

## **A guide to selecting the proper fly pattern**

Selecting a fly pattern, especially from the wide selection offered these days, can be an arduous task. The question most often asked by beginning fly fishers is; What prompts me to use one fly over another in a certain situation? Before fishing a particular fly pattern I encourage beginners to think about the following:

- the time of year you are fishing
- the condition of the stream (muddy, clear)
- the type of fish you are fishing for
- the stream you are fishing
- your location on the stream (grassy banks , deep fast pools, shallow flats)
- time of day

Always, observe what is hatching when you enter the water and as you fish through the day. Trout are driven by the hatch, and hatches change considerably through the day. You may get indications that the fish are taking dries instead of nymphs, and some are very difficult to detect.

Obviously, during the winter you wouldn't fish with a size twelve May fly dun imitation, because no such critters are hatching at that time. During the winter, aquatic flies are small, like the Blue Wing Olives, Midges, and small black Stoneflies. In the spring, Mayflies, Caddisflies, and Stoneflies begin hatching with a vengeance. Drab colored Mayflies are abundant during early spring like the, Hendrickson, March Brown, and Quill Gordon. As mid to late spring approaches, the hatches are big and more colorful. Imitations that might be used during this time are Green Drakes, Light Cahills, Sulphurs, Olive Elk Hair Caddis, and Yellow Stoneflies. During the summer, trout turn their attention to terrestrials (Beetles, Ants, etc.), and that will be their focus for the next three months. Don't forget to bounce big Stonefly nymphs, too. As October approaches and winter not being far away, the fly fisher has to set their site on fishing with small flies again.

Stream conditions play a big part in the fly selection process. If the water is dingy or muddy, try fishing with a larger, more colorful nymph. I like the Prince nymph during dingy high water conditions, and will dead drift a heavy black wooly bugger, if things get really hard. Just remember that fish can't see as well in these conditions and you have to select your flies accordingly. Crystal clear water is another challenge, fish are selective and can see every detail of your fly. I like to fish comparaduns in the still flats and parachute patterns that lie more in the surface film, casting a realistic silhouette to the fish. A smaller fly, presented very delicately is the ticket during clear water conditions.

Next month I will continue with the other topics listed above and provide you with the fly patterns that work well for me. There are no secrets to selecting flies, it is on-the-water experience, a good understanding of the insects trout eat.

Last month I listed six points to consider when choosing a fly to match the hatch. This month we will look in-depth at each point and identify some patterns and fly fishing techniques that work for me through the year.

### **1. Consider the time of year**

Winter (below 40 degree water temps) - Most aquatic flies are not hatching at this time, and are in the form of a nymph or larva. They live on the streambed and feed on decayed matter, which provides them energy to molt and grow prior to emergence in the spring. The flies that I most often use in the winter are nymphs (Pheasant Tails, Copper Johns, Brassie, and Red Fox Squirrel), Blue Wing Olives, and Midge patterns.

Spring (Caddis & Mayflies begin to hatch - above 40 degree water temps) - Drab colored Mayflies are abundant during late winter and early spring like the, Hendrickson, March Brown, Quill Gordon, and Blue Quill. As late spring approaches, the hatches are big and more colorful. Imitations that might be used during this time are Green Drakes, Light Cahill's, Sulphurs, and Yellow Stoneflies to name a few.

Summer (terrestrials)- During the summer, trout turn their attention to terrestrials (Beetles, Ants, etc.), and that will be their focus for the next three months. Don't forget to bounce big Stonefly nymphs, too. Recommended patterns: San Juan Worm, Green Weenie, Chernobyl Ant, and Daves Hopper.

Fall (small flies) - As October approaches and winter not being far away, the fly fisher has to set his site on fishing with small flies again.

### **2. The condition of the stream**

Muddy Stream - If the water is dingy or muddy, try fishing with larger more colorful nymphs. Attractor patterns like the Prince nymph, and heavily weighted black, white, or chartreuse Woolly Buggers work, too. Remember that fish can't see as well in these conditions and you have to select your flies accordingly.

Clear Water Conditions - Trout are selective and can see every detail of your fly during these conditions. I like to fish Comparaduns (Hair & CDC) and Parachute patterns that lie more in the surface film, casting a realistic silhouette to the fish. A smaller fly, presented very delicately is the ticket during clear water conditions.

### **3. The type of fish you are fishing for**

Trout - Preferred foods are; macroinvertebrates (Caddis Flies, May Flies, Stone Flies, Crane Flies, Dragonflies, Dobson Flies) as well as fishes. The larger brown trout like the smallmouth foods listed below.

Smallmouth Bass - Preferred foods are; Crayfish, Hellgrammites, Salamanders, Sculpins, and any small fish like Chubs, Dace, and etc.

#### **4. The type of stream you are fishing**

Tail water (down stream of dam) - The South Holston and Watauga Rivers in Tennessee have made their spot many times over in fly fishing magazines. The aquatic life is abundant and so are the fish. Aquatic flies are abundant due to the more favorable pH and water temperatures. Be sure to have Black Caddis and Mayfly imitations in the spring, and Sulfurs at all times. A Hares Ear nymph imitates the Sulfur nymphs quite well. Have some beetle patterns handy in the summer, but most of all tail waters always have their share of midges. (Midges: Adams, Griffith's Gnat, Crystal Midge, WD40, RS2, midge pupae)

Other patterns - Crane Flies, Woolly Buggers, Stone Flies in some sections of the river

Free Stone - For nymphs I can not say enough about the Pheasant Tail, Prince, and Hares Ear. When it comes to dry flies the tried and true are the Elk Hair Caddis, Wulff patterns, and Adams.

#### **5. Your location on the stream**

Grassy Banks - It's best during the summer to use grasshopper patterns in these areas as well as the many terrestrial patterns available these days. I sometimes use Stimulators or an Elk Hair Caddis to imitate hoppers since they have a swept back wing silhouette.

Fast Runs and Riffles - Trout don't have time to see the fly in fast water, so your imitation in this case should be bigger and if your dry fly fishing the fly should be heavily hackled to allow floatability. Patterns to use are Wulff patterns, Humpies, and Elk Hair Caddis.

Pools - I'm not much for starting my cast or drift at mid-pool. But, what I do like is to drift a nymph deep, beginning at the head of the pool and getting the fly on the bottom. I recommend fishing for the bigger fish using lots of lead with a big stone attached. During the hot days of summer the slack or still water doesn't contain much oxygen, so the head of the pool will offer the most success.

Shallow Flats - Flats can be very challenging and require long leaders and flies that match the hatch. I use flies that project a realistic silhouette, especially during clear water conditions. An Elk Hair Caddis without hackle, a Comparadun, Midge dry or pupae are all possible solutions to catching fish in clear water flats. Try to use long leaders above 10' and small size tippet, so as not to spook the fish.

## **6. Time of day**

It depends on the time of year as to what is hatching through the day. Nymphs are most active during the early morning and late afternoon hours. I always begin my day with a nymph attached, whether it is on a dry dropper rig or a tandem nymph rig. As the sun hits the water during the course of the day emergence is in full effect. Emerging May or Caddis flies can dry their wings and be on their way to begin mating. It is obvious at that point you want to fish Emergers (soft hackles) and dry flies.