

WINTER TACTICS

Even when the conditions are against you there are plenty of carp to be caught. Now's the time to use the quieter banks and shorter daylight hours to your advantage.

Even conditions like this won't put a stop to cold-water action, providing you've done your homework.



ANGLER FILE

LEWIS READ

Age: 38
Nickname: Harry Potter and Mavis
UK PB: 47lb 12oz
Sponsors: Gardner Tackle and Carp Company

Catching carp consistently through the colder months requires a different approach and mind-set from the rest of the year. The carp are harder to find, rarely willing to feed with any gusto, and if you're not suitably prepared the bankside can be a pretty uncomfortable place to spend your time.

It sounds grim but all is far from being lost. In fact, the changes in weather, and subsequent changes in the carp's behaviour, will work in your favour providing you know how to take advantage of the situation. I love the winter season, and really

Total Tip

When casting at showing fish, wrap a PVA nugget around your hook to protect it. Then, providing you feel the lead land with a 'donk,' you can be confident that your rig is fishing effectively.



Simply casting a hook bait in the vicinity of an active carp can be enough to bring success.

WINTER ESSENTIALS



ITEM 1 If fishing nights, take a five-season sleeping bag and a bedchair cover.



ITEM 2 A headtorch with spare batteries. Take a spare torch too just in case.



ITEM 3 You must wear/take some warm, waterproof clothing.

enjoy the advantages of fewer anglers on the bank and the distinct lack of bloodsucking insects.

The major factor that dictates a need for a dedicated winter approach is the dramatic reduction in the carp's feeding patterns. They'll feed for much shorter, often very defined, periods and in localised areas. Bite times differ from one venue to the next, but generally they're somewhere between dawn and dusk, rather than

in the middle of the night. This means that you can actually enjoy a social life in winter – catching up with your non-fishing friends, or even spending time with the family, while still being on the bank at the most productive times.

The key is to identify these feeding periods and tailor your approach to take advantage of them. You might only need to spend three or four hours at the venue to make the most of that day. This is all well and good on a water that you fish regularly and keep in touch with, because finding out where and when the carp are being caught will be relatively easy; you can ask the other venue regulars and go on past experiences.

On unfamiliar waters, though, the best way to determine the bite times is with a little trial and error.

If you can spare the time, spend a few longer sessions at your chosen water and, going on your own successes and that of those



Total Tip

Weed is a magnet to the carp throughout winter, especially if it can only be found in one area of the lake. If you locate a substantial weed bed then try positioning your rigs alongside it.



around you, a pattern will quickly form. From late November, if the weeks leading up to it have been cold, throughout the winter, these bite times will remain fairly consistent. Therefore your sessions can be tailored around having your traps in position for these specific periods, right through until the days start to draw out again in March.

Be on the look out for subtle signs of activity. You may not get a bite but small indications at a particular time of the day may signify periods of maximum activity.

Light intensity is the biggest factor in altering the carp's behaviour, when coming out of winter, as opposed to just the slowly increasing water temperature. From my observations, I don't believe that the limited hours of winter sunlight have enough intensity to alter the water temperature in a 24-hour period on venues with a reasonable depth.



Tie your rigs with care. Bites are at a premium at this time of year, so everything needs to be spot-on.



Once you've identified the bite times on your water, you only need spend a few hours fishing to make the most of a session.

The only exception to this is when there's a strong, warm wind blowing that turns the water over and does actually increase the temperature, albeit only slightly. This actually goes against the theory that still, sunny, winter days warm the water. The only major change over the course of a day is the light levels and this is what dictates when and to what extent the carp will feed. Again, each venue is different, but the one factor that's universal in this respect is that when the days draw out in March the carp will feed to a much greater extent than in similar conditions and temperatures in the months previous.

Along with the time of day in which the carp feed, you will need to identify the locations that they are willing feed. These can be extremely localised, which initially makes finding them a little tricky. Once you do, the same areas will generally keep producing.



Gather as much information on your chosen venue as you can. Visiting it in the warmer months and talking to the venue regulars will help.

Along with actually catching carp, or seeing others do so, keep your eyes peeled for any activity such as bubbles, or carp showing themselves. Carp shoal up tight and don't often move far in winter, so if you see any activity it's well worth fishing in that area.

Once you've found an area where the carp will feed you can start to work out where else on the lake might produce. Are the carp feeding on clear areas, do they prefer feeding in the silt and so on. We all chuck a marker float out and try to find a clear area to present

our rigs on, but how much food is in that clear area? Probably negligible amounts compared to the silt or weedy areas, and the carp won't be far from a natural food larder.

Providing you feel your lead down when casting to choddy or weedy areas and it lands with a 'donk', you can be confident that your rig is reasonably presented, especially if you protect the hook with a nugget of PVA foam or small Micromesh PVA stick of crumbed boilie. This has the benefits of keeping the hair in place and adding a little additional attraction.

Try to ignore the fact that there's a little debris or weed on the rig when you reel in. While it's out there, it's good enough to get you a bite and if that's where the fish are, then that's where you need to be fishing. If you can find a weed bed, especially if the rest of the lake is relatively clear, then that is a magnet to the carp and an area for you to concentrate on. Snags with a sensible depth of water underneath them are another excellent winter area, especially if they get some sun.

If you see a fish show within casting range then get a bait on it because you can often get a bite by simply positioning a hook bait in the vicinity of an active carp.

Similarly, if you're struggling for a bite and you see a fish in a different part of the lake, pack up and move. Okay, this takes a little more effort than staying put and hoping for the best, but nine times out of 10 the end result is worth it. It only takes a few extra

fish as a result of a move and you will be more than happy to make the effort again in the future. Sorting out your tackle and only taking what you really need will allow you to pack up and move quickly and easily, as will being organised.

Making the whole moving process easier will also make you more inclined to move when the situation dictates and open up many more opportunities.

Furthermore, as soon as you get into the habit of moving you'll wonder why you didn't do it before. All of a sudden you concentrate on making the most of every session and put yourself in prime position to take advantage of every chance rather than confining yourself to one swim and staring at motionless rods.

Providing the weather's not too bad you don't need to set up camp until it starts to get dark, so leave most of your kit on your barrow until you're certain that that swim is where you're staying for the night.

It's much easier to move if most of your kit is already packed up and loaded onto your barrow.

Be warned, though, it's very easy to 'blow' an area when casting at showing fish by casting too many times. Ideally, you want to cast each rod once, because the less disturbance you cause, the better your chances of catching. Try to remember, even if you're not 100 per cent happy with your cast but you felt the lead down okay and it was in the vicinity of where the carp are showing, leave it. It's as simple as this, you're much more likely to get a bite on that than a rig that's been cast five times to get it exactly on the right spot and scared all the fish out of the swim.

For the majority of the time we're scratching for a bite throughout winter, purely because the carp are far less active, eat less and there are far fewer chances to capitalise on. For this reason, the effort that you put in to tipping the scales in your favour can, and often is, the difference between the anglers who blank and those who enjoy winter success.



I use slack, or semi-slack, lines all year round because these are more sensitive than tight lines.



Throughout the day, leave most of your kit on your barrow so that you can move swims quickly and easily.