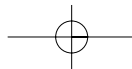
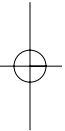
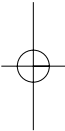


Light on the pocket but heavy on the action, contributor **Keith Clover** takes a look at a well-known local river that yields some surprising results.



Duzi scalies

The fly fishing industry is fast becoming a congested highway of marketing vehicles – tackle manufacturers, local and international fishing venues and guiding services flash their wares across the pages of our favourite fishing magazines, on the screens of our televisions and PCs and the shelves of our tackle stores. Presenting the right ad, at the right time, to the right fisherman is not too different from matching the hatch and fishing to rising browns at dusk. You will invariably catch and be caught, depending on which side of the hook you are on. Although a vital element of the fly fishing industry, this aggressive marketing may result in disappointed buyers. With the vast amount of time, money and research that is put into hooking fishermen, it is not surprising that our expectations when buying a new fly line or fishing a new location are not always met. Be this due to our overactive minds rationalising the decision to spend 20K on an exotic fishing trip, or just not reading the fine print, the majority of anglers will have at some time experienced twinges of



disappointment when reality does not live up to their perceptions.

Fortunately for the enterprising fly angler, the opposite of this situation is more often the case. Finding your favourite fly line in the bargain bin at a local pawn shop, or lucking onto a dream piece of water where the fish are thick and the water clear are such examples. Recently when fishing some home waters, I was treated to an experience that has thus far been the angling highlight of my year. Having just returned from some amazing winter tiger action on the upper Zambezi, I was craving small stream angling. My business partner, a salt water fanatic at heart, had mentioned the fly fishing potential of a stretch of water right on our doorstep. However, living in the KZN Midlands, I know this piece of water better for its high *E.coli* count and the annual influx of river canoeists. Yes, you've guessed it – the Duzi River.

KZN is well known for its great scalie (KZN yellowfish) fishing, the Umgeni, Mooi and Umkomaas rivers providing superb fly fishing in spring and early summer before the waters dirty. The Duzi, on the other hand, is

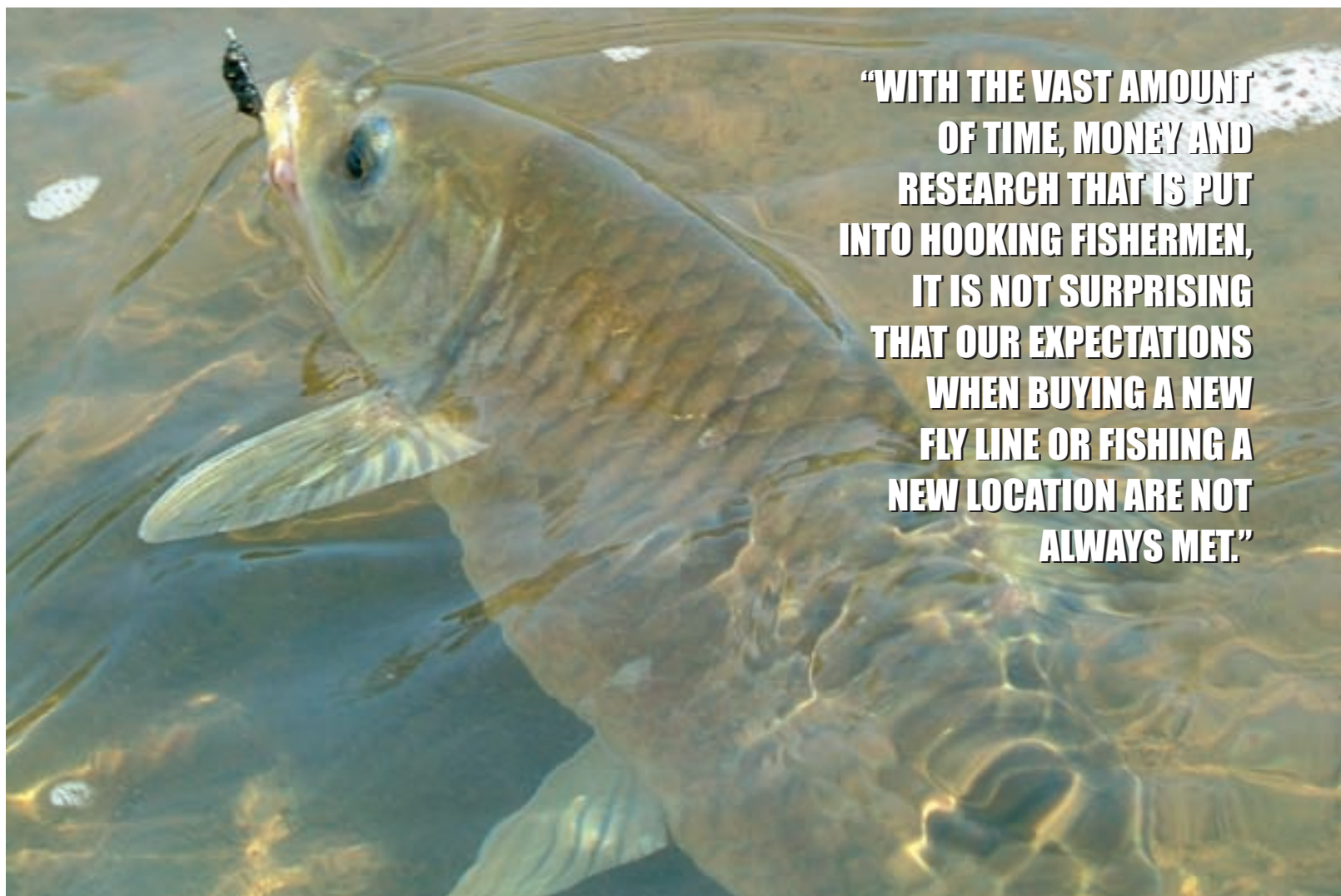
not often mentioned in the same breath as fly fishing and crystal waters. These perceptions, combined with icy waters due to the seemingly endless bombardment of cold fronts and a recent pollution scare, resulted in me being somewhat sceptical about successfully targeting scalies mid-winter in the Duzi.

