

Tanzania Trip Report – Joshua Fine (October 2018)

I have been planning this trip for quite some time and it did not disappoint.

Earlier this summer, I completed my Master of Public Health degree through the University of Iowa and also passed my board exam for certification from the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine. As a reward for that 2.5 year process, I decided to take a bucket-list fishing trip. Having been to Tanzania for work a couple of years prior, and having fished unsuccessfully there, I decided to give it another try. River systems there hold the tiger fish (genus *Hydrocynus*, which means “water dog”), which

are a prized sport fish target and are even more so as a fly rod quarry.

I used Yellow Dog Outfitters, since I’ve trusted them in the past for handling my OCONUS fishing excursions. They partner with Tourette Fly Fishing, a South African Outfitter with in depth regional expertise. Tourette runs an operation of two fly fishing camps with access to two very recently discovered tiger fish habitats, the Mnyera and Ruhudji Rivers. Each is located within the Selous Game Reserve, a 45,000 sq kilometer protected area and UNESCO world heritage site (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/199>) that boasts an array of African megafauna.



After two long flights from Dulles through Amsterdam, I arrived in Dar Es Salaam late at

night and then had an early flight the next morning via bush plane to the landing strip in the game preserve. I met some of the other folks I’d fish with along with a couple of South African hunters also going to the preserve. After a 2 hour flight, we landed and were taken by 4x4 to the main camp on the Mnyera River for lunch. This camp is shared with a hunting outfitter, the larger of the two, and is made up of thatched roof huts located between the river and the bush area filled with elephant grass.

The hosts split the group, so four anglers could fish each river for half of the week and then swap. We then embarked on a 2 hour 4x4 drive to the second camp, located on the Ruhudji River. The first part of this trip involved driving the truck onto a pontoon bridge for a river crossing and ferrying it across with the use of a small boat. It was exciting.



We had vistas like this during the transfer between camps.



The camp on the Ruhudji River consisted of a number of tents on the river's banks. The meal tent was right on the sandy shore, so at night the splashes of hungry fish could be observed. Our tents were large, had cots and were equipped with flush toilets and hot water showers. It wasn't glamour camping, but it was nevertheless very pleasant.

After the long flight from D.C., I slept like a rock there, but my colleagues told me I missed all kinds of animal noises at night.

The next day we started to fish different beats of the river. The fishing reminded me a little of smallmouth bass fishing on Virginia rivers. It involved distance casting as close to structure as possible with streamer flies. We also used poppers in these same areas at different times. The very knowledgeable guides also had us swing flies deep in pockets and riffles, mending lines to get the flies to the fish.

The first two days were slow for me, because I lost several fish. I can attest that tiger fish are very hard fish to hook. They have bony mouths and strike quickly and ferociously. The guides generally tell guests to strip strike three times and never fight the fish on the reel, since they're so likely to drop off. Marcus, a fellow guest and boat-mate, caught several fish those first few days. He used a white game-changer fly, and I believe the second hook improved his landing rate.

It turned out that I was "saving" my first catch for a big one, since on the morning of the third day, while casting along a nondescript bend of the river, I felt my fly strip into what felt like a cinder block. The block started vibrating, so I set the hook again and started to fight the fish. It stayed down for a good while, so I started to suspect it was a larger fish. Under the direction of guide Keegan, I had to put the

down and dirty on the fish to tire it out quickly, and also keep the line low for when the fish jumped. As promised, the fish made several runs with enough power for the line to shred my gloves.

The boat driver whooped when the fish surfaced, so I knew I had a good one. This first fish was my biggest – a 20 pound trophy tiger fish (the objective of the trip). It took one of the house flies – a small, black streamer with a deer hair head and tungsten dumbbell eyes. Later, they explained that this wasn't a place where anyone had caught a big one before, so they suspect the big girl was moving between more likely haunts (big structure).

Note that the adipos fin (the small one on the fish's back close to the tail) is a brilliant blue color. This is a distinctive feature of the tiger fish on these two rivers.



The 20 pounder

I managed a few other large fish during the rest of the trip, but had plenty of misses to keep me humble.

The stay at the main camp on the Mnyera River was also memorable. That camp supported a major hunting operation, so we were treated to fresh game for several meals. Cape buffalo was good, served barbecue style, and pounded until tender. We also had hartebeest and sable (antelope relatives), which were delicious.

The final day of fishing was spent at the upper end of the river in the rapids. This involved fishing several spots on foot and rock-hopping to a few in the upper reaches. I rolled a bunch of fish here and hooked a



good one that jumped and came off.

Like the other days, the guides prepared a riverside lunch for us, but this time it included game barbecued over a fire. After each lunch, they set up hammocks for an after-lunch siesta, and after a week of fishing, I had a great nap this time.

All in all, this was one of the best fishing trips I've ever taken and a true adventure. The guides – Keegan, Johan and Brent were excellent and very knowledgeable. The fishing was by no

means easy, but was fabulously rewarding. The wildlife and scenery, though not a primary objective for me, was breathtaking. Aside from seeing hippos, crocs and more and different birds than I could imagine, there were baboons, warthogs, and a host of herding game.

For more information:

<https://www.yellowdogflyfishing.com/destinations/fly-fishing-tanzania>

<http://www.tourettefishing.com/destinations/tanzania/>

Here are a few more pics from the trip (and from the guys at Tourette) –







Dangerous when disturbed



Caught on a popper at dusk



14 pounder caught while mending in a riffle. It took a streamer tied by Rich Strolis



Marcus and me with a couple of fish caught on streamers by Rich Strolis



18 pounder