

**A Freshwater
Fisherman in
*THAILAND***



Peter Jaggs

A FRESHWATER FISHERMAN IN THAILAND

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With thanks to my Mum for all her help scanning the illustrations and other highly technical stuff.

Also by Peter Jaggs:

From Beggar to Butterfly

Blundering Around Isaan

Fehlritte im Isaan

Visa Run: Pattaya to Sihanoukville

Monkey Business in Thailand

Introduction

This book contains fifteen chapters which include illustrations and detailed information about the habitat, angling methods and baits used to capture the twenty-four types of fish most regularly caught in Thai freshwaters. Of course, there are many other species of fish to be found in the inland waters of Thailand, but a book comprising all of them would be impractical. Because of this, the text covers the two dozen commonest species that the newcomer to fishing in Thailand is most likely to encounter.

When I first started fishing in Thailand, I looked in all the book shops for a guide to freshwater fishing in this wonderful country. Much to my surprise, nothing existed. I had done plenty of angling in England, but I was a complete beginner to fishing in the inland waters of Thailand. I didn't want anything too technical. I was hoping to find a simple guide that I could put in my fishing bag, that would allow me to identify, tackle-up and give me some idea of the baits to use for the different species found in the fishing parks and natural waters that I had begun to frequent.

More than twenty years later, I was browsing the book shops again. It appeared that there was still not such a book available. This really surprised me, because freshwater fishing had, by now, become an extremely popular sport amongst *farang* residents and holidaymakers in Thailand. Because of this, I thought that I would use my two decades of angling experience in Thailand to write this book myself. Over the years, I have helped many friends on their holidays to catch plenty of big fish in Thailand, and I see no reason why the fishing methods and secrets that I have learned should not help the reader to an improved understanding of fishing in Thailand, together with bigger and better catches.

This is not so much a beginner's book as a newcomer's guide to fishing the freshwaters of Thailand.

There are many expert Thai fishermen about, and as all anglers know, there is no substitute for local knowledge. Unfortunately, you will find that the normally kind and helpful Thai people are famously tight-lipped when answering questions about bait, tackle and rigs. They are not being unfriendly. Thai people tend to look at

things from the fishes point of view, and it is actually looked upon as rather bad karma to show someone the deadliest methods to enable them to fill nets full of fish. Besides this, why should anyone give away angling secrets that have taken centuries to develop to a *farang*, anyway? You will also notice that when you ask, whatever species you intend fishing for is present in a water whether it swims there or not. This is the Thai sense of humour. I have spent many days spinning for Snakehead fish that simply did not exist, or casting out huge balls of bread mix for Mekong Giant Catfish that were not in the water at all. This is something you will have to get used to.

Sometimes, angling in fishing parks in Thailand can be very frustrating for the European angler who is used to having his own swim that another fisherman would not dream of encroaching upon. On a crowded day in a fishing park in Thailand, lines are crossed and tangled as a matter of course, then retrieved and unravelled with a smile and no ill-feeling. This is the Thai way. Such behaviour on a Carp fishery in England would probably get you banned, or a black eye at least. Of course, there are still many quiet and peaceful waters and fishing parks off the beaten track in Thailand where the lover of solitude can fish by himself.

As well as technical information on species, tackle and baits simply explained, I have also included what I hope is an evocative short story about a day's fishing for each species. I included these stories because I know that all us fishermen love a good angling yarn. As well as providing the reader with some valuable tips, I hope that these fishing adventures will give the newcomer to freshwater angling in Thailand a taste of what he can expect when fishing the diverse freshwater venues of this amazing and beautiful country.

Peter Jaggs, Bangkok

Glossary Of Useful Words And Fishing Terms

- Ban* - Mould or squeeze
Bet - Hook or rod
Bo plar - Lake or pond
Bo tok plar - Fishing park
Cha cha - Slowly
Daet - Sun
Dakadan - Cricket
Der goot sai bet - Split-shot
Dueng - Pull
Farang - Western foreigner
Gin - Eat, bite
Gorn - Bait ball
Fontoc - Rain
Harm - Forbidden
Hoei - Loose or slack
Hoi - Any type of Shellfish
Hoi keng - Sea Shellfish bait for Walking Catfish
Jingrit - Grasshopper
Kanom pang - Bread
Kangkrai - Scissors
Khong mai - Fresh
Klong - Canal
Kom - Pliers
Kop - Frog
Kradot - Jump
Kung - Prawn or shrimp
Kye mot - Ants' eggs
Laew laew - Quickly
Lek - Small
Leelee - Lily
Leurk - Deep
Lork - Reel
Long Suan - Irrigation Ditch
Lood - To lose
Look kop - Tadpole

