

Helpful Tips for Better Dry Fly Fishing

By Rick Kustich

Each spring and summer I am surprised at the number of anglers that I observe nymphing or wet fly fishing their way through a hatch on a trout river. Without reopening the age old debate of Halford and Skues, to me dry fly fishing for trout represents the essence of the sport of fly fishing. It seems as though some anglers are reluctant to commit to the dry fly because of a lack of confidence. The following tips are an essential part of the skills required to consistently fool trout on a dry fly.

Be prepared

This sounds simple enough. I think that having a working knowledge of the important hatches and spinner falls that occur on the streams and rivers that I frequent is one of the most critical steps to success. This allows me to fill my fly boxes with patterns that are designed to specifically meet the challenges of that water. Also I practice my casting, both accuracy and distance, throughout the year. I have a much better chance of dropping a cast to a precise spot to a feeding trout when I can do it regularly on my lawn.

Observe

The most common mistake I see on streams and rivers today is an angler being impatient and not observing the sometimes obvious signs. I keep both my eyes and ears open to what the water and surroundings want to tell me. I observe the feeding patterns of birds, look for insects



in the air, and continually check the water's surface for signs of the hatch or to what exactly a trout is feeding on. Sometimes selecting the right fly comes down to simply tying on a fly that looks like the insects floating down the river. But the most important part of observation is simply looking for the often subtle rise of a feeding fish. Often times trout will select feeding positions that are not obvious with only a quick glance. Only careful searching will find many of these rising fish.

Wade with care

I do my best to not stumble on boulders or grind the rocks while I am wading into position for a cast. Clumsy foot work can either alert a fish to my presence forcing it to alter its feeding or spook it entirely. For reason of stealth I like to wade without spikes.

The proper leader

I prefer long leaders that end with about four feet of tippet to assist me in placing slack in the leader at the end of the cast. Slack in the leader is key to obtaining an effective drag-free drift of the fly. My leaders are typically fifteen to eighteen feet in length. I will use shorter leaders on small streams or on windy days. Most commercial leaders are too short and do not have a long enough tippet section. A simple solution is to use a commercial leader of nine to twelve feet tapered to 3 or 4x and simply add three to four feet of 5 or 6x.

The right rod

No matter what species an anglers pursues the right rod is important. I think the most important aspect of a good trout rod is that it not be too stout. There has to be a softness throughout to deliver soft casts and protect light tippets. For me length and line weight is determined by the size of the river and length of the average cast. I prefer a nine foot, five weight on larger rivers and adjust down from there.

Presentation

There is nothing more important than presentation when it comes to fishing a dry fly for trout. Except in the relatively rare instances where fish react to caddis or stoneflies skittering across the surface, an imitation that is floating naturally with the current is essential. Casts such as the Pile or Stop Cast combined with a long leader and a smooth rod will result in slack which in turn provides a short period of drag free presentation. It takes practice to become accurate with slack leader casts. A wary stream bred trout will not be fooled by a dragging fly no matter how exacting the imitation.

See your fly

I can only be assured that I am obtaining a natural presentation by actually observing the drift of my fly. This is so important that I go to great lengths to tie flies that are both realistic and quite visible under various lighting. By studying the drift of the fly I can make adjustments that will improve the presentation if necessary. Also, I am able to confidently react to a trout that has been fooled by my imitation.

Get the right angle

The proper presentation often results by simply changing the angle of the cast. On larger rivers I prefer a position across and slightly up river from the feeding fish. From this position I

can make a cast that angles slight down and places the line and leader up river from the fly. This provides two advantages. The trout sees the fly first before the leader and this angle minimizes drag. On smaller streams I usually angle my cast up stream but attempt to take an angle that shows the fly to the trout without the leader drifting through the feeding lane first.



Get the rhythm

Each trout feeds at a different pace. Such factors as the density of insects, the life stage of the insect, or the volume of the current will impact a fish's feeding pace or rhythm. On numerous occasions I have observed trout while surface feeding and I have seen many different styles. Sometimes the fish will feed in rapid succession and other times only occasionally drifting to the surface to pick off a morsel. A trout will only take an imitation when it is otherwise ready to feed on a natural. Pick one fish, determine its rhythm and make an accurate cast.

Be ready for low light

Whether it be a hatch or spinner fall, often the low light period of the late evening provides outstanding dry fly fishing. It is often when the bigger fish will feed on the surface. I prepare myself for this opportunity by organizing my flies so that I can easily access those that I anticipate needing and by making any necessary repairs to my

leader before it starts to get dark. I make sure that I have a light with full battery power that allows me to work with both hands in a lit area. Being able to tie the knots necessary to attach tippet to the leader and the fly to the tippet in low light is essential.