



DON'T BE SCARED

Above: Success is often hard won on big pits, but take the challenge and the rewards are there for the winners.

"Once spring arrives and the temperatures begin to climb my thoughts usually turn to **BIG GRAVEL PIT TENCH.**"

ALAN STAGG reveals how he gets to grips with big pit tench. The waters can be daunting but that's no reason to stay clear. Here's how to fish them.

Once spring arrives and the temperatures begin to climb my thoughts usually turn to big gravel pit tench. By big I mean in excess of 10 acres which is quite large and can be daunting to anglers who are not used to them. These gravel pits are dotted throughout the country, usually close to motorways, as the gravel extracted from them was used for their construction. Most have now matured into the lakes they are today, with abundant weed growth and a decent head of fish. Many of these pits have produced the perfect habitat for coarse fish species, which have grown to specimen sizes in these rich environments. Luxurious weed growth and depth variations harbour a wide range of aquatic invertebrates that the tench feast on throughout the spring in readiness for spawning, a time when these fish are at their biggest.

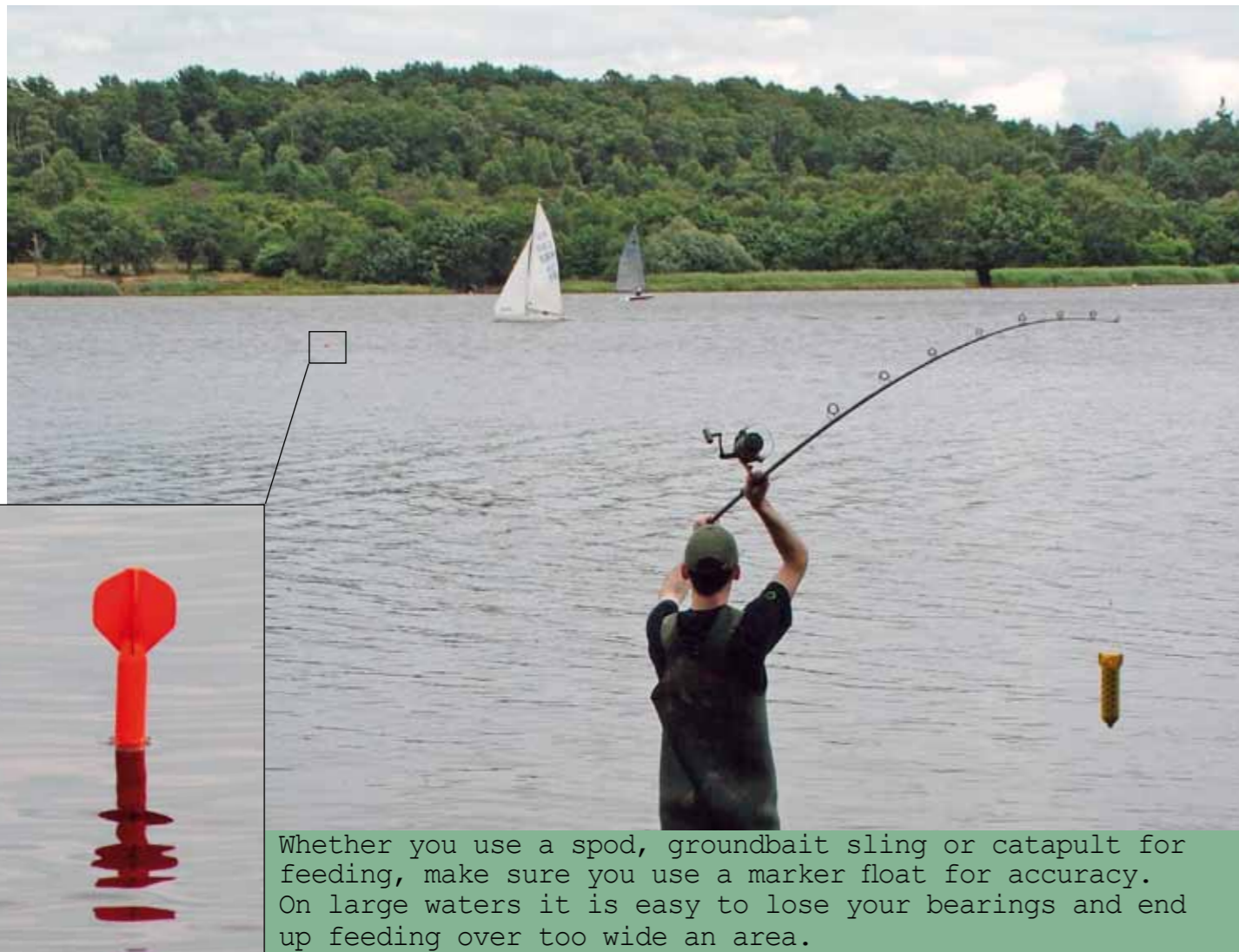
My tench campaign usually starts in April. The weather in early spring can be unpredictable at the best of times and April is often a wet month and the temperatures can be variable - sometimes cool, but sometimes warm (as this year). Big pits can look bleak and daunting at the best of times and it can be very hard to get into the mindset of targeting the species when faced with these conditions. However, time spent at the waterside with a plumbing rod learning the topography of the lake is never time wasted and can stand you in good stead when the weather improves and tench begin to feed in earnest.

