

Fly-fishing for the Himalayan mahseer is not for the faint hearted. This mystical fish of legends will hypnotize you with her iridescent golden scales. She loves to play hard to get – dancing right in front of you in sometimes gin clear water. You will try to seduce her with your offerings, but she will wait for you to get it ‘just right’ before she takes a bite. She is the goddess of India’s most pristine Himalayan rivers, and having her take your fly is guaranteed to provide a rush that leads to a life-long devotion to encounter her once more.

A dream angling adventure for any dedicated angler! An adventure that is complimented by India’s most impressive wildlife. In the land of tigers, wild elephants, colorful birdlife, the majestic Himalayas and ancient cultures flourish.

It’s true that fly fishing for this fierce beauty has only recently become better known on an international stage, but the beginnings of fly fishing for mahseer date back to days of the Raj (the British rule in India).

By reviewing angling classics, such as *The Rod In India*, by Henry Sullivan Thomas (published in the late 1880s), as well as Jim Corbett’s accounts in his legendary *Man Eaters of Kumaon* and *Man Eaters of Rudhaprayag* (published in the 1940s), we get a

glimpse of India’s indigenous forest, the people, the pristine rivers and some of our first accounts of fly fishing for the mighty Himalayan mahseer.

During those times, common techniques for catching the Himalayan mahseer on fly included large black minnow flies, as well as fly spoons. At other times even live-bait like grasshoppers were hooked and then presented with the help of a fly rod.

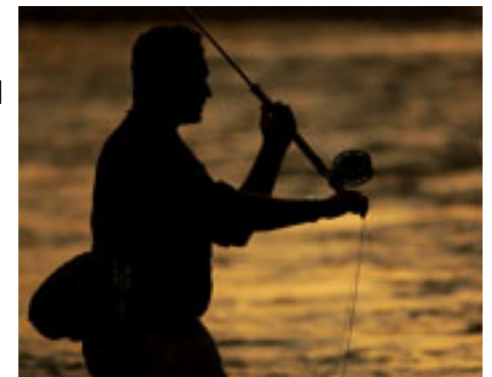
As a young man in the mid '90s, I read these accounts and began to obsess on mastering the art of catching the fish of my dreams on fly. Though grossly limited by fly tackle, I was inspired by sheer optimism and constant visions of catching a mahseer on fly.

My first few years were spent scrambling and gathering tackle, information and making my first, almost futile, attempts at fly fishing for the Himalayan mahseer.

"Passion for Himalayan mahseer"

Later, thanks to the Internet and online shopping, I made my first purchases of good fly tackle. I was lucky enough to use it often, spending sometimes close to 300 days a year on the edge of a river while serving as manager for a reputed rafting company on the infamous Ganges River. It was during those days that I spent several hundred hours dedicated to pursuing my personal passion for encountering the golden Himalayan mahseer. The obsession became so great, I decided to leave all other pursuits behind and find a way to make fly fishing for mahseer a full time career.

In 2004, The Himalayan Outback was formed, providing the perfect platform to follow a more dedicated approach to fly fishing for the Himalayan mahseer. By sharing angling adventures with the world we have been able to collaborate with pioneering fly anglers to progress the art of fly fishing for the mighty Himalayan mahseer.



With the help of passionate anglers such as John Bailey, Jeff Currier, Matt Harris, Larry Dahlburg, Kathryn Maroun, Charlie Conn, Blake McHenry, and Charles Egerton (to name a few - the list of contributions is quite long), we have been able to collect years of data and thus evolve and master new and successful techniques for catching the 'Golden Goddess' on fly.

Himalayan mahseer much like all other mahseer are omnivores; feeding on a variety of fish, insects, crustaceans and given the opportunity will feed as readily on figs as well as seeds. Attired by armour – perhaps the largest scales on any freshwater fish; propelled by a fin-to body ratio that is second to none and a glossy coating of slime, complimenting its strength and agility.

Their territory ranges across the dramatic scenery of the Himalayan foothills. From clear, intimate streams, to the mightiest of rivers across the foothills of the Himalayas of India, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and even Pakistan. Himalayan mahseer are perhaps most widely distributed among all its other cousins; propelling its way upriver; surviving and flourishing in the somewhat, inhospitable southwest monsoons that drain these regions each year.



There are two prime windows for catching the Himalayan mahseer on fly:

The Spring - March and April when the rivers are clear and low, the weather settled and scattered thunderstorms or even rain can only discolour the water and increase the chances of moving fish.

The Autumn - Alternatively, October is also a gorgeous time of year to pursue the mahseer on fly. The river is still high after the southwest monsoons, the weather sunny but comfortable, and the large fish are on the move, returning back to the main river after what is believed to be the main spawning period. This window may vary as you travel further eastwards from northern India and can peak until early December.



Mahseer flies should be tied on strong hooks

Misty prefers the Gamakatsu SC15 in size 2/0

Fly patterns that imitate bait fish or naturals are a good choice

Deceivers and Sculpins are favoured





A variety of presentations can be used to take a mahseer on a fly rod, using either single or double handed fly rods. The most common technique is presenting flies down and across, and stripping or letting the fly swing as the fly hits the water on the far side.

For any dedicated salmon / steelhead angler, this would be quite an appealing way to fish.

But quite unlike a salmon or steelhead, Himalayan mahseer are ferocious feeders, patrolling the river, in search of their quarry. Over the years we continue to evolve our fly patterns. From sculpins, to crease flies – deceivers and lately even tube flies – we are using the wisdom of anglers from all over the world to help us innovate our techniques. We fish our flies using shorter belly fly lines (Skagit and Scandanavian style) with RIO's new MOW tips, mostly T14. Fishing with single-handed rods is also equally effective. Shooting lines that feature a fast 300 grain sinking tip are also the way to go if you wish to fish single-handed rods. We mostly fish the faster water (the head and the tail of the pool) during the day, and the pools during twilight and dusk. Not to mention there are times when we have our best luck directly in the rapids. Feeding mahseer behave much like aggressive saltwater fish – taking fish on the surface, pushing them up against banks, finding crustaceans in the shallows and ambushing bait fish in the rapids.

Today, our flies finally seem to be paying off with good consistency and better sizes, growing international interest in fly fishing for the Himalayan mahseer.

Few angling adventures in today's world truly offer the diversity, uniqueness and pioneering spirit of a Himalayan angling adventure. The legendary Himalayan mahseer are the iconic game-fish of the Himalayas, captivating the hearts of generations of sportsmen for their strength and somewhat mystical characteristics. It is for all these reasons that an effort toward conservation of the mahseer and its pristine waters is essential in this day and age.

With continuous community-based conservation initiatives by anglers, the government and dedicated organizations like the



Mahseer Trust, the Himalayan mahseer will continue to thrive in the Himalayan rivers and captivate anglers for generations to come.

Misty Dhillon

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 Himalayan Outback are key supporters of the Mahseer Trust
 For more from Misty, read Tor magazine, free to Trust members, from December 2013

