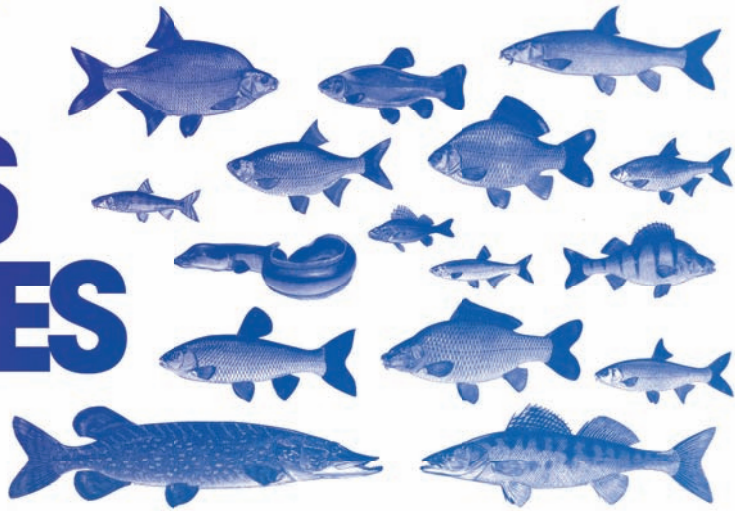


ANDY MAY'S SPECIES HUNT



Perch have a reputation as being the most ravenous of freshwater fish. Could **Andy May** tempt a monster in the cold? Read on to find out...



Trying to catch any species of fish over the last few weeks has been very difficult to say the least, with the atrocious weather that we have been experiencing. Nevertheless, there are always some species that are willing to feed, no matter how cold it is.

I am at Hampton Springs, a place that I haven't fished for around eight years, so I was really looking forward to getting back. My target species, the perch, is probably one of the most striking fish swimming our waters. It was the first fish that I ever caught, when I was three years old, on the Rochdale Canal.

For a good few years I was afraid of getting 'spiked' by them, because I couldn't get to grips with how to hold them. Now, though, I simply love catching them, especially great big ones, which hopefully will be pulling my elastic out today!

As with most commercial fisheries, the potential for predatory fish such as the perch to thrive and grow is huge, thanks to all the small silver fish present that get overlooked. As anglers fish bigger baits to avoid small fish, this in turn creates a great habitat for the perch because they can grow big and fat on the little baitfish. My biggest perch from a commercial is just short of

3lb, but they have been caught to over 5lb from some waters! Although mainly thought of and caught in more natural waters, I wanted to show you how they thrive in commercials too.

I am on the picturesque Alice Pool, on a peg that backs onto Rock Pool. This is the deepest part of the lake and has two main features. Now, perch love features where they can naturally lie in wait for small fish to swim by. Hopefully, they will be lying in wait for maggots, worms and casters!

If your elastic is set too soft you won't set the hook properly.

When perch fishing, keep things simple; you don't need complicated setups. Be confident in your tackle and make sure that you have the correct hook and elastic to cope with them. Perch have a very hard, bony mouth, so setting the hook on

the strike is crucial; strike too soon and you will only just nick the perch and probably lose it.

The elastic must be robust enough to stop them trying to get back to their underwater features but also soft enough to cope with their head shaking. I like to use either blue Hydro or double No5 elastic through the No2 and No3 sections of my pole; both are perfect for perch fishing. It is all about getting that balance right; »

VENUE FILE

HAMPTON SPRINGS FISHERY

Location: Shay Lane, Hampton, Malpas, Cheshire SY14 8AD

Contact: 01948 820789

Website: www.hamptonsprings.co.uk

PERCH

PERCA FLUVIATILIS

The perch is one of the most common and widespread species of coarse fish. Being prevalent in rivers, canals, and drains, it is an extremely hardy species that is generally willing to feed whatever the weather.

Being a largely predatory fish, perch will try and eat just about anything, including fish (and lures) that are bigger than they are! They are susceptible to many kinds of baits, with favourites being worms, casters, bloodworm and maggots.

They are easily identified by the stripes down their body and spiny pectoral fins, which can cause a nasty puncture if you grab them too hastily. They typically have between six and eight vertical stripes down their body and fairly coarse, scaly skin. Their large mouths lend themselves perfectly to their predatory nature and are disproportionately large compared to their bodies.

