

Lewis begins his new 'Bankside Sessions' diary segment in explosive fashion, expressing his opinions on the close-season debate and recalling his recent visit to Thailand.

# CLOSE-SEASON UNREST & OF A LIFE

A man wearing a dark cap with 'IFEG' on it is smiling and holding a large, white and black Amazon redtail catfish. The fish has a prominent red tail. They are in a pond surrounded by lush green plants and trees in the background.

A fantastic  
30lb Amazon  
redtail catfish



# SEASON FISH TIME

## ANGLER PROFILE



**Lewis Baldwin**

**Born:** 1981

**Hometown:** Stratford-upon-Avon

**Favourite venue:** The Warwickshire Avon but,

having also fished the Wye a lot over the past couple of years, that runs it a very close second.

**Favourite species:** Barbel and pike in equal measure.

**Favourite method:** Surface fishing for carp; they're not top of my species list, but the enjoyment that stems from stalking and watching them take the bait is hard to beat.

**Most memorable catch:** My first barbel way back in 1991 from the middle Severn on a family holiday – it left a lasting impression on me that still exists to this day.

**Website:** [www.lewisbaldwinfishing.co.uk](http://www.lewisbaldwinfishing.co.uk)



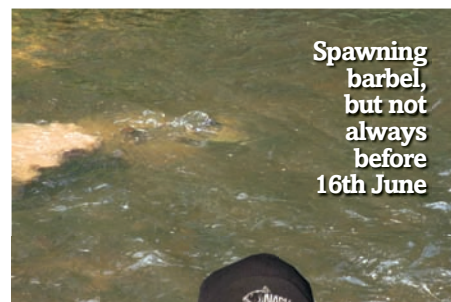
How relevant are the current close-season dates? Is it time for change?

Some of you may already know me from my 'Peg One Think Tank' articles over the past two years. I will still be contributing to the 'Think Tank', but this new bi-monthly piece is my first standalone magazine series, so I must take the opportunity to thank the guys and girls at *Coarse Angling Today* Headquarters for the opportunity.

So, what will this series be about? That is entirely dependent upon what I have been up to in the previous two months, or I could focus entirely on a special red-letter session I've had. I may even entice the odd guest angler to join me on my piscatorial



**Right:** A big end-of-season barbel showing no signs of spawning – can the same be said for this fish in July?







**A beautiful setting for a fishery**



**It's important to remain as in control as possible, no matter how difficult that may be**

adventures and see how others approach their fishing. Whatever I decide to write about, you can be sure I will try to make it as entertaining and informative as possible.

Given that we are now in June (wow, where is the year going?) and the river season is almost upon us, I think a great place to start this month's piece would be in the political angling minefield that is the close season. I'm not a fan of the current close-season dates; for me they are way out of date and serve absolutely no purpose whatsoever. Unfortunately, I can't write an article based on my own opinion and beliefs without backing it up with some facts, especially when the government-backed Environment Agency are the ones setting the rules we, as anglers, must abide by. Here is the official line from the EA website:

'The legal basis for the statutory close seasons is to protect fisheries from the impacts of angling during the breeding season. For coarse fish, a close season was introduced at the end of the nineteenth

century, when coarse fish were usually killed upon capture.

'Nowadays coarse fish are almost invariably returned to the fishery and therefore a close season may no longer be justified on all waters. Although the coarse fish close season may have benefits for wildlife, habitat and to other recreational users, these are incidental and close seasons cannot be imposed for these reasons.

'On this basis, the justification for close seasons for salmon and trout is clear. However, for rainbow trout in stillwaters there is no close season, since these fisheries are entirely reliant on stocking.'

