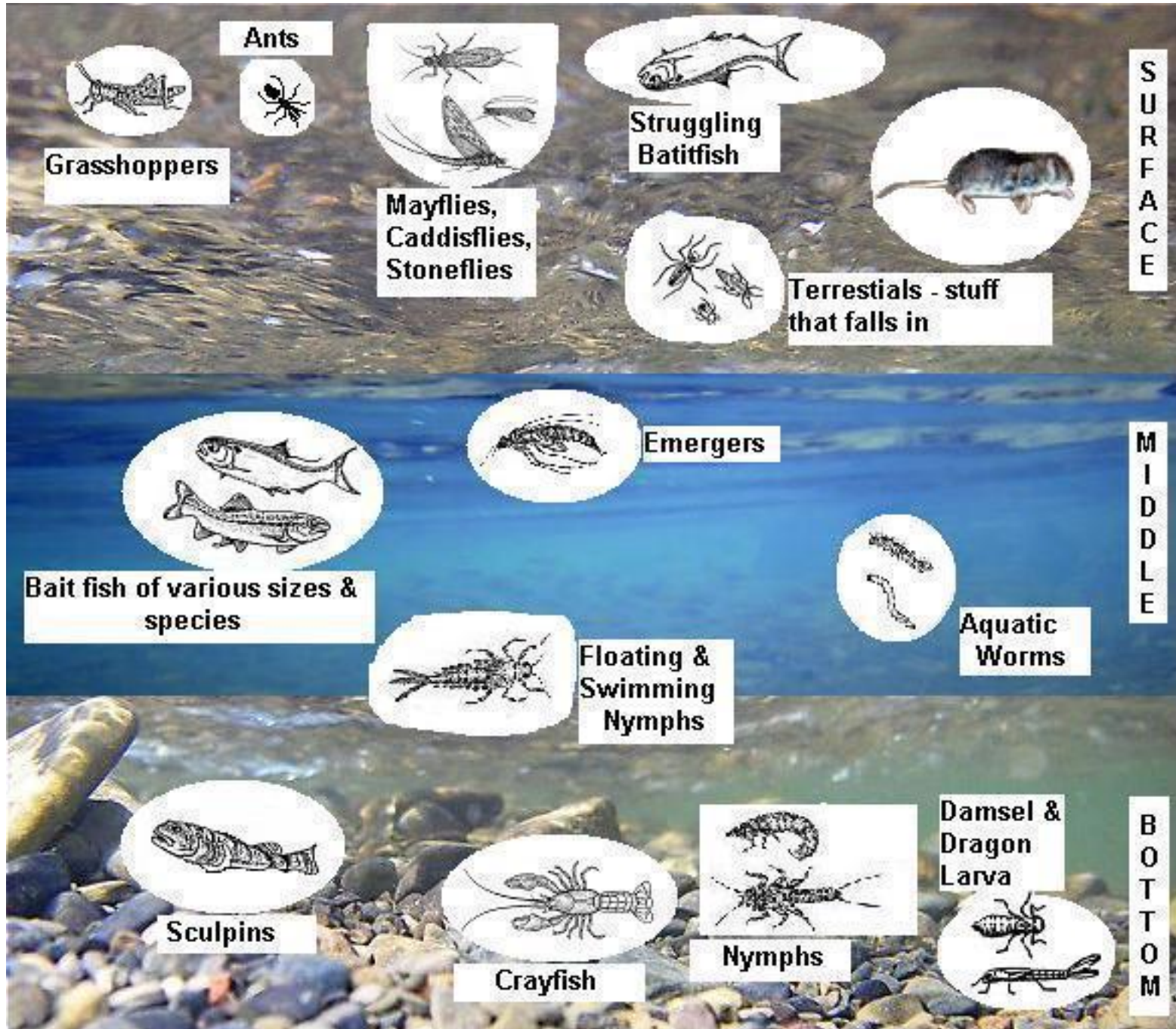


FISH ALL OF THE WATER



Fish ALL of the Water – By Mike Arnold

It's pure folly to think that anyone can tell all that needs to be known on this subject in just a few pages ... not even me. So I'm going to give you some highlights (below) and then tell you to hit the airwaves (internet) or pages (library books) to dig much, much, much deeper into any of the ideas that follow. There are literally thousands of books and each of the topics as well as tens of thousands of books on the various flies ... and how to fish them. All I'm going to do is set you to that task.

THE WATER COLUMN

The term "fly" fishing got its beginning from fishing using imitations of true aquatic insects (mayflies, caddisflies and stoneflies) which live their entire lives and their deaths *in* and *on* the water. In earlier times, the ONLY flies were imitations of those species. In fact, in the beginning ... the only true flies were those that were fished on TOP of the water (I.e. *dry* flies).

