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AFRICA/Tiger fishing



Fighting a tiger with a temper

There is one African creature that takes no prisoners, is a renowned cannibal and never gives up. Mark Hedges creeps to the banks of the Zambezi and throws down the gauntlet

TEMPER, temper. Tiger fish have anger problems. Worse, they come with a set of teeth that would make a piranha blush. Armed, powerful and living in the great rivers of Africa, tiger fish are mad, bad and dangerous to know. They are also cannibals. When they can't get their dagger-like teeth into anything else, they turn on each other. Life for a tiger fish is one long tantrum.

Henry Gilbert/Alamy, John Warburton-Lee/Photographica/Alamy

They're also the most explosive freshwater fish you can catch on a fly. Hook one, and you're not in a fight but a brawl; catch one, and it will try to bite your fingers off. Yet, dental arrangements aside, they're some of the most handsome fish I have ever seen, with glossy silver and green scales set against blood-red fins and tail.

I was in a boat floating down the Zambezi with Charlie White, Roxtons' fishing guru, casting my fly towards the bank, when I first enraged a tiger fish. Suddenly, a huge bow wave powered towards my fly. Then all hell broke loose. The fish's fury beat my tame counter punch and escaped. 'More aggressive, more aggressive,' yelled Vincent, the guide, as I struck into another. He was right and, once the fish was hooked and played out, we had a fine 6½lb fish in the boat. The hook was removed using pliers and gloves before the warrior fish was gently placed back into the river. Over two days, I lost many more tigers than I landed. The tranquillity of the water and the beauty of the scenery dulled my reactions, but not my enjoyment.



Once you've mastered the heavy sinking line and big fly, the fishing isn't difficult. You cast where a fish might wait to ambush its victims—behind fallen trees and under banks—and then strip back the line at a rate of knots. Once hooked, the fish doesn't fight for long, but the take and first, jumping run is incredibly violent. As in all fishing, new techniques can make a difference. One fisherman tried a floating line and a fold fly. He landed a record 42 tigers in a day. Another caught an 18lb monster. But no one needs to boast about numbers and size when it is the character and determination of this pugnacious quarry that sets it apart. Africa has got me hooked all over again.

Left Watch your fingers when holding a tiger. Below It's easy to get distracted on the Zambezi

Beyond the river

Fishing is next to the Lower Zambezi National Park, so there is outstanding game viewing from the boats. We saw amazing birdlife, lions, buffalo, crocodiles, hippos, baboons and elephants. On a night drive, we added porcupines, genets and civets to the list. With the thrill of the fishing, the luxury of the lodge, the game and the excellence of the staff, you're in for a spoiling time.

Travel Information

● Roxtons (01488 689701; www.roxtons.co.uk) has tailor-made trips from £2,500 per person for four nights, including flights

● The Royal Zambezi Lodge (00 260 211 840 682; www.royalzambezilodge.com)

