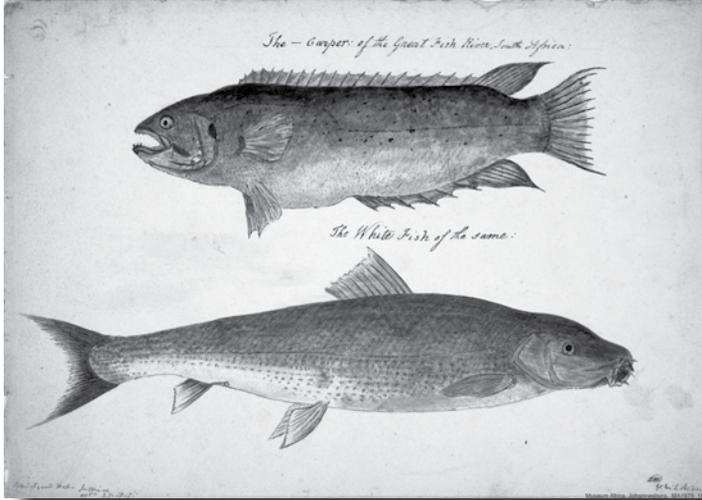


Chapter ONE

EARLY DAYS



Early illustrations of a 'carper' (kurper) and a 'white fish' of the Great Fish River by British traveller Robert H. Dingley in 1815

MAN HAS RECORDED HIS love of fish and fishing since the dawn of time. Fish and methods of catching them have been found in cave paintings of prehistoric times. The ancient Egyptians recorded species of fish that were important to them – in particular the tilapia, Nile perch and catfish that were found in abundance in the Nile. There are many hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians netting fish and even one of an angler wielding a rod and line in a tomb painting c.2000 BC (in the British Museum collection) that was found by Egyptologist Percy Newberry in 1893. One of the prize exhibits in the museum is a glass fish bottle from the 18th Dynasty (1390–1336 BC) that was found at a dig at el-Amarna. The fish represented was a Nile tilapia which was considered something of a sacred fish by the ancient Egyptians because as a mouth-breeder the fish was a living symbol of rebirth and regeneration. It was often represented in jewellery and worn as an amulet or good luck charm.

The British Museum also has several example of Roman mosaics of North African fishermen out at sea catching fish that appear to be common species

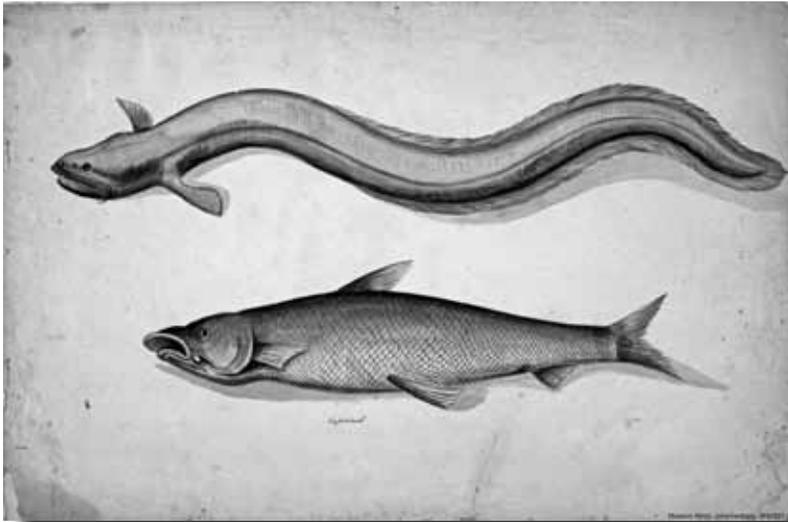
including a type of kabeljou, various mullet and rock cod.

Early *strandloper* rock fishing traps from prehistoric days are still in evidence along the south-western Cape coast of South Africa (see *Prehistoric Fishing Methods in South Africa*, A.J.H. Goodwin – Antiquity vo. xx pp.134-41, Sept 1946) and there must be many traces of such fishing traps still to be found up and down the African coastline.

