

# Playing Hard To Get

Andy Smith highlights the areas we need to look at in order to keep catching when the going gets tough.

**N**ot catching? This can be an ever-present problem for many fly anglers and not just among the relatively inexperienced.

At the start of the year the obligatory Cat's Whisker, Black Nobbler or something big and orange will often work wonders when the lake is full of hungry and naive fresh stockies. However, as things progress, abject frustration can soon set in as often some anglers chalk up blank after blank.

The problem is that trout soon adapt to natural feeding

and if you are fishing a 'catch and release' venue where these trout have been caught once or twice, they will soon begin to ignore some of our more flamboyant patterns.

Natural food is the key, and flies emulating that food will see you do well.

## Fish Food

It is relevant to have some knowledge of fly and insect life – entomology – to give you a fighting chance.

There's no need to be any kind of expert here, unless you really take to the subject, but a basic understanding of

what is going to be of prime interest to the fish is always going to help you.

We all know what to tie on when the fish are hitting hawthorns or even mayflies – it's easy because we all know what these flies are and can recognise them as we see the fish literally snatching them off the surface. Yet this is happening in and around the stillwaters and rivers all the time; unfortunately, though, all too often it's happening sub-surface and so it is never seen. This lack of visibility leaves many anglers at a total loss as to what to fish with.

## Observe, Consider, Then Select!

Resist the temptation to tackle up and tie on a fly before even looking at the water. It really does pay to have a walk around first and see what's what before getting ready.

When there's an abundance of a particular food source available to trout, they will become obsessed with it and ignore anything else presented to them. They become selective.

## Selectivity

The trout's number-one food source, the buzzer, is a





A selection of flies that will help you catch when the trout are proving hard to come by – you'll note that they are all very drab.

perfect example of selectivity, especially those that are about to hatch, hanging in the surface film.

You'll often see fish rising everywhere, but none seem to want to take your fly. You may get a number of aborted swirls but that's about it; something is not right. This can go on for hours resulting in total, and I mean total, frustration. Another angler, passing by and telling you that they have had their limit on the very same fly, soon tops this off!

It's not just about choosing the correct fly; more often than not it's how to fish it that becomes pivotal to success.

If we consider large buzzers hanging under the water just touching the surface, fishing a Black Klinkhamer – however good a fly it is – probably gets the attention of trout, but no hook-ups. Think about it – the Klink sits sort of flat on the surface, not hanging. Therefore the feeding fish don't recognise it in the same way as they do a CDC Shuttlecock Buzzer.

It's worth noting that real buzzers hanging in the surface film require no effort in being

sipped down into the trout's mouth, so your imitation has to mimic that same lack of surface tension.

Trout collecting emerging buzzers need only open their mouths and the buzzer is drawn in, so if your fly is too buoyant the trout won't take it or will abort their take at the last second.

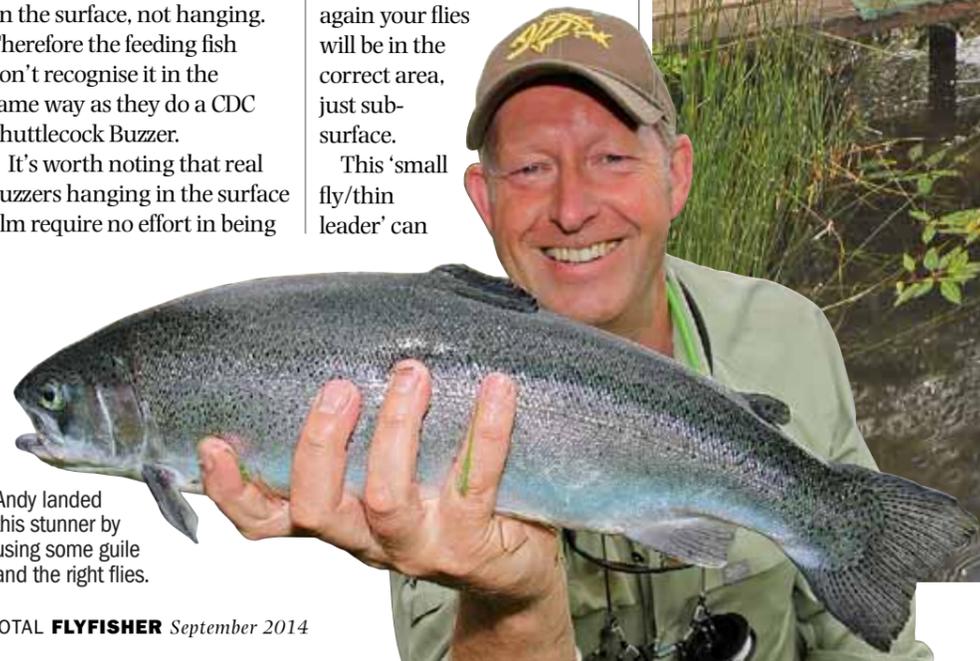
This selective feeding pattern is the same no matter what the trout are feeding on, so you must tailor your approach and adapt your tactics to keep on catching.

**Smaller And Thinner**

When stillwater trout seem picky, it's also worth fishing much smaller flies and changing to a fine, copolymer tapered leader. If the flies are small – sizes 16, 18 and 20 – their weight won't cause the leader to sink, or if it does it'll be at a very slow rate and so again your flies will be in the correct area, just sub-surface.

