

IT'S COARSE FISHING... BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Editor-in-Chief Steve Fitzpatrick joins a growing band of Kiwi coarse fans for a match with a difference...

I HAVE to admit, 11,900 miles and 24 hours on a plane is a long way to go for a net of rudd. Especially when they weigh just a few ounces each.

It seems even more bizarre when you realise that New Zealand has a whole host of exotic fish species which are the envy of the world, including blue and red moki, kingfish, trevally, tarakihi, and an abundance of snappers that are often easier to catch than a plastic duck at the fair.

But for a growing group of ex-pats and Kiwis living around the north island's hotspots of Auckland and Tauranga it's rudd, tench, perch, eels and even a few brightly coloured koi they get most excited about.

A couple of weeks ago I managed to combine a trip to see family and friends with a session on the bank with them. My visit coincided with one of their annual charity matches where lads and ladies from several clubs met for a six

hour challenge, a chinwag, and bit of fun in aid of a local hospice.

I was picked up from central Auckland by ex-pat and New Zealand World Champs angler Matthew Sellen, of Auckland Coarse Fishing Club, and we headed east through some of the world's most stunning scenery to a series of old gravel pits at Kaiaua, on the Firth of Thames.

Most of NZ's coarse fish were introduced in the late 1800s and early 1900s by British settlers for their aquariums and later set free for fishing. Rudd, far more recent arrivals, were smuggled into the country in the 1960s and koi followed in the last few decades.

The lakes we were heading to were among a few dozen which were 'stocked' in the 1980s and the fish had been there so long the NZ government had agreed to let the rudd and tench be classed as 'sport fish', although they still aren't keen for them to spread.

The exceptions are the koi which, in the UK, would be worth

a small fortune. Over there they're classed as a pest species.

But that wouldn't stop us trying to catch a few of them today. The lake we were fishing - 800m long and 100m wide - nestled alongside a coastal road with a stunning backdrop of the Hunua mountain ranges on one side and the Firth of Thames and the Coromandel peninsula on the other.

Ex-pat match secretary Gary Bourne, who's been living in Auckland since 1988, got the draw going and the anglers headed to their swims. I watched as they set up, curious to what kit was going to be pulled from holdalls. Several Maver and Daiwa poles were slipped out over Preston pole rollers, top kits loaded with hollow elastics were assembled and in Matt's case on went rigs featuring 1g Drennan Tipo floats to 0.16mm line and size 16 Kamasan B61s to tackle his 6ft deep swim.

The kit on display surprised me, as my visits to tackle shops



Steve's first 'upside down' rudd from the stunning Kaiaua lake (below).

highlighted a distinct lack of coarse fishing gear (in fact there wasn't any!). Matthew explained that tackle has to come from UK mail order companies, with often horrendous postal prices to match.

What's more, if you want maggots you breed your own!

"You can get them over here,"

he said. "But they sell them for the pet trade in singles - the bloke



"You can't buy bags of groundbait or pints of maggots in the tackle shops here. We breed our own, and call them 'squinkies'..."

WORLD OF FISHING: NEW ZEALAND

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continued



Graham Harrison, originally from Beverley, East Yorks, and now part of the Auckland Coarse Fishing Club, with a bonus tench.



Kaiaua lake - just over the far bank is the azure blue sea of the Firth of Thames.

literally counts them out in front of you!"
The home-grown maggots have earned the nickname 'squinkies' as they're halfway between a squatt and a pinkie in size. And they only come in white!

Imported fishmeal groundbaits are also banned so the anglers make their own, the most popular recipe day being a mix of supermarket bread crumbs, ground peanuts, polenta, a touch of red dye and vanilla essence.

The whistle sounded, Matthew carefully fed two large balls of the mix and went out in search of some action. It didn't take long. He's represented his new nationality in the World Champs and gave Will Raison a run for his money when the event was staged in Holland a few years back.

Looking along the bank it wasn't the bagging session all had expected, but the excitement grew when Gary hooked and played a big koi on his light set-up.

I didn't think I'd get the chance to fish, even though I'd popped

into the local tackle shop to pick up a fishing licence the day before, but Matthew assured me he'd make sure I caught a few.

With a few pounds of rudd in the net and nothing to prove, after a couple of hours he got off his box, and handed over his kit. "I'm off for a chat with the lads, I haven't seen them in weeks," he said.

With the hot autumn sun screaming back from the carbon sections I shipped out Matthew's pole and lowered the rig in, feeding a small ball of crumb and three pieces of corn over the top.

A tiny lift on the bristle was met with a solid strike and rudd number one - my first NZ coarse fish - was being swung to hand.

These New Zealand rudd are weird, they feed hard on the bottom - and to be honest, given the problems with bait supply, it would be difficult to feed in a way that would bring them up in the water anyway!

Piling the bait in isn't an option for the koi either. They don't seem to subscribe to the 'last hour in the

margins' mentality, and the ones I'd seen caught had given bites as shy as a small silverfish. Every time my float dipped I was hoping it was a koi, as Matthew and I were playing catch-up to the other anglers with bonus fish in the net.

For the next three hours I toiled away on the silvers, wishing the next bite was from a koi, a tench, or even one of the famed, and huge, NZ eels. I'd been shown a pic

of one of the club members with a 21-pounder taken on the pole!

Eventually Matthew returned and we swapped places again. It didn't take long for him to get his gear back in order, feed his swim once more and hook that elusive koi I'd been searching for.

A good five-pounder, it was a welcome boost, but would it be enough at the final weigh-in?

The whistle sounded and we



Match Sec Gary Bourne set the pace with his koi.

followed the scales from peg 1 to our peg 12 location. When they got to us our catch sent the needle spinning to a 'massive' 12lb 5oz.

Surprisingly it was enough for third place behind former Wrexham man Peter Williams with 17lb 2oz and Nigel Beadle's 14lb 2oz - I was made up!

Talk after the match was all about next month's get-together, and longer term plans which would see some of the anglers heading over to fish the World Champs in Belgium in 2017.

They'd already set themselves three targets - not to blank, not to finish last, and to beat the Aussies.

Given the passion, skills, and dedication I saw from them all, I don't think they need to worry about that - come on you kiwis!

THANK YOU

Thanks to all the anglers taking part, especially Matthew and Gary, plus Stephen Leak of kiwicorsetackle.com



Nigel Beadle's 14lb net of rudd was second on the day.



Our 'tag-team' mixed net was good enough for third - mainly thanks to Matthew's skills, not mine



Peter Williams, originally from Wrexham, gets his hands on the trophy for his 17lb 2oz catch.

The lads and ladies from the New Zealand coarse clubs who took part in the match.

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