

So you want to fish?

By AZNIR MALEK

Fishing is one of Man's oldest pastimes. Records of fishing with rod and line can be found in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The first English publication on angling was written in the 15th century by a certain Dame Juliana Berners (yes, a lady!) in *A Treatyse On Fyshynge With An Angle* as part of the *Boke of St. Albans*. Here in Asia, 10th century records in China have been found referring to fishing reels and rods.

Thus, recreational fishing has a long tradition indeed. Now, fishing has become one of the biggest hobbies and sports in the world. In the US alone, there are about 90 million recreational fishermen, spending more than US\$90bil (RM342bil) a year. In Malaysia, it is estimated that there are more than one million fishermen, spending a conservative total of RM300mil a year. Thus, recreational fishing is an important factor to the national economy.

What makes fishing so popular? Well, for a start, recreational fishing is an easy sport to pick up. Almost everyone is capable of pursuing the sport, regardless of age, depth of pocket or ability. In fishing, you set your own limits.

There are sport fishermen who go to the extremes of sailing the high seas, chasing monster marlin, sailfish and sharks, or trek the mountain rivers to pit wits with the kelah and sebarau.

Fishermen shooting the breeze while waiting for the fish to bite at a fishing pond in Tanjung Rambutan. —Starpic by LEW YONG KAN

On the other end of the scale, there are those who are happy with wetting their lines at the local fishing pond or disused mining lakes for the likes of carp and tilapia, or cast their baits from the jetty or seashore for fish like gelama or pari.

It's a personal thing; you take your pick.

This diversity makes fishing an attractive option for the masses. But this very diversity poses a problem for the guy about to start in this hobby. What kind of fishing do I do first? What equipment (fishing tackle) should I buy? What methods should I employ? I hope to discuss these issues over the next few articles to help you on your way if you are just starting out on this wonderful journey of being a fisherman.

But the best thing to do first is freshwater fishing. The reasons are obvious. Freshwater fishing is more accessible to the new angler. There are many fishing pay ponds, disused mining pools, lakes and rivers within driving distance. Heck, even in a bustling city like Kuala Lumpur, you can find fishing ponds smack in the middle of town!

Freshwater fishing demands a simple tackle to start with; get some general purpose rods and reels, lines, hooks, baits and lures, and you're in business (we'll discuss basic fishing tackle in a future article).

But how do I start? I can't tell one end of a rod from the other, and I don't know of anyone I can turn to for advice.

Don't worry. Let me list some options for you.

Firstly, buy some fishing books and magazines. But do remember that most of the stuff in our bookshops are about fishing and fishes in Western countries. The techniques discussed in these books need to be adapted to our situation, although the general principles are the same.

For local content, I suggest you buy the local fishing magazines, in particular Rod & Line, the only English language publication on the sport.

Meanwhile, you can surf the Net, a 'bottomless pit' of knowledge and techniques on all things fishing. Again, for local content, I suggest the South-East Asian websites. In particular, Malaysia Fishing Net, is an excellent website if you want to find new fishing friends. The discussion forums cover all types of fishing. There are even sections on the buying and selling of fishing tackle, and discussions on fish and environment conservation. Many of our local angling 'sifus' surf this website, and many a 'newbie' started out via this site.

Next, you can try visiting your local fishing shop. Get to know the proprietor and regulars there. Chances are, they are ever willing to help you with tackle selection and tips on where, what and how of fishing. You can even get one to take you on your first fishing outing.

Make the most of your first visit to a fishing pond. Talk to the fishermen there. You'll probably find someone friendly and willing to give you more advice.

You can also contact local fishing organisations. Some of them conduct occasional fishing clinics. Examples are Persatuan Memancing Malaysia (PeMM), Penang Fishing Association and various clubs. Remember, you can't learn fishing from books and videos alone. Just like riding a bicycle, you need practice, so the most effective way to learn fishing is to go fishing. It is best to have a volunteer coach, so you need to make a friend or two!

Also, you will never learn everything about fishing in a lifetime. Thus, no one single person can teach you everything. Spread your network! Try things out for yourself until you're convinced they work.

Oh yes, later, when you are proficient, don't forget to sustain the tradition and download your knowledge, skills and attitude to others! W

Recommendations...

For ponds:

Subang Lakes (behind Sheraton Hotel, Subang Jaya)

Towfoo Sportfishing Centre, Kundang, Selangor

Kolam Joran Terjun (behind Zoo Negara)

Sg Long Fishing Pond, Sg Long

For reading:

Rod & Line (English), Rod & Line (Chinese) & Pancing (Malay) are monthly magazines and make up the oldest family of fishing magazines in the country

Kingfisher (Chinese) and Sirip (Malay) come out every two months

Petua Memancing by Ahmad Akim

Fishing Forays by Aznir Malek

Freshwater Fishes of Peninsula Malaysia by Azmi Ambak & A.K. Mohd Mokhsin

Saltwater Fishes of Malaysia by Azmi Ambak & A.K. Mohd Mokhsin

Freshwater Fishes of North Borneo, Inger & Chin

The picture of Aznir Malek in StarWeekend, March 25 was actually that of Aziz Daud, IGFA Malaysian representative.