

## The sweet taste of success by Chris Winstanley

Most times on arrival at this big pit I was greeted by many dilemmas as to where to start, but on this particular occasion things were a little more straightforward. Usually I'd get down to the lake at first light to take advantage of any early shows to point me in the right direction. The two to three hour drive over the last couple of months, however had taken its toll, so this time it was late morning before I was doing my laps, looking for a sign. It didn't take too long, the bottom bank was alive with activity, the odd show and plenty of backs glinting in the May sunshine, and more importantly no anglers.

There was an amazing hatch going on, the likes of which I've never seen before, wave after wave of damsel larvae were invading the margins, D-Day indeed. The marginal sedges were covered in these new hatchlings warming their limp wings in the spring sunshine.



It was quite obvious that the carp were taking full advantage of this annual phenomenon. My first thoughts were how to approach this potential gift; zigs would be an obvious choice, the old black foam had to be a winner in this situation. The progress of the weed over the last couple of weeks though put an end to that idea. Sure a take was well on the cards but the chances of landing anything in these conditions looked slim to me.

Not wanting to leave a fly in a carp's mouth I opted to go with the approach that had a few fish slip up over the last trip or two. This would be a small amount of hemp with a few mini tigers spread over the spot, not tight as I like the fish to move between

mouthfuls, and a balanced tiger hookbait with a little cork insert so it just sits up off the hook. At this time of year, with the naturals in abundance, the boilie approach isn't the best option for me on a pit as rich as this. I had everything I needed in the boot of my car, a few tubs of CC Moore prepped hemp, a tub of mini tigers and a small amount of larger tigers that I'd had festering in lake water and that were just right.

Most of the carp were close in off the bottom bank so I decided to leave them there in peace while I checked out an old spot from the previous year. Just out of the way was Crow's point, a swim that had been kind to me in the past. It looked a good starting point, I could prep a spot without causing too much disturbance knowing the fish would soon be close by with a chance of a few getting down to have a little go on the bottom. Peering through my glass bottom bucket the clearing in the weed came into view and an 'H' block was thrown overboard. It was a bit dirtier than I expected but there were a few signs of recent activity. Around a piece of stick or something lying on the bottom were several patches of cleaned off gravel, it had to be worth a go. After sorting out my clips and all the rest of it I managed to get two tiger nut hookbaits sat nicely on the area close to the exposed gravel, donking down nicely on the cast. The advantage of the boat being that I could see their exact position on the spot and trickle down a good few handfuls of hemp and spread around a few mini tigers for them to search for, which I duly did. I settled in for the night with a few beers and a watchful eye as the sun went down over this truly beautiful place. Up until around midnight I heard a few break the surface out in the main body of water which had me full of hope as I drifted off to sleep dreaming of big scaly carp, or maybe something else!

The following day brought nothing but other anglers. The activity of the carp at this end of the lake could not be missed. It was obvious that they were hanging around to gorge themselves on the masses of naturals, but in the swim I was in I felt I was in pole position should they decide to eat something other than bugs. This being the case I stuck to my original plan and repeated the previous day's preparations. A couple of fish were hooked and lost that day on zigs in the weed which reinforced my previous thoughts on that method of angling. I was beginning to think that it was maybe futile angling for carp that were so preoccupied on the natural larder right in front of their faces. Even the shows were peculiar; they appeared to be throwing themselves at the emerging larvae, flipping over as they broke the surface. Not the usual head and shoulder routine.

I dragged myself out of my bag early on what was to be my last morning hoping to see something positive in the area, but things were just the same as before, if anything there was less activity. Sometime during my umpteenth brew I received a few bleeps which turned into a slow and steady run. I found a slow moving weight as I leant into my rod which kited to my right taking my other line with it before all went solid. I couldn't get the line up and the other lead and rig had become snarled up; it wasn't good. I shouted to get Keith's attention who was down to my right and he duly came to my rescue and removed the problem of my other line. I managed to get the fish moving again only for the rod to spring back and the sudden sick feeling in my gut that all was lost. I was totally gutted, I had got things right, I got my chance and had bugged it up. Not only that, I was convinced it was a good fish. I was completely dejected. After a chat with Bungle who was on the bottom bank and Dave on a visit from a nearby pit I decided I would do another night. A couple of phone calls were made; I was due home that day but a trip to the shops for supplies saw me ready for another go. The usual routine was undertaken with the boat and blocks, but looking through the bucket this time was a little different. For a start all the bait was gone, but there was far more exposed gravel around the stick where I'd deposited most of my hemp. There was a hole under the stick where something's mouth had excavated the bottom searching out every grain of food item. This had me very excited and helped somewhat to blot out the pain of that lost fish. Rods positioned, I put out another tub of hemp and a handful of mini tigers all round the stick and settled down hoping for more gravel excavators visiting in the morning.

The bleeps from my alarms that roused me from my sleep were not the usual kind. A small group of goslings thought it would be amusing to dance on my rod tips which were about an inch under the surface. If the constant early morning honking wasn't bad enough, they had to breed even dumber offspring; oh the joys of the goose! Well it's their lake as well I suppose. Enough was enough, I had to admit defeat and get myself up just to chase the little buggers off, again and again. I fired up the kettle and was greeted by Kev turning up for his usual Sunday start laughing at me waving my net cursing the troublesome nursery that had taken up residence in my swim. Soon enough Rob made an appearance, so the discussions of the last few days' occurrences began and the kettle took a bit of hammer. After a bit of info was shared, a small burst of bleeps caught my attention. As I turned my head looking for my little feathered friends, Kev assured me it was not the goslings that were the culprits. Indeed he was right, one of my rod tips was lifting out of the water and the line slowly tightened as the first ticks of the clutch provoked my alarm to give its warning. That was enough for me; I leant into the rod and was met with a heavy slow resistance. After the initial run all went solid, whereupon Rob urged me to get in the boat. After the previous days events I didn't need telling twice and threw net, mat and myself into the boat and cranked myself to the weeded carp. I applied pressure over the top of the weed bed, slowly easing him up, inviting another powerful run to the next mass of weed. Another big pull brought a huge head and shoulders to the surface, flanking over and diving once more to the depths of the pit. I was gobsmacked; it looked massive and I was beginning to wonder which one of the biguns it was. It wasn't a lengthy fight but one of sheer power and the constant worry of the fresh weed the fish was ploughing through. The second the net enveloped the fish I raised an arm, maybe in relief, knowing I had one of the lakes larger residents. I momentarily peered down at its wide back, but then concentrated on the job of getting back to dry land. Approaching the bank I noticed Bungle, who, on hearing the commotion had turned back from his departure, heading home. I got out of the boat and told him to take care of the netted fish in the edge while I gathered my stuff and composed myself.



Everyone was fantastic, people were gathering my stuff when Bungle said, it's effin Choco! What? It's Choco I'm telling you! Well I just couldn't believe my ears, but as he hoisted up the net and layed this truly magnificent carp onto my mat, it was clear as day, I had got the mighty Choco.

For a few moments I stood back sucking frantically on a cigarette as Rob, Kev and Bungle sorted the weighing out. We pondered that he could well be over fifty, but that didn't really matter, it was the fish that mattered. As it goes, he went 50lb 2oz which was the icing on the cake of a really wonderful morning, made better by sharing the moment with my very good friend Rob, and a few others too.



After the photographs, we sat drinking tea for a while, in awe of the fact that we had just had an encounter with one of the finest carp in the land!