

# Size Is Everything

Stan Piecha quizzes Tim Small, the man behind one of the most prolific big-fish waters in the UK, to find out more about him and his remarkable fishery.



Tim Small has seen his fishery grow from strength to strength. If you want to catch a double-figure fish then Lechlade is the place to go!

The sight of a brown trout topping the 20lb mark cruising by in crystal-clear water before stopping to engulf a perfectly presented nymph is a vision most anglers have never experienced. But there's one man who each year makes it his mission to ensure that those fantasies are fulfilled by as many anglers as possible who visit his trout-packed waters.

Tim Small is a man who makes anglers' dreams come true and last year just over 100 rods landed brownies that slammed the scales down past the 20lb barrier and another 500 who netted double-figure fish from his prolific Lechlade – a stunning nine-acre lake in Gloucestershire, with one of the highest proportions of specimen fish found anywhere

in Britain. And next door there's Bushleyaze for any rods wishing to concentrate on 'tidder' rainbows averaging around 4lb.

For while Tim may be Small by name he's the Mr Big when it comes to growing muscle-packed, rod-bucking trout of enormous proportions. The brown trout record for Lechlade stands at 22lb 12oz, while the rainbow best is an impressive 26lb 12oz. The rainbow record for Bushleyaze is 17lb.

On December 26th this year Tim will have been in the trout-rearing game for an astonishing 40 years and, while some folk predict doom and gloom when discussing the future of stillwater fly fishing, he is confident that the sport will continue to survive, providing that fishery owners

do their bit to attract new blood into the sport.

Tim, 58, revealed: "We are spending a lot of time and effort encouraging more youngsters to come along to our waters because, sadly, many of our regulars are no longer with us. We are happy for juniors to come along and share a ticket with an adult because it gives them the chance of catching a fish and hopefully taking up the sport for life."

"We keep a lot of data about our customers and it makes interesting reading, even to the point that catering for the people who fish on our two lakes is often like running two separate businesses.

"The average age of people who visit Lechlade tends to be 35 and their aim is to try and catch a specimen trout,

while the ones who fish at Bushleyaze are in the 60-plus bracket and are happy to spot a few kingfishers and enjoy the odd pull from a feisty trout. The average mileage that customers visiting Lechlade clock up is 100 miles each way, while Bushleyaze is only a round trip of 70 miles. But my greatest joy is the amount of female anglers we attract, and I think that's because we have proper female loos, which tend to be a great source of pleasure for them. Oh, and I've also been out with a few of those women!

"I think fly fishing has leveled out now and the waters that are still going will continue to thrive. The days of someone digging a hole in the ground, filling it with water and adding trout to it then calling it a fishery are long gone."

Tim's association with trout started back in 1974 when he saw an advert in *The Field* magazine, suggesting fish farming was profitable. He looked into the possibility of setting one up – despite having no experience or qualifications for the task in hand – and moved from Somerset to Cirencester, in Gloucestershire, after going into partnership with someone who had some suitable land. Together they set up a hatchery and started breeding trout.

In 1985 Tim bought Lechlade Farm and worked round the clock growing fish to meet the demand from restaurants and supermarkets. However, after an energy-sapping 14 years he decided to turn his back on processing and packaging his trout and concentrate on allowing anglers to catch them instead. He added: "Things were

getting out of hand and when I went to see the bank manager he told me that turnover was for vanity while

profit was for sanity. At the time our turnover was over £1 million a year but we were only just breaking even. These days it's a fraction of that but we make a good living and all the fish we produce go into the lakes."

Each year Tim buys around 40,000 ONE-OUNCE fish costing 10p each and then spends as long as three years growing them on. At any one time there are 70,000 fish being fattened up, thanks to the seven tons of fish food needed each month – which has rocketed from £400 a ton a few years ago to £1,500 today – so it's easy to see why a four-fish-limit day ticket at Lechlade is £60. In fact, he points out that if an angler walks away with four 10-pounders – and plenty do – he's out of pocket because those fish will have set him back £80 to reel!

His fishery does not operate a catch-and-release system because experience has shown that some anglers would return big doubles – which would often die after a hectic fight or not being revived properly – in the hope of hooking an even larger specimen. And when he relaxed the rule once a year while hosting a competition on Lechlade he found it killed sport on the fishery for almost seven weeks.

But his greatest raid on his valuable stocks occurred in



The editor with one of Tim's amazing double-figure brown trout, one of 100 that was landed by anglers in 2012!

1999 when, one morning, he pulled the curtains back from the bedroom window and spotted 26 others gorging themselves on his trout.

Tim recalled: "Someone had released 36 others in the area and most of them decided to make my fishery their home. They stayed for a year and ate almost 55,000 fish and there was simply nothing I could do about it."

"I went outside one morning with a shotgun and fired into the air to try and scare them, and the next minute the police were on my doorstep warning me the others have now dispersed and we have one pair at Lechlade and one pair at Bushleyaze, which doesn't cause us any real problems."

While anglers visit Lechlade in a bid to tangle with the fish of a lifetime, Tim, a keen flyfisher with many exotic species under his belt, has never fished for one.

He said: "Believe it or not the only time I fish for brown trout is when I visit my sister in Ireland and fish Kerry Blackwater, or during trips to Colorado. And in both locations I'm delighted if any of the fish I catch weigh half a pound." ■

## My Favourite Fly And Why...

"I love the simplicity of a buzzer – black ones are by far the best – and let's be honest, the most fish that swim! I do like these patterns, though, the far in the thorax allows them to sink very slowly indeed, far better than those heavy-weight versions, I think. "Fishing the buzzer is a simple process: a light line, long, limby tippet and just allow the fly to do its thing. Let the line decide where it's going to go and often the fish will take it. You can, if the mood takes you, add a little flash to your buzzer but for me the 'basic' patterns are often the better takers of trout."

[www.lechlade trout.co.uk](http://www.lechlade trout.co.uk)

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