



# Muscular Purr-Fection

Alan Stagg is a man who loves to target catfish from time to time. This mysterious, hard-fighting foreign species is now finding its way into more and more British waters. Absorb the expert advice given here and you could soon find yourself in pussy heaven!

**C**atfish are like Marmite - you either love them or you hate them. But cats are, without a doubt, one of the hardest-fighting species in our waters and they have the ability to make even the strongest of tackle look frail. The Wels catfish has become more widespread and therefore more accessible to anglers over the last decade, and can easily be targeted by anglers who have a fascination with them.

## Accidental Captures

It is a fact though, that catfish are caught more often than not by accident, particularly by carp anglers, as they devour their high-protein baits, which helps them pile on the pounds and grow big very quickly in these environments.

The catfish is a species which I have targeted on and off over the last decade. My first encounter was on the Split Lake controlled by CEMEX Angling. A dedicated campaign through the warm summer months saw me catch several cats, with one weighing 40lb 8oz, which back then was a lake record.

These fish have now flourished and have packed on the pounds and fish the size of the forty I mentioned warrant no

more than a raised eyebrow, as they are now commonplace in this fishery. A sure sign of an ideal habitat and good fishery management.

After flicking through the Cemex guidebook, the Match Lake at Yateley caught my attention. This water has a good population of catfish, which have grown to a huge size, well over 60lb. There is also a tremendous stock of carp in there, too.

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## Cats Can’t Read Books

According to the textbooks, catfish only feed at night or when light levels are at their lowest. Well, guess what? These Yateley cats haven’t read the script. And living locally to Yateley, as I do, I know that it is as common to catch the species in the middle of the day as it is at night or at dawn. And it is this phenomenon which I was keen to prove to the readers of Coarse Fisherman.

When it comes to targeting catfish, location is the key, as it is with all species. The first port of call when visiting a venue like the Match Lake is to talk to the local carp anglers, who are very much in touch with the water.

Their up-to-date information can be very useful. Often wanting to avoid the species, they can point you in the right direction, as they describe these fish as ‘a nuisance’. You can take advantage of this, as normally only a handful of anglers target these fish regularly.

Their comment on baits, ‘I never use pellets as all I seem to do is get plagued by catfish’, is a common statement and is advice which should never be ignored. Areas such as island margins, deep holes and the margins all attract catfish and are good places to cast a bait.

On warm, sunny days, it is common to seem them in hunting mode in the upper layers of water in search of prey, and it really is an eye-opener seeing the water exploding as fish scatter, the cats in hot pursuit, seeking out their prey.

It also gives the angler an idea of what size of fish they are likely to encounter and what to aim for.

