

The Head Keeper Gets Paternal

(Salmo Trutta – 2008)

Stung perhaps by suggestions that he might not have enough to do, the Head Keeper has, for the past couple of years, thrown himself into his Mayfly re-colonization project on our stretch of the hallowed waters of the Derbyshire Wye. In times past our Club had enjoyed a spectacular Mayfly hatch, usually in the last week of May and the first of June, as is customary in North Derbyshire. The reasons for its decline are now lost in time but further downstream the river still has a proper hatch whereas in recent years we had been lucky just to see the odd fly.

Over a Chinese Takeaway in the Hut one evening, discussions turned to the reasons why we were so unfortunate when those lucky devils on Monsal & Haddon were awash with the fly. It was thought that pollution may have done for our original population but we couldn't understand why pioneers from downstream had not managed to repopulate the water, as everyone knows that spinners tend to move upstream to lay their eggs. Maybe it was the physical barrier of Cressbrook Mill, or maybe our water quality was just too poor to sustain them. This got us thinking, because Buxton Sewage Works had just been replaced with a completely new state of the art system and we were looking forward to the benefits of clean water for the first time in living memory.

The Head Keeper had read about the great work done by Dr Cyril Bennett on the re-establishment of the Mayfly and instead of bemoaning our lot, decided to do something about it. With the help of his fellow-keepers on the Chatsworth and Haddon Estates and the encouragement of WTT Projects Officer Dr Tim Jacklin, he set about the capture of mature nymphs from the Lathkill and egg laying spinners from lower down the Wye in Monsal Dale. The nymphs were put in a suitably silty stretch whilst the spinners were persuaded to lay their eggs on glass tiles, subsequently suspended on fly boards in several locations and left to hatch in the river. Subsequent discussions with Cyril Bennett at the Riverfly Conference persuaded the Head Keeper to augment the glass tiles with eggs kept in glass jars and observed on a daily basis until they could be seen to be hatching. The tiny larvae could then be put into the river with the satisfaction of knowing that they had a better chance of survival than their siblings left on the fly boards.

We had no great expectations for 2007, especially as our early season riffle sampling sessions revealed few mayfly nymphs. What was very

encouraging from these investigations however, was the relative abundance of stonefly nymphs - a sure sign of improved water quality.

On 26th May the first reports of Mayfly sightings began to come in. Within a few days significant numbers began to hatch and in the afternoon of the 30th I observed a brownie in the pool known as "Dr Smith's Back Passage" (don't ask) taking several duns in succession, quickly followed by my CDC Emerger. The hatch carried on until the third week of June, with the odd spinner seen every day until the end of July. The fly seemed to be in evidence on about two thirds of our water from Cressbrook Lake up to Cheedale. The evening rise to spent spinners was a joy to behold and several spectacular catches were reported.

After a fortnight or so, the Head Keeper's test tube babies started to hatch and they were carefully released into a suitable pool at the top of our water in the hope that they would also establish themselves in due time. He now faces an anxious wait but I have a feeling that over the next year or two his labours will be rewarded and the Head Keeper will once again experience the joys of surrogate fatherhood.