

Fly fishing for mullet along the South Western Cape coastline

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Many fish species indigenous to South Africa are difficult fly targets, i.e. Clanwilliam yellowfish, spotted grunter and mullet, to name a few. However, at certain times or under specific conditions, these fish will take the right fly with the same alacrity and confidence as a bluegill takes a Woolly Bugger!

As I grew up on the South Western Cape coastline, mullet (specifically the southern mullet) have fascinated me since childhood. As a youngster, I used to spend a lot of my spare time targeting these fish along the beaches with light spinning tackle, a float and tiny pieces of red bait.

Initially, fly fishing seemed much too complicated but, with the passage of time, my interest in this facet of angling grew and my interest in mullet became an infatuation when I discovered what difficult fly targets they were. My first attempts are too embarrassing to write about, but then came a breakthrough...

In certain small bays around Kleinmond and Betty's Bay, I witnessed a regular occurrence that captured my interest and fired my imagination. This only took place under specific conditions, which occurred more often than I initially realised.

Given the adverse weather conditions in the Cape, many northwesterly storms wash shredded kelp onto the shoreline. Sand-fleas, also known as beach hoppers (*Talorchestia capensis*), ingest the kelp and appear in their hundreds on the beaches after such a storm. Many larger organisms, and specifically mullet, include sand-fleas in their diet and, when they get trapped in the shore break, they are readily eaten by shoals of patrolling mullet.

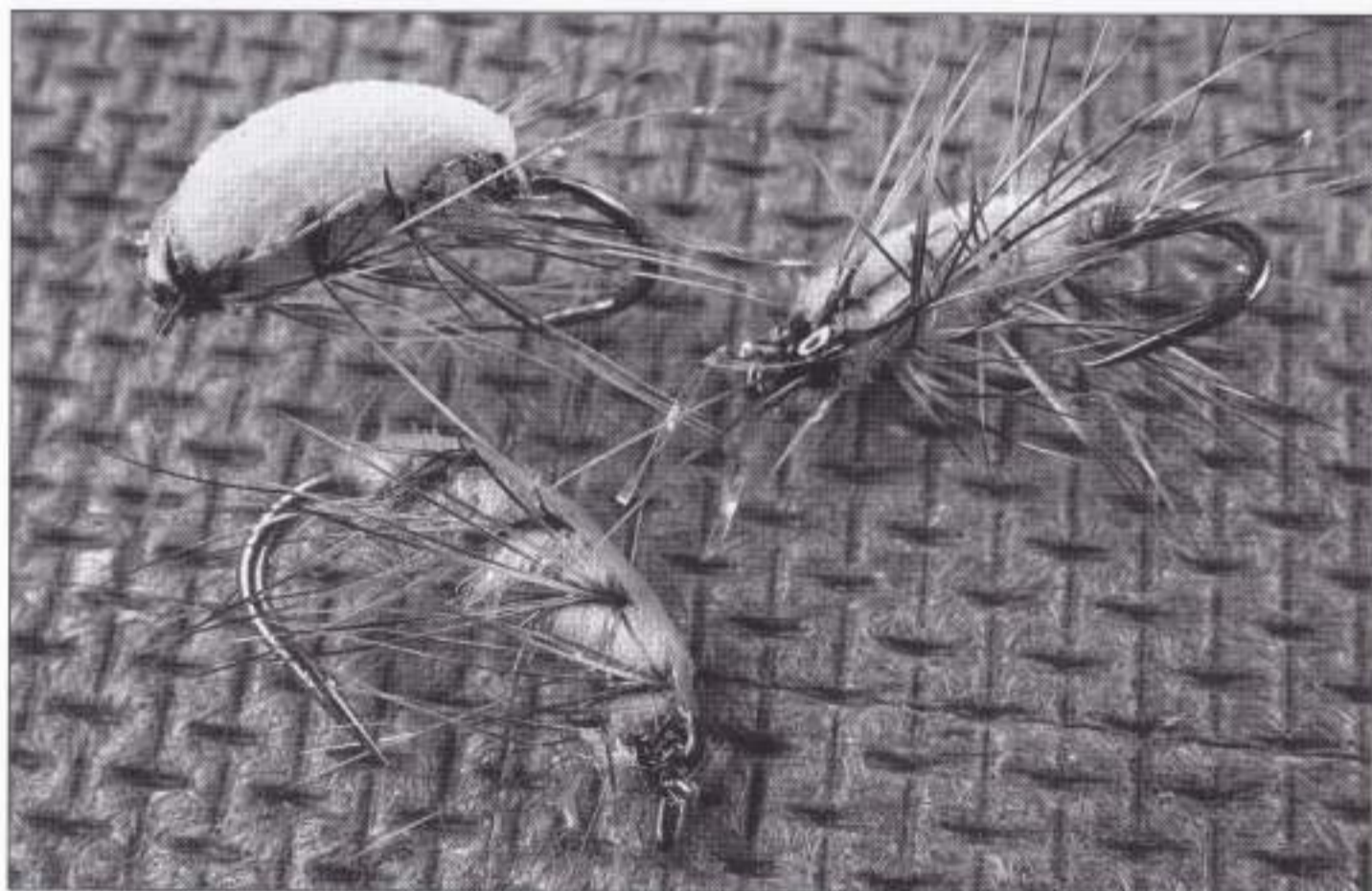
This gave me the opportunity to experiment with different patterns that imitate sand-fleas. I started by slowly stripping small White Deaths and scuds under the surface and took the odd fish every now and then, but the result was not satisfying enough. After observing feeding fish, I noticed that the majority of the sand-fleas were actually taken off the surface and that they floated well. I then developed a foam-backed pattern that proved to be very effective.