Herein lies the problem, the above statement clearly states that the close season was originally brought in during the late 19th century (1878 to be exact) to protect coarse fish from being killed upon capture. Given that we, as anglers, no longer fish for the table and haven't done for many years, this is a seriously flawed argument for retaining the current close season. This, though, isn't the main bone of contention

when it comes to the current rules. The period of 15th March to 15th June inclusive is currently out of bounds to river anglers for the reason of fish breeding/spawning and to protect the fish from angling during this delicate time of the year. It is well known that predators and silver fish need lower water temperatures (typically 6-12°C) to spawn in comparison to other species. Therefore, we have a traditional pike season of 1st October through to 14th March and this tends to be respected by the majority of pike anglers. By the end of March and the beginning of April, pike, perch, roach and dace will invariably have spawned and usually the anglers who target these fish will have moved on to other species by the middle to end of March, leaving the fish in peace to spawn (that's not to say these fish have been targeted whilst spawn bound, but that's an article for another day). This leaves us with several species that will still be some way from spawning, notably barbel, bream, carp and chub. These species inhabit rivers up and down the country and can invariably be found in the same type of habitat at various times of the year. Where you catch bream you will also find chub, barbel and carp the majority of the time.



**A 50lb Siamese carp, one of three to 90lb taken on the trip**



Having researched all these species, it is very interesting to note that they ALL spawn in the May-July period and need water temperatures in the region of 12-20°C, but when can we start fishing for them again? That's right, bang in the middle of spawning time: 16th June. This makes the reason for the close season extremely flawed, to say the least. I have witnessed on more than one occasion – in fact, it's normally annually – barbel and chub spawning a month after the season has started and, yes, you've guessed it, people were fishing for them. All it takes is for a handful of mature fish to be caught and spill their eggs or milt during capture and we lose a percentage of that species' year class.

Sound far-fetched? I think not. Surely based on these facts alone, which can be found quite easily online, it's time to reassess the current close season. I'm not for one minute saying we should abolish it altogether, but how about having a species specific one, or just move the dates to a

more suitable time of year that is actually beneficial to the fish's welfare? I know there is the argument of the 'Glorious 16th' being kept intact, but that's just nostalgic nonsense. It's 2013, time to move with the times and seriously look at protecting our fishing for future generations, and having a true close season in place that really does protect our fish stocks is definitely one that should be considered. We can target spawn bound and indeed spawning carp, tench and bream in stillwaters at will, so how does that differ from the same species in running water? It doesn't! The EA states that there isn't enough scientific evidence to support lifting the close season, but I'd like to think the arguments I have brought up are reason enough to have a look at the situation and, moving forward, see what can be changed. We pay for a rod licence that is valid for 12 months, but a river angler only gets nine months' use. As one person, my voice won't be heard, but as a united group it may be possible – who knows?

#### **FISHING IN PARADISE**

Now for something a bit more light-hearted – actual fishing! Some of you may have seen on my Facebook page or website that

I recently had a trip out to Gillham's in Thailand whilst on holiday with my fiancée. My apologies if you have seen some details of the trip, but it would be remiss of me to omit it from this article, especially as the fishing was so good.

We had been staying in Ao Nang, Krabi, for 10 days prior to the trip to Gillham's and had a great time, but the fishing was never far from my mind. I had booked the last three days of our trip solely for fishing. I had seen plenty of pictures online of the fishery and spoken to a few friends who had been, but nothing prepared me for the sight that greeted us upon arrival. The views from all sides were breathtaking: mountains with sheer cliff faces adorned with a variety of trees, forest and jungle in every direction, exotic plants, birds and other wildlife, not to mention a myriad of huge fish leaping, rolling and bow-waving around the lake. It was obvious a lot of care and dedication had taken place to make the fishery and maintain it to an excellent standard. I was eager to check in and get fishing, but first I needed to complete a few formalities, such as double-checking the rules and going through the methods and equipment to be used so I was familiar with what I was doing.





**The first of the trip – a beautiful 20-pounder**



The best way I can describe it is carp and predator fishing almost as we do here in England but on a much bigger scale: 6lb test-curve rods, 80lb braid or 35lb mono main line, semi-fixed inline leads and short hooklengths. The emphasis is on keeping things as simple as possible; it's less complicated for the angler and more importantly safer for the fish. Two elements that were an absolute must, though, were short hooklengths, as it's impossible to unhook some of the species if they are deep-hooked and this could result in a loss for the fishery, and tubing above the lead to protect the flanks of the fish in the fight. Bait wise, again this was nothing complicated: the fishery's own pellets for hookbaits and feed or deadbaits also supplied by the fishery. Every day of your stay you are supplied with a bucket full of feed pellets, a tub of hookbaits and a packet of deadbaits, but more is available to buy at a very reasonable price should you wish. This is one thing I did do as I wanted to target the Siamese Carp, so smaller pellets and ready-prepared maize was the best way to go.