They usually spawn in late April or early May, leaving trails of sticky eggs on weed, or tree roots in shallow water. Unlike the eggs of other species, perch eggs are inedible to other fish, which means that the majority usually survive. Their sticky nature also means that they are often transported from venue to venue on the legs of water birds.

The British record is 5-15-0, and was taken by Les Brown in 2006 from a stillwater near Crowborough in East Sussex. However, any fish over 3lb is generally regarded as a specimen.

ANGLER FILE

ANDY MAY

Age: 28

Lives: Middlewich

Occupation: Angling coach

Sponsors: Ultima, Shimano, Bag 'em

Pole: Shimano Aernos

Quality perch like this thrive in commercial fisheries.

if your elastic is set too soft you won't set the hook properly but if it is too strong you will stand a chance of losing the fish because they can be quite angry when they start shaking their head to rid themselves of the hook!

My hook choice is a Drennan Silverfish Pellet or Silverfish Match in a size 16. These are quite large and perfect for using bigger baits such as worms or double and treble casters and maggots. Importantly, the hook must also be fairly light but still retain plenty of strength. The most important aspect, however, is that the hook must be needle sharp so that it can penetrate the perch's hard mouth. I quite often check my hook after each fish by hooking a maggot or caster. If there is any resistance at all, or the bait bursts, you need to change your hook. You can't always tell that your hook is blunt when hooking worms because they are soft, but try hooking a maggot or caster and you can tell straightaway whether it needs changing.

I have an outlet pipe at just seven metres to my right, which is where the deepest part of the lake is. It is around seven feet here and

just last week a match was won with 24lb of perch from this very peg. Hopefully the perch are still here waiting for me! I also have a great-looking edge swim, which is four feet deep and sloping off gradually to seven feet at the bottom of the shelf. It looks perfect for later on, when the fish will gradually come into shallow water. I would say 'as the day warms up' but it's bitterly cold and I have a lovely easterly wind blowing in my face, hence the reason for my face being bright red in the pictures!

On my 7m line I've set up a 4x14 J-Range J8 wire-stem float, but if the wind gets up too much I will change to a 4x16. I am using a bulk of No9 shot, which are placed 14 inches

from the hook, with just one No10 dropper six inches from the hook. I have most of my shot close to my hook rather than having, say, a bulk and two or three droppers. This way I can read bites really well. Another thing that I like to do is to go overdepth by at least three inches and keep moving the bait. Perch tend to suck the bait in and mouth it, rather than dart off like other fish, so by constantly moving the bait you can sometimes feel the fish before you see the bite.

My other rig, which is fished at 13 metres up the margin, involves a slimmer 5x10 float with the main bulk of No10s placed 12 inches from the hook and a single No11 four inches from the hook. Again, I'm fishing this overdepth.

My line choice is 0.12mm Ultima Power Silk and 0.10mm Power Silk as hooklength for both rigs. Perch are very willing and I could have got away with fishing heavier.

However, because I have complete confidence in my setup there is no need.

My bait choice stays the same on any venue: maggots, casters and, of course, worms. The only thing

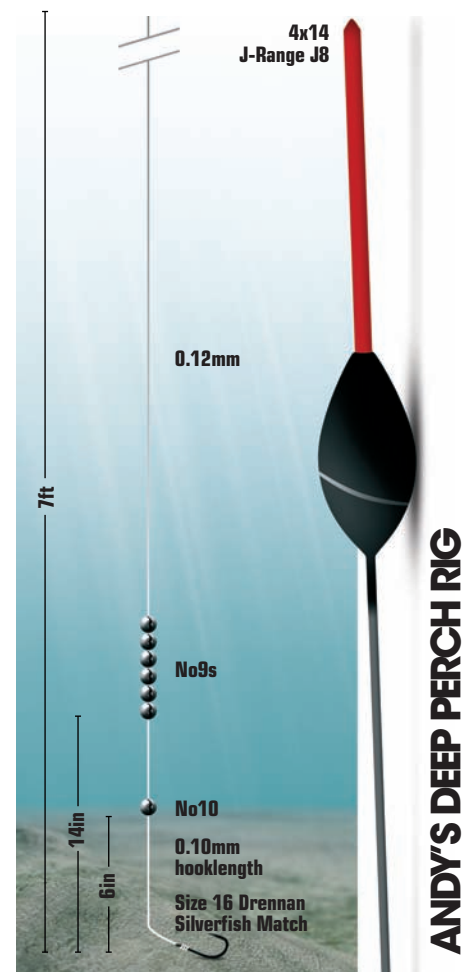
that will change is the amount. I have bought a pint of red and white maggots mixed, a pint of casters, half a kilo of dendrabaenas and finally a small tub of red worms.

