

A man with a beard and blue eyes, wearing a red jacket, is smiling and holding a large, dark-colored perch fish. The fish has a prominent dorsal fin and a large head. The background is a field of tall, dry grass.

# *Hot spice for* **BIG PERCH**

Shaun Harrison has a life-long obsession for stripies and he now he targets specimen perch using maggots coated with an exotic blend of mixed spices

Words: Kevin Green Pictures: Mick Rouse

**T**HE first time a young Shaun Harrison saw a picture of a perch he instantly knew he had to catch one.

As an eight-year-old who was so fascinated by fish that he kept several in a small tank at home, such was the impact of seeing the sail-finned predator that the Nottinghamshire youngster had to have one for his collection.

The only problem was he couldn't buy one – no shops sold perch – so there was only one thing for it – he'd have to learn how to fish. ▶



Give your maggots a spicy flavour to attract perch



There are a four varieties of spices in the Quest Baits range of Braddock's baits. Shaun uses Xotic Spice for perch



Xotic Spice is a curry-style blend of over 20 spices that will flood the water with different tastes and smells



Add two heaped teaspoons of Xotic Spice to each pint of maggots the night before fishing. A 100g tub costs £6.99



*"The big lesson taught me that big fish were no more difficult to catch than little fish"*



Large carp waters will probably hold big perch, too



Lightweight bobbins are essential for perch

Fascinated by fish

"As a kid I was fascinated by fish; I was a bit of an anorak to be honest!" said Shaun with a smile as he filled his feeder with maggots and recast it into a huge expanse of water in Cambridgeshire.

"But it was seeing that picture of a perch that made me go fishing for the first time. I just had to have one for my tank and set out to catch one."

Being largely self-taught Shaun soon succeeded in his mission to catch fish – a gudgeon from the local River Erewash being his first success before the perch he sought also succumbed.

By then, though, the die had been cast – keeping fish in a tank was no longer the real deal. Catching them was much more fun.

These early adventures sparked a passion for fishing that burns no less brightly today and 47-year-old Shaun is involved in a new perch mission.

But all that has really changed from his early days is the size of fish he's after and his knowledge of how to catch them.

While the size of the fish he sought in the 1970s was irrelevant, his target fish these days are much bigger.

As a modern specimen hunter Shaun has recently enjoyed a day session that produced 16 perch over 1lb 11oz, an incredible haul that

included ten two-pounders and a cherry on the top weighing 3lb 3oz!

The perch spell which was cast over him 40 years ago is more powerful than ever, only this time Shaun is equipped with a bait they adore – spiced maggots.

Learning the ropes

As a youngster who had to teach himself how to fish Shaun Harrison was a sponge for every atom of angling information.

While the first three years of his fishing life saw him satisfied with catching any fish, no matter what species or size, he vividly remembers the precise event that changed his motivation forever.

Recalling the day – some 36 years ago when he was just 11 – the memory remains sharp: "I'd gone down to Beeston Weir on the River Trent and as I was fishing I saw an angler nearby land an enormous fish. Looking back it was a chub of about 2lb but it seemed enormous to me.

"Then I watched him take a minnow out of his net, put it on his hook and cast out – I used maggots to catch minnows but he was using one as bait!

"Within a few minutes he caught another massive chub and that was it. I went back to my swim, dug out a big hook I'd found on the floor the year before and tied it on my line.

"I took a minnow out of my net put it on the hook, cast out and I caught myself a chub, too. That was it, the big lesson.

"It taught me that big fish were no more difficult to catch than little fish. You just had to fish for them in a different way.

"The chub didn't want a maggot, they wanted a minnow and as soon as I changed my bait I caught a big fish. It's a lesson I've never forgotten."

And it's a tutorial that's served Shaun well. Although he's modest about his catches he has a big-fish list most anglers would envy.

But of all the species he's pursued it's been the carp that has earned him a high profile and Shaun is now one of the country's leading lights with many 30lb and 40lb fish to his credit.

In fact, such is his expertise that in 2005, after working in a tackle shop for 25 years, Shaun used his long-term experience as a bait developer for one of the UK's biggest firms, to go it alone.

He took the plunge into self-employment and set up his own bait firm, Quest Baits. Six years on he supplies 119 UK stockists and exports to 18 countries.

But while carp are his number one target he's never been a single species angler. It was while he was pursuing big carp at Cambridgeshire syndicate venue Grenvilles

that he made his latest discovery – big carp waters can also be home to giant perch.

Standing behind his two feeder rods primed for perch, Shaun explained how the revelation had come about.

"Although I come to Grenvilles to catch big carp, I enjoy catching any fish. On a lot of carp lakes I often put a rod out to see what else is in there. There's more to fishing than carp."

It was this enquiring mind that led him to the undiscovered perch this 72-acre stillwater boasts.

"I didn't know anything about the perch in here despite fishing the lake for five years. I spend a lot of time watching the water but I'd never seen any sign of a big fish. It goes to show what can be hiding right under your nose," he said.