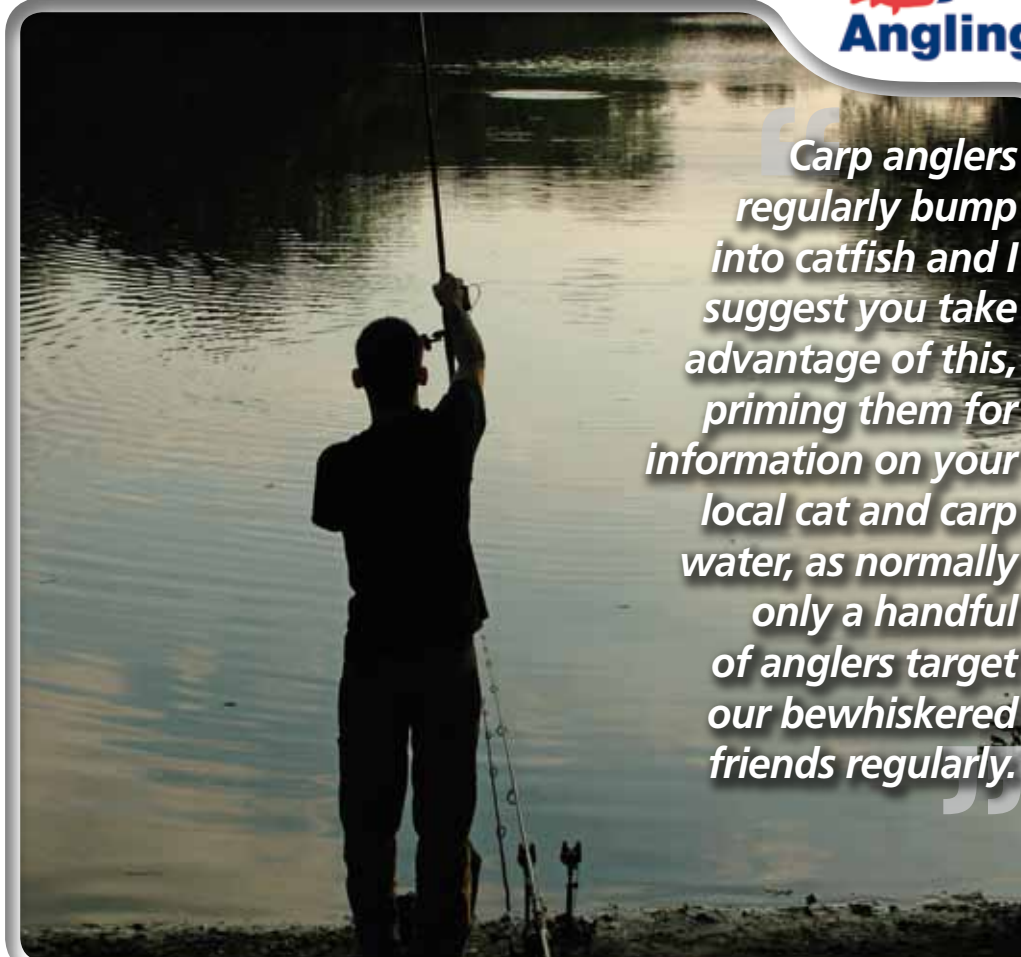
## Go strong!

When targeting catfish, strong tackle is vital. These fish take no prisoners. A minimum of 15lb main line is recommended and, in places where the cats grow big, I have used up to 18lb breaking strain line to deal with their immense power. For those of you who have never hooked a catfish, their power has to be experienced to be believed.

On several occasions I have witnessed carp anglers being destroyed by an unseen moggy which has made a mockery of their less than robust tackle. I would recommend 15lb to 18lb GR60 main line, which is ideal for putting up with the immense strain you are likely to encounter when targeting catfish.

Rods should be a minimum of 2.75lb test curve and if at all possible 3lb test curve or above. Some companies are now manufacturing special rods to deal with trying to tame these beasts.

Reels should have a reliable clutch and be able to deal with the wear and tear those long drawn out battles are



*“Carp anglers regularly bump into catfish and I suggest you take advantage of this, priming them for information on your local cat and carp water, as normally only a handful of anglers target our bewhiskered friends regularly.”*



**Left:** You will need a big quality built reel loaded with tough line.

likely to put on them. On more than one occasion I have witnessed inferior reels literally fall apart, such is the strain they are sometimes put under. A reel from a reputable manufacturer is important, don’t get tempted into buying cheap versions, as these animals will find any weaknesses in your tackle.

## Step It Up

I tend to favour a stepped-up carp-style rig when targeting waters which are predominantly fished for carp. I see little point in specialised livebait rigs when carp anglers are catching most of the catfish anyway.

These fish have been weaned on a high-protein diet, which they don’t have to chase.

I’m not saying you won’t catch on livebaits or any other methods, but if I was a catfish would I chase live fish around or take an easy meal of pellets and boilies? Make up your own mind.

I stay away from low-resistance rigs and use a standard bolt rig, using a Covert lead clip with a lead around 3oz in weight.

A hook-link consisting of a coated braid called Sly Skin of around 10 to 12 inches in length completes the set-up. I like a relatively long hook-link of around 10 to 12 inches when targeting catfish - and a coated version ensures that extra safety against their abrasive pads.

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When using a shorter hook-link I have bumped fish in the early stages of a fight. Lengthening the hook-link eliminated this problem, as it gave the fish longer to take the bait and for the bite to develop, and I believe I was pricking a number of these fish just inside the mouth.

