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AUGUST – 2003




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Anglers wanting to get a jump on the salmon season can usually do so by casting streamers at the mouths of the larger Lake Ontario tributaries. This is typically more productive toward month's end. Large overdressed patterns in white, blue and white, or green and white are the way to go. A sinking line is also beneficial and one should have plenty of backing in case they hook up with a fish that wants to visit the middle of the lake. Although this fishing can be done from shore, a boat offers many options for the angler. It is recommended that 10-weight rods be used.

Late August can often find an early run of salmon making their way up the larger tribs, especially the Salmon River. Stay in contact with the shops for up-to-the-minute information on fish and water conditions. The lack of angler pressure combined with good numbers of fresh fish, make this time of year appealing to many anglers.

Visiting anglers may also hookup with a Skamania steelhead or possibly an Atlantic salmon in the early part of the season. Shortly after the first runs of salmon take place, brown trout will begin to work their way up the tributaries. These can be big fish with trout approaching the 20-lb. mark caught every year.

Fly fishers looking for bass action should consider Sandy Pond, Henderson Harbor, Nine Mile Point, or Redfield Reservoir. Things seemed to get a late start this year and many believe the bass fishing will be fantastic this month. Anglers must be willing to fish both surface and subsurface flies to catch fish. 

TACKLING MARYLAND TIGERS WITH A FLY

by Derek Wiley

After repeatedly casting to likely looking holding areas for several hours to no avail, my once optimistic attitude was beginning to change into a more realistic outlook of the task at hand. This often happens when attempting to hook and land a tiger muskie on a fly rod. Repeated casts with my ten-weight and a large tandem Deceiver-style fly were also beginning to wear on my arm.

After thoroughly working a deep eddy area adjacent to strong current, I waded down river and began casting on the backside of a grassy point where the current was deflected away from the bank. The slow-moving hole I was casting into was about three feet deep before abruptly becoming much shallower down river. As I was distracted by several small sunfish moving around the grass, the fly line in my stripping hand was violently pulled back through the guides as a large splash erupted several feet in front of me. After the second it took me to realize that a tiger muskie had inhaled the nine-inch fly, I proceeded to get the fly line on the reel.

The tiger made several acrobatic jumps and one strong run before tiring. I then led the fish to shore and removed the large fly that was hooked in the side of the upper lip. After a quick picture, I revived the fish until a flick of the tail signaled the tiger was ready to swim off. Although the tiger was not an exceptionally large fish, maybe thirty inches, I consider every one I catch on a fly a trophy.

Tiger muskies sometimes occur naturally in the wild and are a sterile

hybrid resulting from spawning between northern pike and muskellunge (*Esox lucius* and *Esox masquinongy*). This occurrence, however, is rare and most tiger muskies caught by anglers have been raised in a hatchery and then introduced by state or local fisheries agencies to provide both prey control and increased opportunities for recreational anglers.

In Maryland, fingerling tiger muskies have been obtained from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and introduced successfully into the Potomac River and numerous reservoirs and lakes throughout the state including Little Seneca Lake, Bradford Lake, Piney Run Lake, and Piney Creek Reservoir.

The tendency for tigers to eat large fishes, sometimes approaching 40% or more of their total body length, presents several problems for the fly fisher. First of all, large prey is digested more slowly, which means that tigers do not have to feed as often as other predatory species such as largemouth and smallmouth bass. Therefore, most of the time you will be casting to fish that are not actively feeding. Secondly, large flies are often required to imitate the tiger's sizeable prey. The combination of these two problems means that fly fishers will often be presenting large, bulky flies which are difficult to cast to fish that are often not interested in feeding. If you then take into account that tigers are a top predator and, therefore, exist in low numbers in any particular system where they have been introduced, the odds of hooking one on a fly is even lower. However, despite the disadvantages that a fly fisher faces, hooking a tiger on a fly is a realistic endeavor with a little knowledge of the species' habits, gearing up with the

