

The best day-ticket water in Britain

That's the bold claim of Korum's Duncan Charman about Mill Farm Fishery, where dreams of record fish can become reality.

You never know what you're going to catch next at Mill Farm.



No record breakers this time, but these silver bream are what many anglers visit Mill Farm for.

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Nestling in the shadow of the South Downs, there is a fishery where records lurk. Not monster carp, outsize tench or some other sought-after species, but fish that many anglers have never seen, let alone caught.

No, the day-ticket Mill Farm Fishery, near Pulborough in West Sussex, is home to a much rarer fish. I have spent many hours in search of the very special specimens of Mill Farm and I'm proud to say I have caught this particular species to a touch under 2lb. "What?" I hear you cry. "How can a two-pounder be a record?" Simply

because the fish we are talking about is the silver bream.

A completely different species from the much commoner – and larger – bronze bream, the silver bream inhabits the rivers and drains of eastern England, parts of the southwest and just a few other areas of the country, where their large eyes and silver colouration give them away. They're also in one or two lakes, and it's here that they have grown to record-breaking proportions.

Being so rare, silver bream are notoriously unpredictable. Here at Mill Farm, spring is the best time to

catch them, when they're fattened up, full of spawn and pigeon-chested. Thankfully, there are plenty of other fish here to keep anglers happy. Mill Farm, in fact, is home to an abundance of other species including tench, roach, perch and crucian carp. Targeting specific species is difficult, almost impossible here; over the last few weeks I've been fishing for the 'silvers' on Specimen Lake and getting hammered by tench! The fishery's Mill Pond is more popular and an easy water where the rod will arch over constantly throughout the day, whatever the conditions.

THE PLAN

The journey south along the A283 through the picturesque villages of Chiddingfold, Northchapel and Petworth is as pleasurable as always. It's 6am and, right on time, the automatic gates slowly begin to open, after Dad and I have been parked up next to them for a few minutes.

Normally there are at least half a dozen cars queuing to get their favourite plots but today, amazingly, we're alone. The forecast isn't good, with a band of wet and windy weather sitting just off the southern coastline predicted to move inland as the day progresses.



ANGLER FACT FILE

Name: Duncan Charman
Age: 44
Hometown: Aldershot, Hampshire
Occupation: Photographer

Here's the plan: During the morning I will be targeting tench on Specimen Lake before heading onto Mill Pond for a spot of crucian fishing. Two contrasting methods will be used and, who knows, maybe one of those elusive silver bream will put in an appearance.

Dad chooses a swim on Mill; his job is to catch a few crucians, a backup if my afternoon plan fails. I continue the short distance to Specimen Lake and settle in my favourite swim, which has a fantastic backdrop of the rolling countryside nestled on the slopes of the hills.

I have two rods already set up and in minutes I'm ready to go. The tactic that has been working during previous sessions is a simple maggot feeder with a short helicopter rig positioned slightly above, baited with a tiny redworm and maggot cocktail. Turn to page 51 for details of how to tie the rig.

The first rod sends the feeder skywards towards the centre of the island. Feathering it as it lands I simply clip the main line in the reel clip and tie a small piece of pole elastic on the line at the rod top. The second rod is cast slightly left and lands around two metres from the edge of the island in slightly deeper water.

Minutes later a small lift of the indicators, followed quickly by another, raises my confidence as the maggots from the feeder are clearly drawing a few willing mouths towards my hook bait. Then, one indicator hits the ground – a classic bite when using these rigs. Expecting a good bend in the rod to develop I'm rather disappointed as a small roach is swung in. Before


**NOISE
ABATING
TACKLE
TIP**


Duncan plugs the sound holes of his alarm to reduce the noise.

**HOW TO
PREPARE
YOUR
FEED
PELLETS**


01 Half fill a bait tub with water and pour enough pellets in so they're completely covered.



02 Leave 2mm pellets for two minutes and 4mm pellets for four minutes, then tip the water out.

Duncan returns a fine Mill Pond tench.

Quality roach soon started to fall to Duncan's helicopter rig set-up.


**TACKLE
FOR THE
HELICOPTER
RIG**

Rod: Korum Neoteric with 1.75lb tip
Hook link: Two inches of 0.17mm Preston PowerLine, locked in position by two small float stops and the addition of a Korum micro rig sleeve to create an anti-tangle boom
Hook: Size 16 Drennan Super Specialist
Feeder: 30g medium Preston Innovations Quickload
Indicator: Gardner Mini Bug, with Gardner TLB Compact alarm (sound holes plugged so as not to disturb other anglers)

I can get the rod back in position the same happens on the other rod and another, slightly bigger, roach comes to hand. For the next hour numerous roach fall, ranging from just a couple of ounces to maybe touching the pound although the tench, normally so active, stay away.

