



Above, from left to right: Different situations are illustrated here where tigerfish and baitfish will congregate. Focus your efforts on the areas that have features such as tree lines, rocky outcrops, seam lines and backwaters, sandbanks and drop-offs, as well as islands.

Tree lines: The banks of much of the lower Zambezi are heavily wooded. As the river evolves, the water changes course, eroding outside banks and depositing sand on inside banks. Tree lines consisting of partially or fully submerged fallen trees form along the outside banks over time. Fallen trees and shrubs provide perfect shelter for baitfish and ambush cover for tigerfish. Fishing these banks is always a good place to start, and casting behind (and in front of) specific structure as you drift a beat is the most productive form of fishing these areas. Accurate casts and good line control is a definite advantage.

Rocky outcrops: These, found either midriver or jutting out from the bank, are prime areas to look for fish. The Mzata Gorge is one section of the lower Zambezi that abounds with such structure. Submerged rocks provide good shelter for baitfish and a holding area for tigerfish. They are also commonly associated with eddies and slack backwaters. Drifting past and casting to such areas works well, but I prefer to approach them from the upstream side and fish off the actual rocks. Fishing down and across, focussing your retrieve on (or near about) the seam line, is good practice. DI-7 lines come in handy when fishing these areas; some of the holes behind these rocky outcrops are surprisingly deep, and letting your line sink right down is important.

Seam lines and backwaters: Any seam line (border between different or opposing currents) or slack/eddying backwaters are worthy of attention. Baitfish and less competent swimmers often seek refuge from the main current in these slack waters, and injured or dead fry will also be deposited here. Both factors make these waters attractive hunting grounds for tigerfish. Anchoring above such areas and fishing down and across as described works best. Then drift and cast into them (particularly slack backwaters), and strip your fly out of the slack water into the main current. This often enduces a strike.

Sandbanks/drop-offs: Tigers will often patrol the lee side (downstream or deep side) of a sandbank drop-off. Sandbanks provide shallow water where baitfish will find shelter, and if they are in the area they'll be swept off the sandbank from time to time. The deep water off the edge provides the perfect spot for hungry tigerfish to capitalise on these unfortunate morsels. Again there are two options when fishing these drop-offs: either from the boat or by wading. From a boat is by far the safest. Drifting parallel to and well away from the drop-off, make your casts onto the sandbank. Your fly must be left to drift off the drop before the strip is commenced. If fishing from the actual sandbank when wading, make the cast at 45° to the drop; let your fly swing and sink before commencing

the retrieve. It is important to consider that the fish will be expecting food to come from the upstream side (where you would be standing), so make sure you are well away from the edge so as not to disturb any fish in the area. Crocodiles are a real threat, so do not attempt to fish like this on small sandbanks where you are forced to stand too close to the edge!

Islands: Midstream islands provide a myriad structures around which to fish. They can be associated with reeds, tree lines, rocky outcrops, sandbanks, seam lines, eddies and drop-offs. Drifting the length of an island well past the downstream side (often associated with drop-offs, seams and eddies) should be your first choice. If not successful, it is useful to anchor or tie up to the island and focus on specific drop-offs, eddies and seam lines.

This is a far from a definitive article on fishing the lower Zambezi, but it provides the necessary background knowledge to plan a fishing trip to the area with confidence.

Next time you are in two minds about spending your hard-earned money on a family holiday or a fishing trip, consider the lower Zambezi. The world-class fly fishing, excellent game viewing and some of the finest landscapes in southern Africa will keep all who visit this magical valley enthralled. What more could you possibly ask for?