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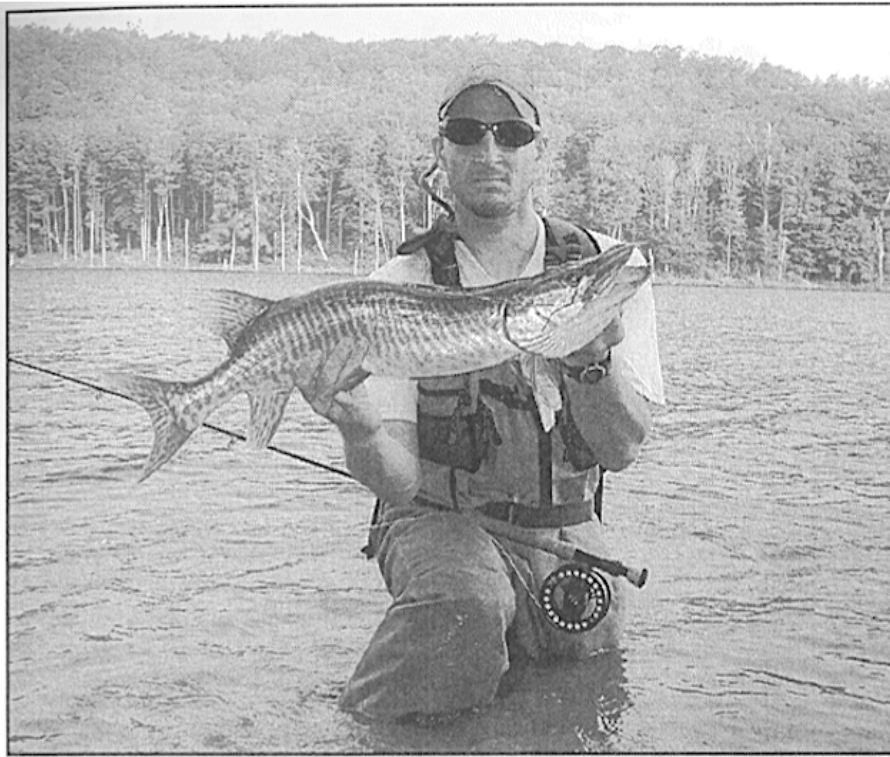
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Derek Wiley

This nice early morning tiger inhaled a large popper near downed wood.

proper fly tackle, and by targeting areas where the species is present in good numbers.

In my experience, tigers are most active around sunrise and sunset or during unstable weather creating cloudy, windy, or drizzly conditions. These periods of adverse weather, including several hours before a cold front, really seem to crank up feeding activity. However, I have also experienced some good fishing on calm, sunny days so fishing for tigers during these conditions should not be avoided.

The elongated, torpedo shape of a tiger makes it a perfect "sit and wait" ambush predator. Although I have witnessed tigers cruising in lakes searching for food, most often tigers will hold near some type of structure that provides security and concealment from unsuspecting prey. In the upper Potomac River where I do a large percentage of my fly fishing for tigers, I concentrate most of my efforts on slow-moving, deep holes with submerged woody debris or rocky structure.

Eddies are particularly good areas to cast for tigers especially if they have good habitat and are at least several feet deep. Grassy points, which provide a current break and are located near deep water, are also excellent areas to try. In lakes or reservoirs I usually target dropoffs where grass or submerged woody debris is present. During a particular outing I will fish the same area several times if I have caught a

tiger there in the past or if the spot looks too good not to hold a fish. On more than one occasion I have fished an area thoroughly and then moved to other spots only to return later to the original area and catch a fish. Although in this situation it may be that a tiger moved into the area after I fished it, I think it is more probable that the fish was there but not actively feeding.

Oftentimes when I have come back to an area and caught a tiger it was at a more ideal low light period such as sunset. These occurrences have demonstrated to me how important it is to consistently work good-looking spots until repeated trips to an area fail to produce a fish.

One important point that I often forget when pursuing tigers, which can help avoid some later frustration, is that fly fishing for the species is more favorable under certain conditions. For instance, if a tiger has been sighted in a specific area such as a slow-moving back eddy near some downed wood, this is a good place to pursue that fish with fly tackle. Other good places to try are in areas where fish have been caught before or spots that can be efficiently covered with a fly fairly quickly. In areas where tigers may be spread out or not be associated with any type of structure it is probably best to cover these areas with conventional tackle until you get a feel for where the fish are located. In these situations, fishing with fly tackle is a tremendous disad-

vantage and is more likely to result in a sore arm from casting and not from fighting a fish.