This 'small fly/thin leader' can

Trees near the water's edge will harbour all manner of bugs – the fish below are keen to take advantage, so try small dry flies fished on the surface.



Andy landed this stunner by using some guile and the right flies.



Ask the locals if they are doing any good; they'll know where the fish are.



A sedge, stripped slowly across the surface, proved too much for this little rainbow.



Andy uses the cover behind him so that his silhouette is not highlighted – a good ploy when the trout are close in.

be a lethal combination and if you use this method over clear water you will often see the fish take an interest and head straight for the fly rather than just pass it by.

**Don't Be Caught Out**

A succession of warm days could see you takn fish after fish using

dry-fly tactics; if this is then interrupted by a cold north or easterly breeze it will see the trout disappear from view.

Don't be fooled, though, they are still there. They will simply have moved down from the wind-cooled surface layers to the warmer sub-surface and will now concentrate on feeding a few inches to a foot or so deeper, so you won't see them.

Try fishing small buzzers or flies such as Diawl Bachs just below the surface. These flies often bring results.

However, even lightly dressed Diawl Bachs will sink quite rapidly and so set up your leader with the buzzer or Diawl Bach as the dropper fly and then add a small deer-hair sedge pattern on the point,

which will stay afloat and therefore keep the dropper fishing just sub-surface and exactly where needed.

A largish Hopper, overdressed Daddy or Booby

curve for those anglers who invest in some decent polarising sunglasses. At this fishery, more often than not you see the take or refusal of the fly as it happens.

Refusals for me are just as important as the take; if several trout ignore your offering it's obviously time to change something! I

“It isn't long before I see a few fish cruising around, the odd one breaking the surface to take down something invisible to me.”

will do the same. Don't worry if the point fly does become waterlogged and eventually sinks; its sink rate will be so slow it will in itself often become an attractive meal for a trout.

Having something a bit on the overdressed side positioned on the point can be a good attractor. Trout may home in for a look yet turn away and take your natural-looking dropper fly.

**The Perfect Venue**

Trinity Lakes Fly Fishing, located just to the east of Nottingham, is a really picturesque water, well stocked with rainbows, browns and blues. Its water clarity means that fishing here can be a massive learning

can have sessions where I'll change flies so many times that I have to make up new leaders, but once I'm on the button, as it were, it's action all the way.

Today it isn't long before I see a few fish cruising around, with the odd one feeding and breaking the surface to take down something invisible to me.

It's a typical end of summer day – very bright, still warm, almost a flat calm. The fishing, I guess, is simple; my cast of Diawl Bach and buzzer, fished on a 12ft leader on a floating line, is allowed to drop through the water in front of these cruisers, but sadly very little interest is shown.

This continues on and on, and it takes me a whole

morning of swirling takes and meagre tugs at the line to finally bite the bullet and change.

### Going Lightweight

These fish are obviously wary, very wary, so I select a finer leader setup, dropping down to 3lb, and I tie on a tiny nymph, something natural in a size 18.

It's the sort of fly that most river anglers would be proud to use.

Within 20 minutes or so I hook one: after letting my tiny fly sink for a second or two I pull the line and it locks up! On my light outfit I soon have a lovely little rainbow played out, unhooked and returned. I think I've cracked it.

“After the fly has sunk about a foot below the surface, I see a flash and then my line tightens – it's fish on again.”

### Keeping It Up For Longer

I like this little nymph, but I want to keep it higher in the water for longer; it's falling through the water too fast, so I tie on a dropper and place it there, and use a Daddy on the point to keep everything up.

Daddies will often work well out in the open as the calm water meets the ripple and, sure enough, I don't have to wait long before it's engulfed by another rainbow, the perfect twin of the first.

### Fishfest

I move on to the second lake, where there are plenty of trout across an area of no more than about 20 yards, and they are all feeding vigorously at the surface. After an hour of fruitless fishing with what I think are the correct flies for the feeding fish – CDC Buzzers and Kinkhamers – I have to have a rethink.

Nothing is visible on the surface, so it's time to go

deeper. I change to a small gold-headed wet fly, all peacock herl and a soft hackle, with the idea being to drop through the surface fish, suspecting others would be holding lower down, almost waiting their turn for food as there is so much activity on top.

### Deeper Down

It works, and within a minute I'm playing another furious rainbow. It goes crazy, sending the other trout scattering in all directions, then sadly, within a few seconds, it's off!

I check the fly – it's always a good idea after you lose one, the hook may be blunt or the point turned in – and it's fine, so I cast again.

After the fly has sunk about a foot below the surface, I see a flash and then my line tightens – it's fish on again.

As I catch sight of the trout in the depths, with flashes of beaming silver from its flanks reflecting back the sunlight, plus the pure fighting power, it can mean only one thing – I've hooked a blue. They fight like hell and truly look like bars of silver reflecting in the sub-surface as they refuse to give up, but with steady pressure I get it in the net.

As the afternoon progresses I go on to catch several more and I lose quite a number of others before finally calling it a day.

The frustrations I had felt at the start of the day, and indeed when I moved on to the second lake for the first time, are long gone and, although it's the end of a tough session, there is great satisfaction in what some might say was a “hard day's fishing.” **IFF**

