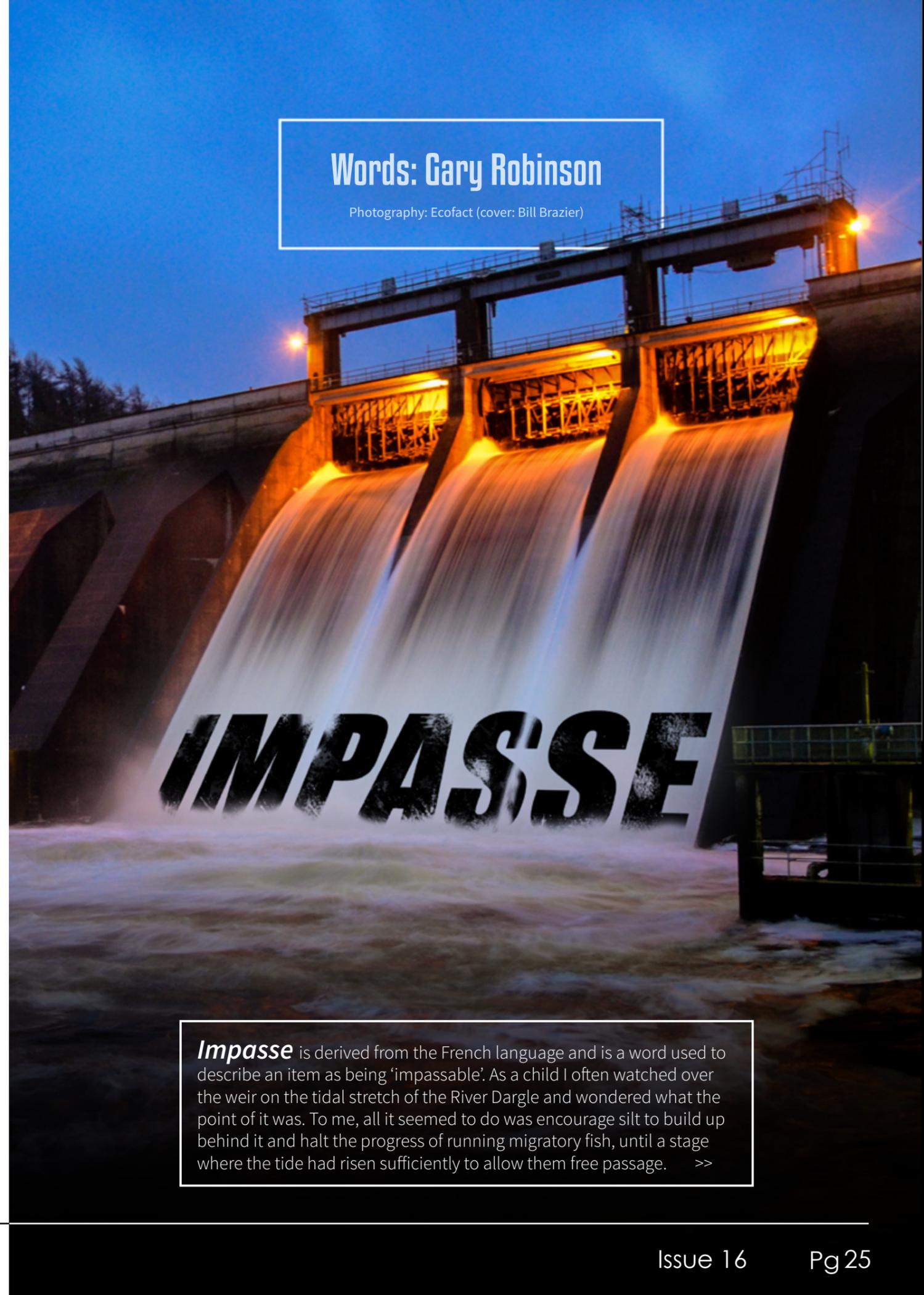
OAKLANDS NEWROSS 20/05/2017
IN AID OF PIETA HOUSE
and H.O.P.E CENTER TALLAGHT



#FishingForPieta #FishingForHope

Words: Gary Robinson

Photography: Ecofact (cover: Bill Brazier)



Impasse is derived from the French language and is a word used to describe an item as being 'impassable'. As a child I often watched over the weir on the tidal stretch of the River Dargle and wondered what the point of it was. To me, all it seemed to do was encourage silt to build up behind it and halt the progress of running migratory fish, until a stage where the tide had risen sufficiently to allow them free passage. >>

Herding and corralling the fish behind this now defunct man-made structure was like a buffet for the local poachers; they wait and count the fish on a rising tide by daylight and by night they stalked 'The Park' and 'The Valley', removing fish. The recent flood relief scheme on the Dargle has seen the removal of said weir, something long overdue and a step in the right direction. However, the approach to the remainder of the scheme has very negatively impacted the lower reaches of this fine Sea trout water, to the point where the benefits of removing the weir will potentially become negligible.

My childhood playground was not the only river to be 'graced' with the construction of weirs and dams, a couple of which I will look at for this article. Weirs and dams were installed for a myriad of reasons, unique to each river and the locality it served. Some were used for flood control, some as domestic water reservoirs and some for power generation through turbines or water wheels. Altering the physical structure of the rivers in this manner has had some positive but also some very negative impacts. Dredging or damming a river can be ecologically disastrous with the concrete proving to be massive barriers to migratory fish. In North America there has been a concerted effort in recent years to remove dams and/or install modern, functioning fish passes for many differing species of fish with great success. Perhaps it is time to start looking to the American example and replicating these projects here in Ireland, particularly at a time when the EU AMBER project will divert funds and advice towards such interests?

Let's have a look at Ardnacrusha, one of Ireland's most ambitious engineering projects for its time and the largest barrier to migration to be found on Ireland's longest river, the Shannon. At the time, Ireland was developing as an 'independent' nation and, although poor, we needed to power homes and businesses to enable our development. Ardnacrusha was conceived and developed as an idea that gained traction, its building completed in 1929. When opened it was marvelled at and admired around the world as a true feat of civil engineering. The power generated from it indeed powered the progression of the west and at the time it was unrivalled as a civic project. It is also well documented that as soon as work started



Left
Ardnacrusha's power generation can be matched by a couple of modern wind turbines. Are dams such as this really necessary in this day and age, given their massive ecological drawbacks?

Below
The well-known removal of the Elwha dam in the U.S has caused a rapid and dramatic recovery of migratory fish populations

AS SOON AS WORK STARTED ON THE PROJECT, THE SHANNON'S ABILITY TO PRODUCE TRULY HUGE SALMON DISAPPEARED. INDEED, ACCESS FOR SALMON TO ... THE SHANNON BASIN DIED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAM

on the project, the Shannon's ability to produce truly huge salmon disappeared. Indeed, access for salmon to many of the inland rivers that make up the Shannon Basin died with the construction of the dam. Physically, the dam has vastly reduced the flow of the river.

Migratory fish were an afterthought and it wasn't until the late 1950's that a fish pass was incorporated into the dam's construction. It is woefully insufficient for the huge runs of sometimes huge fish that used to visit this river. Indeed, the most recent official figures from the fish pass (2013) tell us that not even 500 fish made the journey upstream beyond the dam, a figure not high enough to ensure a viable population of salmon in the Shannon system. To emphasise the dilemma that salmon in the Shannon face, the fish that cannot use the Borland style fish pass congregate in the tail-race and fish are removed from the river illegally day and night. The fish pass is manned by the ESB (Electricity Supply Board), the illegal fishing monitored by Inland Fisheries Ireland. Both are performing abysmally in their respective tasks. It is acknowledged that the power generated by Ardnacrusha can generate enough power to run a town the size of Ennis (~25,000 people) and can now be matched by a couple of modern wind turbines. With this in mind and looking at the tourism revenue that a healthy River Shannon salmon run could bring in, not to mention the ecological benefits, wouldn't

thinking about the removal of the dam now be a timely consideration?

The population of River Lee salmon in Cork is facing a similar decimation without intervention, as highlighted recent years by Declan O Mahony and co. with their River Runner & Free the Lee campaigns. Inniscarra and Carrigadrohid hydroelectric dams also house woefully inadequate fish passes with the Upper Lee now practically devoid of salmon. Like the Shannon, the Lee was once commonly thronged with anglers, their numbers dwindling as the salmon have done. Installation of a new and fit-for-purpose fish pass at Inniscarra and the complete removal of Carrigadrohid dam will go a long way to restoring this once famous salmon river. The main reason for not dismantling the dams is they are used to control water flow and flooding in Cork City. That's worked well over the last 10 years, hasn't it?! Couple removal of the dam with the restoration of upland bog and forestry, and the natural ecosystem services provided, will negate flooding in the city. A project of this nature will also be a lot cheaper, aesthetically pleasing and sympathetic to a range of both aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity. Regeneration of the Gearagh (remnants of an ancient and very rare alluvial forest) and the fishing will also benefit the locals, both economically and environmentally.

Barriers to migration need not be mega-structures and those affected need not be salmon. Weirs offer substantial barriers to eels and lampreys as well, and the structure at Annacotty is a perfect example of this. The Mulkear River, a tributary of the Shannon, is spanned by an old weir installed to power a



Left
Not only do structures like Ardnacrusha stop upstream migration of eelers, countless adults get minced in the turbines on the way back to sea as well!

Below
€1.75m allocated to the Mulkear LIFE project and yet not one suitable eel or lamprey pass currently exists on the weir at Annacotty. Both species are allegedly afforded strict protection under EU Directives

Right
River lampreys trying to, unsuccessfully, ascend Annacotty weir in April of this year. This is an annual occurrence and leaves the species open to rampant poaching (for bait) and massive population declines



AS LONG AS WE ARE HEADED BY PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS THAT CANNOT SEE THE WOOD FROM THE TREES... MIGRATORY FISH ARE GOING TO BE HELD UP BY IMPASSABLE BARRIERS...

mill in a bygone era. Another defunct structure, this weir poses an impassable barrier for river (and all) lampreys, a prehistoric specimen and one allegedly offered strict protection under EU Directives. This should tell us that we should be doing all we can to protect not only the lampreys but to ease their passage and look after their habitat. Good fortune befell the fish and the river when €1.75m was allocated to the upgrade of the weir. Lamprey passes were installed which subsequently were mostly washed away in storm waters, presumably having not been installed securely enough. The one that remains is, according to an independent expert, not suitable for lamprey to use. A couple of years on



THOSE AFFECTED NEED NOT BE SALMON. WEIRS OFFER SUBSTANTIAL BARRIERS TO EELS AND LAMPREYS AS WELL, AND THE STRUCTURE AT ANNACOTTY IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THIS.

and there is nothing to show for the rest of the money and the weir remains in its original and useless state.

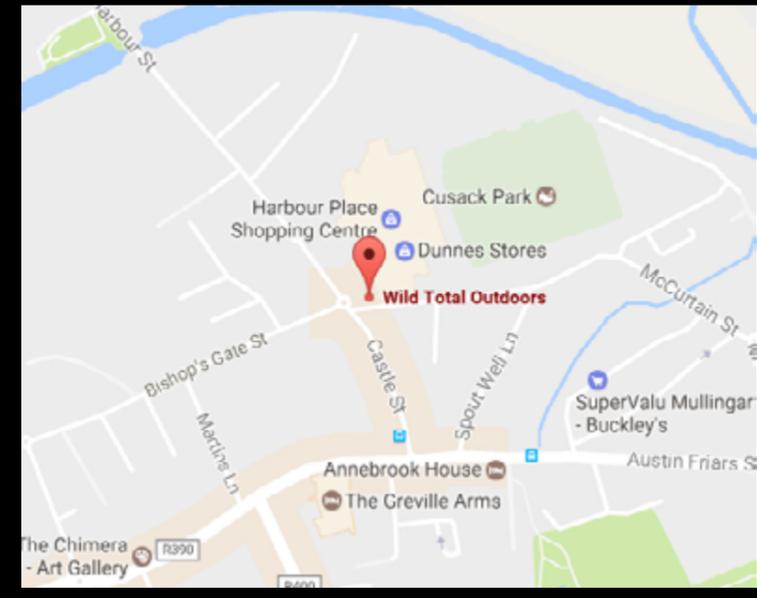
As bad as that abject waste of public funding was, what followed is even more horrifying. Poachers are operating day and night in the area with little regard for the possibility of apprehension. So sure are they that their illegal netting of these very rare fish will not be interrupted, that they illegally remove them from the river in plain view of anybody that happens to be passing. These lamprey will no doubt be sold off as pike bait and those responsible seem to be able to operate freely and unmolested. Those charged with the upkeep and protection of our waterways seem loathe to

even see and acknowledge that there is a problem with the weir and are non-existent when it comes to policing the illegal removal of a species that is ecologically very important to not only Ireland but to the EU as a whole.

So what does all this mean? It means that as long as we are headed by people and organisations that cannot see the wood from the trees, as long as deals in Ireland are done for the minority at the expense of the majority, as long as environmental decisions are made politically and not socially and as long as we have no coherent plan or direction to follow then migratory fish are going to be held up by impassable barriers and slaughtered because they are not offered the protection they need by people well paid to provide it. It means that we could see the end of the wild salmon in our lifetime and when it happens the aforementioned groups will wring their hands and exclaim that there was nothing they could have done. It also means that I will spend a lot of my own time writing and filing reports for the EU Commission this summer, because nobody here in Ireland seems to care.

Gary Robinson





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Tel: 044-9301133



The SCIENCE bit

MAKING THE COMPLICATED SIMPLE



FISH HEARING

Fish don't have ears, right? Wrong! They do, just not on the outside of their heads like we and most other animals have. In fact, ears are just as important to a fish as any other creature and, compared to those of mammals, are often incredibly advanced.