Hopefully by now you have an idea of the challenge I was faced with, so how did I get on? It took me a few hours to get into my stride and work things out, but once I had a picture of the swim in front of me, I could get to work with a baiting strategy and try to maximise the water I had available. Fishing two rods, I had three swims in my peg to target, which gave me plenty of options species wise. I could fish the near margin for huge Arapaima, out in front on the sandy bottom for the carp and the far



**It's important to listen to the advice of the guides**



**Strong, simple rigs were the order of the day**

cabbage-lined margin for Amazon redtail catfish. All three areas were baited regularly and fished in rotation, so one swim was always being rested. It took a while to get

the fish going, but on day one I finished with two Amazon redtails and a rare visitor the bank: a near-40lb striped catfish. The fishing is from 7am until 8pm, so once fishing was over for the day, I baited up in preparation for the following day, and what a day that turned out to be...

I could write a whole article based on just the second day's fishing. In total, I hooked 12 fish, landing eight of them. That's one of the drawbacks with some of the species: they have very bony mouths, so hook pulls are sometimes inevitable. Still, I wasn't complaining after Siamese carp to a whopping great 90lb, Amazon redtails to 30lb and majestic, prehistoric-looking Arapaima to 180lb (these fish actually go to nearer 500lb, and captures of 300lb-plus fish are a regular occurrence at the fishery). It's safe to say I was worn out come 8pm, and by daybreak on day three, I was full of aches. Nonetheless, I was up with the lark and raring to go. The fishing was much slower, due in part to a drop in water temperature. I did, however, manage to land two Amazon redtails and a Siamese carp. Heartbreakingly, I lost four Arapaima, two of which were of monstrous proportions. I can't even begin to describe the sheer power of these fish; once they decide to get their heads down and run, all you can do is hang on. Despite the loss of these fish, it was a truly fantastic experience and one I hope to repeat one day. With 14 fish landed over the three days, and almost the same again lost, the action was hectic at times; double hook-ups occurred twice and fish were hitting baits on the drop. One thing I will say, though, is that if you are

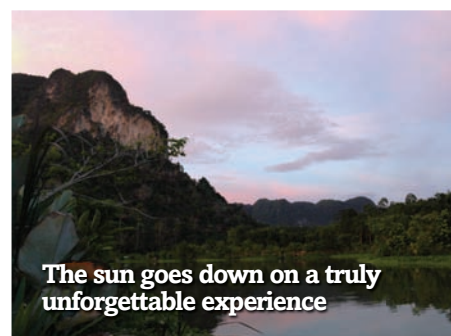


looking for a runs water, Gillham's isn't the place. If you work hard at your fishing, do all the right things and maximise the water in front of you, then the rewards are there to be had, but a turn-up-and-chuck-it-out venue it isn't. What is it? It's a fantastic

