

PERCH MANIA

2019



Having fished for perch pretty much all my life, I would say it was not really until 2018 that I actually started targeting them, if you get my meaning. Fishing for perch and targeting them, is there a difference? Well to me there is. I will try to explain.

I think the majority of us who have fished from a young age cut our teeth on perch. I certainly did, spinning or fishing worms under a float on the

ponds local to the village in which I grew up. I had the odd session using light gear where you were either going to catch jacks or perch. A few of my good friends started targeting perch whilst I was still 100% focused on pike and I never got the urge, the standing joke being that they were just fishing for bait. At that point, I just did not see the attraction although I had encountered perch over three pounds whilst fishing for pike. By the time I decided to have a go at them, I

already knew spots that held big perch and I suppose the push to have a go at them came through Euan Miller. Euan had a rod to test and had been tasked with getting some perch on it. Being totally new to modern perch fishing techniques, I tapped into the wealth of knowledge a few of my long-term fishing buddies had gathered over the years. Guys like Ricky McIntyre, John Mcinairnie, Spencer Burgo and Jamie Woods. Safe to say, I got the bug bad! Fishing with really light 5-20g rods and

size zero reels loaded with 10lb braid, the sport is fantastic. The road to Perchmania 2019 had begun! I had never done any competition fishing but it was something I'd had a notion to try for a few years. I suppose the numerous YouTube videos on competition predator fishing that I watched brought out a bit of a competitive streak in me, even if that is just competing against nature, the fish or myself, I decided to give it a bash!

Having a look around the competition circuit, it was not easy to find one that was achievable to do. With a large family, getting away for days at a time is not easy. I came across Perchmania and figured this would be a good comp' to start with. The competition was being held on Grafham water and would consist of over thirty boats with the best predator anglers from across Europe. I was straight on the blower to my good mate John Mcinairnie. Johnnie

was just as keen as I was to give it a go and there is no one better to have at your side when you need to produce the goods. You would be hard pushed to find an angler who puts as much thought and effort into his fishing. We booked up, the time flew by and before you knew it, we were in the van and heading for Grafham water, a venue none of us had fished before. I have to put my hands up, it was Johnnie who did 99% of the homework. Studying maps through Navicon and sourcing

old aerial pictures of Grafham before it was dammed, the perch did not stand a chance! In reality, our aim was just not to make an arse of ourselves, not to finish at the bottom of the pile and to hook a Zander, as neither of us has had the opportunity to fish for them before. We were given our briefing by Gary Palmer, received our measuring boards, marshalled up outside the harbour, the green light showed and we were off. We knew many of the boats would head straight to the towers. I always feel hitting areas like this is a bit of a lottery as there are that many boats in the one area. We decided to stick to our own plan. We headed to the first spot Johnnie picked out, a plateau coming up to about 15 feet from 30 feet. We were surprised by the absence of shoals of baitfish, not only on the spot but also on route. There were a few fish showing but scattered over the feature. We gave it a thorough going over and apart from Johnnie getting a few offerings from small fish on the drop shot, nothing. We decided to have a look at a few other spots on the finder but again we could not locate any baitfish.

Now a few hours in and without a fish, we decided to go old school and try a drift by a mooring we had come across in a good depth of water. First drift, and just as we were coming up behind the feature, I got a solid hit, jigging a piglet shad. I knew instantly it was a good fish but part of the excitement of perch fishing is that you're never really sure that it's a perch until you see the fish. With the Costas on it wasn't long before I caught a glimpse of the big stripes, about 10 feet below me, through Grafham's green but clear water. Fish number one was soon on the boat and measured a more than respectable 41cm to the fork of the tail, weighing upwards of 3lbs. The next few drifts past the feature were fruitless so we switched to the drop shot, hoping that a finesse approach might make the difference. It wasn't long, then bang! A rattle on the Fin-s minnow and I knew right away this time it was not a perch but a trout. I switched back to a piglet shad, still on the drop shot, and a drift or two later I had another hit, this time it wasn't until I saw the fish that



I realised it was not the target species but a pike.

