

FRESHWATER INFORMER

Issue 341 - January 2026

Free Magazine



Frankie Thompson,
cracking winter Carp
Nightingale Fishery

Catch Up With:

Medway Man
The Friendly Fisherman
In The Edge With Alex
Warrick Francis
Freddy Joe Beaney
Plus Special Guest Writers



URBAN



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Welcome to the January 2026! edition of The Freshwater Informer

Where did that year go? It hardly seems possible that 2025 has already flown by.

This month's magazine is packed with excellent articles from our fantastic regular columnists, who work tirelessly to cover all aspects of angling throughout the seasons. If any of you fancy submitting a piece of your own, we're always keen to hear from you and will do our very best to include your writing—although, as you can appreciate, space can sometimes be tight.

As we head into the New Year, I'd like to wish you all a very happy and healthy 2026. And if, like me, you're a little unorganised, now is probably the perfect time to start pencilling in a few fishing trips for the months ahead 🎉.

As always, a massive thank you to each and every one of you who reads, shares, and supports The Freshwater Informer.

I'm working hard behind the scenes to continue growing the magazine and to bring you even more great content as we move through 2026. If you've got a venue you think we should visit, or a story you'd like to share, please don't hesitate to get in touch. Until next time—tight lines, and make the most of every second on the bank.



*Happy New Year to all our readers and
Supporters wishing you all the very best in 2026*

Content

4	Fishery Reports - A round up of all the latest goings on at the regions fisheries
6	In The Edge With Alex Coutts
16	Readers Catches - including the winners of this month's Urban Baits competition
20	Jim's Journey
23	Trout Informer
24	The Friendly Fisherman - Andy Lush
26	Junior Informer - The next generation of Anglers share their catches
28	Warrick Francis - My Pike Fishing Journey
38	Medway Man Bob Morris
40	Directory - Find you local Fishery, Tackle shop and Clubs



The Freshwater Informer
email: info@freshwaterinformer.com

COPY DEADLINE for January 2026 Magazine
Thursday 22nd January 2026 at 5pm

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Tricklebrook Fishery



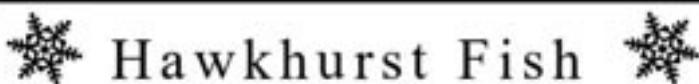
Charlie Young - Tricklebrook biggest 35Lb

Henry Morris - 25lb 7oz
New LakeStephen Hadley - New Lake
27lb 5oz

George Stevens - 22lb Mirror

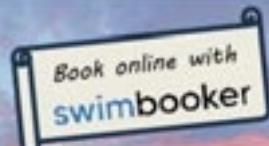
Nathan - Dove Lake
33lb 7oz CommonJack - 32lb Mirror
Speci Lake

Mason - 15lb Quarry Lake

Mason - Quarry Lake
35lb CatJack Acres - 27lb 14oz -
Dove LakeReece Wickens 31.5lb mirror
Dove Lake


Hawkhurst Fish

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T: 01580 854702 E: info@hawkhurstfishfarm.co.uk*Happy New Year to all of our visitors.**Wishing you tight lines and great new PB's!***MAIN LAKE, DOVE LAKE AND ALL PLEASURE LAKES**re-opening on the 31st January**SPECIMEN LAKE** Remains open to Members only**JUNIOR LAKES** re-open 14th February (weather permitting)**WATERSIDE CAFÉ** re-open from 9am on the 3rd January


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2. ALL NETS, UNHOOKING MATS AND WEIGH SLINGS MUST BE DRY BEFORE DIPPING IN THE DISINFECTANT BATHS
3. NO NUTS OR PARTICLE
4. BOILIE AND PELLET ONLY FOR SPECIMEN AND BACK LAKE - ALL BAIT WILL BE INSPECTED
5. ALL FISH MUST BE RETURNED TO THE WATER AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE FOLLOWING CAPTURE. NO STANDING. FISH MUST BE HELD LOW OVER A MAT/CRADLE FOR PHOTOGRAPHS
6. MINIMUM 15LB LINE AND NO BRAIDED MAIN LINE
7. NO SACKING OR RETAINING OF FISH IS PERMITTED. THE REMOVAL OF FISH FROM THIS VENUE WILL BE VIEWED AS A CRIMINAL ACT
8. EACH ANGLER MUST HAVE A MINIMUM OF 42 INCH LANDING NET AND A LARGE PADDED UNHOOKING MAT/CRADLE REGARDLESS OF TARGET SPECIES ON SPECIMEN AND BACK LAKE
9. BARBLESS HOOKS ONLY
10. NO LEAD CORE, NO FUSED LEADERS OF ANY KIND INCLUDING SAFEZONE
11. NO FIXED LEAD RIGS. ALL LEADS MUST PASS FREELY OVER LEADER KNOTS. RIG CHECKS WILL BE CARRIED OUT
12. RECREATIONAL DRUGS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED - IMMEDIATE BAN FOLLOWS
13. PLEASE INFORM FISHERY MANAGEMENT OF ANY SNAGGED TACKLE OR FISH
14. ANY FISH OVER 28LB MUST BE REPORTED TO BAILIFF
15. NO DOGS ALLOWED
16. BARBECUES ALLOWED IF OFF THE GROUND
17. NO BAIT BOATS
18. FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH ANY OF THE RULES WILL RESULT IN BEING ASKED TO LEAVE AND/OR BANS WHERE APPROPRIATE AND NO REFUND WILL BE OFFERED
19. TRICKLEBROOK IS NOW OPERATING A ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY TO ANY ACTS OF AGGRESSION OR ABUSE TOWARDS ITS BAILIFFS AND STAFF
20. ALL RUBBISH TO BE TAKEN HOME

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SUMMER 7AM - 7PM WINTER 7AM TO DUSK



In The Edge With Alex

"There is more to fishing than just catching fish"

As we lean into the beginning of another year, I'm reminded of the quote that 'There is more to fishing than just catching fish'. Years ago, back when I first started angling, it made no sense to me. Surely the whole point of going fishing was to catch fish? Back then, myself and my friends would trapse down to a local pond in the woods in pursuit of tiny roach and rudd. At first it was a challenge to just catch one, but gradually we learned how to rig up a float properly, which baits worked, and how to time our strikes to set the hook. Once we had mastered this, success came thick and fast. If one fish was good, two must be better, and 20,30,50 or more, better still again. Realistically none of them weighed any more than an ounce, but it was all about numbers. That all changed when I joined a local angling club and landed a mirror carp of around 3lbs. I say around 3lbs because the 'Little Samson' spring balance that we weighed it with had rusted solid and stayed at whichever mark we pulled it to. Although questions may always remain over the size of the fish, the size of the impact that it had on my angling has never been in doubt. Over forty years later, I still only have to close my eyes and I can see the unimaginably large, grey silhouette of this monstrous carp as it ghosted up from the depths. I thought that I'd hooked a submarine!

I've no doubt that younger readers will scoff at the idea of a 3lb carp been described as a monster, but to put it in perspective it was almost fifty times the size of anything that I had caught in my previous three seasons of fishing, and the club record at the time was only a couple of ounces over 5lb.

