

## The Day Ticket Lake

I was going to have a rant about some people's approach to fishing but instead I think that the point is probably made better by giving a first-hand example. I am not having a 'pop' at anyone because I think the following is due to lack of knowledge by the person concerned and what follows is an account of a recent visit to a day-ticket fishery.

A new day ticket fishery opened up near to my home at the beginning of May 2009. It consists of a general fishery stocked with the usual species of carp (mirror, common and crucian), tench, roach, rudd, bream, perch and there are a few eels. Originally this lake was 4 irrigation ponds which have been made into one larger body of water in which there grows some large lily pads. There is also a specimen lake – I am being generous as it is really a large pond. When does a pond become a lake, I wonder? I digress; the specimen lake holds some carp in excess of 20lbs but it is full of weed which makes fishing it difficult. I have fished the general fishery since it opened with some success. It seems to attract people of all ages but there is a predominance of younger anglers, most of whom are intent on targeting the carp. There is nothing wrong with that at all, the fish are there to be caught but, it is the way that they do it that leaves a lot to be desired.

On arrival at the fishery I was fortunate to find my chosen swim vacant which is where I set up and remained for the rest of the day. In the adjacent swim there was a bivvy with two rods set up in front of it and a youth of about 18 in residence. He had been there all night and not caught anything. My method of fishing this water is a 13ft match rod, a reel loaded with 6lb mono, a 5BB waggler and a size 12 hook tied to a 4lb hook-length. The bait (maggot, sweetcorn or worm) is presented just on the bottom after plumbing the depth. An occasional ball of groundbait is thrown in to maintain interest. The first half an hour brought a few small perch to the bank followed by a crucian carp of about 1.5lbs., all caught on small red worms. A change to maggot brought a few more perch and another crucian of similar size to its predecessor. My neighbour, who had remained fishless all this time, asked what bait I was using, which I readily told him and gave him some as I had plenty. As the morning wore on I had a couple more crucians while my newly-acquired friend still had caught nothing, which was probably due to the fact that the tackle was airborne for more time than it was in the water. Every half-hour, or so, he would say, "If my buzzer goes, pick up the rod, will you" before he disappeared for a walk to see his mates. I think one of the classics is when he was telling me about some recent fishing outing he announced, "the best thing about fishing here is that you don't need a licence". There was a long silence when I informed him that a licence was necessary to fish any water even if it is in your own garden and that a visiting EA bailiff would report anyone found not to be in possession of the aforementioned document which would most probably lead to a prosecution and eventual fine. There endeth the first lesson. The morning now turned to afternoon, the sun was still shining and the carp had started to cruise just beneath the surface and occasionally sucked at some delicacy attached to the underside of the lily leaves. Our young angler now decided to try a different approach to tempt one of the basking carp and changed from sunken bait to a floater. Leaving his swim (and the ledger rod that was still cast out and baited with some type of boilie whose name evades me), he made his way to where the carp could be seen, and cast to them. The bait must have been in the water for all of 20 seconds before it was retrieved at speed and recast to a similar position. This was repeated several times until the fish casually swam away – pursued by the angler. I think that

the fact that I had caught another 3 crucians made the capture of one of the elusive cruising carp a matter of honour. The stalking approach ended in complete failure with his rod being thrown to the ground on more than one occasion, probably in frustration of being outwitted by a fish. Next, the rig was changed again back to a standard float set up and the tackle was cast into the swim that the cruising carp had vacated. All this time the ledger rod was still cast out in its original swim, unattended. Once the float was cast out the rod was put onto the ground and the youth went 'walkabout' again. Now there were two rods left to their own devices. Fortunately for the fish the bait was obviously not to their liking and so they ignored it and both ledger and float remained untouched. About 15 minutes past and the angler returned to the float rod and wound it in. There were some carp that had started to show between the two islands that had caught his attention and so the setup was changed hastily back to a floater rig. With a swish the tackle was sailing out towards the waiting fish. I did ask how he would land the fish if he was fortunate to hook one, as they were all on the far side of the large lily pads. "It will be Ok", he said, "the line is strong enough to pull them though it". Obviously the desire to catch a fish, at any cost, outweighed the fact that by pulling the poor creature through the pads would, most probably, lead to the fish being damaged. After several more casts, some landing on the island and other times with the bait falling off the hook, this approach was also abandoned in favour of the float tackle again.

The afternoon was passing and young angler's father and siblings arrived to take him home. In a final act of irony, within literally 10 seconds before winding in the ledger rod, a carp seized the boilie and made off at speed causing the buzzer to scream loudly. After a few minutes tussle a fish of about 8.5 lbs was landed which was much admired and photographed with each and every member of the family before being returned to the pond.

There are several lessons to be learned from this tale. The main one is that angling is more than catching fish. Of course, catching fish is the main point of the exercise but we also have a responsibility for the welfare of our capture. For me, I take an equal amount of pleasure watching a fish swim away unharmed as I do in the capture, which is something that needs to be instilled in the young. There are too many who would deny us our sport in the name of animal cruelty and we all must take great care not to give them any ammunition to use against us. This is one of the downsides of day-ticket fisheries where anyone can turn up, pay the daily fee and fish virtually unchallenged.