

Summer 2010



Aardvark McLeod

NEWSLETTER



Welcome...

Summer is upon us, and as the mayfly lift off the edge of the rivers our thoughts turn to fishing. It has been a long winter and the coming season fills me with excitement. The wonderful thing about the world is that there is always somewhere to go and fish. Through the dark nights in the northern hemisphere, many were elsewhere wading across hot bonefish flats. This year, we have had more travelling to the consistent flats of Los Roques in Venezuela than ever before. The Argentine season also proved fruitful. Despite the slow beginning with bad weather in January, the season was successful and made memorable by a colossal fish caught on the Rio Irigoyen in southern Tierra del Fuego.

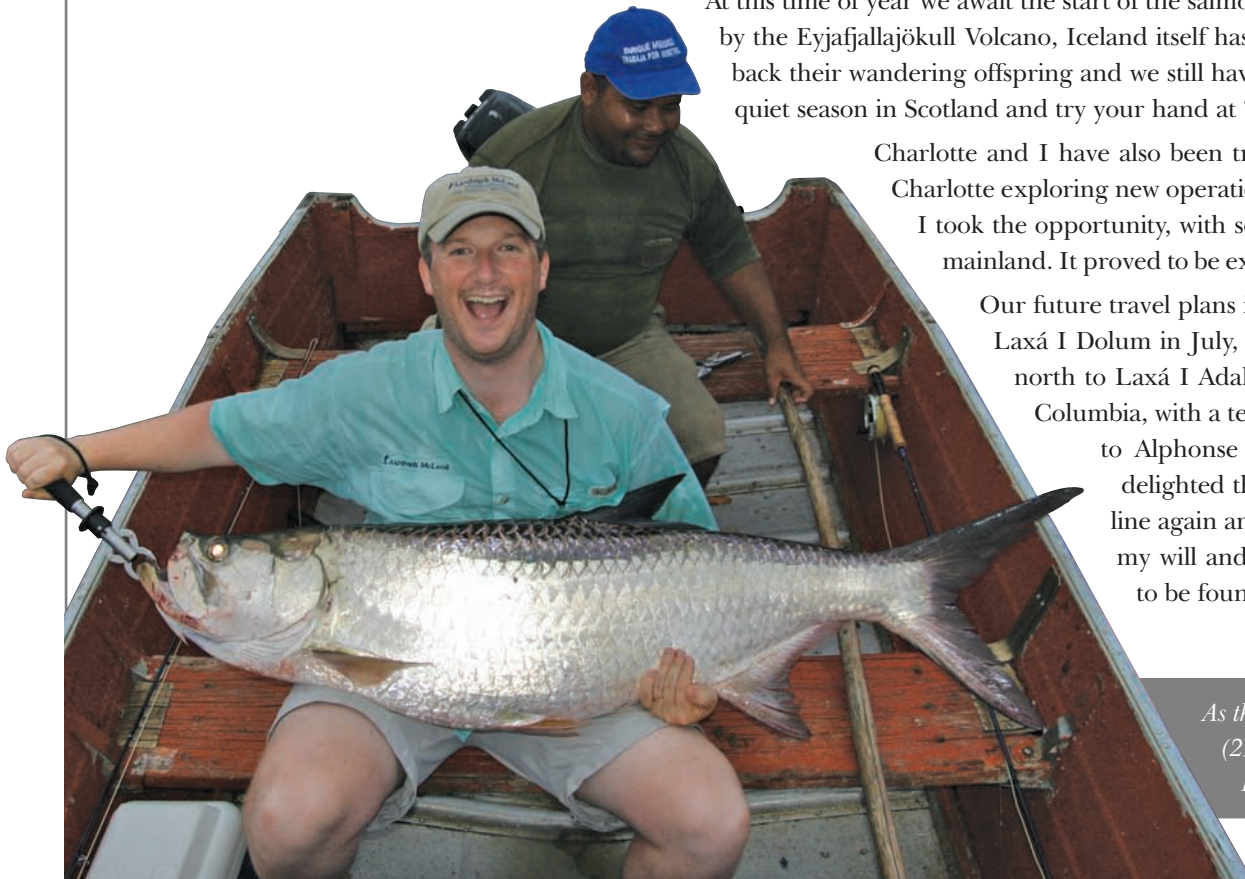
At this time of year we await the start of the salmon season and despite the worldwide disruption caused to travel plans by the Eyjafjallajökull Volcano, Iceland itself has remained remarkably unaffected. The rivers are already welcoming back their wandering offspring and we still have a few last minute slots available should you wish to escape from the quiet season in Scotland and try your hand at 'hitching' a fly in Iceland's clear rivers.

Charlotte and I have also been travelling this spring; with my annual pilgrimage to Los Roques and Charlotte exploring new operations in the Bahamas. While I was delayed in Venezuela by said volcano I took the opportunity, with some adventurous souls, to explore a new fishery at Rio Chico on the mainland. It proved to be extremely interesting and, to our surprise, produced some large tarpon.

Our future travel plans include both of us returning to Iceland – Charlotte to fish Langá and Laxá I Dolum in July, and in August I will also be fishing Laxá I Dolum and then heading north to Laxá I Adaldal. In September I'm looking forward to venturing back to British Columbia, with a team, to fish for steelhead, and Charlotte will be hosting her first group to Alphonse Island in February. I'm delighted that Cosmoledo is back on line again and look forward to pitting my will and kit against the monsters to be found there.