That was it - I was a carp angler. Occasionally at first, not many of our waters held them, but overnight, pounds

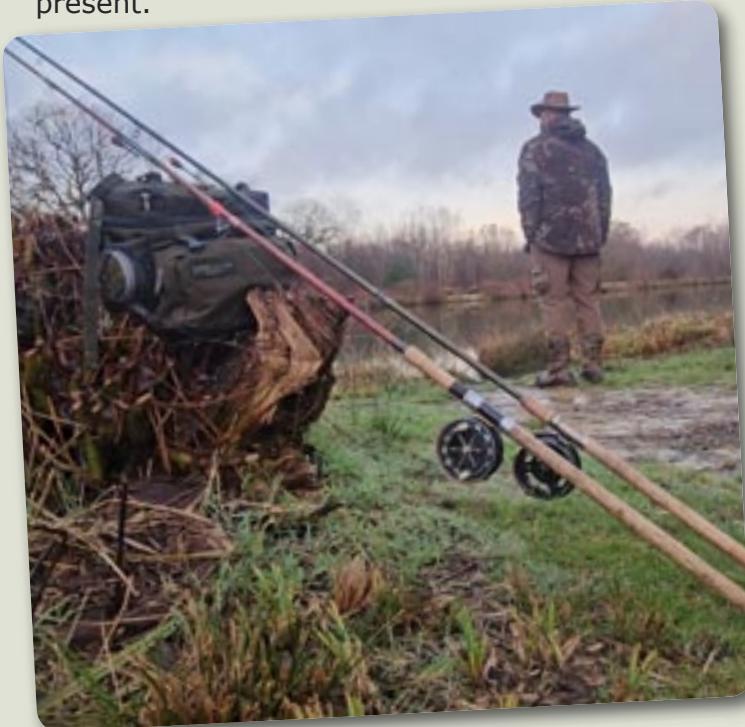
and ounces had become far more important than numbers of fish. Every book, every article, every specimen list that I read, ranked a twenty pound carp as a national specimen, and so that became my target. I was relentless in my fishing. Before school, after school, when I should have been at school... Even so, it was until I was old enough to drive that my fishing world really opened up. I caught plenty of fish in the process, set pb's, lake records, and even a couple of club records, but still couldn't break the twenty pound barrier. On one memorable occasion I encountered the clubs self-appointed carp expert. He puffed his chest out as he told me that he was probably the top rod for the whole club, having landed ten doubles that season. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I'd caught over seventy that year.

And then it happened. I stopped off at one of the clubs lakes for a quick look about on the way home from work. It wasn't unusual for me to do a couple of laps, rod in hand, with a bag of floaters, just in case. I spotted one of the big commons, sunning itself by some lillies. The lake had never produced a twenty, but they were getting close. My best had come the previous month at 19lb11oz. One gentle underarm cast was all it took. The fish took the bait without hesitation before all hell broke loose. A committee member, drawn by all of the commotion, arrived in the swim just in time to witness the weight and take some photographs. 20lb 2oz, a new pb, a new lake record and my first ever twenty. It is hard to explain, but I felt absolutely gutted. For year after year, season after season, the whole driving force behind my angling was to catch a twenty, and now I'd achieved it I had nothing to motivate me and felt completely empty. For a time I completely lost the urge to fish. The thought of a 25lb+ fish as a target, had never entered my mind, and thirty pound carp were almost non-existent in the area at that time.

After some reflection, I went backwards to go forwards. I focused on the elements of angling that gave me the most satisfaction. Short sessions at dawn or dusk. The peace, the



solitude, blending into the countryside, becoming absorbed by nature. Not needing to know the size, or names of fish, or even the species present.



Rediscovering the sense of adventure that made fishing so exhilarating in the first place. Carbon rods were replaced with cane, and baitrunners with centrepins ironically, the first time I used a centrepin reel I landed a 21lb carp, the first fish I caught on a cane rod weighed over 22lb, and since combining the two, I've caught carp in excess of 35lb.

Perch, chub, crucian carp, and even bream, have come to the forefront of my fishing. I try to fish in rhythm with the seasons and flit between lakes, ponds, rivers and streams. I still fish for carp, they are so prolific now that it is difficult not to, but I weigh very few of them. Stalking is

my preferred method, and if I'm able to land an individual fish that I've singled out, I don't want a few ounces either way to detract from its capture. There will always be exceptions, I would find it hard to settle on a guesstimate for a big river carp, and I've yet to land a forty from any type of venue, but in the main I only cast to fish for the challenge of catching them rather than weighing them.

Through all of this I have come to realise that there is no right or wrong way in angling. It is the fact that there are no set goals that make our sport so universal in its appeal. For some to catch a fish, any fish, is success. For others it is the most fish, the biggest fish, or a particular fish that drives them. For many it is the social aspect, or just the opportunity to escape the rat race for a few hours that brings solace. A good day's fishing can be whatever you want, or need, it to be.

And so to my latest fishing trip. I visited Iden Wood Fishery, nr Rye, in search of perch. I've never targeted the species here before, so wasn't expecting too much. I stopped for a chat with an angler by the match lake. In his eighties and still out fishing in all weathers, waiting impatiently for the 'youngsters' (anglers in their sixties and seventies) to arrive so that he could start fishing. I made my way down to the specimen lake, disturbing a heron in the process. It screeched in disapproval as it lazily flapped away. The dawn sky was alight with oranges and pinks as the rising sun reflected off of low surly clouds. The occasional carp topped as buzzards wheeled overhead, and a growing excited chatter signalled jackdaws preparing to leave their roost. The trees behind me were a cacophony of sound. Pheasant, pigeon, robins, and all manner of other birds announcing the start of a new day. I stood, I watched, I listened and all was well with the world. I lowered my floats into a deep margin, beneath an overhanging tree. Nothing happened. A robin joined me, hoping for some maggots. I duly obliged and watched him hop from one to the next whilst stealing a glimpse at my motionless floats.

In fact the only time that my floats moved was as I reeled them in at dusk. It was still an enjoyable day, if only to learn where the fish are not, and a great reminder that 'There is far more to fishing than just catching fish'. Although hopefully we will all land a few in 2026!

Alex



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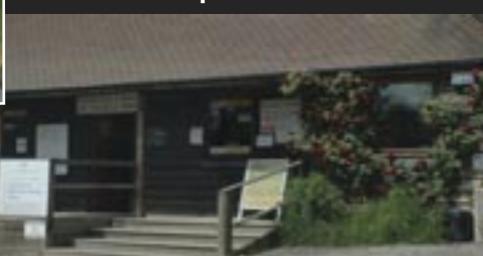


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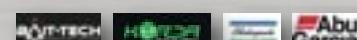
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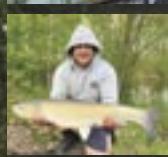
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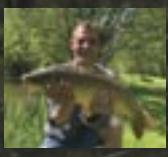
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This beautiful setting needs to be visited and enjoyed!

