

FISHERY MANAGEMENT:

WEATHER

As the seasons turn the fish will change their routines and feeding patterns, and **CHRIS CURRIE** thinks the weather is a key factor to take into consideration.

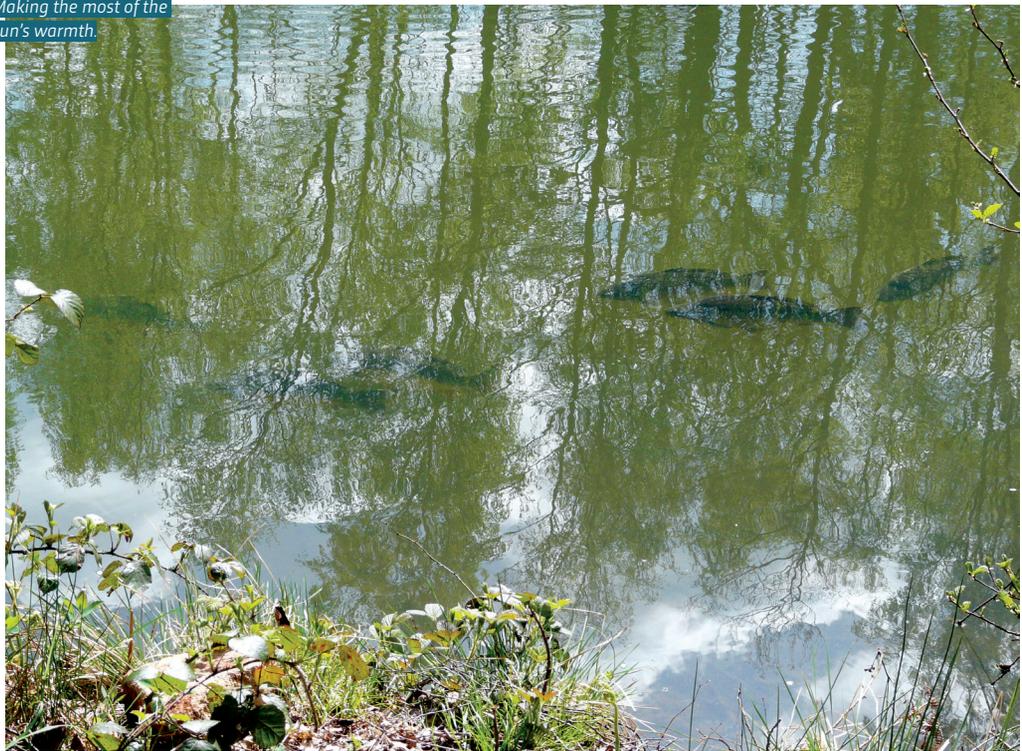
Certain weather patterns will help fish feel settled and in turn help them to focus more on feeding, which will make them more catchable. The changeable nature of the weather can disrupt the vital feeding patterns that we all hope will occur on a daily basis while angling.

Have you ever considered the possible weather fronts when packing the car or booking that annual trip to France? The time of the year becomes most people's main consideration, but studying the prevailing weather can really help stack the odds in your favour.

Consider those times when you have spent a few days at a lake at a certain time of the year and every day you would get run around lunch time for those days when the weather was fairly settled and similar on a daily basis. Now consider the same time of the year but with unsettled and very different weather each day: rain, sun, strong winds and suchlike mean the fish don't feel settled to feed as the change of weather can affect and alter many different water quality parameters, which can put a strain on the fish and their ability to vitally exchange oxygen or other key bodily functions during a feeding spell.

The moon phase can have a dramatic effect on the weather. From careful observation over a long period, the changing of the moon through the month can show key patterns and I have found from my research and observation that the new moon and full moon phases can bring a change

Making the most of the sun's warmth.



in weather. If the weather is very settled on the lead-up to either of these two phases this can bring about a dramatic change. For example, a long period of settled, sunny weather during this phase change can bring about a pressure drop, leading to it becoming blustery.

These sudden changes of weather pattern can have an effect on fish and depending on the change can mean the fish will either be feeding well or just switch off completely. This I feel is one of the reasons these two moon phases have such a big draw for the more experienced angler, who understands the correlation between the weather and fish activity.