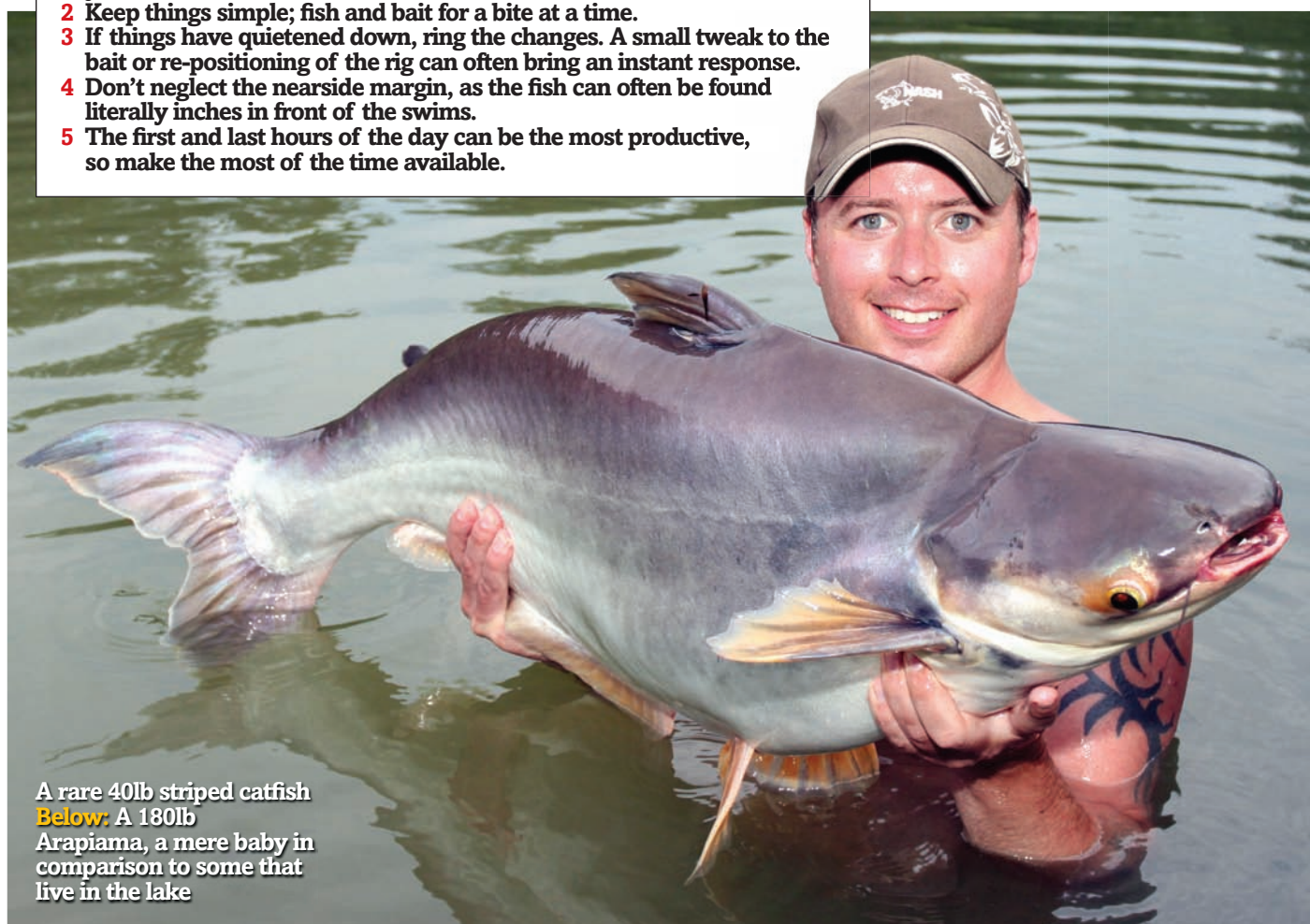
fishery in wonderful surroundings with some of the most immaculate, hardest-fighting, well-looked-after fish in the world. For more information on the fishing at Gillham's, contact Stuart Gillham on [info@gillhamsfishingresorts.com](mailto:info@gillhamsfishingresorts.com).

## TOP 5 GILLHAM'S TIPS

- 1 Listen to the guides; these guys know the fishery inside out and the information you can glean from them can be invaluable, especially if you have limited time.**
- 2 Keep things simple; fish and bait for a bite at a time.**
- 3 If things have quietened down, ring the changes. A small tweak to the bait or re-positioning of the rig can often bring an instant response.**
- 4 Don't neglect the nearside margin, as the fish can often be found literally inches in front of the swims.**
- 5 The first and last hours of the day can be the most productive, so make the most of the time available.**



The sun goes down on a truly unforgettable experience



A rare 40lb striped catfish  
**Below:** A 180lb  
Arapaima, a mere baby in  
comparison to some that  
live in the lake

