

Fly fishing

Five Memorable Catches in Five Continents

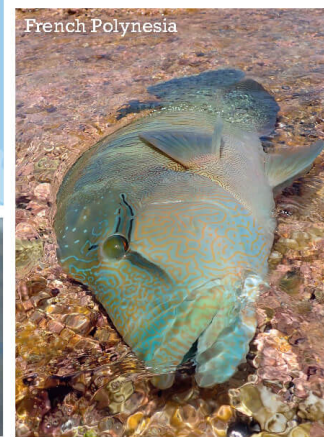
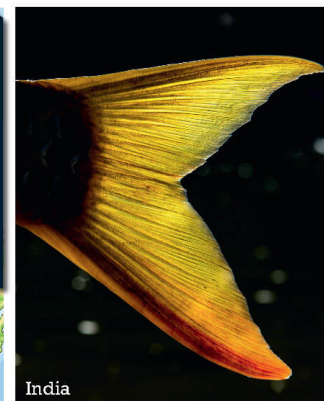
It was always my dream to fly-fish the world, experience wonderful places and catch the most amazing and challenging fish species on the planet. Remarkably, this dream has come to fruition. During my journeys, a few fish have stood out above all. Here are five of my most memorable catches from five continents.

By Jeff Currier



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Currier has long worked in a fly shop in Wyoming and guided fly fishermen in Yellowstone National Park. The author of several books, Jeff is also a superb artist of fish drawings. He lives in Victor, Idaho.



Fly fishing



AFRICA Tanzania - The savage tigerfish

The tigerfish leaps and does everything possible to spit out a fly. The raft provides precarious shelter in the event of a hippo's charge!

I was tigerfishing in a remote corner of Tanzania with friends Keith Clover and Rob Scott, founders of African Waters. Our week on the Mnyera River had been superb — so amazing that we explored our last day. Rob and Keith stash an inflatable raft in camp and had long planned to float a section of the Mnyera known as the Rapids. The holdback was the hassle of getting the raft upstream to the head of the rapids, as well as the rapids themselves, ridden as they are with hippos and crocodiles. But what better time than with their American friend visiting?

At 4:45 a.m., we loaded the 4x4 and headed through the bush. The drive took an hour. The wildlife encountered made the trip pleasurable. The only negative was the swarm of tsetse flies that stole our flesh. Once there, we were in awe of the beauty. Lush vegetation bordered the tumbling riffles and boulders. Colorful birds sang. In the distance you could hear the roar of the rapids.

We launched with me positioned up front and instructed to hold on tight. But falling out of the rickety raft and drowning wasn't my concern. That involved close encounters with numerous angry hippos and crocs larger than I care to remember. The river monsters snapped their jaws at every chance announcing who was boss.

I cast my 9-weight with a 3/0 Clouser. Our leaders were simple — six feet of 40-pound fluorocarbon with 12 inches of 40-pound wire bite tippet. The stout rig was intended to stop these hard-fighting tigers before they could tangle me in the sunken trees or sever my leader against the rocks. But not all tigers can be halted. These fish are the true gangsters of African waters, and big ones over 15 pounds (about 7 kg) are overpowering. Then I hooked into the beast of all beasts. I tried to clamp down on my line, but it tore loose, slicing my finger along the way.

The immense tiger made four acrobatic leaps. My African friends screamed in excitement. This was by far our largest tiger of the week. Once the fish slowed, I heaved back. Between the raft drifting down and me reeling, the fish neared us in a hurry.

By now Rob was at my side. We don't use nets to land tigerfish because their teeth shred them. The only way to get a big tiger in the boat is to grab the tail and cradle him under the head. (Do *not* put your hand near the mouth!)

The beast launched into several more jumps next to the boat. The huge tiger was tiring but still had fight. Every time Rob reached for its tail, the fish bolted under the raft. So many big fish are lost near the boat, we were nervous. But after the fish took one last surge, Rob made a beautiful two-handed tail grab. We had our fish and it was a true Tanzanian giant!



My tigerfish trophy from the Mnyera River, prior to release.



Initiation to the dance of the Maasai, the semi-nomadic herders of Kenya and northern Tanzania. Whoever jumps the highest wins the "battle."

