

February at Sterkfontein

By Ian Cox



I have spent a weekend at Sterkfontein in February for some eight years now. Originally I used to stay and fish with Dave weaver but when a bunch of friends with boats started fishing out of Quantani, well I jumped ship.

In the early years fishing was really easy with our party bagging dozens of fish. This of course had an effect on the popularity of the trip with the result that our party a few years ago numbered over 20 fly fishers.

This is not the case today. That easy fishing disappeared about 4 years ago. It has got progressively harder since then. This has reduced the popularity of the a little. Our party is now down to about 10 anglers divided amongst 3 boats. The general level of competence is very high. All of us have fly fished for the greater part of our lives.

There is much debate about the cause of the change but I think massively increased fishing pressure has made for much wavier fish and thus much harder fishing.

I have been fortunate these past two years to be on a boat with anglers way above my pay grade, chaps who fish Sterkies up to 10 times a year and who fish and have fished all over the world. As I mentioned elsewhere Mark Richardson was in my party from a day but truth be told there was not a huge difference between him and my boat mates.

The results have been interesting. These past 2 years I have caught 1 fish per trip each lasting 3 days of hard fishing. My compadres have managed 2 fish a day over the same period.



I think the difference is a fair reflection of our respective angling abilities. This does not go down well with anglers on the other two boats as they have blanked for the last two years.

This was not due to a lack of fish. We saw an abundance of them. It was also not a case of not getting flies to them. I had dozens of fish look at my fly only to turn away at the last moment. The trouble is that when they do that the whole pod of fish thereafter refuses to look at your fly again. Its official, fish do talk to one another!



Whereas fishing Sterkies 5 years ago or more was a case of arriving with a few trusty patterns (in my case nymphs) and nailing fish, now you arrive with all your fly boxes hoping you have something that will work.

It also isn't as if what worked last year will work today. Last year they would not look at anything tied on anything bigger than a size 20 hook. CDC patterns were the order of the day. So of course I arrived with a box full of very small flies.



Dave's hopper

This year they would not look at a fly on a hook smaller than a size 8 and it had better be a brown or black hopper tied a la Dave's Hopper, unless of course your name was Richardson, in which case a #16 trusty rusty would work. Beetles were distinctly de trop and small flies were was eehgh! As for nymphs pffft, don't bother.

Will I go next year?

I wonder.
