GREAT 'WHERE'S THE CATCH?' COMPETITION

coarse angling today

£2.80 ISSUE 104
APRIL 2010

THANK HEAVENS FOR PERCH

TARGETING BIG CHUB

QUEST FOR SPRING BREAM

BILL & VIRGINIA'S COMMERCIAL BREAKS

AT THE SHARP END! FIND THE PERFECT HOOK

CATCH YOUR FIRST ZANDER

9 771474 721029 04

Catch your first zander

Having recently 'discovered' the zander, Duncan Charman (who *hasn't* changed his name to Cushelle) wants to spread the word

Amazingly, with over four decades of angling behind me, I'd never managed to put any time aside to target zander – until this winter. I hope this feature will help others understand the basic fundamentals required to land their first zed.

Having spent numerous hours pursuing other predators such as pike and perch it was another species that helped me understand and get to grips with zander quicker than I had expected: eels. Eels hate resistance, dropping a bait at the slightest indication when something feels wrong, they feed in short bursts when conditions are right and require the use of simple rigs. Overlooking any of these factors will only bring average returns and frustrating sessions.

25lb Quicksilver has never let me down eel fishing and the statistics continue with zander

My learning period has been spent on probably the most prolific zander water in the country, Old Bury Hill Lake, Surrey, a day-ticket water that's available to all. Not only does this fishery contain lots of zander, it has the potential of producing really big fish in excess of 14lb. On one of my recent sessions, an angler targeting the species for the very first time caught three zeds, all in the last half an hour before closing up time; all three were 11-pounders. That's some fishing and a story that brings me to my first piece of advice.

Search them out – cast regularly at different angles and distances

Conditions and timing

Zander are far more active in low light conditions, so if you're planning a session at Old Bury Hill, keep a close eye on the weather forecast and try and time your visit to coincide with an overcast, mild day. Even when the conditions are favourable, make sure you are at the water as soon as it opens as dawn is a prime feeding time. Dusk is also a period of high activity, so don't leave early; the last 10 minutes before the venue closes can produce more runs than the whole of the day! My advice is that as long as it's mild, the wetter and windier the weather is, then the better the fishing will be. Most

Zander fight well
on the right kit

The big eye is designed to find its prey in low light

Place your rods high with bobbins on a long drop

anglers will be thinking of staying at home, so get the waterproofs on, chuck an umbrella in the car and head off to the lake. You may be the only angler there, but you will without a doubt catch a few fish if you get your basic approach right.

If you do have a water that allows night fishing then you will find that the first couple of hours into darkness are best with another feeding spell just before dawn, however different venues vary, so my advise would be to fish all night, make a note of when the best times are then capitalise on these by being on the water at those times. It's the same with winter carp and roach. Both have specific feeding periods throughout a twenty-four hour period

Simple running rigs are as complex as you need get!

and although these will change slowly over the whole of the winter it will be a slow change, so if you find the fish feed at 10pm then its an almost certain bet that the following evening they will feed at this time again. If you're planned trip does unfortunately fall on a bright sunny day, as mentioned before, be on the water as early as allowed and leave as late as you can as the first and last hours will undoubtedly be the best.

Areas to target

This again varies with the time of year, but in general you will find zander in the shallower areas during the autumn moving into deeper water as the water temperature drops. This is a pretty consistent pattern with all species, so if an area is producing bream or plenty of silver fish you can bet zander won't be far away. Zander hunt in packs so once you receive a bite it's often the case that more will follow quickly, so try and get your rod back out as quickly

