

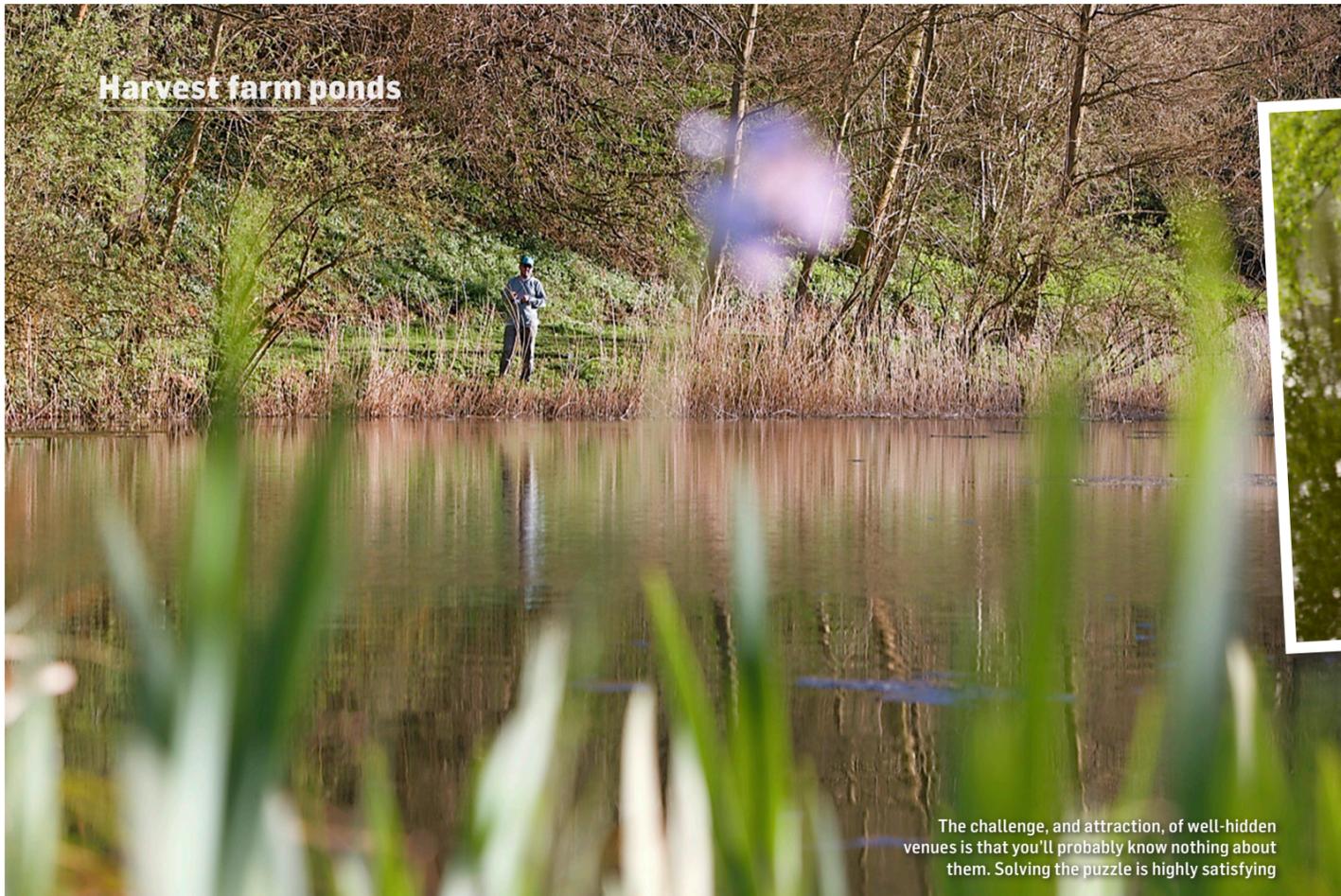
Harvest farm ponds

With the rivers shut and commercials about to become crowded, treat yourself to the rich pickings on unfished, intimate venues

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GREAT BRITISH FISHING • GREAT BRITISH FISHING
A celebration of the best river, lake and canal fishing that the UK has to offer

Harvest farm ponds



The challenge, and attraction, of well-hidden venues is that you'll probably know nothing about them. Solving the puzzle is highly satisfying



Chub prefer running water but you never know what you will find in a pond



"You can easily find your own little bit of paradise to lose yourself"

WITH the hiatus of a closed season for coarse fishing, many anglers find it frustrating to be pulled away just as spring arrives and the rivers seem to come alive once more. There's a bustling all around and a general positivity that comes with a transition into a warmer season, putting the long cold winter behind in an instant.

The run from Christmas to the end of the season always flies by no matter how much we wax lyrical about not letting it, and just as there's a warm day or two as the sun gets higher and days longer, it's apparent that time has run out and every minute must be sapped out of the last few days on the bank. Where does the time go?

Reports of specimen hunters catching huge fish from difficult circuit waters might not help moral, and you may think that a commercial is the only option. But there is a challenge out there that can provide the necessary stimulation

to keep you fishing, and that draw felt in those last days riverside can still be exercised in a less exploited fishy corner of our stunning British countryside.

