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ALL NEW!

Improve your coarse FISHING

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Get more bites!

Make crucians 'fizz' for your bait now...

PLUS: Spring bream – catch your biggest

Pictures: ***Mick Rouse***

DIG a hole, fill it with water and bung some carp in it. Easy, fishery done!

This is what you might think is all that it takes to create a commercial pool, if you listened to some anglers and fishery owners.

But times are a changing and on my travels around the country more anglers and fishery managers are becoming less carp oriented.

A rising number of waters are being managed to be anything but 'carp only' venues.

Boasting a mixed stock of silverfish and favourites like tench and crucian carp there is a whiff of evolution blowing through coarse fishing.

We're not talking about a revolution in attitudes here, carp aren't about to become yesterday's news.

I'm talking about a subtle shift. More anglers want the variety of fishing which a commercial could exploit *without* catching carp all the time.

Hard earned capture
Sliding a 2lb crucian into the net is a moment of achievement for any angler – these are very wary fish

Fishery owners, too, are also starting to heed the views of anglers and a small, but growing number of pools are being transformed or set up as true mixed fisheries.

One such water is Milton Lake on the Bury Hill complex near Dorking, Surrey.

Covering 2.5 acres with 30 platform pegs, this pool was part of the commercial fishery boom and opened in 1991 with a mixed stock of species.

Roach, rudd, bream, tench, crucians and a few common/mirror carp were placed in the lake. While it was a popular lake it's fair to say the Milton story wasn't one of total success.

Some visitors bemoaned the lack of 'prolific' carp sport and unfavourably compared Milton to 'bagging waters' where ton-up hauls were the daily norm.

Bury Hill boss David De Vere bowed to the pressure – six years ago the carp went in.

Over 2,000 mirror and common carp went in the lake. Ranging between 8oz and 1lb, they were excellent brood stock and within a couple of years the population had mushroomed.

From it's starting point as a mixed fishery the lake was now effectively a carp water which wasn't something on-site tackle

A growing number of pools are being set up as true mixed fisheries

>> Russ' personal best crucian is a 3lb 14oz giant, ounces short of the British record, caught from Old Bury Hill lake

FANCY A GO?

Milton Lake is part of the Bury Hill Fisheries complex near Dorking, Surrey. Day tickets cost £11.50 and details can be found at www.buryhillfisheries.co.uk or call 01306 883621

shop manager Russ Evans was too pleased about.

"Personally, it wasn't a change I was in favour of but it was what anglers seemed to want," Russ explained. "Like so many other waters the lake dramatically changed and throughout the warmer months it was carp, carp, carp.

"I almost stopped fishing Milton and limited my trips to the depths of winter when it was too cold for the carp to feed.

"For a couple of months it was possible to catch quality roach and perch but for the rest of the year the carp had every bait you put in and they stopped you fishing with the fine tackle needed to catch silverfish."

For a while anglers voted with their seatboxes. As bigger nets of carp came out of the lake more people fished it and everyone was happy.

Or were they? Over the past couple of years more visitors mentioned that Milton had become a carbon copy of the lake next door, the prolific Bonds Lake which is also home to thousands of carp.

Great though it was, couldn't a bit of variety be added? Couldn't other fish be stocked to make sport less predictable?

The crazy thing is the 'other'

fish were still there but the carp were so voracious that getting a bait in front of a nice tench or quality crucian was almost impossible.

Listening to anglers who wanted something other than carp, David made the call last year to turn the clock full circle.

Just before last Christmas the lake was netted and more than 80% of the mirror and common carp were removed and placed in Bonds Lake or in a stock pond for growing on.

In February a de-silting barge was hired and after three weeks of sweeping and pumping the lakebed the average depth had increased by around 2ft.

After a limited restocking with silverfish and crucians the rejuvenated lake reopened this spring.

