

Some Dry Fly Statistics

In fly fishing the standard that defines a big trout is a 20 incher. It even has an exclusive club attached to it referred to as the “20/20.” This means you landed a 20-inch fish on a Size 20 hook. Your expectation of a great day of fly fishing will normally include a 20-inch trout in the bottom of your net.

We could all agree that a 20-inch fish is what we hunt, but there are thousands of different opinions on how to actually catch that fish. Some common beliefs are that a big fly hooks big fish and others think a fly must be sunk because the big fish live on the bottom. Yet other anglers swear a streamer is the only way. But the one opinion that’s seldom expressed is the concept that a small dry fly is the key to hooking big fish. It’s a preposterous suggestion to think a large fish would take interest in a small surface fly.

As you know I fish a dry fly exclusively in all seasons of the year. That experience has provided a different perspective on how to catch big fish. For years I’ve preached of the power of a small dry fly. The common thread in our blogs consistently links small flies to big fish. But I’ve always struggled with a method to express this concept in concrete terms.

Well I did a little research using the 2018 fishing year. In that calendar year I fished 153 days over a variety of different water. I went back through each of the 2018 blogs and counted all 20-inch fish photo’d in the net and recorded the hook size that landed that specific fish. I didn’t include Geoffrey’s 20-inch fish, only mine and *only* counted a fish that was verified in a photo.

The following information and chart represents the findings of my research:

1. In the calendar year 2018, I landed 121 20-inch fish.
2. Seventeen of those fish were 23 inches long or longer.
3. The largest fish of the year was a 24½-inch brown trout caught on the Henry’s Fork.

The chart below breaks down the number of 20-inch fish caught on each hook size from a #26 to a #4. There are two columns representing large hooks from a Size 12 to a Size 4 and small hooks from a Size 26 to a Size 14.

153 Days Fished in 2018 121 Fish 20+ Inches

Hook Size 12-4		Hook Size 26-14	
4	0	14	14
6	2	16	7
8	0	18	40
10	10	20	28
12	5	22	11
		24	2
		26	2
	Total Fish: 17		Total Fish: 104



#1 Fly: Olive Brown Emperor Caddis #18

As you can see from the chart, the 1st Place hook size was a Size 18 and 2nd Place was a Size 20. The most productive fly was a #18 Olive Brown Emperor Caddis.



In conclusion, I hope this information sheds light on two things: (1) A small dry fly is a potent tool to hook a lot of big fish; and (2) If you could do this with a small, barbless hook without injuring, maiming, and disfiguring a fish, start using smaller hatch bugs for the safety of the fish. This chart proves you'll still catch big fish.