It takes a while before a better fish is hooked and, from the way it's gliding towards me, it can only be one thing – yep, a silver bream of around 1¼lb. After that, roach after roach intercept my bait and I'm perplexed as to what to do to stop them. I try a 4mm pellet without a touch then hook a couple of worms onto my size 16.

The bobbins stay motionless, so at least I've slowed the roach down. Then suddenly the clutch spins and as I lift the rod I realise that I quickly have to release the line clip as a good fish tears off. First impressions are that it's a carp but a couple of minutes later the green flanks of a tench break the surface.

It's not a massive fish but at least I'm off the mark with my target species. A flurry of action sees more quality fish come to net including two more tench, a couple of reasonable perch, another silver bream plus numerous roach.

Never before have I been bitted out like today! I can only put it down to the water temperature rising and the roach becoming more

MILL POND

active. I'm sure the tench, perch and 'silvers' are feeding but they've had very little chance to find my bait before a ravenous roach. Perhaps it's time for a move...

On Mill Pond, Dad has enjoyed a good morning with plenty of fish including roach, silvers, carp and half a dozen crucians – not as many as I would have expected, but at least they're feeding. After lunch we return to our swims and I set up a very different method from the morning session. Crucian fishing is all about finesse, keeping everything delicately presented to outwit such finicky feeders. Sure, big crucians can be caught with bolt rigs too, but do that here and you'll be fighting king carp in a variety of sizes all day.

The pole is almost the ideal tool on this water but the shallow nature of the pond sees any accidentally hooked carp bolting for freedom and wrecking your rig in seconds. My choice is to use a short rod with a running line and, instead of fishing this directly in front, I prefer to present my bait along the marginal shelf. This allows two swims to be fed at the same time, pulling fish in from both sides.

Before lowering my rig into the swim I prepare some feed pellets; 2mm and 4mm Sonubaits Fin

Perfect Expanders, which I find crucians love. Preparing these is simple: Pour some of each into individual containers and just cover them with lake water to soften them up a bit – two minutes for the 2mm and four minutes for the 4mm – then drain off the excess.

Hemp is another great crucian attractor but I always introduce this sparingly because if overdone the fish becoming preoccupied on it.

Today I'm also trying the new 4mm Soft Hooker Pellets from Sonubaits for the first time; I want to see if they are as good as the S-Pellets that I've had so much success on. They all seem absolutely equal in size, soft and oily and can be hooked easily without falling off, but will they be as attractive to the fish?

TACKLE FOR THE FLOAT

Rod: Korum 11ft 3G float

Reel line: Preston PRX Match 3000

Hook link: 0.15mm (5lb 14oz) Preston Innovations Reflo PowerLine

Float: Preston Innovations Bazzleria PB19 4x14, which has a cane tip and carbon stem, shotted with an olivette and two No11 shot between olivette and hook. The float tip must be only just visible at the surface

Hook: Size 18 fine-wire Kamasan B525

Duncan and his dad with the fruits of their session on Mill Pond at Mill Farm Fishery.

WHERE ARE THOSE CRUCIANS?

A quick plumb around reveals less than two feet along the margin but I know the crucians won't mind this. The float can be seen far better against the reflected sky in the water if the colour is changed to black, so after a quick rub with a permanent marker it's ready to go.

After less than a minute the first bite is missed, but the next takes even less time and the strike initially meets solid resistance. It feels as if I've hooked the bottom, but then the 'bottom' starts to move slowly out into the lake. After maybe 30 seconds a large carp realises it's hooked, stripping line from the reel. However, just as I'm gaining the upper hand, the hook pulls. For the next few minutes, bites are constantly missed before not one, but probably a dozen quality roach come to the net.

Finally, after numerous fish, including two silver bream, I hook a crucian only for the hook to pull out. Into the final hour, though, my perseverance finally pays off and I slip the net under a modest crucian.

Has my backup plan worked? Well, Dad has managed a few crucians early on but even his swim now seems empty. Me? Well I've enjoyed a great day's fishing. Even though the tench and crucians were more reluctant than usual. I've taken some clonking roach and some of those silver bream for which Mill Farm is famous.

Let me tell you, if you want non-stop action from a variety of species with the outside chance of breaking a British record, then this is the best day-ticket water in the country – make the journey, I guarantee you won't be disappointed!



VENUE FILE

MILL FARM FISHERY, BURY MILL FARM, BURY, WEST SUSSEX RH20 1NN

Day tickets: Range between £7.50 and £12.50

Opening times: 7am till dusk, gates open at 6am during summer

Contact: 01798 874853

How to get there: Mill Farm Fishery is situated just off the A29 at Bury, about three miles south of Pulborough in West Sussex.

Leave Pulborough on the A29 heading towards Chichester. After passing through Watersfield take the right turn onto the B2138 signed Fittleworth and Petworth. Almost immediately is a road to the left signed West Burton, the entrance to the fishery is about 300 yards down here on the left