There are bushman paintings of fish scattered throughout southern Africa and several early records of the abundance of fish at the Cape – and the dangers. Professor J.L.B. Smith records in his book *High Tide* (1968) that the first recorded fishing venture was in 1498 when Vasco da Gama's crew trek-netted fish at Mossel Bay. Not a very successful outing as apparently they netted some blaasops (puffer fish) and most of the crew became ill, fortunately none died. Over the next three hundred years there were increasingly frequent visits to southern African waters by Portuguese, Dutch, French and English ships. In the mid-1500s the Portuguese discovered the wealth of Pescada (stockfish) on the Agulhas Bank. In 1648 the Dutch vessel *Haarlem* was wrecked in Table Bay, the survivors living off the plentiful fish supplies they found there. After the Dutch settled the Cape in 1652 and built a supply depot for their Java trade, it wasn't long before further exploration of fish and fish stocks took place. These same intrepid sailors must have dropped anchor at many uncharted moorings around both the west and east African coasts and would have fished wherever they went. There must be many similar descriptions in the libraries and museums of Portugal, France, and Holland in particular.

Wardlaw Thompson writes in *Sea Fisheries of the Cape Colony* (1913) that in 1655 the first official 'international' recognition of the value of the Cape fishery came in a command from the Council of Seventeen in Holland to the Governors of the Cape for: '...seine nets to be drawn regularly for catching haarders which were to be salted and used to provision the ships of the (Dutch East India) Company so as to avoid the necessity of their calling at St. Helena for supplies.' He also records that in 1657 the freemen (then located on the lands at Rondebosch and the Liesbeck River) were given permission with hooks anywhere in the river so long as their agricultural holding did not suffer. This proved a futile restriction as the freemen immediately began a free-for-all scramble to sell their catches directly to visiting ships. So in 1658 the freemen were restricted by law to sell only direct to the Company on pain of forfeiture of their lands. However four freemen, T.C. Muller, J. Jansen, J. Elberts and G. Harmanssen, were given permission to settle at Saldanha Bay on the west coast to take up fishing as a living. The company sold them the boat *Penguin* and they were allowed to sell directly to the inhabitants of Cape Town and the visiting ships. This was quite possibly the first commercial fishing venture in Africa

The first paintings of indigenous fish from the Cape were by Hendrik Claudius on exploratory trips with Governor Simon van der Stel in 1685 and 1687. One of the first fish he recorded and painted was the freshwater yellow fish. Others were the red roman, fransmadame, electric ray, joseph, sunfish, gurnard, yellowtail, oarfish, bulleye and horsefish. (*Early Paintings of Cape Fishes by Hendrik Claudius in the Africana Museum*, Margaret Smith, 1969). Early accounts of fish species they came across were made by various travellers to the Cape, including the German Nieuhof in 1682, the Frenchman Tachard in 1688, German Peter Kolb in 1705, (he mentions a haul of 1 200 white steenbras in one trek of the net from False Bay). Plus in the early 1800s, several English and French travellers or collectors including Barrow, Captain Cook, Quoy, Gaimard, Delalande and Verreaux – the last four sent specimens back to Paris. Museum Africa in Johannesburg (previously the Africana Museum) has a few early fish illustrations painted by William Burchell and Robert Dingley in the early 1800s in their collection. But it wasn't until 1849 that Dr Andrew Smith published the fish section of his great opus on South Africa zoology that anything substantial was published on fish in Africa – and that's a not very comprehensive illustrated description of forty-one fish species. Well over fifteen hundred have been recorded today.



An eel and a yellowfish by Hendrik Claudius (painted in 1685 or 1687) as described by Margaret Smith in Early Paintings of Cape Fish by Hendrik Claudius in the Africana Museum (now Museum Africa)

Other early books and records of fish included: *Naturwissenschaftliche (Mozambique)* by W.C.H. Peters and *Mémoire sur les Poissons de la Côte de Guinée* by M.P. Bleeker of Harlem. There are countless scientific reports and papers of fish biology from around Africa. And several anthropological studies of indigenous African fishers in the Congo basin and the Great Lakes of east and central Africa.

There must be many early writings by Greek, Roman, Phoenecian and Arab sailors and fishermen hidden away in collections (or lost) which could open up a whole field of collecting on its own. This book is, however, essentially about angling books and books on ichthyology that have provided important reference for anglers, so that's what I primarily concentrate on.

1

Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa.

