



A thinfaired largemouth (left), and a trophy nembwe (bottom left), two of the numerous species that make up but a small portion of the abundance of the Okavango. They too partake of the feast as hyped catfish work in teams to flush out the hapless baitfish — barbs, bulldogs, bream and silver robbers.

action are the white-winged and whiskered terns, the two tern species that are a common sight around the catfish runs.

Differing from the egrets and herons, which rely on the catfish chasing the baitfish out the water, the terns patrol the air above the deep channels, on the lookout for robbers and bulldogs that are swimming for their lives on the surface of the deep water. As these exceptional little birds do in the open ocean, they have an amazing ability to know where the tigers are going to tear the surface apart, and hence make the tiny baitfish more vulnerable to the terns.

The feeling of watching a tern dive on boiling tigerfish is reminiscent of watching them in action over schools of tuna or bonito. Without wasting time and getting positioned upriver from the feeding birds, a drift over the area will often result in the flyfisher being able to cast to the white water of boiling tigerfish.

In Africa we are blessed to be able to fish wild, vast areas, but sometimes the vastness of a fishing area can be rather daunting. This is most definitely the case with the Okavango River. It can take a lot of time and effort to find a run, covering many kilometres of water while searching for this action. There is much excitement upon finding a good run, after spending a large portion of a day scouting areas a long distance from camp. And there can be disappointment too when having to leave the run in the early evening, in order to get home.

Leaving a fishing area in this manner is often at the prime golden hour before sunset. It was this disappointment of having to leave hot fishing action that led to the concept of fly camping these areas. Fly camping gave us the ability to fish further, and for longer, away from the lodge. With a simple but comfortable fly camp packed onto one of the boats, there was a degree of flexibility that gave us more time over the critical late evening while fishing these far afield runs.

To start up the boat and leave a run when you can see tigers boiling all around you can only be described as heart-breaking and something that haunts you for days to come. On the other hand, already having a camp set up on a nearby island, translates into being able to fully enjoy the fishing without the shadow of the long drive home looming over your shoulder. It is a special feeling to watch other boats leaving when the fishing is starting to gain momentum, thus leaving all the water in our hands.

Returning to our private island well after sunset, starting a fire, star-gazing while reminiscing about the day's fishing, and experiencing a closer bond to the river after some magical fishing is a hard experience to describe, but in one word it is exceptional.

The 2008 Okavango catfish run season proved to be everything, and more, that was expected of this phenomenal natural event. The fishing was exceptional, and mixed with the experience of fly camping on small islands while exploring remote stretches of the river, is something that definitely found a special place within the hearts of the Tourette Fishing team.

It is said that every South African should run the Comrades Marathon at least once, and perhaps the same should apply to flyfishers and the catfish run on the magical Okavango River. Imagine waking on an isolated island to bird-song, the kettle already boiling on the campfire, and the first rays of the sun creeping over the horizon.

With the expectation of catching tigers only a quick break-fast away, how fast would you eat? 🐟

If you would like to find out more about fishing the 2009 catfish run with Tourette Fishing, give Rob Scott a call on (033) 344-2250, or e-mail <rob@tourettefishing.com>.