

GET FLY TO RUNNERS AND RESTERS

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It has long been accepted by many anglers that running fish are virtually impossible to catch. This is because they have read time and time again in many angling books or monthly periodicals that running fish are unwilling or reluctant to take a lure. Going from my own experiences I have not found this to be the case. Most of my own fishing has been done on the spate streams along the west coast of Scotland, but when the opportunities arise I have also been fortunate enough to be able fish most of the larger world famous east coast rivers. If we approach the sport with an open mind and adopt particular methods of fishing for a specific type of fish, i.e. runners or resters, or residents we will increase our chances of taking a fish or two when others who stick to the old indoctrinated practices go fishless. This means fishing in a fashion that will allow us to present our fly in front of as many fish as possible at any particular time. The more fish we can present our fly to the greater will be the chance of one taking hold of it. This is why the fishing on the Kola is so good. In saying this however there is no legal method of angling that will guarantee fish, regardless of whether we are spending £20 a season for an association spate stream or £200 a day on a middle beat of the Tay or Spey, or even £1000 for a day on the Junction Pool of the Tweed during the autumn. We must therefore maximise our chances of hooking fish regardless of where we are fishing at the time. This means adopting and trying different approaches to the accepted methods commonly used for the prevailing river conditions at the time.

It is all very well fishing with a floating line and small fly when the water and air temperature dictates, but, if the water is flowing with an extra 18 inches on the gauge and running coloured we will not be fishing in a fashion that will maximise our chances of taking a fish. Anyway much of that which has been written about the floating line and small fly technique has been centred around the experience of those who fish and frequent the Spey or Dee during late spring or the early summer months. These accepted and practised floating lines techniques can be used in the lesser rain fed rivers to some effect, but for best results in these spate streams the floating line and small fly setup has to be fished when the fish are starting to take up medium to long stay lies between floods.



The salmon is such an unpredictable quarry in its taking behaviour that anyone who writes absolutes will very soon find themselves walking down a minefield with no escape route and this is a path which I have no intention of walking down. In saying this there does seem to be "accepted" methods that will take salmon under designated conditions i.e. if the water is cold our lure should be fished slow and deep, or a small fly fished in conjunction with a floating line once the water starts to warm up during late spring. These general accepted methods when fished during the times mentioned previously will continue to give sport. But both of these methods if fished at different times to the accepted ones can produce sport from running and resting salmon, particularly during the summer and early autumn.

From my own experiences, nigh on over 45 years fishing for salmon, it would seem that "running" spate stream salmon are much more easily caught than "running" fish in the larger classic east coast rivers. Why I have no idea, but I feel that perhaps it is because the salmon which run the larger classics are not so desperate in their rush upstream, the whole affair not being so hectic, whereas the salmon which run the shorter, and usually swifter flowing spate streams are more excited and desperate to run upstream as far as possible, during the short time, that the spate allows. In order to increase our chances of a fish we must choose where and how we are going to present our flies.

Running fish in any river do not swim very deep i.e. usually no more than about 18 inches down, however in a spate stream the running fish seem more likely to take in the fast water at the top of the pool, or the slower water at the tail. If given a choice of only fishing one location for running fish I would opt for the tail every time. The belly of the pools always seems to produce less sport at such times. As well as this they into the bargain seem to produce the staler fish as well during such times. By fishing with a slow sinking line and a fly of "suitable" size for the prevailing water conditions I have had good sport when others had not a touch. My technique at this time is to fish with a fairly large fly tied on either a 1 to 2 inch tube, or a number 6 low water double hook, usually a Pot Bellied Pig type beastie. The overall size of the fly being about 2 to 2.5 inches. In the faster streamy water at the head of the pool it is best to use a weighty fly, or have a few dressed on some 1 inch copper tubes. It is also best to keep the leader length on the short side, three or four feet as this helps to keep the fly at the desired depth. Since the fish that I am intending to tempt in this fast streamy water are running fish, I am confident knowing that my fly is fishing at a depth, which is on an eyeball to eyeball level with the fish. If the fly is at the same depth as the fish they seem much more willing to take it. This technique works well with fresh run fish, if fished right in the neck of the stream at the head of the pool, but in saying this I have also hooked fish at the tail of a pool using this same method. The whole affair on some occasions being quite visible if the water has not been too coloured. If this method of fishing with a slow sinking line had only accounted for a few fish I would not be preaching its benefits . Fishing with a fairly large fly fished in this fashion has caught me many salmon, when others, fishing a small fly at the time, because the water temperature dictated failed to move a fish.. By having fish take in this fashion I started to question the writings of the so called authorities on the subject that running fish do not take. From my own observations and experiences over the years I am convinced that the majority of running spate stream salmon which are inclined to take do so in slower water at the tail of the pool, however when the water starts to fall away, but still flowing with sufficient volume to allow them to run, the head of the pool becomes more productive. It is by observing the fish that take at the tail of the pool which has convinced me running fish prefer a large fly. On many occasions particularly during the autumn I have watched salmon appear over the lip of a weir and take my fly as it swung round in the current past its nose while swimming forward into the pool. When they are taking in the faster streamier water at the head of the pool some of the fish appear to reduce their running speed while assessing the pace of current before pushing on up through the rough water, which they are about to swim through. On many occasions swim through this faster water they must, because it is this fast water which usually separates one pool from the next on the smaller rivers and also because it generally extends across the entire width of the

