



Fishing the Nymph as a Dry

JOHN GIERACH

LET'S SAY THE HATCH is Blue-Winged Olives (#18) and that it's uncomplicated; the trout are rising well and there's nothing else on the water that might account for it. With swelling confidence, you tie on the proper dry fly. This is the classic situation, the one you've read about in books and magazines for years. Fifteen minutes later you've put down four fish and haven't had a strike. Now that you think about it, you've read about this a few times, too.

Many fishermen will in this situation become suspicious of their dry fly—maybe it should be lighter or darker, bigger or smaller. That's possible, but the problem may well be that the trout aren't taking the dry flies

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at all, or at least not very many of them. It's not unusual for trout working a hatch to take many more nymphs or pupae than winged flies, probably because they're easier targets. Sometimes they'll ignore the floating flies altogether.

When To Nymph?

IN SOME SITUATIONS the riseforms will tell the story, but you can't always count on it. Trout taking nymphs an inch under the surface betray themselves to a careful observer who notices that what first looked like a rise is, in fact, a dorsal fin breaking the surface or just a vigorous boil. A fish taking emerging nymphs right in or very near the surface film, however, exhibits virtually the same riseform as one feeding on the winged flies. Often



DAVID LAMBROUGHTON PHOTO

the only clue that the fish are actually nymphing is your lack of strikes.

Which Nymph?

FLOATING NYMPH AND EMERGER patterns are designed for situations like this and can be excellent, but standard nymphs usually work just as well. A nymph with a dubbed body can be greased with floatant and fished right in the film with good results. The nymphal silhouette and flush float are often just what the trout are looking for. In a pinch, the wings, hackle and tails of a dry fly can be clipped off to make a workable, though not very pretty, floating nymph.

In some cases, a slightly sunken nymph draws more strikes than one floating on the surface. A lightly weighted fly sinks only an inch or two in all but the slowest currents and even an unweighted nymph that's doused with leader sink or just squeezed wet in the river will sink below the surface film as long as you don't dry it out with too many false casts.

Nymph Tactics

THE BEST WAY to fish the floating nymph or emerger is exactly the way you'd fish a dry fly in the same situation: on a dead drift over quietly hatching insects and perhaps with a little action with a caddis fly imitation. The only difference is that, except under absolutely perfect conditions, you won't be able to see the fly.

Although you won't be able to spot it, knowing where that floating nymph or emerger is can be crucial, both for setting up on strikes and for judging your drift. Some anglers find it useful to stick with a standard leader length. Eventually they develop a sense of where the fly is because their leader is always, say, nine feet long. If you're fishing a weighted nymph there is usually a tiny blip where the fly strikes the water. It's useful to look for that, especially when throwing something like a pile cast or a downstream hook where the fly will *not* be exactly nine feet off the tip of the line.

Choosing a Fly

PATTERNS? A thorough knowledge of entomology (or a sample nymph in a hand seine) is useful, but in many situations a nymph or pupal pattern the same size or even a size larger than the dry fly is a good place to start.

In the course of a hatch it may happen that your nymph or emerger pattern may suddenly stop working, and though the trout are still rising, they may be less active than they were just a few minutes ago. When this happens, chances are the tables have turned—the hatch is petering off and there are now more duns than nymphs available to the fish. Toward the end of a hatch, fish that had been selective to the nymph often pick off the last few floating flies. When action on the nymph suddenly slows, try switching back to the dry fly for the last few trout of the day.

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