**I: Mammals; II: Birds; III: Reptiles, Fish & Invertebrates
(5 volumes)**

Andrew Smith – 1838–1849

Plate 1

Description:

Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa; consisting of chiefly of figures and descriptions of the the objects of natural history collected during an expedition to the the interior of South Africa 1834, 1835, and 1836; fitted out by The Cape of Good Hope Association for Exploring Central Africa. London: Stewart & Murray for Smith, Elder & Co., 1838–1849.

Without doubt one of the most important books ever published on South African natural history and a milestone in collectable Africana. A 'fine set in the original parts' of *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa* fetched close to R130 000 in a 2004 Christie's auction. Today it would go for nearly double that. Even the Winchester Press facsimile reprint of 1977 (limited to 350 copies) now costs around R10 000 today (2015). I turned my nose up at a copy of this reprint for R1 000 some years back and regret it to this day.

Andrew Smith was a British medical doctor who arrived in the Cape in 1820 and took up the post as district surgeon of the Albany district. He led several scientific journeys in the area and recorded his many visits to the Xhosa tribal leaders, making copious notes on tribal customs and lifestyles. In 1824 he was appointed the first curator of the South African Museum of Natural History in Cape Town. He left South Africa in 1836 for a career in the military, rising to Director General of Army Medical Services in 1853.

The section of most interest to anglers is *Pisces*, which describes both salt and freshwater fish of the Western Cape and Kaffraria and has 31 plates of

fish, 26 of which are hand-coloured. The illustrations of the fish (and most of the animals and reptiles in the book) were done by George Henry Ford (1809–1876), a young South African who, working for many years at the British Museum, was to become one of the most important Victorian natural history illustrators.

2 Synopsis of the Edible Fish at the Cape of Good Hope L. Pappe – 1853

Plate 1

Title page:

*Synopsis / of the / Edible Fishes / at the / Cape of Good Hope / by L. Pappe M.D.
/ Ut desint vires, tamen laudanda voluntas. / Ovid. Epist. Ex Ponto III. 4.
79. / Cape Town: / Van De Sandt, De Villiers & Tier / 1853 (Reprint 1866 – W.
Britten)*

Pappe was a medical doctor and researcher who wrote three books about the flora of the Cape including algae (*Florae Capensis Medicae Prodromus*, *Synopsis Filicum Africae Australis*, and *Syva Capensis*) as well as this little volume on 45 edible fishes. He writes in the introduction that: ‘In publishing this ichthyological essay, I am fully aware, that I venture on a path, hardly trodden before in this Colony.’ He does, however, make a pretty good job of it. He gives a detailed description of each fish and, as it is a book on edible fish, its value on the table, from sole (*delicate and delicious*) to mackerel (*little liked and greasy*). Sadly he doesn’t (except for saying whether the species described could be caught on line) describe any fishing methods, tactics or bait to use. Sadly too, he didn’t feel it necessary to illustrate the book.

There is an introductory chapter where Pappe praises Andrew Smith’s work and sheds interesting light on the eating habits at the times. Fish and shellfish (except for perhaps sole and perlemoen) were seen as food for the poor although there was a thriving industry in pickling and drying fish for the local inland market, and even an export business for dried fish bound primarily for Mauritius (17 800 cwt in 1850). Pappe also spends some time on warning of the dangers of eating puffer fish (*blaasopvisch*) and relates several stories of sailors on visiting ships becoming very ill and even dying from eating the poisonous flesh.

Synopsis of the Edible Fish at the Cape of Good Hope (1853) is 34 pages long and is extremely rare. Only a little less rare is the 1866 ‘second edition’ which is essentially a reprint of the first but, thanks to the use of much smaller type, has only 23 pages.

3

The Fishes of Zanzibar

R.L. Playfair, A.C.L.G. Günther – 1866

Plate 2

Title page:

(From facsimile reprint in 1971)

Hand Colored Reprint Series / Number 1 / The / Fishes of Zanzibar / Acanthopterygii / By / Lieut. Colonel R. Lambert Playfair / Pharyngognathi Etc. / By / Alfred C.L.G. Günther, M.A., PH.D., M.D. / Together With / A New Introduction / Regional Monographs on Extra-European Fishes, 1820–1870 / A Chapter in the History of Ichthyology and Fish Illustration / By George Sprague Myers / Henry Bryant Bigelow Visiting Professor of Ichthyology / Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University; / Professor Emeritus of Biology, Stanford University / A New Forward / By Albert E. Gunther / Newton K. Gregg / Publisher / Kentfield California USA (Originally published by John van Voorst, London)

This book is a fine example of what could be produced by the amateur zoologist of Victorian times – especially when in partnership with professionals. Much of the world's knowledge was accumulated by such amateurs who not only did research themselves by funded expeditions, but also built large collections for their own amusement and endowed many centres of learning and libraries.

