



It's Time For Big Perch!





CF contributor Alan Stagg knows that big perch are waiting to be caught right now, at a commercial fishery near you. And here are his top tips for super spring action with the 'Striped Sergeant Major'.

April is, in my opinion, the time to be angling for big perch. With the rivers close season well under way, and still over ten weeks until the glorious 16th of June, this can be the ideal time to get over the winter blues and dust off the tackle that has lain dormant over the winter months.

Do yourself a favour and get out on the banks and target big perch. There is no better sight in angling than seeing your net bulging as a large spring perch sits in the bottom of the mesh.

Perch can be incredibly active once the water temperature begins to rise and can often be found in a very dominant mood. Once a likely venue has been located, multiple catches of big fish can be common at this time of year and, who knows, you may even bag yourself a new personal best.

Commercials Ahoy!

With the rivers well and truly closed, head for your local commercial fisheries. These are ideal places to target big perch, which thrive on neglect and grow big in these food-rich environments.

So what commercial venues should you target, you may be asking yourself?

Well, my answer would be any, no matter what its size. Even if it does not have a track record for producing perch, a monster could well be waiting to be caught.

Time spent getting to know a new venue can lead to an action-packed session and your photo album bulging.

However, if you experience a couple of blank sessions, move on or if you are fishing a complex of lakes, move to the one next door.

Bites can often be immediate, once the fish have been located.

Work That Seam For Info

Your local tackle shop is a gold mine of information, particularly if matchmen visit regularly. Many will know where perch have been caught on matches and these venues are well worth exploring.

A quick chat can lead to valuable information, in pursuit of that April monster.

These fish are normally caught on worms or maggots and a more dedicated approach can be very successful. Be careful though, and make sure to express what you feel is a big perch to them, as what they feel is big may not meet your expectations.

I've been led up the garden path on a couple of occasions and have spent many wasted sessions plugging away only to find that the perch were not as big as I was led to believe.

Bites can be instant and can occur as soon as the bait hits the water, so keep alert at all times.

The sound of a small fish slapping against the water is particularly attractive to perch and you should always be ready, as the action can start before the float has had a chance to settle.

Perch are not the only species that you can expect to catch when using

livebaits on commercial venues. On two occasions I have caught carp while using them,



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Going Live

So what are the ideal tactics to employ on commercial venues? The use of livebaits is my first approach, if allowed, when visiting a venue for the first time.

Perch are very active at this time of year, prior to spawning, and will be on the lookout for an easy meal.

The use of livebaits takes advantage of a perch's predatory instinct and, if it is a tactic that is seldom used on your water, the action can be explosive.

Small roach, two to four inches in size and bigger, make the perfect bait. A healthy supply of bait can make a big difference. I usually carry a short pole for just this occasion, which makes catching livebait quick and efficient.

A simple, free-running float paternoster rig is the perfect presentation. This suspends the livebait off the bottom forcing it to swim and making it an attractive form of prey.

A light main line of 5-6lb is ideal when used in conjunction with an Avon type rod. My chosen main line is my ever faithful 6lb GR60. Sufix Invisiline in 4-6lb breaking strain makes the perfect hook-link. However, if your venue is particularly snaggy, then up your tackle to deal with this.

A hook size of 6 or 8 is recommended, depending on the size of bait being used.

the biggest so far a Common carp of 17lb that gave a hell of a scrap and made me believe, for a short time, that I was connected to a monster perch!

Traditional Tactics

If livebaits are not allowed on your venue, do not despair, they are not the be all and end all of perch fishing.

On several venues that I targeted in the last few months, livebaits have been outscored by more traditional tactics.

Feeder and float-fishing in the margins can be very successful on venues that regularly see large amounts of maggots and groundbait from match and pleasure fishermen alike.

The use of worms, prawns and mass baiting with maggots has a big place in perch fishing on these types of venues.

On two separate occasions in the last couple of months I fished two such venues with livebaits as my main attack.

These were new waters to me and I had been informed by local match fishermen that they contained large perch.

Several fish fell to float-fished paternostered roach livebaits, but the action was not exactly fast and furious. A quick change of tactics, mass baiting with maggots and

chopped worm in conjunction with a large lobworm as hook-bait, produced a multiple catch of perch that brightened up an otherwise dull day.

Perch in some commercial fisheries seem very switched on to a mass baiting approach with maggots and chopped worm, which can be an excellent tactic if you don't mind catching the odd carp or two.

Wonderful Worms

Worm fishing can be a relatively inexpensive way of fishing if you use other baits to bulk up your feed. Worms are not as expensive as you may first think.

Various companies sell over the internet and if you are able to buy in bulk it can be a cost effective way of fishing.

