

Fishing – experts say it is good for mental health. Not recently it wasn't

Fishing, they say, is about being in the open air and pitting your wits against a creature you can't see. Medical people say it is also good for your mental health. It is not all about catching, but a fish here and there would assist.

Picture this. Not a cloud in the sky, a chill East wind but still shirtsleeve weather for some on Alex's Pond at Orchill (pictured) near Auchterarder.

We've all plumbed up and expectation is high amongst us all. We've done our homework watching videos, including ones by world champion, Tommy "don't move the feeder" Pickering and consulted staff at West Lothian Angling about the correct groundbait.

The gun goes off and the groundbait goes in, a cricket ball size followed progressively by those of golf ball proportions. Within minutes bingo, I'm into a fish.

It's only a one ounce gudgeon, but it bode well. A few maggots were then fed little and often into the swim but nothing came despite moving the shot around to make the bait fall even more slowly through the water column.

After a frustrating hour, a switch from the whip to a waggler was called for. Why? Because, by this time, the angler in the next peg upwind was continually bringing his pole out of the water with a mixed bag of fish.

It was, said the angler, hard work but I would not have minded a slice of his action. His net was full of small fish, but they were still counters.

As the minutes turned into fruitless hours the sound of the 4.5m pole over the rollers began to annoy. The angler was, however, placing his orange-topped wee float delicately inches from the bankside foliage on the island on the opposite side of the water, the advantage of a pole.

Casting a waggler with a tricky wind to that area was a non-starter even if it was clipped up. After another blank hour or two went by and despite liberal quantities of groundbait, another so-called gem of an idea from a top fisherman pinched from YouTube, the depth of the rig was changed.

This was to try to halt the march of the float across the water in the freshening breeze. No luck here either.

So, a bite of lunch to gather thoughts, relieve the monotony and also calm the frustration. The method feeder was in the tackle bag and out it came. That would allow me to clip up just short of the far bank.

I noted that I wasn't the only angler toiling. Even the best struggled as the fish refused to bite. You don't need me to tell you what happened next.

The only bite I received was unwanted from a dreaded midge. Scotland is a beautiful country but why, or why, did they land the midge on us to spoil days in the open air?

I digress but, I did, however, enjoy being in the rolling Perthshire countryside with the trees just beginning to turn into Autumnal shades and geese circulating in the blue sky above making their distinctive sound.

It will be no surprise to learn that I did not weigh-in after the six-plus hour match and I was eliminated from the Knockout Cup run by Edinburgh and Lothians Coarse Angling Club at the semi-final stage, a position I managed to achieve by default rather than copious amounts of skill. The moral boost, even for a short time, was appreciated.

Coarse fishing, I am finding, is another science. My first foray into match fishing a few weeks previously had been encouraging. I at least hooked into eight fish and missed a number of other bites.

Then, seven days later, in horrendous conditions of driving rain and strong winds – my brolly blew away several times and had to be pegged into the ground – my keepnet stored around 30 silver fish (total weight 11lb 12oz) and missed a number of other bites.

Same pond, same bait, much the same tactics, but different pegs and different conditions.

The big factor seems to be the equipment. In competitions I am surrounded by massive poles. It's like being caged in, however, the cost of that gear is high. Not being contemplated.

I'll soldier on with my waggler, method and whip gear and continue to watch instructional videos on YouTube to find the secrets of catching fish.

It looks easy on the lap top. It's not in practice, believe me, but finger-wagging Tommy Pickering be assured, I'm not moving the feeder.