



# The last days at *Lake Tanganyika*

Photos by the author unless otherwise stated.  
Snorkelling in Lake Tanganyika

**In the final days of the JBL expedition to Tanzania, Iggy Tavares and the remaining team headed to Kigoma to discover and dive the delights of Lake Tanganyika**

Elliot Carter, winner of the *Tropical Fish* – JBL competition and I had thoroughly enjoyed the JBL Tanzania Expedition in Arusha Game Park followed by snorkelling in Zanzibar. The warm waters of Zanzibar were teeming with fish that were accessible to both snorkelers and divers. It was an idyllic location with lodges and restaurants on the beach, serving good food washed down with cold beers. Three days flew by much too quickly and it was time to say goodbye to Elliot and the dozen or so other participants that were not going on to Lake Tanganyika, but were returning home. A short 20-minute Precision Air flight in the afternoon took us from Zanzibar to Dar es Salaam for an overnight stay at Hotel Mediterraneo.

#### **Kigoma, Lake Tanganyika**

Next morning Thursday 18th February,

we woke up early to take the 3.30am Air Tanzania flight to Kigoma. On arrival in Kigoma Jeff, a South African guide, picked us up in a safari jeep to take us to Kigoma Hilltop Lodge on top of a hill overlooking the lake. At the lodge, I shared a twin room with Christian who has a fish shop in Berlin. After settling in briefly, we were driven to Lake Tanganyika shores. It was such an amazing sight to see the great expanse of water extending to the horizon. The water was crystal clear as we paddled in the small waves breaking on the pebbly shore. Several species of fish were visible swimming in the shallow water particularly around the concrete jetty that extended some 20-metres into the lake.

We returned to the lodge for lunch, to enjoy whole grilled Lake Tanganyikan fish, *Lates stappersi*, (or burger, or steak) with rice or chips and



salad. At 4pm, when the temperature had dropped a little, some of us headed for the lake in the jeep, armed with mask, snorkel and fins as well as with my fishing rod.

#### **Shallow snorkelling**

Snorkelling in the shallow water about 1.5-metres deep, we saw a large number of species including some black, white spotted juvenile *Tropheus*, as well as some slightly older *Tropheus* species that preferred staying near the rocks at the bottom where they could quickly disappear as we approached. In the shallow water column there were at least three or four species at four to six-centimetres that we could not identify. I used a fine net to catch some one-centimetre unknown species fry, sheltering from the waves behind some rocks that were being preyed

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*Lepidiolamprologus elongatus*



*Cyathopharynx furcifer*. Photo by Heiko Blessin

upon by a fish that occasionally darted out to grab one. I set up the fishing rod with a small spinner and practised casting 30 to 40 times from the jetty for an hour or so slowly reeling in after each cast but with no luck. We returned to the lodge and later enjoyed a great buffet meal of grilled chicken, steak, fish and various vegetables and rice.

#### Catch of the day

We got to the lake before 11am on Friday 19th February to make the most of the day. Snorkelling from the beach but away from the jetty, I saw many young *Simochromis babaulti* and *Tropheus* species near the large pebbly bottom, but fewer surface swimming species. After lunch, returning to the lake for 4pm, we started fishing off the beach with rod and spinner and within 10-minutes of casting a few times I caught a cylindrical brown marked cichlid, *Lepidiolamprologus elongatus* which was returned to the lake. Moving

to the jetty which allowed casting further into the deeper waters, after just a few casts a larger fish took the spinner on the eight-pound line. The catch was brought in slowly and we could see that it was the beautiful blue and yellow cichlid, *Boulengerochromis microlepis*. The landing net came in handy to bring in the very beautiful 40cm long fish. The large cichlid was kept well aerated in water and after a few photos was released back into the lake to hopefully lead a long and fruitful life. Another hour of fishing yielded no more fish and we returned to the lodge for the buffet dinner and a lot of laughs with the other participants.

#### Kigoma town tour

The next morning, Saturday 20th February, we had the choice of a one and a half hour boat ride to Gombe Streams National Park to see baboons and chimpanzees at a cost of \$200. As there were no gorillas in the park, I joined the



*Cyphotilapia frontosa*. Photo by Heiko Blessin

## Once inside the water, the first impression was just amazing since it was like diving into a huge aquarium

group to Kigoma town instead and toured the market. The highlight was the fish market where there was a good selection of large and small fish (*Lates stappersi*, *Oreochromis tanganycae*, *Lobochilotes labiatus*, *Lates mariae*, *Stolothrissa tanganycae* and *Limnothrissa miodon*) on sale for the cooking pot. There were all sorts of other goods also available, from lovely Kanga cloth from neighbouring Congo to second hand trainers.

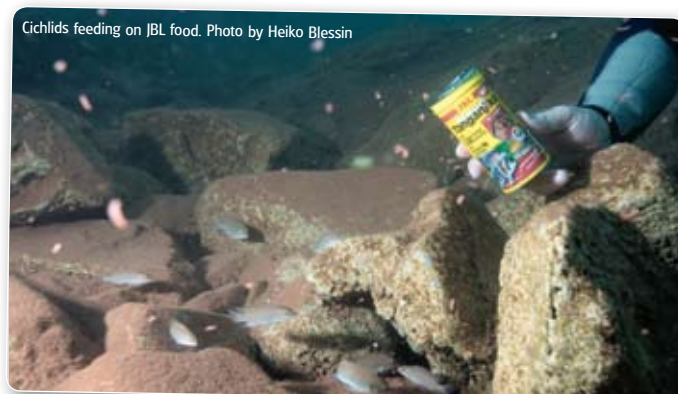
#### Baiting the trap

Returning to the lake before lunch, I set up a fish trap baited with bread and chopped up fish heads pieces from the kitchen, weighed down inside with a large rock, before doing a spot more snorkelling. Returning to the lake for 4pm, the trap was no longer where it was placed. Fortunately we were able to retrieve it a good 10-metres into the lake carried there by the force of the waves. Rather pleasingly, there