Whilst some fish may lack colouration, certain fins, teeth, lateral lines or even eyes, all fish – that's over 30,000 species - have ears. They are something no fish can live without. Sound travels over four times faster in water (1500m/sec) than it does in air (340m/sec), and reverberates for much greater distances too. So, as you might imagine, hearing is vitally

important to a fish. The detection of predators, for example, may often rely (at least partly) on hearing. A sense of hearing also tells fish a great deal about the environment around them, their relative position and even where their food is. This "3D" view, unlike other senses, is not hindered by light levels, currents, or even the presence of most objects in their environment. A fish's ears are actually very

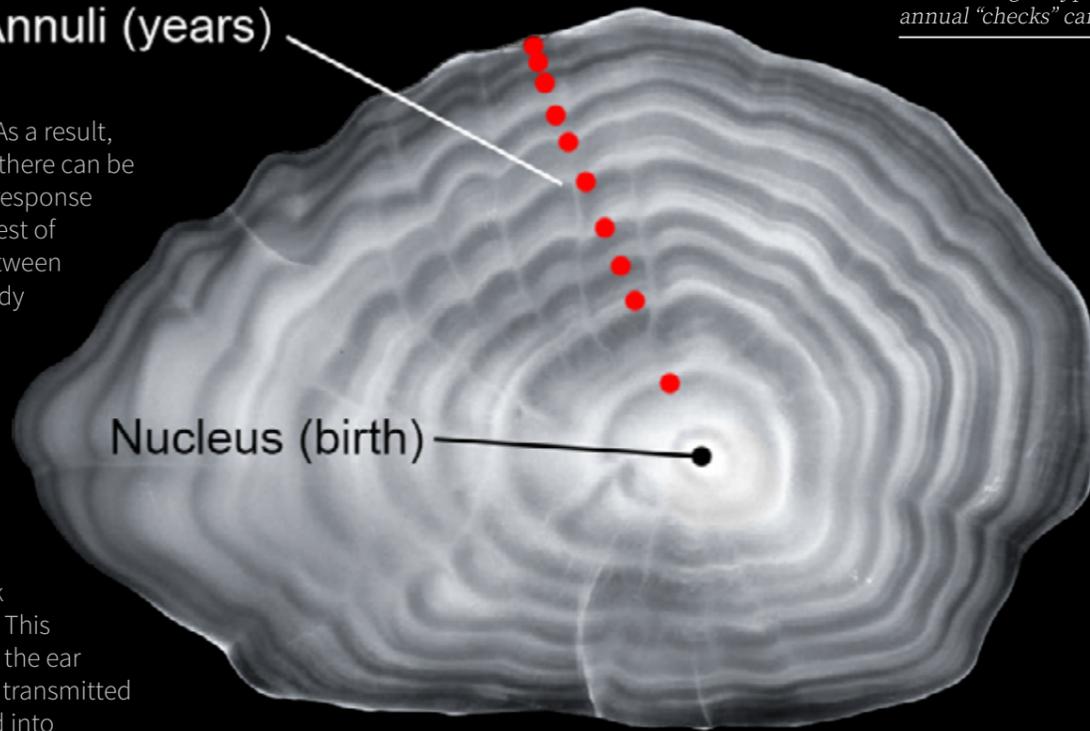
similar to all other vertebrate animals, including us humans, except that they are located internally in the head instead of externally. The reason for this is due to the fact that the body of a fish is, for all intents and purposes, the same density as water and sound actually travels through them. As such, they do not need outer ears like us and most terrestrial animals to channel sound into the inner ear. >>

Fish have bones in the inner ear, called **otoliths**, which are much denser than water and the fish's body (in humans, otoliths are known as "ear stones" and are required for balance). As a result, these ear bones (of which there can be 1-3) move more slowly in response to sound waves than the rest of the fish. The difference between the motion of the fish's body and the otoliths bend tiny sensory hairs in the inner ear, called cilia. These are essentially the same type of sensory cells (neruomasts) that are located in the fish's lateral line as explained way back in issue 6 – [click/tap here](#). This small movement between the ear bones and sensory cells is transmitted to the brain and translated into sound.

So, all fish hear sound due to vibrations in the inner ear but the basic ear is fairly limited in its range of use. Fish are broadly classified as being either "hearing generalists" (relatively limited range of frequencies which they can detect) or "hearing specialists" (wide range of frequencies). Fish without swim bladders (primarily used for buoyancy), such as sharks and rays (elasmobranchs), or with just a small one such as most flatfish, have a poor hearing capacity. Salmon and eels also have poor hearing. Most fish species though do have swim bladders, which are in turn connected to the inner ear. Swim bladders act as a secondary source of sound for fish, acting as a sort of drum to detect a greater range of sounds and frequencies. The closer the distance between the swim bladder and the inner ear, the better a fish's hearing is. Hearing generalist species have a narrower hearing frequency range (less than 1500Hz) and higher hearing threshold (above 100dB) than hearing specialist fish (up to 8kHz and down to 60dB).

Annuli (years)

Nucleus (birth)



Left:
A sagittal otolith is typically used in ageing studies as it the largest type and easiest to read. The annual "checks" can often be very clearly seen

Whilst fish are usually able to hear sounds of a far lower frequency than mammals (down to 0.1Hz), most are unable to detect sounds above 1kHz. However, some species have developed an advanced mechanical link between the swim bladder and inner ear which gives them a fishy sense of super-hearing. These species are known as otophysan fish and include the majority of freshwater fish worldwide, such as the minnow, catfish and carp families. This mechanical link consists of a series of modified backbone vertebrae called the Weberian ossicles. This system conveys sounds and changes in pressure and greatly improves hearing

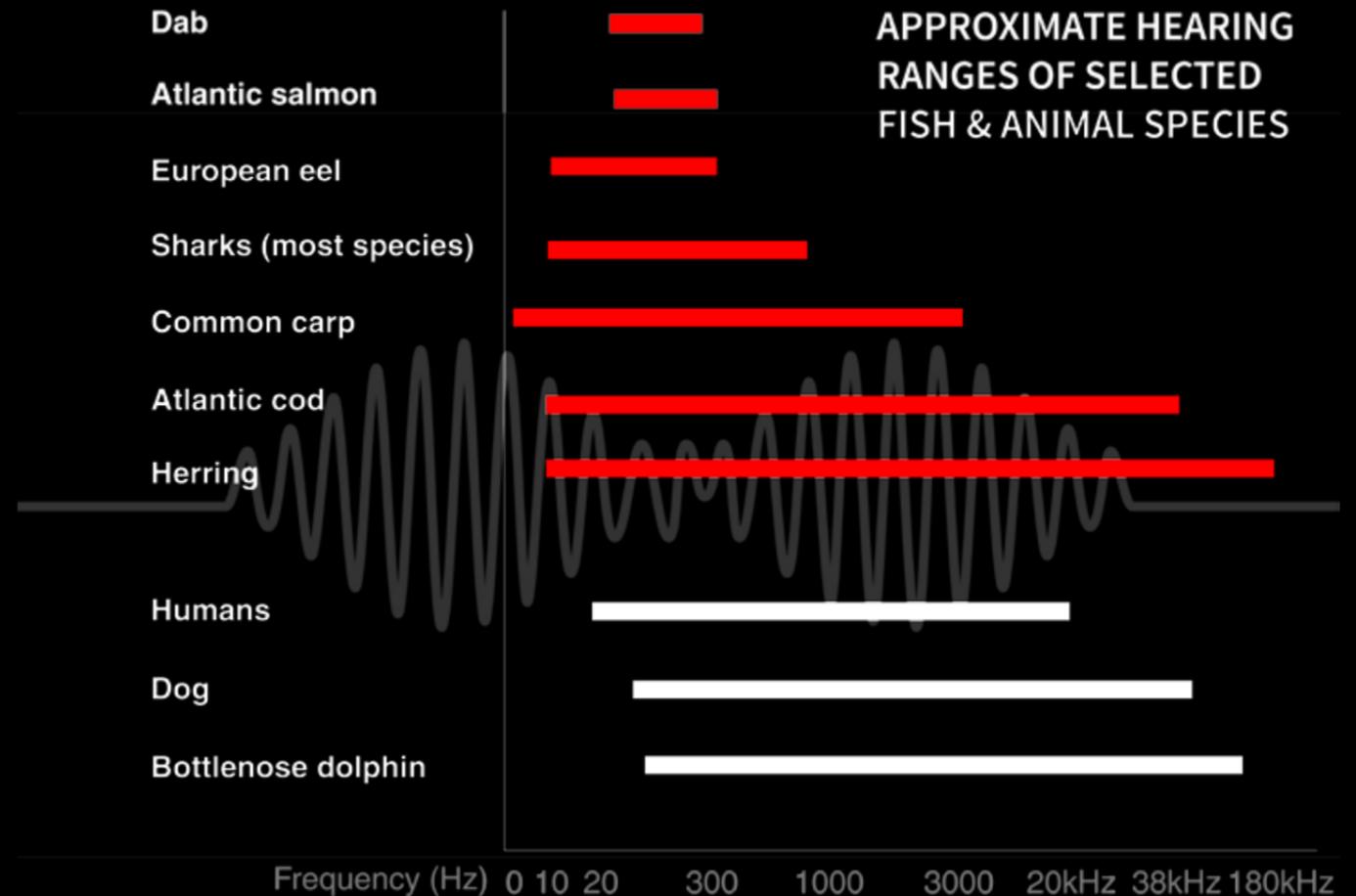
transmission and sensitivity. The Weberian ossicles act as an amplifier of sound waves that would otherwise be only slightly detectable by the inner ear structure alone.

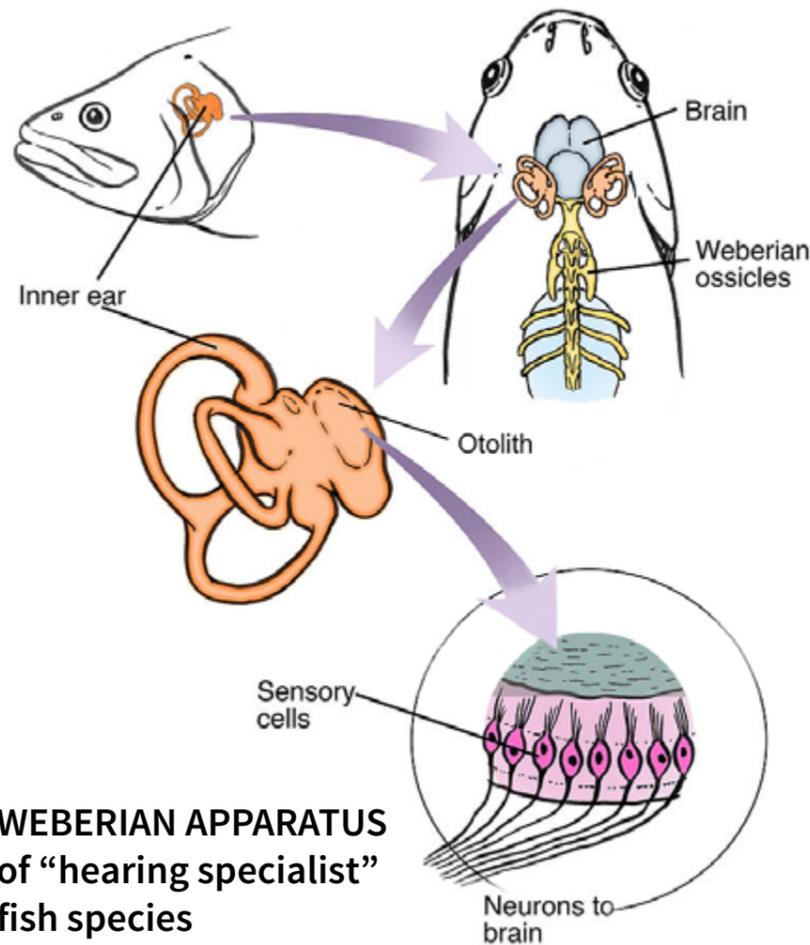
As mentioned above, elasmobranchs (the sharks and rays) have a relatively poor hearing range but what they lack in sound detection they certainly make up for in other ways, such as their highly advanced lateral line and electro-sensory cell systems. Having said this, they are actually well adapted to hear low

frequency sounds and possess good directional hearing, but their overall hearing range is narrow. Atlantic salmon also have very poor hearing but possess an acute sense of sight and ability to migrate accurately. Goldfish and common carp have among the best, most sensitive hearing in the fish world, able to detect sounds of up to 4kHz and with an optimum range of 500-800Hz. The old advice of carp anglers needing to be stealthy and quiet certainly rings true here. >>

Fish are broadly classified as being either "hearing generalists" (relatively limited range of frequencies which they can detect) or "hearing specialists" (wide range of frequencies)

OTOLITHS are made of calcium carbonate and their size and shape is highly variable among fish species. In fact, scientists can tell most species apart just from its ear bones. Otoliths are routinely used for aging fish. Similar to the rings of a tree and, otoliths feature a clear pattern of growth over the lifetime of a fish. Otoliths grow along with the rest of the fish and show both periods of low growth (e.g. winter) and high growth (e.g. spring to autumn). This pattern results in darker "narrow bands" and lighter "wide bands". Narrow bands, called checks, are counted as one winter's worth of growth. A narrow and a wide band together represent one year's growth and collectively are termed "annuli" and are counted to estimate the total age of the fish. Sometimes otoliths are clear enough to see the growth patten under a microscope as is, but they often have to be thinly sliced with lasers to obtain a clear enough sample. Otoliths are typically more accurate for aging fish than scales although, of course, unlike scales, they require the fish to be dead which isn't always preferable in scientific studies.





WEBERIAN APPARATUS of “hearing specialist” fish species

Incredibly, recent research has discovered that some species, such as cod, herring and American shad, can hear in ultrasound (ultra-high frequencies). The reason for this is so they can detect the ultrasonic echolocation “clicks” produced by hunting dolphins, from up to an impressive 187m away. That’s quite an incredible adaptation, I’m sure you’ll agree.

Fish also communicate through sound. For example, the gadoids (cod, haddock, pollock etc.) develop muscles in the spring that beat drum-like on the swim bladder, creating a very low-pitch sound that is used during mating. Herring and sprat have a canal from the swim bladder to the anal opening where air can be released, generating a more high-pitched sound. It has been speculated that these sounds are used for some kind of communication between the herring within a shoal.

Some fish are capable of making very loud sounds. One of the noisiest fish in the oceans is the Oyster toadfish, *Opsanus tau*. Because of their noisiness Oyster toadfishes were studied by the US Navy because they kept hearing them on their sonar! Studies suggest that the volume of sounds produced by the Oyster toadfish can reach 100 decibels (dB), which is equivalent to a piece of heavy machinery.

Despite the similarity of their ears to our own, fish cannot go deaf! Whilst extremely high intensity sounds are able to temporarily damage the cells in the inner ears, they are able to repair and replace damage sensory hair cells throughout their life, unlike humans who are born with a full set which deteriorates with age. In total contrast, fish produce more sensory hairs as they grow and age and several studies have suggested that perhaps older fish are better able to

Despite the similarity of their ears to our own, fish cannot go deaf!

hear than their younger counterparts. However, certain species may be negatively impacted by persistent human made sounds such as those from ships and off-shore windfarms.

Interestingly, farmed fish have worse hearing than wild ones, pretty much regardless of species. This has been repeatedly measured as being up to 50% worse, and is presumed to be largely down to diet in fish farm conditions. Unnatural diets (pelleted food laced with antibiotics and other chemicals) would appear to be responsible for a key deformity in otolith (ear bones) composition, with farmed fish otoliths being composed of a lighter and more brittle form of calcium carbonate. This means they are less able to detect sounds. This could explain the findings of some recent studies, such as farmed salmon showing decreased predator evasion and increased mortality compared to wild fish. This poorer hearing (in what is already a species with poor hearing) may even be linked to a reduced ability to migrate back to spawning sites. Overall, farmed salmon have been found to be ten times more likely to have the otolith deformity than wild fish, and it gets worse with age.

So, hearing is maybe more important to a fish than you first thought. In truth, a fish’s sense of hearing through its ear is just a small part of the incredible advanced system which includes other sensory adaptations such as the lateral line (which also “hears”) and this article has barely scratched the surface of what is a very complex subject. Still, you’ll probably never look at that fish in your hand or landing net the same again...



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"I think my drawings really appeal to people who are passionate about fish"

An interview with
Angela Patchell



Q. FIRST OF ALL ANGELA, you produce some rather unique and creative fish-related products, which we will get to shortly, but where did it all start for you? Have you always wanted to be an artist/designer?

A. It started for me when I first went to school; I was dyslexic and struggled to read and write. I discovered drawing came naturally to me and found that I could explain things visually and could draw out plans. I struggled in general at school and, when I was about 10, I decided the only path for me to take was to go to art college. After leaving art college I quickly found work in the publishing industry illustrating and designing book jackets. I was an "ideas person" and found work as a magic marker visualizer, which really suited me.

Q. Your CV must certainly be an impressive read, but what made you decide that enough was enough, to close your publishing business and move back to Ireland?

A. I started my own publishing list at the age of 50 in 2006, just before the financial crash. After 25 years in the publishing business I had built up a wealth of contacts and was able to sell my books worldwide. But unfortunately in 2008 'Borders Bookstores' closed down in the US and UK, and I was then fighting for shelf space along with the bigger publishers. It was a really tough decision to stop printing books because we had so many plans for new titles. What made me leave London and come to Ireland was the pollution from the heavy traffic. I have asthma and had problems breathing. Ireland was the perfect choice, fresh air, inspiring landscapes and great beaches for my dogs.