As the CLA Game Fair at Ragley Hall in Warwickshire is rapidly approaching (23rd to 25th July), we hope you will drop in and see us on our stand in Fisherman's Row.



GTs and Bumpies

Alphonse Island, Seychelles

Ian Hodge has fished Alphonse many times, but it still continues to surprise and enthrall him.



“My first day on Alphonse this year proved to be somewhat unusual. While fishing with Serge on Tam Tam flat I headed out to a channel that, last year, had produced an 80 lbs GT. Sure enough almost as soon as I arrived I spotted a huge GT cruising the edge with a smaller one in its wake. On my third cast with a Brushy fly, the large one gave chase and engulfed the fly only to spit it out before I could set the hook. Immediately the smaller fish hammered it and headed out to sea trailing line. As the line whipped up through my fingers a small knot appeared and hammered into the bottom ring immediately separating the top three sections of fly rod and I watched helplessly as they followed the fish into the blue.

As I continued to play the fish directly from the reel the level headed Serge retrieved the boat allowing us chase the fish. Eventually, with a low angle, the three ringed sections of fly rod slowly made their way towards us. Serge undid the knot and reattached the sections of fly rod allowing me to continue the fight. After a further struggle we managed to boat the fish which was estimated at 55 lbs. I am still wondering how big the significantly larger fish was!

A couple of days later, while out on the ocean flat between the wreck and Bijoutier Island, James drew my attention to a large dark object in the water and told me to get the crab ready. It was a giant bump head parrot fish feeding merrily on the coral. The 1½” crab was not exactly easy to cast, but somehow on my fourth attempt it landed in the vicinity of the feeding fish. It scurried over to investigate before leaning over to one side to inspect the morsel. The large bump went down, the tail flicked, and everything went solid. The fight was dogged, not frantic like a GT but long and solid. After a further 15 minutes or so of 12 weight pressure the fish came closer to us and we eyeballed each other as the beak came into view. The beak would have no issue snipping off a finger, so it was vital not to rush the landing. After several attempts at lassoing the tail James eventually rugby tackled the body before raising the tail out of the water. The fish measured 1 m 16 cm and was estimated at between 80 – 90 lbs.

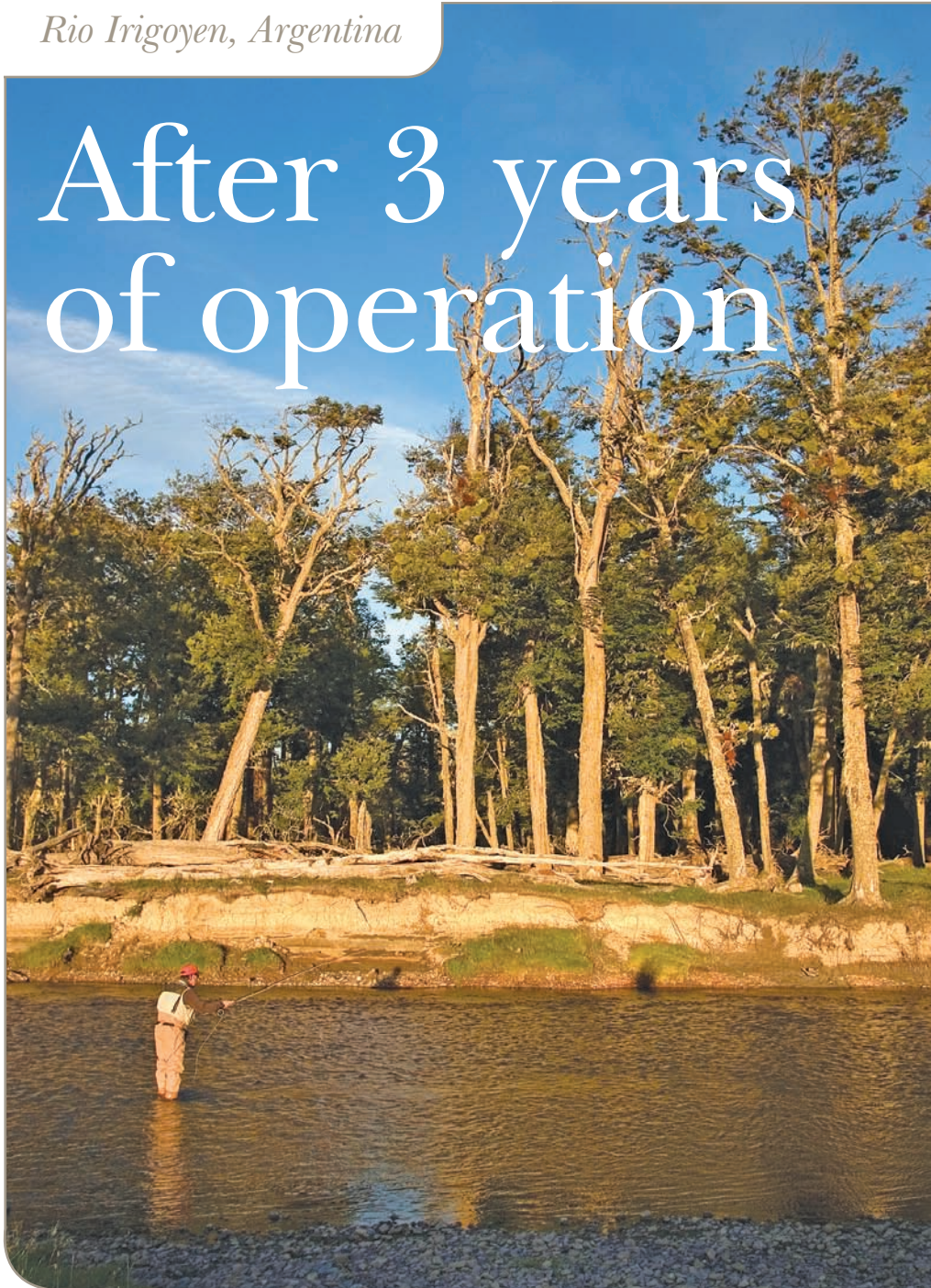
The following couple of days were equally as eventful, casting at 40 – 50 trigger fish on the finger flats, hooking three and landing two. My final day resulted in a further seven hook ups on GT’s, landing two. The more I come to Alphonse the better the fishing appears to get and for someone who enjoys the other species more than bonefish this is exceptional.”

