

Flyfishing in Angola

by MC Coetzer

The fishing operation in southern Angola is run by a company called Angolan Angling Adventures. They are based in the small coastal town of Namib approximately 70 km north of the Kunene River.

To get there you fly from Cape Town to Windhoek and then charter a private flight to Namib. At the airport you are met by the camp staff who will quickly complete the formalities and get you on your way to Camp Flamingo. This is the main camp and consists of six tents with very comfortable beds, warm showers and a central area where meals are served and fishing stories are shared.

The other option is to travel down to the mouth of the Kunene river where the facilities are more basic but, as reported by other anglers, the fishing more than makes up for this with cob of over 50 kg already having been caught on fly. The bulk of the catch at the Kunene is made up of cob with some small leeries in the 5-6 kg size range thrown in. Our group was more concerned with big leeries and elf, however, so we opted for the Flamingo Camp. This piece of coastline is very similar to the Arniston-Struisbaai coast, the only difference being that there are lots of fish here. The landscape is very barren with only the odd *Welwitchia* breaking the monotony of the barren earth.

Fishing is mainly done in fairly rough surf off rocky points or into deep gullies off the beach. The bulk of our catch consisted of leerie and elf, but we also caught blacktail, kasenga (a type of santer), a type of west coast pompano, cob and yellowbelly rockcod.

The rough conditions made fishing off the beach fairly difficult and a long cast was needed to get your fly past the shorebreak where most of the fish were feeding. We fished mainly shooting heads on eight to 12 weight outfits. On the light rods a very fast sinking line produced best results combined with a Clouser minnow tied in chartreuse or grey over white. This combination produced lots of small leeries, big elf (up to 3.5 kg) and also most of the other species.

When going for the big leeries we fished off a rubberduck using 12 weight rods combined with floating shooting heads and poppers as big as we could throw. Just a few things to remember: although we fished up there in August it was always cold and we hardly ever saw the sun. This combined with water temperature of around 17°C makes for some very cold fishing. I would recommend the use of a wetsuit or at least some very good waterproof clothing. Also make sure that you take good protection for your feet as much of the fishing is done from very sharp rocks. Personally I prefer a pair of old running shoes. Other obvious things you will require are a shallow stripping basket suitable for wading, sunblock and a hat.

The lure fishers favoured Chiselnose plugs and metal spinners and although this accounted for some superb leeries up to 24 kg, cob up to 15 kg and uncountable elf over 3 kg, I found this form of fishing too easy, but still lots of fun.



Above: Mike Dolhoff with a popper-caught 10-kg Leerfish on the Angolan coast.



Left: Rian Heyns with a 7 kg Angolan Kob.

The daily routine would be something like this: Get up at first light and have a quick cup of coffee with rusks. Pile into three 4x4 vehicles and head out for the day. Fishing is concentrated around a number of rocky points with a good wash of waves around the points. The fish would feed on the edges of the white water and all that's needed is to get your fly into open water and then strip it back through the white water. If you don't get any results after ten minutes simply get back into the 4x4 and head for the next likely looking spot.

Although 99% of fish caught were returned to the water unharmed we could never resist the temptation of fresh fire-grilled elf fillets washed down with a cold beer. For those who don't enjoy fish there would be freshly braaied sausage and salad. Afternoons were spent in more or less the same way with one group fishing off the Duck and the other two groups fishing from the shore.

After dark we all headed back to the camp for a warm shower and a cold beer.

The best time to go depends on the species you want to catch. Summer is definitely the time for big cob (up to 50 kg) and big elf (up to 8 kg) but you will still get lots of small leerie with the odd jack cravelle, big yellowbelly rockcod and yellowfin tuna offshore.

We went up in winter because we were looking for bigger leeries. But, although lots of fish over 10 kg came out on hardwear, we only managed fish up to 10 kg on fly. Winter is not the time for elf or cob, but we caught enough of them to imagine how good it can get in summer.

Concerning safety, we never felt threatened in any way. Apart from the film on my camera having been confiscated for taking pictures at the airport, the locals were always very friendly and helpful. Once you leave the airport for the camp you hardly see any locals. This area has no permanent water so there are no villages south of Namib. The only people that you see are the odd strandlopers fishing along the beach using very primitive handlines. They dry all their fish and walk back to Namib where they sell their catch.

Fishing in Angola is definitely not easy but I can highly recommend the trip.

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Anyone who knows fish knows that, pound for pound, any salt-water fish is far stronger, far more disinclined to be hauled in on a line, than a comparable fresh-water fish.
Louis D. Rubin, The Even-Tempered Angler (1983).

To master ocean fly fishing nothing beats time on the water. Lou Tabory,
Inshore Fly Fishing (1992)