river. Although some salmon will reduce their running speed I have noticed that they still however continue moving forward. Some will circle a few times swim forward and drop back in the current, repeating the whole process a few times before ascending further. Regardless of why they do this, they are as far as I am concerned running fish. Running fish in the larger rivers are more inclined to take will on the move in tails or the slower middle section of the pool. Why this difference in taking behaviour between a salmon running one type of river, and a salmon running another I am not sure. It does however seem to be the case. Possibly this is due to the fact that usually the fast stream at the head of the pools in these larger east coast classics generally does not extend across the full width of the pool. The fish therefore do not have to run up through the main flow. They can find less powerful flows in to swim through in order to run further upstream. In spate streams there are some pockets of slow water in the neck of the pool, but very often the fish have to go through the fast water because they do not have any choice.



Before choosing ones fly and fly line to use however, we must decide whether it will be for either resting or running fish. When the river is at the maximum migration height the majority of fish will be engaged in running rather than resting. In order to tempt these running fish it is far better to fish the fly shallow, no more than 18 inches down, as mentioned previously, while 9 to 12 inches usually is better. Fish which are running, are much more likely to rise to a fly fished at the same level as them or above them, than one which is swimming beneath them. If the fly is presented beneath them the chances of them seeing it will not be as good. This is because the eye positioning of a salmon is primarily designed for forward and upward vision. As well as fishing our fly at the correct depth we must also present it in the right place. In order to intercept running fish with this method it is best to concentrate our efforts to the head and tail of the pools. The ideal water heights for this method will be different for every river and must be learned through experience. By doing so we can however then present our fly in the fashion previously described. When presenting our fly during the period of maximum migration, at a shallow swimming depth, we will be showing it to more fish, than we would if we where to fish it deep and just off the bottom. The whole object is not to achieve too much depth.

When fishing a classic east coast river running at normal height with fresh fish running upstream every day I tend to think that the water temperature is the important factor in helping us select the size of fly. However, if we are fishing a spate stream it is the water height and colour that will dictate the size of fly. This is something that many acknowledged experts on the subject fail to mention. Running fish that do take our fly are not however always well hooked, with a lot of fish being pricked, lost or only lightly hooked. They do not for some reason like to take a good hold of a fly, but instead prefer to nip or pluck at it.

When spate rivers start to fallback and begin to clear after a flood, most anglers who choose to fish the fly will invariable fish a floating line and small fly. Well from my experience this does not seem to be the best approach at this time, especially if fish are still running in numbers. In many smaller rain dependant rivers there is generally long rough sections of water between pools, and any fish which run up through these sections, will generally favour having a moments breather in the tail of the pool, that they have just entered. These fish will on occasions rise to a small fly fished on a floating line, but for best chance of sport they are best presented with a largish fly fished deep, right in front of their noses. The fly is effectively presented on a plate to them. I prefer to fish for these short stay resters with a sinking line and a long fly of about 2.5 inches in total length. It is not the water temperature that concerns me at this time, but the water height and colour. As the water starts to clear and fall I will change down the size of fly to 2 inches and then to a 1.5 inch fly. I would still fish them though in

conjunction with a sinking line until the river falls right back to height when all fish migration stops. At that time I would fish the small fly and floating line.

My reason for fishing the sinking line for fresh run resting fish is related to my "conservation of energy theory" Let me explain. If you had just exerted a lot of energy i.e. like an athlete during a race you would want get your breath back at the end of it and would be reluctant to move far until you had had a bit of a breather. Like the athletes bending forward and supporting their legs, i.e. the recovery position, after going through the finishing line. Any creature that exerts energy must have time to replenish the oxygen in its blood after strenuous activity, and the salmon is no exception. Since I strongly believe that most fresh run fish, which take our flies is because their feeding instinct has not been fully suppressed, I like to present my lure in a fashion that will optimise my chances of tempting a fish. If we hand these potential takers something on a "plate" will they not be more inclined to take it, if it is presented close to them, rather than having to rise through, 3 or more feet of water. These fish are better takers than fish which actually take in the process of running and also more inclined to be better hooked.

Different runs of fish however can and do produce fish which respond to different tactics, so for this reason it is best to decide whether you will be fishing for "runners" or "resters" and tackle up accordingly. I have also known small pockets of fish within the same run to react differently to the same approach, generally however they seem willing to respond to one particular method. At times the only fish which seemed willing to respond to my fly was running fish, the resting fish ignoring all offerings. While on other occasions the only takes of the day came from resting fish. From my records it would appear that summer fish i.e. grilse, are more willing to take while running, while the autumn and spring fish are more obliging while resting.

Although as described previously running fish can be caught, if approached in the right fashion, I prefer however to fish for short stay resting fish at the tail of pools and above the lips of weirs with a sinking line and large fly. This technique when used during the summer and autumn have caught me many salmon from the tails of pools when others who have been fishing with a floating line and small fly, because the water temperature "dictated" have gone fishless. The technique of using a large fly and sinking line for fresh run resting fish has outfished the floating line and small fly so often, that I seldom use any other method during the summer and autumn. I now only resort to the floater and small flies when the fish have decided to, or having to, due to water height take up residence in the main holding pools.