Look bhat - Bead
Look thum - Weight
Luad sai fai - Wire
Mae nam - River
Maeng mom - Spider
Mee meyhk - Cloudy
Mit - Knife
Nam - Water
Nam chuam - Syrup
Nam katee - Coconut milk
Ngiap - Quiet
Norn - Maggots, grubs
Perd - Open
Pit - Closed
Pla - Fish
Pla Plom - Lure, spinner
Plaeng - Flour
Pobpob -pohpoh - Bobbing, or in and out
Rot - Flavouring or mixers
Ruam - Mix or mixed
Sai-en - Line
Sai-en pan kan - Tangled line
Sai deuhn - Worm
Sai kai - Chicken intestines
Su-wing - Landing net
Tah-kor - Coil-feeder
Teh kor puk bet - Swivel
Teun - Shallow
Tit - Stuck
Toon rong nam - Float
Trong - Straight or tight
Wad bet - Strike
Wiang bet - Cast
Wing - Running (fish)
Yai - Big
Yua - Bait

Waters

The type of waters in Thailand where the angler can wet a line are diverse. Certain species of fish can be found in the shallowest, muddy pond or the smallest stream or irrigation ditch. Even flooded fields hold Snakehead and Walking Catfish and many of the country's large reservoirs and huge rivers are the home to giants of astonishing proportions.

It is likely that most of the newcomer's fishing will be done in fishing parks. This type of fishery is becoming extremely popular in Thailand now, and every year more and more are opening up to cater for the growing number of both Thai and *farang* sport fisherman. A fishing park of some description can be found in almost every province in Thailand now, and the more popular tourist destinations like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hua Hin and Pattaya all have an excellent variety of venues.

Rivers, streams, natural lakes and reservoirs offer much more of a challenge. This is because these waters are much harder to lure fish from than the fishing parks, which are stocked regularly. However, the accomplishment of landing a really wild fish and the occasional giant that is caught make up for the less productive hours of fishing for many anglers. Indeed, fishing at some of the more crowded fishing parks can cease to be a pleasure for the lover of solitude when faced with bank to bank fishermen casting over each others lines. Shouting anglers and even karaoke machines make some fishing parks noisy places. Of course, there are still plenty of very quiet and peaceful fishing park locations in existence, and it is undeniable that some of the fish in even the most crowded of venues are awesome.

Be wary when other anglers either recommend, or advise you not to visit a certain fishery. Fishing parks open and close, species get fished out, and due to judicious stocking programmes, many places actually improve. Fishing tackle shops can provide you with invaluable information about existing venues, and as can local anglers who are friendly enough to be questioned. I have always found the Thai people very helpful when imparting information about fishing parks, though they can be much less forthcoming when asked about methods and baits!

Because of the tenuous nature of fishing parks in Thailand, it is

almost impossible to provide the reader with a list than will stay useful for any length of time.

Of course, besides fishing parks, there are also many rivers and reservoirs around the country where public fishing is permitted that can be given a try. However, wherever edible fish are available in waters that are free for all, gill nets and fish traps set by the resourceful Thais will have severely depleted the natural stocks of fish and huge specimens are rarely taken in these waters, although it does happen. Despite this, sometimes the smallest irrigation ditch or muddiest stream can provide a welcome surprise and no water should be regarded as hopeless until given a try. Nevertheless, it is a fact that due to the growing popularity of the catch and release system in Thailand, most catches of both quality and quantity will certainly come from well-managed, established fishing parks in the future.

Care Of Fish

Freshwater fishing in Thailand can be dramatic, exciting and addictive. The diverse variety of species that inhabit the inland waters of this country and the fascinating methods used to catch them are just as likely to hook the visiting angler's imagination as do the Carp, Pike and Tench back home.

There is no freshwater fishing close season in Thailand, and the angler may fish all year round. Due to cultural differences rather than intentional cruelty, you may notice that some of the Thai anglers you will find yourself fishing next to are a little harder on their captured quarry than their Western counterparts.

As a *farang* angler, please spare a thought for the poor old fish.

There is no need for any visiting angler to fall into the habit of ripping the hooks from a deeply-hooked fish without the aid of a disgorger or long-nosed pliers. Take care that the big species of Catfish and Carp that you catch do not damage themselves as they flap and struggle on the hard, wooden boards of fishing platforms. Be prepared in advance. These fish are big and strong, and very annoyed at being pulled from their watery homes. Be kind enough to bash any fish required for the cooking pot on the head immediately

and humanely, instead of allowing them to gasp out their last breaths in the sun in a few inches of water at the bottom of a bucket, or a plastic bag.

