

FOCUS ON .. OLIVIER PORTRAT



Captured. Olivier with a pike in Laponia, northernmost Sweden (above) and a more relaxed shot taken in a remote base-camp, Mongolia (right)

Olivier Portrat's biography reads like something from the pages of a David Livingstone memoir. He has led

expeditions to 45 countries including a year spent on the Nile, four years on the Ebro in Spain, testing the waters in Patagonia, Morocco, Kazakhstan, Iran and let's not forget to mention the Amazon. All this, to satisfy his passion for recreational fishing and his commitment to animal welfare, nature conservation and the preservation of the way of life of indigenous peoples, such as the nomads in Mongolia.

For over 30 years, he has documented these worldly experiences through photography, the written word and TV production, both as protagonist and director.

This love of angling and photography go hand in hand and has helped to fund his obsession – nobody has published as many photos on recreational fishing as Olivier has – over 600 shots in some of the most well-known angling and non-angling publications including National Geographic, FHM, Men's Health and, surprisingly, Penthouse.

Born in Saarbrücken, Germany, Olivier studied law at the University of Saarland and went on to become an IT consultant, translator (he speaks more than three languages) and journalist.

It was during 1989 Portrat began putting his fishing, journalistic and photography skills to the test – not only in Europe, but worldwide and by 1992 made the decision to

leave the IT world behind him and make his living through documenting his recreational angling experiences through Angling magazines, books and film productions ... needless to say, this has been hugely successful.

He now spends six to eight months a year following his passion and sharing his discovery of new venues, new fishing techniques and new standards in both freshwater and sea predator angling.

Olivier is a true believer in sport fishing working in harmony with nature – and vehemently fights for water and species protection. He also supports numerous initiatives that aim to preserve the habitat of the people who live and work on the banks of the waters. On his last expedition to Mongolia, he documented the appalling exploitation of nature and portrayed the changing lifestyle of the nomads there, which is largely endangered by the upcoming exploitation of the huge natural resources that have been discovered in the past years.

It's no surprise therefore, that in 2019 Olivier was elected CEO of EFTTA (European Fishing Tackle & Trade Association) and in this capacity he represents the interests of the European angling industry at the European Commission and the European Parliament in Brussels.

In this interview with The World of Angling Spirit, Olivier explains his role as EFTTA CEO and his hopes on securing the future of angling in the best possible way. One can only be certain sport fishing couldn't be in safer hands.



CALL OF THE WILD

CEO OF EFTTA IS A MAN ON A MISSION



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CALL OF THE WILD OLIVIER PORTRAT

Q Olivier, you have been travelling all over the world in quest of great sport-angling in the past 30 years. You made your living by publishing articles, photos, books, calendars on the subject of recreational angling. Nobody has published more photos worldwide on this topic than you, you are the father of over 600 cover-shots from all over the world. How does it come that you now invest your time and energy for EFTTA (European Fishing Tackle & Trade Association) in Brussels?"

A I always tried to promote angling in the best possible way. On my photos, you do not see any blood or dead fish. I always wanted recreational angling to be considered as an activity that is modern and up to date. If we do not manage to do that, recreational angling will disappear rather soon.

In Brussels, I now have the opportunity to promote that at a decisive European level. Together, with our colleagues from EAA (European Anglers Alliance), we do the lobbying work for us anglers. Lobbyists are usually people that – in exchange for money – promote the interests of thirds, not their own interests. If you are mean, you can qualify this as prostitution.

With me, things are somewhat different, as the people I talk to in Brussels quickly notice that I really believe in what I'm saying. That gives us precious credibility. This is why the industry of recreational angling has chosen me to represent their interests in Brussels."

Q Would you please explain to our readers what EFTTA actually represents and which (also political) functions it holds? The meaning and effect of the pan-European functionality of an association probably seems very far off for the individual angler.

A EFTTA represents the interests of the European angling industry. The main focus of this work is to cooperate with the EU (Commission & European Parliament) in order to secure the long-term future of angling in the best possible way. This is important because the future of the angling industry has never been so threatened as it is today. These dangers are of political, economic and ecological nature.

If the EU were to make appointments with private individuals, it would be suffocated in a confusing flood of appointments. Therefore, the EU is calling for interest groups to organize themselves into an association.

This will provide a clearer overview of the



Life through a lens.. Olivier has photographed the weird and the wonderful for over 30 years in over 45 countries

situation. The positive aspect is that we anglers can also be heard in this way. But the same applies to our opponents. By listening to both sides, European decision-makers can get their own picture of the situation and thus make well-founded decisions on this basis.

Without our own association, we anglers would not be heard in Brussels. An association such as EFTTA is therefore essential for a sensible continuity of angling within the EU.

In addition, EFTTA's role is also to promote recreational angling in general. Therefore the EFTTA-Board is proud to have Ross Honey as a member: the angling events that Ross organizes here in Europe are amazing and up-to-date, they give angling a new & modern image.

Moreover, Ross always makes efforts to integrate the youth in his events. I wish we could have more "events" like this in Europe ..."



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Q What is your assessment of the ecological situation of our planet and therefore the inevitability of the future situation for us sport fishermen, who are all dependent on ecology? So what do you think is a future-oriented, contemporary angling, if we want to include factors like climate change or environmental and habitat destruction in this vision?

A The ecological situation of our planet is unfortunately disastrous. For 150 years we have been systematically overexploiting and raping nature – and now we are paying the price in the form of rapidly advancing climate change, among other things.