Alphonse Island still retains the saltwater crown; offering some of the finest saltwater fly fishing anywhere on the planet. This is not only due to the huge numbers of large bonefish that call St Francois home, but more now for the large species variation it offers. Prices have reduced for the coming season making Alphonse even better value for such consistently good fishing.



Rio Irigoyen, Argentina

After 3 years of operation



“The scenario is familiar: discover a beautiful new river, catch lots of fish, build a lodge and off you go! Untamed Angling did just that with the wonderful Far End Rivers Lodge on the Rio Irigoyen approximately 180 km south of the legendary Rio

Grande in Tierra del Fuego. The question was: would it last, would it improve? It is now three years since I was in the very first party to fish this new operation. The answers to the above questions are: yes and yes!” Nick Palliser reports back on his own trip to the Rio Irigoyen.

“It is certain that the Irigoyen is vastly different to the Rios Grande and Gallegos; in some ways more challenging, it is also more sheltered and far narrower. The Irigoyen is unique in that you nearly always fish it with a single handed rod. You fish some pools so narrow that you simply cannot believe a monster sea trout could be laying there; yet they are.

This season, many of the local rivers including the Rio Grande and the Irigoyen flooded and coloured for several weeks. Despite this, some extraordinary fish were caught. During our week hosted by Gordon Richmond, Alan Olivier might have broken the river record with a stunning 99 cm cock fish estimated at just over 28 lbs. He and his fishing partner, Jon Jonik, pulled out two further 20 lb plus fish from the same pool on the same day. All fish were as fresh as fresh can be.

I hosted a trip in January which was the very first heli-fishing week on the Irigoyen. Part of the group of highly experienced Irish anglers, Duncan Sleeman and Sean Mannion had the first day of a lifetime, both bagging fish of over 20 lbs. Sean’s was a stunning fish of around 24 lbs.

The Irigoyen is technical and the sea trout are often laying close to, or under, the many fallen trees that criss-cross the river. Although casts rarely need to be long, fly presentation is everything. Add to this the challenge of fighting a double figure fish in these snag infested waters, every fish landed is a moment of great pride and achievement. For this reason, many anglers return year after year.

Such a technical river demands exceptional guides. In Alex and Nico Trochine, this element could not be better. Their amazing knowledge and skill makes fishing with them a joy. Even the most experienced fishermen never fail to mention how much they have learned and improved: high praise indeed. The welcome, the lodge and the outstanding food complete what is a unique destination. After three trips, all my clients have left the Irigoyen with a heavy heart. I cannot think of a finer compliment.”

