



Virtual Fisheries Forum 16/03/2022 (The National Tench Heritage Alliance)

Q&A session

Q. We have a tench pond at Raven field. It's about a half an acre. Only Crucian carp, tench and rudd are stocked. How can we increase the size of our tench?

A. (Phil) Half an acre is quite a small water and probably less than ideal for Tench for grow large as a result. Tench like space, habitat variety and a range of depths to thrive which they likely won't get in such a small water. If the balance of stocking is right then the Tench should make around 2-3lbs. It is worth monitoring the pH level of your fishery with the ideal being around pH 8.5 but anything over 7 is good. Calcium Carbonate application (for example Siltex) might help the fertility of the environment increasing natural food available etc. You mention Crucian carp stocked also which it is well known that tench and Crucian carp co-habit very well in most cases.

A. (Ian) We actually visited a fisheries consultant called Andrew Ellis of [AE Fisheries](#) to see how he breeds and grows on his stock pond tench and the underlying message with them was that less is more for getting the best results.

A. (Phil) Supplementary feeding could work if done appropriately using 2-3mm high protein animal-based pellets fed at water temperatures in excess of 14 degrees centigrade as this is the threshold for which the Tench can utilise the food for growth. In most cases supplementary feeding isn't necessary. If you are going to supplementary feed [Coppens pellets](#) or [aqua premium](#) are the pellets recommended to us.

Q. What would be an average growth rate for tench stocked at 4" long?

A. (Phil) According to Alan Henshaw at the Environment Agency's Calverton fish farm Tench grow very slowly in initial years. I would guess a 4" fish would be around 1 year old, in 2 years they might grow to 8"

and in 3 years they might make 12". When they are sexually mature and feeding hard you could get 0.5lbs a year with very exceptional rich waters supporting growth rates of 1lb a year at this stage.

A. (Ian) Consider a stock pond and feeding them.

A. (Phil) Indeed, a good way of getting tench for many clubs would be buying them in when they are small and cheaper to put in a stock pond and grow on with pellet feeding over the summer months. Within 2-3 years they could be making 2-3lbs. This is more economical than buying the tench at this size where you would be paying £15-20 per 1lb in weight for individual fish. Another tip is do not mix them with other species if you want optimal results.

Q. Which fish species most adversely affect Tench stocks?

A. (Ian) Carp and bream. Bream more so than carp. Crucian carp are the best bedfellows with tench.

A. (Phil) Very often carp fisheries produce the biggest tench with a good example of Horseshoe Lake but with a lake like that it's about 80 acres and has the space/resources to cater for the populations of carp and tench. Our observations historically tell us that tench do much better with small numbers of big carp as opposed to large numbers of smaller carp. The bottom line is if you have a good tench water be very careful stocking other species if you wish to maintain the productivity of the tench. As a personal opinion if I could choose one species to stock alongside tench, other than Crucian carp, it might be chub because they seem to live well alongside tench and also provide good winter fishing sport. Chub also tend not to breed so well in stillwater as well as acting as a predator.

A. (Alex) Yes, I could definitely see how chub would fit in with tench as they do tend to occupy a different feeding zone in the water column being predominantly mid-upper depth fish whilst tench occupy the lower water column.

Q. We have a small non-commercial lake, dominated by perch and carp. It hasn't been stocked in 20+ years and has suffered predation from otter and cormorant. We have been busy clearing the banks and deterring the

predators. Would a stock of small tench be a sensible addition, or would the existing stock need to be thinned?

A. (Ian) Just to re-iterate few things mentioned already, less is more and prioritise creating the space tench need. Then put some fish refuges in to protect your stock that currently exists.

A. (Alex) This is a good point to mention the [Angling Improvement Fund](#) which is now live for applications to clubs & fisheries who want to install or work on projects for protecting their fish stocks whether it be fish refuges or otter fencing etc. This fund is administered by the Angling Trust from fishing rod license money which the Environment Agency provide us with.

[Good video guide to building a cheap fish refuge](#) by the Environment Agency.