Crossing the Duzi, frothy and brown, as we headed through the Pietermaritzburg CBD, I could not help thinking that we might be wasting our time, and should rather be heading to the crisp clear waters of the 'Berg streams or Umko Valley. A 30-minute drive ended in us disembarking from our vehicle deep in the heart of the Duzi Valley. Walking down the steep wooded banks of the soon to be fished river, I could not contain my excitement. Before us lay clear water flowing in white sheets over the underlying bedrock, deep crisp-looking pools and enticing riffles – any fly fisherman's dream. Crossing a section of shallow rapids, Rob stopped midway, bent down, reached into the icy water and pulled up a handful of aquatic plantlife. To my surprise it was packed with dragonfly nymphs, in addition to caddis larvae and small crabs. Obviously the river wasn't

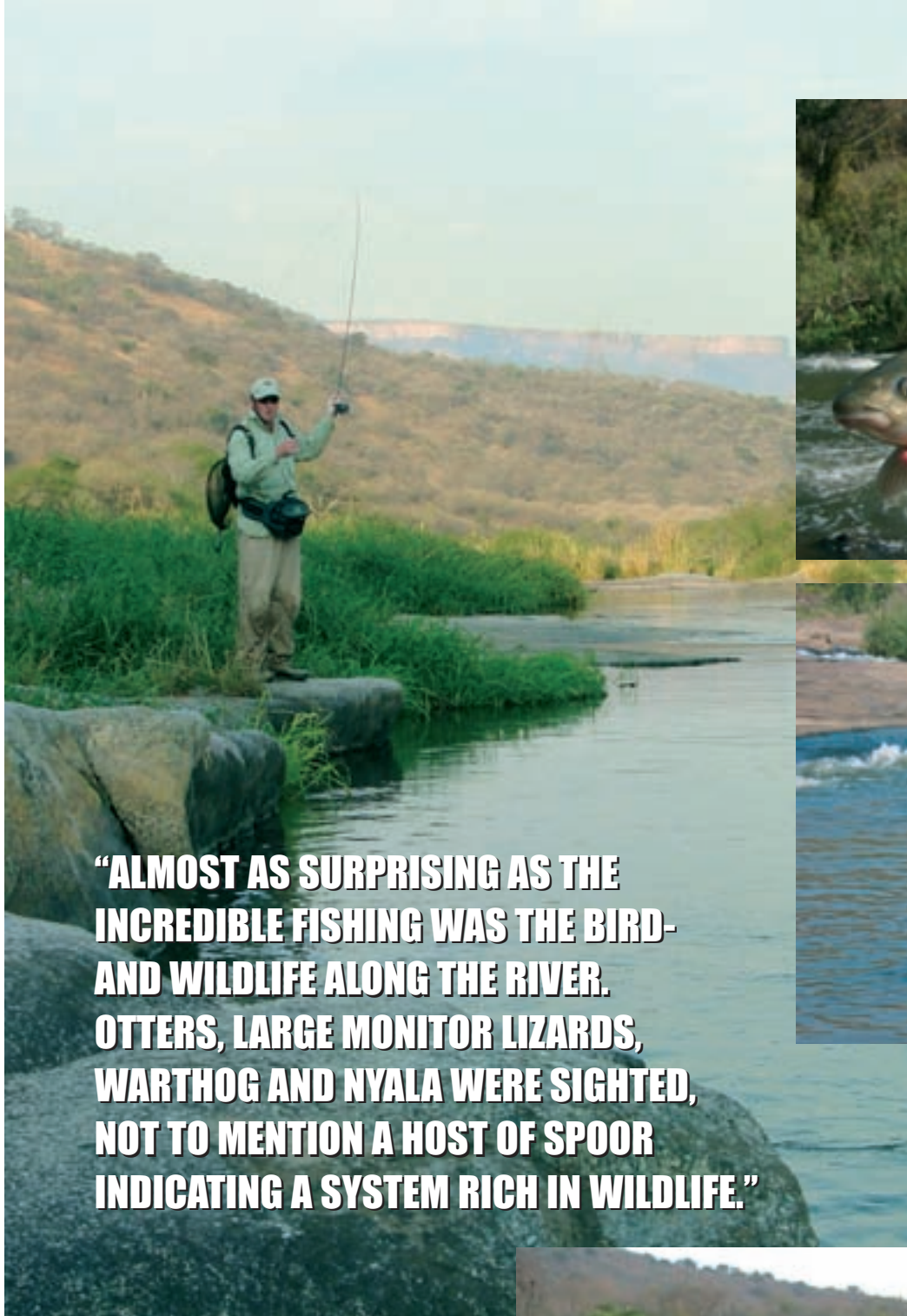
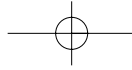
in as bad a shape as we had been led to believe.