Fly fishing

ASIA India - Miracle golden mahseer

May 3, 2013

I spent a rough night trying to sleep on the banks of the Mahakali River in India, and got barely a wink. The moon was bright over my tent, and I was miserably ill. But this was a shoot for the fly fishing film. *Waypoints*. I had to catch the rare golden mahseer for the big screen.

It took four cups of coffee to get me going. Luckily, Misty Dhillon, local fly-fishing expert, kept bringing the java, or I may not have gotten up at all. While guzzling the pick-me-ups, I assessed the river. Conditions were difficult from snow melting 200 miles upstream in Tibet.

Shaking from the caffeine overdose and weakened from my ailment, I hobbled to breakfast. "You look like hell, Currier" was the murmur around the table. "Can you fish?"

"If not, start digging my grave. I'll never miss a day of fishing unless I'm dying," I responded.

I devoured the meal. There were river miles to cover. This was a 10-day float trip, and we needed to travel downstream eight miles to stay on schedule.

At 3 p.m. we beached at Chukka, the legendary village from the classic book *Man Eaters of the Kumaon* by Jim Corbett. Corbett was a famous tiger hunter during the 1930s. He didn't hunt tigers for sport but rather killed man-eating tigers. It was Chukka where he slayed the elusive man eater, the tigress of Champawat, responsible for the deaths of more than 430 people.

Ours was indeed a trip of a lifetime, but was grueling. Especially when the fish weren't cooperating. On day seven of our journey, moments

after stopping, I fell asleep, but Misty woke me, saying "We need to fish around our new camp."

The thermometer showed 110°F; not a puff of wind blew. I staggered to the river, hacking phlegm all the way. It was all I could do to strip line off my reel let alone cast my 9-weight. I was so miserably hot I began hallucinating. I thought I saw schools of mahseers swimming around me. Not!

Several times I dozed off while standing, rod in hand. I snapped out of it when my heavy fly clunked the bottom. I was going through the motions.

Then it happened: I stripped into something solid. At first I thought I had hooked a rock, but soon came head shakes. Then the fish bolted down river. My sinking line sizzled off the reel followed by a blur of fluorescent backing. Fish on!

As backing emptied from my reel, I tightened my drag and gave chase. The mahseer was heading for the Chukka Rapids. If he took me down the rapids, I would either get spooled or broken off by jagged rocks. I cranked my drag tighter and raised my rod high. My rod bent so deep I expected it to shatter. To my relief, the mahseer stopped and ran back upstream.

Now the fish was fighting the mighty current of the Mahakali River. He swam past, flashing his golden armor. Finally, he began to succumb. Moments later we had a massive golden mahseer on the fly.

Any weariness from this expedition was gone. When I lifted the mighty golden mahseer for the cameras, the creature glistened in gold! I removed my fly and took one last look from head to tail. Then in one mighty thrust the mahseer returned to the Mahakali.

Golden mahseer from the Mahakali River, Uttarakhand State, North India.

Fly fishing in a valley of the Himalayan foothills.

Fly fishing

EUROPE Iceland - A monumental Atlantic salmon

August 8, 2014

The Sally, a salmon fly created by Pétur Steingrímsson, a fly-fishing legend on the banks of the famous river Laxá í Aðaldal.

I had dreamed of big Atlantic salmon since childhood, but by age 49, I had not caught a single one. Oh, I had chances. Once I fished the Tweed River in Scotland. No luck. Years later on the Orkla River in Norway, a huge salmon took my fly, but I set too soon. Now, I was on the Laxá Adaldal, one of the best Atlantic salmon rivers in Iceland,

with top salmon angler and friend Ingólfur Helgason, aka Ingo. Yet, despite fishing hard for days, I still had not touched a fish.

We had weather issues. Though we fished in July, temperatures were colder than normal. We suffered heaps of rain. And the Adaldal ran high. Without a doubt, I agonized over my salmon jinx.

Regardless of my struggles, I was learning salmon fishing from one of the best. I was mastering the swing and understanding reading water for salmon as opposed to my home-water trout. I decided to fish a pool that I would have passed up earlier in the trip — one that Ingo taught me might hold a salmon.

The pool didn't look special. Nevertheless, a wave bulged as a large salmon tracked my fly. Unfortunately, the salmon refused it, leaving nothing more than a swirl. Ingo saw the denial and rushed to my side. He handed me a famous Laxá Adaldal single-hook fly pattern called the *Sally*, size 12. The artistic fly looked ridiculously small. I was not so sure. But who was I to say?

