

OCTOBER 2021 DFC CORRECTIONS

My apologies to Jim Strogon and the Trout Bum Nation- Much of Jim's article was over looked by me. See complete article here in.

Fishing Small Streams

Jim Strogon



1.
Sweeper on Tonto Creek

2.
Sweeper on Tonto Creek

3.
A nice Upper Christopher Creek wild brown trout used the water cushion and shade of this boulder to wait for bugs drifting down stream.

4.
Three boulder stream improvement on the East Verde River at 3rd Crossing.

5.
This rainbow waited for me to work my fly under the sweeper before he grabbed it.



One of my favorite aspects of stream fishing is predicting where I will find a trout that is interested in taking my fly.

This requires reading the stream and identifying the most likely places that will hold a trout; and then of course, successfully delivering a fly to that fish.

Trout are interested in mainly five things for most of the year, and a sixth, good spawning substrate, during spawning season. They are interested in securing locations that will provide a steady conveyor belt of aquatic insects delivered to them in the current, and they want immediate access to cover if they are not already hiding under that cover while feeding. Trout always want to minimize the energy that they need to expend while swimming, so will seek areas with less current that still allows them easy access to passing food. They also need adequate dissolved oxygen (DO) and temperature.

Good DO levels and cold temperatures are the norm on productive trout streams, but this summer both have been severely compromised by lower flows, rising stream temperatures, and the corresponding impact on DO available to the trout that warmer water causes.

Several stockings were curtailed this summer in streams that were too warm. As water temperatures approach 68 F or higher, it is tough on the fish who are just doing their best to survive under adverse temperature and DO conditions. I choose not to fish for trout during these times.

A thermometer to measure stream temperature before you fish is a cheap, and worthwhile investment, especially if you practice catch and release. As fall air temperatures cool, that will help the stream temperatures, and I look forward to better fishing opportunities in the coming weeks.

Trout that have been in the stream for any length of time are increasingly concerned about remaining close to cover, and the threat of predators such as fish-eating birds. Anglers that approach the stream noisily, or cast a shadow on the creek will spook a trout too.

When I am on a stream, there are certain places that I target much more heavily than others. Since the streams in Rim Country are often shallow, certainly the deeper pools are prime water to fish. If there is additional cover in the hole in the form of rocks, logs, or undercut banks, so much the better.

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One of my favorite features to look for in a creek is a sweeper. That is a branch that is hanging in the water and the current sweeps under and through it. Sweepers provide shade and a sense of security for trout. They can feed casually as food is delivered from the current, and this hiding location provides a great ambush point to grab bigger prey that might venture too close.

Often anglers will cast along the edge of a sweeper, but that might not encourage a trout to leave the security of the cover. That is typically how I start, but if I'm convinced that a trout must be under the structure, I eventually work my fly completely under the sweeper. I lose flies in that effort, but am often rewarded with my gamble.

I am a big fan of the stream improvement devices that AZGFD has installed in several Rim Country streams over the years. I fish them carefully as I work a section of the creek. One of the simplest stream improvement devices that I have seen, that attracted trout within hours of the installation, was the set of three boulders dropped into the East Verde River in the pool next to the 3rd Crossing parking lot.

That hole has a lot going for it. The three boulders provide a current break and a place for the trout to seek cover if they feel threatened. During reasonable stream flows, the current moves through the pool at a good pace, and there is also a nice undercut bank that the trout utilize.

I generally don't spend a lot of time fishing riffles, those fast stretches of water between pools. In our small streams, the riffles are generally too shallow and often don't have any cover for the trout.

The exception to that rule is what is called pocket water. In this kind of water, actual pools are very limited. Instead, the stream flow is rather fast, and the pocket water

in our streams is often two feet or less in depth, and runs through a series of medium to large boulders. Many of these rocks are undercut and provide a great hiding place for trout, but all of them offer several locations on all sides of the boulder that slow the current and make it easier for fish to maintain their position in the creek, therefore expending less energy.

Most anglers target the area behind the rock as the logical place to find trout trying to avoid the current, but hugging the rock on either flank also provides an advantage for trout. The most overlooked area is the cushion that is formed directly in front of large rocks. That is an easy spot for a trout to maintain its position, and offers the best view of bugs coming down the creek. When I fish a stretch of pocket water, I will make at least four casts all around a boulder before moving on.

Rim Country streams do not require long casts. In fact, the overhead cast on most streams will cause you to spend more time retrieving flies from the trees and bushes than actually fishing. Pinpoint roll casts; and when the casting window gets really small, a well placed sling-shot cast will put your fly in front of the fish most effectively.

If you are unfamiliar with those casts, they can be found on YouTube, but I would suggest practicing them in an open water setting like Green Valley Lake to get the mechanics down and minimize your loss of flies as you practice a new cast.

Small steam fishing is a lot of fun. Give these tips a try the next time you visit a small Rim Country stream.

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