

Wow! Second cat of the season on my first session – 41lb.



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CATS AND KITTENS

GERRY CHANDLER

2010 has been a funny old year for me as cat fishing goes. I started in early April and from the word go it appeared that it was going to be a real stonker of a season. On my first session using luncheon meat on a standard running leger I was off to a flyer. I arrived at the lake mid-afternoon. After setting up my bivvy and getting my three rods ready I took a stroll to the local chippy, loaded up with a hefty bag of cod and chips and sat back to survey the lake while I scoffed it in the old fashioned way using my fingers. The weather was looking a bit hit and miss and it wasn't long before the rain set in. The baits went out; one at about twenty yards, a longish chuck to about forty yards, and one in the margin at about one rod length. It was then a case of taking refuge in the bivvy and watching the heavens empty. The rain stopped at about 10.30pm and the night turned cold and because there was no moon, very dark. 11 o'clock and the middle rod was away. The squeal of the alarm dragged me kicking and screaming from a deep slumber and I staggered to the rod trying my best not to trip and end up in the lake. I lifted the rod and pulled into the run and was rewarded with the satisfying pull of my first cat of the season. A ten minute or so tug-o-war saw me slip the net under the cat; 29lb for my first fish, I was well chuffed.

All the rods were re-cast and I retired again to the bivvy. I dozed off, until a couple of hours later at around 1-30am I was woken again by the squeal of my alarm and the same rod was away again.

This was the rod that was baited with luncheon meat at about twenty yards. I pulled into the fish and this one felt even better than the last. After fifteen to twenty minutes of heart stopping action, a 41lb cat make an appearance on my mat. Wow! what a start to the season. I always take a pic of any fish over the thirty pound mark and as everyone was asleep I slipped it into a cat tunnel to wait for daylight. I had no more fish this session but I felt more than satisfied by the way my cat fish season had started.

The following week I managed to get a 48hr session arranged and arrived at the lake at mid-morning. There had been a chilly NE wind blowing for nearly a week and it showed no sign of shifting direction, consequently the water was below average temperature and the wind chill factor gave a distinct impression that winter had not yet passed. I cast three baits out, two large lumps of luncheon meat at twenty and thirty yards respectively and one in the margin. The margin rod was cast about one rod length out just at the bottom of a margin shelf in about 4ft of water. This was baited with squid popped up 4 inches by means of two large Nash air ball pop-up boilies pushed inside, (a method shown to me by my old mate Phil Aylett). At about 8 o'clock in the evening one of the luncheon meat rods was away and produced a 28lb 8oz fish. Later in the night I had another take, again on meat but after a few minutes the hook pulled. The afternoon had been bright and sunny with a clear sky. The NE wind had finally

dropped and the evening turned cold, I had to put my hooded top coat on. Despite this at around 11.30 another take came on meat and resulted in a 38lb fish. A couple of hours later in the early hours of the morning I had a one toner on the margin rod baited with the squid that had been on for over 40 hours. I played the fish for ten minutes or so but unfortunately it managed to pick up one of my other lines and in the confusion that followed the hook pulled. Strangely, nearly every take that I had on the squid margin rod was a belting one toner just like a carp run, so it would appear that the fish were grabbing the bait and on feeling the resistance making a dash for deeper water.

With my confidence riding high I decided to try my luck on a more difficult and lower stocked water. It proved to be a cold, miserable, bite less session which deflated my ego somewhat. So it was back to my local lake. By the end of April the weather had turned unusually mild and warm and I was doing some 48hr sessions when I was able. Being retired I was able to fish mid-week when the lake wasn't too busy which made things easier. Annoyingly I had started to get some runs on luncheon meat and smoked kipper that were being dropped after only 4 or 5 seconds so I guessed that the fish were starting to wise up and getting spooked. Through the night I

missed two runs during this particular session and the bait was dropped before I could get to the rods. At 7.45 however I had a good steady run on luncheon meat and hooked what felt like a good fish, after a dogged fight it came to the net and on weighing showed a creditable 45lb. In actual fact I recognised this fish having had it twice before in the past both times at 45lb-ish. The following morning at about 5 o'clock another one toner on the popped up squid produced a 33 pounder and at about 7.30am I also had a 29-8 on meat. I decided to give the low stock big fish water another go and, on the spur of the moment, turned up for an overnighter. At about 1.30 in the morning I had a good run on a lump of luncheon meat and pulled into a right old lump of a fish. After playing it for about ten minutes or so it managed to find a particularly nasty snag that has cost me a couple of fish in the past but, despite repeated requests to remove it the lake owner has refused to do anything about it and so I lost this fish.

It was at this time, mid-May, and flushed with success, just as I was beginning to appreciate what a great season I was having, that the omnipotent god of catfishing dealt me a dastardly blow when I was laid low with an ever worsening health problem and my session fishing had to come to an abrupt end.



Luncheon meat accounted for this cracking 45 pounder.

Another lovely
cat – the season
started well!



So it was that with my catfishing put on the back burner while waiting for a pending operation, my fishing was confined to spending a couple of hours in the morning with a float rod. Imagine my delight and surprise to discover that interspersed with the perch, roach and small carp that my worm and maggot baits were picking up were kittens in the twelve to eighteen inch bracket. The lake owner had said that he wanted all the small catfish that I caught removed or banded on the head as there were far too many in the lake, I wasn't prepared to kill them so I armed myself with a large plastic bucket to take them away. I started hunting around for new homes for the unwanted kittens and managed to find a couple of lakes that already held catfish that wanted them, the owners were only prepared to take a limited number however and I started to find myself in the position of a Barnardo's home for a growing number of baby catfish. This then, left me in a bit of a quandary. I had made a holding tank for them by sawing a very large water butt in half and fitting an aerator. Enquiries to a couple of local lake owners brought a negative response as they were either hostile to catfish or afraid to take them. After discussing the situation with an angling friend it was decided that there

was no other option left but to put them in the drain, and so it was that the contents of my water butt went into the drain. I stopped fishing for them after this and as it was late September I waited for the pike season to start.

Perhaps because I am a dedicated catfish angler, and therefore biased, that I noticed that even when catching kittens on float rod and tackle they put up a much more spirited scrap than any of the other species, even carp that were heavier than them. I knew almost instantly when I hooked a fish that it was a small catfish by the way that it fought. Another thing that has me intrigued, and this is especially noticeable in the kittens is the colour variations of catfish even from the same lake. The ones that I was catching ranged from almost black with silvery white marbling, through to deep bronze and even some that were yellow almost to the point of being goldfish/cats. This is an even stranger phenomenon when you consider that the lake has a dark, silty bottom and murky water all over.

Well, considering the great start to the season that I had, it came as a great disappointment to have it cut short so abruptly, who knows, it could have been my best season ever, now I will never know. Hopefully all being well maybe I will get another chance next year.



The worms and maggots were picking up kittens like these.

Post Script

By the way I forget to mention that the drain that the kittens went into is a fifty by thirty yard five feet deep stock pond on a two lake angling complex (one with catfish) that the owner uses to keep stock

fish prior to health checks. Could I suggest therefore that all those who wanted to lynch me put away their rope and sleep easy, you don't think I'd actually put them 'down the drain' do ya?

Yibby Yibbada Folks.