



## ➤ Martin Salter, MP for Reading West, is on a mission.

In recent months, Salter has campaigned on behalf of John Bercow, the new speaker of the House of Commons, and for the beleaguered gurkha soldiers. Today, his ambition is more personal. "I'm on a quest for a double-figure tench," he says.

It's early morning, and we're making our way through the trees to a lake that he hopes will provide the longed-for 10lb fish. That the Labour MP is willing to get up before dawn to go fishing is no surprise: as well as looking after his constituents, he is parliament's angling spokesman.

When I heard Salter was fishing at a lake at Burghfield, Reading, near where I grew up, I was eager to join him. This was a trip back to my childhood summers. Though it is more than two decades since I fished these waters as a boy, every path and clearing is still familiar. I also knew how difficult the fishing was – in only 100 acres of water, there lurk a few huge tench and carp. Finding them is a problem.

Salter remains grounded in his constituency (he has no second home), and reels off his favourite fishing spots and the exact number of minutes it takes him to drive to them. "Reading is one of the best places in the country to be an angler because there are rivers and lakes everywhere," he says.

Salter and his friend Richard have been baiting this small bay – almost a separate lake, connected to the main body of water by a narrow channel – for days in an attempt to draw in the fish. They plan to fish here intensively in the coming weeks.

"The reason it isn't packed with people is because it's bloody hard," he says. Richard, who has fished through the night, has already hooked and then lost a large tench this morning, just as it neared his net. The near-miss is a source of both hope and disappointment.

Salter sets to work casting bait out to an adjacent area. Groundbait flavoured with molasses, maggots, hempseed and sweetcorn is laid some 30 yards out. He then



*Bob Sherwood (left) and Martin Salter use groundbait flavoured with maggots (pictured below) to tempt the tench*



### THE DETAILS

*Permits for Burghfield lake are controlled by Cemex Angling, [www.cemexangling.co.uk](http://www.cemexangling.co.uk). Martin Salter's campaigns and fishing pictures can be seen at [www.martinsalter.com](http://www.martinsalter.com)*

measures two fishing lines precisely, so that his hookbaits are fishing exactly over the groundbait.

Tench are early risers in the summer, feeding from dawn to midday, so time is of the essence. As the sun lifts above the trees that enclose us, Salter wipes his hands on a rag made from a pair of his old underpants. We settle down to wait.

There is a disturbance across the bay, and Richard is on his feet playing a heavy fish. By the time I reach him, it is in the net. He parts the folds of mesh to reveal a carp that pulls his scales down to 22lb 8oz. As he unhooks it, his hands are shaking. We go back to waiting.

Fishing was one of the influences that drew Salter to the area – and to politics – 25 years ago. He used the redundancy money from a job as a Heathrow cargo worker to put a deposit on a house in Reading. It backed on to the river Kennet, so that he could fish for barbel from his garden.

He was soon involved in a fight to overturn the local authority's ban

on angling on Reading's promenade along the Thames. He then found himself standing for the council.

A beep from an electronic bite indicator interrupts Salter's reminiscences. It means there are fish moving in the area, though the movement was probably caused by a tench brushing the line rather than mouthing the bait. We stare at the indicator bobbin, willing it to move. "Come on, baby..." Salter murmurs to himself.

As parliament's angling voice, Salter has tried to show that Labour is not against the sport. "There was never this left-wing conspiracy to ban angling," he snorts. "That was always bollocks."

But angling has not been the easiest pursuit to represent, given a lack of co-ordinated leadership. "Fishing has never punched its weight [politically]," Salter says. However, he is optimistic following the creation in January of the Angling Trust as the sport's new unified representative body. "There is more public money

## Second opinion All at sea

By Margaret McCartney

“ This column likes evidence-based medicine. It is impossible to defend anything else: to pretend there is no need for evidence – or to ignore it – means ignoring the duty to ensure patients get the best possible care.

It would be nice to think that medical research has now got its act together, after many shameful episodes of wilful, look-away ignorance – advising parents to put babies to sleep on their tummies, for example, which substantially increases risk of cot death. But standards are still nowhere near where they should be.