Q. All of us here at Off the Scale, and most of our readers too, understand the primal link between fish, water and ourselves. After all, it is this respect and deep fascination that drives many to become anglers in the first place. You now specialise in drawing, and especially fish art. The obvious question is where does your own fascination with fish come from?

A. I was brought up by the sea in Dar-es-Salaam, East Africa. Every day we would go to the beach and search for shells and watch the fishing boats in the harbour. The fishermen would sell a wide array of fish and seafood which would be live and I loved chasing the crabs and lobsters. There were very few shops and no television so I amused myself with creative projects instead. The fish market was within walking distance and I remember loving everything about it, even the smell of the fish!

Q. Your love for drawing is clear but what is so special for you about creating art on materials such as lokta paper and linen, as opposed to perhaps the more usual canvas? Is this an environmentally-driven choice or do you feel these materials genuinely add something more to the finished piece?

A. I wanted to achieve a 'fossil-like' look, something you would find in a natural history museum. It was more about the tactile quality than being environmentally friendly. The lokta paper is hand made in the Himalayas, making every piece different and a work of art in its own right!

Q. Without giving away any of your secrets, what is involved with one of your typical fish





drawings? How long does each one take on average, do you use a combination of techniques and where does the inspiration for each subject come from? What makes a “good” subject for you from a fish point of view?

A. I work from real fish, so my freezer is full of fish that I draw and put back into the freezer. I never eat the fish I draw, although I do eat other fish. I used to buy fish from a fish van in Gorey and I swapped his fish for my drawings - his wife was delighted! I spend ages looking for the right fish, a perfect specimen. The texture is important to me. I study the scales and fins in great detail. I use Indian inks and graphite pencils, and have a huge range of pencils and fine brushes.

Q. Do you have any plans to expand your range of fish art wall mounts? Are you open to specific customer commissions?

A. I have recently been asked by a fish restaurant to supply a range of wall-hangings. I am open to commissions and would be delighted if your readers would like to contact me through my website www.angelapatchell.com

Q. This year sees you launch a bespoke, designer fish-inspired range of table linen, aimed at fish restaurants, retailers and



general good fish food outlets. This is definitely unique! Can you give us a little more information about why you chose this particular avenue and a few details of the proposed range?

A. I think my drawings really appeal to people who are passionate about fish, not people who frequent art galleries! Because I don't draw backgrounds to my fish they really suit 3-dimensional objects. My aim is to create bespoke linen designs for seafood restaurants here in Ireland and then launch my own range, otherwise the cost will be too high and I don't want to spend all my time selling my products. I like to spend most of my time working in my studio drawing fish!



CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ANGELA'S FISH ART



The life of a small boat angler

Words by **Barry Murphy** Photography by **Barry Murphy & friends**

After the usual enforced winter break, our small boat angler is back and rearing to go!

B

oat angling around the Irish coast in general dies down during the winter months. Saying that, I would normally manage a few trips every winter, even if it's only locally. This autumn there was a good showing of sizable cod in my nearby estuary but unfortunately due to other commitments we didn't get the boat into the water around the time the cod were running. After a long winter, the start of a new year saw us keener than ever to get out when a very welcome opportunity finally arose to get the boat in the water and a plan was put in place. We had two choices; hit the inshore reefs or hit the estuary and see if they were any lingering cod still about in some of the deeper holes.

FIRST OUTING OF THE YEAR

We decided to try for the cod, so some fresh lug worms were dug and a few fresh peeler crabs added to the frozen Welsh black lug (wraps) which we already had. With a low tide for 10am-ish it was decided that we would get the boat in for low, so we would be fishing for the start of the push and fish a few hours up the tide. From the slip it was a short spin up the estuary to the first deep hole we had planned to try. This mark is a hole in some 60ft of water with the surrounding areas between just 20-30ft. Fishing these deeper holes during the main run of tide is best done using up-tiding tactics, at least once the tide starts pushing hard. Simply, up-tiding basically involves using a grip lead which is cast up-tide at varying distances depending on the depth and the current flow. The theory is that by casting up-tide and leaving out a bow of line, the lead will have time to sink, settle and remain secured to the sea bed and fish effectively without getting dragged out of position.

Bait presentation is everything in angling

from how you secure and present it on the hook, to how the trace is fishing in the water. The traces consisted of a mix of two and three flappers with 2/0 hooks. Baits varied between crab, crab/lug cocktails and crab/black lug cocktail. After over an hour fishing and with only one small flounder falling to a worm bait for Conor, it was clearly time for plan B! We upped anchor and headed back down the estuary to try an even deeper hole than the first. It wasn't long before the anchor was set and the boat had settled in the tide. By now we were nearing mid-tide and it was running at its strongest. Due to the lack of action, the gear was scaled down to more match-type set ups, using a range of basic three hook flappers.

We were both happy to finally start seeing a few bites and it was actually the start of a busy few hours fishing for us. Falling to the baits were dab and whiting, and a single rockling for Conor which would be a welcome bonus in the species hunt in May. Black lug tipped with mackerel worked well and accounted for most of the fish. After a slow start we ended the day with four species (no codling sadly) but more importantly we got the first run of the year in.



A small rockling for Conor on our first trip of the year. It was tough going but at least we got out!

NEW TOYS...

I have to be honest and admit that my fishing was scarce to say the least earlier this year and the next trip out wasn't until the 10th April, my long awaited trip aboard my friend Eddie's new boat. I was with Eddie the day he picked it up last October but unfortunately we had to wait till now to get out in *Shockwaves 2*. The Bar Crusher, are renowned for being a fabulous boat and a dream to fish from. This trip had three agendas; get a good run in for the new boat, generally test her out and also trial my friends' new Garmin electronics (which were very kindly provided by Garmin) and, of course, lastly do a bit of fishing!

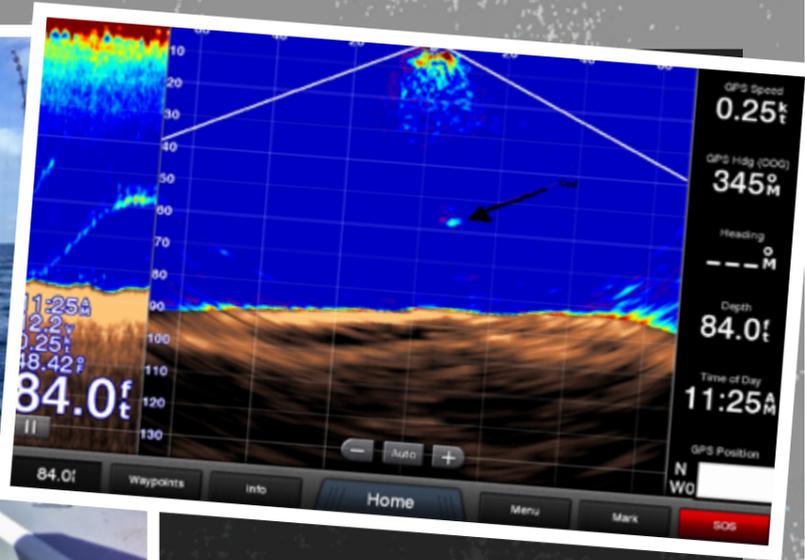
We hoped to hit a few wrecks and try some gilling for pollock and bait fishing for a few ling. Gilling consists of dropping rubber/plastic baits (jelly worms etc.) or bait (rag worm, belly mackerel strip) on a flowing trace fished below the lead to the bottom. Once the bottom is felt a slow retrieve is started. Counting the winds up from the bottom depends on the depth and size of wreck. The idea is to keep



Finally getting *Shockwaves 2* into the water at Dunmore after a long wait!

“

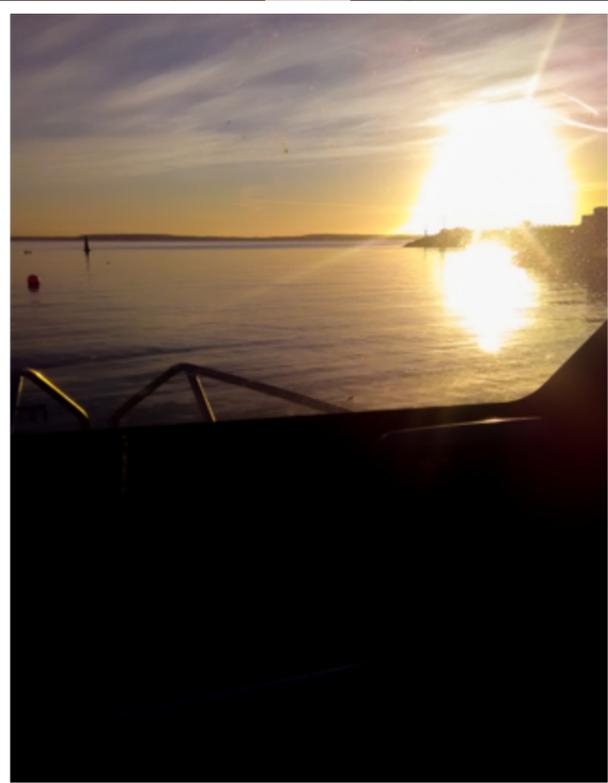
Looking at the different settings and seeing the advance in the technology since we last updated our own system was a real eye opener



A nice April codling which I saw follow the lure on the new echo sounder!

the bait in the "taking zone" near to whatever structure you are fishing over, so once a certain amount of winds are wound the bait is dropped back to the bottom and the process starts over until a fish is hooked. It is important, once the initial plucks of the fish are felt, to keep winding at a steady state – no strike needed, the fish will simply hook themselves. Hooking hard fighting pollock using these tactics can be very exciting as the fish make large dives to for the safety of the wreck, really testing your tackle. For the ling, half fillets of mackerel were fished on three hook flappers containing a lot of "bling" (beads and blades).

For the technical side of the day, we tested out the new electronics and hoped to see some of the potential of the new Garmin unit, a GPSMAP 7412. This was paired with the GT51 TM transducer and also Garmin's own VIRBE XE video recorder. On the software end the unit has many different options for both sonar and mapping. As well as traditional sonar this also comes with PANOPTIX PS30, GSD 25 Clear Vu and Side Vu. We were like kids at Christmas!



A new dawn breaks and the draw of the unknown is as strong as ever - long may the mystery of angling remain

We left from Dunmore at 7am and first port of call was one of the local wrecks, which is about nine miles south. A very comfortable and speedy trip in the new boat soon saw us at the mark. Knowing this is a good size wreck, broken up into a number of sections, we figured there would be plenty of structure to play around with and test the new toys. The unit itself has a 12 inch wide screen display and can, impressively, display up to four displays at once, each one as big as the displays on most smaller units! Looking at the different settings and seeing the advance in the technology since we last updated our own system was a real eye opener. There are a number of different sonar packages and we spent some time playing around and getting a feel for them.

The traditional view, which takes readings of the sea bed directly below the boat, can be seen in the screen grabs, another useful tool on this unit. We also used the Clear Vu which gives a crisper cleaner reading of the sea bed by using a dual sonar beam, rather than a signal conical beam as

with the traditional view. Changing between both we could compare and clearly see the differences. We also played around with the Side Vu which takes the wider readings out from each side of the boat rather than directly below it. In fact you can't see what it directly underneath the boat in this mode. The centre line in the screen grab represents the transducer and the darker area each side of the line represents the boat. The areas to the far left and right are the sea bed each side of the boat. The darker areas are the raised parts of the seabed.

There was not a lot of structure once off the wreck (open water) and if we were in shallower and more structured ground this would really be a useful tool. We also used the traditional view on one of the pinnacles of rock later in the morning in shallower water



Eddie with a brilliantly coloured Ballan

gullies, pinnacles and smaller structure with this system will be really easy and open up so many new marks and opportunities. For me this is one of the big draws for sea angling,



Clear Vu & Side Vu scans of the same wreck. Modern tech coupled with good boat handling can vastly increase your catches

and the clarity and the crispness of the surface roughness was very good. Also while on the inshore reef we used the Panoptix sonar views which gives a real time view of all around the boat. We could even see the traces being dropped to the bottom and also fish (like my codling above left) being played on the way up! This is more like a camera as you are watching it in real time, and it will be ideal for the likes of tracking down bait fish such as mackerel. All these software's are compatible with most up modern Garmin units but a transducer compatible with the software's is also required. I am already looking forward to getting back out with Eddie again, as finding

experimenting and trying out new things and marks, the might-bes and the unknown.

We did take our geek hats off eventually and do a bit of fishing! Strong spring tides made fishing in the deeper water hard as we had wind and tide working together, drifting at around 2.5 knots. While the ling evaded us, we did pick up some nice big pout. A change of tactics to gilling and we started to hit the pollock almost straight away, nothing special only up to around 4lb but pollock are such great scrappers, making huge dives to try get back to the wreck, very good sport. At this stage of the morning we were about two hours into the tide and it was really starting to run

“ For me this is one of the big draws for sea angling, experimenting and trying out new things and marks, the might-bes and the unknown ”

so a change of plan to move a bit shallower water and anchor was the only way we would get any fishing done.

The chosen mark was a few miles away, a very rough ground mark in around 90ft of water with a pinnacle of rock rising up nearly 30ft off the seabed. Anchoring so we would be fishing the slope of the pinnacle rather than just sitting on the top of it would hopefully increase our chances. From the first drop we were into good fishing, with a nice mix of species. Cod fell to fish baits and hard fighting Ballan wrasse to rag. Plenty of big pout, cuckoo wrasse, dogs and poor cod also made an appearance over the next few hours. Trying to track down a few species for the species hunt competition later this month, I tried a few drops for a conger with only the obligatory dogfish to show for my efforts. Congers can be a bit of a tricky one around the Waterford coast.

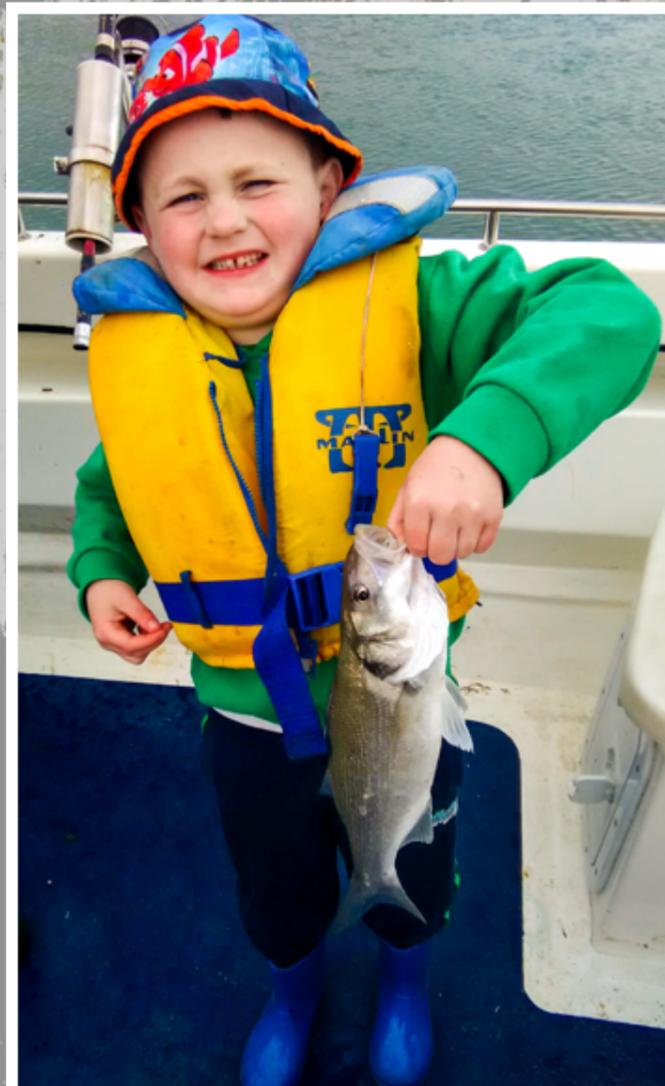
Approaching lunch time, though, fishing was steady. The winds had picked up so we upped-anchor and decided to give a quick drift for a plaice - probably a bit early in the year but we tried anyway. Alas they didn't show but it was a relaxing way to finish a good days fishing. Drifting for flats is one of my favourite types of fishing and hopefully I'll get a few good days at it over the season. All in all, a very successful day and we achieved all we had set out to do. The boat was comfortable to fish from and as for the new electronics; well we have only scratched the surface. Over the summer hopefully we will get out and see the full potential of them, and they might even aid us in increasing our catch and species rate.

