

# Tomorrow Will Be Unseasonably Mild.....

by Steve Morgan

**As mentioned in the last Newsletter, Steve Morgan caught the most perch for season 2010/11. However, as the return came after the 31<sup>st</sup> of March deadline it was too late to be formally accepted for trophy recognition. It was though an excellent catch of 63 perch consisting of 52 perch over 2lb and 11 perch over 3lb. Here Steve recalls just one of those red-letter days.**

The weather had been getting a little milder and with a bit of rain in its belly the Kennet was pushing through nicely. So I ventured forth in search of barbel. But by ten o'clock in the evening, after aeons in a craftily prepared swim, nothing had transpired. Then, something quite out the blue decided that perhaps it did rather fancy meatball after all and the rod shuddered, trembled, hesitated and then flew round in a violent un-missable arc. I grabbed the rod, struck forcibly - and missed. I calmed down after a few suitably profane imprecations and fished bitelessly on for another two hours. Then I went home in a big sulk!

The following day saw bright sunshine and soaring temperatures even though we hadn't yet seen the end of February. I had stuff to do, (chores, which is stuff of the worst kind), and couldn't go fishing. But that evening, slumped in front of the television, I was much heartened by the BBC weather forecast. "Tomorrow", intoned the presenter "will be grey and overcast with showers and the temperatures will be unseasonably mild". "Good enough for me" I thought - "I'm going perch fishing".



And I knew just the swim. I had vaguely planned to get up an hour before dawn and be on the bank just as vampires were retreating to their coffins. However, it was after nine before I managed to drag myself bleary-eyed and leaden-boned from the pit and nearly midday before I eventually pitched up in my fancied swim. Fortunately I was the only angler in town and could claim my swim, despite the small handicap of being five hours late.

Few people seem to know about this particular swim anyway, which is just as well, as it is an absolute cracker. Located midway along a quiet backwater it has reeds upstream and down - which are themselves home to good perch; but the main attraction is a cluster of seven or eight willows which lie in the water along the far bank and extend outwards to about mid-stream. There might as well be a big sign erected proclaiming, "the perch are here!" in bold, red letters three feet high.

I adopted my usual "bait and wait" tactics and got the ball rolling (so to speak) by dropping out ten finely chopped lobbies and a few red maggots into a nice slack area immediately upstream of the willows. Then, once I'd set up the ledger rod with a half ounce bomb and a "helicopter" style rig, I sat back to admire the view and have my coffee and sandwiches.



A male reed bunting came to sit in the branches opposite and watch me eat, which I took to be an omen. And then, to confirm the prospect of good sport ahead, a red kite flew directly overhead, its forked tail twisting this way and that in the breeze to keep the bird on an even keel. After thirty minutes I could wait no longer and, fortified by omens galore, impaled a fat lob on my size eight, chopping both ends off to leak wormy magic downstream.

The first cast was uncharacteristically accurate. In fact I couldn't have done better if I'd swum out and put it there by hand. And to prove the point, before I could even put the rod in the rests, the tip had pulled round to signal the first bite of the day. I struck expectantly and, naturally, missed. Well, at least there were fish at home. In fact, I find usually that missing perch bites isn't actually too disastrous. You normally get a second or third or fourth chance soon afterwards. What definitely is disastrous is to hook and lose a fish. That sort of carelessness can kill a swim for quite a while.

The second cast brought a little knock shortly after I'd put the rod down, then a little pull, then a pause, then another knock, then a confident, slow pull round - which I struck at, this time successfully. A series of heavy thumps on the end of the line suggested a good perch and after a brisk fight the scales gave me 2lb 9oz. The keepnet was quickly deployed and the stripey one duly found himself remanded in custody. Two more lobbies got the chop and the dropper was swung out once again to replenish the swim.



The third cast of the day saw a lull of fully three minutes before a sharp twitch got my hand hovering over the rod ready to strike. Then a pause. Then another twitch. Maddening stuff! Then a double twitch followed by a slow pull. I had to strike at that and, to my relief, I connected with something that felt pleasingly heavy.

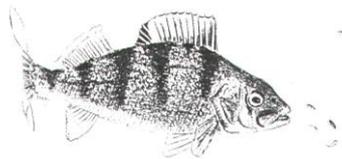
This wasn't the quick "jag-jag-jag" of a little fish but the slow, deep "thud -thud-thud" of something that might even be camera-worthy. I wasn't to be disappointed; a very fat perch grudgingly came to the net amid a last minute flurry of spray and this time the scales were kind enough to give me 3lb 1oz. I catapulted a few more maggots out and treated myself to a cup of coffee.



