



Photos: Jim Klug

Raise Your Permit Game

Jeff Currier

It wasn't long ago that I feared fly fishing for permit. Despite being a slinger for numerous saltwater fish species, from tarpon to giant trevally, permit were my nemesis. But one day I woke up and decided to put an end to this lack of permit confidence. I broke down my uncertainties and flaws then listened to what some of the world's best permit fly fishers had to say.

I didn't need to travel far to get started. Right here in my home town of Victor, Idaho, of all places, live some fantastic permit fly anglers. My house is a mere block from WorldCast Anglers—a top fly-fishing store and guide service in the heart of trout country. Though trout specialist by summer, most the guides turn into saltwater fly-fishing gurus when the snow flies. The leader of WorldCast, Mike Dawes, is one of the top permit fly anglers on the planet.

I'm not one to drill people for information, and with Dawes, along with other Victor permit junkies, I didn't need to set up an interview to ask questions about permit. Often we meet for pints at our local pub and no happy hour goes without permit talk. All I had to do was pay attention.

One of the most significant things I learned from them is that despite having those huge black eyes, permit don't often spot the fly unless it's right in front of them. Now don't get me wrong, permit see extremely well. They'll spot you making a bad cast from 90 feet away. But when

it comes to feeding they have tunnel vision. They aren't looking 10 feet ahead; they are looking for prey in close range. If your fly lands more than a couple feet away from them they may not see it.

Obviously, an excellent cast is essential. But my Idaho clan doesn't talk casting. Everyone on these barstools can cast and put the fly where it needs to be. They talk flies.

It's well known that the best flies for permit are crab imitations. But to my surprise, it isn't necessarily using the right crab pattern that is most important. Sure, some places require certain size crabs and others require special colors. The most important factor in their flies is having the proper sink rate. It doesn't matter how great a cast you make. If the fly doesn't sink into the view of the permit, he will swim right past.

This is where permit fishing gets complicated, because permit feed at many different depths and the depth dictates how weighted your crab needs to be. If the permit is tailing on bottom in five feet of water, then the fly needs to sink like a rock. But if he's tailing in two feet of water, be careful. That same fly for five feet will plunk so hard it's likely to scare the super-shallow feeding permit. If it doesn't scare him, no doubt you'll get hooked on the grass or a piece of coral. To further complicate things, sometimes the permit you are after might be suspended in mid water.

In 20 years of permit fishing, I wasn't showing permit



Jeff Currier

Follow Jeff's adventures on his blog at: www.jeffcurrier.com

Instagram: [@jeffcurrier65](https://www.instagram.com/jeffcurrier65) Facebook: Jeff Currier Global Fly Fishing



Photo Gerhard Laubscher

my fly as often as I assumed and I hadn't been putting enough thought into how fast my permit flies sank. Yea, I caught some permit over the course, but with no consistency. It was time to apply some new personal strategies.

I had a flats trip coming soon. It was a Yellow Dog Flyfishing Adventures ambassadors photo shoot in the Bahamas. Yellow Dog is a leading fly-fishing travel company and I'm fortunate enough to be one of their ambassadors.

When the trip embarked, we had ideal conditions. In the first three days we nailed fantastic footage beyond our wildest expectations of bonefish, jacks, tarpon, and more. Everything but the permit.

On the last morning, Jim Klug, founder of Yellow Dog and composer of this shoot, said at breakfast, "We need a permit, guys. Everyone fish for permit. I'm going with Currier".

Wow, I thought. Jim picked me as the sure bet. And funny thing, I felt no pressure. During the months prior

I'd built up a killer crab fly collection and organized them into three sink rates: slow, medium, and fast. I was going to use the right one at the right time and drop it six inches in front of every permit I saw. I smiled at the breakfast table and looked Jim in the eye and said, "Great plan. Let's get it done".

By 9:30 AM I was posing for Jim's lens with a beauty!

I went on a roll from that day for about two years. On almost every trip, I caught a permit. It was easy. I was confident. But I was cocky. And there's a difference between confident and cocky. Soon I'd be toned down.

The toning came in Mauritius on St. Brandon's Atoll, the antipode of Idaho—a place that is literally on the complete opposite side of the world and takes over four days to travel to from home. But St. Brandon's is a top place to catch the stunning Indo-Pacific permit, also known as the yellow permit. I figured I better get one while I was hot.

But in 10 days on these magnificent flats, I managed to be one of the only anglers on the trip not to catch one. Both my pals that traveled with me—neither hardly aware of



Photo Gerhard Laubscher

the Indo-Pacific permit species before we left—caught one. Brutal! Humbling! Let's just say it was a long flight home.

At first I blamed my yellow permit misery on bad luck. But I'm smarter than that and, in the months to come, I continued to siphon all the great permit anglers I knew for more of their secrets. The next influential angler to clinic me was friend Wil Flack.

Wil is a Belizean-Canadian who splits his year between permit guiding and steelhead. He owns the Belize Permit Club in Hopkins, Belize. Wil is a fellow Yellow Dog ambassador and great teacher. Shortly after my failure in Mauritius, I found myself on the front of Wil's skiff searching for permit in Belize.

