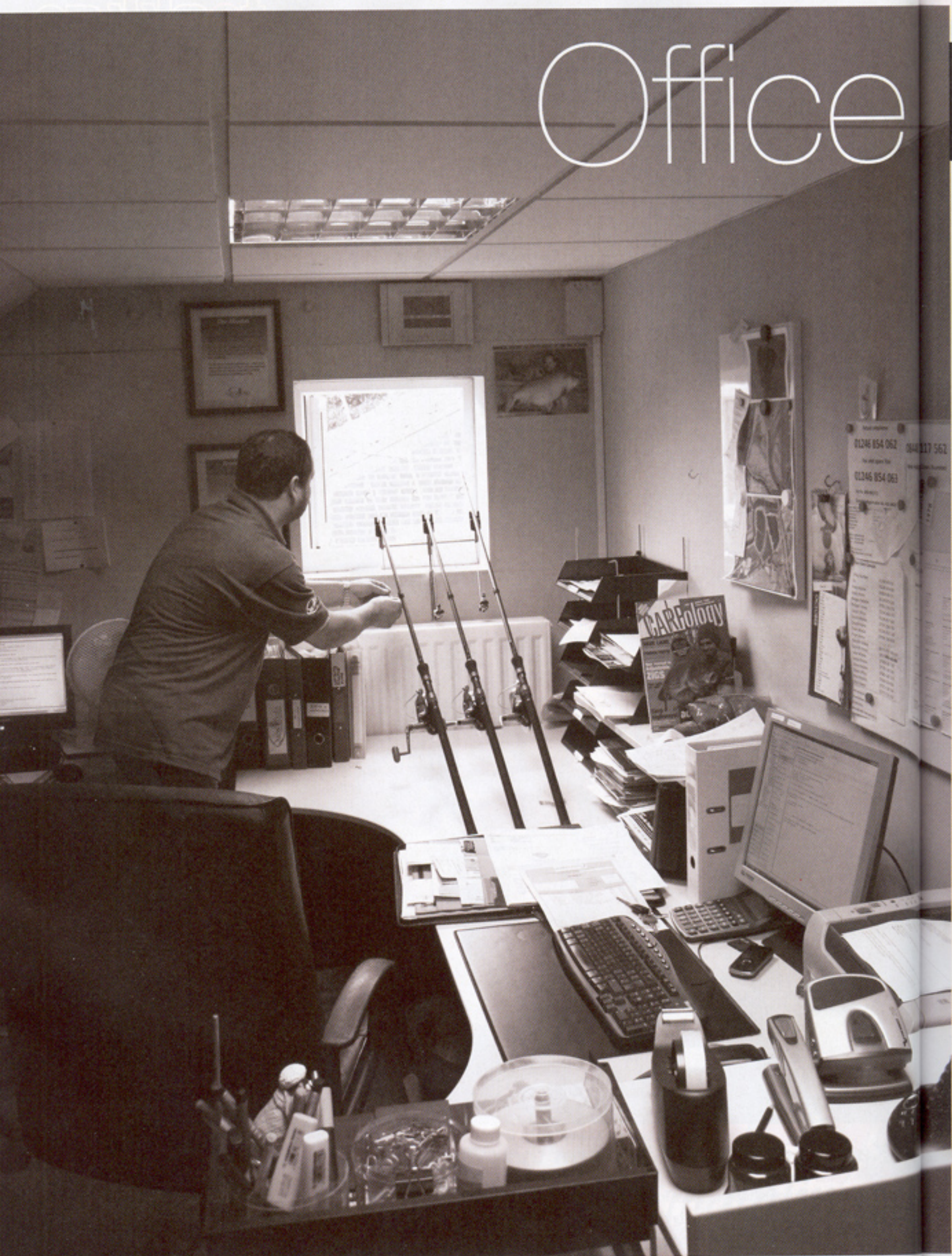


Office



Hour Carping

Because night fishing in winter really isn't fun (and as you'll see, there's simply no need)

'Office hour winter carp fishing', now that's a favourite phrase of mine, as well as one which brings and continues to bring very fond memories. 'Office hour' fishing very much sums up the majority of my winter fishing these days.

[WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY:
SHAUN HARRISON]

For more years than I care to remember, I was a day-and-one or two-nights a week angler regardless of the time of the year. I guess like a lot of things in life, it was simply out of habit and was my usual routine. Being a total addict to carp fishing, I needed my fix. These were the days when I worked at Walkers of Trowell and most weeks would see me arrive at my chosen venue at 8pm-ish for the first night, fish through the following day and night then pack up at silly o'clock in the morning in order to get back home, shower and to work. It was very difficult some mornings getting out of bed to pack away in the dark in heavy frosts or rain, indeed it was bad enough packing up in the dark anyway, but this is what I did and what I got used to doing. That small hardship of setting up and packing away in the dark gave me the best part of two full nights.

I guess this all stemmed from my early experiences of winter carp fishing. Most of the waters I fished produced mostly at night so when stuck with very limited time, the extra effort seemed the sensible thing to do.

I never really had the issues I so often hear people talk about, surviving the boredom of the long cold hours in a dark bivvy. Quite the opposite, in fact I used to actually look forward to the dark hours, not only was it normally the most productive time fishing-wise, but also being an avid reader of true life stuff it gave me quality reading time. Even to this day at home I like to totally focus when reading and it's quite common if I am in the house alone, for me to be sat reading by candlelight or by the soft glow of a salt lamp. With only being able to see the pages with no other distraction I find I get totally absorbed into the book. So this is how I spent the long winter hours in the bivvy: no TV, no radio, just me and the written word and the added advantage of this is the ears are still alert listening to the water parting from a rolling fish.

In fact, pick the right book and the right conditions and you are properly there with the writer. I

remember reading Chay Blythe's story of him rowing the Atlantic whilst I was cocooned in a tiny 45" bivvy (it's all there was in those days)

in a raging winter storm. Chay was writing about riding out a massive storm in his tiny boat and I had the sound effects of the storm and the buffeting about of the bivvy!

Another memory comes to mind from Texas earlier this year. Minus-12 actual temperature with a minus-19 wind chill, it became too cold to fish as everything was icing up. The wind was blowing a total hooligan, the reels were seizing up and the rods were sticking to the rests. We had to wind in. Now 100yds away was a luxury wooden cabin that I would simply love to live in. This was available complete with heating and proper beds but I chose to experience the elements the night was throwing at us whilst getting stuck into a mountaineering book. I simply love to be out in the elements.

But all this is leading us off track from 'Office Hour Carp Fishing'. I guess I merely wanted to demonstrate I haven't gone soft and taken the easy option. I truly believe I am now catching more winter fish by keeping the sessions short.

Instant success

It struck home to me a few years back that most of the fish getting caught from the Shropshire mere I was then fishing were coming out in the daylight hours, so one week I decided to make the four-hour round trip for just 8hrs fishing. Result: five decent fish including a pure English 35lb common! Now this was at the time my best winter catch from the mere and ironically on my shortest session. Naturally I tried again the following week with an almost identical catch, but this time the 35lb was a mirror! I went again – three big fish and another thirty! Now I'm sure at this point you simply want me to tell you now about the new wonder bait and rig I had developed?

Bait was what was to become known the following year as Quest Baits Fruity Trifle and the rig was a home-tied combi consisting of 25lb Maxima and 22lb Dynon SK. But this doesn't really help you other than both produce a lot of fish when fished correctly. I had been using the Fruity Trifle/Combi Rig combination for sometime, but had never previously experienced action like this. There was definitely more to it.

