



PROFILE JEFF'S LIST

IN HIS PURSUIT OF CATCHING ANY FISH WHATSOEVER ON FLY, **JEFF CURRIER** HAS RISKED BEING FIRED BY BOSSES (MILD); LOSING 20LBS IN WEIGHT FROM DELHI BELLY (MEDIUM); GETTING ABDUCTED BY COLOMBIAN REBELS (FIERY); BEING EATEN BY TIGERS (INCINERATION) AND HAS HAD COUNTLESS OTHER MISADVENTURES. BUT OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS AND IN 60 COUNTRIES, HE'S RACKED UP OVER 400 DIFFERENT SPECIES ON FLY. WE ASKED HIM TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE AND SELECT HIS FAVOURITES.

When Belgian cycling legend Eddie "The Cannibal" Merckx was asked by aspiring youngsters what the secret to his success was, his response was brutal and succinct, "Ride lots." Swap out "ride" for "fish" and that nugget of advice could easily be attributed to Jeff Currier, because few, if any, have achieved quite what Currier has done in fly fishing.

Through the decades, fly fishing around the world on self-funded DIY trips or as a guide, as a competition angler and as a Yellowdog Ambassador, Currier has caught over 400 different species of fish.

That's an astonishing number.

Take a minute to try to work out your own list:

- There will be the few local species you've ticked.
- Now think about those places and species a day or two's drive away that you and your buddies like to visit every year or so.
- Then there's the smorgasbord of weird and wonderful species that you might have encountered for the first time on a big exotic trip. You may even be lucky and wealthy enough to have done a few every year.

I bet if you add them all up and throw in an extra 10 -20 for good measure for the random rats and mice you've forgotten about, it's unlikely your tally is much over 50. Maybe you're an ex-guide, so let's say that number is closer to 100. That's incredible, but 400? Verified in journal and blog form every single time you've been fishing the way Currier does it? Doubtful.

By Tudor Caradoc-Davies

Photos Jeff Currier archive

“Tally.”

“Achieve.”

“Numbers.”

These are probably not the terms most would associate with fly fishing. Competitive bird watching or twitching perhaps? I ask Currier (a) if he’s watched the twitcher movie *A Big Year* with Steve Martin, Owen Wilson and Jack Black in which the three are involved in a winner-takes-all species ticking arms race and (b) if he can identify with the mindset.

“When I saw the movie, I was wondering if that’s what I am. In a sense that’s what I have become, but I would say my bio-chemistry wasn’t that at all. It just kind of happened. One day people said, “Holy shit Jeff, have you ever thought about how many fish you have caught on fly? We had probably had a bad winter. I was at home, bored out of my mind and I thought I’d start that list once and for all. It was probably a four to five year process before it was done. I would nibble away at it, then get bored or sidetracked. All of a sudden someone would call upon me for photos of fish from weird destinations so I’d pull the list out again and add to it.”

He may have only formalized it later in life, but the collector in Currier was always there.

“When I was a little kid, I fished hard. I got on my bike and fished all summer. When I was about 12 or 13 I had a calendar in my room and I wrote down every fish I caught that day. Not necessarily different species, but I’d note down, ‘4 pickerel, 3 largemouth bass, 10 pumpkin seeds.’ I was into documenting my fish as a kid and it never stopped. I’m pretty scientific about it these days. In October I will have had my blog ten years (www.jeffcurrier.com) and I have written about every single day of fishing in my life. When I have caught a new species, I’ve documented it very well with photos. Then I get home and google the fish, read about it, learn about it and add it to my list.”

For a fishing mad kid, Jeff’s curiosity and drive has resulted in its own strange momentum and, from having started out as a gung-ho youngster traveling on a song and a prayer to catch fish, Currier is now sought after precisely because he’s the guy who doesn’t simply visit

“new” destinations and catch or figure out “new” species but, through his blog, he has also developed a coveted global audience to share his stories with.

“When you get to learn stuff, then people want you to come do it. The more I traveled, the more travel fell into my lap. I could not have dreamed up a better existence. It’s not what I planned on doing. I get told all the time by kids right up to their late twenties, “I want to do what you’re doing.” There’s no formula, it just happened. The only thing I recommend is to fish hard and learn as much as you can. Maybe it will happen for you.”

