

CRACKING THE

CLEAR WATER CARP CODE

CRYSTAL clear water holds a special fascination for most of us anglers.

Peering deep down into a lake and getting a glimpse of the extraordinarily varied and complex ecosystem beneath the surface is fascinating enough, but add in the possibility of spotting a chunk or two swimming around and the effect can be even more mesmerising and spell-binding.

Tackling clear-water lakes in spring presents benefits and problems in equal measure, but simply being on a water that offers the opportunity to watch fish eyeball-to-eyeball gives you a massive advantage in terms of learning about how your quarry feeds and behaves under such conditions.

Get off on the right foot

Arguably the most important aspect of successful carp fishing in clear water conditions is watercraft. If you can observe the fish, you'll quickly experience just how sensitive they are to both bankside movement and noise (or vibrations). It goes without saying that keeping a discreet presence on the bank will catch you more carp in the

long run. At the most basic level, this begins with the process of setting up.

Whacking in bivvy pegs with a mallet is a definite no-no, but even something as simple as where you erect your bivvy in the swim can have an effect on your catches. It's far better to tuck it away at the side, using any cover available, than to pitch it right in the middle of the swim, in full view of any carp cruising by. A suspicious carp is a wary carp, and one that is a hundred times more difficult to trick than a carp that is in a relaxed frame of mind.

Adopting this simple mindset – being aware how easily your presence can have a negative impact on the fishing situation before you've even begun – is vital to get off on the right foot, but it's even more important to apply it to the rest of your tactical approach too, from your casting and baiting approaches, to how you try to camouflage your tackle.

Concealing your presence

Presuming you haven't sent all the carp in the area scooting for cover by setting up clumsily, the next thing to consider is how your mainline behaves and how it can be manipulated to minimise the carp's suspicions. If, from the outset, we assume that carp can identify your

Watercraft and rig camouflage are key to catching carp in spring. **Lewis Read** reveals his early season approach to keeping the bites coming in clear water conditions... »



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Terminal tackle tweaks

The area that warrants most

consideration is the last foot or so of line on the lakebed – after all, that it is the section that will be in closest proximity to feeding carp, and needs to be kept as covert as possible.

Understanding the nature of the lakebed on the spot you’re fishing to requires knowledge and experience. The only real way to know what it’s like for sure is to view it with your own eyes, so that either means using a boat and a glass-bottomed bucket (if rules allow), climbing a tree (if you’re fishing close in) or learning to ‘feel the lead down’ and understand the feedback you get as you drag it back.

thicker as summer approaches, fishing slightly ‘tighter’ and using a copolymer line and leader combination over a standard mono or fluorocarbon is a better tactic, as the copolymer takes on water and will normally end up tucking itself just into the weed anyway.

There’s an amazing range of low-vis copolymer mainlines available in all manner of colours, all offering slightly different characteristics. Modern-day anglers are spoilt in this respect.

If you’re fishing over a wall of weed down on to a spot, by using a tight line it will actually start to pull it into the green stuff, making it less conspicuous and reducing the angle over the lip of the weed.

Obviously, we all try to colour-match our terminal tackle to the lakebed, using dull-coloured components to blend it all in as far as is possible. The same goes for hooklinks and hooks, and the variety of colours, textures and materials available means there is a product that will suit your venue and swim-specific requirements. The greater light penetration that occurs in clear-water venues means that on bright days there could potentially be a tiny glint coming off the metal items in your rig, and that can sometimes be enough to put a carp on edge. This problem is exacerbated in shallow water, when the carp can be infuriatingly nervous, so any shortfall in your presentation could have a major impact on the whole angling situation.

ABOVE: The only real way to know for sure what the lakebed is like is to see it with your own eyes.

BOTTOM LEFT: A fluorocarbon mainline is inconspicuous early in the season.

BOTTOM LEFT: A semi-slack line and a decent drop on the bobbins works at short to mid-range.



line as meaning danger, then it’s easy to understand why it is vital to keep this, the single largest item they can potentially come into contact with, hidden as well as possible.

