

Cashiers Outside

Spring brings big chances for trout in area rivers

By David Joy
Staff Writer

When daylight saving time lengthened the evenings to a few more hours of sunshine, I was ecstatic to know that my afternoon ritual of hitting a local stream after work would be able to stretch into the early night. A few weeks ago, I cut out of work early to fish the Upper Chattooga off of Bull Pen Rd., and those extra hours of sun kept me there until the final rays dimmed behind Satulah Mountain.

That day on the Chattooga I was reminded what makes spring fishing so spectacular: absolutely every living thing is on the move, including the trout I seek and the bugs they feed on. When I arrived that day a thick baetis mayfly hatch moved upstream in late afternoon and was replaced by blue winged olives as evening rolled on and a cloud of tan caddis in the dying hours of day. I watched one wily brown trout sip bugs underneath the limbs of an overhanging laurel for close to an hour.

I caught some nice wild browns that day and even had one come completely out of the water to engulf a tan CDC Caddis, but more importantly the fish were back to hammering flies the way they'd done in fall. The wintertime blues of casting midges on tiny tippet all day for one or two fish was finally over.

Generally when the first few weeks of spring warm the waters enough to bring on heavy evening hatches, trout are a lot less weary than later in the year. The reason is simple: after a long winter of having to gobble thousands of midges to make a decent meal, trout are eager to jump on larger prey to rebuild their metabolism and energy levels. Furthermore, most trout have yet to see the bum rush of out-of-town anglers sloshing through every hole casting over-hackled flies on sloppy lines.

This brings a perfect opportunity for fly fishermen as during this time trout will

dine on patterns that may not be entomologically correct (you don't have to match the hatch), but the fish are still picky for careful presentations and natural drifts. That is not to say that matching the hatch will not catch fish, but simply that other patterns will draw strikes during heavy hatches.

For instance, when fishing the Chattooga I caught more fish on a large No. 12 Stimulator than I did on March Browns or BWOs. The March Browns mimicked the early baetis hatch and the BWO was a mirror image of the blue winged olives, but fish were more eager to feed on a large bulky Stimulator meant to mimic large stoneflies, a hatch that was definitely not present at the time.

Imagine placing 1,000 chicken drumettes in a pin with a lion that hadn't eaten in a month, and then throwing in a 72-ounce slab of prime rib. What do you think the lion will go for? Trout are much the same way, being extremely opportunistic and preferring larger meals with less effort. In other words, why dine on twenty small baetis mayflies when the same amount of energy can be obtained from one large stonefly?

For this reason, be sure to bring some larger attractor patterns and streamers on your springtime fishing excursions. As far as dry flies, I prefer Stimulators, Mikulak Sedges, Royal Wulffs, Humpys, Double Humpys, Royal Humpys, and a host of other variants. For streamers, I prefer Clouser Minnows, Muddler Minnows, Woolly Buggers, Marabou Muddlers, Thunder Creeks, and Bunny Muddlers.

Still fill your fly boxes with patterns to match all of the popular springtime hatches, including patterns for baetis, blue winged olives, black, gray, and tan caddisflies, and little brown stoneflies. Fish can still occasionally be picky during heavy hatches even in early season. I prefer March Browns and small Hen-



Photos by Sara Hill

The author fishes a stretch of the Horsepasture River headwaters above Rainbow Falls, and sets the hook on a wild rainbow trout, visible in the upper left corner striking a Clouser Minnow.

dricksons for baetis hatches, BWOs and CDC Olive Shuttlescocks for blue winged olives, Elk Hair Caddis and various colors of CDC Caddis for caddisflies, and small Foam Stones, small Stimulators, and Yellow Sallys for early stonefly hatches.

No matter what the fish seem to prefer, stealthy approaches, careful mends, and light presentations are key to catching trout at any time of year. Also, when you find a likely spot, take a seat streamside and watch for a little while. Holding back and not rushing into the water to make a blind cast will often give you time to watch the feeding lies of likely fish.

With the headwaters of four major trout fisheries (Tuckaseegee, Chattooga, Whitewater, and Horsepasture) all within a few minutes of Cashiers, there is no excuse not to find the time to hit the water. The dog days of summer will be here before we know it and all we'll have left are summertime smallmouth and largemouth, so take the time to get in the current while the hatch is on.



The author shows off the Horsepasture wild rainbow, seen above striking a Clouser Minnow, before releasing it back into the stream.



Don't forget about small native streams in spring. At left, small, but beautiful, native brook trout will rise eagerly to well-played dry flies in spring. On the right, the author plays a native brook trout in a pool along one of Jackson County's many creeks.



Photographed and tied by David Joy/Staff

Above, from left are three streamer patterns that will tempt many springtime trout: a Muddler Minnow, a Bunny Muddler, and a Thunder Creek.