Hooks need to be very strong and a pattern with a thick wire gauge is important. Strength is paramount as the strain the hook is put under can be immense and a pattern which is 100 per cent reliable is important.

Gardner Tackle Talon Tips in sizes 2 to 6, depending on the size of hook-bait, fit the bill perfectly and at present I have still yet to open one out, a sure sign of a good hook and one you know won't let you down in the middle of a battle.

bed of pellets or boilies hard to resist and when they are in a feeding mood, multiple catches can be common. Large, oily 17mm Halibut Pellets from Sonubaits are my favourite.

The attraction properties from these pellets are extremely good, drawing in the cats, which have extremely poor eyesight and rely on their sense of smell and vibration to locate their food.

#### Don't Forget Fishy Flavours

On venues which allow them, a pellet and boily approach is my first choice. Using a spread of pellets on one rod and boilies on the second rod allows me to see which bait the fish are switched on to the most.

I have no qualms in introducing a couple of kilos of the chosen bait over each rod if I think the conditions are right.

**Catfish in predominantly carp venues are switched on to pellets and boilies, which are fed into the venues in vast quantities. They become the catfish's staple diet and this is something you should take advantage of.**

#### Follow The Signs

When targeting catfish I visit waters which are predominantly fished by carp anglers and this tends to dictate the tactics and bait that I use.

Catfish in such venues are switched on to pellets and boilies which are fed into the venues in vast quantities. They become the catfish's staple diet and this is something which you should take advantage of.

I am not saying for one minute that you won't catch them when using more traditional tactics, such as live and deadbaits, but carp anglers are doing a lot of the hard work for you, almost prebaiting.

Large beds of big pellets and boilies are a favourite method with groundbait a close second. Catfish seem to find a

I will often create a spread of bait using a spod or catapult and when pellet fishing I tend to use a mixture of pellet sizes as their breakdown times are different, ensuring a constant leakage in the water.



Flavours can play an important part and most fishy flavours such as squid, crayfish, lobster etc, are very good attractants.

I can also recommend spodding large beds of dead maggots out into the swim. I always save and freeze my leftover maggots from targeting smaller species during the winter for such occasions.

Although they will inevitably attract all manner of species into the swim, there is no doubting their pulling power when targeting catfish. I have had some good results when using them.

#### Be Prepared For Action At Anytime

Expect bites at anytime during the day or night. As previously mentioned, I have caught a number of fish at Yateley during bright sunny conditions in the middle of the day.

Throughout the dark hours and early mornings are, without a doubt my favourite times when after catfish. These are the times when I most expect a bite but don't neglect the daytime.

During a recent session on Yateley's Match Lake, I took advice from a couple of carp anglers who told me they were regularly catching large cats.

On a short, overnight session after work, I cast a couple of rods out into the general direction, followed by a good scattering of large halibut pellets, where they had been regularly observing catfish activity.

Just as dawn broke one of the rods screamed off and after one of the best fights I have experienced there in the bottom of the net lay a catfish of good proportions. Weighing 39lb 2oz I was pleased and when I left for work an hour later, I was one very happy angler. **CF**



#### Venue Facts



#### Yateley Match Lake, Yateley, Hants. GU47 8JQ

As with a great deal of the Yateley waters, a mobile approach works very well, as does the static approach, but keep one eye on the weather as the fish do respond well to new winds. The catfish were stocked into the water back in 1993 as 'kittens' and the good head of fish that makes up the backbone of the stock now top 56lb in weight with specimens seen but not caught estimated to be in excess of 75lb. Now there's a challenge for you! If the cats are what you're after look for the silt gullies and drop-offs and the cats won't be far away. The islands on this venue all seem to be a good bet for the cats too as they like patrolling around these.

Spring Ticket Prices (15th March - 11th June)  
Tickets for two rods cost from **£27** for adults  
OAP and disabled anglers cost from **£18**  
Under 18s cost from **£13.50**  
For more pricing information please visit the website below.

Call CEMEX Angling on **01932 583630**  
Email [info@cemexangling.com](mailto:info@cemexangling.com)  
or visit their website [www.cemexangling.com](http://www.cemexangling.com)