In no time we were digging through last season's flies trying to find anything that vaguely resembled the squirming insects in our hands. Rigging 16 - 18ft 4X leaders on floating lines, we were soon onto the water in search of winter scalies. The low and cold waters required that we concentrate on the headwaters and deep sections of individual pools as we worked our way upstream. Being in the unfortunate position of having a limited fly selection, we were forced to fish with split shot, something I always try and avoid. Personally, I prefer to fish a tandem point and dropper rig; split shot *does* the job, but why use it if a potentially fish-catching fly has the same effect?

Walking out onto a protruding rock, I made my first cast up and across a large pool headed by a 20m rock slab. Turbulent white water ran the length of the head of the pool, followed by a couple of big eddies and circulating currents. While mending my line through a myriad different currents, I was most surprised to see a sharp pull on my strike indicator. Lifting my rod into nothing, I was quick to put the blame on a hapless underwater



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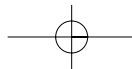


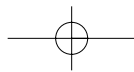
Above: The results of investigative work on the Duzi.

Left, below and next page: Moods on the Duzi – quiet pools, riffles and runs.

snag. Anything rather than get my hopes up with regards to the fishing possibilities. In the next few minutes, after a couple more exploratory casts, my strike indicator once more shot sharply under. This time there was no chance to blame underwater obstructions as a well-conditioned scalie flashed golden out of the depths before making a spirited run downstream. Five minutes later, after a respectful tussle, the fish was photographed and released. A handful of fish were landed in that first pool, all on black dragonfly nymph imitations, before things turned quiet and we progressed upstream. In each consecutive pool we landed three to six fish, all in the region of 2 - 4lb.

14.





We cast upstream, dead-drifting the fly into the deep headwaters of the pools. Casting directly across the current, mending and drifting downstream into the waters pushing upstream, also produced great results. Similarly, casting downstream into the waters eddying up, and just keeping contact with the fly as it slowly drifted upstream produced superb results. At times the takes were vicious; this, I feel, was more due to the fact that the fish hooked themselves before we were aware of them. The majority of takes, however, were fairly subtle, and keeping a keen eye on the strike indicator was essential.

Depth and drift are perhaps the two most important aspects to consider when nymphing deep pools for scalies. It is imperative that one's fly drifts as naturally as possible along the river bottom. Mending skills and controlling drift come with time. Fishing at the right depth, however, is simply a matter of leader construction. When fishing deep pools it is often difficult to judge the depth of the water. A rule of thumb that works for me is: if I'm not occasionally snagging on the bottom, then I'm not fishing deep enough. As I mentioned earlier, fly selection was limited,

and after a couple of hours our first flies were lost either to deep snags or feisty fish. Resorting to dark flies of roughly the same size as the naturals, we continued to draw strikes, albeit not in the same quantity as with the more exact imitations. Some of the flies that ended up in thick scalie lips were stonefly imitations and Montana Nymphs. I am pretty confident that large caddis larvae imitations would have had the desired effect, as would weighted San Juans.

Almost as surprising as the incredible fishing was the bird- and wildlife along the river. Otters, large monitor lizards, warthog and nyala were sighted, not to mention a host of spoor indicating a system rich in wildlife. For the twitchers, the sightings of African black duck and Narina Trogons were much appreciated.

Guiding sport fishing safaris throughout southern Africa, I have been very fortunate to have fished many world-class destinations. And believe it or not, I have had to rely on glossy ads on the pages of magazines and PC screens to make a living. However, as mentioned earlier, this can make for disappointment if one's expectations are not realised. When gauging the success

of a fishing outing, it is seldom that we can be truly subjective. The scale of our enjoyment is often skewed by our pre-determined perceptions which arise from fishy tales told by friends, glossy ads or exorbitant prices which, once paid, are expected to deliver the goods.

The day's fishing described in this article rates as one of my most enjoyable in recent years. This is not due to the fact that a great number of (or exceptionally large) fish were landed – there are many locations where the scalie fishing is as good and better – but because we fished without any preconceptions. It is seldom that one can fish a piece of water with this mindset, and in so doing we can truly appreciate each and every aspect that contributes to a great day's fishing. When next you get the chance to fish a piece of water without any “references”, don't shy away from it in favour of your favourite haunt. Take the opportunity and embrace it. You may be pleasantly surprised by the results. And if not, at least there are several guarantees. No fish will be too small, no water too dirty or crowded, no wind too strong, no bush too thick and no roads too rough. Just good solid fishing!

