Bite has stopped or has it?

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When there are no visual cues of feeding fish and you're not getting hit, it can be a perplexing and frustrating trying to figure out what to do. This article explains why you might not be getting hit, and what to do to find feeding trout.

Feeding trout are constantly on the move seeking food. Their need to feed is the driving force that makes trout willing to move away from the safety of protective cover. The key is to fish when and where trout are feeding.

Trout feed along shoreline edges early and late in the day, and in the top 1-3 feet when aquatic insects are hatching. Remember, if there are no visible water surface rings, that doesn't mean the fish have necessary stopped feeding. They may have moved to a different location on the lake or to a different depth in the water column. An example of this comes from a recent trip I made to South Fork Reservoir in Nevada.



South Fork Reservoir

I got on the water at 8:30 in the morning. The sky was partly cloudy and air temperature a wintry 23 degrees F. Water temperature was a warm 51 degrees F.

Concentric rings appeared close to the shoreline edges indicating fish feeding on small aquatic nymphs near the surface. Seeing those rings made my rod hand itchy with anticipation. "OK," I thought, "this should be an epic fishing adventure!"

Grabbing my rod, I kicked near the shoreline edges where the rings were forming. Casting in 4 feet of water toward the shore using my white AP Nymph, I landed ten fish in two hours.



Vickie's AP Nymph

Then everything suddenly stopped, no strikes, no observable fish, no hook ups. What happened?

In previous years I would have remained in the same location on the lake and tried changing flies. If that did not work, I would have assumed that the bite was over, packed up my gear, and left. Now I adjust my presentation. Here is what I did:

No visible rings on the surface indicated the trout had stopped feeding on pupae in the top two feet and had moved into a deeper zone. The clouds had dissipated, and the sun moved higher in the sky. The clear sky and sunny conditions had removed the trout's protective cover. Since fish have no eyelids and are highly sensitive to light, they had moved away from the shallows into a deeper zone to feed.

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Determining where they were feeding now was the task. I kicked from the shallow four feet water over to a depth of 7-9 feet. Still moving parallel to the shoreline, I cast to the left and right of my pontoon boat.

As I moved through the water slowly casting to either side, I allowed my intermediate 7' sink tip line to sink for a 10-second count before retrieving. Nothing happened. I lengthened my count to 20 before the retrieve; still nothing. Finally, I increased the count to 30 and started the retrieve. Fish on! Allowing the fly to sink to the feeding zone before initiating my retrieve triggered a reactive bite.



Trout caught at South Fork, Nevada on Vickie's Black UV Midge



Vickie's UV Midge

Trout had previously been feeding on pupae in the upper 1-2 feet, but now were feeding in the 3-5 feet zone. Adjusting the presentation depth was the key. A 30-second count put the fly 3 feet below the surface to where the fish were holding (my intermediate sink tip line sinks approximately one foot for every 10 seconds). I continued moving through the water while presenting the fly at that depth and landed eight more fish by noon. By 3pm, I had landed and released a total of 39 fish, five of which were 26 inches.

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Towards the afternoon, I hooked into a 26-inch behemoth which broke the tip of the new rod I had just pulled out of its rod case. I continued to fish without the upper third of the rod! It's interesting to fish without a rod tip – it makes it more difficult to determine the size of the fish until you bring them in close enough to get a look. My dismay over the broken rod was offset by the delight of such a wonderful and productive day on the water.



Fishing with a broken rod tip

When the bite seems to have stopped, I often find presenting the fly at a different depth a successful strategy. The fish are still there; it is just that their feeding behavior has shifted due to changing conditions.

Information on fishing cold water conditions coming in the December's blog entry.

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