

managed to finally connect with the fish. At first I thought I was into another double as the fish didn't feel heavy, but it soon woke up and had a few runs in the margins before succumbing to the net. Deception two: when lifting the net I couldn't believe the weight of this fish; it really didn't feel that big when playing it, but on the unhooking mat it was massive. I started to shake as I lifted the scales and the dial spun around twice and settled on 38 1/4 lb. Unreal again – I had broken my PB with a fantastic fish. What a wake-up call!

After releasing the fish back to its home, I took a few minutes to compose myself, by which I mean a bacon sandwich with brown sauce thanks to Mike's wife. I recast the rod to the same area and re-baited the pellet rod. The day was somewhat quiet, with only a few signs of activity, but it was exceptionally hot at around 25-26c. Still, you would expect the catfish to feed like crazy in that sort of weather. Deception three: the fish don't always play by the book.

The evening drew ever closer and I was starting to feel a little disheartened. Even Mike said that it was unusual, but you have to stay optimistic if nothing else and, before I knew it, the crab pellets had worked and the rod was away. It was only small at 8lb, but I was happy to see a fish on the bank again.

The rod was re-cast to the same spot and, before I had time to set the indicator, the reel screamed into life again. This was a more dogged fight, with the fish pulling one minute and me reeling the next. In the net she went and, just shy of 20lb, I was an even happier bunny.

“My scales only go to 40lb, so trying to weigh her on them was pointless”

I settled down for dinner and by now I was really tired, but there's no rest for the wicked as the night produced run after run of double-figure catfish. After the fourth fish of the night, I checked my worm box only to discover I had one lobworm left, so out it went, but I wasn't hopeful of much with just the one worm. Deception four: I managed at least a couple of hours' sleep before my lobworm rod sprung into life and, with a firm strike, the drag started to

scream off. What with me only having one worm on, I was half expecting a small fish, but 30 minutes into the fight I started to think otherwise, as the fish kept kiting up and down, trying its best to smash me up. However, she eventually gave up gracefully and, peering into the net, I couldn't believe what I was looking at. My scales only go to 40lb, so trying to weigh her on them was pointless as she bottomed them out. Luckily, Gary and Gary (two anglers I met that night) kindly allowed me to use their scales, so up she went – the scales signalled 42 1/2 lb. Unbelievable! The last cast on the final worm had smashed my PB for the third time and what a fish it was; beautiful is not normally a word associated with catfish, but looking at its marbled effect and long body made it such a magnificent fish. After slipping her back it was time for me to pack up and go home, and boy, did I need a bath?!

In conclusion, deception can be a good thing. Small waters can contain big fish, but be careful when playing what you think is a small fish as it may not be as small as you think! Fish don't read books, so don't always expect them to play by the rules and, of course, you don't always need a big bait to catch a big fish. Remember, a little deception adds a touch of mystery to an already exciting and fascinating hobby. Until the next time, tight lines and best fishes.

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My biggest catfish to date at 42½lb – the third time I beat my PB in one session



Right: The three main elements to my two rigs



pre-drilled crab pellets, which contain a very smelly crabmeal that works perfectly with loose feed. On the dumbbell rig it had to be the old faithful lobworms – two on the hook to be precise. With all that wriggling on the surface, any catfish in cruise mode would surely be attracted to it.

around the side of my bivvy?" That was it; I had made myself paranoid and couldn't get to sleep. Looking at my watch, it was about 3.30am and the Sun was rising; the lions had stopped their morning chorus and I managed to get about 30 minutes sleep

before being awoken by the sound of my alarm. The dumbbell rig was off again and, with a firm strike and a few steps back, I

READY, SET, CATFISH

While talking to Mike, I cast out the dumbbell rig close to an island and within five minutes it was away. This thing must have had the hump because it went off like a train. My personal-best catfish was only 15¼lb, so when the scales went round to 15½lb I was as pleased as punch, until Mike turned to me and said: "That's a small one!" It looked pretty big to me.

