

Fishing the Clouser Minnow *by Carl Haensel*

Some flies originated in the Rocky Mountains or the north woods. Many famous flies come from the eastern U.S. Some of the best flies come from Pennsylvania. Bob Clouser, of Royalton, PA, originated his Clouser Minnow in 1984 for Susquehanna River smallmouth bass. The Clouser Minnow is one of the most effective flies used today. Fly-fishing legend Lefty Kreh has landed 86 different species of fish in both freshwater and saltwater using this fly. Still, to make this fly work for you, it must be used correctly. While there are many different techniques for fishing streamers, there are several specific tactics that can make a Clouser Minnow catch smallmouth bass like almost no other pattern.

Rod position

Keeping your rod in a high position has its uses in some aspects of fly-fishing, but fishing the Clouser Minnow is not one of them. After you've made your cast, drop your rod tip to the water, take in your slack line, and prepare to strip in the fly. This fly uses an active retrieve, and to impart the best action, you must have your rod low and the rod tip at the water.

Fly retrieval

To give your fly the best action, Bob Clouser recommends using the "Susquehanna strip." This ploy consists of a full arm length strip that is done under your reel. You should end your strip with an abrupt stop. This stop makes your fly dart about, just like the escaping minnow that it's supposed to imitate. You can make this abrupt stop by forcing the thumb on your stripping hand straight rearward. Remember to keep your rod tip

low and at the water. Retrieving a streamer with your rod tip up leads to poor fly action and missed strikes.

One of the benefits of using this fly is that it is much more snag-free than other streamers. Tied with the lead eyes on top of the hook, it forces the fly to swim upside-down, which keeps the hook point out of rocks, crevices and debris. Still, since this fly is simple to tie, bring along plenty, and plan to lose some flies.

Have a variety of different weighted eyes on your flies to use in specific situations such as shallow flats or deep runs. Try to keep your fly low and near the bottom as you retrieve it, and vary your retrieve speed as you fish. Some days the smallmouths you're targeting will want the fly whizzing by at warp speed, and sometimes a slower pace will trigger strikes.

Hooking the fish

To hook more fish on your Clouser Minnow or almost any other streamer, you must never stop stripping the fly. Remember that this fly is designed to imitate

a minnow that is darting to escape from a predator. If you're retrieving your fly and a fish hits it but doesn't get hooked, keep stripping. You actually need to try to take the fly away from the fish. Think about it—the smallmouth bass that's attacking your fly has never been fed dinner on a platter. A small minnow that's attempting to escape is never going to just stop and sit there. Neither should your fly. This means that when a fish hits, keep stripping in your fly. When it misses, keep stripping in your fly. No matter what—well, you guessed it, just keep that fly moving! Only when you actually feel the fish on the line should you raise up your rod and start to play the bass. ☐



Photo-courtesy of Bob Clouser
Bob Clouser with a Clouser Minnow-caught smallmouth bass