

## Fly Fishing the Middle Paraná River

By Elio Londero and Peter Adams

[Falmouth Flats Fly Fishers](#)

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The [Paraná River](#) is one of the largest rivers in the world, very similar to the [Mississippi River](#) in length, flow and catching area. It starts in southeast Brazil, northwest of Rio de Janeiro, and ends at the Rio de la Plata estuary close to Buenos Aires, Argentina. The Middle Paraná starts at the city of Corrientes, Argentina and ends at the start of its delta close to the city of Diamante, Argentina. The water of the Middle Paraná carries a lot of silt primarily due to the effects of the Paraguay River that joins it at its very beginning. The climate is subtropical and sunny; 100 degrees Fahrenheit is common (more on that later).

From a fly fishing perspective, the most interesting species are the [Dorado](#), the [Chafalote](#) and the hard-to-catch-on-a-fly [Surubí](#). Many of the catfish-like species will also take a fly as certainly will a few varieties of the infamous [Piranha](#); one of them, the Palometa, is large and strong enough to convert a 6-weight rod into an adventure.

Dorados are the stars of the show due to size, voracity, bony jaw, sharp teeth, strength and acrobatics. Catches from 6-12 pounds are frequent and fish up to 20 pounds and above are occasionally caught. A hopeful 10 to 20-pound Dorado will be your target when selecting flies and tackle (more on this later).

Chafalotes are known for their sharp, long, canine-like teeth, voracity, bony jaw, strength and acrobatics, but they are slender and smaller in size and weight than Dorados. They are measured by length rather than by weight.

Surubís are the largest of the three, reaching weights in the hundreds of pounds, although the larger fish are not frequently caught on a fly. Smaller fish are caught on Dorado flies no matter fly size, since they have a large mouth similar to that of a catfish.



Elio with a 20# Dorado, Goya 2010



Pete with a nice Chafalote, Goya 2019

Piranhas are smaller but well-known for their stamina and sharp teeth. Flies last for one Piranha bite (not necessarily catch) only. They are abundant in certain areas, coexist with the larger predators and keep fishers busy regardless the size of their flies. They are good eating without any concern about significant effects on their abundance.

### Recommended Tackle

**Fly Rods:** 8-10wt is best. The #8 is for most Dorado and Chafalote fishing, while the #10 is an expression of hope and optimism in case large Dorado or Surubí are present. The 10wt is recommended if you are fishing the Upper Paraná upstream of the city of Corrientes. A saltwater rod with a fighting butt and “lifting power” would be even better if you have it. Four-piece rods are better for travelling (2-piece would have to be checked and it becomes an extra piece of luggage) and on the boat. We normally carry at least one spare fly rod and reel, as well as some extra lines.

**Fly Reels:** Should hold 100-150 yards of 30# backing and have a decent drag. Large Dorado do not run long distances, but if you get a large fish that decides to do it (the one in the preceding page did) be ready to palm the reel. A saltwater reel normally complies with the requirements.

**Fly Lines:** Warmwater, fast-sinking lines are best - either shooting tapers, integrated lines (sinking heads with intermediate running lines) or just plain sinking lines. Fast sinking is the key. An approximate guide for line weight is 270-300 grain for an 8-weight, 325-350 gr for a 9-weight and 370-400gr for a 10-wt rod. These lines are about 30-40% heavier than standard, but help to launch oversize flies. A smooth, powerful casting stroke is best. Practicing before buying is highly recommended.



Chafalote have sharp conical teeth



Palometas have sharp scissors teeth



Elio with a small Tiger Surubí, Goya 2017

Try your lines with your rod, reel and an Andino fly (see below) to make sure that you can cast them comfortably under the subtropical climate. You may want to cut off the hook at the start of the bend before starting your practice.

Piranhas occasionally chop fly lines, so bring a spare or two. You may also carry an intermediate or floating line on a spare spool just in case, but they are rarely used except in some shallow areas.

**Leaders:** Elio uses 5-foot, 20-pound test leaders: 3 feet of 30# mono, 1 foot of 20# mono (class tippet) and 1 foot of 30# steel leader crimped to a heavy-duty snap. Pete uses a 6-foot RIO Big Nasty tapered leader in 16- or 20-pound test, then adds 9 to 12 inches of RIO 20- or 30-pound braided steel tippet. The leader and tippet can be joined with a small swivel which significantly reduces line twist common with large, wind-resistant flies. Each leader may be tipped with a "quick snap" at the end of the steel tippet for quick fly changes. These snaps allow the fly to move more freely on the end of a stiff steel tippet. Otherwise, an open loop knot is recommended. In designing your leader, keep in mind what you would give up when (not if) you hook up to a sunken tree or an ever-present Camalote vine (affectionately known as "Kevlar Weed"). Delicate presentation is generally not needed since Dorado are not leader shy.

**Flies:** The following three links from the creator of the "Andino" head are tying instructions for the most widely (but not the only) fly used for Dorado in murky waters. The first one is general, the second one on how to do it with bucktail (top half of the tail), and the third one on how to do it with craft fur. In the second two videos the author emphasizes the importance of the space left between the back and belly on one hand and the eyes on the other in order to create a "ditch" or "channel" where you will spin the deer hair or tie it in two bunches (top and bottom).

