

Valley Angler Bugs and Flowers by Bill Thompson

There always seems to be one special day in the spring when the whole world turns green. Previous to that day the woods and fields are gray. There may be a hint of color in that the maples have a red hue and a few buds have begun to show, but for the most part winter still has a firm hold on the landscape. This year it was a week ago last Saturday when the green took over as the dominant color.

This stuff is important to fishermen or at least to the more successful ones. Good fishermen are in tune with nature. This is especially true for fly fishermen, but it has merit for all anglers no matter what method of fishing they choose. On more than one occasion I have mentioned the old adage: "The time to go fishing is when the leaves are the size of a mouse's ear". This may be good advice, but there may be more to it. Is possible to predict important insect hatches by the flowers that grow along the stream bank?

As you might expect I am not the first one to come up with this and there is in fact a book written on the subject. The title is *Trout Flies and Flowers* by Ivan L. Mahoney. Mr. Mahoney makes the case that anglers who have a working knowledge of the flora that inhabits the banks of their favorite trout stream should be able to know what mayflies should be on the water and as a result be able to select the proper fly. The book is lavishly illustrated with lovely colored prints of various flowers and drawings of flies. Based on this alone the book is worth owning, however the book gives very little information on geographical location and time when these flowers can be found. For example the book shows dogwood and gives Sulphers as appearing at the same time that it is in bloom. As any local fly fisherman will tell you we do not have Sulphers in this part of New Hampshire and dogwood is pretty here scarce as well. However, last spring I was in Pennsylvania just about the time the dogwood was beginning to bloom and the Sulphur hatch was indeed happening.

In the interest of science and perhaps better fishing I have endeavored to place a few local wild flowers with some local mayfly hatches. With the aid of my wife Janet, who is more apt to notice what is growing along the stream bank than I am, and armed with a local hatch chart and my own limited knowledge of the local streams I have come to a couple of conclusions.

One of the prettiest early spring wild flowers is Red Trillium or wake-robin. It flowers in early April through June and will often bloom before the first robin has returned. Mahoney's book says to look for March Browns when Trillium begins to bloom. Our local hatch chart calls for March Brown to show up around the end of May 30th to June 20th. There is a pretty wide margin of time here, but Trillium and the March Browns do occur at roughly the same time. The only problem is that this hatch rarely occurs when the river has been stocked so for the most part it is a waste of time as far as fly fishermen are concerned.

The book calls for Gray Fox to appear when the Yellow Honeysuckle begins to show. We do have a fair size hatch of Gray Fox on the Ellis beginning around June 10th. The book gives no definitive time for the Honeysuckle, but it is indigenous to New Hampshire even though most of us equate Honeysuckle with the southern part of the country. The New Hampshire Wild Flower Society lists Trumpet Honeysuckle as rare or endangered. I would have to concur as I have never seen the stuff growing on the Ellis. The book does mention the Lilac as another flower to look for at the same time as the Gray Fox are on. The Lilac's have just started to bloom in the last few days and to date no one has rushed into the shop asking for Gray Fox flies.

The book lists many other wild flowers and corresponding mayfly hatches, but none seem appropriate for our neck of the woods. There are two plants that I would wager that most fishermen are more familiar with than the above mentioned and even though they don't foretell the emergence of any particular mayfly they do herald the beginning of a new spring and the time to go fishing. Neither one is very pretty, which might explain why they failed to appear in the book, but I think most fishermen find them attractive. I am referring to Skunk Cabbage and the Fiddlehead. Skunk Cabbage does indeed have a flower and it is said that it gives off heat that will melt snow. The Fiddlehead, which many New Englanders consider a delicacy, is often served with fresh spring caught salmon.

Another plant that has just reared its head in the last few days is Poison Ivy. It is another indicator of good fishing. I guess in the same vane as Poison Ivy, although not in the plant category, it would have to be black flies and mosquitoes. All of which serves to remind us that we must take the good with the bad.

In the end I was unable to make any firm conclusions. Logically it would seem that the same weather conditions: temperature, moisture and humidity that effect plant life would also have the same effect on insects. However, it is apparent that each living thing has its own time table and even though they return each year at approximately the same time only they know the precise time. The fun comes from recognizing these harbingers of spring and enjoying them again each year when they make their return.

See you on the river.