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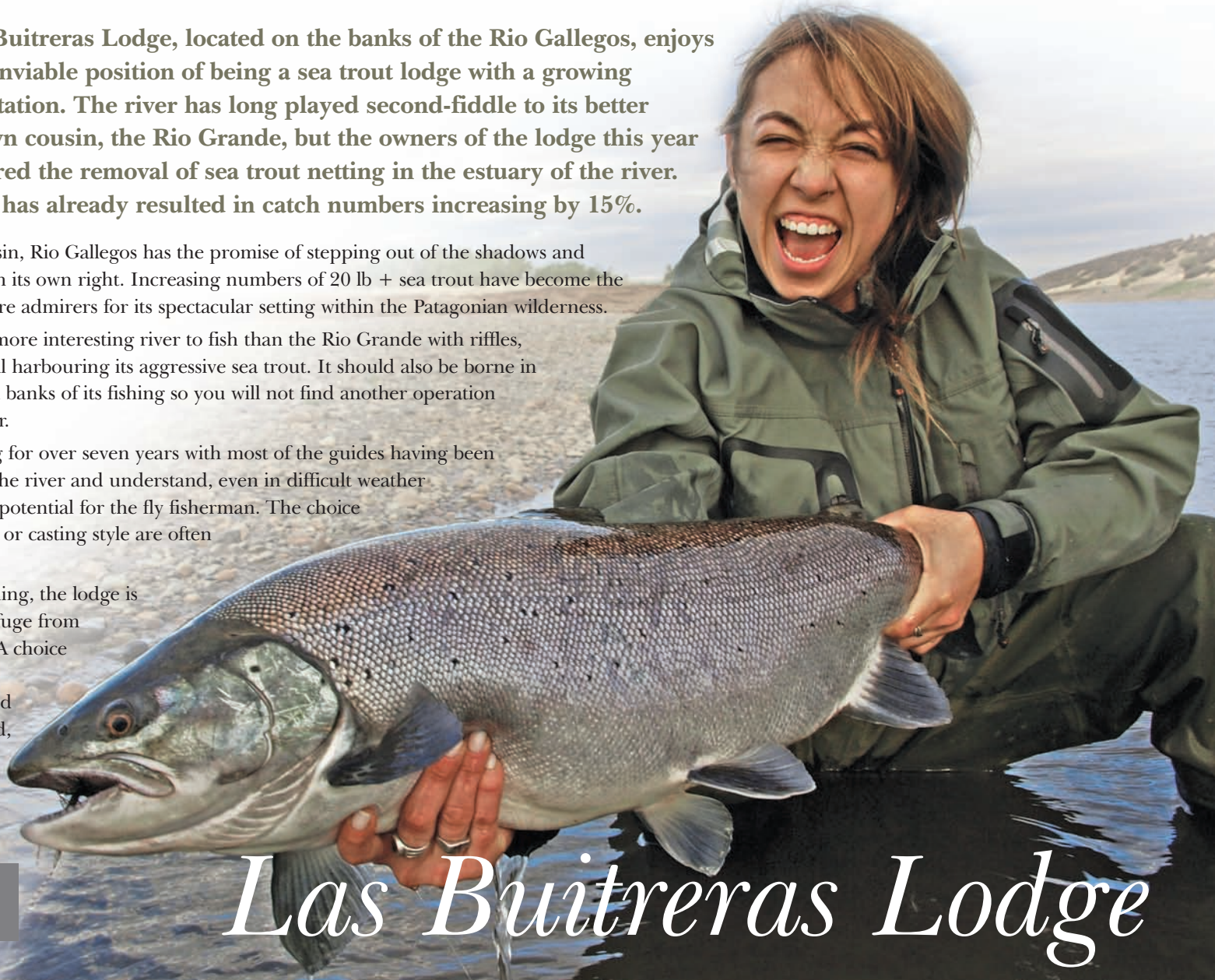
Las Buitreras Lodge, located on the banks of the Rio Gallegos, enjoys the enviable position of being a sea trout lodge with a growing reputation. The river has long played second-fiddle to its better known cousin, the Rio Grande, but the owners of the lodge this year secured the removal of sea trout netting in the estuary of the river. This has already resulted in catch numbers increasing by 15%.

Having less rod pressure than its cousin, Rio Gallegos has the promise of stepping out of the shadows and becoming a sought after destination in its own right. Increasing numbers of 20 lb + sea trout have become the norm. It will no doubt gain many more admirers for its spectacular setting within the Patagonian wilderness.

The Rio Gallegos is, in some ways, a more interesting river to fish than the Rio Grande with riffles, defined pools and tantalising draws all harbouring its aggressive sea trout. It should also be borne in mind that Las Buitreras controls both banks of its fishing so you will not find another operation fishing from the other side of the river.

The operation itself has been running for over seven years with most of the guides having been there since its inception. They know the river and understand, even in difficult weather conditions, how best to maximise the potential for the fly fisherman. The choice of size or type of flies, tippet material, or casting style are often crucial to success.

Upon returning after a hard days fishing, the lodge is warm, comfortable and a welcome refuge from whatever the day has thrown at you. A choice of fabulous local Argentinean wines complements the hearty, well-prepared meals served in a spacious, yet relaxed, dining area where you can exchange tales of the days adventures.



Prime time in Argentina is considered to be January, February and March.

Las Buitreras Lodge

The Secrets of Giants

Sir Chips Keswick recently returned from North Riding Point on Grand Bahama and was kind enough to share a few insights. As a founding member of the lodge, he has come to understand the secrets of the giant bonefish that inhabit these flats.

