

Back to basics for winter mixed bags

Mat Linforth takes inspiration from his formative fishing years to keep the bites coming from a range of species in winter

Words & Photography Tony Grigorjevs

A NGLING innovation down the years has led to countless new tactics being added to our armouries but, sometimes, returning to the simplest forms of fishing can be the best recipe for success.

Think back to your early encounters on the bank and there's a good chance that the combination of a tub of maggots and a (badly) under-shotted float dropped into the margins was the catalyst for getting you

hooked permanently on this sport of ours.

No doubt there would have been numerous flaws with the way you set out your stall back then, but it did the job and helped you to enjoy the thrill of a few bites.

Keen silverfish angler Mat Linforth still takes inspiration from his first-ever sessions and believes that a pint of casters and a short pole are often all you need to put together a bustling winter netful. ►

Mat has obviously refined his approach somewhat over the years, but sticks to the basic principle of trickling a few morsels of bait over the top of a float to get a bite from anything that swims.

"Tackle shops are packed with all manner of different glugs, additives and groundbait mixes, but it's sometimes best to ignore these completely and keep things as simple as possible," he explained.

"There's no doubt that this is the trickiest time of year on the bank, and I want to use an approach that will appeal to everything from hand-sized silvers right through to the odd bonus big fish.

"Fish close to marginal cover with casters and you'll be amazed at what you can catch in just a few hours."

Select a spot

Fish of all species are willing to come close to the bank in summer when they have the cover of murky water surrounding them, but it is a

different ball game when it's gin-clear.

Cover is absolutely essential, as is a reasonable depth of water to help the fish to feel comfortable.

"You need to choose a swim with plenty of reeds, brambles or overhanging trees that will block out some of the natural light and help cast a bit of a shadow over the area. The fish will then feel more secure, and won't be as spooked by any goings-on above the surface," he added.

"Ideally, you'll need to find at least 2ft 6ins-3ft of water, and if you have deep margins that go over 4ft, then all the better."

A peg where the cover is approximately a top kit and two sections away from where you're sat is ideal, according to Mat, as the commotion caused when playing fish won't put the rest of the stocks on edge.

Feed it frugally

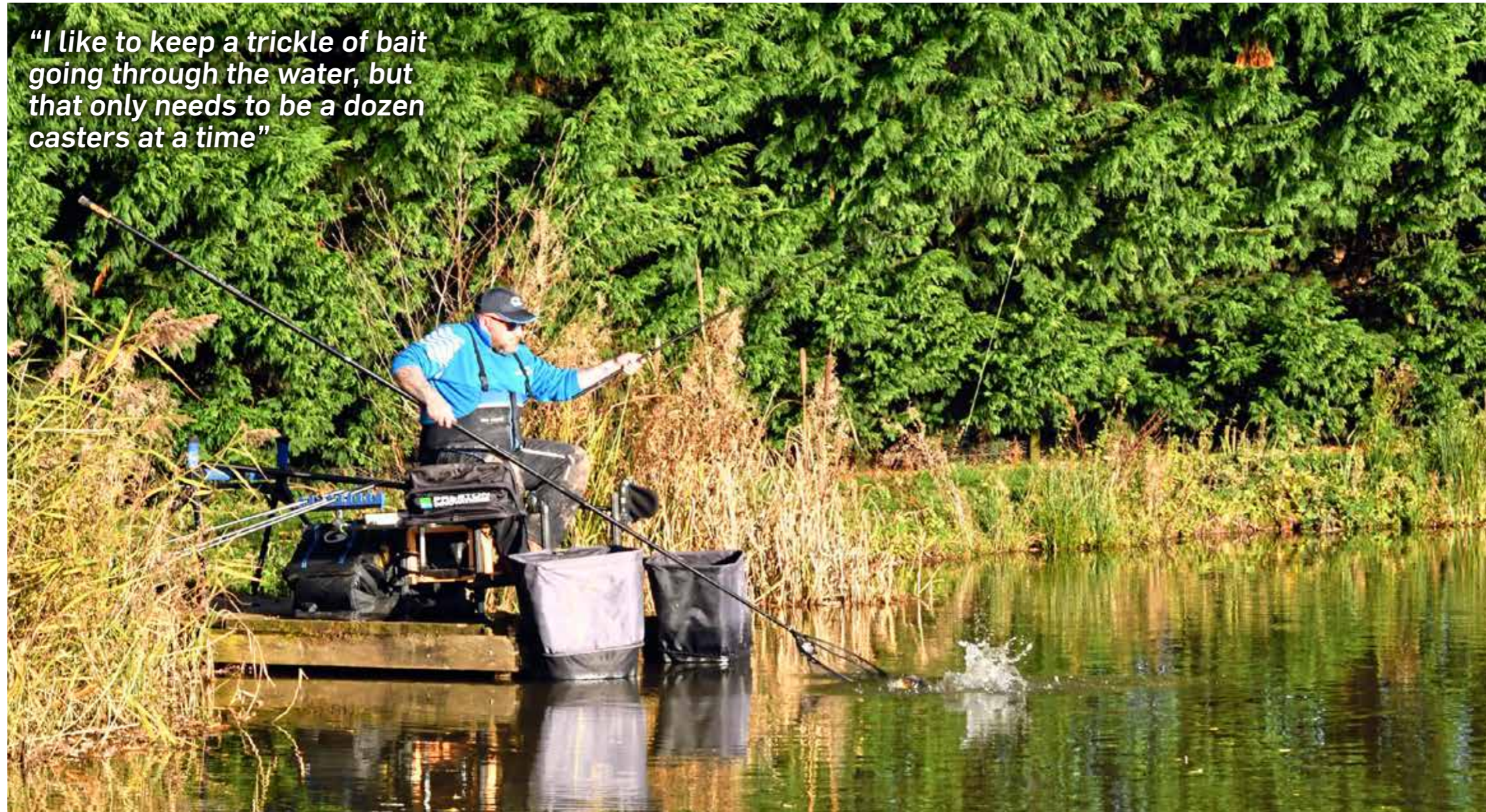
There's no need for pole cups or a catapult with this style of fishing, as all the loosefeed