One hundred lobworms for around £10 can last several sessions and provide some excellent fishing.

When I have a mass baiting approach in mind I usually use a small Gardner Pocket Rocket, which allows bait to be deposited quickly and accurately into my swim.

This normally includes a couple of pints of red maggots and 50 or so chopped lobworms.

Chopped prawns are another excellent addition to the mix and add an extra bit of attraction as well as providing a change of hook-bait. I normally use a Pocket Rocket on a spare Avon rod





Above: The Gardner Pocket Rocket is a great way to mass feed maggots.

which will comfortably deal with casts up to a range of 40 yards and saves having to carry around heavier kit just for the job.

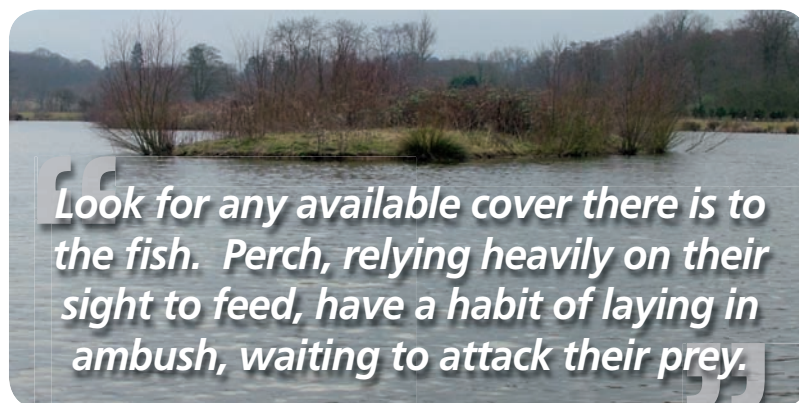
Prawns In The Bag, Too

Prawns are a much underrated bait for big perch. I first saw their use at Broadwater Lake a couple of years ago, where they have been used to good effect.

Either fished on a free-running feeder or float fished overdepth in the margins can prove very effective. They provide an excellent bait for perch.

When using a feeder to target perch I enlarge the feeder holes with a pair of scissors before packing in a mixture of maggots, chopped worms and prawns. This allows the feed to be released more readily.

Casting every 15 minutes helps to build up an attractive bed of feed, hopefully drawing a shoal of perch into the area.



Look for any available cover there is to the fish. Perch, relying heavily on their sight to feed, have a habit of laying in ambush, waiting to attack their prey.

A simple, free-running feeder rig is ample, with a hook-link of around 12 inches, that should be shortened or lengthened, depending on the feeding mood of the fish on the day.

I usually use two rods in this situation, combined with bite alarms and the lightest bobbins I can get away with. As it has been said many times before, perch do not like resistance, so bear this in mind. I usually start off with a hook size of 8 or 10, holding a lobworm or piece of prawn.

On fisheries that have a barbless hook only rule, I use a small piece of elastic band, once the worm has been threaded onto the hook, to help keep the worm in position and stop it from coming off the hook.

Likely Haunts

Once you have decided on your venue, and have taken into account their rules, what areas on a commercial lake should you target?

The answer is to go for any available cover there is to the fish. Perch, relying heavily on their sight to feed, have a habit of laying in ambush, waiting to attack their prey.

Any available cover is worth presenting a bait towards. This does not only include the obvious overhanging trees and reedbeds, but also marginal drop-offs, islands, aerators and outflow pipes, which are all ideal places to present a bait. Big fish can be very territorial so find out where they have been caught from in the past and concentrate on these areas.

Don't be scared to rove baits around, trying to find where perch might be holding up. This can be a particularly successful tactic when fishing livebaits.

I always use one rod as a rover and, nine times out of ten, this will be the rod that will produce the most bites, which usually occur within half-an-hour of the bait being in position.

Keeping mobile and moving swims



The simple feeder rig used for maggots.





"If you get a bite it is important to get a bait back to the area as soon as possible"

several times during a session, to cover as much water as possible, can help to locate shoals of perch. This is particularly important when fishing a venue for the first couple of sessions. Once you have had bites or caught fish, concentrate on these areas.

Fast Action

If you get a bite it is important to get a bait back to the area as soon as possible. I often unhook fish in the net and let them rest for a minute, which gives me

time to reposition a bait back to the area. Perch are often shoal fish and by doing this you are increasing your chance of a further bite.

A repositioned bait will often be picked up and it is not uncommon to have two fish in the net at the same time.

So what are you waiting for, put the theory into practice and get yourself out there and bag yourself a big April perch, you might be surprised how addictive it can be. But most of all, enjoy yourself!

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