Prices start at £10 per session on the coarse lakes. For the specimen lakes prices start at £20 for the day rising to £30 for a 24hrs ticket (up to 3 rods). Lessons now available for all ages. Gates open at 7am and close at 6.30pm (Winter hours 7am to 5pm)

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Chris Dunk



Lou Lou Bird



Stuart Patrick



Simon Naylor



Charlie Cumings - Shirkoak Fishery 18lb Common



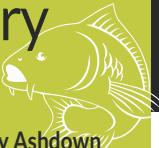
Stephen Lewis - Beachbough - 25 pound grass carp



John Wrenn - Bridges Lake - 65lb Cat Fish



Oli Turner - 17lb 8oz Pike - Team Skeater member

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More House Farm Fishery



catch

catch

In order to fish any of our specimen lakes you must become a member first. To do this simply continue with your catch booking then upon arrival of the venue we will sort out your membership and issue you a membership card. We have been asked to add multiple tiered memberships by you amazing anglers so that's just what we've done!

More House Farm is a rapidly expanding fishery set in the beautiful Mid Sussex countryside. It currently boasts five lakes. They are all set in very tranquil surroundings, bordered almost entirely by open country side.

We also have Two new Specimen carp lakes called Oaks and Dogwood that were built June 2020 and opened October 2021. Oaks has 5 pegs on it with carp ranging from 15lb – 33lb.

Dogwood has 11 pegs on it separated by islands we have 18 tench and carp ranging from 8lb – 32 lb and already the lakes are showing great promise and as soon as the Pictures come in I will make a new section on the website for them.

The fishery is located at More House Farm
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For further details contact: **Jason Tuckey on 07983 569220**

e-mail: lassecretary@lintonangling.co.uk

www.lintonangling.co.uk

Tonbridge & District Catch Report

The predator fishing has been good of late, especially on the river.

Members Tony Cooper, Simon Williams and Neal Rogers have all recorded 20lb+ Pike in the last week.

The biggest being 24lb, caught by Tony Cooper.

There have also been Zander to 7lb being reported. Rob Bruty caught several Chub to 3lb at Canon Bridge using bread and cheese paste.

There have also been the odd quality Roach to over 1lb from the Hartlake stretch. Carp have been showing from the Old Ballast Pit as Andy Leith found out on a recent short session. Barry and Vikki Lambert have been enjoying catching different species on the New Lagoon.

MATCH RESULTS TONBRIDGE v EDENBRIDGE

1st - Tony Bartholamew (E)	13lb 14oz
2nd - T Harvey (E)	11lb 14oz
3rd - Mick Orum (T)	8lb 0oz

CHRISTMAS MATCH - Hartlake (17 fished)

1st - Paul Wiltshire	5lb 9oz
2nd - Steve Parker	3lb 9oz
3rd - Paul Reddy	3lb 0oz

HOUGHTON CUP 4 - HAYSDEN LAKE

1st - Nck Dann	3lb 11oz
2nd - Andy Jones	2lb 3oz
3rd - Phil Edwards	1oz

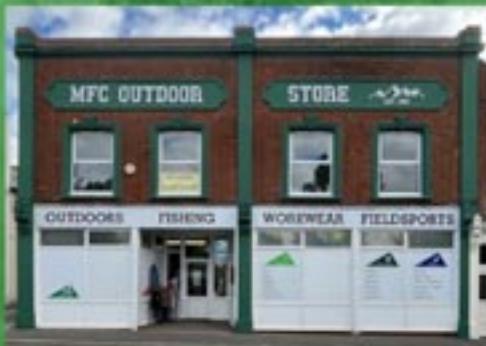
KNOCK UP - NEW LAGOON

1st - Phil Edwards	15lb 2oz
2nd - Paul Reddy	12lb 3oz
3rd - John Cooper	10lb 13oz





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Fish of the Month Prize Winner



William Page North Lake 52lb.2oz



Billy Morris North Lake

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This competition is open to all species. To be in with a chance of winning, send your catches to: info@freshwaterinformer.com or our Facebook Page, Winners will receive a:

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2kg of Boilies 1kg Stick Mix, 500ml Liquid and Hook Baits to match in either their **Nutcracker, Red Spicy Fish, Tuna & Garlic, Strawberry or Fully Loaded Range**

Winner's Spotlight A huge congratulations to William on landing a stunning 52lb 2oz carp from North Lake at Elphicks Fishery — our Urban Bait Prize Winner!

Your continued support is what makes these giveaways possible! Stay tuned for next month's prize — you won't want to miss it!



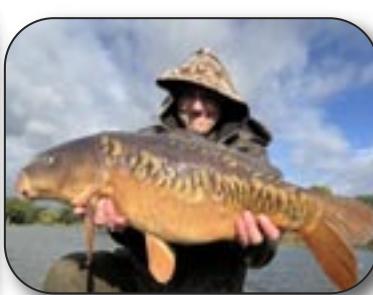
Josh Fuller - Shakespear



Anthony Stygal



Jethro Smith Prairie Lake
42lb



Neil Wale



Jez Campbell



James Slater Prairie Lake
35lb.6oz

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A YouTube channel logo for 'In The Edge With Alex' featuring a fish in a net and the YouTube logo.

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BAIT AVAILABILITY DEPENDENT ON TIDE AND WEATHER CONDITIONS

WYLANDS FISHERY WINTER REPORT

Winter has settled over Wylands Fishery in Battle, East Sussex, and with it comes the familiar seasonal slowdown that tests the patience and skill of every visiting angler. As water temperatures drop and natural food sources dwindle, the fish become lethargic, feeding in short, selective windows. This year has been no exception. Anglers have had to work harder making each bite feel genuinely earned.

The complex's variety of lakes—ranging from match waters to the specimen carp waters—has meant that adaptable anglers continue to find success despite the challenging conditions. Light tactics, small baits, and refined presentations have proven essential. On the carp lakes, single bright pop-ups cast to showing fish or subtle solid bags have accounted for the majority of cold-water captures. On the match and mixed lakes, maggot, pinkie, and small expander pellets fished over minimal feed have been the key to keeping bites coming. Those willing to move swims, observe the water, and scale down have continued to put fish on the bank even during the harshest nights.

The reward for perseverance is often a pristine winter carp or a surprisingly spirited mixed-bag session—proof that winter fishing at Wylands is far from impossible, just more measured and thoughtful. The atmosphere around the fishery remains welcoming, with regulars sharing tactics and celebrating each other's hard-earned catches.

To support anglers through the colder months, Wylands has introduced a range of winter incentives. Reduced-rate tickets, discounted pod stays on Rosies lake, and 24 & 36hr booking offers have made winter sessions more accessible for those looking to challenge themselves or enjoy quieter bankside time. These deals, combined with the fishery's ongoing improvements and attentive bailiff team, make Wylands an attractive destination throughout the off-season.

While the fishing may be harder in winter, the sense of achievement at Wylands is greater than ever—each fish a trophy earned through patience, precision, and persistence.

Wylands Fishery Team



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TEAM FRESHWATER INFORMER

A WINTER SESSION AT SHIRKOAK FISHERY FT "THE LOCAL CARPING LEGEND" DEAN ASHBY

This month, Dean and I headed over to Shirkoak Fishery for a winter day session. With rain falling in the days leading up to our trip, we were pleasantly surprised to be greeted by a decent day, interrupted only by a single brief shower.