Lt Col R. Lambert Playfair was such an amateur zoologist. He was an army officer in India before embarking on a career in the British diplomatic service. One of his postings (in the early 1860s) was to Zanzibar where he was 'political agent and consul' for the British government. There he collected upwards of 600 different species of fish, most of which he 'pickled' and dispatched to the British Museum in London. Where, at the time, the greatest ichthyologist of the day, Albert C.L.G. Günther was half-way through creating the monumental *Catalogue of the Fishes in the British Museum* (in 8 volumes). In this massive project he was ably assisted by one of the greatest scientific illustrators and lithographer ever, G.H. Ford. (The same Ford, who some years before had so ably illustrated much of Andrew Smith's *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa*.)

The 1866 first edition of *The Fishes of Zanzibar* is extremely rare and the only copy I've come across (some years back) had an asking price of R30 000. What is not rare and can be had for around a twentieth of the price is the 1971 facsimile reprint by Newton K. Gregg, of Kentfield California. This is a splendid facsimile, where the publisher went the extra mile in ensuring quality

repro and printing – even going to the extent of having the six colour plates (of the 1866 version) hand-coloured as they were originally.

The 1971 edition has a new, interesting foreword by George Sprague Myers, the then Professor Emeritus of Biology at Stanford University (and Visiting Professor of Ichthyology at Harvard) where he traces the development of ichthyology as a science from 1820 to 1870 and the development of ichthyological illustration. Myers ends his foreword by highlighting the importance of *The Fishes of Zanzibar* and writes that: ‘it remained the principal source (on marine fishes of the entire East African coast)) until the modern researches of Professor J.L.B. Smith.

The original edition of *The Fishes of Zanzibar* has 153 pages (describing 494 fish) with an addition 14 pages of preliminaries. There are 21 plates (6 of which are hand-coloured) showing 68 individual fish. The 1971 edition has an additional 32 pages, including a new introduction, foreword and publisher’s acknowledgements.

Note on illustrator G.H. Ford:

(Edited from A.E. Gunther’s paper, *The original drawings of George Henry Ford* (*Archives of Natural History* Oct 1972 – Edinburgh University Press).

Ford (1809 – 1876) was the son of a Cape Colony farmer, James Edward Ford, who was also a gifted miniaturist. In 1821, Dr Andrew Smith visited Ford’s farm (he had encouraged many farmers to look out for specimens) and found that young George had broken his hip after having been tossed by a cow. He took the lad back to Cape Town for treatment and during his (partial) recovery encouraged him (the young Ford having clearly inherited his father’s talent) to draw some of the specimens Smith had collected. A few years later (1825) Smith got Ford a job at the Museum in Cape Town and in 1834 appointed him artist on his Expedition for Exploring Central Africa, which returned in 1836.

Ford followed Smith back to England a year later to continue working on illustrating the specimens collected on the expedition and was quickly given a position at the British Museum, his talent being immediately recognised.

Despite suffering his entire life from his youthful injury (he became more and more crippled as he grew older), Ford went on to illustrate many of the great works put out by the British Museum including, of interest to anglers, Playfair and Gunther’s, *The Fishes of Zanzibar*, and G.A. Boulenger’s vast *Catalogue of the Fresh-water Fishes of Africa in the British Museum* (4 volumes).

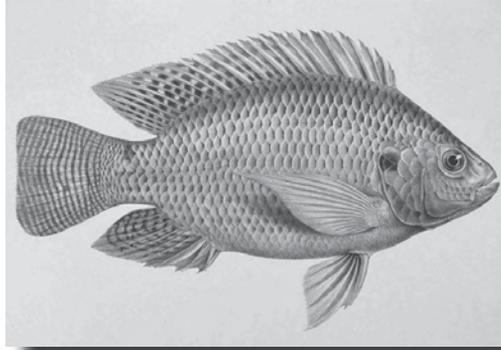
G.H. Ford was, however, perhaps as famous for his incredibly detailed, accurate and intricate human anatomical drawings. First editions of his books containing drawings of medical dissections can today fetch many thousands of pounds sterling.