A SPECIAL DAY...

I must mention my most recent trip out as it was a memorable one for me, and one which I had planned for a long time. In fact, I'd had to eagerly wait over six years for it to happen! My son Alex had been asking me to go out in the boat for the last six months. As he is still young (six) I only bring him to the shore for the odd short trip so as not to lose his attention but the last few times I asked him if he wanted to go fishing his reply was "are we going in the boat?" So, with both of us on Easter holidays I couldn't put him off any longer. I decided to go for a short run in the shelter of the estuary to try for a few bass and flounder. Tactics would be crab and rag worm baits fished on two hook flappers. Joining us on the day was my

own Dad and so, on a nice evening tide on the 18th of April, three generations of Murphy's arrived at the chosen mark. We were right on low tide and the first hour went by without a bite, but finally my Dad's rod bent over into a bass. Using light gear and matching it to the fish really improves your sport. Next up, happily, was Alex with a bass on his new rod which he won for winning the assisted Juvenile Master angler in the Rinnashark SAC last December. This was his first ever bass and the first fish on his new rod. He was delighted, almost as much as we were!

The next hour and a bit was busy, with three rods contently tipping away under the hard fighting knocks of the bass. Alex added another three bass and a few fell for both myself and my father. Nothing special size-wise, all schoolies with biggest about 2.5lb, but this wasn't important. It was about the



My son Alex with his first ever bass. A truly memorable day which both of us will hopefully never forget



As he is still young (six) I only bring him to the shore for the odd short trip... but the last few times I asked him if he wanted to go fishing his reply was "are we going in the boat?"

occasion, the fish were just a bonus. Although the fish were still biting away I chose to cut the trip short as Alex is still very young and I didn't want him to get bored. The young man did a bit of steering on the way back to the slip, which was probably the highlight of his day! All in all a trip I will never forget.

NEW BOAT FESTIVAL FOR THE SOUTH EAST

As there is a lot of small boat fishing in the Waterford area but never anything organised, this year myself and my local clubs, in conjunction with the Three Sister's hotel in Dunmore East, are holding a two day small boats festival out of Dunmore on the 27th & 28th May. This will have a **prize fund of €2000** and will have multiple prizes, from a species hunt to the biggest of certain edible fish. This will cover the seasoned small boat angler but

also cover the novice as anyone can land the big ones. Hopefully it will bring together like minded anglers and knowledge can be shared to benefit novice and experienced anglers alike. The hotel, which is angler friendly, is roasting a pig on a spit for the Sunday evening for all the competitors and their families at the prize giving. All boats are welcome and more information can be found on the **Rinnashark SAC Facebook page** or by contacting myself **barmurphy@hotmail.com**. For travelling boats, cheap rates are being offered by the hotel for the weekend. Click or tap below for more information.

Until next time, happy fishing,

Barry Murphy



THE FUTURE

“JUST THE BEGINNING...”

Written by: Katie Crooks (13)

Photography by: Katie Crooks, Nathan Crooks, Andy Loble & friends

587.347.789.83456

My name is Katie and I'm 13 years old. I started properly fishing at the start of 2015, when I was 11. The first time I ever went fishing though was when I was 5; I caught a tiny roach and then sat in the car with my custard creams waiting for my mum to pick me up because it was too cold – he he! I used to go to the Thorpe Park lake in Cleethorpes and catch mostly bream and ide on a whip, fishing on the bottom with mixed maggots but what really got me fishing in a more serious way was when I went to the Back lake at Bradley Ponds with my Dad (Nathan). I was always begging him to take me so he finally did, even though he didn't think I was ready. I fished a 5 meter



Even when very young I loved fishing!

whip with corn in front of me and something pulled my really light elastic all the way out! I shouted to Dad and said “I think it's stuck on something” and I pulled up my whip till it was virtually straight in the air, something I wouldn't do now! Then all of a sudden the fish shot in underneath my peg, wrapped round the leg of the platform and I netted it. It was an 8lb common carp and I was so happy and excited! I wanted to go all the time after that day, but then Dad had to return to work again and the summer holidays ended. It also started to get colder so I waited (somehow) till the next year.

2016 came around and I was begging my Dad to take me out fishing! He took me out to Bradley's again and people started speaking to me and approaching me, knowing my name. I was so confused and didn't know half of these people, but they knew me as I guess it's rare for a girl to be fishing! The manager of the lake, Pete Morley, spoke to my Dad and said he wanted to help me out because I was starting to get recognition for being a determined angler. He kindly gave me

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.

Katie Crooks is currently one of the shining lights of the UK's junior coarse match scene. Not only does she stand out from the crowd for being a female angler (all too rare, sadly) but also through the impressive list of results and wins she has racked up in the last few years. This girl is going places! Her bubbly enthusiasm for fishing is infectious and she wanted to write about where it all began for her as an angler.



I quickly learned that if you focus and stay positive then results will come your way!

I learned that if you just be positive and have a bit of confidence, or something to fuel you to accomplish your goal, you can do whatever you want

some bits and bobs to go with my Badger seatbox and 5m whip. He also gave me rods, landing nets and even sponsorship from the lake and that's where I started my match fishing from.

I fished my first match at Woldview, doing a junior match on Gold Lake. I was so excited but scared because it was my first ever match. To be totally honest, I didn't concentrate. I was throwing loads of baits in and moving spots constantly. That day I caught about 3lbs of roach and I was a bit mardy about it afterwards, but I was determined to be in the top three next time and prove that I could do it! I went again the month after, fishing on Woldview's Island Lake. This time I had my head down and I drew a good peg, smack bang in the middle. I had the best area of the lake. I was set up



A big hard fighting common from Bradley Ponds

properly and focused and soon started bagging. I caught 10.8lbs that day, enough for first place - I was so happy! I felt so complete and learned that if you just be positive and have a bit of confidence or something to fuel you to accomplish your goal, you can do whatever you want.

At the back end of April 2016, there was a Preston Juniors league at Lindholme Lakes. I wanted to take part but my Dad told me it would be a big step up from doing regional junior matches. There were four matches and your three top weights would be counted. The first week was on the Bonsai lake. This was my first time ever fishing

at Lindholme. I used chopped worm in the margin because I had only ever used a pole at that stage and didn't know how to use a feeder properly. I fished hard on deck in front of me and it wasn't working, so I went into the margins. My Dad told me it was too early in the match to fish there and I said "well, I can try it and it might be good!" I was right, and soon I was hooking into lots and lots of bream, I was so pleased. At the end I weighed in 38lbs and came 2nd.

The next time we were on Bennys. I had the wind on my back and started to fish down my margin with worm again. I was banging out F1 after F1 after F1. It was stuffed with them! Then I started to hook into the barbel. They are tough fighters but I loved it, and caught a total of 46lb.

The third match of the league was on Laurels. It was spawning time for most of the fish and it wasn't fishing well at all, you could see them all topping and playing in the reeds but they didn't want any food. All I managed to catch was a lovely 2lbs perch and a few F1s for a total of 6lbs. That was my lowest weight and I came 6th.

My last Preston match was back on Bennys again. I knew how the place worked by now and set up



Learning from the best! Tommy & Emma Pickering and a certain Mr. Alan Scotthorne

nice and quickly. I was fishing my favourite technique, worm in the margin, and was soon hooking in lots of F1s, then small carp, big carp and finally some barbel moved in. I was having such a good day and it was made even more special because my Grandma and Grandad came to watch me fish. They were so proud, as were my parents, when I came in 3rd place. This result was enough to see me finish 1st in the league by just 2 points and I was buzzing for ages after.

A few weeks later I was fishing a family fun-day pleasure session when none other than match legend Tommy Pickering came up behind me and showed me some tips and tricks, before later on presenting me with my Preston Juniors trophy. I was so excited once again and very proud. I couldn't stop beaming!

Throughout the Preston Juniors I created a Facebook page called "Katie's fishing tails" so I could help others and let people see my progress. My blog is now going really well and has a high amount of likes on it. Lachelle Jackson at our local tackle shop (Baits2Fish) wanted to sponsor me for my "wiggly baits" (maggots & worms etc.), and of course I said

I would not have been able to get anywhere near where I am today without the support of these guys. I am so lucky to have people who want to see me do well in my fishing



Receiving my Preston Juniors trophy from the legend that is Tommy Pickering

yes! They have helped me so much, just as Bradley Lakes have done, as well. Just recently I also picked up a sponsorship from Pele Johnson at Spotted Fin for a range of match groundbaits and additives for the season ahead. Dennis Lee of Gizmo Angling has presented me with the world's best hook tyer,

which makes short work of hook tying prep and gives me great confidence in being able to fish lighter hooklinks. More recently I have been sponsored by Dean Townsend of DT floats, who made me a range of floats to my liking. I would not have been able to get anywhere near where I am today without the support of these guys. I am so lucky to have people



Catching F1s at Lindholme with advice from Alex Dockerty



who want to see me do well in my fishing and want other people to hear about me too.

Last October I met a girl called Sarah Taylor at the Maver Match Aid finals. She was fishing and I went up to her and spoke for a while, asking her lots of questions, as I tend to do! She wasn't really catching much and she was getting cold so she said I could have a go on her pole, if I liked. I got in position and started to feed and a few seconds later I caught an 8lb mirror carp. Buzzing! I asked Sarah if she wanted a hot chocolate to warm her up and she replied "go on, then" So, we sat down for a break and we couldn't stop laughing. We were instantly connected. Just the fact that I made a friend who is like me and I can do my hobbies with is amazing.

I met up with Sarah again at Partridge Lakes, on Covey 5, in November and we fished at the other side of the snake lake at 13 metres. We both were laughing and showing each other some awesome tips we had learned. As if that was enjoyable enough we both had a lovely net of fish at the end too, filled

Fishing besties!



with F1s and carp.

In November I went to the first of four sessions of the Angling Trust's junior Talent Pathway (North) event, back at Partridge. Sarah was there along with a lot of other people my age. We all learnt about waggler fishing and using light line and small hooks for when the going is tough in the winter. We also had to fight through extreme weather and learn about mixing ground baits. It was so much fun (especially when Frankie Gianoncelli fell in – he he!)

Whilst I was doing the Talent Pathway I also fished the winter league with Lee Kerry, Emma Pickering, Matty Pillay etc. I got lots of help and in one of my matches I actually beat angling legend John Allerton off the next peg! He was a really nice man and we had a talk about fishing for the pike which are in this lake in the summer and had a really nice time. I also met Mat Godfrey and Nick Speed there too, the pair of them are nutters but they know how to fish! Nick Speed, when no one was

A nice mixed bag from Wold View



catching, was singing the colours of the rainbow and started having conversations about what he's having for tea across the lake. When he catches a fish he says "another ounce in the bag", followed by a massive splash! A great character, that's for sure.

I'm so lucky to have what I have right now; fisheries which let me practice there and look after me, sponsorships, and good friends, and the main thing is that I'm enjoying it too! I love fishing. It calms me down and relaxes me (unless I'm having a match, then I get very competitive!) I think it is all good fun and it's not about winning, it's about having fun and taking part. Even when I practice I still make it enjoyable for myself, because what's the point in fishing when you don't enjoy it? Just enjoy yourself and keep bagging.

Tight lines,

Katie Crookes

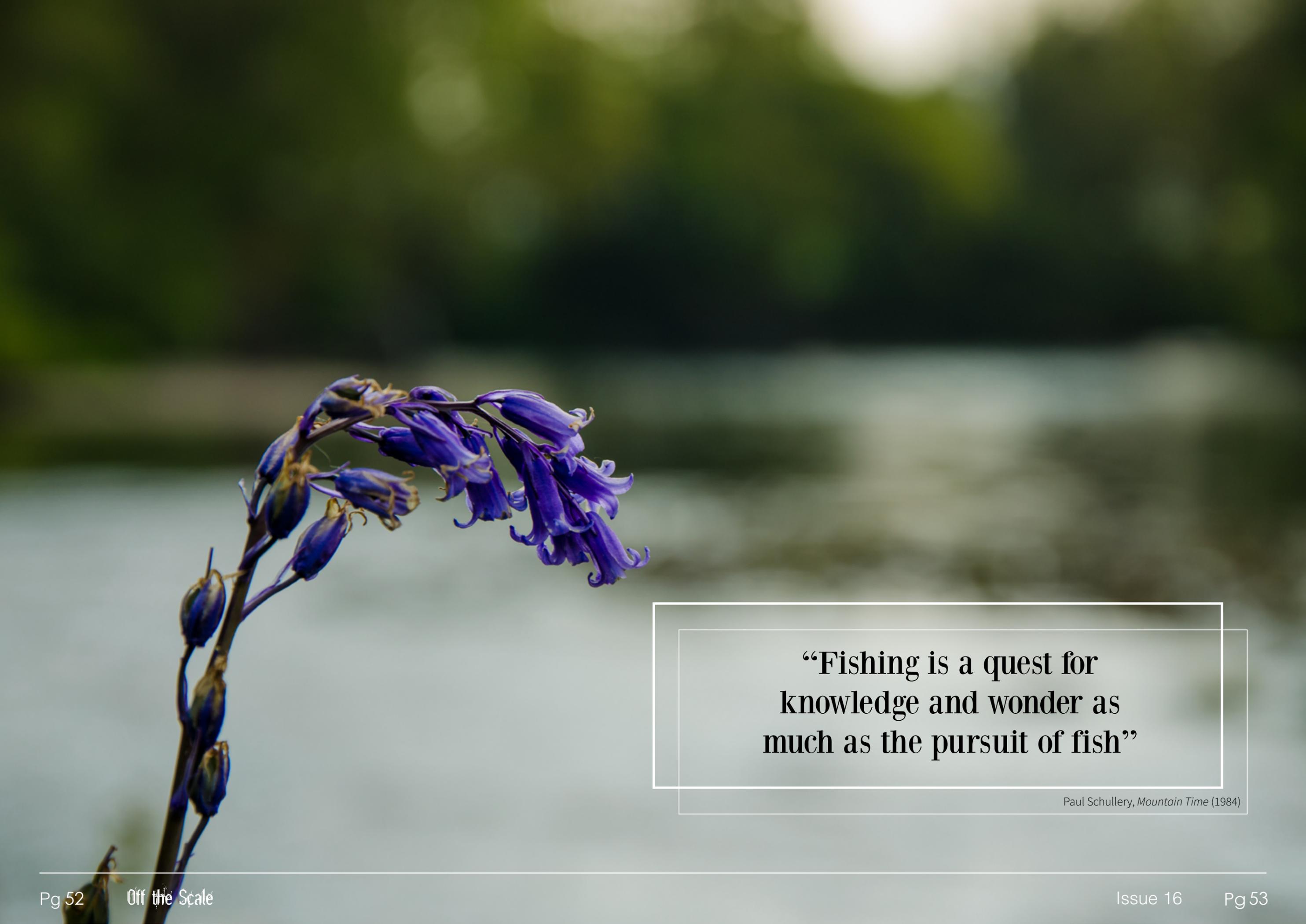


Follow Katie's fishing adventures on her blog by clicking or tapping below:



... it's not about winning, it's about having fun and taking part. Even when I practice I still make it enjoyable for myself, because what's the point in fishing when you don't enjoy it?





