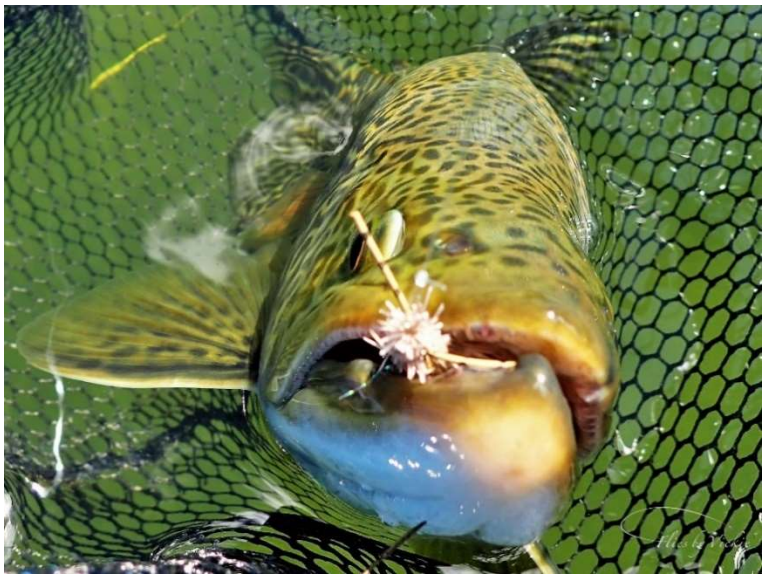
Traveling Sedge Caddis



The traveling sedge one of the largest of 1200 species of caddisfly found in North America. Its name is derived from the adults' distinctive behavior of running-skating across the surface which creates a wake. The wake attracts the attention of trout, which are drawn to the prospect of a juicy source of protein. During a hatch, trout will key on these tasty insects which can be over an inch in length.

Brown Trout



Monster Lake located south of Cody, Wyoming, provides a unique opportunity to fish the traveling sedge hatch. After experiencing this hatch myself, this article provides information on fishing strategies and techniques that brought me success.

Increasing your understanding of the sedge's life cycle, habitat, and behavior will enable you to better understand presentation, line selection, and retrieves when fishing this extraordinary hatch.

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I. Traveling Sedge Caddis Life Cycle

An aquatic cousin of the moth, the adult sedge caddis is light tan in color, and can grow to an inch or more in length. Its mottled brown and tan wings fold to form a tent shape. It has long legs and its antennae can exceed the length of its body. The life cycle includes the egg, larva, pupa and adult stage.



The traveling sedge skates across the water creating a wake before taking flight to mate. Mating occurs on the ground amid shoreline vegetation. Their life span as an adult is relatively short, devoted solely to mating and depositing eggs.

Traveling sedge caddis wake

After mating, the female returns to the water, releasing her eggs by dipping the end of her abdomen into the water while skittering across the water's surface. After the eggs are deposited, they sink to the bottom and within a few weeks hatch into larva.



Female laying eggs

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The young larva form cocoon-like casings and undergo up to 5 instars (molts) during a 2-year period. Each time they molt, they shed their larval casings. The final instar transforms the larva into the pupa stage. The pupa breaks out of their larval case and begins its steady swim from the bottom of the lake to the surface. Using their long hind legs to propel them, they make short gliding movements upwards towards the surface. Upon reaching the surface, they shed their pupal casing to emerge as an adult.



Traveling Sedge crawling out of its pupal casing



After the pupae emerge as adults on the surface, the traveling sedge positions its wings upright to dry.

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Interestingly, the color of their abdomen changes after emergence. The abdomen of a recently emerged adult sedge adult has striations of yellow and olive. The color of the abdomen then changes to a tan color. Trout will key on both the newly emerged adults skittering on the surface or the egg-laying females.



Tiger Trout taking a dry fly caddis pattern during the traveling sedge hatch at Monster Lake, Wyoming



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II. Fishing Tactics: Adult Stage of Traveling Sedge

Line Selection: When adult traveling sedges are hatching, use a floating line in olive or other darker and muted colors. I find that in stillwater environments, a light-colored floating line is visible and spooks trout during sunny and clear water conditions.

Brian Clarke and John Goddard, in The Trout and the Fly…A New Approach (© 1987, Lyons Press), agree, stating that white or light-colored lines should not be used when the trout are close to the surface because the color is highly visible to trout. Green and blue are the least visible colors to fish during conditions of normal light. Goddard's research found that the reflection of the sun on the line can create line flash which spooks fish.



Yellow and white floating line is highly visible under the surface

Leader and Tippet: Use a 9-foot monofilament leader with 24-36" fluorocarbon tippet. This leader length provided immediate response to the strike. I tested various leaders' lengths up to 15 feet. I found that although a longer leader helped mitigate line flash during clear, flat, and sunny conditions, it created slack resulting in missed hookups.

