

BIG FISH TIPS

THIS WEEK: Eric Bailey is back on stillwater zander



Anchors away

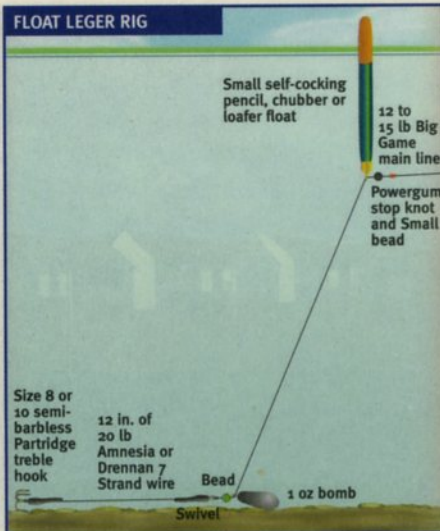
WHEN I want to anchor a bait in a particular area, I like to use this float leger rig.

I fish it up to 25 yards out comfortably and by using a self-cocking pencil, chubber or loafer float it's very sensitive. This way of fishing is a lot better than sunken float rigs I've tried.

I cast out and then tighten up to cock the float when it's only an inch above water. By setting the rig this way, I will instantly know when a zander is messing around and playing with the bait.

Zander takes tend to see the float dip just under the surface and by that time I've already struck and hooked into it. This can often happen without any indication at all at the rod end. Pike tend to carry on moving away with the bait whereas zander have a tendency to hold on to it and stay on the bottom.

My personal preference is to fish with an alarm on my front rod rest. I position the line in a line clip making sure the bale arm is open, or I'll put it straight onto the free-spool of a Baitrunner reel.



★ BURY-D ALIVE!

WHEN it comes to stillwater zander, few anglers are more experienced than Surrey specialist Eric Bailey. He's fished one of the countries top zander venues Bury Hill for over 24 years and has landed specimens to 15 lb 10 oz.

Eric, 55, from Tadworth, is a fishery bailiff and Pro-Fish Instructor on the Bury Hill complex. He has well over 200 10 lb-plus specimens to his credit, including an impressive 25 over 12 lb.



Be a gentle man

THEY may be predators with teeth, but zander are just as delicate as other species.

After landing, rest your prize in the net in the water so it can get its breath back. Then transfer it from the net to a good padded unhooking mat.

If your fish doesn't want to open its mouth, turn it onto its back and the mouth will open up. I then use 12 in. forceps to clamp down onto the hook and twist it free. Sometimes you may have to use forceps via the gills, be careful you don't damage them. To help prevent getting cut by the sharp part on the gills, I have a stainless steel filleting glove.

If you have trouble with unhooking, don't keep the fish out of the water too long, return it to the landing net to recover and try again. When returning, hold it until it has recovered and is kicking. Then release it.

Half baits - try them.



Get it half right

WHEN zander are playing hard to get, try scaling down to small half fish baits on a light leger set-up.

Small dead roach, trout and sprats cut in half all score. Eel sections, just two or three inches in length also work well. If the bait is longer than your finger, it's too long.

I advise that only pre-packed freshwater fish are used, to stop the spread of disease from water to water.

Seadead baits seem to work best in very cold conditions. Baits like joey mackerel, smelt or sardines cut in half, to let the attractive body juices and oils out, have all caught good fish on my local lake.

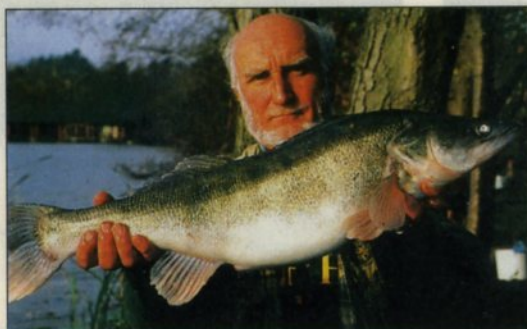
Pictures of lilies

AT this time of year one of the good features to investigate are new lily pad beds.

The new growth may see the stalks about a foot off bottom already and zeds really do like these areas.

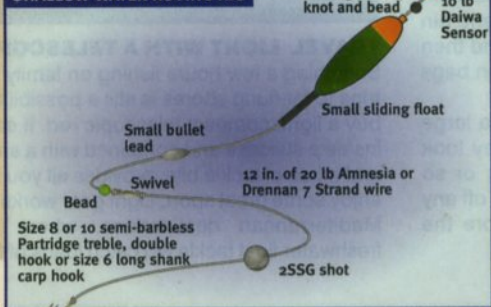
They attract food fish, and with zander liking to chase small fish towards the margins where lily pad beds tend to grow they make good ambush points. I think they're probably used as spawning bed sites as well.

Search out the lily beds by bouncing a bomb back without a hook length on. Island margins with overhanging cover are also well worth checking out for big zeds.



Search out growing lily pad beds for specimens like this 13 lb zed.

SHALLOW WATER ROVING RIG



Play the wild rover

IF I want to search out an area of shallow water, I use this simple roving set-up. It's set to fish anything from 18 to 24 in. deep and features a small pencil type sliding float. It also boasts a small bullet loading and a 2SSG shot to keep a small livebait down in the water.

The trace is either 12 in. of 20 lb Drennan 7 Strand wire or Amnesia leader material with a size 8 or 10 semi-barbless Partridge treble, double hook or even a long shank size 6 carp hook.

Amnesia is used when I'm convinced that there aren't any pike about. I add a blob of Superglue to Amnesia knots for extra security.