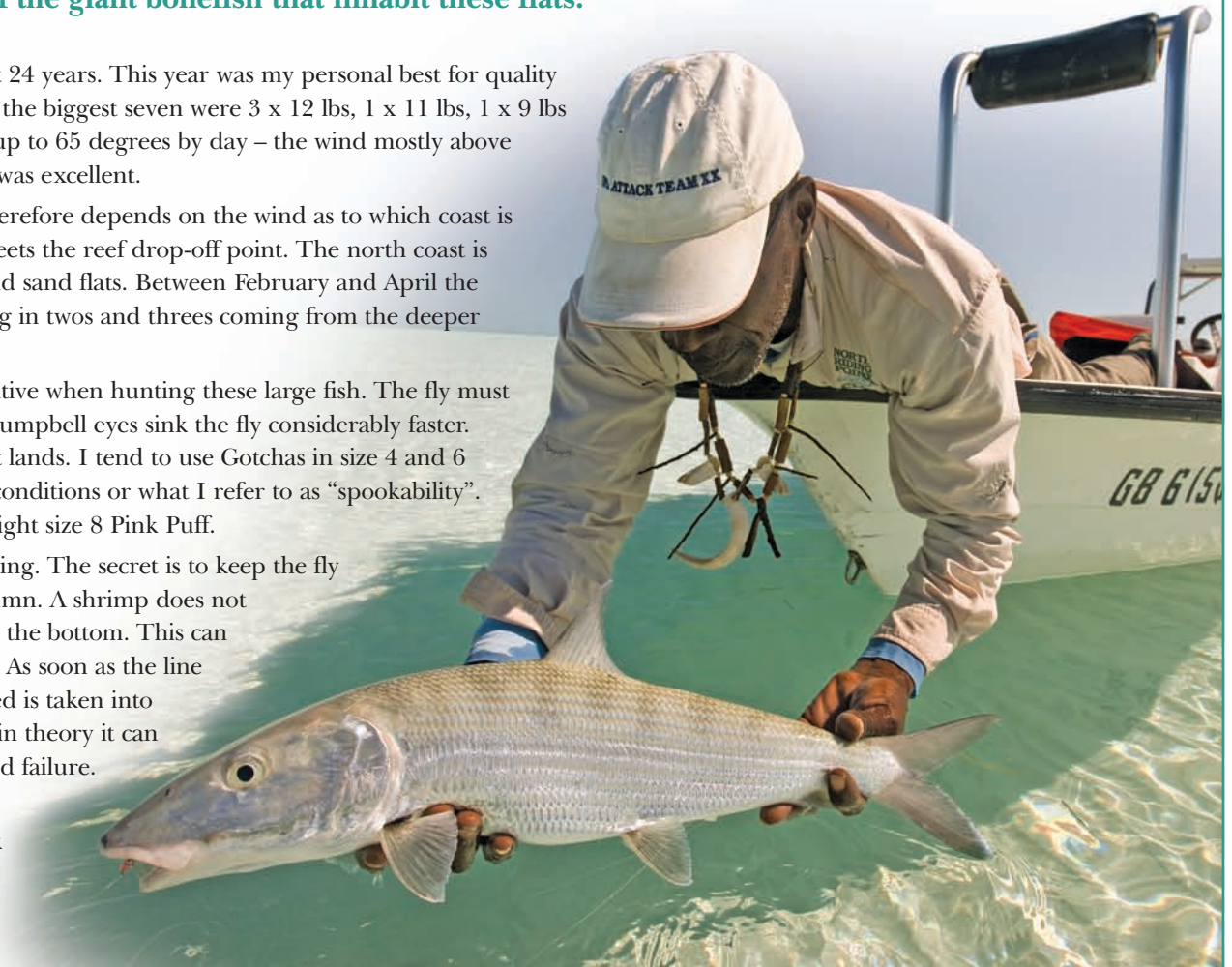
“I have come to North Riding Point on Grand Bahama for the past 24 years. This year was my personal best for quality rather than quantity. 34 bonefish caught – average weight 5 lbs but the biggest seven were 3 x 12 lbs, 1 x 11 lbs, 1 x 9 lbs and 2 x 8 lbs. The weather was cold; 45 degrees at night and only up to 65 degrees by day – the wind mostly above 35 kph and from the north for all but one day – however the light was excellent.

North Riding Point fishes the middle third of the island. Fishing therefore depends on the wind as to which coast is more favourable. The south side is one continuous long flat that meets the reef drop-off point. The north coast is approximately 15 miles of ocean flats, inlets, mangrove channels and sand flats. Between February and April the schools of bones are replaced by small numbers of large fish cruising in twos and threes coming from the deeper water to feed on these ocean flats.

The weather can often be cooler and a little windy, but this is a positive when hunting these large fish. The fly must reach the fish as quickly as possible, and in the deeper water lead dumbbell eyes sink the fly considerably faster. The wave action will hide the entry of the fly, and hide the line as it lands. I tend to use Gotchas in size 4 and 6 and have them with lead or bead chain eyes. Choice is dictated by conditions or what I refer to as “spookability”. If it is flat calm then these tactics are not suitable and I switch to a light size 8 Pink Puff.

Apart from the necessity for good light, the next key factor is stripping. The secret is to keep the fly on the bottom while it is stripped without lifting it in the water column. A shrimp does not suddenly make a break for the surface in a bid for freedom, it hugs the bottom. This can be difficult to achieve when standing on the front of a drifting skiff. As soon as the line is cast then the slack must be removed from the line. The drift speed is taken into account so the fly speed remains the same. Although totally logical in theory it can be harder in practice and is often the difference between success and failure.

I have found at this time of year, with one of our excellent guides, I can normally have 30 good shots at bonefish near the 10 lbs mark per day of which I might hook ten and land one. On fish of that size I think those are good odds.”



Bonefishing for Grown-Ups

Matt Harris, photographer, writer and all round obsessive fisherman recently followed Sir Chips Keswick to North Riding Point.



“I’ve been lucky – I’ve fished a lot of different spots for bonefish over the years; from the wide golden sands of Cuba to the teeming atolls of the Seychelles. They’ve all provided heaps of fun, and I’ve caught more bonefish than I’d care to wave a stick at, but in March of this year, I visited a spot that knocks them all into a cocked hat.

A gaggle of tiny cays, painted onto a spartan canvas of brilliant blue skies and stunning white sand flats, where bonefish from the wilder shores of your fly-fishing dreams come swaggering into view and set your heart-rate rattling through the roof.

This isn’t a place for numbers – if you want to catch a cricket score of tiddlers by plundering a shoal the size of a tennis court, go elsewhere. However, if you want a proper challenge and a reward to match, this is the real deal. Regular shots at maybe one, two or three big, cunning fish – astonishing quicksilver torpedoes that have outgrown their “elusive silver ghost” tag, brutally betrayed by their sheer size as their broad black shadows loom onto the pristine sand.

