

Caddisflies

Text and
Illustrations by
Jerry Hobbs

Second in a series



Before I became a fly fisherman I was an entomology student at the Univ. of Colorado in Boulder. One of the most fascinating of the insects to me was the caddisfly. The larvae of caddisflies either construct cases around themselves for protection while they prey on other aquatic life or they construct a silken net by which they trap their prey, usually in faster water.

Different species use different materials to make their cases- small pebbles, sticks, leaves, shells, or sand. They then lurk inside the case to catch unsuspecting prey. Or, in the case of certain other species, they use their nets to catch prey.

Caddisflies engage in complete metamorphosis, so have 4 stages in their life cycle: egg, larva, pupa, adult. Each stage in complete metamorphosis is distinct from the others- imagine a butterfly- egg, caterpillar, pupa (cocoon), and then adult. The adult caddis is unusual in that they hold their wings tent like over their body when at rest. They lay their eggs in the water and are usually taken by fish as they rise back to the surface after egg laying and as they try to kick through the surface film and break free to fly away. According to Jim Schollmeyer in his article "Fishing a Caddisfly Hatch" in the Summer 2006 issue of Flyfishing and Tying Journal, you can tell more or less how trout are feeding by observing the rises, if such exists.



Breaking the surface indicates that the fish is taking a caddis (or other insect) at or near the surface. Further, if the take is slow the fish is probably taking a spent or dead form, which is not a threat to escape. A fast take usually means the fish is hitting an adult or emerging adult, which is a threat to escape. Trout feeding within a foot or two feet of the surface produce a more or less gentle boil. This tells you to fish a little deeper.

One successful method is to tie on an adult caddisfly imitation, such as an elk hair caddis or a deer hair caddis, in the proper color. 18" below this tie on an immature pattern, like a sparkle pupa. As Jim Schollmeyer suggests, treat the dry as an indicator. Set the hook if it moves or there is the slightest disturbance of the water around it.

Just as an aside, statistics show that trout take nine times as many larvae or nymphs as adults. Don't leave off the dropper. Caddisfly hatches occur throughout Arizona and there is hardly a time on any stream where caddisflies are not available in some form. In the Summer 2006 issue of "Fly Tyer" magazine (page 28) you will find an article on tying realistic and effective patterns for caddis larvae. Check it out!



Go-To Flies When Caddis are Hatching:

Wet: Fuzzy Wuzzy, Hare's Ear tied heavy
Dry: Elk Hair Caddis, Stimulator

-Ron Robinson