Tackle for tigers need not be fancy. Although heavier weight rods are not usually necessary to fight and land tigers, especially smaller fish, a fast action nine- or ten-weight rod is ideal at casting the large, bulky flies necessary to entice tigers into striking. Faster rods will also help cast a large fly in windy conditions.

Reels need to have a smooth drag that will not stick when a tiger makes a quick burst or thrashes on the surface. I prefer a large arbor reel to a conventional sized reel. The increased line recovery of a large arbor reel makes it much easier to stay tight to a fish that makes a run towards the angler and introduces slack into the line.

I like to use a running line and shooting head system for tiger fishing because of the ease at which lines can be switched for a variety of conditions. If I only had one option I would go with an intermediate line. An intermediate line will still allow a popper to be properly fished on the surface and a weighted streamer to sink fairly quickly in a deep hole. However, for very deep holes with moderate current, it may be necessary to fish a sinking line to quickly get a fly down deep.

For leaders, I use a simple loop to loop connection tapered from thirty pound test down to seventeen or fourteen pound test tippet. Tigers have extremely sharp teeth that make it essential to use a wire guard to prevent bite-offs. I have found nylon-coated wire made by Berkley to be extremely effective at providing bite protection. A loop connection between the fly and wire can be created by twisting the wire over itself and then burning it with a lighter. I have never had a wire unwrap after burning the coating with a lighter and the loop connection allows the fly to move uninhibited in the water. This increased action can make the difference between a tiger following the fly only to reject it at the last moment or taking the fly without hesitation.

Few suitable muskie fly patterns are currently available to fly fishers who do not tie their own flies. For this reason, in the last several years I have been experimenting with several patterns with good success. The most productive has been a nine-inch tandem hook Deceiver-style fly that I usually tie with all black material and *creatively* refer to as the Black Tandem. The color is ideal


continued on page 14

Rivers in this region could use a little water as this is being written in early July. Much of the rain that has drenched the mid Atlantic states in June went south of the Adirondacks leaving some rivers in need of water. A good downpour or two would go a long way to alleviating the problem. The fishing is still good in most rivers but if August is to continue to fish well, we need a little help from Mother Nature. Check with the shops for current conditions.

As mentioned above, even with the lower water, fishing has held up in most areas and pressure has been heavy along the beaten paths. Try getting off onto the dirt roads or anywhere you need to walk in a little to find fish that haven't seen a steady stream of flies. Two possibilities are the more remote sections of the West Branch of the AuSable and along Silver Lake Road on the upper Saranac. In general, most headwater areas receive less fishing pressure than the main rivers.

Hatches will include *Tricos* in the mornings, slate drakes later in August, olives, and a variety of caddis. Brown, olive, and black will represent most of the caddis you'll see this month. Stoneflies will also be important in the

upcoming weeks. Both nymphs and dry fly imitations will take trout. Golden and black stones will both be available.

During the hot periods, trout in the ponds and lakes will be deep and it will take hard work with sinking lines to take a few. You may want to concentrate on the warm water species, as they will be more likely to strike. Bass, both small and largemouth, will be hitting in the lakes. Fish around the weed beds and if a drop-off is nearby, so much the better. Bays and coves will be the hot-spots for big mouths while the river mouths into the lakes will offer up smallies. For pike, add a wire bite guard and fish big ugly streamers and poppers around the weedy areas. The wire won't deter largemouth if any are present 

Tackling Md. Tigers—cont.

continued from page 13

for the often-stained waters of the upper Potomac River and the seductive motion of the trailer portion of the fly has enticed more than a few tigers into striking.

The fly is best retrieved erratically with several quick strips followed by a short pause. I have also caught tigers on the same style fly with a foam head that can be chugged or popped on the surface. Sometimes it seems that tigers are more willing to strike a fly worked on the surface possibly because they have less time to inspect the object causing the commotion. I have taken several tigers while twitching a streamer fly on the surface after retrieving it to within several feet of the rod tip.