We arrived at the lake for 7am, just as first light began to lift the darkness, allowing us to walk the water. A few other anglers were already gearing up, ready to start their day's fishing. After a lap of the lake, we opted for the double swim opposite the far island. It looked as good a place as any, especially after spotting a fish move off the island — at least we'd already seen signs of life in the area.

Dean — "The local carping legend" — opted to utilise his Bushwhacker baiting pole, allowing him to fish over a small bed of particle bait. He topped this with an ISO Fish & floro Pink Squid hookbait on both rods, while his third rod was cast into open water to the right of the swim, fished with a solid PVA bag.

I set up two rods using Urban Baits Nutcracker, each presented with a small mesh bag of crushed baits, all soaked in Nutcracker liquid. Both were positioned around a rod length from the island. My third rod was dedicated to perch fishing in the margins, using worm and maggot, with regular feeding to keep fish interested.

It wasn't long at all — and typically, just as our breakfasts were delivered to the swim by Hugh, Dean's rod showed a dropped back with a couple of

beeps. Around twenty seconds later, the hungry carp took off and Dean was into his first fish of the session. We'd been at the lake for no more than an hour, breakfasts going



cold, and already Dean was playing a fish. He soon had it safely in the net and, after a few quick photos and the weigh-in, the scales settled at 16lb 8oz — a cracking common and a great start to the day,

marking Dean's first proper winter carp.

After we'd finished our breakfasts and tea, I managed a smaller common of around 12lb. I then followed this up on the perch rod with a

couple of bream, along with a few small perch throughout the day. Mid-afternoon, my rod carp was away again, resulting in a slightly bigger common of around 16lb. After sorting the fish out and taking a few quick photos, that proved to be our final capture of the session. Both of us were more than happy not to blank and thoroughly enjoyed our day on the bank. With winter sessions often being hard-earned, any fish is a bonus. The only other fish caught that day was by fellow angler Charles Cummings, who landed a carp of around 18lb while fishing with his nephew, who was celebrating his 14th birthday — a memorable way to mark the occasion.

As we packed down and watched the light begin to fade, it was a timely reminder of why winter fishing still holds such appeal. Fewer bites make every take feel special, and shared moments on the bank — hot tea, cold breakfasts, and bent rods — are often what stay with you the longest.

Shirkoak once again delivered not just fish, but a thoroughly enjoyable day, proving that even in the colder months, a well-planned session and good company can make all the difference.





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CARP: Andy shares his knowledge and experience in this rapidly growing form of fly fishing. He has written two blogs for Fulling Mill specifically detailing the tackle and tactics he uses; follow this link

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TROUT: Boat fishing on Bewl Water or Powdermill reservoir, learn how to locate and catch fish on these large intimidating waters, or fish one of the smaller local fisheries. Learn where trout find their food during the changing seasons; understand this and you will 'catch more fish'.

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Lakedown Trout Fishery & Taproom - Check Facebook for June Events

LAKEDOWN TROUT FISHERY & TAPROOM

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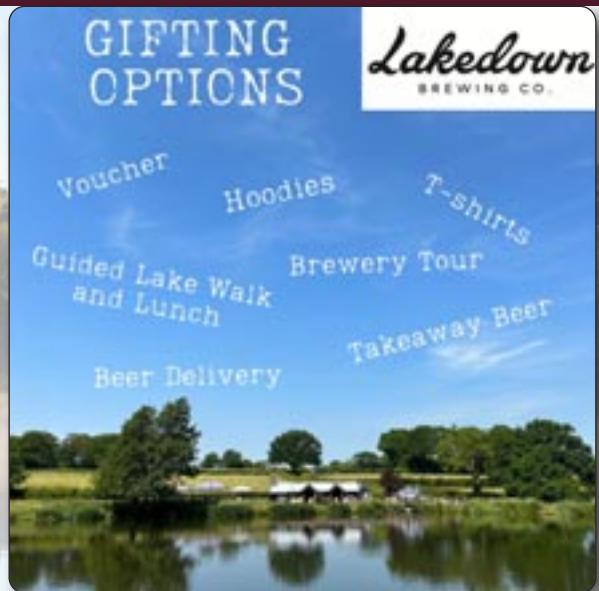
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Andy Lush - The Friendly Fisherman

Zig Rigs - Revisited

This isn't my new year's resolution; in fact, I started this particular mission back in the autumn, when my son Adam bought me a RidgeMonkey Zyggo adjustable zig float for my birthday. I decided there and then to focus on zigging, a method I was keen to learn. I chose a venue where I could expect to catch plenty of carp; if I wasn't, then I'd know I was doing something wrong. The water I chose had depths in excess of 10 ft; this would give me plenty of scope to search with the adjustable zig float.

You may remember that earlier this year I dabbled with zigs, with mixed results. Although I'd caught carp on the method, my results were inconsistent. So now I would have to totally focus on solving the problems I'd experienced. My aim was to learn enough, so I could confidently fish zigs on harder waters, in an effort to target some specimen carp.

Pellet waggler
come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The Zyggo zig float is easy to use, and it's tangle-free!



Keeping a diary

There are so many moving parts to zigging; it's important to note what you do, otherwise you won't be able to identify what works!

I note the depth of water I'm fishing, the distance I'm fishing using distance sticks, before clipping the rods up. I also note the depth and colour of bait on each rod. Next, the time I start spombing, the amount of spombs I make, and the frequency of each spombing session.

Obviously I note the time of each capture, the successful bait's depth and colour, the fish's weight and whether it is a common or mirror carp. It's important to note any changes in bait's colour or depth; there's so much to learn, but by keeping these notes I hope to notice a pattern. It can be busy fishing, especially when I'm spombing frequently, making notes and



Spombing Sloppy Cloud bait over your zigs works well on well-stocked waters

hopefully catching carp! I quite understand why many carp anglers prefer not to com I love the learning process; at the moment, I'm still building a picture of what is important. I'm putting some of the puzzle together, but there are still a lot of missing parts; with each session I learn a little more; this all adds to the enjoyment. It's not always about how many you catch; sometimes it's about how you catch them.

October 27th

Strong north-west wind, I cast my zig into deep open water. A yellow zig-bait was set at 6ft off the bottom. Once in position I cast ten spombs of sloppy cloudbait over it. No takes until I went closer to the bottom at 5ft. After three spombing sessions, I got off the mark just after 9am. I worked hard throughout the day, spombing every 30 minutes, changing depths and colours of baits. Referring to my notes on this session, I notice that my takes all came very soon after spombing. Another interesting fact was that five of the six carp were caught on yellow baits, with only one on red. However, I was only using one rod and only put a red bait on after a two-hour blank period. The red failed to produce another fish, so I reverted to yellow after another two-hour blank, and caught three more fish! The jury's out on colours for now.