Jeff has far too many stories to condense into one profile so, to cut to the chase we asked him, in the order that he fished them, to go continent by continent and ocean by ocean choosing one favourite species from each.

NORTH AMERICA

SMALLMOUTH BASS

My father and grandfather were big-time anglers and my dad also fly fished. Once, I was in the boat with my dad and my grandfather and we were all fishing nightcrawlers when my dad caught a 6lb smallmouth bass. His dad had seen this bass while he was snorkeling throughout the summer. It was a particularly big one that had broken my grandfather off several times. My dad finally got it that night. Unfortunately, we killed it. It was probably 1971 and those were the days when you did that. My dad always wanted to get it mounted but it sat in our freezer for 15 years because he could never afford to. We would take it out once or twice a year and just look at it. It was almost as if we’d had it taxidermied, but to enjoy it we had to take it out of the freezer and put it back in. My mom finally tossed it. Ironically, in my late teens I became a taxidermist, so I probably could have done it, although there would have been freezer burn by then. That fish made an unbelievable impact on my life. It blew my dad’s mind so you can only imagine what it did to me. I became an animal. Right there and then my life was going to be all fishing. I learned to fly fish and I have to say that smallmouth bass, from that day and despite all my fishing experiences, is probably still my favourite all round fish on the entire planet.

THE LAST NINE YEARS THAT I’VE HAD MY BLOG,
**I HAVE WRITTEN ABOUT EVERY SINGLE DAY
OF FISHING IN MY LIFE.**



ATLANTIC JACK CREVALLE

I moved to Wyoming for my trout fishing and to work in a shop, the Jack Dennis Outdoor Shop. The fishing was phenomenal but in the long winters some of my clientele and my boss went saltwater fly fishing in Belize. My boss came back with so many frigging stories and pictures, I went absolutely bananas. How was I going to do this? I had college loans to pay; was driving a 1976 Dodge Aspen which was falling apart; I was in debt. Somehow I was going to make this work. The very next year, which would have been 1988, I charged not one but two trips to Belize on my account at the store because we had a little bit of travel business going there. I didn't ask the boss if I could do this. It was a fairly large company, so it slipped through the cracks. I took off to Belize and they had no way of firing me because they had to get their money back. My boss was actually a pretty cool dude. He said, "What you're going to do on this trip is do your homework and set up the whole Belize thing so that next year you're going to go there and host our clients." It worked out. I went to Belize, rounded up a Shakespeare 12-weight (it was hard to get a 12-weight back then), and got my first tarpon and plenty of bonefish, but I did not get a permit. It was a pretty special trip and



huge growth in my travel experience. I loved it so much because I knew I was going to travel and I also realised you could do this without really having that much money. My breakthrough fish on the Atlantic would have been a Jack Crevalle. That was the first big fish I caught. That was at a time, 30 years ago, when nobody gave a shit about Jack Crevalles.



CENTRAL AMERICA GUAPOTE

The most fabulous fishing happened in Costa Rica in 1993. I actually went there with a friend with the intention of catching some sailfish from the rocks with my fly rod. I had a connection in San Jose, an older guy from Texas who had shopped in our store. He was a well-known guy in the industry, Jimmy Nicks. He was quick to say that we did not have the money for sailfish, but he said what we did have the money for was freshwater fish. Up north at Lake Arenal there's a fish called Guapote, nicknamed the Rainbow Bass. It's a very cool fish. Jimmy hooked us up with his friend, this

old guy Peter and when we met him, smoking his pipe in his office, above him was a mount of a guapote which was at least 8lb. The next day he took us out on his boat to where he caught that fish. He told us that he had only caught a handful that big in the twenty years he had been living there and they were very rare. But goddamn if we didn't go out the next day and catch some nice ones. My final fish that day was an 8lb guapote. By the end of the week I caught two more big ones. That's when I first learned I had the golden horseshoe up my ass. At least that's what Peter told me.

