IAN WELCH'S
angling adventures

Here, in our unmissable 4-page slot, the UK's most cutting edge specialist coarse angler is the man to follow every week. Welchy writes exclusively in *Angler's Mail*.

Welchy's in morning to Bury the living zed

WITH zander feeding spells short and sharp, it is essential to get baits out quickly. Welchy was ready for a dawn start, and netted three big fish, including this stunning double, within 20 minutes of the fishery gates opening!

THIS WEEK'S VENUE

OLD BURY HILL LAKE, DORKING, SURREY.

A 200-year-old estate lake set amidst delightful surroundings, Old Bury Hill Lake extends for some 12.5 acres in a secluded valley surrounded by mature woodland. With a well-appointed boathouse offering fishing from a fleet of punts, a luxurious café serving up everything from snacks to a full English, and a well-stocked bait and tackle shop, the facilities are second to none. The fishing takes the venue to another level, offering carp to 35 lb, pike to 30 lb, zander to 16 lb, tench and bream to double figures, perch and crucians to 4 lb, and roach and rudd to 3 lb.

IAN'S AIM

It's predator time at Old Bury Hill. And with the venue offering the best chance of a double-figure zander anywhere in the UK, Welchy is after a big zed.

CONDITIONS

Bright and sunny following a light overnight frost, it's a pleasant day but not ideal for zander.

I'VE always been a bit of a zed head, and the species, its introduction, and its impact on native species, has occupied my mind since it formed the major part of my masters degree back in the 1980s.

Back in those days zander were evil incarnate; public enemy numero uno, responsible for everything from the collapse of the East Anglian fisheries to the high unemployment rate and the soaring teenage pregnancy figures! Kill-on-sight policies instigated by angling clubs did little to popularise the species among average anglers, and zander became 'the fish they love to hate'.

Time, of course, is a great healer, and predator-prey relationships did eventually find a balance, as I and other fishery biologists at the time predicted they would. These days much of Fenland is thriving as a mixed fishery, with superb bags of tench, rudd and silvers to be caught. The irony, of course, is that many of the anglers who shouted loudest about the impact of zander in Fenland have little idea how good the fishing is on many of the drains and rivers these days, because they are sitting on commercial pools.

Despite fishery policy designed to restrict their spread, and the best efforts of some to wipe the species from the face of the Earth, it was inevitable zander would spread. By a combination of natural migration and a little help from their friends, zeds did start to appear out of the areas of their first introductions.

Owner David DeVere understands professional fisheries in a way that few others do, and the venue stands head and shoulders above most others as a consequence.

Today there are well-established populations in a number of lakes, and some of our major river systems, including the Severn, Warwickshire Avon, Trent and Thames.

Legal introductions of zander into enclosed stillwaters occurred well before the introduction of the species into Fenland, with Woburn Lakes, in Bedfordshire, receiving the first ever zander in the UK with a shipment of German fish in 1878. And from there, fish were transferred to other venues in the area, including Claydon Lakes, which received their fish in 1950.

Kenny Collings is one of the great anglers of modern times, and wonderful company to boot; it was good to catch up with him in the on-site shop.

Great swims and delightful surroundings – Old Bury Hill is one of my all-time favourite day ticket fisheries.

Open bale arms and lightweight drop-off indicators are a must, to minimise resistance felt by taking fish when zander fishing.

For a minute I thought I was into a right lump of a zander – but instead this 18 lb mirror had snacked on my legered roach head.

The stabbing teeth and perfectly evolved eyes help make the zander a highly effective predator.

Whole baits will catch zander, but I prefer the head section of small, freshwater species such as roach and skimmers.

I prefer single and double hooks for zander, and see no reason to employ trebles with small baits.

Sensible predator rules ensure the OBH zeds are immaculate, and this 9 lb specimen was typical of the quality you can expect.

OBH is one of few venues where sea baits will pick up zander: small chunks of mackerel can be deadly.

Big leads do not necessarily mean resistance. If you want a truly free-running set-up this is the way to go.

This fish took a small mackerel sliver hair-rigged on a size 6 single hook. My mate Mark Barrett might disagree, but I see no need for pike-style end tackle.

VENUE information

DESCRIPTION. A relatively shallow estate lake, the Old Lake at Bury Hill is lily-fringed with a heavily wooded island and water ranging from 3 ft around the shallow 'jungle' area to over 10 ft at the boathouse. It's a traditional mixed fishery, with a prolific but sensible stock density. Common sense tactics will bring bites from most species, but scale down for the zander.

TICKETS. Fishing at Old Bury Hill is by day ticket only, with sunrise-to-sunset tickets (from 7:30am weekdays) available from the on-site shop at £11.50 per rod for adults with second- and third-rod tickets at £5.50 each. Discounts are available for junior, OAP and disabled anglers. Boat, tackle hire and tuition are also available. Call 01306 877540 or visit www.buryhillfisheries.com

LOCAL TACKLE SHOP. A well-stocked tackle shop is present on-site. Call 01306 877540.

