

The Floating Minnow

by Carl Haensel



I picked up my first Floating Minnow at a fly shop a few years ago. I had heard tales of fish aggressively inhaling similar patterns everywhere from local trout streams to Florida's mangrove flats. As with many new patterns, I had no faith in it, so it stayed untouched in my fly box for many months. A day of smallmouth bass fishing on a creek near home finally brought it out. My wife, Cindy, and I were floating downstream in our canoe when smallmouth bass started pushing good-sized shiners to the surface. I tied the Floating Minnow onto a 7-weight rod and handed it to Cindy. Three casts, a dozen vicious surface hits and one 17-inch smallmouth bass later, we were both hooked on the Floating Minnow concept.

Floating minnow patterns have been around for a while, with recipes dating back over a century using materials including hollow goose quills. The current popular version consists of a Mustad 3966 hook or equivalent, a floating head of two bug bodies glued together, and a body of deer hair and Krystal Flash. Begin the streamer fly by tying on the deer hair, Krystal Flash and tinsel. Glue the bug bodies on after you finish the body. Eyes can be either drawn on or glued on for added effect. A monofilament weed guard can be tied in for use in brushy areas.

True to our expectations, the Floating Minnow has been successful just about everywhere we have tried it. A day of fall fishing on the Little Juniata River proved its worth for trout. A few friends banded together for one last day

of fall trout fishing before the winter chill. Nymph patterns and other streamers had brought some small fish to hand, but we caught none of the large trout that we all imagined were lurking in the deep holes of the Little J.

We spotted trout pushing minnows to the surface in an eddy near a railroad trestle, and I tied on the Floating Minnow. A few casts later, a large brown trout, better estimated in pounds than inches, came hurtling out of the water. The Floating Minnow disappeared as the trout crashed down into the eddy. A quick strip and hook set put the trout on the line, but it soon shook the hook. Smaller but still hefty brown trout continued to strike the fly during the rest of the day.

The strikes you can get with these patterns are the most exciting part of the fishing. On one cast you may get a half-dozen strikes. The key to hooking fish is not to set the hook. This may sound odd, but consider this: Underwater a predatory fish suddenly sees a wounded minnow on the surface. With a sudden rush it heads to the surface and takes a grab at it. More often than not, it misses the fly. If you set the hook now, you won't catch the fish. Instead, continue stripping the fly in. With your rod tip close to the water, strip the fly in using short bursts. When a fish finally connects and gets the fly in its mouth, you'll feel it on the next strip. Only then should you bring your rod up and complete the hookset. ☐



The Floating Minnow has been successful just about everywhere the author has tried it. This 17-inch smallmouth bass grabbed a Floating Minnow on a stream in southcentral Pennsylvania.