



## Crucians – native or naturalised? By Peter Rolfe

Many anglers like to call the Crucian “our native carp”, to separate it from the common carp *Cyprinus carpio*, which was introduced here in the Middle Ages. The statement reflects the affection with which the crucian is held but it is now clear that it cannot be justified.

First, the crucian is **not a carp**, as the Latin name - *Carassius carassius* - shows. Some think that it would help if we dropped “carp” out of its name entirely and called it just “crucian”, to emphasise that it is a completely separate genus.

Secondly, latest scientific research<sup>i</sup> now indicates that the crucian was introduced to the British Isles and is not a native fish. By “native” we mean the presence of a fish in the British Isles before the land bridge between us and the continent was finally flooded.

We do not know exactly *when* the crucian was introduced to Britain. The literature of natural historians and anglers<sup>ii</sup> suggests that it came into the country early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at roughly the same time as the goldfish, *Carassius auratus*. Equally, it has been suggested that it was brought in with the common carp in the fifteenth century because the two species are easily confused. The discovery of a crucian bone during excavation at a British/Roman site gave rise to the idea that the crucian has been here even longer.

However, what is more important for the conservation of the crucian is that it is a species certainly long established in this country. It is benign and poses no threat to other species or to the environment.

Moreover, the British Isles, because of our isolation from the continent, offers a unique refuge for a species under serious threat. In its native range in Europe the crucian is in serious danger of becoming extinct because of habitat degradation and hybridisation with the invasive gibel carp, *Carassius gibelio*.

Anglers, naturalists and scientists need to work together in conserving the crucian here. In addition, and vitally, we must ensure that the gibel carp never crosses the Channel, so that the UK remains an “ark site” for the preservation of the crucian.

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<sup>i</sup> Jeffries DL, Copp GH, Maes GE, Lawson Handley L, Sayer CD, Hänfling B. Genetic evidence challenges the native status of a threatened freshwater fish (*Carassius carassius*) in England. *Ecol Evol.* 2017; 00:1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.2831>

<sup>ii</sup> *Crock of Gold – Seeking the Crucian Carp*, Mpress 2010