A terrific paper on this subject was published recently in *The Lancet*, written by two heroes of mine: Sir Iain Chalmers, editor of the James Lind Library, and Paul Glasziou, of the Department of Primary Care at the University of Oxford. It is a scathing rebuke to those who feel that developments in research standards have gone far enough.

They quote a medical researcher who sought information about treatment for his bone marrow cancer. He was looking for published research in relation to possible treatments he had seen presented in a conference abstract, a summary of a research presentation. Years later, the full data remained unpublished. “Why was I forced to make my decision knowing that information was somewhere but not available?” he said. “Was the delay because the results were less exciting than expected?”

A paper last year in the journal *Oncologist* found that fewer than one in five studies in cancer that had been registered on the website [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) (a global register that ensures that current trials are in the public domain) was subsequently published. This led the researchers to ask if they were “practising on the tip of an information iceberg”.

Chalmers and Glasziou are also concerned that new research is “too often wasteful”, with badly designed trials meaning that the outcomes will not be clinically helpful. Even the purpose of the research itself can fail patients – patients with knee osteoarthritis were found to be most interested in research into physiotherapy and surgery, not drug interventions, on which the bulk of the research is focused.

Many journals now insist on publishing trials only if they have been registered at [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov). This ensures that there is a record of what research is being done. However, with only a fraction of research being published, together with question marks over what kind of research we are prioritising, complacency is not an option. Unsuccessful trials are still less likely to be published and although some pharmaceutical companies have pledged to publish all research, this is neither compulsory nor standard practice. This is a scandal: there is information out there about treatment interventions and it is

not being used to benefit patients.  
*Margaret McCartney is a GP in Glasgow.*  
[margaret.mccartney@ft.com](mailto:margaret.mccartney@ft.com)

For lively discussion of the latest medical issues go to Margaret McCartney's blog at [www.margaretmccartney.com/blog](http://www.margaretmccartney.com/blog)



going into fishing than ever before,” he says.

As the wait goes on, I stroll around the lake, remembering fishing days from my youth. I pass the spot where my friend Nick caught a 17lb pike, a bigger fish than we had ever dreamed of, when we were 14. I am surprised how little has changed – and Salter bears some responsibility for that. He has just led a successful fight against the building of 7,500 houses on this floodplain. “This spot would have been covered in concrete,” he says.

The conversation pauses as we both scan for signs of fish – tench often betray their presence by sending up streams of tiny bubbles. “Hello, we’ve got some bubbles,” Salter says. “We’ve got fish moving out there.”

However, just at that moment, a young bailiff arrives to check Salter’s permit. Recognising him, he grills the MP for the latest news on the housing development plan.

“I have a slight problem being the MP for the area because everybody talks to me while I’m fishing,” he grins sardonically. “That’s why I’ve just bought a boat, because then they can’t get to you.”

He plans to spend more time exploring the Thames in his new boat after he stands down from parliament at the next election – a decision taken long before the rush of expenses-driven departures in recent months. At 56, he appears to have more fishing ambitions left than political ones: “If I had a choice between being a member of the cabinet and catching a 3lb roach, I’d probably take the roach.” I don’t think he’s joking.

Richard is on his feet across the lake again, playing what looks like a good tench. But again, agonisingly, it slips free. Salter shrugs, knowing he will return repeatedly until he lands the tench he is chasing.

For all his evident desire for a memorable catch, fishing offers him more than the thrill of capture. It is the antithesis of the glare and hustle of public life. “Fishing teaches you to be happy in your own company,” he says, “and it gives you space to think.”

As we pack up, I find a link with my childhood home unexpectedly rekindled, and I am suddenly keen to return to the simpler fishing style of my youth. Salter has inspired me. How many MPs can you say that about? ■

[pursuits@ft.com](mailto:pursuits@ft.com)

“I have a slight problem being the MP for the area because everybody talks to me while I’m fishing – that’s why I’ve bought a boat”