

Hidden silvers

Are the big roach in your local commercial largely ignored? Follow Duncan Charman's advice and you can sort the men from the boys.

Finding a day ticket fishery that offers specimen roach instead of small carp was always going to be difficult. The problem was, that's what I was asked to do for this month's feature. Thank goodness I like a challenge!

And believe me, this lake, or should I say 'pond', was going to be a challenge. As my father and I opened the car doors and looked into the valley, we initially thought someone was having a laugh. The lake we'd been told about was tiny – less than two acres – and if it wasn't for a couple of carp anglers that were already settled we could

quite easily have turned around and gone home again.

This was far from what I would consider a specimen roach water but by careful management, such a water had been developed and laying beneath its murky surface I was assured swam a large number of 'redfins'.

Every two years the fishery management team net and remove the small roach, leaving just the bigger ones. Now, they have transformed this water into a specimen-roach angler's dream.

On our arrival the owner pointed out a couple of the better roach swims, and almost

guaranteed that if the fish were obliging then a two-pounder was on the cards. A smug grin covered my face and as I sat on my Preston On-Box I began to realise just why others – even friends – had kept it a closely guarded secret. It was Dad who had uncovered its identity and for this reason we were going to enjoy its fruits to the fullest.

TACTICS

Not wanting to make a rash decision, I took time to look at my swim and work out how I would get the best from it, similar to a matchman leading up to the whistle sounding.

Use simple waggler tackle and you can catch quality roach on your local commercial.



Three set-ups, but don't use them all at the same time!

01 Waggler

The centre of the lake is within easy reach of casting a waggler and loose feeding casters. I love using a waggler and as it's been a while since I've put this tactic to the test, I'm really looking forward to the day.

For my waggler set-up I'm using a 13ft Preston CarbonActive Sentient Super Float rod – an extremely balanced rod that's a joy to use.

My choice of reel is one of the recently released Preston PXR3000s, which I've loaded to the rim with an old favourite – 3lb Maxima. The choice of float is easy; another variety that has stood the test of time, casts like a dream and is sensitive enough to show even the most delicate bite – a Drennan Loaded Crystal. Locking the float with two No4 shot, I add a No6 next to them so that the float almost cocks perfectly. The addition of two



When you're fishing for quality roach, it pays to use relatively fine terminal tackle.

small No8 'droppers' lowers the tip to perfection.

It's still early in the season and I know that the bigger fish are unlikely to come off the bottom. For this reason I'm happy to fix my shot directly onto the line. If I'd known I'd have to keep altering the depth to keep in touch with the fish, I'd have locked these on with some tiny pole-float sleeving.

My hook link is another favourite – Preston Grand Match fluorocarbon in a strain of 2.64lb, which has a Kamasan B525 size 18 hook attached to it.

02 Long rod and pole float

My second tactic is to fish a 17ft rod, lowering a delicately balanced pole rig off its end. My reason for using a long rod over the pole is, knowing roach have very delicate mouths, it would be easy to encounter hook pulls on the pole. Also, if a bonus

carp showed then the reel's clutch will hopefully give me the upper hand over stretching elastic.

My choice of long rod is a 17ft Preston CarbonActive coupled with an old Shimano match reel containing 3lb Korum Advanced reel line. Threading the main line through the eye of a Preston Bazzler PB19 float marked 4x14, three tiny strips of pole float tubing follow.

Some anglers only use one piece of sleeving to attach their pole floats to the line, but I like to use three – the first directly under the body of the float, the next halfway down the stem and the final one right on the stem's end.

The rig is completed with a hooklength of 1.54lb Grand Match, an olivette at two-thirds depth, and a size 22 Kamasan B525 hook. The olivette is just big enough to cock the float, allowing three tiny No12

shot to be added at even spaces to the hook, allowing a near natural drop of my single maggot offering. The reason for using an olivette is that this gets the bait through the surface layers quickly, well away from small roach that will intercept the bait on its descent.

Before adding the three dropper shots I find the swim's depth by adding a heavy plummet. This is lowered from the rod top without any disturbance and the perfect depth can be found in just a few minutes.

03 Blockend feeder

A maggot feeder is my backup if all else fails.

PLUMB THE DEPTH

My first job is to find the depth of the lake so I attach an AAA shot to the hook on the waggler set-up and make a cast to the centre of the lake. I much prefer the use of a big shot on the hook than a heavy plummet that I feel will disturb the swim even before I start.

I'm assured that it's about four feet in the middle and after watching the float disappear I simply wind in, add six inches and cast again. This time the float is easily visible so I make another six casts, altering the depth slightly every time until I know I'm just touching bottom.

