



The Okavango in western Botswana and "... one of Africa's finest sportfishing spectacles, the catfish run." Inset: Snow white egrets swoop down on the seething brown mass of slithering barbel and partake of the frenzy.

populations or, most likely, a combination of all of these factors could be the catalyst. What we do know is that a run can start anywhere at any time over these few months, and for the fortunate anglers who intercept such a run, the flyfishing is mind-blowing.

When clients ask about the quality of a run, I commonly described them as big or small, and anything in between. What makes a run big or small is subjective, but — generally speaking — I talk of a big run when one can remain in one position with catfish passing you for over half-an-hour, and occasionally up to two hours. These runs generally last a couple of days and can be intercepted on consecutive days, subject to them not fading out.

A small run can be anything from a couple of thrashes in the papyrus to a 5-10 minute procession of running catfish. As I said, this is subjective, and different anglers or guides may well have different views. In any case, the run we had just found was of the large variety, so large in fact that we were able to follow it for four full days before we had to leave.

Now the size of a run is by no means directly related to the size of tigerfish that will be caught in it. Tigerfish, being fairly territorial, will remain in locations that allow them maximum protection as well as feeding possibilities, thus fish of different sizes

will occupy different niches. As a run moves upstream, therefore, different shoals of fish will be attracted to the commotions, feed until gorged and then drop off the run.

The beauty of this scenario is that, when one big fish is hooked, an angler can be more or less guaranteed further hookups with similarly sized fish. The converse of this is also true. Fortunately for fly-rodgers, however, the age-old debate of quality-vs-quantity leans heavily to the latter in such situations. Then there are also the endless opportunities to sight cast to feeding catfish, some in excess of 20 lb. This, in my view, is sublime fishing, no matter where you are.

For first-time flyfishers fishing for tigers, the catfish run provides the perfect classroom. The fast action and multiple hookups provide adequate room for failure, without the disappointment

normally associated with failure when fishing more challenging waters. For the more experienced angler, it also allows one the opportunity to experiment with flies and materials. When testing tigerfish flies, there can be no better test tank than fishing the catfish run, particularly where fly hardness and castability are concerned.

My preferred tackle when fishing the catfish run is a standard tigerfishing rig, namely an 8/9-wt rod, loaded with a D17 line, and a short (4-5ft) leader of 15-20 lb Maxima hard mono, attached via an Albright knot to 5cm of #5 piano wire on to which one's fly is attached with a haywire twist.

With regard to fly selection, for the most part any baitfish imitation will produce the goods. Angler confidence must be taken into account, as well as water conditions. Generally I do my



Husband and wife duo Darren Williams and Jennifer Bailey, from the USA, came in search of Africa's finest freshwater fighter. The smiles say it all.