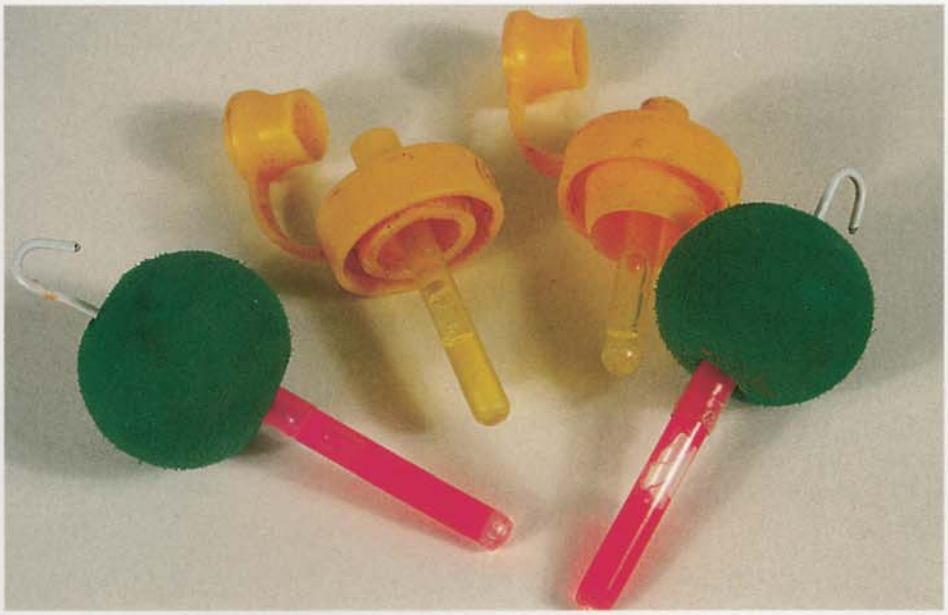
Avoid backrests that grip the handle – Korum Butt Rests are ideal for zander and eel fishing when everything needs to be kept smooth

as possible after each capture. One good method is to keep moving, maybe spending half an hour in a swim before moving a few yards further down the bank. If you see another angler catching don't be afraid to move closer to him, though obviously not so close that it effects his fishing.

Try to imagine what most anglers do when they pack up. They remove their bait and throw it into the lake along with a few other leftovers. Zander aren't stupid and will switch on to the time this happens and feed close in, so don't go casting to the horizon, often a short underarm cast is all that's required. Quite often one rod will receive more takes than the other. This is because the zander are shoaled up close together, so maximise your chances and place both rods close together on the going spot.

Casting frequently

I'm not sure whether or not zander respond to the noise of a lead hitting



Two styles of homemade bobbin – bottle tops and foam poppers

Isotopes available at Lidl's in bulk – brilliant for zander fishing

Caught on a tiny fish section

the water, but it's often the case that a run will occur very quickly after casting out, sometimes when you're setting the indicator. When I arrive at a swim I keep casting frequently at different angles and distances until I get a bite. Once a bite comes I cast back to the same area, as this will often produce another. Twitching baits back is meant to work, but all I found it did is mask the bait with leaf debris, making it less appealing, so I wouldn't recommend it, especially on waters surrounded by trees. Some anglers seem happy to cast out and wait, confident that this is the way to catch the bigger fish, but my plan in catching a big fish is to catch as many fish as I can.

Simple running rigs

Just like eel fishing, as soon as you try to complicate your rigs you will see a downturn in runs. The more bits of terminal tackle making up your end rig, the more resistance it has and the fewer bites it will produce. A simple running leger rig with just enough weight to get your bait where the fish are feeding is adequate. Let me try to explain my thoughts on leads that are too big or the use of a float when legering. A lead that's too heavy will sink into the bottom of the lake. If that is silt it could

dig in a few inches and the angle of your main line and hooklink through the eye of the lead will cause friction, creating aborted runs; hence the need to use the lightest lead possible. A float also causes an angle through it to the lead, once again creating resistance, and if the float is too big, its buoyancy will also cause dropped runs. If you're going to use a float then use the smallest one possible, maybe a loaded waggler or chubber style float, shotted right down and the bait just resting on the bottom. I can't see the point of float legering; it over-complicates what really does need to be kept simple. As long as you have a sensitive indicator system set-up with a simple running leger rig then you've won half the battle.

Balanced tackle

In fighting terms zander are similar to bream. Hook them using 15lb line and 3lb test curve rods and not a lot will be felt. However, refine your rods, line and terminal tackle and these creatures can fight back. The rods I've been using are 1¾lb Korum Precision Specialists teamed with 8lb Gardner Hydro-Flow main line; balanced, adequate and enjoyable.

My set up may not look trendy, somewhat primitive in fact, but using long banksticks that set your rods around waist height is perfect, and bobbins set close to the ground allow plenty of time to strike before they reach the rod. No resistance, no dropped runs – just steady, hittable bites every time. Bobbins should be as light as possible. I still use old Fairy Liquid bottle tops with isotopes pushed in when fishing after dark. Unfortunately, these seem to be unavailable now; that's unless Dave Ball's fishing next door, he seems to have an everlasting supply of what has to be the best lightweight indicator ever available. I thought the bottle top type couldn't be beaten but the foam poppers simply have the plastic tube that comes with the cheap isotopes pushed into them and a broken paper clip Araldited into the top. If you need to weight them down then heavy metal putty can be added to the tube before pushing in the isotope.

