

GOLD AND GREEN – CLOSE SEASON CRUCIANS AND TENCH

PART ONE – APRIL 2008 – EARLY SIGNS OF ADDICTION

*"For anyone that has possibly dropped off the planet, Marsh Farm is and has been for the last few years **the** place to be if you really, absolutely, positively and with a loaded gun to your head need to break the 3lb Crucian barrier."*

So wrote Lee Swords in his article last year.

Well I hadn't dropped off the planet, or at least not the planet I was on, but for some unknown reason, I had never even seen the place, let alone fish it, and it was only 18 miles away from where I live! But my enforced separation from the Dorset Stour chub and barbel got me thinking about alternative challenges. I'd fished the Yateley Summer Pit in the past and had been fortunate to net crucians to 3lb+ but the thought of finding some more of these bars of gold was more than enough encouragement to at least check the place out. The initial early April visit resulted in an addiction which saw me return on a very regular basis for the next two months or so. Here's the story of my efforts.

An Interesting Start

I did wonder what I was doing as I walked the short distance from the car park to Harris Lake. It was quite obvious I was the only one there; the crisp white grass was untouched as I surveyed the lake for the first time. Perhaps -3C and a heavy frost are not really the ideal conditions for my intended quarry but the sight of a rolling fish was more than enough to boost the flagging enthusiasm. Having previously re-read Lee's article several times, I settled for a swim half way down the lake and set up a short pole intending to fish the margin shelf. A very fine tipped pole float was paired with #6 hollow elastic and #22 hook to .08 with red maggot as bait. Concentration was good as I stared at the dotted down float but finally flagged after about three hours! Not a bite or at least nothing I recognized as a bite. Although the frost had melted away, I needed to get the circulation going again, so wandered back to the on-site tackle shop/canteen for some food and proper hot coffee rather than the tepid stuff from my flask.

Suitably recharged and with a bit of new information – *"try a bit further out at about 8mtrs"* – I connected up a couple more sections and potted in a small amount of maggot. The float shot under! It was a small but perfectly formed rudd but it was a fish! Quite a few rudd and roach to about 12oz then followed at regular intervals, I was warming up and enjoying the fishing. Then as the float dipped and settled a little lower, I lifted into what was an altogether bigger fish. The elastic started to stretch alarmingly and I was frantically trying to find some more pole sections when the whole lot came whizzing back! There are no common or mirror carp in Harris Lake, or at least very few, so I assumed it was a tench. Not too long after this episode I did connect with another tench but this time the elastic did its job as the 2lber slid into the net. Three more tench up to about 3lbs followed to round off a surprisingly good day.

Hailstones, Rain and Some Gold

I was back the following week and although the temperature was rising, the gusting easterly winds were biting cold. The first signs of Spring were trying their best but rain showers and sudden deluges of hailstones all conspired to make it difficult.

In three hours I had five bites and missed them all! I connected with the next one but once again the elastic stretched alarmingly and the hook pulled. The very next "cast" produced a definite dip which I connected with. Again I thought it was a tench but this time the elastic stopped and a golden flank rolled across the surface. My first Marsh Farm crucian weighed in at 2lbs 04oz. I fished on for a few more hours and did manage to connect with two more bites which turned out to be a tench of about 1lb and another "bar of gold" weighing 2lbs 01oz. A very pleasing result in what sometimes felt like mid winter conditions.

Three days later I was back in the same area and although there was a slight frost, it turned out to be a bright sunny day; I even took my coat off! I scaled up the gear to #8 elastic and #20 hook to .09! Mind you I still struggled to hit the first few bites but eventually connected with some small tench and another crucian which turned out to be a twin of the 2lbs 04oz. As the afternoon progressed the tench decided they were keen to feed and I had a steady run of fish to just short of 5lb, great fun on the light pole gear. I then lifted into a "plodder" of a fish; it didn't go too far but managed a very detailed survey of that corner of the lake. After several attempts I put the net under what was, at 7lbs 03oz, my second heaviest tench and certainly the biggest I'd ever had on the pole. A short while later, a savage bite stretched the elastic before I could react, and resulted in what was obviously another tench. So the 2lbs 06oz crucian that came to the net was a very pleasant surprise! Who says crucians are shy biting fish?

I was well pleased with my efforts but then the guy in the next swim called over with a big grin on his face. The crucian that lay in his net was something else! It went 3lb 10oz, caught on caster, and gave me a glimpse of what the true potential of this place is! What's it going to be like when it warms up?

