

At exactly 42lb this lovely catfish was only Craig's second catfish capture ever!



A TURN IN FORTUNES

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My first contact with catfish came with a trip to Spain for my fortieth birthday in October 2007. Having been an angler since the age of eight, I was ready for a total change of fishing direction from match and pleasure to a spot of big fish hunting. I only caught two catfish during the week one a 109lb fish which was a nice indoctrination to the power of catfish then I had a 166lb cat which was phenomenal and I was then hooked on the turbo charged tadpoles.

When I returned from Spain I started to make plans to catch my first English catfish. During the winter I bought all the various tackle I thought I needed and proceeded to trawl the internet for information, tactics and venues, the CCG website being particularly good. Full of confidence I found a Lincolnshire day ticket water and booked in for some night sessions. After going to Spain I thought this catfishing lark would be easy and an English catfish would soon grace my net; how wrong I was! I blanked all season after doing about twelve sessions. I saw some nice cats up to 48lb caught but never caught myself, back to the drawing board ho hum!!

In February 2009 I joined the CCG and started to plan my next assault on the catfish of Lincolnshire. I booked two sessions at the beginning of April on my day ticket water. I was full of confidence from my internet browsing I had refined my rigs, upgraded some of my tackle, and was trying some new baits – result two blanks doh! My head was starting to drop, time for a change of venue. Back on the internet forums and websites and I decided to try Willow Bank at Kirton-in-Lyndsey. I had thought of Willow Bank before but the cost was putting me off (five young kids and a busy work/home life). I did a day session on Lake Three

near the end of April. What a cracking venue it is, not crowded, very scenic and tranquil – I didn't care if I didn't catch it was nice just being there. I got there for five in the morning and made the long walk to Lake Three and got set up at the top left of the island where there is plenty of water to cover. From the article in the *Whiskers* magazine I had gleaned some useful information and put one rod out with a dead roach down the margins, one rod against the island with a mackerel chunk on and one rod to the point of the island with a nice sliver of liver on. The two dead bait rods had no loose feed around them but the liver rod had half a bag of 8mm halibut pellets catapulted over it – I sat back and awaited the usual lack of activity. At about six thirty, I had a couple of bleeps on the liver rod and I nearly wet myself. A minute or two later I had a one toner, I thought this is it and struck hard, there was a boil at the point of the island and a quick short run and two minutes later a double figure common was sliding over the net; a bit of an anticlimax. I didn't think carp could get a big piece of liver down but this one did! It looked like the halibut pellets had attracted the carp in. Over the course of the next two hours I kept getting very short runs on the liver rod from the carp, and then everything went dead.

I was just reaching into my bag at twelve o'clock for a sandwich when the liver rod went off on a one toner again. At last a catfish, I didn't care how big it was I just new by how it was in control and not me, that it was a catfish. It took me all over; down the margins, back to the island, back down the right hand margins, kicking up plumes of silt and trying to go backwards as much as forwards; I was like quivering jelly! Some how after about fifteen minutes and lots

of "Please don't come off" prayers I managed to bundle it into the net, it looked a good fish. I screamed out a very loud "Yes"! When I had managed to pull myself together, I put her on the scales; she went 34lb 8oz. I was so delighted I couldn't smile any wider if I tried. Unfortunately no one else was on the lake so I had to take pictures of her on the mat. I got her back in the lake holding her until she was ready, and then watched her swim away powerfully. It was an awesome sight.

That was it; I was determined to now catch one from my small Lincolnshire day ticket water so another one nighter was arranged a week later. When I got to the lake mid-afternoon, one of the local village lads was there, a cracking lad called Luke, who fishes it as often as he can afford and to very good effect. We had become friends and he joined me while I set up the bivvy. He had fished all through the day and had some small cats up to 15lb on popped up lobworms, but he was being picked up to go home soon. I had not got any lobs with me so he gave me what was left of his and one of his popped up worm rigs, this was just an 1/0 eagle wave to 45lb braid hook link with a chunk of high density foam secured to the hair. This was fished on a running lead set-up and was to be fished about a foot off bottom very tight into the shallow margin in a tight corner.

I try to take one of my children with me when I go over night, it's an adventure for them and they are not bad at catching live baits either. This time it was my five year old son Elliott. We settled down for the night about ten o'clock and we kept getting some indications on the alarms throughout until about two o'clock. There are lots of carp that will try to sample anything that's put in front of them. Unusually the popped up lobs had been silent so I checked them before turning in

and settled down for the night. About five in the morning I was awoken by a couple of bleeps on the rod with the lobs on then nothing for a couple of minutes, it was starting to get light and that's when the carp start ravaging your baits again so I thought they were the culprits, then all of a sudden off it went .

I struck into a heavy cat that was already half way up the margins going to the other side of the lake and towards a big trailing bramble bush, I managed to turn her just in time; good old braid. I got her coming towards me; she then veered off towards the small island to my left nearly dragging the rod out of my hands. I managed to turn her again and get her coming towards me where she then spent the best part of ten minutes ploughing up and down the margins in front of me, it looked like someone had tipped a skip of mud in, it was that cloudy. Eventually in the net she went! All this time I was shouting at my son Elliott to wake up but to no avail, typical of kids, so I staked the net to the bank with a couple of bank sticks while I woke my son up and got the weigh equipment and camera ready. On the scales she went, 42lb exactly and new personal best, my son was amazed. A lean but nicely marked catfish with big thick whiskers. I couldn't believe it, two cats in two trips what a turn around. I had to dedicate the cat to Luke so thanks Luke for the lobs and for the rig and a rub of your luck.

I went on to catch five more cats from the day ticket water during the season, these were 21.8, 23, 28, 31 and 32.8 on a variety of baits, including the new love of my life leeches, though my wife is horrified by them. I also missed some good runs so more browsing, more tinkering of rigs and more picking of brains over the winter period. 2009 has certainly seen a turn in fortunes and more confidence for me, roll on April 2010!



My first ever catfish – 34lb.