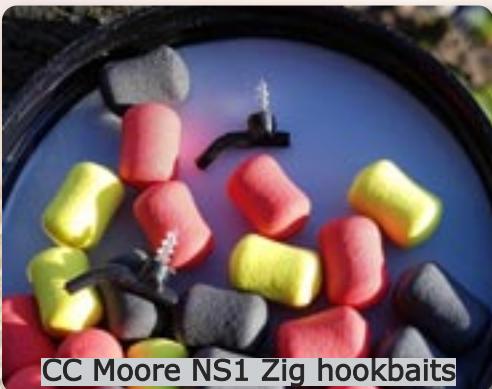
October 31st

Fished the same swim as the 27th, cast the same distance with a yellow zig bait, set at 5ft. While in the process of spombing I had a take and hooked a low double mirror. I imagined this was going to be the start of another successful day; I was wrong. Despite regular spombing, changing depths and bait colours, I failed to

catch another fish. During the afternoon I noticed a few carp showing near the surface, not many and not frequently enough for me to confidently position my zig up in the water. I reasoned that 90% of the carp weren't near the surface. The fish I had seen were making subtle swirls, sometimes poking their heads through the surface; very rarely disrupting the ripple. I know from my fly fishing experience that subtle shows like this are from fish that are very close to the surface; the more explosive shows are from fish coming up from depth. On reflection, I should have been bold and tried putting my zig within a foot or two of the surface.

While talking to the fishery bailiff about my observations, he advised me I needed to commit both my rods to zigs, if I wanted to be successful. With two rods I could use different colours and position them at different depths at the same time. The learning process would then be so much quicker, and comparisons could then be made. Up until then I had only been using zigs on one rod; the other had been on other methods.

November 5th



CC Moore NS1 Zig hookbaits

hookbait; these were attached to Nash zig screw aligners which allowed me to change bait colours easily. Now I could experiment with depths and hopefully find the "sweet spot".

Nash zig screws make changing baits quick and easy



Nash Zig Screws

I started off with a yellow bait at 5ft because this had worked so well previously. On my second rod I had a red bait positioned at 10ft, 3ft under the surface. Two hours in, I was surprised the yellow bait at 5ft hadn't been taken, there were no signs of shallow fish, so I brought my red bait down to 5ft too. Interesting, referring to my notes, I see the first take came shortly after the third spombing session. The red bait had worked; in fact, I caught three more fish on red at 5ft. The action came in waves; I imagined a group of fish had wandered into my baited spot. With no takes on the yellow bait I decided to pop it up to 10ft, 3ft under the surface. To my surprise, I caught a bonus fish on the yellow soon after this. I then had an unexpected double take; one zig set at 5ft while the other was still at 10ft!

November 11th

Incredible weather for November, damp and overcast, 13C degrees with a gentle southerly breeze. My hopes were high, the conditions looked perfect, and I was confident. Both rods were clipped up at the same distance, so I was sure my sloppy cloud mix would fall over my rigs. I'd clipped the spomb rod up half a wrap shorter than my zig rods; this was to allow for the swing back. I was again casting into 13ft.

I started off with a red bait at 5ft and a yellow bait at 8ft. It took two hours of spombing, every 15 minutes to kick things off. Once I'd caught my first fish, I reined it back a little by spombing every 30 minutes, which gave me a chance to relax a little. Red worked, yellow didn't! So I changed it to black, this worked, as I had a double take! Fortunately, the angler in the next swim lent a hand and we landed both of them! Things were hectic for a while as I landed several fish, one after another which kept me busy, just how I like it. Catching, casting, spombing, I even had a take as I tried to attach the bobbin; the fish ripped the line from my grasp. This was so exciting I didn't want the action to stop, but eventually it slowed as the light faded, which probably was for the good so I could pack my gear away and avoid getting "locked in"!

Nine takes, nine carp. I'm now feeling more confident to fish both rods on zigs, and no longer feel I might be missing out by not having a bottom bait on one.

To be continued.....

Tight lines

Andy Lush

Junior Competition Winners



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See Page 15 & 35
for more details for
MFC



Fish With Carl

🎉 MFC Store Prize Winner – Zac Cross 🎉



🎉 MFC Baits Prize Winner

The Freshwater Informer 🎉

After four hours without a fish over double figures, a switch to an orange garlic pop-up made all the difference. Just two minutes later, the rod rattled off and this beauty was in the net!

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Proof that a small change can turn the session around

well done and enjoy the prize! 🎉 🎉

🎉 Fish With Carl Winner: Jacob Kent 🎉

🎉 Fish With Carl – Signed Book Winner! 🎉

🎉 Fish With Carl – Signed Book Winner!

🎉 Young angler Jacob has been out on the bank at his local water, Falkenville Fishery (Mushroom Farm), proudly starting his angling journey.

A big well done to Jacob on a fantastic day's fishing — and congratulations on winning a signed Fish With Carl book!

Keep those photos coming for future issues of The Freshwater Informer! 📸 🎉 !





Bailey hills - 29.5lb Common Carp



Bailey Hardiman-Hills -
Midle Lake Wylands 16lb 5oz



Jack Hurst - Pitlands lakes -
10.9LB common carp



Ollie Gates - Frant Lakes



Beth - 9lb Mirror carp - Sand-
wich Lakes



Tyler Cooper 10,



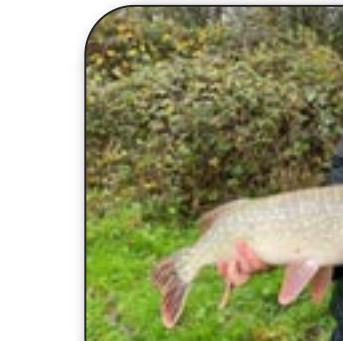
Cracking Sized Perch



Fraser - 22lb Common - Tat-
tershall Lakes



Finnegan Kelly (12) caught
this 20lb beauty



William Stevens - Pike 17lb 9os - River Ouse Lewes



Archie Haynes - 13lbs 20z
mirror - It was fully scaled



Morgan Gray



Oliver Carr - Mousehole
lakes - 21lb's



Charlie Challinor - 3lb 9oz
Chub - Local river

My Pike Fishing Journey

This would mark the start of my pike fishing journey that would eventually lead me to the trout waters right on my doorstep.

by Warrick Francis

I was born in Sussex in 1969. My father was a very keen fisherman. During the summers, we fished for carp with bread crust and tench with corn, and in the winter, we pursued pike with lures. Typically, on Sunday mornings, we'd head out, with me carrying his lures and gaff. We'd catch a few jacks, maybe a big perch, but we'd always make it back in time for Sunday lunch, followed by watching 'Man About Town' with Jack Hargreaves. This is how my love for fishing, especially predators, began.

As I grew older, my grandmother treated me to a couple of stronger rods so I could target larger fish. I started to do quite well on local rivers and pools. As a schoolboy, I couldn't afford much bait, but live bait was free. I began regularly catching pike in double figures. I had acquired a few books from a jumble sale with pictures of huge pike from the Norfolk Broads. This sparked my ambition to catch a 20lb pike.

It's hard to believe, but at that time, I had four large trout waters within 30 minutes of my house, all of which harbored pike over 30lb two of which produced 40s. Carp, on the other hand, were my other passion.

Thirty-pound carp were very rare, with the nearest being 45 minutes away.