4 **Zoology of Egypt: The Fishes of the Nile (2 volumes)**
G.A. Boulenger – 1907

Plate 3

Title page:

Zoology of Egypt / The Fishes of the Nile / By / G.A. Boulenger, F.R.S. / Published for the Egyptian Government / By / Hugh Rees, Limited, / 119 Pall Mall, London, S.W. / 1907.



This extremely scarce work is published in two volumes and is parts 3 and 4 of John Anderson's *Zoology of Egypt* – parts 1 and 2 being 'Reptilia' and 'Mammalia'. There was a limited printing of *Zoology of Egypt* (thought to be 100 copies only) so today, copies, if they ever come up, fetch a king's ransom.

George Albert Boulenger was a Belgian who became a naturalised British subject when he joined Dr Albert Gunther as an assistant at the Natural History Museum, then part part of the British museum, in 1880. Extremely methodical, Boulenger was given the job of cataloguing much of the Natural History Museum's collection of fish and reptiles and over the years wrote nearly 900 papers and monographs and was responsible for the next book described here: *Catalogue of the Fresh-water Fishes of Africa in the British Museum* (4 volumes).

This work, *The Fishes of the Nile*, is a quality hard cover production (in green cloth with gilt lettering) in two volumes. Its format is Folio (318mm x 260mm) and it has 578 pages with maps and photographs in the text. There are 97 fine lithographs, many of which are double-page, with two in colour. In all 192 species are described. Above is *Tilapia Nilotica* from the book.

5 **Catalogue of the Fresh-water Fishes of Africa in the British Museum (4 volumes)**
G.A. Boulenger – 1909-1916

Plate 3

Title page:

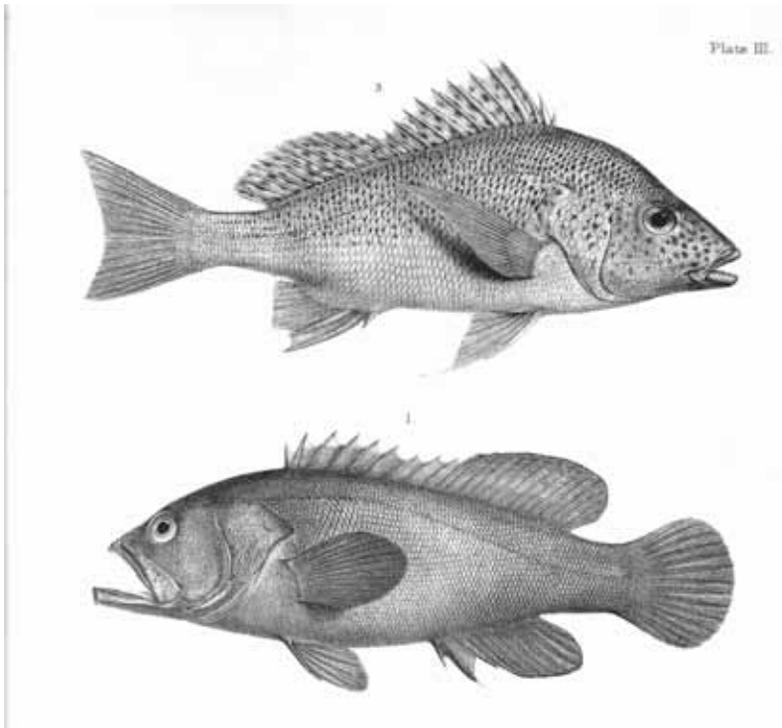
Catalogue / of the / Fresh-water Fishes of Africa / in the / British Museum / (Natural History) / Volume 1. / By / George Albert Boulenger F.R.S. / London: / Printed by Order of the Trustees, / Sold by / Longman & Co., 30 Paternoster