Get it right and you’ll be attached to a fabulous gleaming greyhound that will empty your reel and turn your legs to jelly. Don’t expect to enjoy the fight – your heart will rush straight up into your throat as your prize fizzles out towards the horizon, but do everything right and eventually, you’ll be cradling the most stunning fish in the sea – a genuine double-figure bonefish.

Numbers and weights are a crude way to assess any fishing trip, but sometimes they can help. In a trip bedevilled by bad weather, I managed to make the long journey across the deep to this bonefishing wonderland just twice. In those two magical days, aided by my brilliant guide and mentor, Leroy, I caught fish of 3, 5, 5, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 10, 10, 10 & 11 pounds.

A fluke? Not on your life. The lodge wall where I stayed displays images of numerous monsters, including a 16 pounder cradled by the venerable Sir Chips Keswick, a fish that puts my achievement into a more modest perspective.

How did I find this paradise? I have to thank Pete McLeod at Aardvark McLeod for sending me. North Riding Point on Grand Bahama is simply THE place to go bonefishing.”



The Bahamas are best fished between January and June, although it really is an all year round destination. Straightforward to get to, the Bahamas is a perfect destination for both fishers and non-fishers alike.

COSMOLEDO

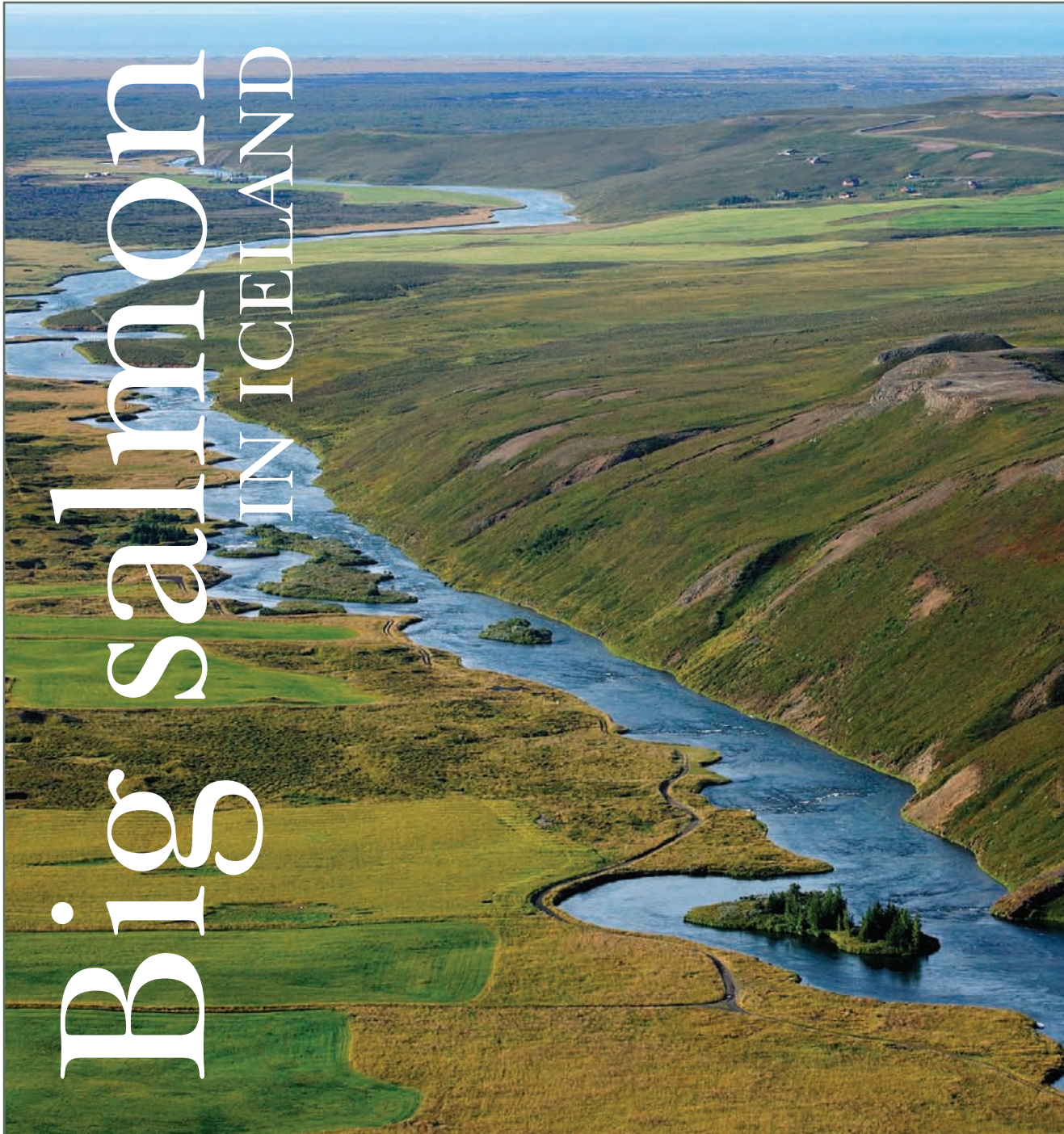
We are pleased to announce that we will once again be able to run trips to Cosmoledo atoll in the outer islands of the Seychelles. Having made my last trip nearly two years ago, I am desperate to return to this paradise, and the lack of fishermen in that time should have returned the fishery to a near virgin state. There is nowhere on the planet where giant trevally are so numerous or the variety of species so prolific.

