



Gary Newman's BIG FISH SCENE

THE UK'S
TOP YOUNG
SPECIALIST
ANGLER

Learn from the nation's ace specimen fish reporter, here in his own weekly column.

THIS WEEK: Gary heads out East and he's hoping for arapaima.



THIS 85 kg arapaima came just three days into my visit to Gillham's Fishing Resorts, Krabi, Southern Thailand. And they aren't the only species in this piece of paradise – as I soon found out!

Land of the giants

THAILAND is a country that I've always associated with backpackers and family beach holidays, but in the past few years it has become a popular destination for anglers from the UK.

There is a huge fish trade out there, meaning that fishery owners have access to some huge species, both native to Thailand and from other countries around the world, some of them growing to massive sizes.

It has been on my list of places to visit for some time, having spoken to friends who had been out there and told me how good the fishing was.

So when well-known English

angler Stuart Gillham offered me the chance to travel out there and sample the fishing at his own water I immediately started planning a trip for the end of August, just after their rainy season ended.

Stuart Gillham is a name that many of you will be familiar with, having been a top carp angler back in the 1980s and early 90s, famed for his catches of big carp from Harefield lake, amongst other waters, and also for his exploits with big pike, culminating in a fish of 44 lb from Llandegfedd.

He disappeared off the English fishing scene 14 years ago and spent a lot of time running big game boats

in a number of countries around the world before settling in Phuket in Thailand.

With the sea fishing on the decline he decided to build his own fishery and, after much searching, settled on a 17-acre piece of land in Krabi in the south of Thailand. When he first bought it, it was just a bit of jungle, and many of his friends thought that he was mad and that it would never work.

But now, after much hard work by both himself and his Thai wife Benz, he has transformed it into a beautiful, nine-acre lake with luxury bungalows overlooking it.

The next thing was to stock it with

fish, and after extensive research he introduced 30 different species, a number of which have attained sizes in excess of the world record.

A few weeks back, myself and my mates Adam Parker and Vince Rogers caught a Thai Airways flight from Heathrow to Bangkok, and then onto Krabi, arriving at the lake late in the evening.

It was dark when we arrived so we wouldn't get to see the lake properly until the following day. But that night I hardly slept, such was the anticipation of getting some rods out, as well as struggling to ignore the huge fish that I could hear jumping all night, having left my door open.



Not the biggest alligator gar, at around 8 lb, but I was happy to notch up yet another species.



Stunning scenery makes this venue something special – and the fishing is out of this world.

AIMING FOR ARAPAIMA

THE morning confirmed everything that I had heard about the place, with landscaped gardens full of tropical plants and flowers running down to the water's edge, and jungle leading up to stunning, rocky outcrops.

After a quick breakfast we settled on our swims and I was happy to be left with a bay at the far end of the lake, especially as there were plenty of fish rolling as I set up.

I've always wanted to catch an arapaima, but don't have the time or money to fish for them in their native Brazil. But Gillham's Fishing Resorts holds these huge fish to in excess of 400 lb, with quite a number of specimens over the 200 lb mark, so I'd decided to target them to start with.

To stand a chance of landing one of these huge fish you need the correct tackle, and Stuart provides you with Free Spirit Cat Tamer rods coupled with Shimano Big Baitrunner reels loaded with 35 lb ProTuf line. They have sharp teeth, so a very abrasion resistant hook length is required, in this case Kryston Ton-Up, and to the end of this was tied a size 4/0 hook.

These fish feed by inhaling their prey, so avoiding deep-hooking them it is essential. You need to use either a Method feeder or a bubble float to stop them taking the bait back too far. Baits were sea deadbaits, with half a fish giving you a better chance of a positive pick-up.

Within minutes of casting out I had a take, but made the mistake of leaning into it as I would a carp back home, rather than hitting it properly, a mistake I didn't make again.

There are plenty of other predators in the lake as well as the arapaima, and that first day I managed to land seven sorubim catfish up to 30 lb, plus three redbtail catfish to 40 lb – the colouration on these fish is stunning.

Then during the afternoon I hooked into my first arapaima, and after a decent fight landed a fish of around 30 lb – not huge by arapaima standards, but I was happy to get one.

The following day I woke up with



This cracking redbtail catfish to Adam Parker was one of a number landed by the party.

a headache, and after fishing for a few hours and landing a few more sorubim and redbtails I decided to get some much-needed sleep.

I must have been knackered because I didn't wake up until around 4pm, but within minutes of casting back out I was into an arapaima of around 30 kg.

They must have been on the feed because I quickly hooked two more, but unfortunately both came off. These fish have hard mouths, and the way that they inhale the baits means that hook holds often aren't great.

They also try to jump out of the water and shake the hook, meaning that you only land around 50 per cent of what you hook, but I soon sussed that applying sidestrain as soon as I felt them coming towards the surface, rather than keeping the rod up, resulted in fewer lost fish.

I landed two more that day – a couple of lovely fish of 70 kg and 85 kg – and lost another one.

The weights are all estimated as despite their size and ferocious looks they are very delicate, with a blood vessel running down there back that is easily snapped if they are bent at all when lifted. For this reason Stuart has designed cages into which they are led, rather than a landing net, and all photos are taken in the water with three people supporting the fish.

The next couple of days saw me land five arapaima to 100 kg – along with plenty of redbtails and sorubim, plus a few alligator gar to about 10 lb.

Vince and Adam were also getting among plenty of fish, with Adam landing a couple of 100 kg specimens,

including a fantastic brace of 80 kg and 100 kg when his second rod went off as he was playing the bigger of the pair.

Vince wasn't having much luck with the arapaima, having landed a smaller fish of around 35 kg – if you can call a fish of this size smaller – and losing a couple, but he'd had more success with the redbtails, landing three around 70 lb.

The fishing had already been fantastic, and everything that we'd hoped for, so surely it couldn't get any better?

Find out if it did in part two next week.

CONTACTS

To book a holiday at Gillham's Fishing Resorts in Thailand or to find out more information visit the website www.gillhamsfishingresorts.com Alternatively why not e-mail info@gillhamsfishingresorts.com or give him a call in Thailand on 00 66 861644554.