I made my cast, and at the end of the swing there was a tug. It felt like moss catching my fly, but at the same time a shockingly gigantic salmon porpoised. Was that salmon the tension I felt?

With Atlantic salmon it's best to wait and let the fish turn before setting the hook. Not repeating the mistake I had made in Norway, I paused, and the feel of moss became weight like a sinking anchor. I raised my 9-weight rod and the Atlantic was on!

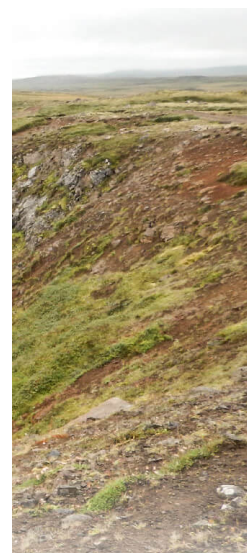
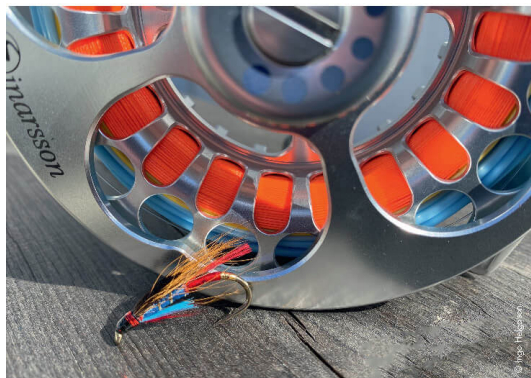
The salmon jumped, a half jump. Like many huge fish, they don't get all the way out of the water. Then it ran, and I fed my loose line through the guides until finally the salmon hit the reel.

Ingo was well aware of my bad salmon luck but unaware that I am a maniac as far as putting immense pressure on big fish. I trusted my 22-pound tippet and angled a deep bend in my rod to absorb the pull of the salmon. Ingo shouted for me to ease up, but I heard nothing. This was the fish I fantasized. I was in a trance.

The magnificent Atlantic jumped six times and, regardless of my tight drag, ran into my backing. The fight lasted more than 10 minutes. I chased the leaping giant down the rapids, stumbling over boulders the entire way. At last, it happened: Ingo netted the Atlantic salmon of my dreams!

Icelandic rivers offer spectacular fishing. Here, the Hrafnalónsá, a river in the northeast known for its Atlantic salmon and Arctic char.

The salmon of my dreams, landed after a crazy pursuit on the banks of the Laxá í Aðaldal.



Fly fishing

OCEANIA French Polynesia – Anaa's Napoleon

December 11, 2018

Fly-fishing the reef isn't for everyone. It's hard walking, and if a wave knocks you down, chances are you will be bruised and cut by pointy rock or coral. Fly-line management is daunting, and many of the fish you hook will break you off. But to me, the rewards are high and worth dealing with the nuisances.

On yet another beautiful day on Anaa Atoll in French Polynesia, my friend Matt and I were finishing up an exceptional morning fishing the reef. Between the two of us, we had landed several chunky bohar snapper and bluefin trevally. But one species still eluded us — the Humphead wrasse, better known as the Napoleon. Surely

the giant wrasses were around. Perhaps we didn't see them because they are so cleverly camouflaged in their environment.

Matt and I had reeled in, ready for lunch. Matt was walking slightly ahead of me when suddenly he crouched and shouted, "Currier! Currier! Napoleon!"

I stood motionless waiting for Matt to cast. Instead, Matt kept his eye on the fish and beckoned me towards him. I crouched and scurried his way, false casting my line back out as I went. Camouflaged or not, I saw this Napoleon with ease.

I still couldn't be sure Matt wasn't going cast, so I hesitated to let my

On approach to Anaa Atoll in the Tuamotu Archipelago.



loops go. But when he said, "Drop it!" I plunked my fly right next to the Napoleon. The fish swam right past without a look.

The huge wrasse didn't seem spooked or even aware of our presence, but he was approaching deeper water and we were losing sight of him. I dropped my fly at him again just as he went completely out of sight. I stripped and hoped, and... there he was. Napoleon wrasse on!

