



HEDGING MY BETS FOR BIG CATFISH

Would they prefer boilies or sea deadbaits? I try both on a small lake stocked with these exotic and increasingly-popular predators

WHEN the blossom blooms I know for certain catfish will be on the prowl – and, despite an easterly wind and a lingering overnight frost, I felt confident that my targets would be ready for battle.

At least I hoped so, as I'd made the long trip east from Wiltshire to Cambridgeshire. Famed for its architecture, university and fertile

fenlands, it's an interesting area to visit, especially if catfish are your target.

I'd been invited to fish a 2½-acre irrigation reservoir known as Roedeer Lake.

It's had an initial stocking of 85 cats to 90lb, so it wasn't surprising that I was greeted by a giant tail slapping on the surface soon after I arrived! The cats were on the prowl, and I needed to get fishing.

Having the lake to myself, it made sense to be positioned in the middle and stagger the baits to cover three different areas – but what tactics should I use on catfish that had received little pressure?

Normally, given that vast amounts of boilies and pellets are introduced, I'd favour a cat/carp approach, but maybe

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on this trip I could journey back in time and use more traditional methods.

So, rod one was a 12ft, 3lb 6oz test curve affair matched to an 8000-sized reel loaded with braid, and a fluorocarbon leader.

For catfish I always favour braid, with its lack of stretch. If a big fish gets weeded up, it becomes very difficult to get it to move with mono, once it's found an anchor point.

At the end of the leader was a lead clip supporting a flat 4oz lead and a quick-change swivel. The hooklength was unstripped 25lb Ultra Skin to a size 4 wide gape hook.

On to the hair went two Sticky Krill wafers tipped off by a PVA mesh bag of pellets and powder, dampened by Tuna Hydro. To offer even more attraction, I'd be using half-a-kilo of Krill Active boilies around it.

I was still keen to adopt tactics more suited to the predatory nature of cats, so my other two rods were 10ft models, matched with 40lb braid. A long leader was essential to protect the cat's body, but this time I'd use a running lead set-up before a 3ft, 80lb braid hooklength and a size 2/0 hook.

I'd be using a hair to mount a chunk of mackerel, gently nicking the hook through a sliver of skin to ensure the point couldn't twist round and be masked.

I'd be fishing this alongside half-a-dozen more chunks of fish, and it was going to be interesting to see which bait would be the first to be taken.

With everything in position, I tried to relax, which I found difficult every time a tail slapped the water or the alarm signified a liner.

I wondered if dusk, when the water was at its warmest, rather than after dark, would



The serpentine body of a big cat nears the net.

"Six feet long, with a belly any beer drinker would be proud of, my estimate of 50lb was well out!"

be the time I was most likely to get a bite.

But only a couple of hours later, when I'd just created a delicious chicken wrap for my tea, one of the mackerel rods suddenly sprang into life. I wasn't the only one who was hungry, and now wasn't the

time for me to eat. I struck, but I didn't experience the crazy run I'd expected as I drew the fish back towards me from the far margin. This being an old irrigation reservoir, my quarry was over 20ft of water, which I think confused it, and I drew it to

my bank like a dog on a lead.

"Easy!" Well, no, I should have kept my mouth shut, because as I tried to draw it up into 12ft of water, the penny dropped for the cat and all hell broke loose. The drag screamed, and I felt the full weight of the beast for the first time!

All I could do was hold on and enjoy the ride, which lasted at full speed for five minutes. Great fun, especially as the battle took place in daylight, allowing me to

witness the serpent-like movements of the cat as it tried to avoid my net.

Only when I eventually lifted the fish into the mesh did I realise how big it was. Six feet long, with a belly that any beer drinker would be proud of, it seemed my early estimate of 50lb would be well out! Fortunately, help was on hand to put a number on it and take a picture, because I'd have been concerned for my back if I'd been on my own. The weight was recorded at

71lb, and Roedeer had lived up to its promise of being a premier league catfish water.

And what of my experiments? Well, a 40lb cat took the mackerel the following morning and two carp came on the boilie.

Maybe, given a choice, the predatory instinct of catfish is still stronger than their taste for boilies?

● For bookings and details, visit <https://www.swallowpool.co.uk> and click on the 'Roedeer Lake' link.



One of two carp that took the boilies.



My 71lb cat was as 'tall' as me!



Half a mackerel proved effective.



Strong hooks and hooklengths were essential.



The carp/catfish approach – PVA bag with wafers.