Almost But Not Quite

Although it was still April, the weather was improving, the grass was growing and the bankside "flags" were beginning to show some bright yellow. Things were definitely looking up and then it snowed! Best laid plans and all that! Still it didn't last long and I returned for another midweek session. Ignoring the blast of snow, the spring like weather had obviously attracted a lot more crucian hunters as the place was buzzing with activity.

I settled into a new area and, learning from the previous trip, was armed with a pint of caster and some hemp. I scaled up once more to a #18 hook to .09 paired with a delicate float that just yelled "*buy me*" as I waited to be served in the shop. Maybe it was the increased bankside activity but the fishing was tough. I had a few delicate lifts and dips on the float and the occasional sail away but couldn't hit any of them. This frustration carried on for most of the afternoon until I had a 15 minute spell when I connected with three in a row! Two 3lb tench were very welcome but sandwiched between them was a big crucian that looked every ounce a 3lber. It was not to be but I was really pleased as

the scales showed 2lb 15oz. No further bites were forthcoming but I ventured home via the Off License and Chinese Takeaway a very contented man.

April Was Finally On The Way Out

I got there early on the Saturday of the last weekend in April and was walking down the far bank of Harris Lake looking for a swim, it was pretty hectic. Perhaps “The Circus” hadn’t yet arrived but plenty of people were looking for those crucians and hopefully taking advantage of the better weather. I eventually settled in a likely spot and resolved to concentrate hard and fish positively. Five hours and two bites later I and those all around were fishless! Most had given up and gone home but I just conceded defeat and moved into the adjacent Richardson Lake which, allegedly, has a larger head of fish and is “easier”. Well it was quite easy as I had fun with small tench and crucians on punched meat. But after an hour or so I suddenly decided to up sticks and move the 30 yards or so back to Harris Lake.

Reinstated in a different swim in what was now a pretty much deserted lake, I set up again and started fishing seriously at about 5pm. Within 10 minutes I had a 4lb tench on double caster fished very close in just over what passed for a marginal shelf. That one was followed by several others averaging about 3lbs and as the evening progressed I had them queuing up for their evening snack. Whilst these tench were very enjoyable, it was clear they were there in big numbers and if there were any crucians about, they weren’t getting a look in! The somewhat cavalier approach I had adopted was given a big shock when I lifted into yet another tench, but not “just another tench”! This was something all together far heavier and lumbered about the swim at quite a sedate pace but never seemingly realizing it was attached to my elastic. It eventually rolled a couple of times at which point I got somewhat excited as I had never seen a tench of these proportions close up. I even convinced myself it may be a “double” and then really started to worry that it was going to wake up at any second. However it just continued to sort of wallow around and occasionally come into netting range. On one of its passes, I managed to get most of it in my pan net, drop the pole and grab the net with both hands. As I slipped the weigh sling around her, I was still convinced she exceeded 10lbs. But at 9lb 05oz I had that “Mick Brown Look” on my face as I just stared at my new pb. Not bad on the pole!

I did carry on fishing but a short while later I snapped the float in half trying to clear the bits of slime off the hook length and decided enough was enough and packed up. A really odd day with an incredible ending!

I hadn’t planned to fish both days of the weekend but after such an evening I somehow managed to persuade my wife that I absolutely, positively and with a loaded gun to my head had to go again on Sunday. I’ve a feeling that may cost me something later in the year!

Sunday promised to be another spring like day as I pulled into the car park. Bright sunny skies but hopefully the reasonably strong winds would keep the threat of showers at bay.

I was surprised to get a wide choice of swims as only a few anglers were to be found around the lake, perhaps word of yesterday's tough results had put them off.

I ended up a couple of swims away from the previous evenings exploits and settled in expecting a tough start but more than happy to stick around until later. I was therefore pleasantly surprised to find myself attached to a good tench within 20 minutes. This early success was followed at regular intervals throughout the late morning and afternoon by a succession of good quality tench, the like of which I've not had before. By 6pm I had had 14 tench with the best two going 6lbs 13oz and 7lbs 09oz. With tench of this quality and condition I temporarily forget about the crucians and was thoroughly enjoying my best ever catch of these superb fish. The potential for even more sport as the evening approached heightened my anticipation but the swim just died and no further fish or bites were forthcoming. Almost the complete opposite of the previous day!

Addiction Confirmed

So a full month had passed and I fished nowhere else other than Marsh Farm! I had limited but pleasing success with the crucians but that was more than compensated by the stunning tench. What's more, I was looking forward to the next month of better weather, improving conditions and trying to apply my new found knowledge of the venue to those challenging crucians. It was confirmed, I was addicted!

In Part Two, hopefully the crucians will oblige.