The summer we have just experienced has really taken

its toll on many lakes, with above-average temperatures and the lack of dissolved oxygen with high water temperatures. This has affected the patterns of fish feeding and has meant that many lakes haven't produced a number of summer captures.

However, going into September and October has seen increased action as the waters have cooled down; this is purely down to the fish feeling more settled with the weather pattern experienced around this time, the increase in the water quality helping them after a prolonged period of pressure on their system.

The attack from pathogens is higher in warmer water, which is why many fisheries have experienced outbreaks of disease because of the

prolonged hot weather. A long, warm period like the summer we have just experienced can take its effect, but a small window of this weather of a few days can be a trigger, especially if it is during the winter after a particular cold period. A slight increase in temperature of the water, after a few days of this weather, can spur the fish to be more active and to feed, as fish are cold blooded.

If you get a warm spell in the winter the fish will come up in the layers because they need the warmth just as much as you and I do. They like the sun on their back and if you get a warm spell in the winter, they'll be rising up in the layers. You'll get them come right up in a period of three or four hours on some lakes.

Fizzers are a clear sign of feeding fish.

If you get a cold frosty day and then the sun comes up at 9am, then they're up by midday. Sometimes you might not see them, or you might just see a fin break the surface or you might just see a mouth, but they will usually be one to two feet below the surface enjoying the rays.

Heavy cloud cover can also help to raise the ambient air temperature by quite a few degrees, helping to warm the water and reduce light levels, meaning fish will feel more confident to feed. This is because the water temperature will rise to help generate a feeding spell, which is especially pertinent if you were fishing for predators such as perch, or during the cold period for barbel; a few degrees during a day can be all that's needed to have an effect on running water and many of the most successful barbel anglers watch the temperature of the water very closely.

Switching on to the long periods of settled weather can be advantageous, as it offers the carp a stable environment to work with, meaning they can become quite routine in their feeding and activity, offering us the chance to work this out and exploit the situation.

Conversely, some of the worst conditions are bright sunshine and blue skies. The

high intensity of the light levels can really put the fish down as their lack of eyelids means it's too harsh for their vision, especially when coupled with clear water. These conditions will tend to send the fish to the overhead cover of snags or lilies.

During the winter or early spring when the water is very clear as the algae has died and the sediment created by lots of feeding activity has fallen

out of the water column, the fishes' eyesight can be very good, spotting approaching skyline markers and shadows cast on to the water. This improved sight means they are on edge and less likely to feed, hence why the single hook bait approach is so successful during this period.

Vastly changeable weather over a short period can be a deterrent for fish to feed because it can cause the fish

to be stressed, as the water quality parameters change quickly without warning, putting stress on their bodily functions.

Any stress-relating factors in a fish's life will have an adverse impact on its feeding behaviour. Sharp frosts can be the kiss of death on shallow waters, sudden changes in the water temperature after an ambient drop in daytime and night-time temperatures



can cause the water to begin freezing and this influx of cold into a stable temperature environment can promote stress and put the carp off feeding for a period of time.

I have noticed just on my fish farm the difference in larger fish and smaller fish feeding patterns during certain weather conditions. Larger fish like C5 15lb plus will definitely feed more on a strong wind. The smaller fish like the C3 5lb plus don't seem to worry too much, unless you get a sudden high barometer pressure, then they seem to go off for a bit until they get used to it.

Last week we had a flat calm, foggy, cold spell, but once they got used to it for a few days they were feeding again. As soon as the barometer stayed settled – for two days – the fish fed normally.

Winter feeding patterns are often easier to read than their summer counterparts if you get it cold and frosty, like we should do most winters, although the last few have been mild.

Even now as I write this it's mild for the time of year, but as long as you get this settled weather then they'll feed. It went very slow feeding on the out site last week when we had the change from high pressure to low pressure but now it's picked back up again.

I can tell very quickly just by looking at the water colour as to the activity of the fish on any given day before a cereal feed or pellet has even been fed.

