

December 2, 2012 SF Boise River Winter Dry Fly Fishing Report

If you fish the winter on a dry fly, you realize that intense hatch windows are relatively short—maybe 2 ½ hours in midday, and that will vary slightly every day you fish. The question is not what you do when the hatch is on; that's pretty obvious. But how do you extend productive fishing hours before and after the hatch? I have developed somewhat of a strategy for that. It goes like this: Hunt in the morning, catch fish like crazy in midday, and searcher fish into darkness. Today was a classic example of how to execute the plan.

I arrived at the river early as I always do, most times a few hours ahead of the anticipated hatch window. I was at river level a little before 11 a.m. and I did nothing but move slowly downstream. I positioned in the river to the point that there was reflective light at the surface from bank to bank. A fish head is dark; and if he breaks the surface below me, he'll create a color contrast of a dark head against a shimmering surface. The first fish I saw was across the river 40 yards below me against a riffle and a soft edge. He never rose again, but I knew where he lived and I knew he was hunting like I was. I waded the river, crept into position, and served the fish a #20 BWO Comparadun. On the second cast, I hooked and landed the first fish of the day. I set up again and hunted shoreline to shoreline standing at viewpoints with maximum surface light. This time I didn't see a fish head; I see the top of his back and a dorsal fin. The fish was straight below me in a tongue behind a boulder protruding through the surface. An easy approach and I catch that fish also. I covered about a half mile of river in slow motion during the first hour and I only caught four fish, but the hatch hadn't started and I hunted up a bonus before play time. I didn't searcher fish at all; I probably only made 15 casts. I have grown to realize that only fish that eat in the morning before the hatch are the ones that indicate they have a willingness to rise to a convenient bug that floats perfectly into their field of vision. You must see that fish, so I hunted the morning and the first phase of my plan paid dividends.

In the afternoon starting at about 12:30, the BWO hatch exploded; and for almost three hours, I did nothing but stage up on feeding fish, hook them, and land or lose them. The single upright wing and no hackle BWO #22 were the most effective patterns. Phase two of the plan was perfect.

It was roughly 3:15 when most of the fish stopped feeding. I chased a few stragglers, hooked some and missed others, but for all intents and purposes, the hatch was over. I tied on the BWO #20 Comparadun and moved to the upper end of the run in the riffle section. There were no fish feeding in the soft foam line against the riffle, but I started casting upstream on a quarter angle into the transition lines between riffle and foam line. After multiple deliveries, a fish came out of nowhere and ate my bug. I land the fish and continued to slowly move upriver working the foam line. Another fish ate the bug, then another; and in the last 30 minutes before dark, I land five more fish completely after the hatch. Phase 3 paid off a little more than normal.

In winter, I often try searcher fishing in the morning with limited success, but in late afternoon, it's often worth my effort. The fish just completed a phase where there were

hundreds of bugs over their heads and they were vigorously gorging on them. They see your offering in their feed zone and react to your fly as a remnant of the previous hatch.

Anyway, that's my lame-brain philosophy, and I'm sticking to it. Diligently hunt for heads before the hatch, fish the perfect bug and catch a ton of fish during the hatch, then searcher fish until dark.

Flies that Caught Fish:

#20 BWO Comparadun

#22 and #20 BWO Colored Emerger

#22 BWO No Hackle

#22 BWO Single Upright Wing