



Hoppers and Beetles and Ants — Oh, My!

by Walt Fulps

I remember the first time I laughed at a trout fly. It bears noting that it was the only time I've ever laughed at a trout fly, which is an indicator of how memorable the fly turned out to be. That fly single-handedly cured my skepticism of silly-looking artificials.

After high school, I decided I would make it my annual summer ritual to pack up my hatchback and head to the mountains for a couple weeks of roughing it in search of new and interesting places to catch trout. In case you were wondering, this was B.W. (before wife).

During one of those early trips, I was given a tip by another angler about where to find a secret little gem of a trout stream supposedly full of wild rainbows, and, of course, I sought out the hamlet of a town for which the creek was named. In 1988, the little creek did not appear on any map I could find, but the clerk at the town's combination hardware and tackle shop gave me directions to get to the best fishing areas. I was assured that I could ignore any trespass signs I found — the landowners didn't care if people fished there, as long as they didn't litter or keep any fish. So, with an 18-year-old's faith that he wouldn't get in any trouble, I headed out.

I found the creek, I found the rainbows, and I had a great time. I only saw one other fisherman coming the opposite direction, and we stopped to chat and smoke. I was proud to announce that I'd caught seven or eight fish, even though none of them topped 9 inches in length. He had me beat, though. He reported 30 fish, including one that pushed 20 inches. Ridiculous! He had to be pulling my leg. "If you don't believe that, then you probably won't believe this either," he said with a smile, showing me the fly on the end of his line. That's when I embarrassed myself by laughing out loud — I was so sure he was joking. I was no fool! However, he was a gentleman, and offered me one of his silly-looking flies to try.

It reminded me of a cork bass popper, but it was cylindrical in shape, painted black and yellow, and was punctuated with a series of rubber legs that had been poked through the two-inch-long body from side-to-side. He called it the "Extra Terrestrial."

If I see grasshoppers flitting here and there as I'm walking along a riverbank, I'm very apt to tie one on. Beetles, on the other hand, are often drawn to the smell of decay, and I generally only go that route after picking up the scent of a nearby dead critter.

Contrary to popular opinion, you don't have to wait for a windy day to fish terrestrials. In fact, even just a few days with a light breeze will put enough bugs on the water to remind the trout that they should keep one eye on the heavens for potential gifts from above. If I'm wandering upstream in the summertime, I'll probably nymph. But when the sun's on the water and it's time to head back downstream to the car, a terrestrial is often the first fly out of the box.



Flies like it were obviously the inspiration for many of the foam terrestrial patterns we have today. With that one fly, I caught more fish than I thought possible, before finally breaking it off in the mouth of a monster. That day terrestrial fishing hooked a lot of trout, but more importantly, it really hooked me.

A terrestrial insect is any bug that grows up on land and accidentally ends up in the water. This can include houseflies, spiders, wasps, moths, and so on, but I categorize the most common terrestrial trout food into two primary groups: "clumsy flyers" and "tree huggers."

The tree hugger group includes any bug that will spend part of its life on tree limbs and branches, including ants, caterpillars, inchworms, leaf cutters and the like. They generally don't have a problem holding on, but a stiff breeze will often shake the branches solidly enough that a sudden "hatch" of tree huggers will hit the water all at once. If I were a trout, I'd get excited too! However, my personal preference is the clumsy flyer group. Grasshoppers and beetles can end up on the water at any time, simply because they have delusions of grandeur regarding their flying



Just in case you're not convinced, here's my final pitch. When a trout begins grabbing ants, beetles and grasshoppers, the allure is in the fact that these bugs don't run away and are easy to see. The fish won't be picky, and they won't demand a delicate presentation. In other words, tie on anything big and clunky that looks like it might fall out of tree, slap it hard onto the water's surface (and I really mean PLOP it down good), let it drift four or five feet, pick it up nice and slow, and repeat! If you use this technique while leisurely strolling along your favorite trout stream during the warmer months, you'll be amazed how much fun you'll have.

Walt Fulps is the owner of Trout Hunter Fly Fishing School and Ozark Taxidermy, both based in Rolla, MO. You can reach him through his website, www.MissouriTroutHunter.com.