

Dave Pugh, *Lure Fishing - Presentation & Strategy*, Coch-y-Bonddu Books, 2014

Traditionally, lure fishing, especially for pike, has had relatively few enthusiastic followers in the UK. The main reason has always been the conviction that big pike - and that's what most British anglers are interested in - are much more likely to be caught with natural baits, dead or alive. Only in the last twenty to thirty years have we seen a steady increase in the number of British anglers explaining and recommending lure fishing in books and magazines and, more recently, on the internet. Different from England, lure fishing in the Netherlands had already become very popular since the early 1950's. The result has been - in sincere modesty - that the Netherlands had advanced much further in this particular way of angling, compared to England. This was noticed by British angler Chris McCully, after he moved to Holland in 2000. In 2009 this led to the publication of his excellent book *Fishing and Pike Lures*, which made the knowledge he had gathered in the Netherlands available to British lure anglers.

And now another specialized book on lure fishing has been published: *Lure Fishing - Presentation & Strategy* by Dave Pugh. Is it another step forward? I certainly think so. But like McCully, Pugh too builds on ideas and techniques that had been developed abroad in the previous decades. For Pugh the book that really opened his eyes to why and when predatory fish choose and use the places they do, was *Spoonplugging* (1973) by the American angler Elwood 'Buck' Perry from Hickory, North Carolina. In the USA Perry is regarded as one of the great innovators in lure fishing for bass: 'the daddy of structure fishing'. He developed his theories on the location of predatory fish in the 1950's and 1960's and presented them with the triumphant commercial slogan "You too can catch big fish... and lots of them!" Perry put questions to many assumptions that by then had existed for so long that they had gradually turned into certainties. Pugh does the same thing, and there's a lot to be learned from that.

For an important part Pugh thinks independently, based on his own experiences. And he formulates his thoughts and conclusions accurately. He mops the floor with well-established ideas and assumptions that over time - and sometimes for generations - have been copied as certainties by many anglers and angling writers. That's a relief. But now the reader in his turn owes it to Pugh to also be critical about Pugh's ideas and not adopt them without any thinking of his own. Moreover the circumstances in which Pugh does his fishing - mostly rivers and lakes - often differ a lot from e.g. the Dutch polders. But still Dutch anglers will find in Pugh's book many thoughts and approaches that are universal and therefore apply to their fishing as well.

The book is divided into two sections: 'Presentation' en 'Strategy'. In the first section Pugh considers the presentation of lures - that is the location and depth where, and speed at which they are presented - of primary importance. Next to that the size of a lure can be critical as well. But the type of lure and its colour and action matter much less - the type only so much as it determines the depth at which a lure can be fished. In other words, the fish-catching power of the different types of lures is strongly relativized by Pugh. Especially the part about why fish take or ignore a lure is, in my opinion, important and convincing. Here Pugh settles with the anthropomorphic ideas on fish behaviour and the believe that lures should as well as possible imitate prey fish, or even wounded prey fish. However much an angler may be convinced of the attractiveness of a lure, the fish may hold completely different ideas about it. And here, I'm sure, Pugh really hits the nail right on the head.

Section two, 'Strategy', contains a good and useful explanation of the different approaches in lures fishing. Yet I find the many certainties Pugh presents here sometimes a bit too positive and far-fetched. It leads to statements like "the chance of getting a take if two pike are present is twenty times higher than from a single pike". How do you know that? And how can you measure it so precisely? Without a doubt there's much knowledge on fishing to be gained from experience. But the problem will always be that, when fishing, the circumstances in nature include an infinite amount of variables: the behavior of the fish themselves at the moment of fishing, circumstances in the water on the exact location (e.g. type of bottom, depth, weed growth, clearness of the water), the weather, the time of day, the behavior of the angler, the materials and bait or lure used, the way in which the bait is presented, etc. etc. All these values, that often differ from day to day or even from hour to hour too, make that conclusions will inevitably remain uncertain and will often also depend on local circumstances. Unfortunately this leaves very little room for certainties. Speaking for myself, in fifty years of angling I've had to give up ever more certainties and assumptions - almost to the point of becoming an angling agnostic. Rather paradoxically, Pugh has helped me with his

findings and assumptions to reconsider many of my own ideas and assumptions and to have a fresh and different look at various things. I certainly expect this to benefit my fishing.

Yet there remain some fundamental differences in view between Pugh and me. These can probably be carried back mainly to cultural differences between Dutch and British anglers - with the British attitude on the whole being rather more competitive. An important example is the subject of 'time management'. For someone who first and for all values the quality in fishing and who knows to enjoy the way in which a fish is caught and the entire setting in which this takes place - say more the rustic Chris Yates type of angler - this chapter will be hard to swallow. Because here Pugh sets off in a purely quantitative attitude: catching fish like harvesting potatoes. Pugh wants us to ask ourselves the question 'Are there loads of fish here that I can catch easily?'. If not so, we should move on. Here the objective of angling is reduced to hauling in the maximum amount of fish - 'bagging up' - and any circumstances or joy in fishing seems to be subordinate to this goal and irrelevant. At least not a word is spent on it.

The same attitude can also be recognized in the way Pugh chooses his tackle. He says very little about it at all, other than that he likes to use the strongest tackle and the most powerful rod he can, in fear of losing a fish: "The fight is more an irritation - a potential risk of loss after doing all that hard work in location and presentation." In this Pugh and I are divided by a fundamental difference in attitude. The day I will ever think of fishing as 'hard work' and of the fight as 'an irritation' I will quit angling immediately. Even so, this difference in attitude can hardly be a ground for criticism. Everyone chooses his own way to happiness. Conclusion: Without any doubt Pugh's *Lure Fishing* is an important book with which any lure angler will be able to improve his fishing - at least his results - considerably. Compliments also for the fine hard cover edition with a very attractive painting by Maurice Pledger. Highly recommended.

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