**"MY FINAL FISH THAT DAY WAS AN 8LB GUAPOTE
THAT'S WHEN I FIRST LEARNED I HAD THE
GOLDEN HORSESHOE UP MY ASS."**



SOUTH AMERICA

PAYARA

My first real trip to South America was to Venezuela in 1996. I went down there to catch Payara, aka Vampire Fish. By then I was so used to winging trips by myself through Central America that I thought I was just going to go to Venezuela and wing it again. I went with a friend who had never done a trip like that. The plan was to go down there, ride the busses into the jungle and stay in cheap places and hire Indians to take us out in their wooden canoes. Ironically, when we were on our flight from Atlanta to Caracas, a guy got on the plane with a peacock bass shirt. My friend remarked on the shirt, "Ah cool, peacock bass. We're headed down to do some fishing too."

The guy stopped, asked us where we were fishing and when we told him we were going to wing it, he said, "You guys are going to die. I'm in seat 23A, when the plane

takes off get your asses back here and come and talk to me." It turned out, he owned a lodge that had been shut down four years earlier because Colombian guerillas stole their plane. The plane, carrying some doctors, landed and the guerillas came out of the jungle and had the pilot fly it with all the doctors back to Colombia where they disappeared for six months. The message from the guy in seat 23A – you don't mess around in Venezuela. He was going back after four years to see if they had a lodge left. He ended up offering to take us down to the lodge to catch payara if we did some work for him. Our assignment was to drive supplies from Caracas to his lodge, which was a seven-day drive. What a wild experience. Sometimes weird things happen when you travel, you meet people and stuff just comes together if you have time, and we had a month. We got it done and caught our payaras, as well as peacocks, piranhas and all sorts of cool shit.



EUROPE

ATLANTIC SALMON

(Honorable mention – European Grayling)

In 1996 they had the world fly fishing championships in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. To be honest with you, I didn't even know there was a competition for fly fishing and I was against the idea. When I heard about it, my initial reaction was, 'They're going to come and fish our rivers!' Anyway, I got asked to participate, not as an angler but as a host, to help out these foreigners. I loved it. It was so cool to meet all these teams – I think there were 32 - from around the world. I got close to all the English speaking teams. The US team was a bunch of old guys, one of whom, Walter, was a customer of mine and they got thirtieth place out of 33 teams. At the time I was about 30 years old and the other local fishing guides and I were talking shit, "Where did these Yodas come from? They suck! We should have had a real team, we could have won this thing." Walter overheard us and said, "You would not have won, because Europeans are so good, you can't even imagine."

I recall that some of my friends who guided the Euros, saw these guys land two fish at a time. I think it had happened to me two or three times in my life. In a three-hour session they did it four times.

Walter then said, "The other thing is the American team had no funding, so we had to pay our way. Next year the competition is in Poland. If you'd like to go we'd love to have you."

It was going to cost \$6000 so, for me, it was never going to happen but, out of the blue that winter, I got a call from Walter. He wanted to know how serious I was about fishing for team USA. None of his friends wanted to go to Poland so he was willing to pay for me and my friend Gary (another guide in Jackson Hole). And just like that I was going to Poland. We did ok, we came in thirteenth place instead of the usual twenty fifth to thirtieth. I was twenty second and Gary was twenty fourth which, at that stage, was the highest an American had ever scored. Walter let us fish on the team for the next few years. I loved it. I became passionate about Europe, especially the European grayling. They are hard to catch and they made me a better fisherman because I had to learn how to catch them over the years to compete in these tournaments.

I met some Icelanders years later who were promoting their business at the New Jersey Fishing Show and they asked me to come over, do a blog and put their company in my presentations. On that trip I caught a really big Atlantic salmon which is a fish that has tormented me for years. I grew up with Atlantic salmon in Maine, Massachusetts and New Hampshire and never caught one. I tried in Sweden and also in Norway but never got one. To finally get one of 22lb in Iceland, makes it my favourite European fish.