Then, folks got smarter and noticed that other critters ended up as dinner for the fish. These *others* include terrestrial insects that happen to fall into or land on the water; smaller fish like sculpins, minnows and small sunfish (oh, my ... those cannibals); crustaceans such as crayfish and scuds or sow-bugs; reptiles like snakes, skinks, salamanders and lizards; and certain small mammals ... yes, mammals ... there isn't a big bass or a large trout that will turn down a satisfying meal of swimming field-mouse or vole.

Today we have an enormous base of flies for all three sections of the water column ... the surface, the middle and the bottom. And if you want to be a *really good* fisher (i.e. somebody who's "*got the smell*") you need to be able to fish all three places.

SURFACE

The surface of the water can be as slick and smooth as glass or as rough as 50-grit sandpaper. The flies you need to learn to fish with may not even imitate insects. Deer-hair mice, swimming snake lures, foundering baitfish imitations are necessary weapons in your flyfishing arsenal. Floating insects are by far the most common and around here I would say the cricket and grasshopper are the kings of the terrestrial category and big mayflies top the list of aquatic insects (even though caddis flies are more prevalent and stoneflies are a bigger mouthful).

These larger fly/lures can really change your fishing tactics, your cast and your retrieve. Number one ... you need to fish larger sizes of fly lines if you are going to be pushing big, hairy, wind-resistant flies. Your cast needs adjustment too. The loop must be opened up and slowed down to accommodate the extended wait-time for your offering to get where it's going. If you don't make those adjustments ... odds are favorable for your ears or the back of your head to be pierced.

And don't forget to include a sink tip line (or added section to the end of any floating line) in your gear to allow you to DIVE some of the big floating flies such as Dahlberg Divers and Rusty Rats.

MIDDLE

Fishing the middle can be both the best fishing ever and the worst fishing ever if you aren't aware of a few things. Yes ... bait-fish, nymphs and aquatic worms (I include leeches in that group) all inhabit the middle of the water column. Most of them actively swim; some just drift in the current and curl closed and open up as they are wafted downstream. Fishing for them require that you figure out at what depth they are playing so you can put your lure there. In my opinion (and 30 years of experience) anyone who fishes the middle without a strike indicator is missing half of the hits, takes and bites that are actually occurring on his or her fly. Also, if you don't allow for underwater currents ... EVEN in still water fishing applications (lakes and ponds) ... you are doing yourself a disservice.

If you fish big rivers with depths that run from four to ten feet or deeper, you're setting yourself up for failure if you don't keep in constant contact with your fly. The deeper your fly rides, the higher the chance your line and leader are running through several changes of direction and speed with every obstruction on the river bottom. Large boulders (or boat hulls, submerged cars, houses, etc) cause surges of current, not only around, but also OVER themselves and all that plays havoc with your lure.

Even in lakes and ponds, springs on the bottom change the water temperature sending columns of water upward. Cooling water from the surface generally falls. Both of these scenarios create underwater currents ... so don't be thinking your lure is hanging straight off the end of your fly-line. It's liable to be several feet closer to you and you're "out of contact" for that brief period.

As far as stream fishing the middle ... many fly-fishers try to get what is called a "dead drift" with an underwater bug (nymph, aquatic worm, etc) when they should be swimming the little beggars ... darting them to and fro ... and vice versa. Knowing when to "hold 'em" and when to "let 'em run" can often be the secret to fishing a tough section of water.

BOTTOM

I truly believe that most fish eat on or around the bottom of any stream. Moving water brings food rolling along the rocks and mud, lots of critters and small fish actually spend their whole lives there ... so it should be no surprise to find more fish and bigger fish feeding there. Anyone who has fly (or spin) fished wading streams knows that if you're not hanging up on the bottom occasionally or losing flies to submerged structure ... "you ain't fishin' where the fish are".

Learning to tie almost weed-less flies that can be crawled along a rocky stream bottom will put bigger fish on your catch list. Sculpins are a favorite food of trout, and they rarely get more than an inch off the bottom. Crayfish dart back and forth (backwards) diving into crevasses in the rocks and along underwater shelves. Drag a near-enough looking imitation there, and you'll stick a fish. All three species of true aquatic insects spend much of their lives crawling around the bottom. Go to any stream, wade out about five feet, bend down and pickup a rock. Now turn it over and look very closely at the underside of the rock ... if you don't find almost colorless bugs (nymphs) crawling around there ... you're probably wasting your time fishing that stream. If the water isn't chemically polluted ... the bugs will be there. Also take a look at those little tiny black snails that are there. Hold one with the point up in the air ... if the mouth of the shell is on the right ... the water is NOT polluted. If the opening is to the left ... chances are the fishing food chain isn't very good there. No joke ... this is real. So good luck finding more to read on each topic. There much out there to learn.