For those not familiar with Cosmoledo it is an atoll located approximately 600 miles south west of Mahé and 200 miles north of Madagascar in the far reaches of the Aldabra chain. The atoll itself is approximately 152 km square. There are 16 individual islets and cays along the rim of the atoll, with Menai (in the west) and Wizard Island (in the south-east) being the largest. The cuts and channels between these islets provide an extraordinary habitat for giant trevally, blue fin trevally, permit, milkfish, trigger fish and numerous other species. The internal flats that lead down to the lagoon, consist of miles of pristine sand flats teeming with bonefish. Fishermen are broken up into parties of three and four with their guide, and move around the atoll targeting whatever species the group prefers.

The new vessel will be an upgrade from previous years in the form of the Neptune Warrior, a luxury motorised catamaran fully refitted last year. Accommodation is in five spacious double cabins and, with a draft of only 1.3 metres, she can easily cruise inside the pristine lagoons of Seychelles' outer island coral atolls. She is skippered by Francis Roucou previously of Indian Ocean Explorer who has been taking trips to Cosmoledo for eleven years. To reach the flats Neptune Warrior has two Orca 350 Aluminium tender boats which are 5.3 m long with a draft of only 8 inches and powered by Yamaha 85 hp engines. These trips will be fully guided with experienced fly fishing guides familiar with the atoll with one guide between three rods.

Neptune Warrior will be operating at Cosmoledo from 21st October – 10th December 2010 and then from 11th February – 1st April 2011.

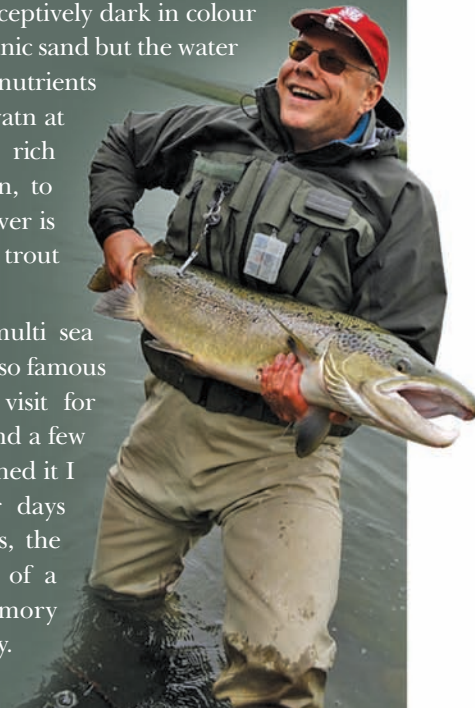
Big salmon IN ICELAND



Iceland has always had a reputation for consistent numbers of salmon, but not many big fish. The average size on most rivers is between 6 – 10 lbs which is phenomenal on light tackle and hitching on the surface. The size factor does occasionally put some fishermen off. There is a river on Iceland's north coast that has consistently produced salmon over 20 lbs for the last 35 years. It is also the river on which fly fishing arrived in Iceland. It is called the Laxá I Adaldal or “Big Laxá” by our American brethren.

The Laxá I Adaldal is a large sweeping river, broad and powerful with wonderful slick fly water and perfect for those who prefer two handed rods. Long pools are punctuated with dancing riffles and smooth tails that end in intoxicating Vs. It looks deceptively dark in colour as a result of the black volcanic sand but the water is crystal clear. The rich nutrients that flood out of Lake Myvatn at its headwaters maintain a rich habitat that trout thrive in, to the point that the upper river is perhaps some of the finest trout fishing in Europe.

However it is the large multi sea winter fish that this river is so famous for. It is not a river to visit for numbers, but to try and land a few big fish. The first time I fished it I landed eight fish in four days between 12 lbs and 21 lbs, the last was right on the lip of a waterfall and the memory remains with me to this day.



Mongolia

By Peter McLeod

“In September last year I floated the Delger-Muron River in Mongolia in search of taimen. Taimen are prehistoric ancestors of salmon and trout species and can grow in excess of 60 lbs. They are an aggressive predatory fish whose main diet consists of lenok, grayling, mice, steppe squirrels and even marmots if they swim the river. Although our primary target was taimen, what I had not been prepared for was the eager lenok and grayling in the river. These were fantastic sport and I actually would do the trip just for them. The biggest we landed was 8 lbs or so, and they would readily take dry flies and nymphs. The lenok are dogged fighters and, on light tackle, will give you quite a battle.

On most days we fished from the bank only using the rafts to move from pool to pool, fishing along the way. On the third day I manoeuvred us down a set of rapids and into a long slow pool. I spotted a long dark shape hanging off one of the boulders. Andy, our guide, confirmed it was a fish and, as I began to frantically back row, my brother Alex threw a cast that swung the gurgler across its nose. Alex popped the fly a couple of times and unbelievably the fish opened its huge mouth sucking the fly in. The fish moved back across the pool, relatively un-perturbed that it was now towing an angler and a raft. Now on the bank, Alex’s rod bent double as he slowly began to work the taimen into the shallows. Andy offered encouraging instruction to him as the fish loomed closer and closer. He slowly moved up behind it, but as soon as it saw him the taimen began to thrash madly on the surface. It reminded me of a tarpon when it makes that gill rattling shake of

the head. Alex managed to bring it back to the shore and after a brief fight he slid the fish into the sling and quickly clamped the ends shut. The elation on Alex’s face said it all. He had been waiting for 23 years for this moment. This incredible fish measured 125 cm, approximately 35 – 40 lbs.

