

April nymphs casting their charms

*Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips and Cranks and wanton Wiles,
Nods and Becks and wreathed Smiles*
— John Milton

There was no wind as I approached through a clear cut, nor was there any sign of people. Even the loons had not returned yet. It was as if nature itself was whispering. The scent of spruce and pine filled the cold morning air, wafting off the evergreens surrounding this lonely little lake on the Eastern Shore.

Stepping into the water I stared at the bottom, searching the rocks. I waded along the shoreline until I saw the dark shapes under water. I tied on my fly and cast, letting it sink with my leader. I fought the temptation to retrieve my line quickly, remembering what I was imitating. After I was sure it had reached maximum depth, I pulled gingerly.

After each painstaking centimetre I waited motionless for some signal in the line, like feeling for vibrations on a railway track long before the oncoming train.

As a boy, I remember a fellow classmate who used to say April was the best time of year to catch trout. I eagerly asked him how, for my success with trout came later in May and early June, after the water had warmed up and just before the sum-

mer heat drove them to back to depths and heavily covered backwaters.

“Mayfly nymphs,” he declared. Mayfly nymphs? I caught trout with worms, minnows, corn, spinners and spoons. What were mayfly nymphs? Lures? Bait? I eventually learned they were the larvae of mayflies.

In general, the life cycle of a mayfly goes through four distinct phases, of which two concern the angler fishing with nymphs. The actual nymph, or pupa as it is sometimes called, crawls along the bottom of rivers and lakes for a year, waiting to undergo metamorphosis. When it is time to hatch, the nymph swims to the surface as an emerger.

Nymphs, not only of mayflies but of all water-hatching flies, make up an extremely significant proportion of a trout’s diet, and strangely enough, the artificial flies that imitate them make up a small proportion of most fly fishermen’s arsenals. Some argue that nymphs are the most effective flies for trout.

When I was introduced to the art of fly fishing I used dry flies for trout, or streamers, which are wet flies that imitate small fish. Salmon flies are an entirely different ball game.

I had a weighted Prince Nymph tied on at the moment, and thought back to that boy’s declaration as I

TROUT IN NOVA SCOTIA

Four trout species inhabit Nova Scotia waters. Two are native and two were introduced in the last century.

Our two native species are not true trout, but char. The most common is the speckled trout, commonly known as brook trout. It is found province-wide, though populations are in decline in the southern half of the province. The other native species, the lake trout, is extremely rare and only known positively to exist in Sherbrooke Lake (Lunenburg County) and Dollar Lake (Halifax County).

The two introduced species are the rainbow trout, sometimes called steelhead, which are indigenous to western Canada, and the brown trout, which was introduced from the U.K. and Germany.

There are sea-run populations of speckled, rainbow and brown trout throughout Nova Scotia. The lake trout is landlocked.

imagined it inching over the rocks.

I gradually brought the nymph closer, and felt the tiniest bit of resistance. Trout often lazily inhale vulnerable nymphs rather than striking them, and I risked a tug to set the hook. I was rewarded with a return yank, and an ensuing battle on my light fly rod.

After lifting a good-sized speckled trout from the lake, I realized that I, too, had fallen for the charms of the nymph — and consequently, of April. **Joe Fitzgerald is a freelance writer living in Halifax.**



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