**“Fishing is a quest for
knowledge and wonder as
much as the pursuit of fish”**

Paul Schullery, *Mountain Time* (1984)



Yellow iris

Scientific name: *Iris pseudacorus*

Also known as yellow flag, iris is a brilliantly yellow flowering plant of all types of wet ground, especially around lakes, ponds, rivers, marshes and some bogs. Flowers appear in May-June. Long sword-shaped leaves may reach a height of 100-150cm. Can spread quickly and form large patches. Pollinated by long-tongued insects like bumble bees.

Acorn barnacle

Scientific name: *Semibalanus balanoides*

The rough, creamy-white stuff on rocks near the sea? They're barnacles; small crustaceans related to crabs & lobsters and not mussels as many believe. There are actually a large number of different species but among the most common are Acorn barnacles. Fixed in position, they filter feed on plankton/algae as it passes by. Can live for up to 7 years.



#otslookout

On the lookout...

Some wildlife to keep an eye out for when fishing this May & June



Broad-leaved pondweed

Scientific name: *Potamogeton natans*

A very common native weed (macrophyte) found across a range of habitats, from slow flowing rivers, ditches and canals to ponds and lakes. Leaves float on the surface and vary from oval to spear-shaped. Small spikes of tiny flowers appear in summer. Stems are easily snapped on their own but each bed may have thousands of stems and make landing fish tricky!

Ringed plover

Scientific name: *Charadrius hiaticula*

This small wading bird is found around the entire coast of Ireland & the UK all-year round. Characteristic plover feeding action is a short run along ground, pause, bend over to pick up the food item and followed by another run. Feeds on a variety of invertebrates, crustaceans and worms.



Common pond skater

Scientific name: *Gerris lacustris*

There are several similar looking species of pond skaters but this is one of the most frequent. Pond skaters are just 10-15mm in size, very light and literally walk on water. They can often be found in large groups and are aggressive predators of other insects. They are good fliers as well.

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Words by Chris O Sullivan

Images by Chris O Sullivan & James Allman

Let's be honest here; fishing trips take a lot of planning. We are forever watching tides and weather, collecting bait and tying rigs, not to mention trying to decide which rods and reels suit the purpose of the trip in question. But then sometimes it's the last minute trips when you go with the traces still in the box from your last venture that are the ones that pay off most handsomely. This was one of those occasions when the latter proved to be the case...

A call from avid river angler James Allman confirmed that a lack of water in the river meant he could be tempted to put down the fly rod and get some salty sea air in his lungs. At this time of year many angler's thoughts turn to the Stingray and elusive Undulate ray that can be found in Tralee Bay and fishermen from all over Ireland and the UK come to visit to chase these monsters. Unfortunately, those beasts take a fair amount of preparation and bait collection so the decision was taken to have a go at another hard fighting spring fish, the Sea

“As we walked toward the waterline the first bit of excitement happened as a nice fish broking the surface mid-channel. They were here, so were we. Surely the fishing Gods were giving us the thumbs up?”

Left
Not a bad place to while away a few hours!

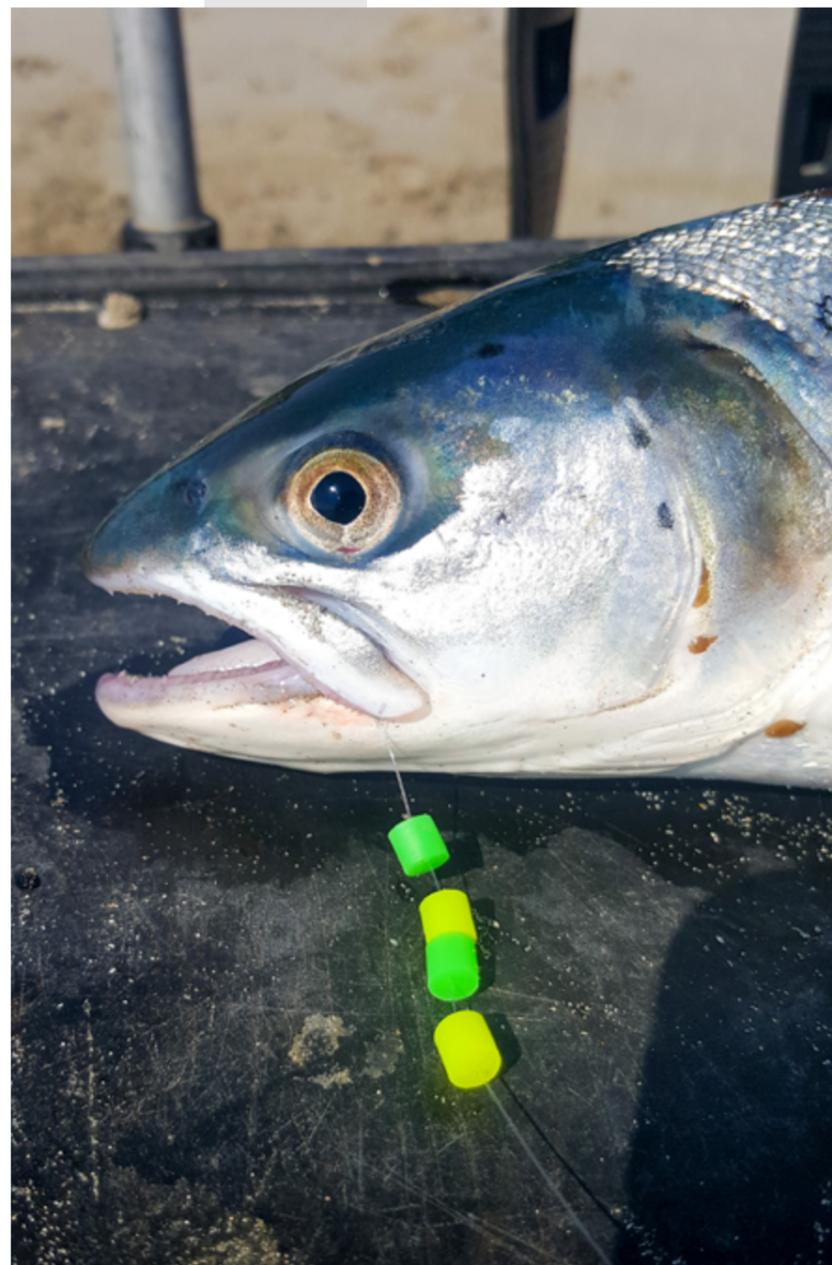
Below
A mint conditioned Sea trout falls to the 3-hook flapper

see calm and bright conditions, with a visiting English angler surveying the beach ahead of us. He informed us that he'd had some luck on the lures for Sea trout but that they were a small stamp of fish and his target species, the bass, had proved elusive. He mentioned

trout. It should be noted that to target Sea trout in estuarine or fresh waters a (salmon & Sea trout) licence is required. These can be purchased online or from local tackle shops; we picked up our annual all-Ireland licences (€100) in Jim Halpin's fishing and hunting shop in Main Street, Listowel.

We decided that Cappagh beach at the mouth of the Cloghane estuary would be where we would make our stand. Only 40 minutes from Tralee, the drive out along the N86 offers scenic views of Brandon Bay and its magnificent surf beaches. A 20km easterly wind was forecast and that dampened enthusiasm briefly but the promise from the weather forecasters that Ireland would be "hotter than Ibiza" kept us dreaming.

On this trip tactics would be simple and the bait would match. Light rods were selected with 12lb Akios silk line and no leader. After all, it was about getting out and about while having some fun. We would only be lobbing the traces 30 to 40m so there was no need for a shock leader. As we arrived we were pleasantly surprised to



©



3-HOOK FLAPPER FOR SEA TROUT

5FT 30LB MONO TRACE BODY

50lb test swivel

10-15mm foam pop up bead

12-14" 8LB SUPPLE FLUOROCARBON SNOODS

Third of a sandeel on each hook (minus head & tail)

Size 8-4 fine-wire hook

Gemini clip

Rolling lead

*Rig shown in this position for display purposes only. In reality, in shallow water, the rig will lie with the baits in a line on or just off the seabed



Above
A graceful pose in the soft sands with a stunning bar of silver. I fell over just after this shot was taken!

Left
I find a 3-hook flapper, complete with pop up beads, lethal for Sea trout in my local area

“when, a mere ten minutes into our adventure, my rod tip began to tremble I gave James a knowing look thinking to myself “thank God, I haven’t brought us on a wild goose chase!”

that a 70cm bass had been taken on a lure by another angler the previous day at nearby Fermoy. For any lure anglers reading, a classic silver Toby had accounted for his Sea trout

As we walked toward the waterline the first bit of excitement happened as a nice fish broke the surface mid-channel. They were here, so were we. Surely the fishing gods were giving us the thumbs up? Traces baited and traps set, we sent our first cast’s into the clear blue water that was slowly filling towards the high water mark. It should be noted that the sand is extremely soft here and wading is only

advised under extreme caution as you will routinely sink up to your knee, which means one false step could see you stumble and end up in a whole pile of trouble.

Choice of tactic divides opinion when it comes to chasing these amazing fish. Traditional spinning has its followers, as does a long running ledger with a size 4 hook and a light rolling ball type lead but the one that does it for me is a simple 3-hook flapper. I usually make them with approximately 5ft of 30lb mono and use 12 to 14” fluorocarbon snoods of 8lb breaking strain. Recently I have been using the Asso Ultraflex for my main bodies and have nothing but praise for it so far. As for the fluorocarbon there is a massive variety to choose from, and on this occasion I used Colmic Zayo which is a brilliantly supple fluorocarbon. At the business end I use a fine wire pattern hook in size 8 with a 15mm foam pop up, which helps keep the bait away from the crabs. As for bait I like to use a medium sized sandeel with the head and tail taken off and then cut evenly into three sections. Some anglers choose to use bait elastic when putting the eels on but I have found that it really makes no difference when only casting a short distance. It is down purely to personal preference. In fact, we had fish when binding the baits and when

we didn’t use elastic. I find this 3-hook tactic lethal when targeting Sea trout in this area so when, a mere ten minutes into our adventure, my rod tip began to tremble I gave James a knowing look thinking to myself “thank God, I haven’t brought us on a wild goose chase!”

A minimal fight told me something was wrong straight away - no jump, no runs; this wasn’t part of the plan. A flounder, that old reliable, blank-saving fish, had scoffed my sandeel bait. A quick move to the right brought us closer to the channel and stopped the need to wade out. First cast and the rod tip slammed over as the trace



“The water exploded almost immediately and a fine bar of silver broke the surface for an aerial display unrivalled in our coastal waters.

made its way around with the tide. This was more like it! The water exploded almost immediately and a fine bar of silver broke the surface for an aerial display unrivalled in our coastal waters. Three more spectacular jumps and some line stripping runs in the shallows really had the pulses racing and me reaching for the drag to allow the fish run. Finally, after a few moments of nervous excitement, the fish was landed. Measuring in at 47cm and being very well-conditioned, the smile said it all!

The day continued along this line until the top of the tide, when the water movement stopped. Predictably, this is when the crabs came out to play and offered some frustration. Thankfully the fish returned with the dropping tide (back down the estuary) and we were back in action. James struck for two quick fire fish, both over 30cm. The sandeel sections were doing well with a bite every second cast in the May sun. As our evening progressed a bitter east wind made an unwelcome appearance but luckily this coincided with our sandeel supply running out. Thirty baits out of a packet of eels has to be considered great value for money.

As we were making our way off the beach, reflecting on how successful the mini-trip was, two other anglers appeared with the spinning gear ready for action having had some good results over the previous few days. They were confident of some hook ups. Even though there was no official competition between us there is always a competitive side to fishing for me and I was happy to come out narrowly ahead five Sea trout to four, meaning James would be buying the ice creams for the short drive home!

Chris O Sullivan



Above
You have to do something whilst waiting for a bite, might as well try and be a little creative!

Left
A hard fighting, acrobatic silver bullet from the Kerry coast



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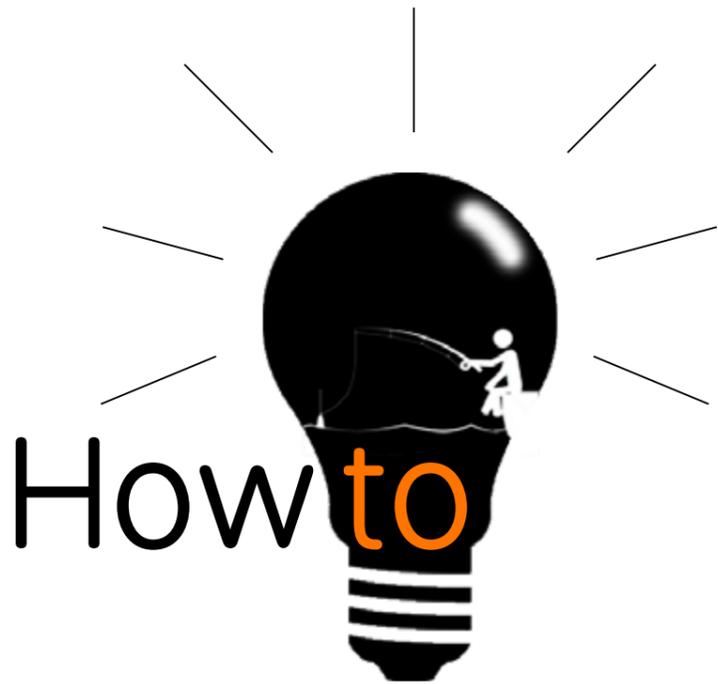
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DO



