



**"WE COULD ACCURATELY
PREDICT AREAS AND
STRUCTURE THAT WOULD
HOLD TROPHY FISH."**

A trophy landed in deep water. This fish fell to a rainbow Brush Fly.

found on the lower Zambezi (just a lot bigger). The biomass of this species in the river is astounding. One of the most prominent features of this baitfish when viewed in the water is its large, conspicuous eye and a striking black spot on the base of its tail. These, along with red tips on fins and tail, were some of the strongest triggers for tigers. Steve Farah baitfish patterns with large eyes and red tips proved extremely successful.

A number of natural Brush Flies, specifically tied for the Mnyera and Ruhudji rivers, proved deadly with increasing water clarity. As with other systems, the choice of fly colour varied throughout the day. Plain black and black/grey patterns dominated the fishing in low light conditions, and natural colours such as olive, rainbow and tan produced the goods through the middle of the day. Important to note is that SF Blend baitfish patterns, tied over and under the shank to give a stronger profile, outfished those tied only above the shank. Also, flies with large eyes and pupils dead centre produced better than those with pupils off-centre. The lack of

penetration when hooking trophy tigerfish results in a lot of pressure on the hook curve due to the pronounced lever effect. Grip's short shank Stinger hook (21571-BN) was the only one that consistently stood up to the task.

FISH HABITS

Fishing rivers so rich in structure presented two hurdles on the path to trophy success. First, how to get the fly into the strike zone of fish holding deep and tight to the structure. Second, how to avoid obstacles in the water once a big fish was hooked. These tigerfish don't necessarily fight dirty, but with their first run they often cover a substantial distance, so the probability of getting hung up is high. On more than one occasion, fish launched themselves through overhanging branches (and sometimes even onto the banks) on their first hit. The outcome was always the same. Later in the season, we had some success landing fish by quickly releasing the drag to almost free spool, which allowed the fish to carry on running through or around the structure, while giving us the chance to get the boat into a position to unsnag the fly line.

There were interesting lessons to be learnt about the structure-oriented habitat of tigers. Naturally, the biggest fish occupy the best territorial niches within any given area – those that offer the most cover, the strongest eddy from the current, and an optimal position from which to ambush prey. These are mostly the deepest parts of the river with related structure. There are two angles of attack when attempting to reach fish holding deep and tight. The first is to fish a longer leader (9ft or more) with heavily weighted flies. The flies mentioned before, tied with ample lead wraps, heavily weighted Clousers and even tungsten beads slid onto the wire above the fly help achieve the desired results. Accurate casts to the structure, mending upstream as the fly sinks, and a super-fast strip out of the structure produces strikes. Not surprisingly, most hits come in the first couple of strips.

Secondly, anglers can focus their efforts on structure where tigers hold upstream of (logjams and large boulders) which creates a buffer in which they can hold out of the current. In these