AUSTRALIA

BROWN TROUT

(Coveted target – Murray Cod)



I've fished for browns and rainbows around Melbourne and done a photo assignment around Tasmania for Tassy tourism. There

was a world championship just south of Sydney. Americans don't know a thing about lake fishing and that was our first time doing a lake tournament. I'll never forget how badly we got our ass kicked. What I got out of that was that I needed to learn how to lake fish. Nobody lake fishes around where I live in Idaho except for myself and a couple of friends. It's pretty dam crowded on the rivers so now I fish lakes more than I fish rivers.

If I go back, it will be for Murray cod. In the mid-90s when I visited Australia people were not focused on other species of fish. Twenty years ago, it was bad enough in the States, to get someone to fly fish for bass or carp, it just didn't happen. In Australia, going for Murray cod on fly just didn't happen. I think they have made a huge comeback. It was borderline endangered back then. Now I need to get over there and fish for Murray cod with Josh Hutchins (aka Aussie Fly Fisher www.aussieflyfisher.com).



ASIA

GOLDEN MAHSEER

In 2002, my wife Granny (*ed: his wife Yvonne's nickname*) and I went to Asia to do a full-on three month pursuit of mahseer from Nepal to India. It was probably the greatest adventure two young Americans could have in the year 2002, but we came up shy on mahseer on fly. I've since learned I was fishing too big a fly. You look at a mahseer in a picture and, without too much info on them back then, I was fishing big tarpon flies. I've learned since from fishing for them with Misty Dillon (legend of fly fishing for mahseer with The Himalayan Outback), that they like small flies, like size 8 brown Woolly Buggers.

After that three-month trip we had a joke about what I-N-D-I-A stood for. I Never Do It Again. Because, after living like locals, riding the busses and trains, we were pretty sick by the time we got back. I lost twenty pounds and

I can't do that. I am a small man as it is. We were never going to go back but then, three years later, out of the blue I had written about India and somehow Misty got word that there was this American who had come over and got his ass kicked. He was just getting into fly fishing and the mahseer thing, so he invited me over. I went and fished with him and got what was considered at the time, the IGFA catch and release record for golden mahseer at 28lb. I ended up catching six big ones in all on that trip, a record Misty broke a couple of years later. On the same day I caught that big fish, I ran into a Bengal tiger and almost lost my life. It's a long campfire story, but in a nutshell, I saved my own life by having this instinct that something was following me. I finally saw the cat, just forty feet away. If I had taken one more step, it would have been over.

AFRICA

NILE PERCH/TIGERFISH

After India, Granny and I felt pretty confident about doing Africa. We finally made it over in 2005. To Americans, Africa has always been viewed as one of those places where you've got to be rich to go there because people think that it's nothing but one giant safari through Tanzania and Kenya. My way of travel has always been the Lonely Planet book. We got the one for Central-Southern Africa and off we went. We wanted to start in Kenya and wing it down through Uganda and Tanzania over a three-month trip. I was using frequent flyer miles to get both of us there, but I could not get them to work for Kenya. The airline said I could not go to Nairobi or Dar es Salaam. Lusaka, Zambia was however an option. I had to look at a map and saw it was close enough to the Zambezi so I said fine, give me two tickets for Lusaka. It was our goal to catch our first tigerfish. We spent some time around Maun in Botswana and then on the Zambezi with Garreth Coombes of Sekoma. We had a very successful trip catching tigers, barbel and bream.

If I have to choose a favourite fish, it's definitely either tigerfish or Nile perch. My trip to Tanzania was pretty incredible. I got to meet the Tourette guys, became friends with them and got to do all their destinations. My biggest fish in Botswana was probably 11lb and the biggest the rest of that first trip was 13lb on the Kafue. Compare that



to my first day in Tanzania which was just an afternoon session, I got four fish between 12lb and 15lb. We were doing that movie *Connect* and I remember our photo guy that first night looking at the footage and going, "Holy shit, we've already got a movie!". On the second to last day I got a 22 pounder up at the rapids. In Cameroon I wanted to catch a Nile Perch like the one I caught in Lake Nasser in Egypt, which was a 44 pounder. So I was relentless. In the end, I got that 53 pounder and I was stoked.