By the age of 14, I was pike fisherman fishing most weekends in the winter. Soon, one of my two long-term fishing friends, Jon, passed his driving test and purchased a rusty Ford Fiesta. We had exhausted the fishing spots in my local streams and pools, catching fish to high doubles.

What next? The Norfolk Broads were miles away, but I had access to trout waters. Ardingly Reservoir became my next target. My dad had been invited to pike fish there with the local angling club in the early '80s after a huge pike had washed up dead, but they had no luck with lures. This wouldn't be my first trout water as I'd managed to land an 17lb pike at Weirwood Reservoir while fly fishing after school for trout. Unfortunately, that fish was killed by a crowd of trouties who had gathered to watch. Weirwood was just a short bike ride from home, and although it was rumored to hold huge carp, my fly-caught pike remained the biggest I'd heard of in the '80s. On the other hand, Ardingly was gaining attention. A couple of my local fishing club mates had done well, one landing a 31lb pike with a big 'S' lure and the other catching a 28lb pike on a dead bait, both from the Balcombe Arm.



It was the season of 1985, and we knew where the big fish were. JW had a car, and Ardingly was at its prime, so that's where we headed. The Balcombe Arm with dead baits and live ones seemed a good starting point. We kept up with angling publications, knowing that the biggest names in pike angling were already there. Every other angler we encountered on the bank, we assumed was Eddie Turner or his mate Bill Hancock. They didn't seem

interested in talking to a couple of spotty teenagers, but we were eager. We did okay but didn't connect with any real monsters, though we did see a few pictures being taken on boats. Sadly, at this time in my life, I was soon to discover two of its greatest evils: beer and women. I had turned 16, fancied myself as Paul Weller, bought a Vespa, joined a scooter club, and bumped into another scooter-riding fishing enthusiast called Nigel, soon to be nicknamed Noddy. During that summer, I turned him from a pleasure angler into a budding carp fisherman, at which he became quite skilled over the following years, surpassing me. He wasn't a pike angler, but I told him we could go to Ardingly, get a boat, catch a few 30-pounders, and then

head to the pub. Nigel had traded his scooter for a Mark 2 Escort, Jon had been accepted at a college up north, leaving me with less transportation, but Noddy had wheels.

It was a very cold morning when we arrived to set sail to catch my first 20 pounder. It had been a rather heavy night; Nigel and I had been drinking his homebrew. His girl-friend's friend, Michelle, had decided to sleep it off in the car. The morning looked perfect, flat with a thin layer of ice in the margins. We were a little disappointed not to get the biggest boat with a cabin. I ordered Nigel to row to the Balcombe Point, where I had seen a huge pike photographed from Hammer Point while bank fishing. Noddy rowed across the flat, calm water. I had shifted my focus from catching 20-pounders to aiming for 30-pounders. I had looked at the photos on the lodge wall and decided that mine would soon be up there. The trout were surfacing, and I had seen a huge pike strike. I can remember what Nigel wore that day: a Harrington jacket, a Fred Perry shirt, and Levi's red tag jeans. We stopped at our chosen spot, slowly dropped the anchor, set out stop knots to 18 feet, and deployed our baits around the boat, both live and dead. I was certain it was about to happen. I was warm, but Nigel looked rather cold, so he decided to roll a couple of carp cigarettes to keep himself warm. We were both very hungover, and I could see Nigel was bored

and cold, unable to keep still. He stood up in the boat, the early boats there were less than stable but had he decided to throw a fresh sprat at me because I looked so warm wrapped up with my charcoal hand warmer. There was only one thing to do, and that was to return fire. Noddy managed to dodge the sprat, but in doing so, lost his balance and fell over the side of the boat. I heard the crack of ice as he went for his winter dip. Briefly, it crossed my mind that he might not make it, but thankfully, he was wearing a life jacket. At that moment, it was the most amusing thing I'd ever witnessed. I can remember his white face clinging to the side of the boat. I composed myself and managed to get him back in the boat; it was very cold. The event didn't go unnoticed; I could clearly see the big boat with a cuddy almost capsize as they were laughing so much, their laughter echoing through the valley. This was pre-mobile phones, and I'm not sure how news got back to the lodge, but soon the rescue boat appeared around the corner. They must have been keeping an eye on us. At 16, I had convinced them I was a competent pike angler with boat handling skills. My fishing was ruined, and Nigel was taken to the lodge to be treated for hypothermia. He lived, and I rowed slowly back to inform his girlfriend, asleep in car.

Operation 30 back up plan. I decided to avoid the boats at Ardingly for the rest of that season, for some reason. Instead, I did a few bank trips. The late 80s were a crazy time in my life; wine, women, and song. I had been accepted at art college but had to drop out after my father passed away tragically. I needed a job ASAP and started working for Nigel's dad in the printing trade; Noddy was my boss. Nigel and I are still in the print industry today. I'm able to print this fine magazine and work with a number of fishing tackle companies, which I'm very proud of.

Bewl was another trout water, a bit further away at 30 minutes drive. It was bigger at 500-plus acres. There was a rumor that a fish over the British record had been caught in the gill nets, and 30s were being caught by trout anglers regularly. In the 80s, trout waters didn't want pike in them, so they were culled. Avian predation by the black death cormorants had not taken hold. The trout stocked were much smaller, so pike were able to get on them much sooner to grow. But the main thing was, Nigel and I were not blacklisted from the boats there. So, we had a few trips during the early trials trolling big copper spoons and witnessed a few big 30s caught by better lure anglers, most of whom were trout anglers trying to kill them. You were meant to put an oar in the air so they could collect the pike caught. We chose to forget to do this, and the fact it was lures only made me realize I needed to get back on Ardingly or get banned.

In 1989, I somehow managed to settle down with a tall, attractive blonde. I now lived in my grandmother's house in

Lingfield, still within 15 minutes of Ardingly and Weirwood. Here was another trout water being talked about within the 15-mile radius. This was Bough Beech, where a 40lb fish had been caught by a fly angler. Things were starting to get silly, but I had to work. This year, I made the decision to buy a boat. I scoured the local papers and managed to purchase a 12ft boat with a cabin for £50. I spent the summer fixing it up in-between work and carp fishing. I fitted a TR7 boot rack to the roof. I had made a few fishing friends at Ardingly, including a portly medical student called James and his mate Andy Lush, who owned an Aladdin's cave of a shop called the Friendly Fisherman. Andy sold me his old fish finder, and I purchased a cheap electric outboard. Ardingly had changed hands, and there was a new bailiff on the scene, Wez. I had met Wez a few times on the bank, and we got on rather well. He understood how Noddy Nigel had fallen in. We had a lot in common, and he was plugged into the Pike network. My grandmother felt sorry for him living in his caravan with his dog, Busty, and used to bake him cakes, which he loved. Now I had a bailiff friend and a boat named Weed Sucker that was stored next to the Piking legend Peter Cardozo's orkney spinner. New rod rests, a season ticket, some

Berkley 15lb big game line, and Wez got me some huge handmade floats called Widow's Comforts. My method was simple: I'd float troll as slow as possible along the Balcombe arm, as there was no bank fishing on this side. Wez sorted me with the biggest live trout, mine were the biggest floats; I just needed the biggest pike. Soon, my photo was going to be on that wall of fame in the lodge.

