

Fly fishing shad in the lower Delaware River

This article is about fly fishing for shad in the lower Delaware River. The area I am going to cover is from wind gap to Trenton. Shad run up the Delaware in early spring from around mid March to June. Starting in March there are some smaller buck shad running early. Water temps are usually still on the cold side. If the water is ice free and in the high forty degree range you have a good chance of hooking an early season fish. Starting in Trenton area one of the best spots is the water plant area.

From Trenton the next spot I prefer is the scudder falls area, either on the pa side or the jersey side of the river. The Pa side you have to access the falls from down river at the Yardley boat launch. From the jersey side there is a parking lot just above route 95 that will get you down to the main chute and pool. I normally go up to the New Hope wing dam from scudder falls as getting access between there is harder. What I look for on the river is where the river necks down and is deeper than the surrounding area. .

From this point I hit the route 202 bridge from the New Jersey side where the deeper water comes close to shore. Then on to Center bridge New Jersey.



Here just north of town there is a parking area at an old mill where you can access a small run of sorts that the shad run. This spot has produced some nice walleye as well on shad flies. From here the next stop is the wing dam

by the walking bridge across from Bull's island



N.J.

Going on up river my next stop though not a real favorite would be thru bridge at Frenchtown New jersey. Just across the river from Pa. you make a right turn and park along



the river there. Here you can access the river by wading out a good distance. This is a long cast but can be very rewarding. From Frenchtown the next spot is below the fish ladder in Easton where the Lehigh River enters the river. If it's crowded with other fishermen a walk down below the train bridge can be a good area. The last spot I like to fish is the coal to steam plant above Easton Pa. Here you can wade out by the railroad bridge to get to the fishing. Below there is huge deep pool where the shad stack up before running the fast water above the bridge. These are just some of the places I spent in the last 30+ years chasing shad on the river. All were wade able the last year I lived there.

Now let's get into the Equipment part, which to me is the most important part of being able to fish for shad. For the most part a 5 to 6 wt. rod is great for the upper river. In the lower you

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need to cast further and get down where the shad hang out. Starting with the rod I have always used a nine foot, eight weight rod as my standard, for other times I have used a 14 foot spey rod also. Reels don't have to be expensive though they should have a good disc drag. Shad for their size can really run. You do need at least one extra spool for a spare or different line. I carry three extras loaded with different weight heads. (Orvis rocky mtn. works great)



For lines I always carry an intermediate and sinking heads of different weights. I do make my own heads out of lead core line. (Cortland LC 13) can be bought in 100 foot lengths.



Cutting this into different lengths will give you a lot of ways to get your fly down in the strike zone. I like to use Cortland braided mono Hi-Vis running line in 30 lb. 100 foot long for the



running lines.

Amnesia works also. You will need to cast a long ways for shad in the lower river unless you have a boat.

As for leader you really do not need one. A 2 to 4 foot piece of mono in 4 to 10 lb (depending on water clarity) will be fine. This is not finesse fishing. You do need to learn the double haul with a chuck and duck sort of method. Using lead core and lead head flies makes for an exciting day... For wading, you should wear chest waders with studded boots, or better yet a pair of corkers. A wading belt is a must and some sort of PFD is wise. A Shooting basket is also needed since you will be casting long lines. A wading staff and a net (large) will be helpful.

For flies anything with bright colors and flash in size 8 to 4 will work. I like the comet style of flies that the western steel headers use, just change up the colors for shad. Chartreuse, white/red. Yellow, pink, blue, and black are the



most popular.

Adding flash into the fly really makes a difference. I tie some bright colored wet flies too. Another good fly is either gold or silver Mylar tubing slid over a hook shank and tied in at the bend and eye of the hook. For hooks I like

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eagle claw 1197 B,N,or G in size 6. Mustad hooks in 9672's Salmon hooks work also. Any large heavy nymph style should work. One hook that was popular is the gold hook for making shad spoons. It was a lighter wire but with a longer shank (3x long). These were obtained at local bait and tackle shops for the guys making shad spoons.

Now let's get down to the fly patterns.

First one is the comet series. First tie in a bead chain eyes $\frac{1}{4}$ in. behind eye of hook. Then tie in tail. Next wrap body with whatever color and material you like. Ribbing is optional but gold and silver Mylar seems to help. Then wrap hackle (saddle) behind and in front of bead chain. Tie off and finish head.



Next fly in my box is fly to imitate the shad dart. Hook- heavy wire nymph style. Tie in some lead eyes near the front of fly. Then add a tail of short marabou. Then wrap body with white or yellow chenille to just behind eye. Now tie in a contrasting color of chenille and wrap around

eyes and in front. Tie off.



Next is the bucktail. As you can see these are all easy patterns. Hook nymph style or 3x long streamer. Tail I like using flash-a-bou for the tail. Body is chenille in different colors. Wing is bucktail, fish hair, or any colored hair for the



wing .

A simple but effective pattern is one that has been very popular up north is this fly.



Simple wet fly. Hook nymph or large wet (remember these flies are all tied on size 4 to 8 hooks 6 & 8 being the most popular) body silver or gold Mylar. Wing pair of goose shoulder or

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duck wing dyed bright colors.



The last one is a size 8 gold hooks with a gold or silver sequence on the bend of hook. Then a small body is formed with uni-stretch and covered with sally Hansen's to protect it. I use this pattern mostly below center Bridge as the herring love hitting it. I have fished this in multiples of 3 flies for the herring.



There are a lot of different patterns you can use, streamers are another way of catching shad. The Mickey Finn has always been a producer. Standard buctails do a nice job too. The flies I have listed are ones I have used with the most success.

Alright let's go fishing. Once you find a spot where there is deep water being necked down you want to set up above this spot slightly. Or a

deep area where the river drops to where shad can rest.

I will cast slightly up stream and across the river keeping a tight line so my fly swings through the faster water. When my fly is downstream from me, I'll start stripping it in with short strips. Some days you need to do this fast and others a slow strip works. When the shad hit your fly do not, I repeat do not strike. Shad have soft mouths and you will rip the fly out. They hit hard and you will know it Just let him run if need be and play him off of the reel. If they run down stream you can lay your rod over and point it in the opposite way to try and turn the fish. I have had large roe shad run me into the backing and even lost a whole rig once. Once you have your fish in close this is where you have the greatest chance of losing him. A lot of people start to lift the fish when the leader gets close bad idea, the shad will shake loose from you. Now's the time to work the fish close and use the net. Congratulation you have your first shad on the fly..Take some pics to share and gently release him. Not all shad die after spawning and they will come year after year to spawn again.

Any Questions I can be reached at
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Thank You

Bob

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