Q. Our disused canal and our new still water has big tench up to 8lb and over but also has lots of small tench 2 to 3 ounce these waters are very weedy and very overgrown with weed however we don't seem to catch many, I think this is because of the natural food available what is your feelings on this, it's great to see young tench coming through but we need to work to help improve the fishing and help the tench we have?

A. (Phil) It is difficult to talk in theory. If there are a lot of 2-3 oz tench it perhaps would pay to thin them out a bit so long as you have somewhere to put them and the necessary permissions to transfer the fish etc. You don't know how old they are I'm guessing but if they are young and still have plenty of growth left in them they will do much better than if they were older stunted fish. With regards to the other point I wouldn't say natural food stops you catching tench, they just often only feed hard for 1-2 months each year in the run up to spawning and are much less food focused again after spawning. There is a bit of a contradiction in the question where you state the small 2-3oz tench are not growing yet there is lots of natural food in which case it must be a case that there are too many fish. Undertaking a fish survey would be useful.

A. (Alex) One thing you could try is getting in touch with your local Environment Agency Fisheries Officer and asking for fish age analysis to be performed for the stock through the National Fisheries Laboratory.

Q. Would you (the Tenchfishers) be able to help a south Wales club?

A. (Ian) Absolutely, if you are based in the UK and have an interest in tench/developing tench in your fishery get in touch.

Q. How does a tench population disappear in a 2-acre lake which becomes overpopulated with roach/rudd?

A. (Phil) Tench do not spawn each year and their spawning requirements are quite specific regarding the habitat. Assuming the habitat is suitable for their spawning then it could simply be a failure to monitor what is going on in the water. One of the things you can do with tench unlike many fish is easily tell which sex they are and it is reasonably accepted that male tench do not live as long as the female tench so if there was more male they would potentially disappear quicker.

Q. What are the best weeds for supporting tench and their food?

A. (Phil) In Sam's case study it was quite an exceptional water being 3 acres and producing tench to over 9lbs. It was mentioned the water was very weedy so what kind of weed was in there Sam?

A. (Sam) A mixture of invasive Elodea, silkweed and some others in patches but predominantly Elodea which colonised naturally and is now very established. The weed is not the only source of natural food at the fishery as it has very expansive silt beds which hold considerable stores of bloodworm.

A. (Phil) Elodea is very good but it is invasive and non-native so not what I would choose to introduce to a fishery by design. Something like hornwort, milfoil or mareetail would be the first choices. Regarding water lilies, there were some in the case study I noticed; they can be problematic so I wouldn't introduce them again personally if starting from scratch. Lilies do not oxygenate and can choke up a lake quickly making angling challenging. Controlling lilies is also much harder now certain aquatic weed treatments are rightly banned because of their other adverse impacts on the environment. Half the issue with aquatic weeds is finding a balance between safe angling and cover/natural food for the fish.

A. (Ian) One important point to note is that when raking our weed, particularly elodea you must go through it carefully as often there can

baby tench fry nestled up within it and by pulling the weed out and leaving it on the side this would be undoing a lot of the good work at the fishery.

Q. Other than "refuges" what advice can you give to encourage spawning and avoid predation?

A. (Alex) Weed and natural cover within the fishery.

A. (Phil) Tench do not tend to spawn in water deeper than 3ft so in deeper lakes this is an issue for habitat suitability and recruitment will be poor. 18-36" is the ideal spawning depth with lots of weed.

Q. We had tench in 2 small lakes, the top lake flows into the lower lake, over the years they have gone? We want to turn the top lake into a tench and crucian carp only fishery. Any tips on how we can maintain population and any other advice that would prove useful? As for the lower lake, what is a good ratio for mixing species? Thank you?

A. (Alex) This sounds like one to be consulting your local Environment Agency Fisheries Officer for as they can visit the site and offer tailored advice based on this.

A. (Ian) I would reiterate that, use the Environment Agency professionals for consultation as that is why they are there funded by rod license money.

