



CHAPTER THREE

Foods and Flies for Front Range Trout

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom;
and with all thy getting get understanding.” — *Proverbs 4:7*

F RONT RANGE RIVERS and streams teem with varied kinds of aquatic insects, many unique to the Rocky Mountain region. A basic understanding of the insects and their imitations can make your Front Range angling experiences more rewarding. Whatever the time of year you happen to be fishing, take time to investigate and examine the foods available to trout. In the field, you won't always be able to identify the insects you discover, especially those in pre-adult life stages. But close observation of an insect's size, shape, and color can help you select the most suitable imitation. Similarly, an insect's behavior exemplifies the elements of a lifelike and appealing presentation.

Observation Powers

Let's say it's a sunny mid-afternoon in early July, and you're fishing a fast stream at an elevation of about 9,000 feet. You notice large (size #12 or so) yellowish mayflies flying above the water. Trout aren't yet rising but, being hopeful and a good sport, you tie on a dry fly that matches the natural insect.

However, your well-placed, perfectly drifted presentations arouse no interest, not even a refusal. Neither do the naturals. What's happening here? Chances are the mayflies are newly-emerged quill gordons (*Epeorus* sp.). Though trout often rise to the duns, sometimes they focus instead on eating the insects' pre-emergent nymphs, which gather near slack waters and near the shore. If you had drifted an appropriate nymph through these areas, you probably would have done better. Consistent fly-fishing success relies more on logic than on luck.

Sometimes, though, merely locating the insects (or other foods) that trout may be eating can be tricky. In these instances, search rocks, branches, vegetation, and other potential insect habitat found on or near the streambed. Look in spider webs too. To capture subsurface insect specimens, use a wire-handled aquarium dip-net, holding the net underwater for at least a few minutes before you retrieve and inspect its contents. You can also use the net to catch insects as they float, fly, or move about on the shore. Sold at pet shops, a dip-net weighs only a couple of ounces and costs two or three dollars. In addition, unless you're extremely nearsighted, you'll probably need some sort of small magnifier for viewing insects that measure less than 8 millimeters (about 5/16 inch) long. That's where a collapsible printer's loupe comes in handy. It takes up only about as much space as a pocket watch but provides 4X magnification, which is adequate for most streamside uses.

* * *

The next five chapters explore the major kinds of aquatic and terrestrial insects and other foods available to Front Range trout. They also describe emergence periods, fishing techniques, and the most effective regional fly patterns.

Scientific Names — Why and How

To convey information accurately, scientific names accompany the common names of aquatic insects. For instance, in Colorado the common name “red quill mayfly” might refer to a size #12 species that hatches from July to August, or to another mayfly that’s half as large and emerges a month or so earlier. Using an insect’s scientific name helps prevent this kind of confusion.

As typified by the form “Family: *Genus species*,” a scientific name parses out the characteristics of an insect from the general to the specific. “Ephemerelellidae: *Ephemerelella inermis*” (a pale morning dun) refers to the insect family Ephemerelellidae (which has about ten members in Front Range waters), the genus *Ephemerelella* (of which there are three regional species), and the species *inermis* (which is the actual insect in question). The abbreviation “sp.” indicates that two or more species of an insect exist and that the differences between them hold little importance to Front Range fly fishing. For instance, *Sweltsa* sp. refers to several species of stoneflies commonly known as the yellow sally.

Bug Emergences, Coloration, and Size

Although based upon years of firsthand observation by experienced Front Range fly anglers, the emergence periods listed here can serve only as guidelines. Front Range waters flow in wild, unpredictable environments shaped by climatic extremes. Don’t be surprised if a particular hatch comes off weeks earlier or later than the times indicated in this book’s emergence charts.

Descriptions of an insect’s coloration represent generalized information. An insect’s color often varies in intensity and hue