With that wonderful thing called 'hindsight', I am now totally convinced I





caught those fish because they were unaware I was there and with the lines only being draped through the swim for a few hours this didn't particularly give the game away either. Angler awareness is something the carp are very much in tune with on most waters these days yet most carp anglers appear to have lost the art of stealth, making it so obvious to the fish they are there. It totally amazes me. Carp in most waters have just one main predator to avoid in everyday life – us! One thing to avoid – us! So what do most do? Pace up and down the bank, kick their feet about, walk up to the waters edge constantly looking for fish (as though stepping forward 6ft will reveal a lot more), set the bivvies up in the open, on top of the bank etc. We have all seen it and probably all done it, but once it has been pointed out...

The sheer fact I was able to fish with the minimal of gear: chair, carryall and rods meant there wasn't all the usual commotion of setting up bivvies, beds, cooking gear and all the other paraphernalia which goes with it. Now when you are perched upon little wooden islands which cause little waves each time you move, the less movement required the better. Spook them off in the winter and it could be days before they drift back.

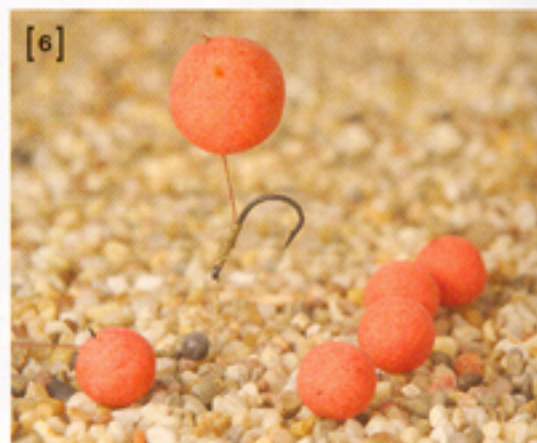
Anyway, on the back of this success and the sheer fact that I had so enjoyed fishing without the general necessary clutter associated with winter fishing, I began to adopt this day time only approach on a few other waters too. Surprise, surprise I caught them and what is more, I was able to enjoy a little out-of-carp-fishing-life in between!



Doing your prep work

I must admit these days I'm not that bothered about catching fish in the dark, although I still do a lot of nights to save having to get up so early in the mornings. Most of the venues I fish are a distance from home so during the summer months I would rather be getting up there as the sun is rising rather than 3hrs before!

The beauty of winter days is that you don't have to get up so ridiculously early in order to be sorted and at the lake for first light, plus with the longer darker evenings I find it easier to convince myself it is later than it is thus get to



bed earlier. The secret to this I find is trying not to have too much to do the night before. I try and get the gear ready two nights before if I need to make a particularly early start. This way I can get home from work the night before, eat dinner and chill out thus be suitably wound down and tired earlier. I don't lose so much sleep this way. I find there is nothing worse than sitting there dozing off all day when you really want to be angling.

I do like to be at the water as the eastern sky is just starting to light up. I find the carp can often give themselves away at this time of the

Back to basics

Adding attraction with ease

When the water is at its coldest you need every edge you can get. I pay great emphasis on attracting fish to my hookbait but without over dosing the flavour content. I feel many go wrong in this respect and simply boost their flavour levels thinking this to be the best way of attracting the carp. Through close range

winter observation I have found that this can actually move fish from an area. I prefer to utilise the quick leak-off but subtle attraction you can create with the Quest Baits Maximum Action Pellets along with paste covered hookbaits.

For absolute maximum leak-off you can add water to the Maximum

Action Pellet and within a couple of minutes turn this into a very fast dissolving paste. The other advantage to this is that you can fire these paste balls out much further than you can fire the pellets thus creating a stimulating attraction in the swim without actually feeding the fish. Give it a go!

TOOLS OF MY TRADE

Introducing the kit to keep you catching this winter

- [1] Free Spirit Outer Wear: Totally waterproof and windproof.
- [2] Free Spirit Standard Rigid Carryall: Quick easy access to your gear without having to empty it!
- [3] Rods banded together (Shaun's Special Bands) for speed of setting up and

moving without all the clutter of rod sleeves etc.

