

TACTICS | PRE-BAITING IS THE WAY TO GET ROACH SHOALS FEEDING

AND REGULAR LOOSE OFFERINGS WILL HOLD THEM

A CATCH THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

Tackle giant Peter Drennan visits roach fishing heaven

“While we enjoyed our pub grub, the roach gorged even more



MARTIN BOWLER

BRITAIN'S BEST BIG-FISH ANGLER

We all have our favourite species and Peter Drennan's was obvious, even though I had never asked him. The word 'roach' put a twinkle in his eye and a smile across his face – but his expression changed to one etched in concentration as he kept vigil over the tip of a waggler.

Talking and dreaming about roach is all well and good, but nothing beats catching them, and today they were being particularly obliging.

Spread far and wide throughout the British Isles, *Rutilus rutilus* has captured the imagination of generations of anglers all hoping to find the Holy Grail of roach – a specimen of 2lb or more, still the benchmark even today.

Catching them has never been easy, and here I quote legendary angler Captain LA Parker: “I have no hesitation whatever in saying that a good roach fisherman is as good as, if not better, than a good salmon or trout fisherman.”

Whether Peter and

I fall into this category is not for me to say, but as each bar of silver found its way into the palms of our hands, brushing our skin with its distinctive smelling mucus, we seemed to be doing a pretty good job at fooling our quarry into believing so!

The adventure had begun the evening before, with our first roach. But, more importantly, we had prepared our swims for the following morning. Peter chose a groundbait bombardment to grab their attention, while I called on a more modern approach with Richworth's KG1 pellets and a Spomb.

I doubt it mattered to the fish as long as food was being served! By the time we headed to the local pub for dinner and a beer we concluded that the area was looking decidedly 'roachy', given the number of greenish backs breaking the surface. So while we enjoyed our lamb shank and fish and chips, the roach gorged even more. A few hours' good sleep would be hard to come



It was a struggle to lift the bulging net.

by, given the prospects ahead.

It seemed that my head had only just touched the pillow when the alarm drew me back to reality and away from the dream of the record roach I had just caught! An over-eager setting of the clock meant it was still dark, but by the time the kettle had boiled and we had each drunk a cup of black coffee to sharpen our focus, a misty dawn was breaking.

Twisting and moving like ghosts of anglers past in the faint dawn breeze, the mist added further to the atmosphere, and although our swims were still 200 yards away, the surface was already being ringed by priming fish – these roach were no figments of our imagination.

We had left our made-up rods in situ, deep in the countryside, confident they would remain unmolested, so I had little more to do than wipe the light frost from my seatbox lid and remove the hook from the rod's

bottom eye to start fishing.

My hookbait, a single kernel of corn with its sickly-sweet aroma, was enhanced by a classic fruit and shellfish flavour (KG1), but before I made a cast, I catapulted out a pouchful of pellets, the first of many. The free food hadn't reached the bottom when the loaded waggler dipped, pulling the 3lb Supplex mainline down with it.

Weight around the base of the float stem enabled it to be cast the required distance with ease – in fact, it landed 10 yards further out, but this was all part of the cunning plan.

A spin of the reel handle saw the monofilament nicely sunk and the sweetcorn drawn into position. Now

the series of No6 shot could begin to work, allowing the rig to settle nicely on the weed and present the baited wide-gape hook to any passing mouths.

I missed that first bite, but next time the hook went home and the rod jagged in characteristic fashion. To my right, Peter was into a fish as well.

Rhythmic gymnastics is an Olympic sport, rhythmic roach catching is not, but I know which I would rather win a gold medal at...or should that be silver? We both followed the same routine – feed, cast, catch...feed, cast, catch. That was until the bend in my IM9 rod put an end to the repetitive sequence. This was no small roach, and even when I began to regain line I was fearful I should lose my opponent.

As the bearer of shimmering silver scales rose towards the surface, I did my best not to fall at the final hurdle. At last, lying there inside the green mesh of the landing net, was a roach of over 2lb – a benchmark fish in anyone's season.

It was a magnificent creature, broad and deep with the archetypal blue shimmer to every inch of its body set off against ruby-red fins. It is not hard to see why any angler worth his salt would wish for such a prize.

Peter and I momentarily paused to discuss its beauty, but the shoal still in front of us didn't want us to stop – these roach were hungry for more.

We were only too happy to oblige, but by lunchtime even we had to declare enough was enough. You know you've had a good day when you struggle to lift the keepnet, and from the strained look on our faces as we did so it was a safe bet to say we'd had a fantastic one.

MARTIN BOWLER'S STILLWATER ROACH TIPS

1 When floatfishing, use crystal wagglers that allow you to alter the colour of the tips. This helps to cope with different light conditions.

2 With big baits like sweetcorn use wide-gape

hooks to prevent missed bites.

3 Remember, when fishing for roach the key to feeding is little and often.

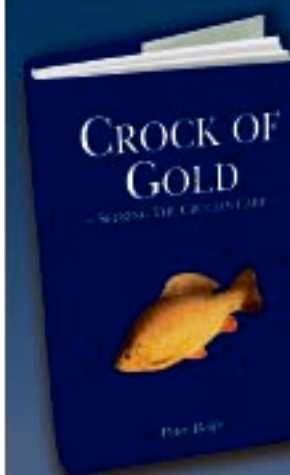
4 Pre-baiting the night before is very often a shortcut to success with roach.

5 When floatfishing, get yourself organised and have every item of tackle to hand, including a landing net. This will maximise your catch rate.



A netful of prime roach for Peter Drennan and me.

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