FISH



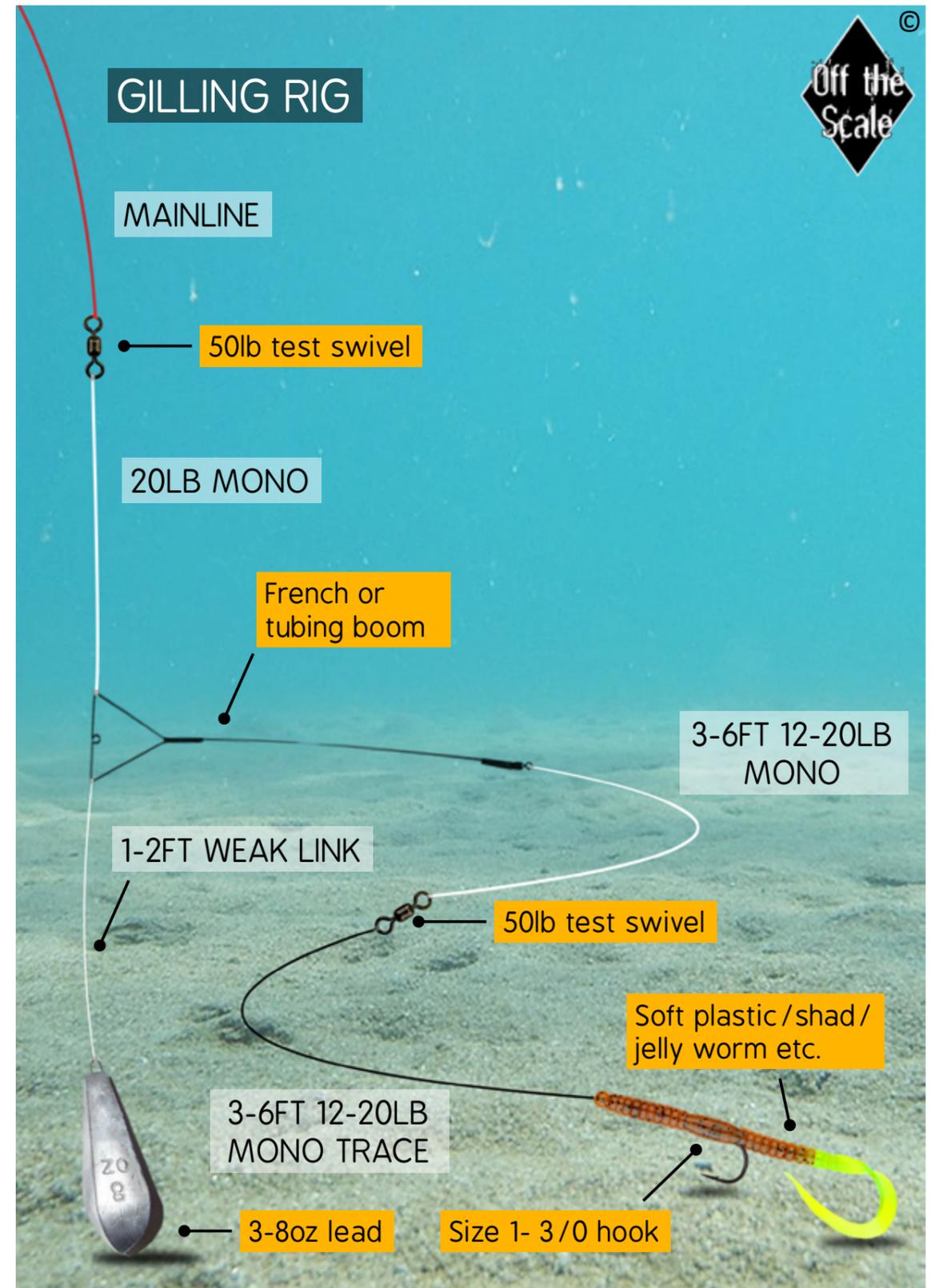
CATCH!

TIE A SIMPLE **GILLING** RIG FOR POLLOCK ETC.

with Barry Murphy

Gilling is a very popular and successful way of fishing for species such as pollock and coalfish, but other species such as cod can also be targeted. Gilling is a type of spinning done from a boat, most often whilst fishing over wrecks or reefs. Pollock caught in this way are great sport and make some very hard fighting dives to get back to the safety of the reef or wreck. While the principle of the tactic stays the same there are many variables such as number of hooks and type of baits.

- Bait can be of two types; natural or artificial. Natural baits are mostly head-hooked rag worm or long thin belly strips of mackerel. Artificial baits consist of many variations of plastic/rubber lures that imitate worms and fish. The main ones are jelly worms and shads.
- Depending on the depth and water conditions certain colours seem to work better. Typically though have a few black, black & red, orange & green in your box and you should be well covered. As with all fishing presenting the bait neatly is the key to success.
- The diagram shows the simplest gilling set up - one hook - this is adequate for most pleasure angling. For the match angler another hook or two can be added by adding extra snoods evenly spaced between the bottom hook and the boom.
- For gilling traces I tend to use heavier and stiffer line than usual, to reduce tangles and present the baits better. Length depends on the depth and current, but 3-6ft covers most situations.
- Gilling requires the lead and bait to be dropped to the bottom at a steady rate to avoid tangles. Once on the bottom start retrieving at a slow and steady pace. Multipliers have slower retrieval rates than most fixed spools in general and can be easier to use. Count the number of turns you make on the reel handle, which will depend on water depth, bottom type and area you're in.
- A good starting point is 30 to 40 turns. If no fish take then drop back to the bottom and start all over again. Often you will feel small bites as the fish plucks at the bait before taken it. It is important to keep reeling at the same speed until the fish takes and hooks itself.



TAG, you're

it!



TAGGING IRISH BASS FOR CONSERVATION

By Jim Clohessy

The basic facts about bass, as we understand, are thus; bass spend the summer and autumn at inshore feeding areas. For winter and most of spring bass leave the inshore areas and head offshore, where it is thought they gather in large shoals and then breed. When scientists realised that bass numbers were plummeting one of the first protection measures brought in was to protect the gatherings of offshore bass (when you think about it, it's madness to be targeting spawning fish in any case).

Older studies showed some bass being caught within 16km of their capture location so we anticipated at least some fish returning. Nothing prepared us for what we would discover; ALL our bass came back!

IN EARLY APRIL 2017 A SCIENTIFIC PAPER WAS PUBLISHED ABOUT THE HABITS OF BASS. IT HAD THE LOFTY TITLE, "LOCALISED RESIDENCY AND INTER-ANNUAL FIDELITY TO COASTAL FORAGING AREAS MAY PLACE SEA BASS AT RISK TO LOCAL DEPLETION". SO, WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? DOES A SCIENTIFIC PAPER HAVE THE ABILITY TO EFFECT ANGLING, ANGLING POLICY AND ANGLING REGULATIONS? THIS ONE DOES.



In its conception, this was a simple study. It is easy to have a simple study about bass because we really know so little about them. The scientists of the Marine and Renewable Energy (MaREI) have been experimenting with acoustic tracking for a few years now. Over a conversation about Cork harbour it was decided that to acoustically track bass would be a worthwhile experiment. This enigmatic fish is currently our only protected marine species and is a very important species in a European context.

Lead scientist **Tom Doyle** (of NUIG) secured funding for the research and plans were put in place to begin the study. Simply put, each

Above
We deployed 14 acoustic receivers over 2 years in and around Cork Harbour and they gave us some truly amazing info about the habits of bass!

Main
Kevin Murphy with one of the smaller subjects - bass were tagged from 45cm upwards

year over two years fifteen bass were caught, surgically implanted with a transmitter and released back to where they were caught. An array of receivers were set up at strategically chosen locations around the harbour. These would listen to the "pings" from the tagged bass. That first year the scientists downloaded information during the summer and autumn and were able to track the tagged fish on different receivers. As autumn turned to winter the bass vacated the harbour and were tracked on the receivers near the harbour mouth as they left for their winter grounds.



Left & inset
Surgically implanting a tiny but powerful VEMCO transmitter in an anaesthetized bass

Below left
Floy tags – each fish was tagged externally as well in the hope of being spotted again

Below
East Ferry, Cork harbour - bass country!

Right
Local participating angler Daire Lynch with an East Ferry bass

bass were incredibly loyal to their local area... If you take all the fish from a particular area it is unknown how long it would take to replace those bass, if, in fact, they get replaced at all



The following year there was some degree of anticipation as we waited to see if any of our bass would arrive back to the harbour. Older studies showed some bass being caught within 16km of their capture location so we anticipated at least some fish returning. Nothing prepared us for what we would discover; ALL our bass came back! They not only came back but they came back to the exact same stretch of water that they had occupied before. The level of fine-scale residency was staggering.

We continued that second year and tagged a new crop of bass. That summer we had two sets of fish to monitor until the batteries began to run out after around a year and a bit. Our new set of fish were monitored in a similar way to the first and they duly left the harbour around mid-October/November. We waited for the New Year and sure enough the bass returned and again these fish returned to their local patch of water. It was safe to say that bass were incredibly loyal to their local area. Data returns showed that the fish did not stray too far from their local receiver. Tracking did show the odd fish taking a trip to various locations

around the harbour for a couple of days but they always returned to the home receiver.

WHAT DO THESE RESULTS SAY ABOUT OUR BASS AND HOW WE SHOULD PROTECT THEM?

In terms of commercial fishing for bass (commercial fishing for bass is prohibited in Irish and much EU



waters) it is important to recognise that local bass "hot spots" need to be protected. If you take all the fish from a particular area it is unknown how long it would take to replace those bass, if, in fact, they get replaced at

all. It is unknown how a bass gets attached to a particular area of water. One thing is for sure though, they are fairly accomplished navigators to return to the same patch year after year.

The situation is equally important from an angling point of view. If you kill all the fish you catch from your local spot you may suddenly experience a drop off in bass numbers, as the bass are not replaced with "new" fish. It is ever more important to be selective when you are giving out information so that you try limit the amount of fish being retained by anglers.

We enthuse and rave about the ability of a salmon to find its way back to its river of birth to spawn. It may only do this once or twice in its lifetime. Bass return to their favourite reef year after year.

A stunning result of this study is the survivability of the tagged fish. Often we were told that mortality post-release could be as high as 20%. The study showed 100% survival after 30 days of each set of fish. It is important to stress that the fish were well handled and they were mainly caught with single hooks and all on lures, but the figures are still incredible - ALL the fish survived. It shows that catch and release is the perfect way to allow fishing to continue and fish stocks to be maintained or improved.

CAN A STUDY LIKE THIS IMPACT POLICY?

It should, it can and it does! In 2015 there was talk of a six month closed season for anglers - no bass fishing allowed. The results of this study in no small way helped decision makers allow catch and release for recreational anglers during the December to June restrictions.



It is clear that where there is a commercial fishery for bass that selective methods such as towed line and rod & line fishing are the way forward. Blunt instruments such as gill nets should not be favoured over methods that

allow undersized fish to be released back to the water alive – as we now know, it is clear that they will survive. Recently the Isle of Man brought in new protection measures for bass. Again the policy makers were aware of the results of this study and as such the results offered comfort and encouragement that they were doing the correct thing in regards to their regulations. In terms of protection of fish, this study is important as it allows fishery protection to be targeted more effectively. The bass are moving during specific periods and take specific routes when entering and exiting the harbour. Therefore, these

routes can be protected. It is clear that there is little point in patrolling Cork harbour in the period from Christmas until March, as the bass are simply not there. Fishery protection resources can now be utilised and targeted more effectively.

Bass are an important species. They are a target for a

multitude of tourist anglers. They are also a target for a huge cohort of local anglers. The social and economic benefits of bass angling as a sport fish far outweigh the value of those fish in any fish market. Bass fishing provides employment to many across the range of accommodation, restaurateurs, angling guides and

tackle sellers.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

So how do bass get attached to an area? It could be genetic - maybe they follow more experienced fish when they are juveniles. Where do bass go when they leave the inshore areas and head offshore? How does a bass navigate? What would happen if you take a bass from its local area and move it to another area?

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Left & above
An acoustic- and floy-tagged bass ready to be released

Below right
Lead Scientist Dr. Tom Doyle shows off a huge bass that was tagged, released and tracked

This study had an interesting dimension in that it was a collaboration between scientists and anglers. The study was conceived by Tom Doyle and Jim Clohessy. Damien Haberlin, Mark Jessep and Ashley Bennison worked on different aspects and authored the paper with Tom and Jim.

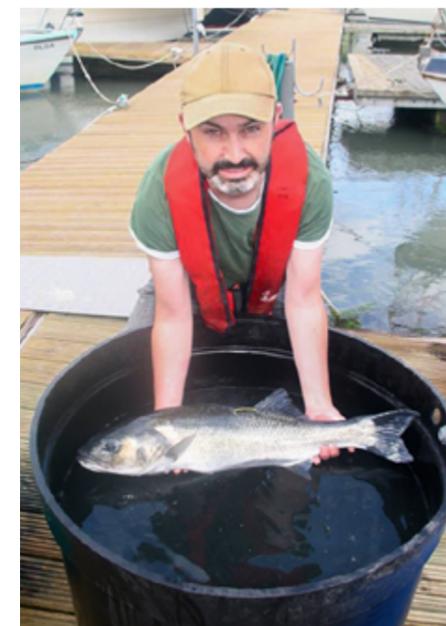
The anglers were a great bunch of local anglers - Richie Ryan, Andrew Davies, Kevin McLoughlin, Daire Lynch, Pat O'Shea, Kevin Murphy & Michael Hennesey.

Funding was provided by the Electricity Supply Board, Science Foundation Ireland and MaREI.

Will it find its way back? Could bass from one area be used to restock areas where bass are scarce, or would they just up sticks and return to their home patch?

Studies like this one kick-start scientists into action. Scientists tend to get motivated when they see others making progress. In the UK and France, CEFAS and INFERMER have started a study where they are tracking bass movements at sea. It will be interesting to see what new information they will be able to add to our knowledge of this great species. In Ireland, IFI have a superb bass tagging programme. Anglers are tagging fish with streamer/floy tags and also take scales samples from which scientists are building a large database on bass growth rates throughout different years. This is all work that is feeding into an ever-growing pool of quality information about bass and bass habits.

If our political servants have the sense to continue with bass protection measures, and



if these measures are rolled out across the EU, the future should be bright for bass and bass angling. In the meantime, fisheries scientists, once they get support, will strive to increase our knowledge about bass and other important species. All that anglers must do is to limit their retention of bass and to practice and promote catch and release angling for bass.

Jim Clohessy



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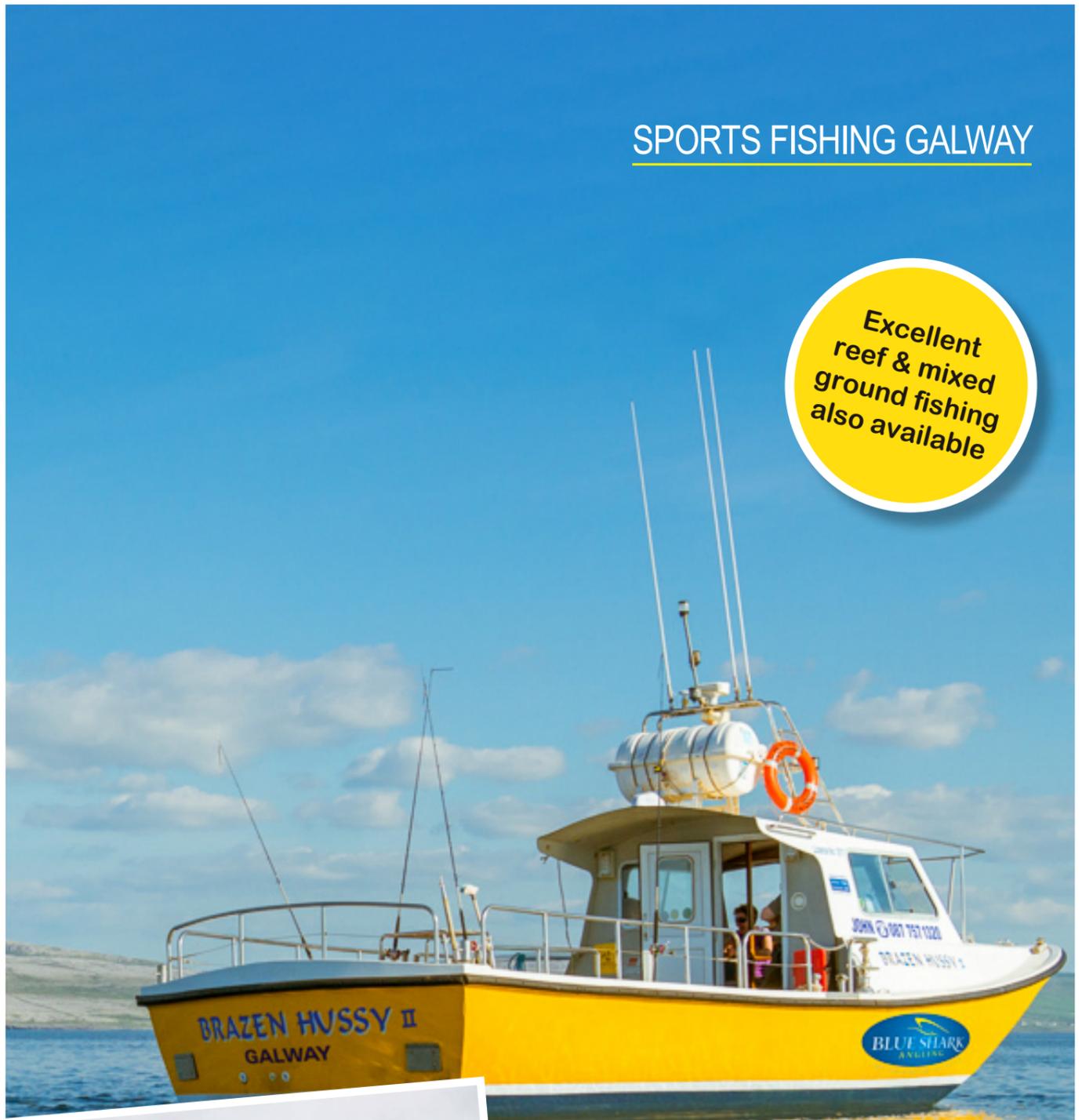
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Galway porbeagle!