On the part of EFTTA, we in Brussels are fighting for free migration routes in our rivers and are vehemently resisting additional waterway construction, while at the same time promoting the dismantling of power plants. But in the context of the nuclear phase-out and the search for "sustainable" energies, thousands of new hydroelectric power projects are in the planning phase! For us at EFTTA, any hydroelectric power associated with damming is an ecological disaster and anything but sustainable.

Massive, mostly agricultural caused insect losses make it difficult for many fish species to thrive. Invasive species, some of which are extremely protected (cormorants, otters!), make the situation even more difficult – unfortunately there are countless construction sites here too.

I try to make myself heard by the decision-makers in Brussels by always pointing out that we anglers have a vested interest in healthy biotopes, as only then can our angling sport be crowned with success. We anglers are nature conservationists and not nature users!"





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Q The fishing industry itself seems to be developing rapidly, despite the crisis it has been called. It is estimated that the European fishing sector has a turnover of at least 20-25 billion euros a year (sea fishing alone generates 10.5 billion euros in turnover and 100,000 jobs within the EU – see the study by Kieran Hyder), and in the USA this figure could be quadrupled again. How can we make our hobby sustainable and nature-friendly?"

A This is in our very own interest, today more than ever before, because the EU has declared war on plastic waste. We at EFTTA welcome this "war" – it is unfortunately necessary. Whoever expresses a different opinion, I would ask them to ask their children about this issue and the answers regularly that such a "war" is essential. The youth of today are aware of this problem, often more so than the older generations ...

Whenever possible, I urge the industry behind the angling business to be more ecological and "greener" on its own initiative. Currently, research is underway to find out what percentage of the plastic waste in the European oceans we fishermen are responsible for. Unfortunately, these investigations are currently based on the number of pieces and not on the weight of the plastic found. If a 300 kilo synthetic fishing net is found on a beach (which professional fishermen often deliberately dispose of in the sea, because it is cheaper than any professional disposal!), then this amounts to as much in the statistics as a few centimeters of angling line! This is of course extremely unfair towards us anglers, that's what I am fighting against in Brussels.

Would the plastic waste that we anglers dispose of - against our will! – be rated by weight when fishing, we would hardly appear in these statistics as waste producers at all. A plastic bottle contains far more plastic than what the average angler loses in his life in fishing line over getting snagged. No angler is out to lose his equipment, because he has to pay a lot of money for it!

The EU Commission is currently working on a list of banned disposable plastics – the first edition became valid in June 2021. During winter 2019/20, plastic fishing line was suddenly on this list! It is important to know that not only nylon lines are made of plastic, but also braided lines are made of plastic-polymers. In short, if the plastic fishing line remains on this list and the list becomes legally binding after a vote in the European Parliament & Council, then the



Animal fights! Olivier wrestles with a crocodile on Rio Xingu

use of modern fishing line would suddenly be banned throughout the EU, to which we anglers have no sensible alternative! That would be the end of fishing and for about 300.000 jobs in the EU!

We have therefore made representations to the Commission and have convinced them to take plastic fishing line off this list of banned products. In return we promised that we will gladly give up plastic fishing lines as soon as we have a reasonable alternative (which does not exist yet!). This is only a stage win as the plastic line may be back on the banned list at some point – it is EFTTA's job to stay on top of it and stay on the ball.

By underlining that the amount of plastic lures (Hard- & Softbait) lost by anglers is insignificant compared with the quantities of plastic discarded in our waters, we avoided until now to see plastic lures on that list. Also other substances are in the scope of the commission – for example lead, but also additives for boilies & groundbait.

I am a little less concerned about these issues as there are very environmentally friendly alternatives – for example soft plastic baits without plastisols and without other toxic substances (Phtalates, Bisphenols and so on...).

As mentioned at the beginning, I am pushing "my" industry to become "greener" on its own initiative, even before any laws require us to do so. The echo is very positive – the proof is in the many environmentally friendly soft plastic baits that are now on the market, and many manufacturers now offer alternatives to lead."

Q "What are the other topics that will keep you busy the next years?"

A Oh, there are various "construction sites" for us, but these are the two I regard as the most important ones:

Firstly, the so-called "CFP" is the "Common Fisheries Policy" of the European Union. This policy is there to find a fair and equitable way to share the resource "fish" that we have along our European coasts.

For the moment, the only stakeholders that are being listened to in this regard are the commercial fishers and the aquaculture industry. We from EFTTA have invested a lot of time and efforts into convincing the European Commission that in this regard, recreational anglers should also be respected at equal footing with our commercial and aquaculture colleagues.

Things develop in the right direction for us and I guess that we are on a good way to be treated as an equal stakeholder within the future "CFP".

Secondly, in frame of the current EU-Programs (Natura 2000, Biodiversity 2030) it is planned that 30% of the EU become "Protected Areas". When I started my work in Brussels in 2019, we were regarded an "extractive activity" and it was therefore not foreseen that angling will be allowed within these future protected areas. That means that if we do not manage to convince the Commission that we are not an extractive activity, we would potentially lose 30% of our angling waters!

This is why I kept underlining at every meeting with the Commission and at every event we organized and organize in the European Parliament (RecFishForum) that we are not an extractive activity! On the opposite of hunters, we are free to release our catch! That is a very modern aspect of angling that deserves to be underlined!

Nothing has been decided, but due to catch & release we are not regarded as an extractive activity anymore and it looks good that we anglers will be welcomed to fish within these future protected areas. To me that is great news: we will soon have a quality of angling there that we never had before. Just 2 or 3 years after the establishment and implementation of these protected areas most fish stocks will recover significantly offering us better angling opportunities than ever before. Angling tourism will thrive, but also all the activities that go along with it: guiding services, boat rentals, accommodation of anglers and much more. It looks as if our industry will not be shrinking, but thriving in the future!"



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