

## **Carp Fishing**

Angling is one of the most popular pastimes around the globe, it can take many forms from simple Sunday afternoon coarse angling with no particular species or size of fish targeted, to blue water deep sea fishing where the angler is looking to hook and land a large marlin, tuna or shark.

Carp fishing is one of the highest growth areas of the sport; again this one facet of angling has several different types. Many carp fishermen will be specimen hunters, looking to catch the biggest fish they can, sometimes they will be looking to set records both locally, nationally and on an international level. Other carp fishermen will be "baggers" looking to fill their keep nets with as many fish as possible, often catching huge weights of small carp in one session, this kind of angler will usually be a competition or "match" fisherman. Falling between these two extremes we have the hobbyist angler who is happy to catch any size or type of carp, they will usually target carp as a specific species but will not be looking to catch either the biggest or the most fish, they are in it purely for the fun.

Traditionally carp would be sought in established lakes and rivers where it was known that the species thrived, some fisheries were noted to contain very large fish, and others were noted due to the prolific amount of carp to be found over other species. Today we have specialist carp fisheries designed with the carp fisherman in mind from the ground up.

### **How is Carp Fishing Different?**

Carp fishing differs so much from general coarse angling that it is now considered a sport in its own right. The sport falls under two main headings, both of which take coarse fishing to an extreme, firstly specimen hunting and secondly carp match fishing or bagging.

Carp tackle is very different from general purpose coarse tackle, it is stronger, heavier rated, and often sharing characteristics with sea tackle. Carp tackle is seldom suitable for catching any other species of fish. Hook sizes will be far larger than those used by other freshwater fishermen, lines will be of a heavier breaking strain and rods, reels and nets will be much heavier duty.

The methods used to catch carp; either by the specimen hunter or the match fisherman are vastly different to those used in other types of coarse fishing. Baits are often designed solely to be palatable to carp; this reduces the probability of the angler catching any other species of fish. The way the tackle is set up, what fishermen call the "rig" is completely orientated to catching large, powerful fish. Again this will usually ensure that only carp are caught although other species that grow to a large size such as tench and bream will also take the bait from time to time. Often you will hear a carp fisherman complaining of a large specimen of another species that took their bait that most general coarse fisherman would be delighted to catch. Carp fishermen can be somewhat fanatical it has been noted.

### **Specimen Hunting**

Specimen hunting is used to describe the group of anglers who specialise in catching superior quality fish of the largest size possible. These are the people that set the records, they will often but not always specialise in one species, some however will hunt large specimens of all species depending on the season.

Being the more fanatical of the two types of carp fisherman the specimen hunter will often prepare a swim (the part of the bank and area of water he fishes in) for weeks before actually taking a hook to the water. Whilst preparing a swim they will repeatedly introduce the bait they are intending to use so that carp are attracted to the area and comfortable with eating what he proposes to use as bait to catch them. They will take great care not to disturb the fish in any way, you will often witness a specimen hunter, clad in military camouflage clothing, stalking along the bank in complete silence as he searches for a likely spot to catch his prey.

When the time comes to actually start fishing the specimen hunter once again reveals his rather extreme attitudes towards the sport. He will often disappear for days or weeks at a time, setting up a camp by the water using a small structure named a bivvy; this is very much like a tent but with one side open so that he can be protected from the elements whilst still being able to access his rods. They will take everything they need, food, water and clothing and will not leave the spot for the entire time they are fishing.

### **Carp and Competition Fishing**

Carp match fishing is a fairly new style of angling, it has evolved out of the new custom built carp fisheries we have seen establish themselves over the last two decades.

A match fisherman has one simple goal, to catch the heaviest weight of fish possible in a given time, prize money is usually offered to the winner, sometimes very large amounts of prize money on a national and international level although at club level it will normally take the form of a small sweepstake.

Before the advent of carp match fishing, a finishing weight (or bag) would seldom exceed 20 or 30 pounds with some notable exceptions coming from well know bream fisheries. Nowadays it is not unheard of for a bag to be several hundred pounds in weight. A carp match will see the most successful participants enticing the fish in their swim into a feeding frenzy, the water will be boiling with fish and their bait will often be snapped up within seconds of it hitting the water. This is a very strenuous sport, people who think that fishing is a relaxing pastime should really see a carp match in full swing, to catch a couple of hundred pounds of fish in a few hours takes extreme concentration and a fair level of physical fitness.

### **The Evolution of Carp Fisheries**

Two decades ago carp fishing was solely the domain of the specimen hunter, many would fish their local waters, learning over a period of years the habits of the carp that lived in them, they would then try to catch the largest specimens possible, often catching the same fish year after year. There were a handful of well known carp waters; these were the lakes and rivers where the national record breaking fish were caught from. Many of these venues became syndicated and anglers would join a list, sometimes waiting years for a chance to fish them.

In the mid 1980's a trend emerged, entrepreneurs realised there was a great deal of money to be made by building custom made fishing venues, usually offering refreshment, bait and tackle on site, some also offered accommodation. The main problem with this type of business venture was care and maintenance of the fish stocks. Carp are a naturally hardy breed, fun to catch and easy to breed, the species were a logical choice as a stock fish for these new fisheries.

Today we have many day ticket (pay a fee to fish for one day) venues in operation, almost all of them supply fast and fun carp fishing, no large fish but a very many smaller fish (1lb to 5lb in weight). It was out of these fisheries that the carp match fishing side of the sport evolved.