

neously the outboard sputtered into life as our coxswain put some distance between us and the hippos. We beached on a nearby sandbank, and holding the trophy fish in the slack water as Darren readied the cameras, the size of the fish hit home. She turned out to be 23lb – the Holy Grail of the 20lb tiger on fly had finally been achieved. Years of research, thousands of days of fishing, countless scouting trips, a hot tip from a good friend, days of waiting, a morning of wasted opportunities – success at last. We were ecstatic!

**PERSPECTIVE**

Even if this single fish was an isolated and random occurrence, it would have been superb. The fact that we had three shots at similar-sized fish on the same day left me dumbstruck. I was in heaven – not only were we the only fly fishermen on a remote river in wildest Africa, but we were fishing a river of previously unheard-of pedigree. Add the ferocity, speed, power, aerial attributes and tough hookup-to-landing ratio of our quarry, and one can begin to appreciate the enormity of it all. We had landed another 20lb fish that afternoon, soon after the first, but to write about that would just be smug. The day had been a success so the beers that evening tasted sweeter than ever.

Three days later I was browsing through the photos on a plane en route to Zambia. Once again I found the words of Eminem playing in my head: “You only get one shot, do not miss the chance ... this opportunity comes once in a lifetime.” I was truly thankful that my opportunity had (and would) arise more than once in a lifetime: four times in one day in fact.

**TAXONOMICAL NOTES**

The tigers we were catching were, to the best of my knowledge and that of leading ichthyologists I have consulted, *Hydrocymus vittatus* – the same tigerfish of the Zambezi and Okavango systems and all east-flowing rivers in the tigerfish’s range. They were not goliath tigerfish (*H. goliath*). The lack of the typical vivid colouring on the fins in all the fish we landed is most likely a function of the environment; the river is discoloured and turbid for ten months of the year. I have also noticed similar colouration in a few tigerfish on the Zambezi that were caught in localised areas of turbid water. The biggest fish we landed measured 73cm, consistent with the maximum length achieved by *H. vittatus*. All evidence points to a system of maximum efficiency and very little pressure on the tigerfish in this area, allowing them to grow at an exceptional rate. The unique proportion of the fishes’ mouths in relation to their bodies also suggests a system that facilitates unheard-of growth rates; thus the fish are able to gain body mass faster than they achieve skeletal growth. Once the maximum length is reached, these fish grow upwards and outwards, resulting in tigerfish of epic proportions.

**Duma River Update – 2nd trip**

**FISHING DIARY:** I’ve just returned from another three days at Duma River Camp with two easily persuaded fly fishermen. The water had cleared well since our first recce trip a month earlier, and the levels had also dropped roughly half a foot. In summary, over the course of three days, two fish in the 20lb range were landed. Seven fish conservatively estimated at over 20lb were lost. We saw one fish under the boat that we initially thought was a crocodile, but turned out to be a tiger as the red of its tail flashed as it finned downward again. Having witnessed this, I’m confident that a 25lb-plus fish will be landed here in future.

**PREPARATION:** Tackle and angler competence are both tested to the utmost when these beasts hit. The speed and ferocity cannot be compared to any fish I have ever taken in fresh or salt water. When fishing the salt, I find that there is a micro second between the hookup and the first run that allows one to comprehend and plan for the ensuing run. With these fish, no such time is offered. The take is brutal and comes out of nowhere. No matter what you may think, at no time are you really in control until the fish is on the reel. The learning curve is steep, to the point of vertical. As Grant said, “This place will break fly fishing egos, and bruise even more knuckles.” Ah, what a place to be!

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