SINK or SWIM?

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



HTO Stink Pots & Go! boxes

We were kindly sent a box of lure fishing goodies from the Tronix stable recently to check and test out, and good they certainly are. First up are the aptly named Stink Pots, small egg cup-sized pots of scented soft plastics for ultra-light and LRF styles. The range comes in 3 patterns – ragworm, heart tail and paddle tail – each in 4 colours, white, pink, red and motor oil.

Both the paddle and heart tails are a little over an inch in size, with the hearts being of a more streamlined profile. The ragworm variety measures approx. 3". You get over 50 baits in each pot (15-20 of the larger rag) which offers great value for money especially when you consider that these baits are made from a highly durable, stretchy, almost indestructible plastic. They last extremely well and you can expect just

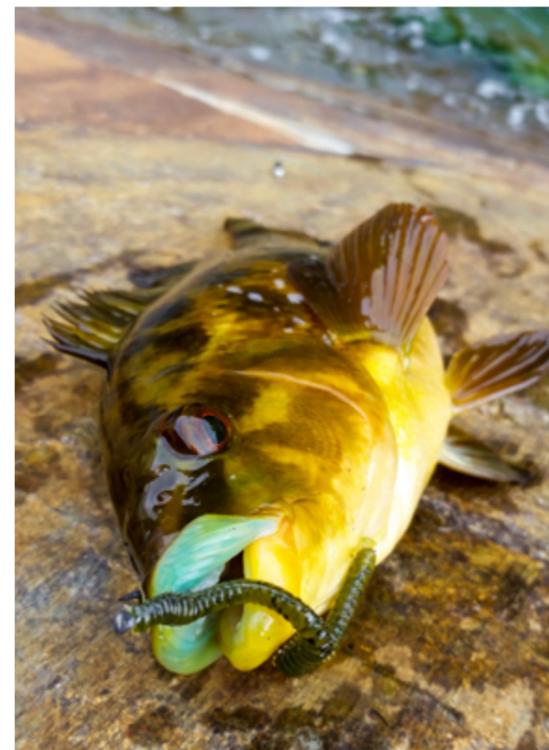


MADE FROM A HIGHLY DURABLE,
STRETCHY, ALMOST INDESTRUCTIBLE
PLASTIC. THEY LAST EXTREMELY WELL
AND YOU CAN EXPECT JUST A SINGLE
POT TO LAST A VERY LONG TIME

a single pot to last a very long time. As with other lures of this material, it is advised not to mix them with other plastic/rubber baits as they can react with each other and physically melt; a good thing then that HTO provide them in a handy, re-sealable screw top jar.

The near-everlasting nature of these small baits is good enough reason to have them in your tackle box or bag but their real standout characteristic is the fact that they are also scented. As you may have seen, even in previous issues of Off the Scale, scented lures are giving another valuable dimension to light lure fishing in recent years. No longer are you solely relying on making your bait look realistic to induce a take; if it also smells like natural food then surely your chances are that much increased. Whilst the exact recipe of the infused scent is obviously a trade secret, the pots certainly smell strongly of some sort of fishy concoction – in fact, they stink!

The quality of the lures is beyond doubt, but do they actually make a difference to your catch rate? That's the million dollar question. In testing we have found that the answer may well



OVER 50 BAITS IN EACH POT (15-20 OF THE LARGER RAG) WHICH OFFERS GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY

be yes. Fishing for a range of species in both fresh (perch, trout) and saltwater (wrasse, pollock and mini-species) the scented lures have generally outperformed un-scented types, especially in coloured water or low light conditions. We must make note of the ragworm variety, which seems particularly effective for LRF fishing in the sea – they absolutely made a difference!

If you are looking for baits for light jigging, dropshotting or even fishing as a substitute for real static bait (i.e. ragworm), then you should really check these out. At around €4.50 a pot, they are great value for money.

Price: ~ €4.50 a pot

The Go! Boxes from HTO are a really great little idea – a small flip-top box containing just enough baits and jig heads to grab at a moment's notice and get light-lure fishing. There are 5 often flamboyantly-named boxes in the range – Excalibur (basic worm imitation, 4 colours), Mace (heart-tailed worm, 4 colours), Knightworm (scented 2" twin tailed worms, 3 colours), Bug (2" creature baits, 4 colours) and finally Dropshot (1.5" paddle tails, 4 colours). It has to be said, the dropshot baits are a work of art! Incidentally, you get 20-30+ baits per box, depending on the pattern.

Unlike the Stink Pots, these soft plastics are not made from an everlasting material and so aren't as durable but are more than good enough to catch you a lot of fish before you exhaust >>

SINK or Swim?

your supply. Of course, you could always supplement the Go! Boxes with some Stink Pot contents or buy replacement lures separately.

All boxes come with 4-5 size 6 or 8 Maikuro jig heads (depending on lure type), whereas the Dropshot boxes come with 3.5g tungsten dropshot weights. The scented Knightworm boxes also feature dropshot weights in addition to the jig heads. One thing bearing in mind is that the dropshot weights are not coated and are quite reflective, which may work for or against you in certain situations. In testing, aggressive wrasse were overly keen to attack the drop shot weight but on the other hand perch and small pollock definitely seemed attracted to the bait as a result.

These ready-to go boxes are perfect for stashing in your box or tackle bag just in case, or keeping hidden in the car so you can have a sneaky cast as and when the opportunity arises. They are pocket-sized so you can carry them with you without noticing, even

THESE READY-TO GO BOXES ARE PERFECT FOR STASHING IN YOUR BOX OR TACKLE BAG JUST IN CASE, OR KEEPING HIDDEN IN THE CAR SO YOU CAN HAVE A SNEAKY CAST AS AND WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY ARISES



on long walks. These kits are great for youngsters or beginners as well, and will catch (as we have proven to ourselves) all manner of different species. Grab a rod and a Go! Box and off you go! Other than some coated dropshot weights, it would be nice to see a Go! Box offered with dropshot hooks or even small weedless jig heads in the future. This would mean all your bases are essentially covered wherever you happen to fish. For now though there is more than enough in the range to get you started and catching.

Price: ~ €9-12 per box

Available from HTO stockists



EXCALIBUR



MACE



KNIGHTWORM



BUG



DROPSHOT

SINK or Swim?



IF YOU ARE SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR SEA FISHING THEN YOU SERIOUSLY NEED TO READ THIS BOOK! POSITIVELY PACKED FULL OF PRACTICAL POINTERS, I CHALLENGE ANYONE NOT TO LEARN A GREAT DEAL FROM THE TACTICAL SHORE ANGLER

The Tactical Shore Angler by Mike Thrussell

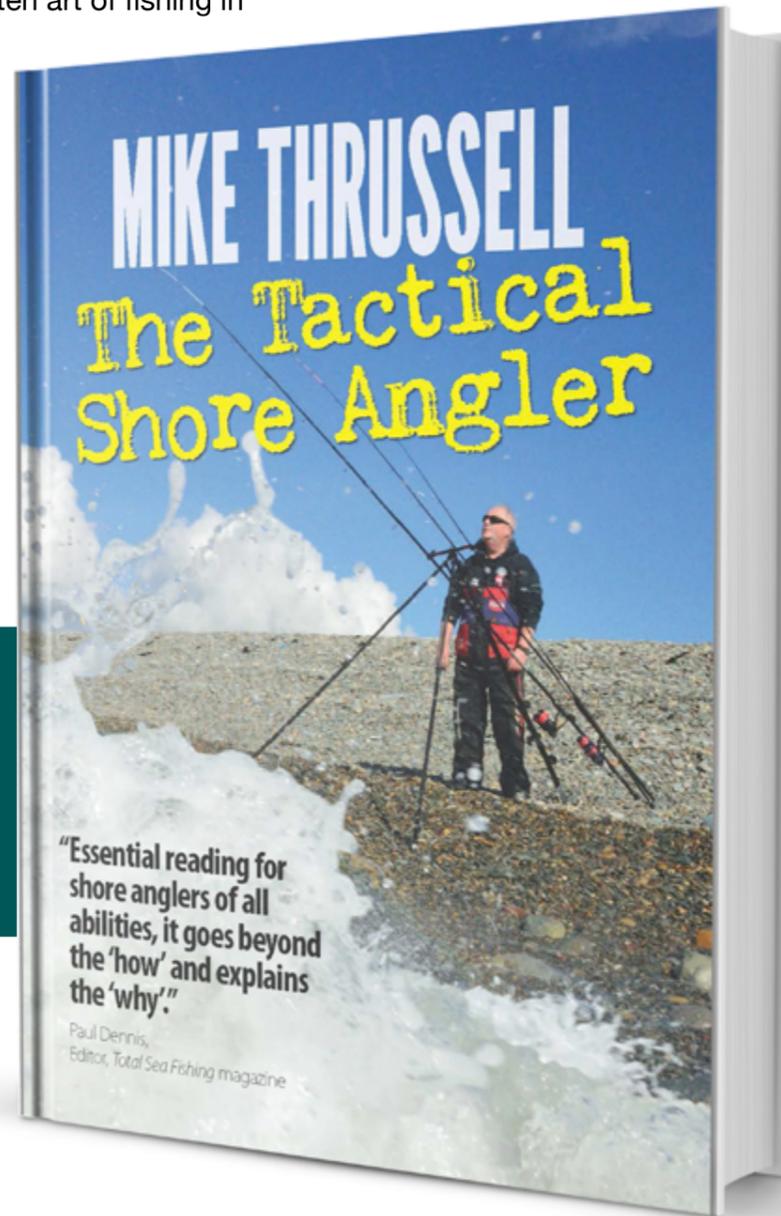
Every now and then a book comes along that is genuinely worth its weight in gold; one that analyses and breaks down a specific discipline into its most basic form, spelling it out in simple language so that one can better understand it - this is one of those.

To many existing sea anglers, Mike Thrussell needs little introduction. The man has fished in more locations, caught more fish, more species and mastered more tactics than almost anyone else in the sport. In fact, without blowing any smoke, he is a bit of a living legend in sea angling terms, with an absolute wealth of both angling and written experience. So, when he releases another book (his 4th, I think) you tend to take notice.

In the Tactical Shore Angler, published again by Peridot Press, Mike expertly strips sea angling down to its

beach or a pier, looked out at the big blue yonder and thought "where the hell do I start?!" then this book will quash all your fears and uncertainties. By explaining the basic yet technical and definitely much-forgotten art of fishing in the sea, Mike gives the reader a massive helping hand, a veritable shortcut to success.

Specific topics covered in this all-too-short book (193pgs) include how to read the vital weather conditions and understand what effects it will have on your chosen marks and species.



choice and presentation, rigs and even bite detection are all laid out in layman's terms. Even if you were to just read chapter 14 alone (Tactics, tips and tricks) it would likely greatly improve your

catch rates. I swear, a lot of you will never think or approach the sea in the same way again after reading this. It will surely open many eyes and make many pennies drop. Above all, what this book will do is give you confidence in your angling and the ability to think your way around the typical problems you may encounter.

Usually experienced anglers would say that this is all

information you literally can't learn, that it must be gained through experience and hard graft. This is partly true; no one is going to lay fishing success out on a plate for you... but Mike Thrussell has come pretty close! He has passed on a lifetime - almost 60 years - worth of knowledge and crammed it into a single book, one that will surely become a bit of a bible for many anglers out there, particularly those just starting off or perhaps broadening their horizons from one genre of angling to another.

If you are serious about your sea fishing then you seriously need to read this book! Positively packed full of practical pointers, I challenge anyone not to learn a great deal from the Tactical Shore Angler, set to fast become a go-to reference for budding and experienced shore anglers alike. An excellent and invaluable companion.

Book reviewed by **Bill Brazier**



BY EXPLAINING THE BASIC YET TECHNICAL AND DEFINITELY MUCH-FORGOTTEN ART OF FISHING IN THE SEA, MIKE GIVES THE READER A MASSIVE HELPING HAND, A VERITABLE SHORTCUT TO SUCCESS

bare bones, explaining the basics of when, where, why and how to fish in pretty much any sea angling situation you may find yourself in. In essence, this book attempts to convey the art of watercraft and a fine job it does, too. If, as an angler, you've ever stood on a

The tides and how to read, investigate and interpret a range of different marks, from every type of beach to estuaries and jetties; bait

Iranian

gökt



A tale of adventure in the Middle East
by Sam Wadman

Images: Sam & Leila Wadman and friends

Imagine, if you will, a predatory barbel of epic proportions. Growing to a possible maximum of 200 kilograms, this freshwater giant is found only in the Tigris-Euphrates river system of Central Asia. It must surely be one of the last remaining unknowns in the world of angling today. This is the King barbus - *Luciobarbus esocinus*.

>>

Often referred to as 'Mangar' as well, it first came to my attention during the Gulf War. Once Saddam Hussein's palace had been seized, the troops took to fishing in his ornamental lakes for a bit of fun during their downtime. Before long, images of their catches filtered through to the angling press back home. I remember first seeing the image of a British soldier cradling a huge barbel-type creature in the Anglers Mail. It blew me away. I had to catch one of my own. Giant predatory barbel on lure and fly tackle sounded too good to be true!

Back then (in the early 2000's) and indeed to this day, very little was and is known about these fish. I struggled to find out much about them other than their name and the fact that they are native to Iraq, Iran, Syria and parts of Eastern Turkey. With these countries being volatile and unstable at the time, planning a fishing trip there was never going to happen. And with that, I forgot all about it.

Things are now a little different and I got married three years ago to my lovely wife Leila, who happens to be half Persian. Back in March of 2016, after many failed attempts to get a visa, I was finally granted one. We then planned a trip to Iran to visit her family for the Persian New Year celebrations, which is the same date as our spring equinox.

A few weeks before we left for Iran, I was trawling

through fishing forums on the internet looking at fish photos - as you do! - and whilst doing so came across an image of a fish that looked remarkably like a King Barbus. The angler also happened to be from Iran. It was a light bulb moment for me. I immediately got Leila to send him a message in the Farsi language to ask about this special fish he was cradling. Perhaps there could be a chance of catching one of these impressive creatures after all?

