

Dry Fly Suggestions for the Mo!!

I've fished the Missouri River twice in the late April/early May window, so I'm certainly not the dry fly guru there. In my experience, I've found the fishing to be lights-out on both visits, and the small bug hatches (midges and BWOs) are some of the most prolific events I've ever witnessed. During my latest stay, I encountered blanket midge hatches starting around 9 AM and remnants of that hatch are on the water all day long, then intensifying going into darkness. Around 12:30 PM the leading edge of the BWO hatch begins to muster and it shortly mushrooms into a blanket hatch running strong for a solid 3 hours. The hatch slowly peters out with spent bugs and duns running through early evening. In summation, there are literally small bugs on the surface all day long, and the big fish there take full advantage.

The Mo has all the characteristics of a giant spring creek with a moss bottom and crystal-clear, slow-moving water. The fish are big with an average size over 17 inches long. They're smart, selective, and highly sensitive to your presence. They pose a great dry fly challenge—being difficult to hook and tough to land on a small hook and 6X tippet. But in my limited experience, the big fish there have shared some valuable lessons that may help you if you decide to put the Missouri on your bucket list. Here are a few tips:

- 1) The Mo is heavily fished, mostly by multiple guide services working the area, but there are wade fishermen also who inhabit the side channels. The boat anglers fish mostly center river. A few of them yank streamers, but nymphing under a bobber is the dominant technique. There's a tiny population of anglers that dry fly fish, so the fish population along the edges are mostly left untouched. Then there's a giant population of big rising fish inhabiting those shorelines. So, if you dry fly, focus your efforts on the shorelines, and you'll have miles of river with next to no competition.
- 2) The fish against the shoreline are living in shallow, crystal-clear water. They're super sensitive to wade wake, can see you at great distances, and they're vigilant at all times. All approaches are performed in slow motion, and the post-ups are much more successful if you're below the fish.
- 3) Use extremely long leaders, and the tippet attached to the hook should be 6X. Long leaders make it possible to cast up over the target and the dry fly line/heavy leader never intercedes with the fish. The only thing over the fish is 6X tippet and your fly that they can't see.
- 4) You'll encounter giant pods of fast-cadence eaters all packed into a tight space. Target the biggest fish on the outside edge and DO NOT let your fly venture to the center or inner edge of the pod. By hooking the fish on the outside edge, he'll fight outward and downward, away from the rest of the group, not spooking them. I've made the mistake of targeting the center of the pod and had the entire group disappear while I fought one fish to the net. Hooking the outside fish first, I've netted up to five fish from a single pod.

- 5) Blanket small bug hatches create one major problem...there are too many naturals on the surface, and the fish can't find your imitation. I've been hatch-busting in those situations, offering a different species than what's on the water. In the midge hatches, I found a #20 or #18 BWO Comparadun to be very effective, and it provides the fish a bigger fly pattern to home in on. One morning I remember netting 10 fish in succession using the BWO pattern in a blanket midge hatch.
- 6) The hatch-buster concept was very productive, but you will encounter certain pods of fish that are highly selective, only eating the hatch bug on the water. When the fish are on a midge, the #22 Blood Midge cracked the code, but you must continue to hit your target with multiple casts to get the fish to eat. In the BWO hatches, my No. 1 offering was the #20/#18 BWO Comparadun, but you must watch the rise form. One afternoon, most of the rises were low plane with few heads above the surface. In that situation, I flipped flies to a #20 BWO Colored Emerger, and it mowed down a field of big fish.
- 7) Here is the fly selection that I found most productive:
 - a. #20 or #18 BWO Comparadun
 - b. #24 or #22 Mighty-Mite Midge
 - c. #20 BWO Colored Emerger
 - d. #22 Blood Midge
 - e. #20 BWO Hoagie's Cripple
 - f. #20 BWO Convertible
- 8) The Missouri is a big river; even in low flows, it's still 4000cfs. You can wade fish it because it's wide with mostly shallow edges. I find a boat to be a very helpful tool, not so much to fish out of, but more to hunt fish. You can cover more ground, find more fish, and have the pleasure of selecting only the larger ones to cast to.

Please rest assured there are many other lessons that these big, smart fish can teach you, but if you follow some of the tactics expressed in this document, the Mo can be dry fly heaven!