LOCATION. From junction 9 of the M25 pick up the southbound A24 Leatherhead by-pass towards Dorking. After about 5 miles, at the roundabout junction with the A25, turn right towards Guildford. The fishery entrance is on the left after about a mile, with the lake at the end of a mile-long track.
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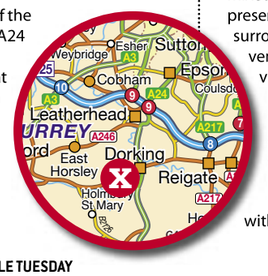

One of the other venues to receive an introduction from the Woburn stock was Surrey's Old Bury Hill (OBH) Lake, which took delivery of 30 fish in the 6 in. to 8 in. range from a lake in the Woburn area in the early 1970s.

These young zander thrived in their new home, and were well into double-figures by the end of the 1970s, forming one of the few populations easily accessible to southern anglers.

Superb fishery management and sensible predator fishing rules established by current owner, David DeVere, have helped to ensure the continued presence in OBH of what is a very fragile species.

The fishery has become arguably the finest zander fishery in the country, with a superb average weight, every chance of a double and a top weight of over 16 lb.

In addition to the zander, OBH is a great mixed fishery, with big fish of most species present. This, in combination with stunning surroundings, makes it one of my favourite venues, and one I always look forward to visiting every year.

This year the start of the predator season on OBH was an absolute flyer, with good numbers of big zander and some excellent pike reported.

I couldn't wait to get to grips with it. Typically, the day of my visit coincided with a change in the weather, and instead of overcast, mild weather, which always turns zander on, I was faced a cold, bright and sunny day. On the back of perfect conditions, this could mean a total feeding shutdown. But such is the appeal of the venue I was happy just to be there!

With a special coating on the retina of their eyes (the tapetum lucidum) giving them excellent night vision, zeds have a massive advantage over their prey in low light intensity, and feeding is always concentrated around first and last light.

With this in mind, I wanted to have baits in the water as soon as possible after the fishery opened, so my rods were already set up and ready to go!

Zander, like most predators, are sensitive to changes in resistance, and the OBH fish do see a bit of angling pressure, and can be finicky feeders, so I had scaled down everything to maximise my chances.

Most notably, I modified the business end, where instead of the obligatory pair of trebles I used either a single size 6 or a size 10 double hook tied to long, soft, multi-strand wire.

To minimise resistance I used 2.5 oz leads attached to wide diameter run rings. Leads this size seem heavy, but they stay put on a take, unlike lighter leads, which can drag.

They also allow line to pull freely and directly from the reel, which I was going to use with an open bale arm, with an ultra-light homemade drop-off indicator made from a Fox popper with a Gardner line clip screwed into it.

> "Most zander anglers will tell you that sea baits are a no-goer for the species. Not on Old Bury Hill they're not!"

Setting up halfway down the left-hand bank, where shop assistant and amiable gentleman of angling Kenny Collings had told me the small fish had been shoaling, I got the rods out straight away. I kept baits small, to match my end rig, with roach heads on two and a hair-rigged sliver of mackerel section on the third. Zander tend to favour smaller baits, but most zander anglers will tell you that sea baits are a no-goer for the species. Not on OBH they're not!

The first bait I positioned just a rod length out on the far side of a bed of decaying lilies. I guessed the network of leaves and roots would act as a haven for fry, and almost certainly be on the patrol route of a pack of feeding zeds. The other two I positioned at around 30 metres, where I could see fry dimpling in the half light.

I had only just got the third rod out when I had my first take, and struck into a solid fish demonstrating the characteristic head-shaking of a good zander.

In the landing net she looked to be around 8 lb or 9 lb, but I wasn't going to find out just yet, as I unhooked her in the net and re-cast immediately.

Zander feed in packs, and activity can be intense and short-lived, so I wanted to get back out straight away. It paid off, as my re-cast roach head was taken within a minute and I netted a second fish, slightly larger than the first.

I had time to complete the weighing and photographing of both fish before my third take, but only just, as the same rod signalled a jerky and hesitant bite as I was returning the second fish.

It was another good one, and as it hit the net I knew it was likely to go the right side of double-figures, and so it proved. The fishery had been open less than 20 minutes and I had netted zeds of 8 lb, 9 lb and 10 lb – brilliant!

Unsurprisingly, action slowed down in the bright sunshine, but I netted a couple of small fish before another of around 8 lb took my mackerel section as the afternoon sun began to sink behind the trees.

I readied myself for the dusk feeding spell, the time that usually brings the best fish of the day.

A slow take on my middle rod came when it was still light, and I felt a solid fish moving slowly off towards the deeper water, the line ticking off the clutch slowly. It was a very big fish.

I kept the pressure up, tightening up slowly, and was surprised when I found I couldn't stop it. The realisation that the fish I was attached to possibly wasn't a zander came just before it took off on an electrifying run towards the island.

I fish light barbel rods for zander, and my 1.75 lb Duo-Lite took the strain well. After ten minutes of fun under the rod top I bustled a big carp into the net, hooked perfectly in the bottom lip having sucked in a roach head!

The scales settled a couple of pounds short of 20 lb, and the frantic activity had whipped the swim to a froth and destroyed my chances of another zander, but what a wonderful finish to the session, and so very typical of OBH.

Old Bury Hill is one of those venues where you can never tell what's going to happen next. I can't wait to go back.