Farm ponds dot the British landscape and with agriculture using some 70% of our land. With the help of an OS map or Google Earth, and a courteous approach to a land owner, you can easily find your own little bit of paradise to lose yourself. Whether the fish in these ponds are known about or not, or whether they grow big or not, there's a whole new challenge in finding out what's in them. With a rod in hand, the gap in the closed season soon whistles by.

Apart from the seasonal change to enjoy you can let your imagination run riot with what fish may reside in the untapped venues, how they may be behaving as they wake from a winter of doing very little, and while doing so you can keep your angling senses tuned instead of

letting them lie dormant along with your tackle in the shed.

Without wanting to burst this bubble, however, the first warm days can be misleading. Many a pool has been visited on a late afternoon in spring, after the mind has run riot all day with visions of tench fizzing and carp cruising, only to get there and find everything seemingly lifeless. Birds might have been singing all day in your garden, flies in the air, the smell of freshly mown grass and the colourful sight of daffodils kidding you into thinking it's all happening down at the pond and you must be there. Come the first signs of dusk, however, you might be uncomfortably cold and feeling a fool for throwing in all that bait.

You may despondently put your kit away telling yourself it's still way too early, until a few days later when you shed a layer doing the smallest of tasks and drive around with the car window cracked, and all the hope and anticipation returns.

Just be prepared for feeling chilly at the water's edge and remember relative water temperature will have nothing like the same drop as the air – the day will soon creep up when you're sat into dusk in a T-shirt with only the lack of daylight stopping you catching fish. Picking a day just like this is difficult, but if you're out fishing through the spring progression it will come to you and the sunlight will dapple through trees as the leaves appear once more, the smell of wild garlic being stamped in your memory for future nostalgia.

The swim chosen in spring is often dictated by aspect of the sun. You want somewhere that's had a decent amount of direct sunlight during the day, remembering that shallow water will always warm up first. A shelf that fish



You're bound to catch fish this rudd which has never seen a hook before

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A brace like this is impressive but it's not what you catch that's so important. It's the act of trying to catch something, anything, that counts

TOP TIPS FOR SPRING FISHING FARM PONDS:

STEALTH – the fish are used to animals not humans so keep a low profile.

DON'T OVERFEED – Bait up when you leave. There will be lots of natural food if unfished for and getting the fish confident and into a habit is key.

BE PREPARED – It may be warm during the day but this will make it feel colder when the sun eventually disappears.

CONCENTRATE – Bites may come out of the blue especially if your swim appears lifeless. Be close to your rod and have a loose clutch.

SUNGLASSES – Polaroids are become an important part of your armoury as the sun gets higher in the sky. They will help you spot signs of activity such as clouding up or bait being eaten from a clear spot.

RAKE THE SWIM – After a winter of leaves and twigs being blown into the water, then your swim could be snag city and so impossible to present a bait efficiently. Doing this from the start of your campaign will get your swim cleared ready for later sessions when you don't want to spook fish. If fishing a new water then it's a good way of finding out what makes up the bed of the lake.

For those who don't have the opportunity of finding waters for themselves, they can sample farm ponds through www.anglingdreams.co.uk or www.wyeuskfoundation.org

can cruise and feed along is ideal, and a bit of cover is always a good start. The branches of an overhanging tree or bush not only act as a target for accurate baiting and casting, but are a food source too, especially in spring.

After first getting a waggler set to the depth on the chosen spot, an introduction of a couple of golf balls of Swim Stim groundbait, bound with a tin of creamed corn and laced with a handful of grubber pellets and hemp gets things going. The beauty of Swim Stim is that you still get signs of fish in the swim without waiting for bubbles or bites. The swim can go completely dead but the light waft from a pectoral fin is enough to start the "pinking" again as the oils from the groundbait are released and rise to the surface – concentration levels are high at this point.

Hook size is not that important but a brace of squished corn grains comes highly recommended. It's almost neutrally balanced and if the 'guts' of the corn are left intact a smellier grain and an easily hovered hookbait is on offer. Waiting for at least an hour before fishing not only lets fish build confidence in your swim, but enables you to walk around the lake, perhaps introducing a little bait in a couple of

likely-looking spots, trying to read the water and think like a fish.

The first cast is always met with great expectation. From sitting down in your chair, to handling rod and reel, every movement is patient and precise, and your heron-like concentration is only finally broken when your body reminds you that you haven't taken a proper breath for a while!

It can be intense fishing especially if the rewards are unknown, and when that magic moment of the float disappearing does eventually happen, it could be anything from a 4oz rudd, to a 4lb tench, to a 14lb carp. More often than not, however, it's an eel – left alone to occupy a forgotten water only waiting to annoy an angler, or, grow really big, but that's another story...

Regardless of the results, fishing farm ponds is about continuing your season, and being out there as your surroundings are springing into life. Ideally you'll catch a few fish but small, untapped stillwaters offers a new challenge when the rivers close, and ultimately satisfies what most of us go fishing for – you may even happen across some really special fish that only you know about.



You'll need to be adaptable. Accessing the water will probably be more difficult than a commercial!

