

Over thousands of years of attacking bony fish with scant regard for their own wellbeing, tigerfish have developed hard and bony mouths. This fly-unfriendly mouth must be taken into account when selecting a hook on which to tie our tiger flies. We can balance the scales slightly by selecting a hook that helps us overcome these obstructions.

Firstly, the sharpness of a hook is non-negotiable in these instances. Thickness of the hook wire is the second aspect that must be taken into account. It's no use having a super sharp point followed by a thick wire which hampers full penetration. Conversely, too thin a wire will bend; therefore a compromise must be reached. Lastly, shank length must be considered. Although long-shank hooks make for very attractive zonker patterns, they tend to give slightly along the shank when the angler strikes, in effect reducing one's hook penetrating ability.

Using the above three pointers to select a hook, Gamakatsu B10S and Grip 21711NSL hooks come out tops when tying all the flies described below. You can order these hooks from your local tackle dealer.



BLACK-AND-GREY CLOUSER WITH RED TAG

Hook: #4 - #2 Gamakatsu B10S
Thread: 3/0 black or red for flies into which I have incorporated lead
Eyes: 4mm dumbbell eyes
Body: Gold tinsel
Underwing: Grey bucktail
Top wing: Black bucktail in a ratio of roughly three parts grey underwing to one part black top wing
Flash: One strand of crystal flash per side

Tail/tag: Red holographic tinsel

Extra weight: Round lead wire (optional)

I prefer to tie this fly on a size 4 hook and fish it when the fishing is tough. When a front passes, temperatures drop and the wind picks up, fishing on the upper Zambezi can prove frustrating. The tigers hold deep and do not feed aggressively. This fly comes into its own at times like these.

Fished deep and slow, close to the banks, this fly often produces the results. Slow is a relative term; the phrase which best describes this is a

slow "stroking-the-dog" strip. We also fish this fly when we notice lots of small baitfish holding around the boat or in the surrounding submerged structure.



BLACK-AND-RED CLOUSER (OR ALL BLACK)

Hook: #2 Gamakatsu B10S
Thread: 3/0 black or red for flies into which I have incorporated lead
Eyes: 4mm dumbbell eyes
Body: Copper tinsel
Underwing: Red bucktail
Top wing: Black bucktail in a ratio of roughly one part red underwing to four parts black top wing
Flash: One strand of copper crystal flash per side
Extra weight: Round lead wire (optional)

Over the past couple of years we have noticed that this fly is most productive when tigerfish are feeding aggressively in the main channel. Baitfish that have been flushed off the flood plains form loose aggregations in the main channel. Tigers can be seen slashing the surface here, and gulls are often involved picking up injured baitfish off the water.

The black-and-red Clouser is a good option in these situations, and a positive strip retrieve works best. In the scenarios described above, the fly is often taken on the swing, so be patient. Let your line get down and begin its swing before commencing your retrieve.

The black-and-red Clouser is also a good option to fish in discoloured water, low light conditions and in the rapids on the upper Zambezi.



COPPER CLOUSER

Hook: #2 Gamakatsu B10S
Thread: 3/0 black or red for flies into which I have incorporated lead
Eyes: 4mm dumbbell eyes
Body: Copper tinsel
Underwing: Orange kinky fibre

Mid-wing: Red bucktail

Top wing: Black bucktail topped with peacock herl (layers in the ratio of 3:1:2 - orange:red:black)

Flash: One strand of crystal flash per side

Extra weight: Round lead wire (optional)

The Copper Clouser is a great early-season fly. Eighty percent of the trophy fish landed before the feeding frenzies start are taken on this fly. Wherever one finds the river bed is comprised of a rocky substrate (as on certain parts of the far upper Zambezi in western Zambia), this fly is a good choice. Often these rocks are a mottled light-brown to coppery colour, forming a band across the river. The baitfish which seek shelter in this structure are similarly coloured, hence the productiveness of the Copper Clouser in such circumstances.



SCOOBIE-DO CLOUSERS

Colours: yellow-and-grey, grey-and-olive, white-and-pink

Hook: #4 - #2 Gamakatsu B10S

Thread: 3/0 red (for yellow and pink versions) and olive

Eyes: 4mm dumbbell eyes

Body: Scoobie-do wire

Underwing: Yellow, grey or white

Top wing: Grey, olive or pink for respective underwings above, in a ratio of 1:1

Flash: One strand of crystal flash per side

Tinus, a client from the Eastern Cape, convinced me of this style of Clouser on an upper Zambezi float trip in 2006. He tied all his Clousers this style. The pink-and-white version he used exclusively to target kingfish in the Eastern Cape estuaries. I tie this fly in the three colour combinations described above.

This fly is fished in similar situations to the grey-and-black Clouser, close to structure when one can see baitfish milling around and birds feeding on the margins. In size 2 these flies are also very productive when fished mid-cur-