

SUCCESS WITH BUZZERS

by Chris Shelton

A little catch and release pond which my fishing partner, Rolf Laumann and I had occasion to stock, is producing some very selective trout.

We rested the dam for three months after the stocking, to allow the fish time to settle in nicely. During this time, regular visits revealed very little in the way of piscine life. No tell-tale rises, or any sign of fish for that matter, to betray the fact that a stocking had actually taken place.

We could not understand it and at one stage presumed all the fish to be dead, or lost to the local cormorant population. The latter was true to a degree, as was witnessed by Rolf one day, whilst in quiet contemplation over the seeming demise of our trout.

A cormorant circled twice and alighted on one of the Eucalyptus branches overhanging the water.

After careful surveillance of the dam, the bird, unaware of Rolf's presence and satisfied that no imminent danger was present, plunged into the dam. A minute later it reappeared with a trout sandwiched in its beak. A horrified Rolf nearly fell off his perch in a desperate attempt to grab something to throw at the intruder. The bird extended its snakelike neck and swallowed the 400gm fish without so much as the blink of an eye. The sight of Rolf jumping up and down, discharging a bedlam of profanities, caused the bird to take fright.

The incident left us in little doubt that our fish were alive but obviously in hiding. We visited the dam every evening for the next month, Rolf armed with shotgun and myself with catapult. We never did get the opportunity to do away with one of the predators, but the strong military presence was enough to create a suitably unhealthy environment for them.

In the meantime, the remaining trout were getting fatter and wiser. The water temperature started dropping as autumn approached. It was mutually agreed that we would visit the dam the first weekend in April, this time armed with fly rods.

It was not long before we were both into fish, almost simultaneously. No sooner had we released the trout, when we were each into yet another. The trout were now averaging 500 grams, showing a growth rate of just over 100 grams per month. The willingness with which they took our flies, followed by extremely energetic runs and acrobatics, was a heart warming experience and had us both in a state of ecstasy.

The euphoria lasted for about two months, with the odd recognizable trout being taken more than once. A steady decline in our catch rate followed, coinciding with the dark months of winter. By August, they were just about impossible to tempt with anything. Up to this time, we had caught most of our fish on various tadpole and damsel imitations.

One fresh August morning, I observed a lot of surface activity. Not splashy rises but long wakes and humping (better known as head and tail rises). I recalled an article I had once read on rise forms. Apparently the head and tail rise is typical of fish feeding on emerging buzzers. When buzzers emerge, they often fail to break the surface film on their first ascent. They are forced to sink again, in order to have a second and third attempt. It is at this stage that they are extremely vulnerable to feeding trout.

Closer inspection of the water revealed midge husks floating about, unmistakable, with their little worm-like abdomens and white, fluffy breathing filaments. That was it! The longer I stared into the water, the more my eyes became accustomed to spotting them. Closer inspection revealed a few emerging at the surface.

That afternoon I tied a few imitations of the midges I had found. A restless night followed and I was back at the dam before first light the following morning.

I marveled at the beauty around me on that lovely spring morning. The sun was just starting to illuminate the eastern sky, slowly extinguishing the stars above. Not a cloud was in sight. The air was cool, as I inhaled the earthy scents around me. My feeling of well-being had a youthful tang, spurred by the prospect of the fishing which lay ahead.

With my little two weight outfit duly assembled, I proceeded to attach two feet of 6x tippet material to the end of my leader, which was constructed as follows. Looped to my double taper two weight floating line, was a seven and a half foot, floating, braided leader. Attached to this was a 4x, seven and a half foot, knotless, tapered leader. A standard blood-knot secured the tippet. I attached the little size 14 buzzer with a turle-knot. Finally, I greased the whole leader to within a foot of the fly. (To the uninitiated, grease repels water, which causes the line to float high in the surface film. A good substitute for the expensive greasing products available in tackle shops, is ordinary household Vaseline.) Leaving the last foot of the tippet degreased allows the fly to hang just under the surface like an emerging buzzer.

A gentle breeze was causing a slight ripple on the water. "Just perfect", I thought, as I waded slowly into the shallow end of the dam. I cast a short line into the breeze so that the fly could drift back past me. The leader turned over smartly, presenting the buzzer ever so delicately. I watched the point of entry like a hawk as the line drifted with the breeze, taking up the resulting slack at the same time. It was not long before my leader suddenly disappeared under the surface and I had the satisfying feeling of a fish on the other end of my line. The two weight outfit cushioned the take beautifully, ensuring the preservation of the fine tippet.

I went on to catch another three trout that morning, using the same fly and technique. The fourth fish is one that I will always remember.

I had cast out in the usual manner. The fly reached the end of its drift, without any takes, so I proceeded to retrieve it slowly. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a trout cruising in a most unhurried manner along the edge of a weed bed. I could see the white of his mouth every time he opened and closed it. My fly was now also visible to me as it neared the same weed bed. Leaving it static, I waited for the trout to close the gap. When he came to within a few feet of my buzzer, I raised the rod tip ever so slightly. The fish nonchalantly cruised up to the rising fly, opened his mouth, closed it and all I had to do was lift my rod tip in order to set the hook.

The experience was so satisfying, that I immediately packed up and headed for home, completely at peace with the world. In my 25 years of fly fishing, I have accumulated some haunting memories of fish lost. Memories of fish caught soon disappear in the mists of time, but every once in a while that special fish is landed which one will never forget. It is not the size of the fish that matters. The whole series of events that take place, finally culminating in the catch and subsequent release of the fish, forges itself in the memory for posterity. Similar memories include a wild rainbow trout of no bigger than nine inches, which I tempted for half an hour with various dry flies. I eventually took him by landing the fly on top of a rock and gently pulling it off. These are the things that make fly fishing the great sport that it is.

“ This peculiar and almost immediate relief which this innocent pursuit of flyfishing yields to the distressed or uneasy mind, by calming the perturbations which misfortunes or other vexatious circumstances may have excited, is to be ranked among the first of its recommendations ”
George C. Bainbridge – The Fly Fishers Guide, 1816