In recent years the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) has identified the presence of true muskellunge in the Potomac River.

EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

- Aug. 12 Black River TU. 7:00 p.m.
Mercy Care Center, Watertown
- Aug. 13 Mohawk Valley TU Eagles
Club, 10513 Crosby Manor
Road, Deerfield 7:00 p.m.
- Aug. 16,30 .. Free Fly Casting Clinic & BBQ
Ausable River Sport Shop

The origin of these fish is thought to be from an introduction by a recreational angler in the mid 1980s (legal at the time). The current distribution of muskellunge is believed to be in the Washington County portion of the Potomac River although the exact distribution at this time is unknown. At present I have yet to take one on a fly or conventional tackle in the upper Potomac River. The occurrence of muskellunge in the Potomac River gives fly anglers additional opportunities besides that supplied by the introduction of stocked tiger muskies and, because muskellunge grow larger than tigers, potentially a chance at landing a real monster in the near future.

Because of their elusive nature, preference for large prey, and unpredictability, tiger muskies, are one of the most challenging freshwater game fish available to many fly fishers. Unfortunately, most fly fishers do not consider pursuing tigers because they do not provide the consistent action that you might experience from other species such as smallmouth bass in a river or trout in a small stream. There is no denying that fly fishing for tigers is hard work and oftentimes leaves the angler empty handed. However, the thrill of chasing a fish that is extremely powerful often makes acrobatic jumps

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FLY FISHING GUIDE HATCH and PATTERN CHART®

STREAM	INSECT/FLY	SIZE	DATES	STREAM	INSECT/FLY	SIZE	DATES	
Saranac 2 5	Emergers	14-16	Anytime	AuSable (cont.)	Isonychia	10-12	Late August	
	Stonefly Nymph	8-12	Anytime		Olive	22-24	All Month	
	Caddis	14-16	Anytime		Boquet 2 10	Same as AuSable		
	White Wulff	12-14	Anytime					
	White Miller	12-14	Anytime					
AuSable 2 10	Terrestrials	14-20	All Month	Lakes 2 10	Smelt Imitations	6-8	All Month	
	Black Caddis	20	All Month		Scuds	14-16	All Month	
	Tan Caddis	16-20	All Month		Damselfly	8-10	All Month	
	Olive Caddis	14-16	All Month		Dragonfly	8	All Month	
	Golden Stonefly	4	1st Half		Damselfly Nymph	8-10	All Month	
	Black Stonefly	8-10	All Month		Leeches	12	All Month	
	Trico	22-24	Mornings		Callibaetis	16	Sporadic	

Chart numbers correspond to the shop numbers monitoring that stream.
For more information and current conditions stop at the indicated area fly shops.

TM

immediately after being hooked, and can reach lengths of over forty inches makes up for the slow times when I go several trips or more without landing a fish.

The persistent fly fisher who targets Maryland waters with good numbers of tigers and is willing to sacrifice consistent action for the chance at landing a fish of a lifetime may be pleasantly rewarded when one of the most exciting and unpredictable game fish, the tiger muskie, or possibly even a muskellunge, decides to pay him a visit.

For more information about fly fishing for tiger muskies, an excellent source of information is *Pike on the Fly: The Flyfisherman's Guide to Northerns, Tigers, and Muskies* by Barry Reynolds and John Berryman, Boulder, Colorado, Johnson Printing Company, 1993.

For more information about tiger muskies in Maryland consult the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Fisheries webpage at <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/fisheries>.



Derek Wiley is a fisheries biologist and works as a Faculty Research Assistant at the Appalachian Laboratory, Frostburg, Md. This is his first appearance in the *Fly Fishing Guide*.

NEXT MONTH

Southcentral Pennsylvania's West Branch of the Octoraro isn't as famous as some other trout streams in the region but can offer some excellent trout fishing in its own right. In September, Jim Smeltz will tell us about this little river in **FEATURED STREAMS.**



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