As the week progressed Ian Reilly and Stuart Forsyth both picked up a few more taimen each to good sizes, and in between, all of us hammered the lenok and grayling. On this trip I almost have to say that the fishing took second place to the experience of just being there, and for a float trip it was exceedingly comfortable and very slick.”



The season for fishing in Mongolia is June and September. The June weeks are normally warmer and have higher catch rates, but are more susceptible to heavy rains. The September weeks historically have caught fewer but larger fish as they put on fat for winter, and the autumn colours are magnificent. If you are looking for something completely different to do, or just literally get away from it all, I cannot recommend this experience highly enough.



Peter Vikanis reports on his twelfth visit to Los Roques



“I had not been to Los Roques for over a year and had forgotten how amazing the fishing there can be. I say that because there are more fish there than anywhere else, the average fish size is larger, and the styles of fishing are more diverse.

You can fish on classic flats to schools and singles like in the Bahamas or Mexico. You can also fish on very shallow pancake flats to tailing fish. But the most exciting part is fishing on beaches to fish feeding on the millions of baitfish.

I managed to catch a lot of bonefish and I was getting a little bored; remedied by fishing for bones with dry flies. There are some serious monster bones around that I estimate to be 15 lbs+. I think that they are impossible to catch with any type of fly unless you can simulate the intestines of a cleaned fish. They have a ‘can’t catch me’ arrogance and give you more than the fin.

One day was very windy so we decided not to go too far and try to find shelter from the wind. We went to Madrizqui, a short boat ride from Gran Roques. We arrived at about 8.00 am and decided to walk the beach, fishing floating gummy minnows and caught about a dozen fish all around 3-4 lbs and one 7-8 lb fish.

This is, to me, the most exciting method to fish for bones there is as you see every take and refusal. The fish will stick its head right out of the water to take a fly. Imagine dry fly fishing for salmon in totally clear water when the fish comes up to take a good look at the fly.

The highlight of the afternoon was on our return to Gran Roques. We were fishing the front when I saw one larger fish cruising and cast my floating minnow in its path. The fish continued swimming and on the way past it sucked in my fly. It realised it was hooked and it immediately took off swimming parallel to the beach, underneath the boats and anchor lines. It took at least 200 yards of backing and almost spooled me before it stopped.

How do I get him out? With a little help from my friends.

My guide, Rafael, took his shirt off, found a diving mask and jumped off the boat. We passed the rod under the anchor lines and slowly got the line back in. By now we had attracted a small audience on the beach and, line back on the reel, unbelievably the fish was still on. Rafael passed him to me to the applause of our crowd.

I know that by IFGA rules the fish doesn't count but who cares. I estimate it to be 11-12 lbs.”

LOS ROQUES



A 7 lb fish from Madrizqui

Ian Reilly reports back, post Botswana and Namibia...

“My wife and I had our first trip to Africa in 2009 and no sooner had we arrived home than we were back on the phone asking Charlotte to book us up again for 2010. We loved Africa.

That trip had a safari focus, with some tiger fishing on the lower Zambezi thrown in for me. The brief for May 2010 was to do the reverse: to organise a fishing holiday with bit of safari thrown in – a challenge as May is not prime time for either game or fishing.

Our trip took us from the panhandle of the Okavango delta, through the heart of Moremi Game Reserve and up to Impalila Island in Namibian waters. As a lover of water and waterways I was very excited to visit the Okavango river system. Having fished the muddier waters of the lower Zambezi, it was an absolute delight to fish the almost gin clear waters of the upper Okavango. A mokoro ride through the wide and shallow lagoons is a must, as is a visit to the enchanting Tsodilo Hills to see the ancient Bushmen rock drawings.

As (very) amateur photographers, my wife and I were suitably employed taking in the fantastic vistas, beautiful colours and huge array of bird life via our SLRs.

My wife has a particular passion for elephants and with that in mind, we stayed at Stanley’s Camp – the most fantastic of the ones we have visited so far. The reason for staying here is the elephants. Doug and Sandy Groves run the ‘Living with Elephants’ experience; three orphaned elephants for whom they have cared for many years. We spent the whole morning with the three amazing animals, interacting with them and I cannot recommend this experience highly enough. My wife, Jacquie, is pictured with the herd (she’s the one in the trousers).

Another exciting flight and a short trip across the Chobe River brought us to Impalila Island – a place with a big history of fly fishing. Although not prime fishing time, I still managed to tickle a number of tiger fish out of the very clear waters, with the biggest going to 10 lbs.

Homeward bound, our pilot – 20, charming, smooth and good looking (not fair he had so much going for him, including Mrs Reilly...!) flew us over Victoria Falls on the way back to Livingstone – truly an impressive flight.

The holiday was absolutely fantastic given that we had given Charlotte a slightly difficult brief in terms of the time of year. I am very keen to return to Africa in 2011 to fish once again and the opportunity to catch other species such as tilapia and barbel is very appealing.”

Although not prime time, April and May are lovely months in Africa. The bush is lush, the babies are growing and the birdlife is fantastic. Low season rates apply and it is generally quieter. Whilst June/July/August are the prime fishing months in Botswana and Namibia, tiger fishing on the Zambezi in Zambia or Zimbabwe continues through September/October/November.

