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Learn from the nation's ace specimen fish reporter in his own weekly column.

THIS WEEK: With the nights drawing in Gary gets his 'zed head' on.

Zander to the four

LIKE to set myself personal goals to achieve during the course of a season, and with many of my PBs now being hard to beat, these sometimes take other forms.

It is the same for many other specimen anglers, and you'll hear of people trying to catch double-figure barbel from a certain number of rivers, a certain number of fish over a certain size in a year, or a combination of species in excess of a particular weight, such as a 40 lb-plus pike, carp and catfish.

These targets are usually pretty arbitrary and are usually set by the individual in order to drive them on to catch more big fish.

When I landed a 12 lb 10 oz tench back in June I was obviously very pleased, but it was only at a later date that I decided to set myself a target of adding bream, barbel and zander over 12 lb before the season ended.

It has probably been done before but I felt that it would set me a bit of a challenge, even though I'd already done the hardest part with the tench.

In July I got my barbel with a 13 lb 2 oz specimen, which was also a River Thames PB, and in September I managed to get a couple of bream over 12 lb from Harefield Lake, the best going 12 lb 8 oz. So now I just needed the zander.

There aren't loads of waters around where I live in Buckinghamshire that have zander in them, so the obvious choice was Bury Hill Fisheries, at Dorking, in Surrey.

I'd fished this day ticket water a couple of times at the back end of last season and caught zeds up to 9 lb 8 oz, and knew that over the years it has built a reputation for producing good numbers of double-figure fish every season.

During the week I'm only able to fish overnight sessions, and Bury Hill owner David De Vere was kind enough to allow me to fish a few evening sessions on there, fishing until as late as I could stay awake, and then winding in and getting some sleep before going to work the next morning.

After getting stuck in traffic on the M25 I didn't arrive at the lake until



MISSION accomplished! I set myself a target of 12 lb-plus fish from four different species, and this 12 lb 14 oz zander was the last of the quartet to fall.

GARY'S WEEK AHEAD

“ Conditions aren't looking too promising with cold, frosty nights, so I'll probably dig out my chub gear for a go on the Thames. ”

around 9pm for my first session, and quickly cast out a couple of rods baited with fish heads – one about ten yards out and the other at around 30 yards where there was a bit of a shallower shelf.

Within 20 minutes or so I'd landed a small zander of a couple of pounds, quickly followed by another of 7 lb. Then, about an hour after arriving, I hit into something that felt far heavier and that stayed deep and plodded around, and as it came up to the surface close to the bank I could see it was a good zander.

On the scales it went 11 lb 12 oz and it was the perfect start, the only disappointing thing being that it was the same fish that had been reported at 15 lb-plus just a week or so before, and I know for certain that my scales and weighing procedure are accurate!

I ended up with a total of eight

zander, including others of 8 lb 15 oz and 8 lb 10 oz, before I wound in at 2am to get some sleep. I also had an 18 lb 3 oz carp that did a very good impression of a huge zander throughout the fight by not fighting as hard as carp usually do.

I decided to fish the following night and landed nine fish, but the best two were only around 7 lb. I also added another upper-double mirror, which shows how much carp like small fish baits.

The weather then took a turn for the worse, with cold nights and high pressure, including the odd frost – far from ideal zander conditions.

But then about ten days later we were forecast to have a warm night with low pressure and rain as well as strong south-westerly winds, so I knew I just had to go back and have another go.

I arrived around 5pm on a

Saturday and the lake was fairly quiet as a match had just finished, so I got in the area that I fancied. I fished a different swim on each of my three sessions as in the past I've found that zander don't like being hammered too much in one spot.

Within 20 minutes of casting out I had a take and played what felt like a decent fish for a few minutes before I was able to net it. It looked like a good one, but it was only when I lifted the net that I realised just how good. On the scales she went 12 lb 14 oz and it meant that I'd achieved my goal with almost five months to spare.

During the rest of the night I landed 11 other zander up to 8 lb 6 oz before winding in at about 2am to get some much needed sleep.

For more details on the fishing, Tel: 01306 883621. Or check out: www.buryhillfisheries.com