Q. What are the advantages of adding Siltex?

A. (Alex) For purpose of explaining to those that are not aware, siltex is Calcium Carbonate which breaks down decayed/biological matter increasing fertility.

A. (Phil) If you sprinkle Siltex around it will improve the pH level. I do not have any direct experience of Siltex however. One thing you should never use is hydrogenated lime as this will kill your fish despite doing wonders for the water pH. Siltex is quite safe to apply. Did the club use any Siltex on the case study water Sam?

A. (Sam) No, Siltex has never been applied to the lake and to my knowledge wouldn't be an option to use in the terms of the clubs fishery management of the site due to the SSSI restrictions.

Q. Quite a complex question, what are the impacts of Ergasilus parasites. I have approached numerous farms for larger tench and all are saying this is a huge problem now. Smaller fish are often available up to 10", but rarely available above this largely because they are only available from cropped waters and this is where class 2 parasites are a problem and no one appears to farm them beyond 10". I have a small fishery with Tench, Crucians, Rudd and silver bream?

A. (Alex) Probably a question again for the guys at the National Fisheries Laboratory.

A. (Phil) If what you are saying is true and there is a parasite issue with supplying of larger tench this is certainly a problem. However, the simple expense of keeping and raising tench beyond 10" means many fish farmers want to move them on to fisheries before they exceed that size.

A. (Ian) On Sywell reservoir we have stocked 4-5 stockings of fish from small 1–2-year-old tench up to individual fish weights of 8lbs all sourced from our approved fish suppliers/breeders who we have visit personally to inspect their facility and processes before purchasing. Throughout this experience there has never been a parasitic issue. When you are looking to stock tench you need to make an early decision as to whether you will stock fish bred from scratch where provenance is completely known or whether you transfer in tench from another fishery or water which was not a controlled aquaculture facility. Transferred fish will have had to pass all the CEFAS checks obviously but there is more risk with this strategy and at Sywell as I say we have chosen to go down the fish farm route with no parasite issues whatsoever.

Q. Brilliant as always guys. We have tench that are all around 5lb+ and have always put it down to the fact we have pike in the lake that won't take that size. Is this correct? We have stocked Tench around 4 years ago that were 6-8inch but no sign of catches in that time frame. Do we look to stock bigger in the future? as we are quite a well-known tench water locally?

A. (Phil) I'll start off by saying if you want tench productivity one predator definitely to avoid completely is stocking catfish. Pike will predate upon tench but stocking with less fish at a bigger size should mitigate this if there is an issue. Quite often small tench do go missing

for a number of years then re-appear at 1-2lbs so do not give up hope on there being younger year classes of tench until more study/survey work has been done at the fishery.

Q. I see more and more waters around the country being taken over by carp syndicates. It looks as if access to general stillwater coarse fishing (which means tench fishing too) is being continually squeezed. In terms of alliances, how do the Tenchfishers feel about trying to work with organisations like Danny Fairbrass's Embryo or the owners of the Thames Valley pit complexes to work to combine quality tench fishing in their portfolio of carp-focussed waters?

A. (Ian) This is something we have discussed for a long time. To produce and to develop really good tench waters it is a need to engage with these carp syndicate groups and day ticket complexes. Linear Fisheries in Oxfordshire is a prime example of a carp fishery with excellent tench. The Tenchfishers have a very good relationship with Linear Fisheries management, and they will be soon opening up a few new waters which are less carp orientated to provide opportunities for general coarse anglers where they are not side by side with anglers targeting carp and all the conflicts of interest which often come with doing so. Linear Fisheries recognise there is a growing demand for these angling opportunities. Regarding EMBRYO and Danny Fairbrass, about 4 years ago there was discussion with them to turn a lake at their Norton Disney complex into a tench fishery but sadly this did not come to fruition. Many of these commercial enterprises are put off tench due to them only being a reliable angling quarry for 3-4 months of the year compared to carp which people fish for all year round.