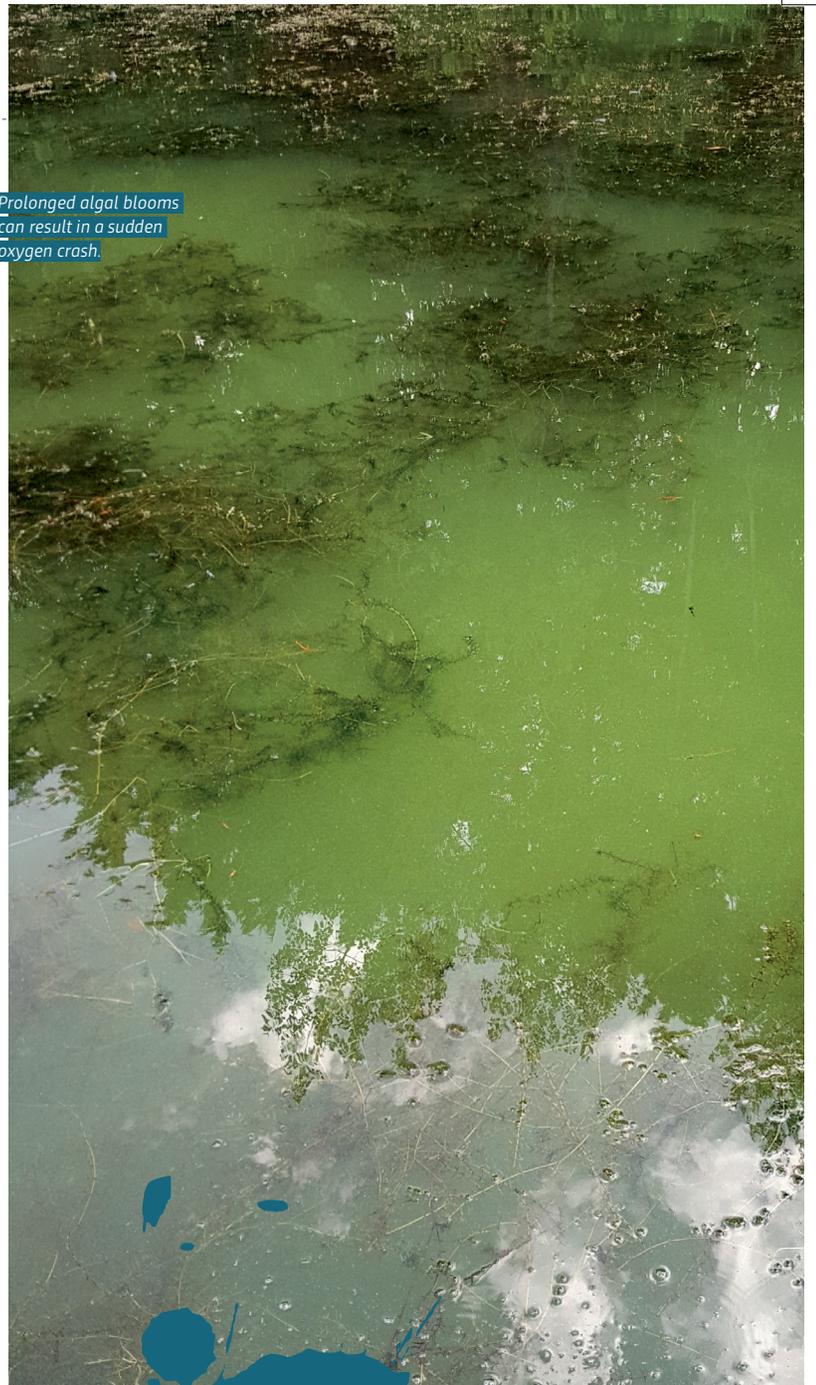
The temperature in the water in winter can really put paid to lakes, especially on the less densely stocked waters; they will just seem to disappear and only close observation or past habits around these conditions can help pinpoint a starting point, but in places that have a high concentration of fish per acre they will feed longer.

Once you get to the freezing mark or just above, the fish in the lower stocked waters will slow right down. In other places where there is more competition for the food, then they will carry on feeding, and that is why these higher stock waters fish all year.

Lakes that are sheltered from the wind can also hold the temperature for longer, and obviously deep lakes will fish a lot longer than their more shallow counterparts, but conversely once the temperature drops it takes a long time to build back up again.

Think about your venue of choice this winter and consider a lot of what I said above, and see if it has a direct correlation to your success or failure on the day.

Prolonged algal blooms can result in a sudden oxygen crash.



High pressure mornings typically mean flat calm conditions

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A single bright hook bait can often be enough to get a bite when they are not heavily feeding.