This was the first deception. Catching a new PB within five minutes really increased my confidence levels and I thought I was going to be in for a good night. After a lovely dinner, thanks to the microwave in the lodge, I settled in for the night with excitement and expectation, but didn't really get much sleep. Through the course of the night I had several runs, but for reasons I couldn't fathom I didn't connect with any of them. However, it wasn't the aborted runs that kept me awake all night: about a mile away there is a wildlife sanctuary with lions, tigers and bears, which were all making noises throughout the hours of darkness. Unfortunately for me, I have a very vivid imagination and the thought kept popping into my head: "What if a lion stuck its head



Back she goes to her watery home

ANGLER PROFILE



Scott Cordingley
Year of birth: 1986
Home town: Ashford, Kent
Favourite species: Everything but, if I had to pick one, probably perch.

Favourite venue: None.

Most memorable catch: Every catch has been memorable, big or small, I love them all.

The second PB at 38½lb. It can't get any better, can it?



The rigs were kept as simple as possible. The first was a catfish ready-tied hair rig on 70lb breaking-strain braid with a size 2 eagle-eye hook on a running ledger. On the second I used a catfish pro worm and leech dumbbell to enable me to fish effectively on the surface; again this was on a running-ledger rig with another catfish pro ready-tied rig, but without the hair.

Catfish have a fantastic sense of smell and not only hunt for prey but also scavenge any food items they may come across on their travels. With this in mind, I needed something to attract them, so opted for the Devil Mix. This mix contains red and brown crumb for the base, but also to act as a carrier, I added a couple of tins of tuna in brine, dead and live maggots, Cotswold Bait Creations Mixed Halibut pellets and a mix of Crab Flesh and Biosquid liquid. This really is a smelly mix but, strangely enough, not on the bank; because of the base mix being crumb it absorbs the flavours and smell, allowing them to disperse when in the water.

That's the tackle, rigs and loose feed sorted, so what about hookbait? On the bottom-bait rig it had to be some sort of pellet; normally halibut would be the first choice, but this time I decided to use 22mm

Right: A perfect dawn
Below: Battling a beast on a misty dawn



APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEPTIVE

Scott Cordingley learns that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover

Deception is one word that seems to pop up every now and again when I'm fishing. Although sometimes associated with negativity, it can also be tagged with surprise and mystery. When arriving at a lake, have you sometimes thought: "There's no way it's possible for big fish to reside in here." I know I have, but only to be caught unawares with a fish of a lifetime. Take this recent trip as an example....

I was invited down to Manor Fisheries in Headcorn, Kent, by Mike the owner, for a 36-hour session. The fishery itself consists of three beautiful lakes: Specimen Lake One, which contains carp around the 30lb mark, and only four anglers can fish it at any one time; Mixed Lake Three, which is one of those lakes that cries out 'float' with its good head of tench, bream, carp and all manner of silver fish, but the lake I intended to fish

was Specimen Lake Two. This lake has carp to around 30lb and catfish to 50lb which, when you consider the lake itself is all of 2-3 acres in size, you can see why I refer to the word 'deception'. After arriving at the lake at around 7pm, I was greeted by Mike and his good lady, both of whom are probably the most kind and hospitable people I have ever had the good fortune to meet.

TACKLE, RIGS AND BAIT

My set-up consisted of two 12ft 3lb TFGear Delta XS carp rods, matched with TFGear V8 distance reels, and loaded with 20lb main line. Now, most people would disagree with me on this one, but on a lake of this size there is no need for heavy test curves as you're not going to be casting to the horizon or fishing with big baits; ideally a 3lb rod is perfect, as long as it has a soft progressive action to absorb the powerful surge of a catfish.



The Moon can brighten up even the darkest night



The first PB at 15½lb. Fantastic!



**Above: All you need for the Devil Mix
Below: What the mix should look like**