A. (Phil) We will work with anybody who has a genuine interest in tench. Linear as you mentioned is a great example. What you can't do is just create a specimen tench fishery because the sport is restricted to such a small window and the revenue would be too limited compared to other fishery models. Developing tench fishing integrated within/alongside other fishery types is the most viable option. You may need to be a nuisance and press the issue for tench making your desires known at your club AGM for example.

A. (Ian) We communicate often with staff at Calverton Fish Farm who say that currently the lack of demand for tench is the main limiting reason why they do not rear more of them.

Q. Do you think winter tench fishing is viable. some waters seem to produce better than others?

A. (Phil) They are a warm water species which originate from the Black & Caspian Sea areas of central Europe. Warmer water increases their metabolism. Their comfort zones are in the upper teens of degrees Celsius temperature ranges. Winter tench feeding and fishing sport does happen, but it is not reliable from my experience.

A. (Alex) It is probably worth making the distinction between canals and slow rivers and more static enclosed stillwater fisheries as from my experience moving water venues provide more consistent winter tench feeding than static.

A. (Ian) A lot of the time it is to do with whether there is bait going in consistently which if it is fish will continue to feed and be catchable.

A. (Sam) It is also dependant on the weather patterns which occur over the course of a winter, for example if a mild winter is had then there is more chance of winter sport opportunities with tench than there would be during a winter with extended cold periods. A relationship similar to that of Barbel feeding spells on rivers.

A. (Phil) Yep, you can generalise more with factors like the further south a water is, it's size, depth, wind exposure and many more. It is an interesting topic but in summary winter sport is un-reliable and inconsistent.

Q. My club has tried to buy tench and has found it very hard to find them (esp. larger ones). Are there any efforts from NTHA or from fish farms themselves to ensure availability of tench for fisheries to buy? There seems to be demand that is not being met!?

A. (Ian) It is something we can encourage but fish farmers also need the customer demand for the fish so it goes back to really pushing the issue for tench at your club/fishery.

A. (Phil) Make your demand known to your local fisheries officer and Calverton but importantly plan ahead because due to the slow growth of

tench it is not a case of getting them quickly. [Coarse fish UK](#) supply a lot of tench as well as [AE Fisheries](#) so enquire, maybe, with these!. There are others too.

Q. Is there any specific guidance needed to help choose the correct site for fish refuges, water depth etc? or is it a case of drop them and they will come?

A. (Alex) Contact an [Angling Trust Fisheries Management Advisor](#)

Q. we have a small lake that is an old clay pit. It has produced Tench to 6lb however in small numbers. depths run from 6' - 30' therefore limited weed. what could we do to improve this pond we have had issues with deoxygenation but the tench seem to survive? just seen depths for breeding. Our other ponds have healthy breeding tench populations?

A. (Alex) Making that habitat suitable for breeding (shallow water and weedy areas) is probably the key thing there.

A. (Phil) Yep, I would agree with that and it sounds like the sort of water which could produce some really big tench. Check the pH level and plant weed if possible.

Q. Will the Tenchfishers be creating a database of approved suppliers of Tench we as a club have had issues trying to purchase fish over 10" for all the reasons as explained?

A. (Ian) Providing a list of approved suppliers is a dangerous road to go down. We have mentioned some suppliers tonight who we have visited and had dealing with but creating a database is another matter.

A. (Phil) I am tempted to throw that one back at the Angling Trust to liaise with clubs and collate their experiences in a resource.

A. (Alex) I think the IFM used to do something along these lines, but unfortunately it stopped. It may be revisited in future though.

Q. Would you want to retain some silt on the bottom of the lake for the tench to bury themselves in during the winter?

A. (Alex) Is this something which tench actually do? Or is it more folklore?

A. (Ian) There is no evidence that tench do this to my knowledge much like the old "doctor fish myth"!

A. (Phil) Silt is not a bad thing but it becomes a problem when it is feet deep and everywhere. Retain silt but manage it.

Key contacts from this Forum:

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- Sam Hubbard (Angling Trust National Angler Engagement Officer)
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- Phil Jackson (President of the Tenchfishers)
- Ian Peacock (Chairman of The Tenchfishers)