"But a few weeks ago I was float fishing off one of the stages for 'bits' when I saw a shoal of small perch come through the clear water. The group included a fish of about 1lb 8oz – well worth catching.

"I started fishing for them on the float and had one just over 2lb which was a great result. It got me thinking about what else might be in

here and I decided to give it another go when I returned."

Next time out

Recalling the Beeston Weir lesson that to catch a big fish you often just need a different bait or to fish a different area, his second stab at the Grenvilles perch saw him armed with two new weapons.

First, he had baits that had been specially prepared for the job – red maggots coated in a potent spice powder invented by master flavourist Archie Braddock.

In the mid-1990s Archie launched a range of top quality additives that quickly gained cult status.

His potent liquid potions and powder blends had been created after years of painstaking trials during which he tested many different concoctions of attractors.

Archie argued that baits could be made that didn't just attract fish in general – his baits could be made to attract certain species.

One of his most lauded creations was a blend of more than 20 powdered spices and essential oils called Xotic Spice – a curry-like

The double hookbait



Offer up the blunt end of the maggot to the hookpoint and sink the point into the bait



Tease the grub round the bend and poke the point out of the side. Shank is covered



This leaves room for another maggot to be lightly hooked so the hookpoint is clear

Glued maggot snake



For an extra large hookbait moisten the fat end of a maggot then paint with superglue

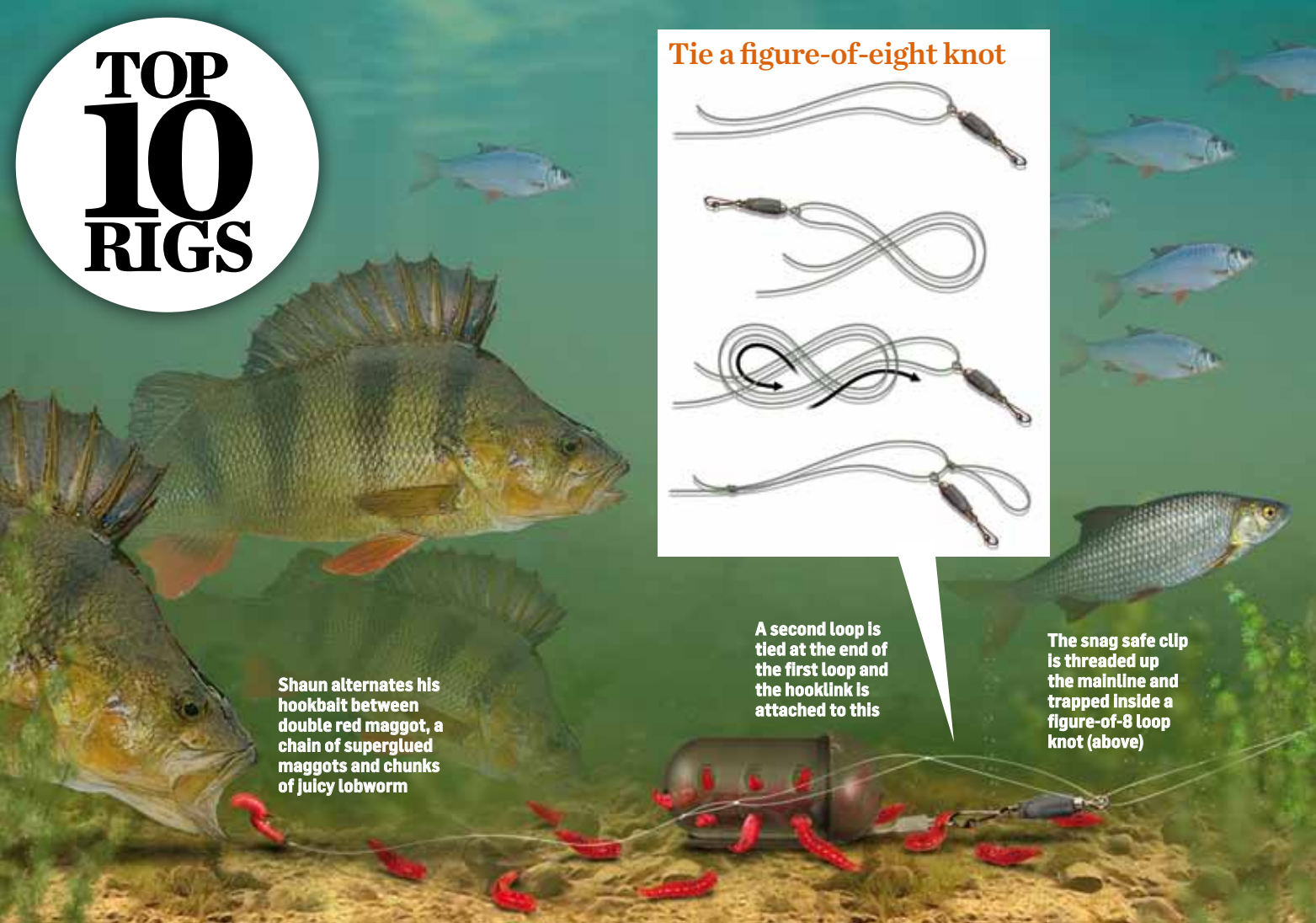


Repeat the glueing process with two more maggots to create a long string of grubs



Thread one maggot up the shank then add the string of three superglued maggots





additive on which Archie (and many other anglers) caught bundles of big perch.

