

Circus Trout

by Darryl Lampert

Towards the end of last season on a warm April day, I was fishing a small, tightly bushed stream with a friend. We were both fishing our Sage 000weights, which are ideal for this kind of water where the average size fish is around four to six inches.

Back casts are a luxury not often enjoyed, and with the canopy often closed in above, standard roll casts can also be problematic. Most of the time, the casting consists of bow and arrow casts or short sideways flicks. A handy technique I picked up after watching one of the Joe Humphry DVD's on casting in tight bush, is to wiggle the line left and right off the water towards you and then flick it forwards. This all sounds really impressive, but in reality a lot of time is spent retrieving one's fly from the often claustrophobically close vegetation. On this occasion, when we did manage to get our flies into the water, we were rewarded with numerous pretty rainbows.

We came up to a crystal clear and shallow pool, where a large, bushy branch blocked the tail of the pool. I peeked over the branch and saw four or five nice fish on the feed. I watched them for some time and recorded a couple of video clips. It was time to try and catch one of them, but the only problem was how? With the canopy totally grown over the pool and a bushy branch across the tail, I could see no way of casting my fly without spooking them. A bow and arrow cast would have landed my fly in the nearest bush and a side cast would have ended in a similar way. With the nearest fish only five or so feet in front of me, I decided to try and poke my rod through the branches and simply lower the fly in front of him. Moving extremely slowly so as not to spook it, I slowly started pushing the tip of my rod through a gap in the branches. I was using on one of my CDC midges, which was dangling from more than a metre about of 7x tippet. I inched the fly closer and closer and slowly lowered it towards the water surface.

In reality, the whole process probably lasted 15 seconds, but seemed to take an age. The fly was now about six inches above the water surface and about 6 – 8 inches behind the nearest rainbow.

I wasn't sure what the fish would do when my rod tip entered its field of vision, but I was hoping that it would be camouflaged by the canopy of branches. Suddenly without warning, the fish turned like a circus trapeze artist and launched itself out the water at my fly. It grabbed the fly and hit the water with a splash!

Replaying the moment in mind afterwards, I tightened into the fish and landed it after a short fight. In reality, I got such a fright I struck too hard pulling the fly out of the fish's mouth and getting it caught in the tree above me. I tried the same technique on a couple of other fish that day but always managed to spook them.

I now have new respect for a fish's windows of vision.