



JOHN BAILEY the thinking angler

THIS WEEK: We get close, very close, to JB's innermost thoughts on tench fishing...



JOHN'S WEEK AHEAD
Found a perfect tench pool. Crystal water, acres of lilies and one massive rolling tench. It looks like I will be setting the alarm for silly o'clock yet again! How much stick can an old dog take...!!



Float fantastic – another waggler-caught tench for John.

A MIGHTY 9 lb 8 oz of giant green pleasure! This superb fish really does prove the merit of keeping your eyes wide open. A few fish were bubbling spasmodically in water around 6 ft deep. Steady feeding with maggots slowly increased the bubbling and made it obvious they'd switched on to the bait. Gear was comparatively simple. A Hardy Marksman 13 ft float rod, Conquest centrepin, an Andy Field waggler and six pound line straight through to a size 14 hook. Two buoyant fake maggots and two real ones were the bait.

BREAK of day. A pewter surface. Bubbles breaking. A cuckoo calling. The float slips away and the reel goes ballistic. Does tenching get better than this?

This piece is not about tradition. Perhaps the majority of good tench do come at range on feeder tactics, but not all of them. The margin gully on gravel pits and the dam wall on estate lakes are both right up there on the list of top tench holding locations.

Fishing the float close, you can be tight, accurate and right on top of them. And Crabtree got one thing right – this is the most white-knuckle ride in tenching.

The rod tip float approach pays best in the warm months so we're right on the money now. Ideally, I'd use a soft-actioned 13 ft float rod and a centrepin. Again, this isn't anything about tradition.

A pin cushions light lines during the fight in a way that a fixed spool reel just doesn't. So, if you've got a pin use it: if you haven't, aspire to one.

You'll notice I mentioned lighter lines? In close, providing there's not too much in the way of weed and snags – you can get away with 4 lb line straight through.

Use 10 lb for feeders but half that for the float isn't a rule, but it's a workable guideline. If you can fish light and close you will catch more tench and get the hair-raising fights they are famous for.

Next, then, the float. This is where I disagree with Crabtree. Today's tench, I guess, are brighter than they were in the 1950s.

Fishing with fixed or running bullets and massive peacock quills wouldn't get you far today. Give me a light waggler – one that can take two or three BBs – and shot it perfectly and you're in the game.

How do I mean 'perfectly'? You need the exact depth of your swim – at least to the nearest inch. Once you've found the depth, with shot enough to cock it, lock the float so it's set four inches overdepth. Nip on a No.8 shot so it sits just on the

JOHN'S TOP CLOSE-IN TENCH TIPS

- 1 TIMING.** Dawn till nine or ten-ish and then again at last light are the times for close-in float work.
- 2 SEE IT.** Electric red for the float tip or white at last knockings with a modern hi-vis torch beam on it.
- 3 BASICS.** Don't confuse tench with too many baits and flavours. Stick to two or three and then try different approaches next session.
- 4 WORM CHARMS.** A lob remains a killer bait on a size 10. Chopped pieces of worm around the float are magic.
- 5 BUBBLING.** Look for the tight clusters of small bubbles for tench. Bigger bubbles across a larger area mean carp.
- 6 ON A ROLL!** A rolling tench is a feeding tench. What are you waiting for... go get it boy!

“The float is where I disagree with Crabtree. Today's tench, I guess, are brighter than they were in the 1950s.”



See these and you'll be on the edge of your seat, ready for action!

bottom. This will steady the float in a breeze and keep that four inches of line nailed down and away from the tench's nose.

Bites should be dynamic. The float simply sliding away or lifting half an inch first. There's not likely to be all the dithering, bobbing and weaving you read about in the old books.

Baits? Maggots on a 14 or 16 if there aren't too many silver fish.

Three casters are brilliant, and don't forget a maggot and caster cocktail. A grain of sweetcorn on a 14. Use 6 or 8 mm pellets on a band and a size 12. Side-hooked soft pellets and small boilies on a 12 or even a 14. I've had tench recently on prawn pieces on a size 14. A real favourite bait for me are seeds, beans and pulses – lentils can be superb.

Which brings me to baiting. I'm not a fan of groundbait itself for tench and prefer loose feed. But beware of hemp, that false friend. It gets tench feeding fine but can persuade them to ignore everything else. Scatterings of corn, small or dust halibut pellets, seed mixes, chopped up boilies or even pulverised balls of casters are my choice. Mix a little hemp-flavoured groundbait with all these to bind them, if you wish.

This is true tenching. If you ask me, a tench on the float is worth double the weight of a fish on the feeder. I want my 'ten' but a 'five' on a float is arguably the greater achievement.