

FORGET YOUR BEST METHOD - FIND THEIRS!

Tony Wignall

A superbly proportioned cat
of 23lb caught in April

It was a late spring start. So much for catching cats early! I had a rubbish start (think we all did) Cold, unsettled weather with rubbish wind. It took a long time for our spring to come but when it did it was instant, from no cats out to one after another. The water temp was 9 degrees tested a foot down when the first one came out, (didn't check the water at any other depth) from then the sun was out each day and there was no stopping them. The first one of the year was on the 17th of April, well done Ash even though it was caught on a pop-up boilie aimed at carp he still has cat blood in him. Then there were two the next night then two the next. Then at least one out each night for a week or so after. The carp only members had their short time of good carping-cat free then the 'carp onlys' were gone, off to one of the other lakes. The carp anglers that don't mind cats stayed on for the hope of a good scrap. This year there was a special bunch, a new set of cat anglers. All the encouraging I had done and questions answered (not always right) finally paid off. We've got more cat fishing interest than ever, and I always

push them the CCG way. The lake has upped the average now at 33ish with very few lower than 27lb and the odd surprise large one coming out after giving us the slip for a couple of years, it's nice to still get a surprise monster come through the ranks of big cats and it's good to know that they don't get caught every year.

Cat shutdown?

Looking back In 2012 the cats shut down from the 8th may to the 28th may with no reports of any hooked or lost. That's 20 days. While walking round the snaggy back of the lake I noticed a big cat probably about 30lb, (That's still big to me) sitting a couple of foot from the bank under overhanging willow branches in about a foot of water. It didn't seem to be doing anything? The water wasn't very clear and there was quiet a glare on top so I couldn't see much until I put my polarised glasses on, then it all made sense, right next to the cat was what could only be described as a melon sized ball of pale yellow eggs. I tried to take a pic but it didn't show anything but a dirty surface on the water. Me being a div, I even tried holding the polarised



glasses over the lens which also failed (wouldn't focus). This was the first year I noticed it happen, and the first piece of evidence of what they were up to. Not a single cat came out between these dates and yes there were loads of people trying; all scratching their heads (including me). Before these dates and after they were regularly caught. It was an instant stop and I didn't realise till a few days in. There were no reports of any cats at all then I thought to myself here we go again. I guess that the water got up to a certain temperature then all they wanted to do is hump and dump their eggs all at the same time. I don't know a single lake that can stop and start with a flick of a switch like this one! (I'm sure there is somewhere) it is only a small lake so I suppose it's like living in a small community with close neighbours with everyone knowing everyone else's business. As predicted, just like last year but a little later, everything came to a halt, in 2013 on 15th may till the 12th June (surprised it was this early considering how long our cold weather lasted) That's a whopping 29 nights. There were cat anglers fishing almost every night and day the whole time blanking, all doing the best they could and trying all sorts of bait and rigs without even a run. Nothing worked. Then, as if they've just got back off holiday two cats were caught, a 27lber and a 33lb, both with bite marks, grazes and a little on the lean side. Two other cats were lost all in the same night. Then one was landed the next night then again, the next. They were ravenous. We couldn't do anything wrong and this went on for a couple of weeks of superb catting, just another reminder that timing is a very important part in cat fishing. Time it right and you'll get a bumper session.

Eel pest problem solved (completely) I found that some nights even a long hook link weak linked to a bush (which had worked previously) didn't do the job. I knew within half hour or so into dark what sort of night it was going to be, whether they were going to ruin me or not. No longer will I sit and do nothing but hope they had left a piece of live (dead) bait on my hook, only to wake up in the morning with my empty hook hanging in the water. I had a new plan. Like it or not, the halibut pellets came out, there's no doubt that they're a great cat bait. Not my preferred method but there's no knocking them, they're a brilliant backup and a lot of cat fisherman's 1st choice. For me nuggets are best used as they are, no extra oils, bits or additives they are perfect just



Another early season cracker for Tony



First cat of the year for Ash Thomas

how they come and I've found they out-fish any other strong stinky nugget mix and It's still cat fishing just a different method. It's a bit of a worry moving away from a favourite method in the middle of the night but it's not about me and my favourite method it's about what method gives you the very best chance of a cat. Nuggets fished in between 3-5ft on this lake works well which means anywhere round the edge because its 12ft deep. This will give you the best chance of a pick-up because without doubt the top five foot all over (this lake) is the best position for any bottom bait. If a cat's moving then there's a good chance it's feeding so if they're in the top five foot wherever they go they will at some point come to the edge of the lake which is where my bait will be. So many times this year it's proved to be a clever move.

Semi fixed short Vs free running long

Over the last couple of years I've seen too many carp anglers catch too many cats to ignore the fact that 8-10 inch semi fixed rigs work. I won't say much about rigs because everyone has their own 'confident' rig. The rig that I use is simple slip-knotted nugget on a knotless knot with a size 5 fox arms point hook, on a 8

inch hook link which made with a proper cat link material is plenty strong enough for the biggest cats in our lake which is up to 60lb. I know a lot of (very good) cat anglers who opt for a long hook link on a free running method but you still have to get that hook in yourself. I've also seen cats lost on runs before the angler even moves out of his bivvy or runs 20 yds to get to their rod. It might be they were too slow to get to the rod or It just wasn't to be. There's so much sucking and blowing from a feeding cats big mouth throwing baits around inside there is a chance the hook might be dislodged and come out which brings us to my most important rule in cat fishing, the quicker you get a connection between you and the cat the better. It might look a bit strange fishing with my rod butts poking in my bivvy door but for me that's the most important thing, to get that quick connection. I think the idea of long running hook links are for the hope that the cat takes your bait further down therefore giving you a better chance of hooking and having no resistance will help the cat carry on feeding and not realise there is a problem. No resistance can take over your catting and I don't think it's always the right thing to do on

all methods. I don't want to hook the cat deep down, all I want to do is get the hook inside of the lip. Given the shape of a cat's mouth (the design looks awkward for picking a bait off the bottom) and the amount of cats caught on short carp rigs it seems that they never struggle to get a boilie or nugget in their mouths. On a semi fixed rig, half the work is done for you. When you get a run, the hook (barbless only here) has pricked the cat, the weight of the lead has pulled it in. All I've got to do is lift in to it and hold on but most importantly be quick.

We can all copy others (which I do) and learn by our mistakes, there's nothing wrong with that, but we mustn't get caught up in using methods just because we like them. We have to think what the best method and bait for that exact time is. Watercraft in cat fishing is as important as it is in carp fishing. Just by listening to a lake (or watching) at night can give away big clues that will help you catch, there's nothing like the unmistakable sound of a cat slap or coots going crazy when one of their babies gets sucked down. One thing I've learnt from the very few years catting is to fish at night not sleep at night, you'll be surprised what you will learn.

This 45lb beast fell to a semi-fixed rig and short hooklength