1. <http://carloingrassia.blogspot.com/2008/06/deceiver-andino.html>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuAv1CprXXM>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6hXIBTN3c8>

While texts are in Spanish, the pictures are clear. In short, it is like a Deceiver, tied close to the front, with eyes under the shank (so it rides point down), and a muddler-like Andino head. Most popular head/body colors are: black/black, black/yellow, black/orange, black/white, dark purple or blue/yellow, orange or white, or all parrot green. Note that the "head" is not trimmed or it is trimmed to a blunt, water-pushing shape. Some people prefer to trim the head to a truncated cone "muddler-like" shape; those flies would be a bit easier to cast but will push less water and thus create less water disturbance (what is believed to attract the fish in low visibility muddy water). Don't overdo with the head size because ... you have to cast it! You may see pictures at the end of this document.

Most popular fly size is 3/0, tied on a sharp, strong hook. Guides recommend mini-barb hooks to increase penetration with minimal fish injuries. Elio primarily uses Mustad 91706 (now Mustad 91706NP-NI) or 32606 (now 32606NP-NI) spinnerbait hooks in sizes 3/0 to 5/0. Pete uses Mustad 3366, straight-shank bass worm hooks (with the shank barbs crimped down), or weedless hooks in the same sizes. Saltwater hooks, like the Mustad 34007 (now S71SZ-34007) or 34011 (now S74SZ-34011) also work well. Dorados have a bony mouth and you have to penetrate the bone with your hook, so a strong, sharp hook is very important.

Flies should generally be in the 5-6" range. Larger flies are good, but remember that you have to cast them! Having said that, many fishermen prefer 6" flies and larger. Dorado have large mouths, and a 6" fly is still a "snack". Larger fish won't move very far for a smaller fly.

Most fishing will be in or near murky water, but under some conditions - shallow or clear water, or fish busting baitfish on the surface - a smaller fly of about 4" can work well on a size 1/0 hook. These flies should be designed for more accurate and delicate presentation to spotted fish or fishy-looking lies, and generally don't need the Andino head or dumbbell eyes. A weedless hook is useful where wood structure or heavy weeds are present. The advantage of a smaller, lighter, and more streamlined fly is ease of casting and the ability to tease fish with a slower retrieve. They're also less likely to spook fish in shallow or clear water. See the pictures at the end of this document.

Other proven colors are gray/white (clear water), fire tiger or yellow perch flies in bucktail deceiver, deceiver and Andino versions. For the occasional cast into shallow water, you may want an old style Clouser (100% tied under), a simpler unweighted inverted hook pattern (with or without Andino head) in black or grey over white. A bendback style fly is also good.

You need to tie your flies with a strong thread like FlyMaster+, flat waxed nylon, Kevlar or GSP and use lead, nickel or brass eyes (lead is more difficult to cast). Kevlar and GSP threads are good for deer hair - they hold up better than other threads. For the tail you may use coque, schlappen or hackle (or bucktail or synthetic hair) for tails; coque has better lateral profile but less tail movement and schlappen is a good combination of profile and movement.

You will need no less than 10 flies a day; if there are Palometa the count will go up. One fly may last one palometa bite and no more than two Dorado bites. If you have an excess at the end, Andino deceivers are good largemouth bass, pike/pickrel and striper flies.

## **Other**

**Casting:** Casting 6-7 hours a day under the subtropical sun, sometimes from a moving boat, sometimes anchored, sometimes in windy conditions, is common and tiring. In most situations, one of the two fishermen in the boat may be casting his line over the boat, so it is important to be comfortable with casting with your rod on a plane perpendicular to the water (rather than sideways) so the line will fly high; as we get tired the "earring" risk increases. If you are not used to this casting style, practice beforehand in the water with a sinking line and fly, and shoot for casting 50-60 feet or more.

**Setting the Hook:** Dorados have bony mouths and you need to drive the hook in to prevent the fish from spitting it out when jumping and shaking its head. Always keep your rod pointing at the water and aligned with the fly line, keep the line with tension (no slack) and **SET THE HOOK BY STRIPPING THE LINE FAST UNTIL YOU FEEL YOU HAVE FULL CONTACT WITH THE FISH** - only then strip **HARD** and raise your rod. Any slack in your line, including a belly made by the current, requires additional strips in order to get enough tension to set the hook; line bellies are fish losers and they are hard to avoid when fishing in the current.

**Experience suggests the convenience of practicing beforehand** (can be done fishing for

bluegills with a small popper or gurgler; if you do it right the bluegill will come out in the air), thus saving half a day or more of fishing time. Wearing a stripping sleeve or stripping finger prevents your finger from burning and, when wet, helps clean the line as you strip (see picture at the end). Useful references for strip setting are:

- Jose Wejebe and Rob Fordyce: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmUIbo\\_Ukx0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmUIbo_Ukx0)
- Gink and Gasoline: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0AvUKkPktQ>

**Andino-style Flies:** You may use coque or schlappen for tails; coque provides more lateral profile but less tail movement than schlappen (preferred) or saddle hackle. Elio's flies below were tied with coque, hackle and schlappen, synthetic hair and bucktail. Pete uses these patterns but also some lighter flies tied with synthetics or a mix of hackle and synthetics, and without the heavy dumbbell eyes and Andino head. Experience has shown that having some weedless flies handy can help when the fish are hiding in woody structure or under floating weeds. The before last photo illustrates what happens to flies when Dorado or Palometa chew on them.

	
<p><b>Feather-Tailed Andino Deceivers with Synthetic Fibers and Bucktail Heads</b></p>	<p><b>Andino Deceiver on a Weedless Hook</b></p>
	
<p><b>Andino Deceivers on Spinnerbait Hooks</b></p>	<p><b>6-inch Weedless Streamers</b></p>



**Weedless Streamer Before and After the Fight**



**Stripping Finger After a Dorado Run**

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