

TACTICS | Big Fish From Canals

COMMERCIALS! WHO NEEDS 'EM?

If you want to bag big fish, you'll need to head to your local commercial fishery, right? Well, not necessarily, as Leicester-based matchman **Nick Edwards** reveals – just minutes from his front door...



ANGLER PROFILE

NICK EDWARDS

Age: 40 odd!

Team: 'For hire'

Sponsors: None

Pole used: Daiwa Tournament Professional 16m

Float: 0.2g Preston Innovations Tyson 4

Line: 5.5lb Silstar Match Team fished straight through to the hook

Hook: Size 15 Kamasan B711

Shooting: Bulk of No11s with three No11 droppers spaced evenly below



VENUE FACT FILE



GRAND UNION CANAL

Location: Crow Mills, South Wigston, Leicestershire

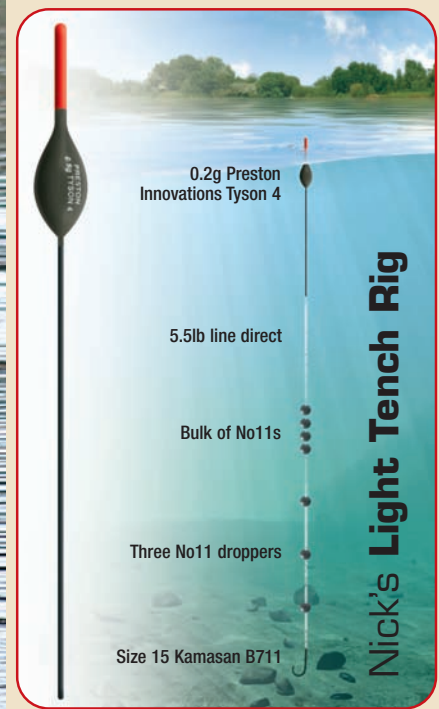
Tickets: Controlled by Wigston Angling Society. Day tickets are £3, season tickets £16

Restrictions: None that we know of!

Nearest tackle shop: All Seasons Angling on 0116 782440

Directions: Leave the M1 at junction 21 taking the A5460 to Leicester. Branch left and at the roundabout, take the first exit onto the A563 (signposted Outer Ring Road). Go through the traffic lights and at the next roundabout take the fifth exit onto the B5366 for South Wigston. In South Wigston turn left at the mini-roundabout and then turn into Landsdowne Grove. Turn left at the T-Junction and the Crow Mills carp park is on your right.

Contact: Mick Holohan on 07762 566986



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There's no doubting that over the last decade the influx of commercial fisheries has changed the way we fish. There's now a saturated market of heavy-duty pole tackle, including the poles themselves, elastics, bushes, bungs, floats, line and hooks. Even baits have been designed to help us land more big fish. It's called evolution, or should that be revolution? Whatever your thoughts, there's no doubt that commercial fisheries have had a positive impact and many of us now want to catch big fish wherever we go... and plenty of them. That's the reason thousands of us head for our local carp pond every weekend. However, as Leicester angler Nick Edwards is keen to point out, why do anglers have to visit man-made fisheries to catch a netful of big fish? Although many of us assume that the two go hand in hand, nothing could be further from the truth. It's time that we all realised that being blinkered is making us miss out on the bigger picture. Read on, because you're about to find out from Nick what you've been missing out on...

Canals have been in their own state of evolution since anglers left the towpath in favour of landscaped gravel paths. Although the bread-and-butter

HOOKING WORMS



Step ONE

Grab a lobworm and cut it in half, ready for hooking. The tail is often the best bit.



Step THREE

Thread the point down into the worm's body so that the hook sits inside.



Step TWO

Nick uses strong, wide-gaped hooks for fishing worms to cope with powerful, big fish.



Step FOUR

Once the hook is far enough down the body, push the hook point so that it's visible.

small fish that canals are renowned for are still present in huge numbers, it's the explosion of big fish like bream, tench and carp that have taken a firm hold on many stretches throughout the country. To show us the quality of sport that you can expect from canals these days, I've brought the APF cameras to a stretch called Crow Mills, in South Wigston, which is situated on the south side of Leicester. It's typical of any canal in the country; 14

metres to 15 metres wide, with reeds and



bushes lining the far bank and six feet of water in the middle of the boat track. In other words, it's tailor-made for the pole angle.

The real beauty of this stretch, though, and it has to be the same throughout the country, is that if you're a commercial-fishery 'junkie', you can turn up for a proper canal session without having to alter your kit in any way! So, without further ado, let's discover what you can expect and, more importantly, how to approach these new-look canals.

Selecting the right float is just as important on canals as it is on a commercial fishery. Carp patterns will be perfect and those pellet or meat rigs that you've got for fishing tight to islands, or in the margins of your local carp pool, will be spot on. Floats need to be robust and capable of presenting big baits overdepth. As long as they meet these criteria they will be perfect. Carbon or fibre-stemmed patterns, with either a thick plastic or cane bristle, are what you need and for fishing on top of the shelf a 4x14 is the largest that you'll need.

Because you're fishing close to snags, there's every chance that your float will be in them at some point. If it isn't up to the job, it will get smashed to pieces! I've two rigs assembled today and both feature 0.2g Preston carp floats, which

This tench couldn't resist the allure of a lobworm.

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are as durable as they come. One rig is a light set-up (5.5lb Silstar direct to the hook) for fishing pellets and corn and the other is for fishing the worm with 0.16mm line straight through to a size 12 hook.