A venue I am targeting at the moment is around 20 acres in size and holds around 40 to 50 tench which, to be honest, is a rubbish water to stock ratio. Needless to say it has the reputation of being tricky and time spent on the bank learning about the venue is what is needed to succeed. However, not all big

gravel pits require substantial amounts of time for the angler to succeed. Many venues contain a good population of shoal fish, which graze the bottom, sheep-like in their search for food. At venues like these, when the right methods and tactics are adopted, it can mean multiple catches are on the cards.

When it comes to targeting big gravel pit tench my chosen tactics and methods vary through the months of May, June, July and August according to how the fish are reacting and feeding and the time I plan to spend on the bank each session.





Whether you use a spod, groundbait sling or catapult for feeding, make sure you use a marker float for accuracy. On large waters it is easy to lose your bearings and end up feeding over too wide an area.

Long Sessions

Through May and June the temperatures will have risen somewhat and the tench will be active and on the search for food. During these months I like to adopt a long-stay approach, if time permits, and cash in on the time I have spent learning about the venue in the colder months. Longer sessions allow you to build up your swim, regularly casting and feeding in a bid to attract fish into the area. It is also a time when tench are particularly bold and less aware of terminal tackle and they can fall to cruder approaches compared to later on in the season, when a more delicate presentation is sometimes what is needed to score. On large venues I favour a long-stay approach using multiple rods, for me this is the most successful way of targeting the species. Features often lie at distance, beyond the range of a float and prolific weed growth can mean heavy tackle has to be adopted to safely extract fish when hooked. Abrasion resistant line is not only important in dealing with extracting fish from heavy weed but also for casting heavy feeders and PVA bags

Above: Although Alan now uses a groundbait sling for feeding groundbait you can use a spod to achieve the same result.

Below: Alan's tench food!

long distances. My chosen reel line consists of 10lb GR60, which offers good security when hooking any rogue big carp that reside in these venues, which will often fall to baits intended for tench. At the beginning of each session I like to form a carpet of attractive particles in the swim and there is no better way than using groundbait to do this. I favour Sonubaits Hemp & Hali Crush which is

full of crushed hemp and halibut pellets. To this very oily mix I add liberal amounts of hemp, various sizes of halibut pellets and dead maggots. I always make sure I freeze any leftover maggots from sessions throughout the winter for such occasions, it's surprising how quickly they amass. Once mixed, I favour a groundbait sling to deposit a carpet of feed out into the swim, a far superior way of baiting up especially at range in comparison to using a catapult. I witnessed Duncan Charman using this method recently in which he proved its benefit as a baiting tool. It is quicker, with practise more accurate, and saves on bruised and bleeding knuckles, which can occur when using a groundbait catty over long periods. Of course you can use a spod or a large cage type feeder if you don't mind all the casting and winding!



Size 12 Mugga hook with Mag-Aligner

Top Bait And Rigs

Maggots are my number one choice for hook-bait. They are a fantastic bait which fish can easily become preoccupied with and an item I rarely leave home without when targeting tench. The magnificent Mag-Aligner often forms the basis of my attack when using maggots as a hook-bait, a tactic which I have written about before in CF. The rig incorporates an Enterprise grub, slipped over the eye of the hook, which creates a line aligner effect, enabling the hook to flip or turn in the fish's mouth, creating a very effective hooking mechanism. I always fish this rig helicopter style, with a large 'O' ring fixed to the bottom of the lead. This is used to hold a PVA bag of maggots. Three white maggots are placed onto the hook, which is then nicked into the bag before casting, and this creates a lovely pile of maggots on the bottom of the lake and an area for tench to home-in on.

The hook-link I use is Sly Skin in 10lb, unless the fish are showing an obvious dislike to coated hook-link materials, which is where fluorocarbon can be advantageous. I always use a size 12 Mugga hook, which are perfect hooks when Mag-Aligner fishing, as the curve of the hook works really well with this style of hooking arrangement. The set-up is devastating and, in my opinion, one of the most successful rigs around in modern day angling. I think one of the major factors that makes this rig such a success is once the rig hits the bottom, and if a big enough PVA bag is used, it melts and the maggots cover the rig, hiding the hook and hook-link. The weight of the hook is counterbalanced by the buoyant grub and once the fish start sucking up the maggots the hook easily enters the fish's mouth. As the rig is seldom used in specimen angling circles the fish doesn't know how to deal with the problem it faces, turns and bolts and the job is done. Larger baits can also work well at this time of year when tench are feeling bold. Small boilies, stacks of sweetcorn, lobworms and bread are all good options.

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Above: This large tench fell to a maggot hook-bait fished with a PVA bag full of maggots.