The season started, and I caught good fish from the start. By now, they had stopped stocking the trout, and the pike had dropped a bit in weight, but they were hungry. There were still a few 30s in there, plus a delivery of large fish from Bewl had arrived; fish up to 37lb had been stocked that year. It was October, and I'd already boated some big doubles, but no cigar yet. This day was flat, and Wez and I were doing some synchronized live bait trolling. He was in front of me, trolling a deeper line, and I was float trolling the in 18ft

and had already landed a couple of pike. As I passed the Balcombe point, the spot where Noddy had almost drowned a few years earlier, one of my big floats buried. I knew the drill. I wound in the other rod, pointed my tip at the line peeling off. I wound down until the reel stopped turning, lifted my 2.5lb test curve rod, it buckled, and took on an alarming bend. I had baitrunners by now, and the next thing I heard was the drag clicking, and it slowly took line. I knew this fish was the one I had waited for. I yelled at Wez; this was definitely a 20; it was slow and deep. After a couple of minutes, it was under the boat but still on the bottom. As I lifted the fish, small pin bubbles appeared. The water was clear 15ft below; a huge green crocodile shape appeared; it was very big. At this point, I shouted at Wez; this looks more like a 30lb (he thought I was on drugs) but



made his way to the bank and removed his dog, Busty, from his bed, a sleeping bag to use as an unhooking mat. It was an epic battle, but I was now winning, and I drew her over my net, and she was mine. Onto the bank to my waiting bailiff. This fish was huge, but all that mattered was this was my first 20lb plus Pike. To this day, one of the biggest heads I've seen on a pike; she was measured at 46" and weighed in at just under 25lb. Many years later, I was able to identify her as she featured on the cover of the Anglers Mail after she filled out a bit at 28lb that year. I was happy, and my photo was on the wall. I'm an all-round angler, but that fish will always feature as one of my happiest memories, my first really big pike. The season carried on well with plenty of pike. I was building up a picture of hot spots. November came and went, the fishing slowed down a bit, and the heavy rains started. The reservoir levels came up, and the water became the color of chocolate.

Around Christmas time, I made a decision to bank fish. It was colder, the silver fish had shoaled up, and my boat trips had shown me where I needed to fish. The water around the trout cages was now black on the finder with silver fish. Wez had been keeping his live baits in the cages and dropping a few dead fish in most days. He also had not opened this swim up for fishing, and the wall in front of the lodge was now out of bounds for fishing. It was time to try this swim.

I met Wez at first light in the morning, and we headed to the swim closest to the trout cages, called the boat park. I had the left-hand side, and Wez the right. I had one 3lb test Pike rod with an early big pit reel, plus 3 2.5lb TC rods with Shimano bait runners. Wez had glass Conaflex pike rods made by himself. That morning, possibly the rings were fixed to his rods with shrink tape. We didn't cheat by rowing out baits. I was just able to cast a popped-up trout dead bait under the cage with my heavy rod, the others were spread out. Wez got as close to the cages as he could. It didn't take long for my

cage rod to go. The day turned into utter carnage of the Pike type. I'm pretty sure we caught 18 doubles between us, most of the fish coming to my heavy rod fished under the cage. The best of the day went 19lb. I was surprised no 20s showed up. This action did not go unnoticed. The chap that ran the fishing at the time was called Nigel (not Noddy Nigel) he had decided he wanted in, so the next day he was there. I popped over with some food from my Nan for Wez and popped down to see this Nigel. He had a run-less morning, which I was happy about, thinking I'd his cleared his swim. He then had a small drop-back. I told him to hit it. A few minutes later, I was slipping the net under the first 30lb pike I'd seen, and it was huge. Looks like I had missed one. This fish became known as a Mug 30lb and seemed to always come out the day after I fished that swim; it drove me mad. I did manage a few to 22lb, trying and failing to catch that fish.

I loved every minute spent fishing Ardingly, especially from my boat. It was a much friendlier time to be a Pike fisherman/Specimen hunter. No internet, people on the bank spoke to each other, and I made loads of friends, many of whom I fish and speak to even now. Sadly, a couple are not with us. For me, 1988 to 1992 was a special time to be a Pike fisherman; the trout waters were opening up for Pike fishing—Ardingly, Llandegfedd, Bewl, Weirwood, Boughbee, Ardleigh, and Darwell. Out of the ones mentioned, only one was out of my range.

My logic was then and still is today: catch what's in front of you before moving on. The ticket I purchased next was 10 minutes from home, and rather a water going downhill, it had just started to throw up 30lb Pike for £150 for a winter's fishing on maybe the first trout water Pike syndicate where the average size of pike caught was soon to be over 24lbs. Live baits were 50p each, help yourself. This kept me busy for most of the naughties. They say if you can remember it, you weren't there.





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The Diary of an Match Angler

Hawkhurst Fish Farm - Fishery

Written By *Freddy Joe Beany*



Match Day!! There's a particular buzz that only a match morning brings. The alarm goes off early, the kettle works overtime, and the mind starts racing through rigs, bait choices, and swim plans long before you reach the venue.

Today's match was hosted by

Bait Bucket Tackle Warehouse at the stunning **Hawkhurst Fish Farm**, and I was proud to be fishing as the **The Freshwater Informer** entry angler. With a strong turnout and a lake full of quality fish, it promised to be an interesting—and testing—day on the bank.

Hawkhurst Fish Farm really is a venue that stops you in your tracks. Surrounded by rolling countryside, the lake has that calm, picture-postcard feel that can lull you into a false sense of security. Beneath the surface, however, it can be a very different story. The fish here are well looked after, well fed, and know how to avoid a hook—especially when the pressure of a match is on.

The draw put me on peg 10, positioned on the opposite side of the road bank and more or less in the middle of the lake. From experience, this isn't exactly the banker area. If you're being picky, the corners are usually where you want to be, offering natural holding areas and patrol routes for the fish. Still, that's match fishing—everyone gets what they're given, and anything can happen on the day. With the whistle blown and the match underway, I opted to start long on pellets. The idea was simple: establish a steady rhythm early, build a bit of confidence, and see what the peg had to offer. For the first two and a half hours, things went well. I was catching steadily, nothing frantic, but enough to keep the net ticking over. The fish responded well, and it felt like I'd made the right call with my opening approach. Then, almost without warning, the lake completely switched off.