For Monster Lake, I used a 0X leader with 1X fluorocarbon tippet to help prevent break offs; the trout on this lake are that big and aggressive! On other lakes which do not support such large trout, adjusting your leader and tippet sizes to 3X and 4X, respectively, should suffice.

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Retrieve: Use a continuous, short, slow, 4-inch retrieve, interspersed with distinct 4-5 second pauses. I observed trout take the fly during the pause while the fly sat quietly on the surface. The reason to slow down the retrieve is because of the effect warmer water has on trout's feeding behavior. When the water warms up, fish are less willing to chase a fly due to the lower oxygen content in the upper sections of the water column.

Several times I observed the trout first swamping the traveling sedge to prevent it from flying away, then taking the subsurface sedge on the second pass. If you see this happening, watch and wait. After the trout makes its first pass, continue to strip with a slow strip of the drowned fly. The trout will take it on the second pass. Wait until you feel the line tighten before setting the hook. This technique is harder to execute than you might imagine. It can be difficult to wait and resist reacting when a huge trout boils over your fly on its first pass!



This trout swamped the fly first and then came back and took it on the second pass

Positioning on the lake: Hatches occur in shallow water in 7-10 feet of water above submerged weed beds and next to aquatic vegetation. I also observed trout cruising along shallow shoreline edges even during high sun and flat conditions seeking these tasty morsels. If you see a trout, cast 4-5 feet ahead in front of the cruising trout.

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Craig Aguilar, casting fly next to the shoreline edge, immediately hooked cruising trout

Floatant: Dress the fly pattern with floatant to maintain its buoyancy. Avoid greasing the leader as this causes dimples along the leader and will make it more visible to trout (described by Goddard in The Trout and the Fly).

Hatch: At Monster Lake, the hatch occurred two times a day, first between noon and 2:30 pm, and then at dusk.

Pattern Selection: Anglers should use caddis dry fly patterns that are reflective of the size of the adult traveling sedge. If fishing in lakes which support trophy size trout like Monster Lake, dry fly hook size can be up to a size #8. Select a hook that is strong enough to withstand the hard takes, aerial acrobatics, and long runs that can take you into your backing. I tried various caddis patterns and I found that they were all effective.

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III. Fishing Tactics: Pupa Stage of the Traveling Sedge

During a hatch, when trout were selective to the pupa stage, they refused all offerings of the adult fly. For example, when windy conditions put the hatch down or if the hatch has not yet started, fishing a pupa pattern is effective. When trout become selective it is always to the stage of an insect, not the specific insect.

Line Selection: A floating line can be used but is problematic during windy conditions. The line will bow creating slack, and line drag will move the fly in an unnatural manner. The other issue is surface disturbance caused when retrieving the line. All these factors can spook trout. In my opinion, the two preferred line options when fishing the pupa stage are the slow intermediate sinking line, and the slow intermediate sink tip line.

Option 1: Intermediate sinking line (sink rate: 1.25-2.0 ips): The advantage of this line is it is possible to move the fly diagonally upwards through the water column, mirroring the upward movement of the pupa rising towards the surface. To do this, cast 30-40 feet, count down 30 seconds, then start the retrieve. The 30-count allows the fly to sink. When the fly is retrieved, it moves at an upwards diagonal angle, mirroring the upward movement of the traveling sedge pupa. Slow, 4-6-inch retrieves interspersed with definite pauses from 3-7 seconds.

Option 2: Intermediate sink tip line (sink rate: 1.25-2.0 ips): The advantage of this line is that it is effective in maintaining the fly in the top 2 feet of the water column above the weed beds. It also works well along shallow shore line areas. After casting the line, use a 5 second count before starting the retrieve. If no strike occurs, retrieve the line 4-6 inches, pause for 5 seconds and then continue to repeat the pull and pause technique. If not hit, most likely there weren't any trout located in that spot. Recast in a different direction.



Craig Aguilar landed this brown trout in using a slow intermediate seven-foot sink tip.

Leader and Tippet: Use a 9-foot monofilament leader and 3 feet of fluorocarbon tippet for a combined length of 12 feet. For Monster Lake, I used a 0X leader with 1X fluorocarbon tippet.

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Pattern Selection:



My UV Emerger pattern in Tan, White and Rusty Brown all worked well when the trout were selective to the pupa stage.

During choppy conditions, I switched to my Grizzly Bug pattern, and fished it along shallow shore line edges which proved deadly.





Landing a big trout with attitude is always exciting, but doing so with a dry fly really offers anglers an unforgettable rush. If running into your backing, watching aerial acrobatics, and white knuckling it while landing behemoth trout fires up your imagination, then you should add fishing the traveling sedge caddis hatch at Monster Lake on your bucket list!

Watch for my next article which will be on chironomids and midges!

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