



ALL BY MYSELF

Shaun Harrison likes his winter carping. That's when he can locate fish without other anglers getting in the way

Winter carp fishing... what's the point in freezing your bits off and catching nothing? Well, I absolutely love it! In fact I think I prefer it to summer fishing, although to be fair both elements have their own special attraction.

It's the rawness of winter fishing that appeals to me. There are also fewer anglers out on the bank, so I am able to focus totally on locating and catching the carp. This is much better than turning up on the bank in the hope of being able to get into a swim holding a few fish, as is often the case during the warmer months.

Winter certainly gives you the greatest opportunity to pit yourself against the carp, not against other anglers. Think about it - most of your local carp lakes will see little pressure, and all your hard work is unlikely to be interrupted by another angler.

On reflection, perhaps I shouldn't be writing this and giving advice on how to put a big ➔



Read the water – here there's weed on the bottom, a possible hot swim.



winter fish on the bank – after all, I've got no competition at the moment.

My own winter fishing goes back a long way, in fact the first carp I ever caught was in the snow in 1977. Over the years I have read a mountain on the subject of catching winter carp and, if I am honest, a lot of what I read didn't really fit in with my own experiences for a very long while. It was as if someone wrote something, someone else repeated it elsewhere and all of a sudden it became the way to do it. You know the score.

It would often make me smile when winter articles were submitted with pictures of carp with leaves on the trees in the background.

Now I want to concentrate on a no-nonsense approach to winter fishing which will put carp on the bank for you without it becoming a massive ordeal. First and foremost, by fishing many different waters during the winter I've found shallower areas with little in the way of weed. These will always produce far more fish than deep or weedy waters – not that carp won't feed just as much in both types of swim, but the shallower waters are always far more predictable and easier to read.

Try and avoid water you don't

know and stick to those that you do, places you have fished at other times of the year where you have a basic understanding of the fish.

I have moved on to new waters in the winter in the past and have usually found it pretty hard going. The second winter, after I have gained a bit more knowledge about the place, is always far more productive.

Best of all, try and keep your winter fishing local. This way you can visit regularly even when you're not fishing and generally

keep in tune with how much it is being fished and how much bait is going in.

If a particular angler is doing well and putting bait in too it will be obvious where they are catching, from the almost guaranteed coot and tuftie activity in the area the following day. Take advantage and find why they are catching there. Is it on silt, is it on gravel, is the water deeper or shallower?

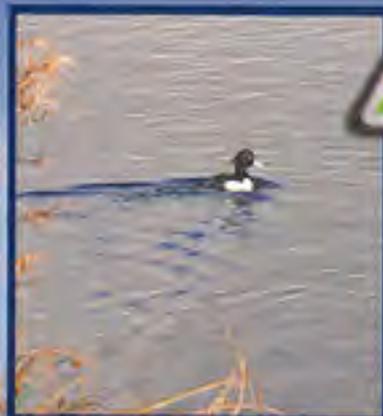
There will be so many questions answered simply by watching the

A double hit of Trent commons in sub-Arctic weather. Result!





**SHAUN'S
QUICK TIP**



Waterfowl and carp eat the same thing, so watch for diving birds – they can pinpoint areas of natural food where the carp will be.



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THE LAKE WHICH
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OTHERS TURN OUT TO BE
**SHELTERED SUN
TRAPS**



bird life. Don't move straight into their swim and prevent them from enjoying what they have found and created. Go find yourself a similar scenario elsewhere on the lake. There will be more than one.

One of the most important things in winter carp fishing is to find out when they are willing to feed. Year after year, on water after water, I have come to the conclusion that most sensibly stocked carp lakes (heavily stocked waters are a different matter as they are generally full of fish which are permanently hungry) will offer two good chances of catching a fish in any 24-hour period, and these times will be the same, week in and week out. Find when these feeding spells are likely to be and you have partly cracked it.

Definitely the most productive and consistent winter carp fishing I have enjoyed has involved fishing very short sessions of just a few hours, fishing when the fish are most likely to feed and resting the swim totally from lines when they are not.

The first question I ever ask anyone who is telling me about what they have caught is 'what time did you catch?' I have absolutely no interest in the rig or the bait – but finding out when fish are caught can totally transform a winter.

Winter fishing doesn't necessarily mean long cold and dark hours sat in a bivvy waiting for it to happen. A lot of my fishing at this time of year is conducted



During the colder months it is important to pinpoint feeding times, which often follow a pattern. To do this, keep accurate notes of not only your own catches, but those of other anglers.



travelling very light with just a couple of rods, a small rucksack and a chair, while watching the water for any possible clues from the fish or birds. Remember that most water birds feed on the same things as the carp. The birds can show you a lot of natural food harbours which the carp are sure to visit too. Plus, the carp do like to eat what comes out of the birds! So, where the birds are sat, the carp will be close.

If you are really lucky you may find a water with no-one else fishing it. This is when you are going to have to use a little more watercraft in tracking down the quarry.

Carp, like us, prefer to be warm than cold. If I have nothing else to work on I will start by studying the sun's movement through the day.

Just as here on dry land there will be areas of the lake which hardly ever get any sunlight, whereas others get lots.

You have seen it before in a field, which will be partly

frozen along one side all day whereas the other side is nicely thawed. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realise one side is warmer than the other. Similarly, one particular corner of a lake will be warmer than the rest if there is a fence, a thick hedgerow or whatever to bounce the warmth

back. Also, dark ground (weed and silt) will always be warmer than light ground (stones, gravel and pale clay).

Concentrate on just the warmer areas of the lake and suddenly you can discount a big area of water, making it more feasible to find a few fish.

I have had countless carp from the tiniest of features during the winter simply because I realised there was a particularly warm spot where the sun shone for most of the day. At this point, remember that the midday sun onwards is always the warmest in the winter.

Early-morning sun has very limited warmth.

Look for shallow areas where what little warmth there may be is bounced back off old reeds or even tufts of marsh grass. I caught a lot of fish one winter from next to a tuft of marsh grass. This was obviously a spot which the carp visited on a regular basis. **CARP**

Dark ground will always be warmer than light ground



Catching carp in winter can be seen as solving all the clues to a puzzle.