My father joined me recently for his first ever zander trip, and after a few hours of missed runs due to using inadequate bobbins, we sat down and created what now seems the ultimate zander bobbin. If you need the isotopes, they can be bought from Lidl's at around two quid for 50. What more do you want!

Alan Stagg found zander fishing addictive

As the water-cooled, sardine sections out-fished all other baits

The key to converting bites into hooked fish is to sit on your rods and strike before the bobbin reaches the top. Also, don't use back rests that grip the rod handle. I use Korum Butt Rests, which allow the rod to be picked up with minimal fuss.

Hookbait mounting

Old Bury Hill Lake seems to be one that's different to all others in that it's one of the only waters where zander feed confidently on sea deadbaits. I'm not sure why this is so, but can only assume that so much has entered the water from pike anglers over the years the zander have switched on to it as an easy food source, similar to how catfish switch on to pellets and boilies. When targeting zander, err on the side of small baits rather than large, as although they look quite frightening, they have relatively small mouths compared to pike.

Early on in the season, whilst the water temperature is still warm naturals work well, as do sprats, but as it cools the oily nature of mackerel start to become the more favoured bait. I've never been a lover of mackerel due to its tough skin, so I decided to use sardine sections instead and before I

Get ready when the sun drops below the horizon, as the action can be frantic

Once dad sorted out his indication system he caught this double on his first ever zander trip

It seems logical to me to keep the hook out of the bait – frozen sections also cast well and quickly defrost leaking attractants into the water

knew it they were out-fishing all other baits. Knowing that hooking a piece of sardine wasn't the best option, especially for casting, I started to hair rig a frozen section on a single, barbless size 6 Korum S3 and I haven't looked back since. The frozen section can be easily mounted and cast, slowly defrosting and leaking off all its blood and oil into the water, simply irresistible as well as leaving the hook free to easily penetrate the zander's hard, bony mouth.

Sea deadbaits will not work on all waters, probably very few, but keep in mind what's happening on Old Bury Hill, as it may be worth a trial as an alternative on your water when the going gets tough. My thoughts on hair rigging seem to be going into overdrive, not only for zander, but pike as well. Surely this option is far safer for the well being of the fish stocks than snap-tackle, and looking at my strike rate, the latter is a thing of the past. Give it a go – you may be surprised just how effective it is.

Probably the best piece of advice on the subject of bait is to always carry a good variety of different baits as zander have a tendency of changing their feeding preference on a daily basis. Never be afraid of hair-rigging two tiny sections of a small bait like a gudgeon or lamprey as these maybe the only items they will feed on, especially during the day.

Handling.

One word of warning with zander, and one I found out on my first outing is they have a very sharp pointed dorsal fin and are just as lively on the bank as in the water. The first zander I caught caught me with this spike, right at the

Small fish baits can attract other species – the bream took a liking to a sprat tail!

base of by thumb. Like perch they also have a sharp gill cover that can also catch you out, so beware.

Hopefully, my introduction to zander fishing has inspired a few anglers to refine their kit and make a visit to Old Bury Hill, or maybe to one of the harder venues such as the River Severn, Trent or Thames. Wherever you go, some of the things learnt throughout my early sessions should help you in understanding the way zander feed, the tackle required and when to target this quite addictive species.

Please note some items of kit described here may not comply with Old Bury Hill's rules. This is because special permission was granted by the owner for us to carry out tests, to supply statistics to him for the future running of the business. When visiting the venue, please make sure you comply with the rules.

Vital statistics

Based on two anglers fishing five short afternoon sessions:
Runs – 101
Fish hooked – 77
Fish landed – 69 zander and one pike
24 runs missed due to either not striking out of bait or sometimes two runs coming at same time

Fact file

Address: Bury Hill Fisheries, The Boathouse, Old Bury Hill, Westcott, nr Dorking, Surrey, RH4 3JU.
Tel: 01306 877540
Website: www.buryhillfisheries.co.uk