were 10-fish in the trap. Eight of these were *Simochromis babaulti*, one *Tropheus brichardi* and a *Neolamprologus mondabu* trapped in the net mesh that was difficult to release and died. After a few photos the fish were released back into the lake. The dead *N. mondabu* was cut up and used on a baited hook to fish with, rod and float casting into open water from the jetty. Soon we caught a large mouth, red eyed, mainly silver *Lates mariae* that had a double dorsal fin and small spines on its gill covers. A group of us went night fishing on a couple of evenings hoping to catch catfish or eels but with no luck but had a great time sitting around a wood fire drinking beer and having a laugh.

#### Diving in crystal waters

The divers had the choice of going from the shore or taking a boat to deeper waters for their dives. Once inside the water, the first impression ▶



Cichlids feeding on JBL food. Photo by Heiko Blessin



*Tropheus duboisi*. Photo by Heiko Blessin



*Lates Stappersi* at market



*Boulengerochromis microlepis*

## The JBL Tanzania Expedition, with three days each at three very different locations, gave us a chance to have a taste of the wildlife of Tanzania

was just amazing since it was like diving into a huge aquarium. The water was crystal with all the cichlids one knows from pictures found swimming all around. The more perceptive divers quickly noticed that the depth of water decided what species one sees. In shallow areas down to five-metres one finds *Tropheus brichardi* living in groups, while *Tropheus duboisi* can be found down to 30-metres and are mostly living in pairs. Below 13-metres one comes across the beautiful *Cyphotilapia frontosa*, some of which become really big! One definitely needs to rethink the layout of an aquarium for Tanganyikan cichlids. The rocks in the shallow water are small and cover just the bottom. Only in some areas there are rocks that are vertical that provide dividing

territories. At greater depths one can find huge rocks the size of houses, something not easily reproduced in the average home aquarium. Among the other species seen were several *Neolamprologus* and *Lamprologus* species including *N. brichardi*, *N. walteri* and *L. callipterus*, *Altolamprologus compressiceps* as well as *Xenotilapia flavipinnis* and *X. sima*. Non cichlids and invertebrates that were seen included eels such as *Mastacembelus albomaculatus*, catfish such as *Synodontis petricola*, the crab *Platythelphusa armata*, the shrimp *Limnocaridina tanganyicae* and even the killifish *Lamprichthys tanganicanus*. Diving in Lake Tanganyika was certainly a breath taking experience

On Sunday 21st February we took the morning flight back to Dar es

Salaam and after an overnight stay at Hotel Mediterraneo, I flew to Addis Ababa and then back to London arriving on the 23rd February.

### Conclusions

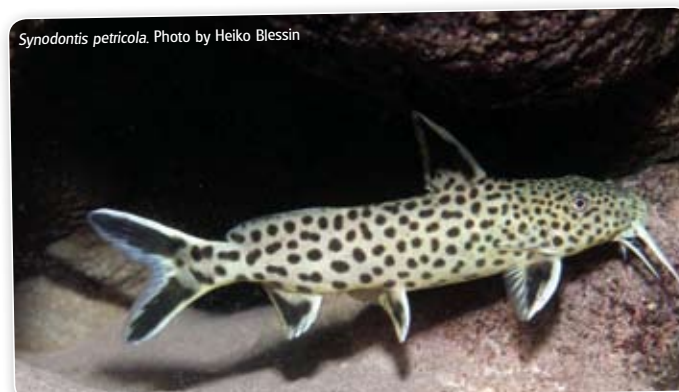
The JBL Tanzania Expedition was very well organised and led by Heiko Blessing M.S, Marketing Director of JBL, who troubleshooted the trip the year before when he and a colleague made a preliminary excursion to the regions. Sebastian Thürmer of Thürmer Reisen, Munich was given the job of arranging the eight flights that we each took, the four lodges and the three transit hotels that we stayed in as well as all the pick ups from the airports and all the transport during the expedition for all 75 participants. Not surprisingly, everything went with German precision, which added to the enjoyment of the expedition.

The JBL Tanzania Expedition, with three days each at three very different locations, gave us a chance to have a taste of the wildlife of Tanzania. The participants saw large game such as giraffes and buffaloes as well as having a chance to walk about looking for smaller creatures

such as lizards, scorpions and insects in Arusha Game Park. We were able to enjoy the sun, sand and the sea while snorkelling and diving among the wonderful coral reefs of Zanzibar. Snorkelling and diving in the fresh, clear waters of Lake Tanganyika that is home to hundreds of different species of cichlids as well as other fish species was an amazing experience. We learnt a little about data collection in the wild that could help in designing better products for the animals that we keep as pets in our homes. We also rather enjoyed the food and the fresh fruit such as mangoes, pineapple and papaw at the various lodges. The fantastic JBL Tanzania Expedition 2010 is something that will live long in our memories, particularly as everyone was so friendly. **FIN**

### ► Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Heiko Blessin and Rudi Ruelle for their contributions to this feature. Visit: [www.jbl.de/?lang=en](http://www.jbl.de/?lang=en) for more information on JBL.



*Synodontis petricola*. Photo by Heiko Blessin