

## Hook Study 2024

It was a banner year of dry fly for big fish everywhere I visited, and there's one legitimate reason why. Nearly the entire world of fly fishing has turned to nymphs and streamers, so the fish population is seeing fewer and fewer acutely tied dry flies. It's making risers less hesitant to a surface fly and more persnickety to flies that sink. It's an enormous advantage to the few who deliver a dry fly. Let me give you a couple of examples:

- A) I fished the Missouri River in mid-April with the midges and BWOs in full bloom. There were lots of guide boats mostly fishing center river and all of them were nymphing under a strike indicator. That left the entire shoreline vacant of anglers except me, and for five straight days those shorelines were loaded with big rising fish that I had all to myself. On May 2, 2024 (a single day) I netted eight 20-inch fish with a 2-foot rainbow in the mix. It wasn't about being the ace dry fly guy, it was more about having zero competition.
- B) On September 26 through the 28, 2024 my ol' buddy Joe Bare and I fished Daniels Lake in eastern Idaho. We encountered numerous anglers at the small reservoir, and I was the only person in three days that used a dry fly. Joe isn't married to a dry fly and he used exclusively nymphs and sunken lake patterns during our stay. It's late September at fairly high elevation, and most of the summer bug hatches were gone, yet the big rainbows went out of the way to eat two caddis patterns (a #16 Mother's Day Meathead Caddis and a #14 Big-Ass Caddis). Joe may have caught a few more fish than me during our stay at Daniels, but didn't land a single 20-inch fish. He caught the cookie cutter 16-19 inchers while I netted a dozen fish over 20 inches long. The big fish were shy to the sunken flies, but they ate a dry fly without hesitation. Again, it wasn't about me doing anything special, it was simply casting a dry fly that the big boys hadn't seen.



Mother's Day Meathead Caddis



Big-Ass Caddis

I've been dry fly fishing exclusively for 63 years and never have seen the fishing so prosperous for big fish. I want to personally thank the nymphers and streamer anglers because you're ushering in the "renaissance" of dry fly.

The Hook Study of 2024 followed a similar pattern as previous years indicating that most large fish are netted on a small hook size in the 22-14 range, but there were some shocking numbers. In 2024 a Size 16 hook was truly phenomenal, netting 91 fish at 20 inches or larger. The lion's

share of those fish was landed using a #16 Olive Brown and #16 Mother's Day Meathead Caddis. But there were other patterns in a Size 16 that carried the ball as well including a Pink Tantalizer, a BWO Comparadun, and a Flav Searcher.



Olive Brown Meathead Caddis



Mother's Day Meathead Caddis



BWO Comparadun



Pink Tantalizer



Flav Searcher

In the large hook category (Size 12-4) a Size 10 hook won the day and it was mostly due to the early arrival of the skwala on the SF Boise River. Our #10 Slow Stone pattern netted nine 20 inchers.



The other two hook sizes that produced some pretty vast numbers were the Size 18 and Size 20. These hook sizes represent the small hatch bug of mostly BWOs, mahoganies, and midges. The predominant patterns were Comparaduns, Colored Emergers, Convertibles, Tantalizers, and No Hackles.

The hook sizes 14 and 12 had a pretty good showing in 2024 as well. The two dry fly patterns that shined were a #14 Big-Ass Caddis fished over multiple streams and lakes and a #12 Beetle that was quite productive on the Harriman Ranch.



Big-Ass Caddis



Beetle

The dry fly pattern that produced the most 20-inch fish in 2024 was a Meathead Caddis Size 16. The Mother's Day and the Olive Brown were a fish favorite. Here's the chart.

## 134 Days Fished in 2024

### 174 Fish 20+ Inches

#### Hook Size 12-4

Hook Size	Fish Caught
4	0
6	1
8	0
10	9
12	6

**Total Fish: 16**



#### Hook Size 26-14

Hook Size	Fish Caught
14	14
16	91
18	28
20	21
22	6
24	0
26	0

**Total Fish: 160**

Fourth year that the #16 Meathead Caddis has caught more 20-inch fish than any other fly pattern in our inventory.

(See a couple of big fish below)





25 Inch Cutty



25 Inch Rainbow