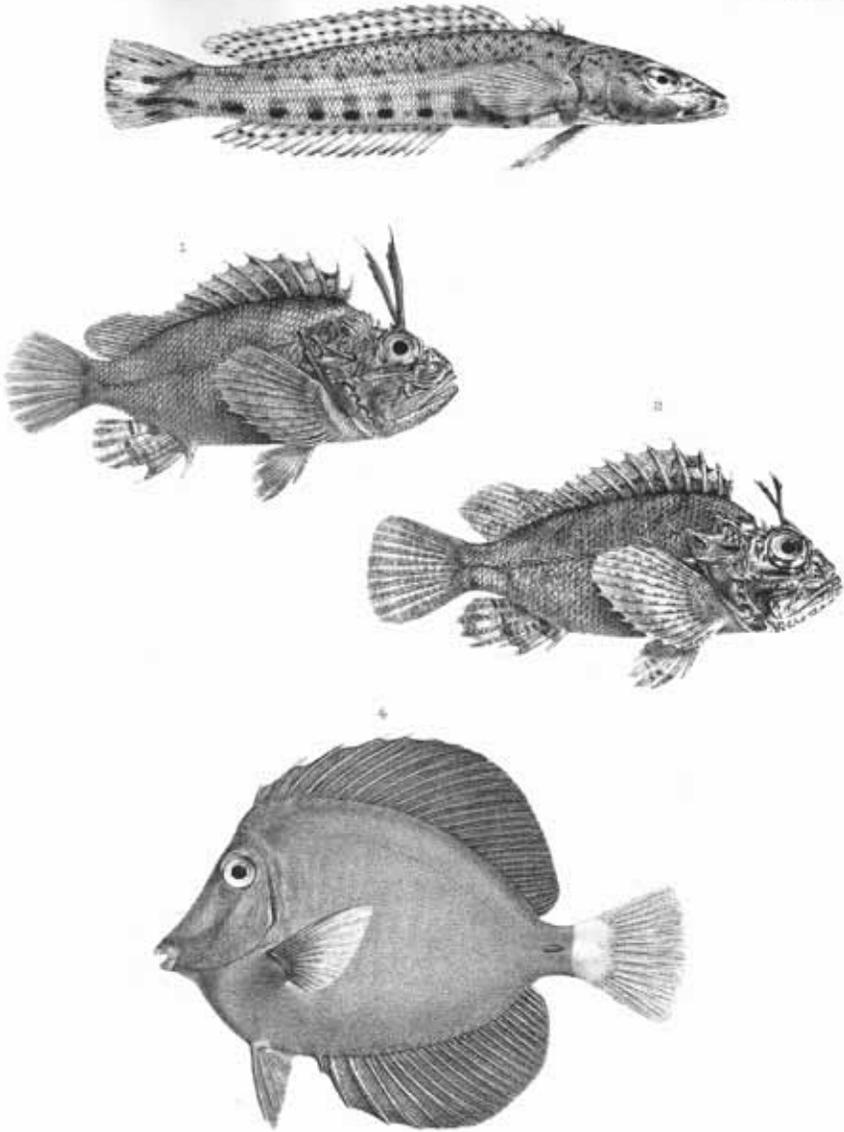
Row E.C.; / B. Quaritch, 11 Grafton Street, New Bond Street, W.; / Delau & Co., 37 Soho Square, W.; / and at the / British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, S.W. / (All Rights Reserved)

This monumental work in 4 volumes took seven years to complete. Its format is royal octavo (273mm x 185mm) and it has 1 820 pages in total. This is the first major work on the freshwater fishes of Africa. In his introduction Boulenger writes:

‘The past decade has been productive of an enormous increase in our knowledge of the fresh-water fishes of Africa. The explorations of the Congo and the Nile, undertaken at considerable expense. and of the great lakes of Central Africa, initiated in this country [the UK] have resulted in the discovery and description of an unexpectedly large number of generic and specific forms, types of most of which are deposited in the Natural History.’

Catalogue of the Fresh-water Fishes of Africa in the British Museum, while not as rare as Boulenger’s previous book is still pretty pricey – but is perhaps (with *The Fishes of the Nile*) a cornerstone for any serious collection of African ichthyology. I don’t have a copy of either in my library but then, thankfully, I’m a fisherman and not an ichthyologist.





1. SCORPÆNA LONGICORNIS. 2. SCORPÆNA TANZIBARENSIS
3. PERCIS XANTHOECNA. 4. ACANTHURUS XANTHURUS.

*Above and on preceding page: illustrations by
G.H. Ford from The Fishes of Zanzibar by
Playfair and Gunther*