But in 2003 Archie retired and although some of his baits lived on his powdered additives disappeared from shop shelves. That was until a chance meeting with Shaun saw them strike a deal to relaunch Archie's spice powder range under the Quest label (visit [www.questbaits.com](http://www.questbaits.com)).

So Shaun now had a bait with a track record for producing perch. But the second change made by the Notts specialist was to swap from float to feeder tactics.

After catching lots of small perch alongside the solitary two-pounder on his first attempt with the float, Shaun reasoned that any bigger perch would be unlikely to hang around with lots of tiddlers.

His intention was to load his feeders and hook with spiced maggots and cast 25 metres into the deep, dark water off the steep marginal slope.

Perch are famed for seeking cover or the darkness of deep water during daylight and with depths of more than 20 feet Shaun thought he'd got the location sorted. It was a

case of putting theory into practice – and was he in for a pleasant surprise!

On his first assault with spiced maggots he banked his 16-fish haul topped by his new personal best specimen of 3lb 3oz.

Boldly painted and in mint condition the fish were as good a selection of specimen perch you're ever likely to see. It was another prime example of the Beeston lesson in action.

"The catch made me wonder how many other lakes I've fished for big carp and totally missed out on a load of giant perch!

"Nobody knew these fish even existed and it certainly reminded me to explore more methods. Yes, the float caught plenty of perch, but it wasn't the way to catch the big fish. As soon as I cast 25 metres into deeper water I caught a different group of fish altogether – I never had a small one!"

### The spice is right

As this diagram (above) shows, Shaun's perch set-up is essentially very simple.

A block-end Fox feeder is threaded on the mainline and trapped in a loop of line with a figure-of-8 knot. A second knot tied in the

bottom of the first creates a stiffer boom of doubled-up line and the hooklink is also attached to this second loop.

Where Shaun's rig differs is his mode of fixing the feeder to the line.

To avoid the common problem of loop rigs where the feeder is fixed to the line and could tether a fish if the mainline snaps above the loop, Shaun slides the feeder on to an Enterprise Tackle Snag Safe Lead Clip.

Designed to open up under pressure and release the feeder, the clip is strong enough to hold the feeder for casting but will pop open with minimal force should the feeder get snagged. It's a clever way to make a loop rig a safe rig.

### For the camera

With a blanket of heavy cloud conditions for catching perch were good as we chatted about Shaun's tactics and his epic catch, made a couple of weeks before our visit.

And although the curse of the camera meant the rapid-fire results of his previous session weren't repeated this time it still didn't take him long to earn his first take – his

### How to make Shaun's feeder rig



Feeder goes on an Enterprise Tackle Snag Safe Lead Clip that releases the rig if feeder snags



Cover the clip with silicone tubing to stop the swimfeeder becoming dislodged on the cast



Feeder goes inside a figure-of-8 loop (see left) with a second loop below it to hold the hooklink



Feeder slides in the loop offering little resistance to a taking fish. A light bobbin will then rise



Maggots coated in Quest Baits Xotic Spice are packed inside a block-end feeder. Once cast out they pump out a slick of spicy flavours which perch adore. All you need to do is dust the grubs with the spice

lightweight bobbin rising smoothly to the rod as a perch made off with his bait. It was a bold bite and from the second Shaun lifted into it he knew it was a lump.

With the hard-fighting fish using the deep water to aid its escape Shaun's Free Spirit specialist rod thumped every time the fish powered into the deeps.

Line was given out and Shaun took his time to bring the fish up the marginal slope and towards the net – after waiting a while for the bite he wasn't about to lose it by rushing things.

Shaun's calm reactions to the lunges of the fish eventually saw it played to the bank where the net was waiting to scoop up its mighty frame.

On the scales the beauty weighed 3lb 6oz (see page 22), a new PB and another fin-perfect example of perch perfection.



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Large fish like this should be unhooked on a mat

It came as a complete surprise to him when he banked 10 over 2lb in a day!

With so many lakes now dominated by bivvy-dwelling carp anglers, all of whom are focused on one species with baits that are designed to discourage interest from other fish, the predatory perch are often left completely undisturbed to grow big on a prolific diet of carp fry.

If you see a lake surrounded by bivvy 'mushrooms' don't write it off. Ask yourself, could there be something else worth fishing for other than the carp that everyone seems preoccupied by?

The chances are there will be perch lurking in the shadows and if you're brave enough to cast out a maggot or worm when everyone else is throwing out boilies, then it could be you who is soon holding a fish every inch as magnificent as a 40lb carp, even if it is a tenth of the size.