As is typical of the Iranian culture, the response to our message was warm and inviting. The camaraderie amongst anglers can be truly wonderful at times, this was no different. It turned out that my new friend, Sina, was equally as nutty about all things piscatorial as I was. There was also an offer to join him on a fishing trip after King Barbus while we were there. He told me to bring a medium weight spinning rod, 4000 size fixed spool reel, 30lb braid, 25lb fluorocarbon leader and a minimum of twenty five



Above: A bustling Hubbly Bubbly café in downtown Tehran

Below: The photo of the big King Barbus caught from Saddam's palace, my inspiration for the trip to Iran

Mepps no.5 Spinners. The silver ones with red spots.

That was enough for me and a decision was made. It was so tough to get a visa to travel there that we simply had to make this happen. Who knows when I'd get the chance to visit again? We swapped phone numbers and agreed that we would get in touch once we were settled in the capital, Tehran.

As the day to travel arrived, I was a little nervous and apprehensive. I didn't really know what to expect from my first visit to Iran. I'm pleased to say that the nervousness was certainly unwarranted and we received a very warm welcome. I can honestly say, I've never

eaten so much or drunk so much tea as I did during my first ten days in Iran! The New Year celebrations were amazing, if a little lengthy!

Once all the family celebrations had settled down, we got in touch with Sina and arranged to meet him for tea and a smoke at a hubbly bubbly café in downtown Tehran. With alcohol being forbidden, this is all the rage with the young and trendy Tehranis.

As soon as I met Sina, we clicked. He was so passionate about his fishing and my hunch about meeting yet another strange man from the internet had once again been proved correct! He was the real deal,

loved his fishing and was eager to share his passion with others. A kindred spirit for sure, his enthusiasm was truly infectious. The photos he showed me on his laptop left me spellbound. The King Barbus were simply stunning and they were all set to the backdrop of spectacular mountain scenery.

Over several cups of tea and some smooth molasses tobacco, we began planning the fishing trip. The location he had in mind was a huge lake created by damming a river in the South of the country, close to the Iraqi border. Logistically, it involved flying from Tehran down to a small regional airport and then a lengthy drive. On the ground at the other end it was necessary to arrange a boat to get us around the huge expanse of water, a boatman, food, fuel and camping equipment.

The plan was to spend 4 days exploring the dam and sleep under the stars. Sina arranged everything and assured us that we were in good hands. We were to be joined by one of his friends, Sohrab, a keen fly angler. He was keen to see if he could tempt one of these fish on his hand tied creations.

A week later and we were on our way, the flight was a little delayed but nothing too problematic. Hardi, our driver, picked us up once we'd landed at the other end and after a dinner of liver and heart kebabs, we all squeezed into his tiny car. He drove with his foot to the floor for 4 hours through the night, across the oil fields and desert. Other than some hairy overtaking manoeuvres, the journey was mostly without incident. That is until a feral cat ran under the car as we passed through a small village. With his driving, it stood no chance!

When Hardi finally applied the brakes, it was outside the front of his house

AS SOON AS I MET SINA, WE CLICKED. HE WAS SO PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS FISHING AND MY HUNCH ABOUT MEETING YET ANOTHER STRANGE MAN FROM THE INTERNET HAD ONCE AGAIN BEEN PROVED CORRECT!



IT REALLY WAS A MOST IMPRESSIVE AND UNUSUAL LANDSCAPE. NOTHING BUT THE SOUND OF THE BIRDS AND THE GOATS BEING HERDED BY THE SHEPHERDS HIGH UP IN THE HILLS. IT TRULY WAS THE MOST TRANQUIL PLACE. NOT WHAT I EXPECTED TO FIND IN IRAN AT ALL.

in a small dusty village. We all piled in and were introduced to his brother, Mehti. He was to be our boatman, guide, cook and camp coordinator. He'd spent his whole lifetime fishing the lakes and rivers of the area commercially. He was certainly well qualified for the job and had organised all the supplies for us on the ground as well.

We were told we had just a few hours to rest before we were off again. I couldn't sleep due to the excitement of it all and by 4am we'd been driven down to the lake and were loading our boat in the dark. We stacked it high with everything we needed to keep us going for 4 days and jumped in before heading off into the gloom. There was no moon and it was impossible to see what the surroundings were like. It didn't phase Mehti at the helm, he knew exactly where he was going.

We chugged along for about 20 minutes before he pointed out a cave in the rock

with his torch and tied up alongside it. It was still dark at this time so he started a fire and got the tea on. Then came out the pan and within 10 minutes we all had fried eggs to eat with some delicious Iranian flatbread. The man's a legend!

We all put our rods together and patiently sat waiting for the light. When it finally came, we were treated to the most fantastic sunrise and got a glimpse of the valley and mountains which were to be our home for the next several days. With towering peaks and forged from rock it really was a most impressive and unusual landscape. Nothing but the sound of the birds and the goats being herded by the shepherds high up in the hills. It truly was the most tranquil place. Not what I expected to find in Iran at all.

We started to fish from the shore as soon as we could see. There were small bait fish topping all over the place in the early morning light and it

looked very promising. We tried all around our spot but nothing was interested in our offerings. We soon loaded back into the boat and moved on. As we ventured out into the main body of water we got a proper look at the vastness of it all, there were many bays and arms to explore.

Mehti knew all the spots and we'd either drift and fish from the boat or jump ashore and hop along the rocks. The heat became intense as the sun rose ever higher in the sky. There were slim fish of a couple of pounds swimming around near the surface, following my spinner. Sina explained that these were a species known as Shirbot fish (*Arabibarbus grypus*). Not what we were after, but good sport when they get above 10lb or so apparently. With the water being so clear we could see everything but sadly I didn't spot any King Barbus.

When lunchtime came we found a shady spot where we could relax, eat and have a snooze. Once the worst of the

heat had passed, we were back on the water fishing hard. Sadly, our efforts were fruitless. The only excitement came when Sina spotted a nice fish mooching along the edge. It ignored his spinner though. With the setting of the sun, we found a nice spot and made camp for the night. After a relaxing evening eating kebabs and stargazing, we were ready for an early night. The heat and the travelling had taken their toll, we were all exhausted.

The following morning we arose to another cloudless sky, refreshed and ready for action. We fished hard all day. I spotted a few King Barbus as I was stalking along the shore but again they were not interested. The

only action had come to Sohrab and his flies with a small hand-sized Shirbot fish. It had been a hard couple of days, thousands of casts in the heat and no fish. Something had to change and fast; we were already halfway through the trip. Sina and Mehti were getting frustrated themselves, it was April and usually the fish were pretty

Above: A panoramic of one of our camping spots. Words can't really do the place justice.

Below: Sohrab's small Shirbot fish caught on one of his home-tied flies



obliging by then.

We talked through the situation round the campfire that night. Maybe the fish were spawning late that year and were preoccupied, or perhaps the late snow melt and low water temperature was making them sluggish? Whatever the reason, it was decided that the next morning we would travel right up to the far end of the dam where the river flows in. It's much shallower and the water would be a little warmer. It could make a difference. There

covering the water, I felt a bang on the line as my spinner came up over the nearside ledge. I set the hook and finally had my first fish on. It was thumping away and darting all over the place, putting up reasonable resistance. When I got my first glimpse of it and saw that it was a King Barbus I shouted up the bank to wake the others up. Leila came running down with the camera and took a few shots. At little more than 18 inches long, it was probably the smallest in the lake, but it was a

the reel. Everything went solid and the rod hooped right over. This was a much bigger fish and there wasn't a huge amount I could do to control it. It was steadily taking line and running to my right. I don't think the fish even realised it was hooked.

I went chasing after it, scrambling over the boulders and called to the guys to get the boat ready in case we needed to follow it. My heart was pounding. The fight had all the characteristics of a big fish. I managed to get myself on to a well-positioned rock and then just as I did, the line fell slack. The fish was gone. I was gutted. That horrible sinking feeling we as anglers all relate to swept over me. The King Barbus have a very hard, bony mouth and if your hook is not in the scissors or one of the few fleshy parts then hook pulls can be an issue. Sadly, it had to happen on this fish. Although I never saw it, it felt enormous. We all have those tales of 'the one that got away'... this one is mine.

After the agony and the ecstasy of hooking and losing that fish, we moved on to the top of the dam. It was truly beautiful up there and we started to spot a few fish in the shallows. Before long, Sohrab had a small one on the fly which made his trip for him. We all managed a few better King Barbus and even some sizeable Shirbot fish that afternoon. Finally, things were looking up, there were far more fish up the top end.

This really lifted our spirits and there were big smiles all-round the campfire that night. Mehti made us lamb kebabs for dinner, all

local organic meat fresh from the hillside. It was delicious. We discussed the reasons as to why the fish were all up in the shallows and agreed that they were just enjoying the extra warmth that it provided them. It made sense to me. I likened their behaviour to our carp when we get the first few warm days of sunshine in the spring. Now that we'd found them, we were all super keen for the following morning.

We arose well before sunrise, broke camp, ate and had the boat loaded just before first light. As we set out for our



Above: After a very hard, exhausting couple of days I landed my first and smallest King Barbus. From then on the fishing turned around completely...
Below: Sohrab with his fly-caught King Barbus

AT LITTLE MORE THAN 18 INCHES LONG, IT WAS PROBABLY THE SMALLEST IN THE LAKE, BUT IT WAS A START. THIS ACTUALLY TURNED OUT TO BE A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE TRIP



is also a nice island on the way that Mehti suggested would be worth a look around.

I was first up the next morning, before the sun had risen. I got a fire going for the tea and then crept down to the water's edge with my rod for a few casts as the light crept in. The atmosphere was incredible, without a single ripple on the vast expanse of water, it was beautiful. I stood on a large rock, fanning my casts out around me in to the inky depths, ever hopeful.

After 10 minutes of

start. This actually turned out to be a pivotal moment in the trip.

After breakfast, as planned, we loaded the boat and headed way up the valley, through a narrow ravine into the upper part of the dam. We stopped off at the island that Mehti had mentioned on the way and spread out to fish all around it. I made my way to a point at the far end and got to work. It was deep off the point and it took a while for the spinner to reach the bottom. On my fourth or fifth cast it got hit just after I started to crank





SINA AND MEHTI REMARKED THAT NO ONE HAD EVER TRIED FISHING WITH JELLY LURES BEFORE AND WEREN'T ENTIRELY CONVINCED WITH MY CHOICE. THREE CASTS IN AND THEY SOON CHANGED THEIR MINDS...





Far left: Once we found them, we started catching steadily. Sina looks on as another fine fish is displayed for the camera

Left: The golden tail of a King Barbus

Below: Boat-side action as a King Barbus dives for freedom

last full day on the water we were full of anticipation and excitement. It was a perfect dawn and everything seemed just right. We all had that fisherman's intuition telling us it was going to be a good morning.

We stopped about a hundred yards offshore where there was a submerged island and drifted across it slowly, casting expectantly. I clipped on a small rubber lure instead of the tried and tested Mepps spinner. Sina and Mehti remarked that no one had ever tried fishing with jelly lures before and weren't entirely convinced with my choice. Three casts in and they soon changed their minds as my reel sang to the tune of a hard running King Barbus! It was a good start to the day.

That was the beginning of a steady mornings fishing,

we were getting the measure of them. Again, they were in the shallows and anywhere that the rock came close to the surface. With good numbers of King Barbus coming to our rods it was an altogether different experience. There were some reasonable sized specimens mixed in with them too. They put up a good scrap and it was

Mornings definitely seemed to be better and certainly more comfortable for us with regards to the heat. By the end of the day we'd had a good tally of fish amongst us. There were a still a few hours to fish the following morning but the boat had to be back in by midday so we could catch our flight to Tehran. It was our last chance.

a thrill to watch them twisting and turning, thrashing their tails down deep in the clear water. The only thing that was missing now was one of the big ones.

The afternoon didn't fish so well but the action was fairly steady.





WITH A COUPLE OF HOURS REMAINING WE DRIFTED INTO A SECLUDED BAY WE'D NOT YET EXPLORED AND STRUCK GOLD. THERE WERE HUGE NUMBERS OF FISH MILLING ABOUT IN THE SHALLOW WATER

was going to have the final word. Just before we had to leave, he chose to have a few casts. You honestly couldn't make it up, but on his third cast he hooked an absolute monster. It was the fish we had collectively been seeking the whole trip. Talk about jammy!

The fight was a long, drawn out process and there were several tense moments where it looked like it might

find a weakness in his tackle. Fortunately, everything held. The first time we saw it deep down below us was quite a moment. It was huge. We were all willing it to stay attached. Sina was literally bursting at the seams in his unique, enthusiastic way whilst Mehti played it cool. He had a big smile plastered across his face though, he was enjoying every rod bending moment. When the

We camped in the same place as the previous night and enjoyed our last meal together under the stars. As usual, we were all exhausted and, as soon as dinner was over, retired to our tents. We had it all to play for the following morning. With only a few hours to fish, the pressure was on.

Fortunately for us, the fishing Gods definitely saved the best until last. The sport on that final morning can only be described as hectic; it was going off! With a couple of hours remaining we drifted into a secluded bay we'd not yet explored and struck gold. There were huge numbers of fish milling about in the shallow water. Large shoals of them would meander by, it was amazing to see so many of them together. Most looked to be in the 10 to 20 lb range, nice fish to target on the lures.

We caught many fish in those last couple of hours between us, they were really most obliging. This enabled us

to experiment with our lures a bit as well. It seemed that as long as the lure looked lifelike enough and was well presented they weren't that fussy. We had frequent double hook ups and at one point all three of us were playing fish. It was fantastic to end the trip on a high note.

It wasn't over just yet though. Mehti decided that he

Above: Casting for gold...

Below: The biggest Shirbot fish of the trip. They were great sport.

Right: Another fine fish from the shallow water





WHEN THE FISH FINALLY HIT THE SURFACE, WE WERE ALL ASTOUNDED AT THE SHEER BULK OF IT. IT TRULY WAS A MONSTER OF EPIC PROPORTIONS. A REALLY VERY SPECIAL AND RARE CREATURE...

fish finally hit the surface, we were all astounded at the sheer bulk of it. It truly was a monster of epic proportions. A really very special and rare creature, I was mesmerised by it and so happy to share in the moment with my fellow anglers. It was so good to see one up close.

We brought the fish into the boat and removed the spinner, then took a few photos.

It's hard to put a weight on the fish as we didn't have scales, it must have been the best part of 80lb though. Either way, a super fish and the icing on the cake. To think that they can grow to twice this size and more is just mind boggling!

Mehti wanted to keep the fish and sell it. It's all he's ever known and how he makes his living. That's his life. It would

Below right: Mehti's monster King Barbus was a sight to behold and really did make the perfect end to an amazing trip.

Below left: It weighed at least 80lb

Right: After some persuasion, Mehti agreed to release his big one

have been a real anti-climax for us to see this incredible fish bashed around the head or left to suffocate in the bottom of the boat. We'd released all of ours but he'd never returned a fish in his life... why would he?

We all reasoned with him about how great it would be to see this beautiful creature revived and swim off to fight another day and even discussed



the virtues of fishing tourism. It took that, and a few crisp banknotes, to finally persuade him that it was a good idea. In the end, he released his first ever fish and I was able to get some great video and photos of this giant King Barbus returning to its watery home.

It was a great way to end what had been the most incredible adventure. I'd had the chance to make a dream come true and come face to face with one species I never thought possible. The experience of travelling and fishing in Iran blew my expectations out of the water. Satisfied as I was with the whole experience, I'll certainly be back again. There's a monster out there with my name on it, I'm sure.

Sam Wadman





**A trout is a
moment of
beauty known
only to those who
seek it**

Arnold Gingrich

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