



SUSTAINABLE YELLOWFISHING

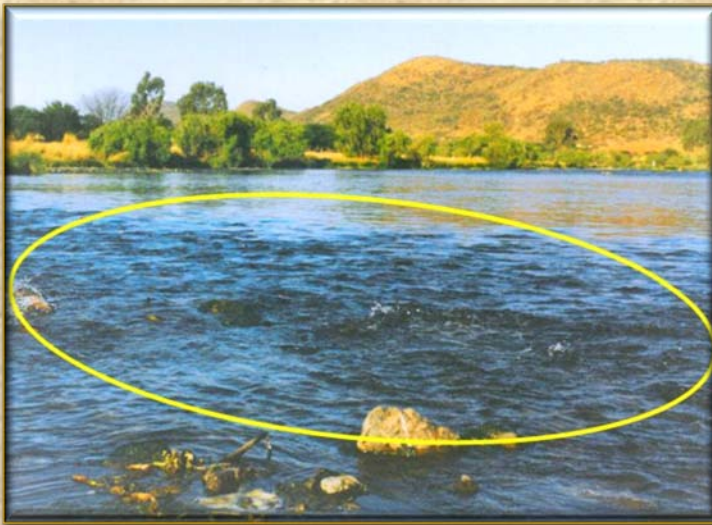
WADING THE RIVER:

REDUCE YOUR IMPACT ON SPAWNING YELLOWFISH AND THE ECOSYSTEM

In the warmer months, the shallow rapids and riffles are home to a very rich ecosystem and food web on which yellowfish and other biota depend. Some obvious organisms being impacted by careless wading include:

- Aquatic plants
- Aquatic insects and crustaceans living on the rocks and aquatic plants
- Fish species in the process of spawning such as smallmouth yellowfish (*Labeobarbus aeneus*), Orange / Vaal mudfish (*Labeo capensis*) and catfish (*Clarias gariepinus*)
- Fish species permanently resident in the rapids such as the smaller catfish species and minnows
- Fish eggs maturing between the rocks and in the gravel

This is certainly not an exhaustive list but it offers you, the angler, some insight into whose backyard you are trampling



Yellowfish spawning in the Vaal along a spawning area

The Yellowfishes of Southern Africa (*Labeobarbus spp.*) and the mudfish will probably spawn when the river rises due to rain or because of artificial flow management that stimulates spawning through increased flow.

These species spawn several times from late Spring to late Summer.

When this happens you will notice schools of fish holding in extremely shallow water (less than 30 centimetres sometimes) with their fins and sometimes bodies out of the water and will only spook when you are almost on top of them.

They will rub themselves on the rocks and against each other and splash when they spawn.

So how can you limit your impact on the ecosystem in the rapids? A few basic steps follow:

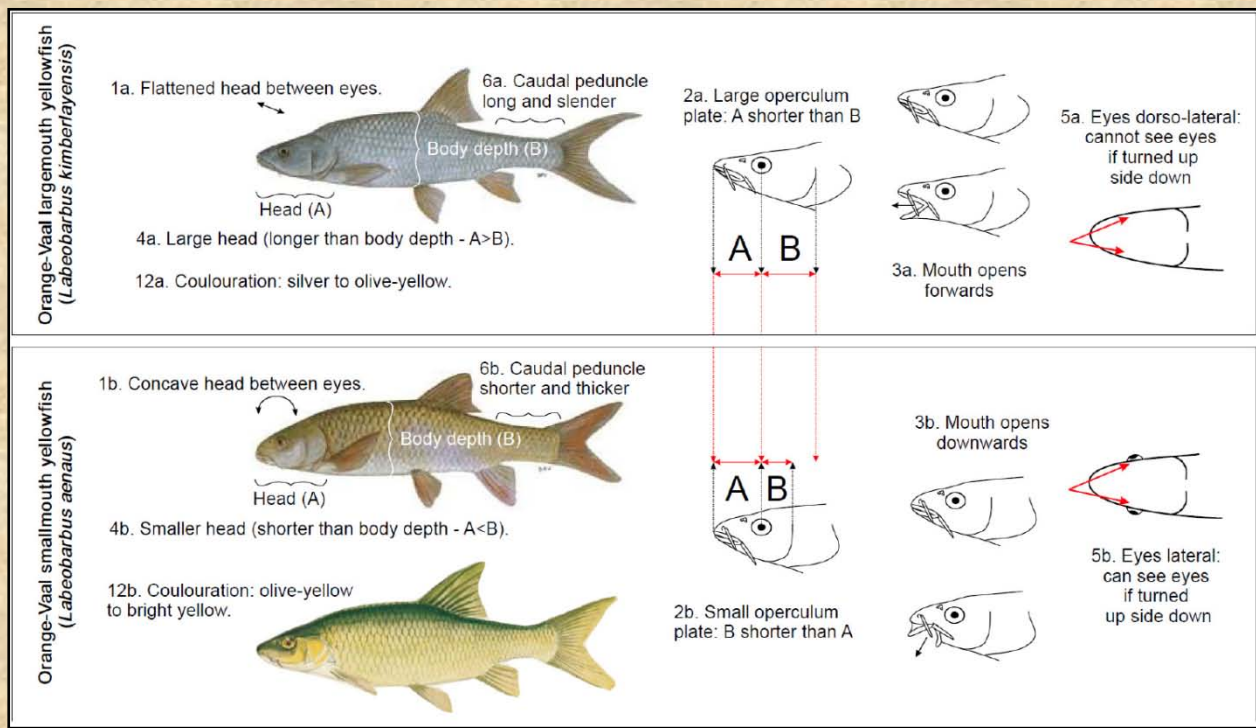
- Please do not wade through spawning habitat or areas of fish activity, stay in water deeper than your knees.
- At spawning time be extra careful with the fish, fight them quickly, do not remove them from the water and make an effort to release them immediately.
- Use barbless hooks only.
- Spawning lasts for a few days and occurs on first rains or in mid spring (October normally), mid summer (normally December) and late rains or the latter half of summer (Feb/March). Spawning times can vary by up to a few weeks depending on where you are on the river, so be on the lookout.
- Respect spawning fish by avoiding them, not damaging spawning habitat (eggs are crushed by waders or boots moving rocks against each other as you walk) and not casting at "spawners".