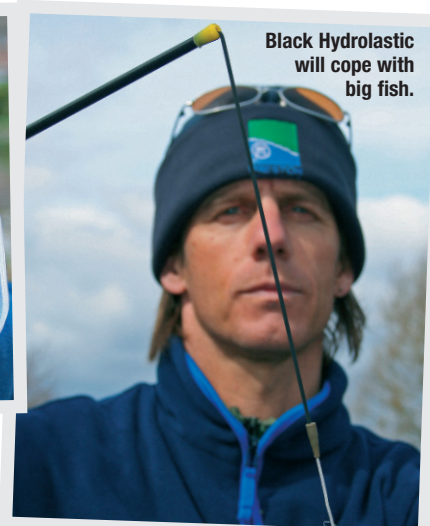
Fishing so close to snags, there's really no point messing around with elastics that are too light. You have to be in control of a fish the moment it's hooked; otherwise you can kiss the fish and your rig goodbye! I don't mess around where elastics are concerned in this type of swim. For fishing next to the sunken bush I'm using black Hydrolastic, which will give me the control and power needed to pull tench away from the snags. Although they can go to 5lb plus along this stretch, they average 3lb and a fish of that size still has the power to snag you up within seconds. Another trick of mine is to set the rig so that I'm only fishing an inch or two overdepth. This helps me to detect bites quicker than when fishing further overdepth, which delays bite registration.

On my other rig, which is for use in my



back-up swim, I'm using grey Hydrolastic. This is lighter than the black but it matches my lighter rig and still has the power to pull tench away from the reed bed.

Shooting patterns are simple and both rigs feature a bulk of No11s with three No11 droppers below. You have to use a little common sense when it comes to baits. Pellets and meat may well dominate catches on your local carp pool, and you might even catch loads of tench on them,



but canal fish are different. On commercial fisheries, many of the fish have been bred in stock ponds and have been reared on pellets. Once they're introduced into the fishery, meat and pellets form a big part of their diet. The fish are wild on canals, so, for best results, you need to use more natural baits like worms, casters and

WHERE TO FISH?

Area 2

Bottom Of The Far Shelf

This is similar to area one but this is the spot where the canal begins to slope upwards towards the far bank. It's a great area for big fish and you can expect to catch more big fish here. Bream and skimmers, in particular, like this area and, if boat traffic isn't too heavy, they will really get their heads down in this deep water.

Area 3

The Far Shelf

This is where those lumps are most likely to show up. The far bank offers a variety of big-fish sanctuaries and cover, and reed beds, overhanging branches and lily pads are just the features you're looking for. This is where you're most likely to find big tench, carp, bream, perch and roach.

I've decided to concentrate on fishing on top of the far shelf. I'm after tench and I know that they like to live in the cover so I need to fish close to the snags to catch them. Rather than feeding a single swim, I'm going to feed one in front of me, next to the sunken branches, and a second to my left in front the reed bed. Feeding two areas will give me the opportunity to alternate swims, which is essential when your main catching area needs to be rested.

Area 1

Bottom Of The Near Shelf

Almost all canals have a boat channel down the middle, where the water is at its deepest. This slopes up as it nears the near and far banks and the area where it starts to shallow is great for targeting fish. The base of the near shelf is typically found at four or five metres, so you need to plumb around carefully until you find where the depth levels off. Here, you can expect to catch skimmers, perch, roach and, occasionally, bigger fish such as tench, carp and bream.

maggots. That's not to say that baits such as pellets won't work. I always have baits like pellets and corn with me for use on the hook. However, feeding these baits isn't productive, although they can work wonders when used as changed baits and fished on the hook over the top of the natural feed.

This could be different on heavily fished stretches where the fish have become used to artificial baits and now recognise them as part of their diet. This is where you have to do your homework but as a general rule, natural offerings are a much safer bet.

I'm feeding my main line with chopped lobworms, casters and red maggots. Chopped worm is arguably 'the' bait for targeting big fish on canals and its real advantage is that it isn't selective – all species are attracted to it. Casters are excellent for holding fish in the swim and I also like to feed a few red maggots, which will start to bury themselves in the silt and encourage the fish to have a good root around for food.

“CUPPING IN ALL YOUR FEED IS CRUCIAL, SO DON'T ENTERTAIN INTRODUCING IT IN ANY OTHER WAY.”

My back-up swim is going to be mainly fed with sweetcorn and a mix of crushed hemp. This is another little trick of mine and the crushed hemp has been soaked overnight in the water used to cook hempseed. The following morning, you should have a milky, hemp soup that produces an awesome cloud in the water and is a brilliant fish attractor.

It almost goes without saying, but cupping in all your feed is crucial, so don't even entertain the thought of introducing it in any other way!

It's much easier to experiment with hook baits because, unlike loose feed, you can take out what you put in. It's always a good idea to bring a good selection with you and I'm having success using Dynamite Baits' Soft Hooker Pellets fished over the top of the chopped worm. However, I've also tried feeding pellets on this canal, without much success!

Other hookers include sweetcorn, casters and maggots, but I'm keen to point out that one hook bait eclipses everything else – half a lobworm! This bait has accounted for, perhaps, more than 80 per cent of the tench I've caught here. It will catch you fish when everything else has

failed, but you have to hook them correctly or you'll miss too many bites. So, that's the theory out of the way but how has it all turned out? One look at the catch shot will tell you that canals are back with a bang. In just four hours fishing, I've landed 10 tench – including three on 10mm Soft Hooker Pellets!

It's been a brilliant session, although I had to transform my fishless back-up swim into a second chopped-worm swim to keep the fish coming. The ploy worked a

treat and I've landed four tench from this area during the last hour to boost the bag from impressive to awesome... even if I do say so myself!

With rigs and tackle normally associated with commercial venues, it's now possible to get among the big fish on canals.

Somehow, a big bag of 'wild' fish feels all the more sweeter. Why don't you give it a go? ”

Howzat! Ten big tench from a canal on commercial tactics.