The easiest way of doing this is to have the line sunk as tight as possible to the bottom, but in the real world it’s not always that easy. Clear-water environments harbour masses of aquatic plants and it only takes a few fronds between rod-tip and terminal tackle to hold the line up. However, there are ways and means to help it to drop down through the wispy strands of weed evident in spring. One of these is to hold the rod high and bounce the tip so that the mainline flicks but the lead doesn’t move. This will often work your line down into the weed, as opposed to sitting on top of it.

Using pure fluorocarbon mainlines



such as Gardner Mirage, which are far heavier than mono, is a good solution early in the year, provided the weed is not too high or growing in solid bands.

For short to medium ranges, I like to fish 0.35mm fluoro mainline straight through, with no leader involved at all, and just a couple of blobs of Critical Mass putty moulded on to the line a few feet above the lead. When doing so, I’ve often wound in at the end of a session to find the line festooned with lakebed detritus, indicating that not only has it been lying on the bottom, but is starting to bury itself into it!

Tight or slack lines? Both have their place

The topography of the lakebed and the range you’re fishing at also makes a massive difference to how your line lies on the bottom. Fishing with a semi-slack line and a decent drop on the bobbin is seen as the best combination in most situations, yet once you get past about 100 yards, bite indication begins to become compromised and a tighter line and more positive indicator arrangement need to be used, not only so you become aware of pick-ups, but also to help with the hooking mechanics of the rig being used.

When the weed starts to become



The last of these is the method that gives the highest degree of variability but, ironically, it also opens up a lot of highly-fishable and productive spots, and not just the typical ‘glowing’ areas that many anglers target.

It’s imperative to understand that spots don’t need to be shiny gravel patches for you to catch off them. In clear water such areas can be a bit blatant, and I prefer to look for subtler spots to drop a hookbait upon. I’m looking for naturally appealing spots that have perhaps been fed upon, not those that have been cleaned off due to someone diligently baiting them!

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Bait considerations

To help improve rig concealment even further, some of my favourite presentations are those where the bait settles over the top of the hook on the lakebed – you can’t get better camouflage than that! To achieve this I always favour slow-sinking or critically-balanced baits. If I haven’t made up any dedicated slow-sinkers

in my favoured boilie type, I’ll just use half a bottom bait with half a pop-up sat on top. This is a subtle and highly effective trick for achieving the desired effect. Other presentations, such as using PVA sticks threaded down the hooklink, can help to mask the terminal tackle too.

This leads to a totally different way of looking at rig camouflage – and that is using bait to hide more of your tackle. Burying your rig and leader under spod mix may seem counter to our desire to have the hookbait sat on the near side of the baited area, but if spodding over the top of your end tackle not only draws in feeding fish but also hides the terminal tackle, then it’s a double bonus! What’s more, if the fish feed hard on an area, they kick up sediment in doing so, which in turn either colours the water (encouraging further feeding) or settles over the terminal tackle, making it all look a lot more natural if they revisit the spot.

What colour bait you use is another important area of consideration. First, you need to be ‘bird aware’, as most rich, clear-water venues harbour lots of waterfowl that

love to feast on our baits almost as much as the carp do. Using dark baits may have an advantage for priming and establishing areas because they should last a little longer on the lakebed before



ABOVE LEFT: Hooks with a customised, dull coating help the tackle to blend in on the lakebed and reduce any glare from sunlight penetrating the depths.

ABOVE: A scattering of light-coloured baits tends to stand out better, and may help the fish to initially identify a baited area as they cruise around in mid-water.

BELOW: At this time of year carp are in prime condition. Get your clear-water tactics right and you could enjoy your best-ever spring!

being found by the birds, giving the carp more chance of doing so as well.

On the flip side, light-coloured baits spread among the weedy fronds or across a dark lakebed tend to stand out better, and may help the fish to initially identify a baited area as they cruise around in mid-water.

These ‘stand-out’ baits can really draw the fish in, and once they’re hovering over the bait the fish are faced with a simple choice – ‘eat it now, or another fish following on behind will’.

Clear-water venues may be a little trickier to tackle than coloured waters, but the opportunities to observe the carp and learn from their reactions and habits while fishing such lakes are almost limitless. Watching the fish from day to day and the peculiar things they get up to can certainly add a whole new dimension to your angling!