Casters are the ideal bait for picking out bigger roach



A slimline float with a carbon stem will help you spot every bite

"I like to keep a trickle of bait going through the water, but that only needs to be a dozen casters at a time"



TOP TIP

USING smaller shot will allow the hookbait to fall at a very slow pace. Spreading them out reduces the weight in any single area of the rig, providing the natural presentation that is key to fooling a better stamp of fish. Use No11s with a 0.1g or 0.2g float, stepping up to No10s when a 0.3g or 0.4g float is in use

goes in by hand, with little-and-often being the name of the game.

"I like to keep a trickle of bait going through the water, but that only needs to be a dozen casters at a time," said Mat.

"That quantity goes in every couple of minutes, and I lay my rig in immediately after feeding so that my hookbait is sinking with the freebies," said Mat. "A lot of the bites happen either on the drop or just as the float has settled. The fish watch the bait fall in the clear water before they pounce."

Having shot strung through the bottom half of the rig helps to provide this natural-looking fall that serves to blend the hookbait in with the loosefeed. Mat will also have at least 2ft of line between his pole tip and float. This allows him to keep the tip away from the target zone, so the fish don't get alarmed by seeing it waving about above their heads.

A No8 backshot is pinched halfway down that length of line. This maintains tension and reduces the chances of missing the lightning-fast bites that species such as roach are renowned for. ►



Feeding little and often is the key to getting a range of species competing in the margins

Swim building

A venue that's home to a wide range of species is best for this style of winter fishing. That way, if one species is not in the mood to feed, for whatever reason, the chances are that there'll be another that's willing to get stuck in.

Cleobury Mortimer's Woodside Fishery fits the bill perfectly, and Mat set his stall out on the Woodside Pool to give a demonstration of his tactics for the IYCF cameras.

It was refreshing to see such a simple set-up on show, with just a couple of top kits rigged up and a single tub of bait on his side tray.

With two sections of pole and the top kit ready, he shipped a carbon stemmed, slimline float out to his left before trickling a few casters in over the top.

"I'll build it up slowly, as having a big bed of bait on the bottom can unsettle the fish. It's the movement of the bait sinking that sparks the reaction, not the amount in the swim."

Casters were trickled in every couple of minutes, and it didn't take long for a tiny perch to signal the start of the action.

"I don't mind catching fish like this at the beginning, as any activity in the peg is bound to draw others in," Mat said.

"It's usually a case of the stamp getting better as the session progresses.

"Whenever the bites dry up a little, stick with your feeding pattern and don't be tempted to try somewhere else."

As predicted, the stamp did improve, with roach and perch in the 4oz-8oz bracket coming frequently, plus the odd hybrid and skimmer thrown in for good measure.

Mat's final hour turned out to be a productive one, and a perch nudging the 2lb mark was beaten before a couple of carp muscled in as the last rays of sunlight penetrated the surface. The air temperature may have been chilly, but Mat barely noticed as he was kept busy from start to finish.

"Anglers can be guilty of over-complicating things but today is proof that the simplest ways of fishing can still sometimes be the most effective," he said.

"Take inspiration from where your angling journey started, fine-tune a few things, and you'll wonder why you ever moved away from fishing like that in the first place!"

IYCF



The stamp of fish got noticeably bigger as the session progressed

Mat's tackle

ELASTIC Grade 4-6 Garbolino Fighter Hi-Stretch

MAINLINE 0.18mm Garbolino Super Soft

FLOAT 0.3g Garbolino DC C32

HOOKLENGTH 0.10mm Garbolino Super Soft

HOOK Size 17 Kamasan B711

Roach, perch, skimmers and carp all fell for Mat's approach