ETIQUETTE ON THE VAAL: All anglers are equal and give fellow anglers the space they deserve (60m). The same respect applies to the anglers on boats. We all share the same passion and interest, so let's lead South Africa!

OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIES: Differentiating between species

WE EXPECT ALL YELLOWFISH TO BE RELEASED AS RECOMMENDED BELOW (CATCH & RELEASE) AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT TO KILL THE LARGEMOUTH YELLOWFISH IS ILLEGAL AND CARRIES THE RISK OF A HEAVY FINE. TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE TWO ORANGE – VAAL SPECIES SEE DIAGRAMS BELOW:

O'Brien and De Villiers, 2011



CATCH AND RELEASE OF YELLOWFISH

Catch and release of yellows has become an accepted practice amongst the flyfishing fraternity. This has ensured that despite heavy fishing pressure sufficient adult fish of breeding age are released to maintain a healthy population. However, a few basic rules apply to Catch & Release:

1. Use only barbless hooks
2. Do not play fish to exhaustion. Try and release within 3 minutes or sooner.
3. Try and unhook the fish without removing it from the water.
4. Never hold the fish with dry hands.
5. Handle the fish firmly but gently and do not squeeze it.
6. If the fish is exhausted hold it upright in well-oxygenated water pointing upstream until it has recovered. If necessary, push it forwards but not backwards and forwards.
7. If you use a net, make sure the netting material is soft, fine, knotless and non abrasive, which will not remove the protective slime of the fish.
8. All fish stress during capture and this is particularly marked in polluted, warm water with low levels of dissolved oxygen. Limit the number of fish you catch especially when they are prone to stress.

POLLUTION OF THE VAAL: A HUGE PROBLEM

Pollution is a major problem in South Africa and the Vaal itself has been particularly badly affected. In fact pollution is by far the most important threat to what is still a world-class fly fishing resource.

If you have evidence of this please contact the following Department of Water Affairs offices and Conservation Enforcements:

- Above the Barrage: Gauteng office at **012-3921306 & 392-1300**
- Barrage to Bloemhof Dam: Bloemfontein office at **051-4059000**
- Downstream of Bloemhof Dam: Kimberley office at **053-8367600**
- **Gauteng Nature Conservation Enforcement:** Contact Person: Erasmus Nkabinde Tel: **011 355 1440**
- **Free State Enforcement Division:** Contact Person: Werner Boing **082 789 4468**; Chris Louw **078 408 7690**; Office: **051 400 9535**
- **North West Bio Diversity Enforcement:** Contact Person: E A Swart Tel: **018 299 6648**

Lastly, kindly develop a sense of responsibility towards the river. If there is the litter which is washed into the river or which irresponsible anglers and picnickers leave on the riverbank, pick it up on the way back to your car.