Placing the hook in the rod's hook holder I simply stick a small piece of electrical tape around the blank to mark the depth so that if I need to set up later in the day I need not go through the plumbing process again.

A GOOD START

Firstly, I need to feed the swim so I start catapulting in a steady flow of maggots before beginning with my 17ft rod and pole float.



Pristine roach like this are often left untouched in your local commercial.

After a few agonising moments, the roach drops into the net, only a few ounces short of 2lb!

When fishing the long rod it's important to try and keep your feeding very tight. Unable to add a pole cup to the thin rod tip, I have a solution up my sleeve in the shape of an old pole with markers at 13, 15 and 17 feet! It's simply a case of attaching a pole cup and extending the pole to the desired length and depositing the desired bait. First I place a cupful of Sonubaits Supercrush Green Pellet groundbait, a real silverfish attractor that has never let me down, followed by a cupful of Sonubaits Super Scent Hemp and two of maggots.

NEARLY A 'TWO'!

On the first drop in, the pole float slides away. I simply lift the rod, it takes on a healthy curve and the float momentarily sits motionless

in the air before slipping away beneath the surface. Line is taken from the clutch and the head shaking tells me it's a good roach.

After a few agonising minutes a roach drops into the net – not the desired two-pounder, but only a few ounces short! The next put-in is a repeat performance and I'm rubbing my hands on what might be, but the third fish has a completely different fight and for the next 10 minutes I'm 'beaten up' by what can only be one of the immaculate commons the lake is known for. This signals an end to the sport and after a couple of small fish I decide it's time to reach for the waggler.

After casting out and sinking the line a bite comes almost immediately, and after a spirited fight a 2lb 2oz roach slips over

DUNCAN'S WAGGLER TIPS



01 Carry a good selection of wagglers of different lengths and tip colours.



02 Use a large shot as a waggler plummet.



03 Loaded floats take less locking shot than unloaded ones. They cast better too.

DUNCAN'S BAIT TIPS



01 Make sure you have a spare catapult or two!



02 Supermarket spices make great roach attractors. Just sprinkle some on your maggots.



03 Additives like turmeric form a great cloud when added to maggots cupped in a swim.

the landing net. Numerous casts from then on only produce a few small roach before I connect with another good fish. Experience soon dictates that this isn't a roach and after a somewhat erratic fight, a surprise chub sits in the net.

I persevere on the waggler for one more net roach but the constant spraying of maggots has only attracted small roach and unable to get my bait to the bottom, I revert to the long rod. Little happens at first so I introduce more hemp, groundbait and maggots, momentarily casting the waggler rod, which again produces just small fish.

CHANCE BLOWN?

I'm beginning to think I've blown my chances but after constantly switching between waggler and long rod while feeding both lines, the pole float sinks and I hook a good fish. It's not a roach but a carp and after a 40-minute fight an immaculate 'double' slips into the net. I'm not relishing a repeat performance but another carp is hooked, taking just as long to subdue. I'm half thinking of ignoring this line but the next put-in produces a net roach, followed by another, and then another.

My dad is struggling next door so after introducing more bait via the pole cup I take

FEED WITH ACCURACY TOP TIP



Duncan marks an old pole and uses this for pinpoint feeding accuracy with a pole cup.

time to fine-tune his rigs and soon he's catching as well – top-quality roach unheard of from a day ticket water. Returning to my swim I continue to catch quality roach, including another two two-pounders on the long rod.

AFTER DARK?

Numerous return visits all produced quality roach, however, I was intrigued to find out how it fished after dark.

Returning a few weeks later, during a period of high pressure, I cast the waggler continuously all day managing a dozen roach over the pound, the best at 1lb 15oz! When the light was too dim to see the float

tip I simply added a starlight and continued, but after an hour, one eel was all I had to show for

my efforts. Specialist rigs, designed for cagey roach on an Oxfordshire lake, were then cast out between the hours of 8pm and 11pm. A constant supply of quality roach dropped into the landing net. Considering the temperature had dropped to minus 4°C by 11pm, freezing everything around, it became a laughing matter just how easy these fish were to catch. Having taken around 24 quality roach by 11pm – most around 1lb 12oz to 1lb 15oz – it became apparent that to get a 'two' was going to be a numbers game and although one weighing 2lb 2oz did fall through this period, the hours spent watching a waggler soon caught up with me.

What could I do if I spent the whole night on such rigs? Well as soon I can get down to the lake again I will let you know... **total cover FISHING**