It was becoming clear that we were going to have to work for every fish. I switched back to jigging the piglet shad and after another few drifts I connected with Perch number two, again another good fish going 41cm and shaped like a rugby ball. We persisted in that area for a good while but caught nothing more. Time was getting on, so sticking with the old school theme, Johnnie noticed a few birds feeding in one area. Birds feeding = baitfish, baitfish = predators. We headed over to try to find a feature, which we did, in the form of a drop off running 8 into 12 feet. We managed another Perch from this spot, this time going 37cm. We fished hard on the feature but could not locate any more fish.

To avoid being penalised for being late, we decided to have a go at a reed bed close to the harbour for the last half hour. I put on a crank-bait and dropped a fish or two, probably trout, but with just a few minutes to go, one stuck, in the shape of a beautiful Grafham brown, heading towards double figures. Time was up and we headed in but with only three fish on the scorecard, we thought we would be way down the leader board. Being new to the competition scene, I found it quite funny returning to the harbour and making conversation with people. It was obvious no one was giving much away regarding catches but I was getting the vibe it had been a hard day for many of the boats. I quietly said to Johnnie that I think we might have done better than we had previously thought. Sure enough, as the results came in we were pleasantly surprised.

Positions after Day 1...

1ST - Lukasz Miziolek & Michal Wittstock - 245CM
 2ND - Shaun Milner & Chris Tredway - 168CM
 3RD - Mark Stone & David Mcleash - 121CM
 4TH - Stuart Sutherland & John Mcairnie - 119CM
 5TH - Pawel Swat & Slawomir Perzynski - 109CM



We set out optimistically on day two, thinking if we could just fill the scorecard, with the same stamp of fish we had the day before, we would have a good chance of being up there. We decided on trying to be at the tower first and setting up a quick drift before everyone else got there and dropped anchor. We did this and managed to lift a perch off it straight away and sure enough, another great fish on the piglet shad, going 43 cm to the fork of the tail. By this stage, we were not wasting fishing time weighing the

fish but, like the others, it was in great condition, shaped like a rugby ball and well over 3lbs or 1.4kg. We did not waste time in that area as it was already surrounded by other boats and headed to a bay Johnnie had picked out. It was not long before I connected again, this time the reel was singing and as the fish came up I could see it was something I had never seen before. Operation Zander was complete! The fish was 75cm, we didn't weigh it but on talking with Gary Palmer that night, he estimated it to be around 10lbs. It

was an old warhorse of a thing, black as coal with white cloudy eyes like one of those old street dogs you see, with no teeth and looking like it should have died years before! They definitely earn their name of vampire fish! I was pumped at this point! A few cast later, not even 10 am, back on the jig, and piglet shad perch number five was in the boat, going 40 cm. By this time we were thinking, it's in the bag. We also planned, once the card was full, to scale up lure size by a few centimetres, to target bigger fish.

A short time later and bang, Johnnie's into a good fish and result, he's earned his zander badge with a totally different fish, gold in colour and in great condition, solid like a tuna. High fives were given out, left, right and centre. Not long after and boom! Johnnie is in again, another zander. Now I am starting to think to myself, I see a pattern emerging here, sure enough my next fish, you guessed it, another f####ing Zander.

As we only required one more fish, we decided to give the features we had caught fish from the day before another go, but this proved fruitless. Time was running out fast and we decided our last chance was to hit the tower and try offering them something they hadn't yet seen. Out of the box I got an old favourite, a black and orange twin tail, thinking, no one uses these things anymore. Inching it along the bottom I felt the tell tail subtle nips of a perch, I ripped into it and I could not believe it when a crazy rainbow trout surfaced at the end of my line.

Time was up and we had given it our best shot. In hindsight, we probably spent too much time on areas where we had fish. With the knowledge that we just needed that one fish, maybe we should have run and gunned features for that last one but that's it, you play your cards, make your plan and you stick to it.

On return to the harbour, we knew the drill, do not ask questions, tell nobody anything and slip your scorecard in the back door, not that it is it going to make a blind bit of difference to the results. We were quietly confident about finishing in the top ten and our confidence only grew as the results started to come in. As you can see below, we came in fourth, if we had managed that number 6 fish it would have, for sure, seen us in third but hey-ho, we didn't!

Summing things up, it was a fantastic experience, the people who finished above us, and many who finished below us, were truly great anglers and importantly, we had exceeded our own expectations.

Will we go back and try again? We are already booked up for next year's event! Roll on Perchmania 2020! Join the 5%!

Stuart Sutherland