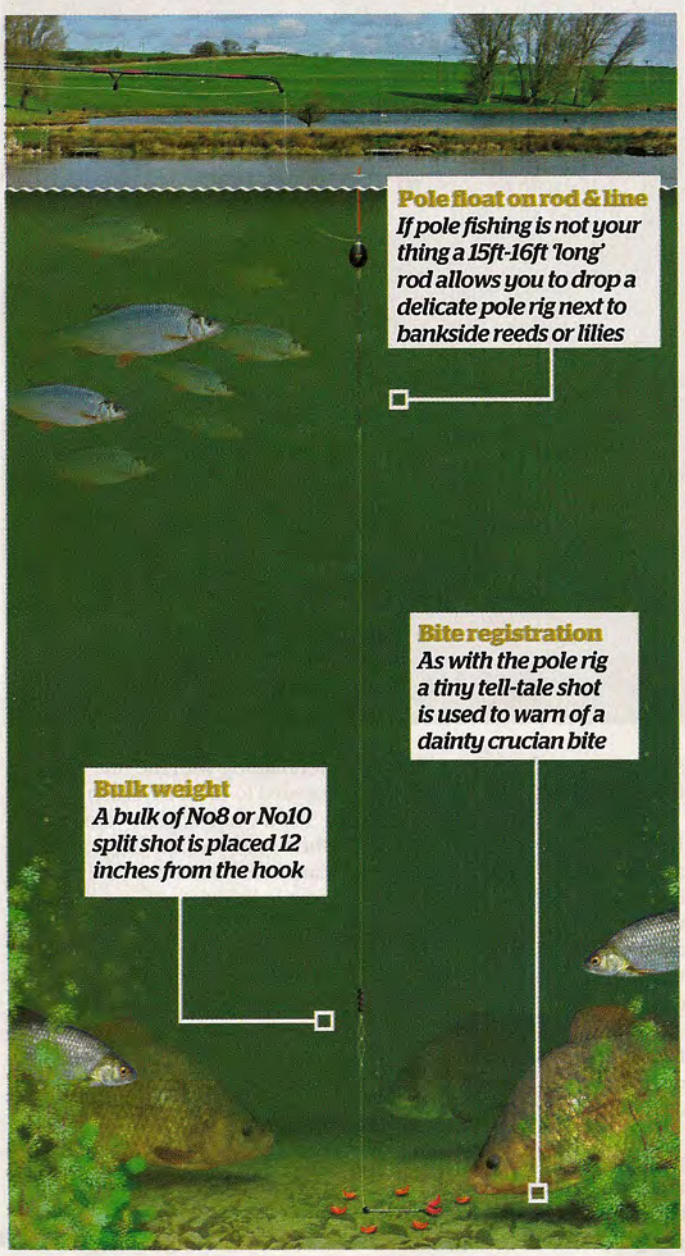
"The result has been fantastic," enthused Russ, as he shipped out his rig to six metres on peg 20 of Milton Lake.

"The de-silting has returned the lake to its original average depth of 5ft while drop-offs and ledges have re-emerged.

"But the real change has been the fishing, it's been fantastic. With fewer carp tearing up your swim it's been possible to fish 'properly' for other fish with the sort of tackle that gets you bites.

"The old stock fish have come out of the shadows and suddenly we've got a lake that could give many anglers four or five personal bests in a day.

"Fish that have long been forgotten about are being caught – we've had roach and rudd over 2lb, tench to 6lb, skimmers that haven't been caught for years and thumping perch to just under 4lb."



But the biggest surprise Milton's had in store is a fish most anglers would cross burning coals to catch – big, beautiful crucian carp.

The original stock fish of the lake, or their golden flanked progeny, it's these spectacular fish Russ was focussed on during our visit.

Laid out on his bait tray were offerings that had little place on the bank when the carp terrorised Milton – maggots, casters and worms. Added to the traditional crucian fayre was a tub of corn.

But also lined up alongside these old-school offerings were two baits not normally considered crucian fodder – 2mm feed pellets and 4mm soft expander pellets for the hook.

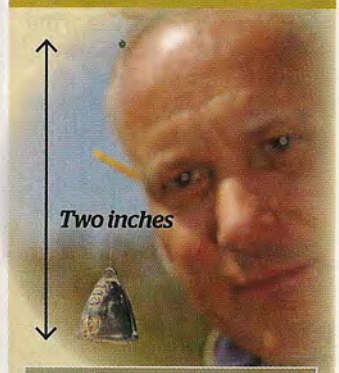
Bream and tench aren't the only fish that have developed a taste for pellets used by anglers after mirror and common carp, crucians have also latched on to fishmeal.

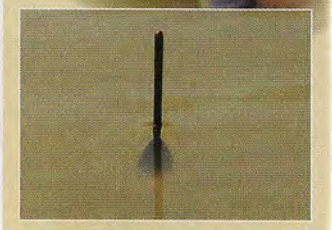
As for his tackle, this was also a leap away from the strong-arm kit that had dominated the lake.

Bungee pole elastic had been

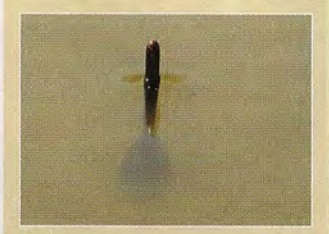
> We've had roach and rudd over 2lb, tench to 6lb and thumping perch to 4lb

How to set up a float for crucians

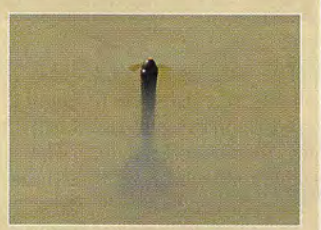




1 This is how many anglers shot a pole float – this is undershotted for crucians



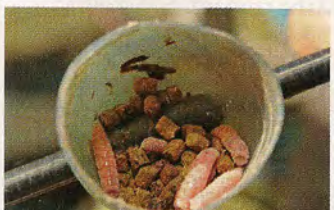
2 This is better, there's more chance of a crucian pulling it under. It's not perfect, though



3 If calm conditions allow it this is ideal – a pimple of tip poking above the water

ditched in favour of softer blue Daiwa Hydrolastic with a rating of 5-8.