The approach is rather simple because the fish are so distracted in their feeding frenzy that they hardly notice human activity. Mullet can be extremely 'line-shy' and fairly light tippets, up to 6X, are sometimes necessary in clear water. I have had several fish 'nosing' a fly before I retied it onto a lighter tippet - which produced a fish on the very next presentation.

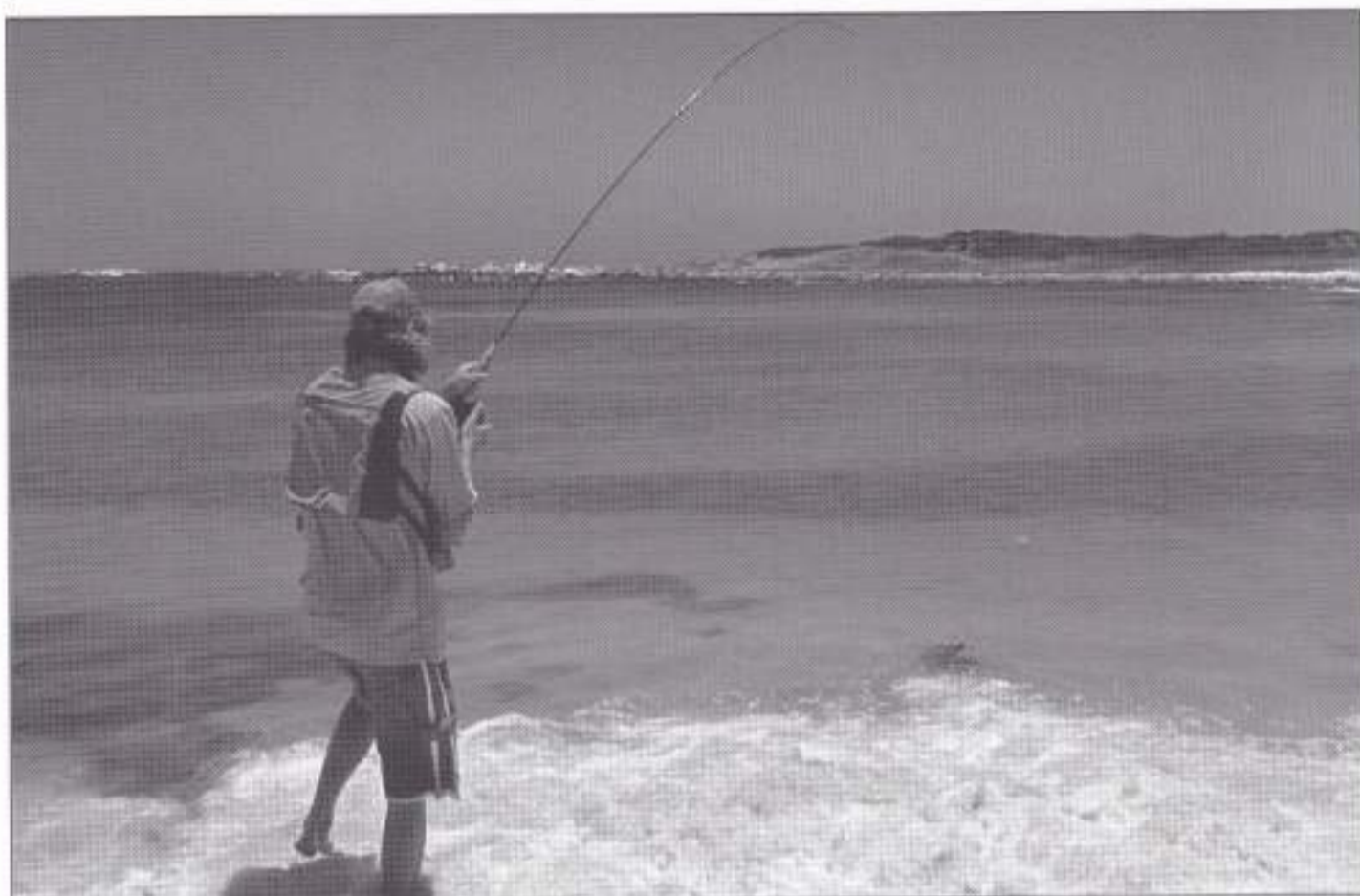
They readily take dries and wet flies, either offered on a dead drift or with subtle movement (slow to medium figure-of-eight retrieve) - as long as it resembles a sand flea. A tandem rig (tied New Zealand style) with a dry at the top and a small wet fly as the point