- [4] Free Spirit Kayak Unhooking Mat/Weigh Sling: I love the fact that with the zip right round and the long straps, it gives me extra carrying capacity as well as balancing the load with the carryall so all the weight isn't on one shoulder. I undid the

stitching on mine at the bottom so I can slide an umbrella in too if required. I don't use it to weigh the fish preferring a separate weigh sling.

- [5] Small chair: Well at my age you need to get off the floor! This varies from venue to venue depending upon how far I need to walk.



- [6] 35lb 8oz - one of a multiple fish catch whilst 'Office Hour Winter Carping'
- [7] The first of three thirties from Cambridgeshire in 12hrs
- [8] Another purler
- [9] Looking for clues
- [10] A real deep chunky one this time
- [11] The alternate hookbait set-ups were also Fruity Trifle - a superb coldwater bait
- [12] The Free Spirit Kayak Sling Mat carries my landing net, short session weigh sling, sticks and bars, as well as a fold up water bowl for the carp
- [13] Kayak folded: note the forecups are always to hand
- [14] Office Hour carping kit

day. So unless I have a swim I have primed a couple of days before with a little bait, I put myself somewhere I can see plenty of water before committing myself. If I don't see any clues and I don't have any idea where the fish could be, I sit myself in the most central swim I can which gives a good view of the lake with the view to upping sticks if something is spotted.

I always fish with the view to indicating line bites. I appreciate what has been concluded from the underwater tests in CARPology regarding lead movement and bite indication, but tight lines are no good for exaggerating line bites to give indication where carp are moving, so I continue to use bobbins as light as will just about combat any natural drift although I do keep paying a little line off to keep them at half mast. These drag up easily to the rod as the carp picks the line up on their body and to my mind this has got to be far less spooky to them than a tight line 'bouncing' off of them.

If liners don't occur, I try longer casts as well as casts at different angles. I find lead splash spooks the fish far less in the winter months, but having said that, I do stick with the smallest I can reach the fish with but rarely drop below 1oz unless I can 'plug it' in

silt to give a better jolt.

I rarely introduce much bait on day-only sessions whilst fishing (I do like to feed them when I leave) but do make a point of having bait PVA'd on each cast so although I'm not piling the bait in, I am leaving bits of bait/smell/taste around after every cast. This I feel is important to stop them getting paranoid about picking up single hookbaits.

I constantly swap rods around until I find just how the fish want it with rods fishing pop-ups, bottom baits, snowmen etc., as well as bright baits and dull baits, glugged and subtle. As soon as the first fish is caught I explore it further. If a fish falls to a bottom bait I will put bottom baits on them all but one of them will be on a slower sinking bottom bait and one will be on a critically-balanced bottom bait.

Rather than carry loads of different hookbait scenarios with me, I simply use part of a pop-up and part of a bottom bait. Depending upon the bait, as different mixes have different buoyancies, these maybe half a pop-up and half a boilie or a quarter of a pop-up and three-quarters boilie to alter the sink rates and to establish the most effective presentation for that water. Once it becomes clear, then I play around with bright tops to

the baits as well as dull tops. So many variations are possible from just two baits, but believe me it is well worth ringing the changes and being bothered to try.

You must look at office hour fishing as a match angler possibly does. You are not there for long, you have got to make it happen rather than wait for it to happen. Fishing days-only keeps me mentally alert, allows me to set-up with the minimum of disturbance, with the minimum clutter on the bank and what is more, it seems to me to be a more effective way of catching winter fish. I have lots of theories for this, mostly based upon not having lines draped through swims for days on end. Similarly, I have theories why I used to catch so many of my winter fish in the dark hours. Back then I would usually fish tight lines and in the depths of winter when the water is at its cleanest/clearest then I am sure a lot of daytime chances were ruined by obvious visual end tackle situations.

Next month I will go into a little more detail about some of my winter methods I use when I move from 'Office Hour Carp Fishing' to 'Part Time Carp Fishing'. Until then, may I wish you all best fishes?

Shaun Harrison