I'm taking things really steady to begin with by just chopping up two full worms and introducing 10 to 15 casters and some red maggots. This is introduced onto both lines and I begin fishing at seven metres against the outlet pipe. It doesn't take me long to catch... a nice roach! In fact, for the first 30 minutes all I can catch is roach. This wouldn't have been the case had I opted to fish heavier. I start to feed heavier and that brings even more roach into the peg. These are real stamp fish as well, all between 8oz

and 1lb!

I am actually disappointed at catching them, which goes against everything I know about fishing. To catch my intended species I have to try and fish through, or feed off, these big, perfectly formed and never-caught-before roach! Usually, I would be in my element catching these fish but for the purpose of this feature they are actually a nuisance. Can you believe that 8oz to 1lb roach in these conditions are a menace? It's mad!

After 40 minutes I have a quiet spell and Jon Arthur and I know that there is something big in the peg. Sure enough, my



Perch tend to suck the bait in and mouth it, rather than dart off.

ANDY'S DEEP PERCH RIG



NEW SUPER SKIMMER WINTER WONDER GROUNDBAIT

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- Added red flecks for extra attraction



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float lifts slightly before moving slowly sideways and under... one... two... whack! The fish is on and three feet of elastic is out of the pole. That's more like it, and after a short fight a fish of around 1 ½lb comes to the top with its mouth wide open, shaking its head angrily. There isn't much to compare to the sight of a big perch coming to the surface like that – it's awesome.

The fish goes in the net safely. It is hooked perfectly and has lots of bait down its throat. Quite often you will find that perch shoal up very tightly and swim around in packs, so I don't hesitate and go straight back in with a tail of a worm on. Two minutes later I have a similar bite, so again I let the bite develop before pausing and striking.

Wahoo, another one! This one is smaller at around 12oz to 14oz.

Have they finally turned up? Er, no! I have another perch of around 4oz before those 'nuisance' redfins make another appearance! Time to try the margins. Again for the first 30 minutes I can't get through quality roach but it's so obvious when a big fish moves into the swim because all goes quiet. It gives you an amazing buzz in anticipation that the next bite could be from something big!

I have a 10-minute wait before I receive »

Small amounts of chopped worm and casters were the key.



Deep water next to an overflow pipe offered the perfect ambush feature for big perch.



The second perch swim was fed in shallower water up against an attractive red bush.



Andy May
three-times
Kamasan Matchman
of the Year
joins the
Bag 'em team



Website: www.bagem.co.uk


a lift bite. Again I count to two and strike. This is something bigger and I actually have to put on another section (I know, what a girl!). After five minutes I have the perch in front of me shaking its head violently, trying to get rid of the hook, but it fails and I slide the net under another decent-sized perch of around 2lb. What a fish and in full winter condition, they just look so menacing!

I manage to catch a few more perch to around 12oz off the margin peg but there are far more roach there than on the 7m swim. I try bigger baits, such as a full worm and treble caster, but this just brings more interest from the roach. Two tails of red worms or double white caster are the best baits today by far. Perch love light-

I'm expecting the perch to move in and the roach feeding to draw them in.

coloured casters and they've worked on all waters that I have fished. They must look like small fry in the water. Whatever the reason, I would recommend that you try them over darker-coloured casters.

As the light is fading I'm expecting the perch to move in and the roach feeding to draw them in. While feeding through a Kinder pot I introduce a few maggots just to keep silver fish in the peg. This can work brilliantly at times because the perch will come to the commotion of the small fish feeding. However, it seems that there are too many roach! I end the session with 12 perch, including two very nice fish, and in between catching my intended species I've had more than 20lb of roach.

It's been a brilliant day, even if it is one of the coldest I have fished in for a long time! The main thing with perch is to keep ringing the changes and make sure you keep moving the bait. They can take a while to come onto the feed and that's why keeping baits such as maggots going in to attract smaller fish increases your chances with bigger perch. They really are impressive fish to catch! 



Line and hooks do not have to be too delicate for perch.

Four cracking perch... plus 20lb of 'nuisance' silvers!