Always use tackle strong enough to ensure that the absolute minimum of fish are left trailing coil-feeders, hooks and line after snap-ups. If a fishery insists on barbless hooks, use them. Release any big fish that you catch as gently and as quickly as possible, instead of imprisoning them in the tiny, knotted keep nets provided by many fishing parks. Bring a large keep net with a knotless mesh from home if you intend to photograph your bags at the end of the day. And while you are about it, you might consider that the landing nets provided at fishing parks in Thailand are not much better either. As well as being made from very rough mesh, they are also hopelessly small for those twenty and thirty pound fish that you are eventually going to find yourself attached to.

You may sometimes witness angling practices in Thailand that border on the cruel by Western standards, but if you should, don't try telling the Thais what to do, or how they should treat their fish. That is unless you don't mind joining the Catfish in the muddiest part of the lake.

It is a good idea to always remember that you are a visitor here, and that this country belongs to the Thai people, and so do the fish.

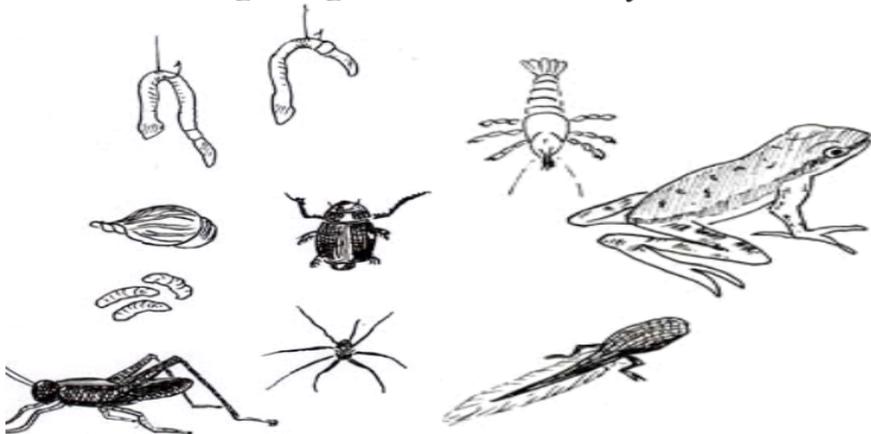
Baits

Most angling in fishing parks nowadays is done with coil-feeders on bread, pellet or flour bait mixes. Nearly all fishing parks have these baits for sale. If not, you will find them at any good tackle shop. The ground bait is moulded around the coil-feeder in a ball, in such a way that when it lies on the lake or river bed, it will break up and disperse. In doing so, it forms a cloud or carpet of feed to attract the hungry fish to your hook.

You may find yourself becoming confused when contemplating the bewildering array of additives that some Mekong Giant and Striped Catfish anglers dream up, and Carp anglers are in a class of their own when experimenting with new baits. Coconut milk, red

Fanta, aniseed, syrup, sticky rice, banana, peanuts - these and many other additives are all widely used. Don't worry. Many excellent fish are caught on nothing more exotic than plain bread and flour baits every week, so the experimentation of different ingredients in baits presented on coil-feeders is largely a matter of choice.

Sometimes it isn't easy to lure a fish from angling parks that are over-fished. This is due to the fish mopping up so much of the free offerings of ground bait that they cease to be hungry.



As well as this, the owners of a water that has recently been hard-fished will occasionally overfeed their stock on purpose, in order to protect them. In the past, I have seen literally boatfuls of stale bread being shovelled in at some fishing parks during the quiet of the early mornings before the anglers arrive. The big, clever fish then have enough to eat without risking food items that looks at all suspicious. On days like this, it sometimes needs a little something special - or a good deal of luck - to tempt a bite.

Of course, rural, up-country Thai fishermen do have their own secret special baits. However, when you have tried getting your hands on the grubs of giant hornets, or considered the moral implications of hooking up a soft, hairless pink baby mouse or impaling a live lizard on your hook, you will probably decide to opt for the more regular baits used.

Crickets, grasshoppers, frogs, lizards, tadpoles, spiders, ant's eggs, worms, brandlings, chicken intestines, shellfish, bee, hornet and wasp grubs, freshwater shrimps, small fish, certain species of beetle, water weed and some nuts and fruits are all popular baits amongst the rural Thais - particularly the older generation of fisherman. Surprisingly,