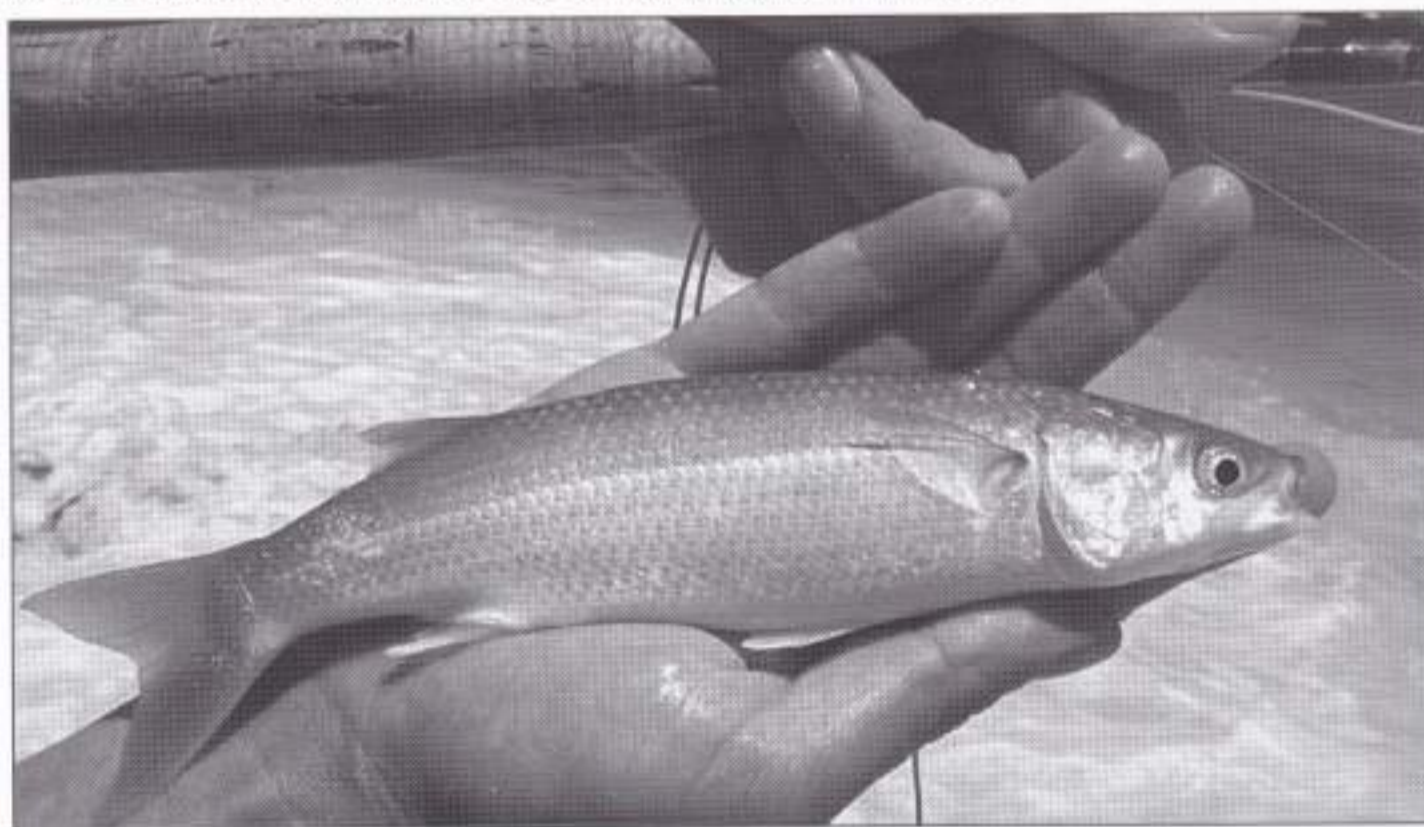
Mark Krige trying out a three-weight on mullet.



The author's sand flea imitation is tied on a #16 hook, has a body made of white dubbing ribbed with grizzly hackle, an ethafoam shellback and krystalflash feelers fore and aft.



The author hooks a mullet on his floating sand flea imitation...



... and lands it.

fly, works well when mullet are abundant in large shoals. I started off fishing for mullet with a six-weight because of strong wind and the distance of the cast that is often needed, but I have had good fun on a 3-wt on clearer and quieter days since.

When it comes to fighting ability and sheer speed in relation to body weight, I do not think any of the other smaller fish species found along our coastline come close to matching a mullet on the fly!