Anyone who fishes matches regularly will recognise the feeling. One minute you're into fish at regular intervals, the next it's as if someone has flicked a switch. Bites dried up, liners disappeared, and the whole venue seemed to go quiet. I started rotating between lines, adjusting depths, changing hook baits, and trying to spark something—anything—but the peg felt lifeless. Anticipating the need for a change, I'd already fed a short maggot line earlier in the match. With the long line producing nothing, it made sense to drop in and see if I could nick a few quick bites. It paid off briefly, with two fish landed, but once again the action stalled. It was frustrating, especially knowing how quickly a match can slip away during these quiet spells. At that point, it was all about staying focused and not panicking. Matches aren't always won in the frantic periods—they're often decided by how you manage the difficult ones. I kept feeding little and often, stayed disciplined with my rigs, and trusted that the fish would eventually come back on the feed. As the final hour approached, things began to pick up again. A few fish came to the net, and a few were unfortunately lost—those moments are always painful when you know every ounce counts 😥. Still, it was a relief to be catching again and to finish the match feeling like I'd squeezed everything possible out of the



peg. When the scales finally made their way around, my weight came to 75lb and ounces, which was enough to secure second place 🥈. From the area I'd drawn, I was more than happy with that result. It felt like a small victory in itself, proving that careful management

and persistence can still produce a strong finish, even from a peg that isn't considered prime real estate. Credit where it's due—**Bait Bucket Tackle**

Warehouse hosted a very well-run match. Everything flowed smoothly, the atmosphere was friendly but competitive, and **Hawkhurst Fish Farm** once again showed why it's such a respected venue on the match circuit. Days like this remind you why you keep coming

back, even when the fishing makes you work for every bite.

And finally, a quick personal note: I got absolutely soaked. The weather clearly hadn't read the forecast, and by the end of the match I'd taken on

enough water to rival the lake itself. Still, that's all part of the experience, and it certainly didn't dampen the enjoyment—or the result. All in all, a cracking day's match fishing, a solid finish for **The Freshwater Informer**, and another reminder that in angling, perseverance often pays off. I'm already looking forward to the next one.

Now back to the tackle room to get ready for the next outing.

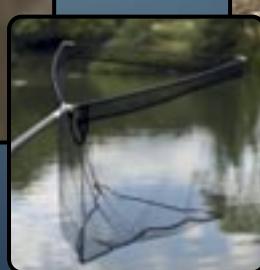


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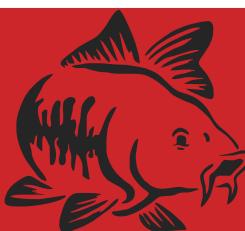
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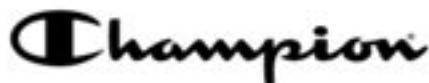
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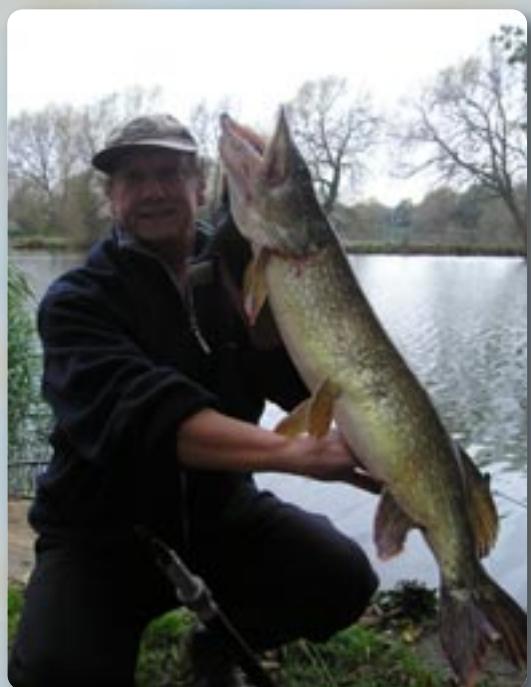
Bob Morris



Happy New Year, I hope all the readers of the freshwater Informer have had an enjoyable Christmas period and are now looking forward to the new year on the fishing front. Traditionally this is the time when we are supposed to make resolutions and decisions which, hopefully, will improve our lot during the coming year. This can be a good idea generally but sticking to a new regime is always difficult and the fishing plans are no exception to this.

Although my main aim these days is to just enjoy my fishing as much as possible, I must admit that I still have a few ideas about where I would like to spend more time and put in more of an effort etc. For me, this does not revolve around catching monster fish or great numbers these days but more to do with getting better results on waters that have proved difficult to crack or more consistent catches where I have been struggling. For the start of this year, I am concentrating on several Pike waters that can be extremely frustrating because ideal conditions do not always add up to action on the rods. Much of this is down to location and I try to combat this by adopting a more mobile approach, while on one water timing is king, it seems, as a swim /area where you have blanked today may well fish exceptionally well tomorrow. Hot spots can always change because of the movements of fodder fish which are often in large shoals during mid-winter, but when you see pike moving in a certain location but fail to get any

takes it often means that you are missing out on the main feeding times. This may mean that you need to adjust your approach by arriving earlier or even staying later and I can certainly remember sessions when doing this has been a game changer. Why pike would have a preferred feeding time I still don't know, and I would not like to suggest a 'best time' of day to target them, as over the years this has altered considerably from water to water and seemingly time of day and of year. So as with fishing generally, trial and error is often the only tactic available for identifying these feeding factors. This is one of the many mysteries that preserve the attractiveness of angling I believe, but having said this, it is only by ruling out as many of these as possible that we become successful anglers or at least 'more successful'. I think that if our results ever became too predictable, I would lose interest and even now I move away from a venue if I think that I have had the best and particularly with pike, I don't want to keep catching the same individual fish and this happens frequently on popular waters! I believe that there are rarely as many pike in a lake or stretch of river as is



often believed. I have come to this conclusion after comparing pictures of fish landed for many years and by removing traces/snap tackles from fish that have been lost or, unfortunately, left in the pike due to a lack of ability to remove them.

I have been doing my fare share of blanking already this season but feel that I am learning quite a bit about the places that I am fishing – particularly about fish movement and even about the relatively small populations in certain areas and venues. It is all part of the game and sometimes a blank can tell you as much (or more) as a successful session. A series of good catches as nice as this is, usually means that the pike and fodder fish have stayed in the same spot. A blank suggests that they have moved and you need to follow or change your timing – it is all a learning curve and I find it interesting. I think that although I still want and enjoy success, I can put up with blanks if it helps with the overall war effort. After all I have had a lot of good sessions over the years, and I really do just enjoy being out on the lake or riverbank these days and a red-letter day is just a bonus that crops up every now and then – hopefully as a direct result of my experiments and efforts. I am sure that when the 'Piscatorial Pendulum' finally swings in my direction it is, in part, due to what I have learned during those lean times.

Best Fishes & Mysteries

Bob Morris



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An advertisement for Bob Morris. On the left, a book titled 'TALES OF A MEDWAY MAN' by Bob Morris is shown. The cover features a photo of a man fishing. On the right, a large text advertisement reads 'Rods & Odd Jobs, Call Bob!' over a background of a river and trees. The bottom of the page says '2nd Book Still Available'.

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Willows Angling Centre	Bax Farm, Lower Road, Teynham ME9 9BU	01795 520887	The Tackle Box 251 Watling Street, Dartford DA2 6EG 01322 292400
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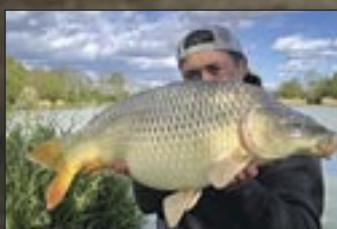
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