*A 3lb'er caught in unseasonably mild late winter sunshine*

The next cast brought a similar result: a few initial twitches, then a big enough pull to warrant a strike. And, after another heavy, dour fight with plenty of happy "thud-thud-thud" the double of the previous fish came in. The scales tried to repeat the exact same weight but wouldn't quite settle on the mark so I had to be satisfied with 3lb. Not too hard to bear! Two more lobs were butchered and despatched to the killing zone along with a few more maggots. I sat back for another coffee. I had three good fish in the net after only about fifteen minutes; surely it couldn't go on like this?

I gave the swim ten minutes to settle and then re-cast. I expected the remaining fish to be a bit spooky now, having just seen three of their number disappear in short order, and indeed for five minutes all was quiet. I kept a trickle of maggots going in with the catapult and it was while I still had the catty in my hand that the tip suddenly stabbed round about six inches. Two seconds later my right hand was over the rod ready to strike but the tip fell back before I could react. I waited. Seconds passed. Then another little pull, then a twitch. Patience!



Then a whole minute with no more indications. I tried a little dodge that often turns a twitch into a positive pull. I carefully lifted the rod off the rests, tightened down to the lead and deliberately dislodged it, moving the bait a few inches. Three seconds later the tip pulled round decisively and I struck into another perch. This one "jag-jagged" about a bit and I guessed it might be a smaller fish than hitherto, but it turned out to be nearly as good and another plump, pristine specimen of 2lb 13oz was soon joining its fellows in the keepnet.

Disaster followed on the next cast. I struck a confident pull perhaps a moment prematurely and after a few moments of delicious "thud-thud" the hook pulled. This, as I hinted earlier, can often be catastrophic so I decided to re-bait quite heavily and give the swim a prolonged rest to recover, teasing it along in the meantime with a continuous trickle of maggots with the catapult. Time is a great healer, especially if helped on its way with plenty of free chopped worms. Anyhow, it gave me a few minutes to scout the adjacent swims and find a back up swim should the current one run out of steam.

With thirty minutes of recovery time behind it, it was time to see if the plan had worked. I re-cast and waited to see what would happen. Almost immediately I started getting indications and I glowed with anticipation. After a few more indecisive little nods and taps I suddenly got the mother of all drop-backs and immediately grabbed the rod and struck. I met very firm resistance indeed as something heavy and unyielding gave several slow, ponderous "thuds" in the direction of the willows.



I submerged the tip to apply maximum side-strain and held on grimly. The fish stopped and then changed tack, moving upstream in a slow, inexorable march. My knees were starting to shake; this could be a champagne perch, possibly that rarest of creatures, a Kennet "four". But it was not to be. The fish did eventually come grudgingly to the surface, but instead of a big, broad stripey flank I was horrified to see a great, gasping pair of white lips. The culprit was a greedy chub and not even a particularly big one. I bundled it in to the waiting net and released it a long way upstream.

Over the next couple of hours the pace slackened, though a couple more "scraper" two pounders succumbed to my continuous feeding of chopped worm and red maggot. But these fish had both come after endless spooky twitches and taps - suggesting that whatever perch remained in the swim were by now becoming reluctant to feed. I decided to rest the swim again and try an hour in another promising spot fifty yards downstream. With this diversion in mind I had already, half an hour previously, droppered some bait in there as well.

My new swim had a very long line of rushes on the far bank, alongside which the current slowed to a crawl. A few stems protruded out into the river here and there and it was into one of these sheltered hidey-holes that I swung out my tackle.

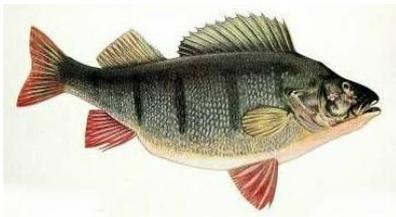
The bomb landed about six inches shy of the rushes, just missing a clump of swaying fronds, making a delicate little “plop”. Everything seemed to be coming up roses; on any other day malicious demons would have snagged the hooklength in one of those fronds and I would have been tugging for a break. Even the sun emerged briefly and for a while it could almost have been Spring.



After forty-five minutes of inactivity I was beginning to wonder if I should return to my first swim and my attention started to wander. My eyes were, almost involuntarily, following the progress of a wren along the far bank rushes but as the wren reached a point directly opposite me I became aware that the white quiver tip was no longer pointing out at ninety degrees but was bent round in a severe curve.