Chances of landing this Napoleon, with sharp coral in every direction, were slim. I had the slight advantage of a heavy leader, but still I needed to play a dirty trick. My strategy was to beach the fish on the reef before he knew he was hooked. I stripped and ran backwards at lightning speed, but the loose line I stripped in dropped to the reef and got stuck. It stopped me in my tracks, and that was long enough for the Napoleon to wake up. The fight was

on, and down he went, right into hole in the coral. "No!" I yelled.

Wisely, however, I never stopped stripping and hoisting with my rod, and by some marvel, the Napoleon didn't dig himself in enough to win. Instead, I extracted him and surfed him up onto the reef with the next incoming wave. I had him!

The Napoleon wrasse is a striking fish, starting with its thick lips and protruding teeth. It has an array of colors with warpaint around the eyes and crazy zigzagging lines on the cheeks and fins. This fish was unmatched by anything else I've ever seen in nature.

After a long look, I freed my fly and faced the colorful fish into a breaking wave. I felt its power return and in one kick of the tail it was released. The Napoleon wrasse is a creature to behold.

Fly fishing from the barrier reef of Anaa Atoll ... great sport.



Napoleon wrasse are undoubtedly one of the strangest looking fish found around coral reefs.



Fly fishing

SOUTH AMERICA Brazil - Mammoth peacock bass

September 18, 2019

The Rio Marié and its small, secret lagoons, where huge peacock bass waited for our flies.

Deep in Brazil our float plane descended toward one of Amazon's most far-flung fisheries, a river the locals call Rio Dos Gigantes because it's home to gigantic peacock bass. This is the Marié River, and I was with Amazon fly fishing guru and friend, Rodrigo Salles of Untamed Angling.

In most Amazon waters, peacock bass (*Cichla temensis*) rarely exceed 15 pounds, but on the Marié it's not uncommon to catch ones of 20 pounds (9 kg) or larger. I brought 9-weight rods rigged with floating lines with 60-pound core strength. Strong lines are mandatory because here we fish straight 50-pound leaders.

Every day of our adventure we had clashes with big peacocks. On day one I landed a 21-pounder (9.5 kg). But it was our last day that I'll remember most.

Rodrigo took us to a spot where we could sight-cast to monsters cruising over a sand flat. When we arrived, visibility was poor; recent rains had left the water slightly colored. But we saw one, and Rodrigo made a long, accurate cast. I watched, hoping to see the brute dart for his fly. Instead, the peacock spooked away.

Not wanting to disturb Rodrigo's opportunity, I scanned the flat on the opposite side of the boat. I had sun in my eyes and a blinding cloud reflection. I could

hardly see into the water — but I thought I saw an ugly beast.

I made a cast. Nothing. But then I got another glimpse. I could see a huge peacock, and this time I plunked my fly close. I braced myself, and after two quick strips to straighten my leader, I began a slow, deliberate retrieve. Instantly there was a hellacious explosion on my fly.

By the swoosh on hook-up and then the sound of line crackling off my reel, we knew this was no ordinary peacock. I couldn't stop this one. Luckily I was safe from snags because the colossal peacock ran straight across the lagoon.

"You have a true monster, Jeff!" Rodrigo shouted as he reeled in. Indeed, this peacock was an XXXL. And this fight wouldn't be the standard two-minute flurry. This fish came halfway to the boat then surged back out at least six times. Finally, I got it close enough for a look — bigger than my 21-pounder.

There were a few startling moments in battle including gill-rattling jumps. It's never easy getting a mammoth of any fish species in a net. But soon we succeeded, the fish so huge that Rodrigo shouted to our guide, "To the beach immediately, Hamilton!"

I have experience with large peacock bass, but I didn't know they grew this big. And not only was this peacock enormous, but the colours and healthy condition of this fish were beyond belief. The fish weighed 24.5 pounds (11.1 kg) and measured 36 inches (92 cm) — the longest fish ever measured on the Marié, however, short a couple pounds of the river's weight record. If only the fish had eaten a full breakfast!

I reminisce each of these fish as if it were yesterday — the incredible locations in which they live, the flies they ate and the battles they put on. But most of all, I recall looking deep into the eyes of each. When I released them, I didn't take my sights off them until each had completely disappeared back to the wild — the ultimate way to remember five continents and the five most memorable catches of my life. ♦

Large Brazilian tucunaré approaching 25 pounds.