PACIFIC ROOSTERFISH

For me the Pacific is about my quest to get a big rooster fish. It was probably one of the hardest of all my fish quests other than the golden mahseer. It started with me spending five weeks basically living on the beach in Baha. The biggest rooster I caught the entire trip was 41lb. But there was a lot to learn back then. Since the late 90s a lot more people are doing it and you stand a much better chance. Better flies, better lines. We know their habits better.

I caught my most memorable rooster with one of my childhood friends, Sammy, and a guy I became friends with named Grant Hartman of Baha Anglers. I went off on my own while Grant guided Sammy. I landed my big rooster. Those guys weren't even in sight when I got it. The fish was so big that when I hauled it in, I could not handle it or take a photo. I was just standing there fumbling around, looking at this thing in awe. While I was looking at it, a big wave came in and kind of took it back out. The fish sort of up-righted, but did not take off. It just kind of chilled. I thought I'd just ease my fly line out, maybe 60 feet and try to walk the beach to my buddies. The fish was very well behaved. I held my rod high and we walked together down the beach. Finally, I got close enough and they were looking at me wondering what the hell I was doing waving. They figured it out. 'Jeff's got his big rooster.' I thought I was going to just reel that thing in for pictures. Nah. Because I had walked it for 45 minutes, that SOB took off and it was like a whole do-over. We got him in and took some photos. It was a nice fish, probably 35lb. That was it, things clicked.

INDIAN OCEAN

BUMPHEAD PARROTFISH



Having fished Sudan, I really wanted to go to the Seychelles and St Brandon’s. I did not know the Flycastaway guys, but I had started working for Yellowdog Fly Fishing Adventures as an ambassador. If somebody is looking at a destination, say, Tanzania and they can’t close the deal, they will call me and get me to call the guy and tell him about my trip. I’m their closer.

I had just come back from a ten-day trip to Guyana, doing some tagging of arapaima for an aquarium in Chicago and I got home to one of the worst Novembers weather-wise you have ever seen. I returned to five feet of snow and my wife just pulling her hair out. So I suggested we take a few days off and go to Arizona for a vacation because it is warm all year round. We hopped in the car, drove to Arizona and literally, less than 24 hours after we got there our car broke down. We were sitting on the side of the highway waiting for a wrecker to come and get our vehicle when my phone rang. I was Jim Klug, owner of Yellowdog and he’s like,

“Currier! we need you to fill in on an emergency host job!”

I don’t host. It’s not something I like to do. I do one trip every four years. So I said, “Jim, I’m down in Arizona on vacation with Granny.” Jim said, “You don’t understand, Ian’s dad died.”

Ian is Jim’s business partner. “Ian was hosting in the Seychelles starting on Saturday and he can’t go. We have no other person. We advertised it as a hosted trip. You’ve got to do it.”

I look at my wife sitting on the curb, stressed out, and there’s a broken car. I’d had a horrible November and I said, “Jim, as much as I want to go to the Seychelles, I am going to have to turn this trip down.”

He yelled at me, “When you come to your goddamn senses – you call me back!”

Click.

I remember looking at my phone and thinking, “Did I just say no to this? Did I just piss off Klug that bad?”

Granny looked up and said, “Is that Klug? He sounded pretty stressed out. Did he want you to go to the Seychelles?”

I explained that he wanted me to leave on Saturday and that we were in a broken car hundreds of miles from home and she just said, “And you said no? You call him back and you tell him you’ll be there.”

The wrecker came and towed the car. We made it home within 24 hours. I threw a bunch of saltwater shit in a duffel bag and hosted that trip. And what a trip it was. My target species was a bumphead parrotfish and I ended up catching two of them. It was frigging awesome. Such an epic trip. I ended up going back to Farquhar, hosting a trip anyway because I loved it so much. I’ll be back in the Seychelles again in December in Providence hosting a trip.

** Apologies to Antarctica as it got subbed for Central America, but no doubt, as the planet melts, Jeff will be dredging for Ross Sea Cod Icefish soon enough.*

“SOMETIMES WEIRD THINGS HAPPEN WHEN YOU TRAVEL, **YOU MEET PEOPLE AND STUFF JUST COMES TOGETHER IF YOU HAVE TIME**”

