

WHERE, WHEN and How to FISH FAMED STONEFLY HATCHES ON WESTERN RIVERS

The frenzied feeding of trout that accompanies a hatch of the large stoneflies on a western river, and the excellent fishing that often results, lures anglers who dream of catching big trout. Many of these anglers are disappointed with their success, and that is why we hope to be of help with information presented here.

Your chances for success will be greatly increased if you have some knowledge of the insects themselves, the nature of the hatch, how the trout feed and the characteristics of the stream.

The most common of the large stoneflies (*Pteronarcys Californica*) develop from egg to mature adult in three years. The nymphs migrate from the stream to the banks, the adult emerges from the nymphal shuck to cling on branches, logs and rocks along the river's edge. Final maturity and mating of the adults occur here, then the female will take to the air to deposit her fertilized eggs into the stream. Thus a three year cycle begins again.

Nymphs in various stages of development will always be found in a stream, but the concentration of nymphs as they prepare to crawl from the stream generates the glutinous feeding of trout.

The mass emergence of the adults, ^{is} "the hatch". The hatch will first appear on the lower reaches of a river and progress upstream. The appearance of the hatch and its upstream movement are determined by several factors. Water temperature, turbidity of the river, air temperature seem to be the conditions that dictate exactly when the stoneflies will hatch.

Usually the hatch begins about the same time each year, but it can be earlier with unseasonably warm weather and below normal stream flows. High water and cold weather can retard the hatch a few days or weeks. The greatest numbers of hatched adult flies ordinarily will remain along a stream section four to six days, although conditions will affect the rate of progression upstream. Stoneflies require oxygenated water, so that fast moving water over gravel and boulder strewn river bottoms is where the nymphs develop in great numbers.

Contrary to other hatches, the major flight of the adults is mid-day. After the sun has warmed the air and the adults have dried their wings and mated, the flight begins. There will be some feeding activity on either side of this mid-day period and is well worth fishing. Evenings can sometimes be an exceptionally rewarding time to fish.

As the nymphs begin to crawl from mid-stream to the banks, many are washed loose and tumble along the bottom of the stream. The trout feed on these drifting nymphs with great relish. This occurrence is always well upstream from the main body of the adult hatch. Anglers that employ heavily weighted, dark colored nymph imitations, fished dead drift along the bottom will enjoy some exciting fishing. Use a short line for control and touch. Don't spare the weight on fly or leader. Trout will feed on the nymphs until they are gorged. When the adults first begin their egg laying

flights the trout may be full and ignore them. Sound advice is to fish an area several days. Success will depend on persistence.

When the trout first start surface feeding you may find that smaller trout are the most active or even the Rocky Mountain white fish if they are present in the river. Soon the big trout will take their turn.

In rivers with small side channels, feeding may begin there first. Eventually the really big trout will take up the prime feeding locations by logs, large boulders and heavy currents over submerged rocks. The trophy size trout will be selective even though their smaller buddies get careless. For choosy, cagey trout the leader must be as light as practical for the conditions. A smaller and sparsely dressed fly sometimes works when a refusal is experienced. The big lazy trout also prefer a drifting drowned adult which may be matched with a wet fly or streamer.

Watch for hatches of smaller stoneflies that follow the main hatch. These too provide great fishing. Matching the hatch with flies size #10 and #12 is the usual order.

Western rivers that produce "salmon" or more properly stonefly hatches, often baffle visiting anglers on their first trip or two. Learning where the feeding trout can be found in the stream is the problem. Trout feeding on the nymphs seek out riffles that lead to deeper holding areas of the river. The shallow riffles are easily overlooked by anglers. Deeper runs can be productive when trout are not actively feeding on nymphs.

Hatched adults fall or are blown into the water along the banks. Trout move into feeding stations that intercept floating insects and take them off the surface with slashing rises. Rivers in canyons and over rocky bottoms are referred to as pocket water. Each sizeable stone creates a pocket favorable for feeding trout. Wary trout will remain in mid-stream pockets for security. The round, slick rocks of the stream bottom in pocket water makes wading difficult for the angler. The current is swift as well so that felt soled waders and a staff are two great aids in reaching the tough spots well out into the river.

Surface feeding trout are not easy to detect in the rough, broken riffles of a rushing mountain stream. Experience will be required to learn how to "read" the river and locate the big busier that is busy gathering in "bugs"

Floating an artificial dry fly of size #2, 4, 6 or 8 on a swift river with conflicting currents is not easy. Don't cast too long a line, throw a slack line and learn to get cross stream drifts to reach trout under overhangs.

The following list of rivers and the approximate dates of the stonefly hatch on each is limited to those rivers we know best and includes most of the famous western waters. Feel free to call or write for additional information.

Henry's Fork of the Snake River (Idaho) - Mid to late May until early June. River is usually clear, but can be high.

Big Hole River (Montana) - First week of June to third week of June. River may be high and roiley in early part of hatch.

Clarks Fork of the Columbia, Rock Creek, Blackfoot Rivers (Montana) -
Early June to early July. Variable due to weather fluxuations on
Western slope of Divide. High water often a problem.

Yellowstone River (Montana & Wyoming) - Early July to early August.
High, discolored water limits fishing the first stages, but
usually clear in Yellowstone Park by the middle of July.

Madison River (Montana) - Mid June to mid July. High, roiley water
until late June. Excellent nymph fishing until water drops and
clears. Upper reaches provide both nymph and dry fly fishing.

Float boat fishing is permitted on all rivers listed except in
Yellowstone National Park. Floating is not practical on some rivers or
sections of them. Wading to fish is best for some sections of these rivers.

Equipment should include both floating and sinking lines, a single action
reel with backing. Rods for 6, 7, or 8 weight lines are suggested. Also
chest high waders with felt or similar soles. See our 1976 tackle catalog
and handbook for more information on fly patterns.

We are offering a limited edition of three nymphs and three adult
stonefly imitators not for sale in our ~~shop or~~ catalog. This limited
edition selection consists of six flies for \$5.95.

FOR THE
SELECTION SEND CHECK TO
BUD LILLY'S TROUT SHOP
WEST YELLOWSTONE
MONTANA 59758

Good fishing,

Bud and Greg Lilly

Frenzied Feeding

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Early July. Variable due to
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Early July to early August.
High, discolored water limits fishing
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Madison River - Montana

Mid-June to mid-July

High, roily water until late June. Excellent nymph fishing until water drops and clears. Upper reaches provides both nymph and dry fly fishing.

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Good Fishing - Bud and Greg Kelly