Get On The Method Feeder

The Method feeder is another favourite when tench are feeling bold and is a tactic which I often adopt when fishing short sessions during May and June. A brightly coloured bait popped a couple of inches above the feeder can be effective especially when combined with a short hook-length of around 4 to 6 inches. This is a tactic which can be particularly successful when casting towards signs of fish activity such as fizzing and rolling. When you are not sure what type of bottom you are fishing over, push the hook-bait into the ball ensuring that the rig is not masked by any bottom debris. Various groundbait mixes are produced for fishing the method, which all produce good mixes. It's hard to beat the effectiveness of scaled pellets as a mix. Covering your pellets with hot water and allowing them to stand for 10 minutes will cause them to break down creating an attractive mix which you can easily bind around a feeder.

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PVA bag tied to large 'O' ring at the bottom of the lead.

Alan's Maggot PVA Rig

Specialist Coarse Fishing Rods

The market place has been flooded with 'off the shelf' rods many of which are lacking in one respect or another and the real specialist demands the need for performance without compromise. Hence the demand for our custom-built rods.

The Peregrine GTi 11ft & 12ft 2 piece 1lb 12oz tc
This rod is certainly one of the best all-rounders money can buy. Sensitive, yet at the same time powerful enough to subdue any barbel. Optional tip section available incorporating spliced quiver tip. Price £185, Twin tip rod £230

The Peregrine GTX 12ft 2 piece 1lb 8oz tc
Made from woven graphite the rod is as stunning in looks as it is to use. For those who prefer a 12 foot rod, the GTX fills a gap in the market with style. Power, sensitivity and lightness all add up to this new concept in design for the specialist barbel angler. Price £185

The Peregrine Stalker 10'2 piece 1lb. 12oz. tc
All the power and action needed for tight swims but still with a sensitivity that belies its power. Designed to subdue any barbel that swims. Price £175

The Peregrine SU Avon 12ft 2 piece 1lb 10 oz tc
The SU has a powerful, smooth progressive action that makes playing big barbel a breeze. This rod is at home on virtually any river, big or small and will handle leads from a single swan shot up to over 3 ozs. Price £180

The (famous) Peregrine Flood Rod 11ft 9ins
No test curve on this one! This is a real floodwater specialist's dream come true. A soft (?) top to allow the build up of debris without the lead being prematurely displaced, but this is no quiver tip rod! This rod will cast up to 8 ounces! Yet again, by choosing the right materials the rod is powerful yet still has the right feel for playing barbel. Price £190

The Peregrine Avon 11ft 2 piece 1lb 6oz tc
A lovely sweet actioned Avon action style rod. The rod is ideally suited to meat trundling as well as more conventional tactics. Light in the hand and very versatile. A firm favourite as a chub/barbel summer rod. Price £180

The Peregrine 4 piece Avon 11ft 1lb 8oz tc
Slightly more powerful than it's two piece counterpart but still retaining that lovely sweet Avon action. Versatile, smooth power, four section portability and not a flat spot in sight! Price £185

Standard specification. Full Cork handle with Fuji DPS reel seat. Seymo 2475 rings tied in black tastefully trimmed with gold. Hook keeper and black Wye button fitted as standard.

New! Chris Ponsford's 'Teme Tigers' DVD, only £12.99, call now to get your copy!

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HOW TO MAKE

A Pellet Method Feeder For Tench



1 Cover your pellets with boiling water. Allow to stand until they turn into a soft mush.



3 The mix should look like this when it's ready for use. A bit like groundbait with pellets in it.



5 Then rub your thumb back through the squeezed ball to break it down.



2 Add more pellets and leave for 30 mins, then repeat until there's not enough moisture left to break the last pellets down.



4 To check the consistency give a handful a squeeze. It should stick together easily.



6 If it's right it should easily break back down to nearly the consistency of pic.3. If it doesn't it's too wet - add more pellets.

Time To Scale Down

As the season progresses through the months of May and June the fish tend to wise-up a little and become more aware of their pursuit by anglers. They can be fairly tricky to tempt at times through the months of July and August. This could be down to the pressure they have faced over the previous months and there is little doubt that once they have been caught they can become more aware of the terminal tackle. It can be fairly common at this time of the year to have a swim full of feeding tench yet very little in the way of action is forthcoming. Now this could be caused by various factors such as angler pressure, weather conditions, terminal tackle etc.

This can be a time when well-presented helicopter rigs, combined with short hook-links, can do the damage. Light mono or fluorocarbon hook-links and small size 14 and 16 hooks, combined with smaller particle bait offerings, such as maggots and casters, are sometimes needed to get those bobbins moving. Balancing hooks with imitation baits or small pieces of foam can be an added advantage if the fishing becomes difficult and

bites are hard to come by. Popping hook-baits up off the bottom can work effectively and are often one of the first offerings a tench will eat when entering a baited patch. Summer is a time when experimenting with rigs is sometimes needed to get the best from a swim.

Whether you have days to spend on the bank or just a few hours in the evening, the tench has something to offer everyone.

Something For Everyone

Summer tench fishing has a lot to offer the angler, the glorious dawns, a swim full of tench bubbling away and a fish which can be caught on a variety of methods and tactics throughout the summer always makes this species an interesting pursuit. Whether you have days to spend on the bank or just a few hours in the evening, the tench has something to offer everyone and the memories of slipping a big tench back into the water and watching it swim away is a memory hard to beat. **CF**