Coming to my senses I grabbed the rod and immediately found myself connected to the familiar “thud-thud” of a good perch. Resisting my polite invitation to come upstream and be netted it thudded its way downstream a little and then kited most inconveniently towards the near bank. I stood up and held the rod out as far as I could to lever it back out into the main flow. That did the trick and thereafter it ran out of ideas and I drew it over the net, where it bristled and thrashed in a somewhat petulant fit of rage.

The hook pinged free and, dropping it into the margins for the time being, I pulled back the mesh to take a close look at this bull of a perch - short, stocky, thick across the shoulders and as heavy in the waist as a pub landlord - a brute dressed in outrageous black stripes and armed with two inch nails on its back! The scales delivered happy news too, 3lb 1oz, though one can scarcely reduce such a fish to a bald statistic.



The rest had been as good as a change and the first swim was now ready to be further harvested. I invested a few more lobs and was rewarded straight away with a more streamlined fish of 2lb 6oz and then a couple more pound-plussers that I didn't bother weighing. It was all going past in a bit of a blur by now: a circular sequence of chopping and dropper worms, catapulting maggots, hitting bites, playing, landing and weighing fish, repeated again and again. I could do no wrong and a fine specimen of 2lb 13oz by now had come to seem routine. Then, quite suddenly, the spell was broken and the bites stopped.

The sky had darkened and the breeze had died. All was still, as if waiting for something momentous to happen. There was about an hour of daylight left and I wondered if the swim still held one really big fish to crown what had already been a truly outstanding day. I guessed that I might have caught most of the fish in the swim - and if so, that this might now be a good opportunity to catch whatever monster might still be lurking under the willows. I chopped up ten good lobs and committed them to what I intended to be a final baiting. Then I sat back to rest the swim for twenty minutes.

As I waited, the first spots of rain began dimpling the surface. I thought of braving it out but an ominously black cloud overhead had me scrambling for the umbrella. And, just in time too. The fine spots turned rapidly into big fat bullets of rain and in seconds these had turned into a drenching downpour.



For five minutes I sat huddled under the brolley clutching the shaft to prevent it being gusted away by the frisky squall that had now roused itself. But it soon eased and the rain momentarily turned to hail before stopping altogether. All was once again quiet and still, though by now the light levels had dropped quite a few stops and an atmospheric churchyard gloom had descended. As I swung out the freshly baited rig, I just knew something terrific was about to happen.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was about twenty to six. I had about thirty minutes, at best, before bad light would stop play. The white quiver tip showed up well against the dark, oily shadows on the surface of the water and I willed it to go round. Then, without any warning, it did just that. No preliminaries. No little knocks or twitches. One moment the tip was standing straight and proud, the next it was swinging round in an ever tightening arc. I struck and felt a nice solid thud in reply.

For a moment it was stalemate and I even wondered if I was snagged. Then, a slow, inexorable “thud-thud” confirmed that I was indeed connected to something - which quickly decided that the conversation might be better continued underneath the willows. I wasn't going to have that and, burying the tip underwater, I gave it some serious side-strain.

The fish gave up on the willows and, now heading upstream, made a very unseemly dash towards some straggly rushes on the far side. Denied that refuge as well, it settled for a prolonged bout of “thudding” in mid-river until, eventually tiring, it came wallowing to the surface. This is always the most nerve-wracking part of any contest with perch and this time it was made rather worse by the fact that I could now see that this was indeed a very big fish and secondly that my hook hung by a sliver in the scissors.

It took approximately three weeks to draw the fish gingerly across the surface and over the waiting net and as I hoisted it ashore the hook duly dropped out and snagged in the mesh. I didn't think it would quite make four pounds and moments later my assessment was confirmed. The scales flirted with 3lb 14oz but preferred 3lb 13oz and so that was the weight I accepted. A new personal best by one ounce!



And what a beast of a fish she was - a square shaped slab of a perch with massive shoulders and a bulging girth. Her colours looked as if they had been painted on and then varnished. By the time I had rested her for a bit and then taken her picture there was no time left to fish on. But watching this fat old warrior waddle her way back into the depths was just about the perfect end to a perfect day.

An unseasonably mild day had now become a balmy evening and in temperatures more befitting June than February I made my way back across the fields, my heavy old rucksack and holdall as light as vapour.

**Steve Morgan**



***“A New Personal Best Of 3lb 13oz”***  
**A Perch of 3lb 13oz caught by Steve Morgan**  
Caught from The River Kennet  
25<sup>th</sup> February 2011 - Quiver Tipped Lobworm