Tow-rope lines and strong hooks were out. To balance the soft elastic, low diameter 2lb-3lb line was used with lightweight size 18 or 16 Kamasan B911 hooks.



Potting in A pinch of 2mm feed pellets and red maggots

To finish off his sensitive rigs, each carried a slender, lightweight float with minimal shot down the line.

While one rig (page 115) was fished on the end of a six-metre pole to drop the bait just over the marginal shelf, Russ also rigged up an extra long 15ft Drennan float rod (far left) to drop a rig next to a set of sprouting rushes.

What Russ was most definitive about was the necessity to perfectly plumb the depth.

Crucian carp are almost exclusively bottom or just off bottom feeders, it is very rare to catch one mid-water so you must 'map' the lakebed and ensure your hookbait touches the deck every put-in.

Crucians also have a reputation for being delicate feeders that treat a bait with grave suspicion before deciding whether to eat it.

This means the rig must be carefully shotted so the instant a fish picks up the hookbait the float yells a warning.

"Crucians are my favourite fish because they drive me mad," laughed Russ. "They are so finicky and the bites can be incredibly frustrating to hit, your rig has got to be extremely sensitive."

To achieve this Russ plumbs dead depth then slides the float two inches overdepth.

A tiny number 10 dropper shot is pinched on the line two inches from the hook so it just rests on the bottom.

With Russ Evans

>> His best day was a match-winning catch of skimmers from a punt at Patshull Park

A sense of achievement *This is part of Russ' Milton haul but the biggest two of these 13 golden crucians go over 2lb and most of the others top the 1lb mark – a great day's fishing*

"Why I catch..."

1 - Be quick

Bites are subtle and sharp so you need to strike quickly

2 - Pellets

On many waters crucians have grown to love pellets more than maggots or casters

3 - Hookbaits

Soft 4mm expander pellets are far better than hard pellets

4 - Plumbing

You must fish on the deck or within an inch of it

5 - Feeding

Accurately potting a pinch of 2mm feed pellets and red maggots gets them interested

The purpose of this 'tell tale' shot is to register the moment a crucian picks up the hookbait and lifts the shot off the deck. The weight pulls on the line and the dotted down float goes under.

Russ also believes the feeding pattern is an important factor in getting the fish to feed confidently.

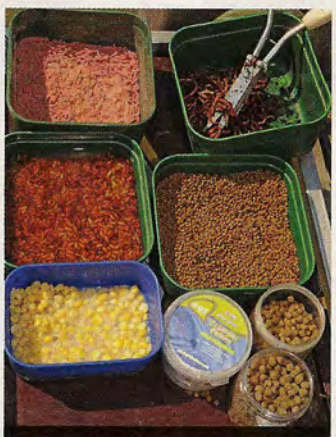
In the morning stages of the session potting in a pinch of 2mm pellets and a few red maggots tempted some incredibly minute movements of the float.

Even though it was dotted down to within a few millimetres of the surface, rarely did the fish pull the float under – most bites caused the bristle to do little more than 'jostle'.

Russ missed more bites than he hit.

But as the first couple of hours passed and with just three crucians in his net, regular sprinkling of micro pellets and red maggots coaxed the fish into marginally forgetting their natural reticence.

Slowly, the bites became more positive and the fish even pulled the float under!



Be varied *Russ starts with maggot or caster hookbaits but pellets usually take over*

"This is more like it..." said Russ as he lifted into a typically dogged crucian that had just about pulled the pimple of float tip under the surface.

"You often get a little 'knock on the door' when a crucian is near your bait. Pin prick bubbles often surface and the float might dip or lift a fraction," he said.

"This puts you on guard – you need to watch the float like a hawk and strike the instant it dips under."

As repeated feeding of micro pellets brought more fish into his swim Russ also 'worked' his hookbait. Lifting his float a few inches every minute or so injected movement into his bait and gave it a fresh drop to the bottom.

"This makes a huge difference to your catch rate," said Russ. "Lifting the bait off the bottom a fraction grabs a crucian's attention and bites often come within seconds of allowing the float to resettle."

Time and again this advice was backed up with evidence as the Oxted, Surrey, angler built an impressive net of golden fish that took his 4mm expander pellet hookbait a few moments after lifting the rig.

As an added bonus he also bagged half a dozen tench to 3lb, a few bream and a handful of roach.

It was great fishing in anyone's book and as we admired Russ' catch he summed up what makes a day crucian carp fishing so special: "If you build a bag of fish like this you can be satisfied you've fished well and had a good day – crucians have to be earned."

If more anglers take up the crucian challenge this faint wind of change will hopefully gather strength as more anglers seek to find out what's living in the shadow of carp. **IYCF**