We had god-awful conditions. It was December and not only did the wind gale and the rain fall, but Belize broke cold temperature records. Any normal angler would have stayed at the lodge and consumed heaps of Belikin Beer. But Wil and I are crazy. And when together, we can be just plain stupid. We fished for permit for six days straight through the worst conditions I've ever dealt with on tropical flats.

It's difficult to explain how good of a permit guide Wil is. But I'll tell you he is by far the finest that I've fished with. He poled despite hellacious wind and, regardless of gray skies, his osprey-like vision can spot a permit a mile away. Although we still didn't see many during this horrendous weather week, those we saw I got excellent shots at.

One of the first things Wil emphasized with me was to be more aggressive with my casting. Permit have a habit of feeding their way across a flat fast and erratically. If you wait for a perfect casting opportunity they might move away and you won't get a cast at all. Also, in overcast conditions it's easy to lose sight of a permit. No doubt I've had both situations happen to me in the past which always made me more anxious because I flat out knew I blew it.

Wil had me test cast before we started fishing. This is a great trick everyone should do the first time you fish with a new guide. He saw I was comfortable and accurate at 70 feet so as soon as a permit reached that zone he had me fire. Wil also convinced me not to be concerned about

spooking a permit by plunking a heavy crab fly with a cast too close or a bad cast in general. His feeling is if you spook them at least they had a chance to see the fly.

Wil also taught me that permit eat our flies more than we think. They are so fast at grabbing it and spitting it out that sometimes you don't know it happened. The very first permit I presented to tracked my fly with his nose right on it. Wil hollered for me to set and I asked, "For what?"

Wil was adamant that the permit ate but I never saw it. At that moment I didn't believe Wil, but after learning from him through week, I think he was right. I had several more instances where a permit ate my fly and spit it so fast it made my head spin. But I started watching more closely and anytime I saw the permit open his mouth or wiggle his tail, I strip set. I hooked three during

this challenging week that in the past I definitely would not have.

My very next trip to Belize I visited my friends Craig and Karen Hayes of Turneffe Flats Lodge. In 10 trips I never landed a permit at Turneffe. On this trip I caught a monster. He ate my crab as it was sinking. The only reason I set was because I saw his mouth open. There he was. You should have seen the look on my guide's face!

In May of 2018, I found myself on the long journey all the way back to St. Brandon's Atoll. My South African friends, Gerhard Laubscher, Ryan Hammond, and Tim Babich, owners of FlyCastaway, invited me to join them on an Indo-Pacific permit pursuit. They knew that my previous trip here without a yellow permit had been haunting me and now was time for revenge.

As you would suspect, Gerhard, Ryan, and Tim are supreme saltwater flats anglers and they definitely know their permit. On the first day Ryan caught an Indo-Pacific permit and, where he was, he said there were plenty. The next afternoon he took me there.

Sure enough, there were yellow tails glimmering. Not a ton of permit but a school of about six stood out as very happy, catchable fish. Being the good friend Ryan is, he left his rod in the boat and walked the flat with me. This

was an endless flat of grass and sand. Though at this time my permit skills were better than on the last trip, I couldn't help but feel some nervousness.

Unlike with Wil, Ryan insisted we get closer than 70 feet. It was a sensible idea because we were walking the flat rather than up high on a boat platform. We got within 40 feet. I made my cast right to the lead couple of fish, tails in the air.

As soon as my fly landed, all the tails went down but in a swirl towards my crab. The problem, however: now I could not see my fly or the fish. Time for another great trick. Ryan told me to slide my crab along the bottom in a big strip as slow as I possibly could but enough where I could feel the contact to it. The idea is that if a permit grabs my fly, I'll feel him and set the hook. Though I didn't get one of those permit, what Ryan taught me made perfect sense and has come in handy with triggerfish, parrotfish, and even back home when fly fishing for carp in murky water.

Ryan headed back to the boat for his rod and I spotted a couple more tailing permit. I eased into close range again and made a good cast. Both tails dunked and I had no doubt they were moving for my fly. With the fish out of my sight I made that long gentle strip. Halfway through

the strip, there was a thump. Damn it. I missed him!

I was flustered. But couldn't let the missed fish rattle me. I knew there were two permit and perhaps the one I missed was still there. You need to keep the faith and until you see the fish actually spook you keep doing your thing. My next cast, I hooked up.

Just like their Atlantic Ocean cousins, the Indo-Pacific permit will tear line and backing off a reel so fast it's frightening. I raised my deeply bent Winston and, as the permit ran, I scanned the flat for any possible leader cutting dangers such as a protruding mangrove or coral. I was lucky and the coast was clear. Fifteen minutes later, I posed with my first yellow permit. I'd go on to land one more that week. Mission accomplished!

My permit fishing has been spectacular since I invested time to get better at understanding these fish. It goes to show that when you put your mind to something, good things happen. I've gone from catching a permit once in a blue moon to catching one nearly each trip. It helps to listen to the best, practice what they teach, then concentrate and put the tools you learn to work. While I'm no permit fishing machine such as Mike Dawes, Wil Flack, or my boys from FlyCastaway, I suspect that if I'm on a tropical flat anywhere in the world, the permit are in danger!

