

# SALMON FLY TRANSITIONAL SERIES



Streamweaver Flies

Phone: 403.343.8699

Email: [bedens@shaw.ca](mailto:bedens@shaw.ca)

Web: [www.streamweaverflies.com](http://www.streamweaverflies.com)

Randy Henderson and myself have wanted to get this awesome natural event down on film for three years and we finally got it done on May/29/2006 on the Crowsnest River. It took seven hours of searching, collecting, observing and snapping photos to complete this series of photographs. I thank my dear wife Beth and daughter Debra for tolerating my indulgences and obsessions as they put it. They are my life circle and I love them both dearly. Randy is probably the best project person I have ever worked with and my longest and best fishing compadre/friend. He is a part of why this website and business we run has gotten to where it is currently sitting. As well a big thanks must go out to Andrew Pete, my brother Pat Edens, Duane McBain, Brian Johnson, Pat Williams and the staff at Canadian Web (Shane & Jason) for sharing their time and expertise to help complete this website and business. I would also like to thank Ken Hickford for patiently helping out with his literary expertise.

That being said this series of photos captures the essence of what aquatic insects go through during emergence and transition. Whether an aquatic insect emerges inside the margins of a stream below the surface, in the surface film, or even on dry land along the shorelines of streams the angler can always learn valuable information by observing their emergence process. All aquatic insects exit the nymphal or pupal shuck in the same manner up through the opening that expands horizontally down the middle of the wing or wing cases on the dorsal side of the insect's thorax. This opening that is created along the topside of the insect allows all Stoneflies, Mayflies, Caddisflies and Midges to transform from an aquatic stream born insect into an adult terrestrial air-breathing insect. Observing these emergence activities can help the angler to better understand the intricacies of the aquatic insect's life cycle, trout feeding habits and as a result help them tie more effective fly patterns and consequently learn how to more fully enjoy the sport of fly-fishing.

The Salmon fly is part of the stonefly family or the order Plecoptera (braid wing) it's scientific Latin name is *Pteronarcys Californica* and they are part of the spring/summer group of stoneflies. At two and a half to three inches in length and a 3 or 4-year life cycle it is probably the largest aquatic insect on the North American continent that is available for particularly large trout to feed on. When the Salmon fly adults are clumsily flying about above the stream their profile is huge they almost look like hummingbirds flying around their so big. The Salmon fly in the nymphal stage is a vegetable matter feeder and in the adult stage is unable to feed or take in moisture so the spring summer stoneflies survive for only a short duration of several days in the adult part of the life cycle. The Salmon fly nymphs live in the riff and tumble riffle type areas within a stream until they emerge into the adult form of the life cycle. At which time the nymph crawls out of the water and begins the transition from an aquatic nymph to a terrestrial air breathing adult insect.

Once the nymph locates a suitable location to extract itself from the outer nymphal shuck the outer nymphal skin can take quite awhile to shed the moisture from its aquatic environment. The actual extraction of the adult from the outer nymphal skin is a very difficult process for these insects to progress through, especially one particular point in time when the antennae are being pulled from the outer exoskeleton. This one point in time during the extraction takes at least 10-15 minutes to complete. We hope this series of photographs will open some anglers thinking to how important insect hatches are to fly-fishing and how they ultimately affect how, why, where, when and what trout feed on at the stream surface.

Once an angler observes these transitional characteristics and understands that every aquatic insect completes this extraction process in the same manner. We as fly tiers can then integrate these physical traits into our fly patterns. When large selective trout feed on aquatic insects at the stream surface during emergence they typically demand that these visual traits be present in

our fly patterns before they will eat them. More accomplished anglers are usually well informed fly tiers as well, they wisely tend to incorporate these features into their emergent, transitional and crippled fly patterns.

Anglers that aren't accomplished fly tiers should be aware of these facts and purchase patterns that duplicate these features and behave in the same manner as the natural insect in order to fish aquatic insect emergences effectively. When fished these patterns must also settle into the appropriate position and/or remain suspended in the water column for an extended period at the level the trout is feeding at in reference to the streams surface film. Patterns possessing these discussed traits and features must also be fished in the appropriate manner and proper hook size range for each important aquatic insect super hatch. Attention to detail will drastically improve efficiency and increase your angling success

Even though trout are unable to feed on the Salmon fly as it transforms from the nymph to adult stage of it's life cycle, because it unfolds above the waterline on dry land along the margins of the stream out of the trout's feeding lanes. Make no mistake though it is critical to what transpires next in the adult stage of the life cycle, providing the trout with a tremendous feeding opportunity and the angler with exiting dry fly fishing. The mature nymphs will congregate in specific emergence sites that are suitable such as bridge abutments, large boulders and streamside vegetation. When fully mature the nymphs will crawl up out of the water onto land and finally settle on streamside objects that provide a suitable site to extract their adult structure from the nymphal shuck. This transitional stage is critical allowing mature nymphs to become an adult terrestrial insect enabling it to sexually mature, mate and come back to the stream surface to lay eggs to begin a new generation of Pteronarcys Californica.

When the fully formed adult insect begins extracting itself from the nymphal shuck it is a difficult transformation that takes immense effort and a long duration in time to complete. It takes roughly 45 minutes to over an hour for the Salmon fly adult to fully complete the whole extraction process. Which begins the instant the nymphal shuck dries out enough for the exit crack to form on the insect's dorsal side down the middle of the wing cases to the point where each individual wing muscle and wing is completely formed, totally expanded and fully functional.

Once this transitional process takes place, which is usually at night from after dark until later than midnight for spring/summer stoneflies the adult insect will mature, mate and become egg laden. It is on nice bright hot windy afternoons when egg laden females and adult Salmon flies in general get knocked down on the surface and become a huge meal for the largest trout in a stream that creates exciting dry fly-fishing. This is an event the avid angler will want to be on stream for if their timing is right, the weather co-operates, stream flows and water clarity are moderate the angler can encounter the ultimate fishing experience.

This hatch usually takes place around the same time high elevation Mountain runoff (spring time mountain snow melt) occurs which can completely blow out streams. Totally decimating any chance of catching fish so this hatch is a crapshoot, but one that is worthwhile participating in. Especially if you can locate one of those special streams that originates at an elevation well below the level that experiences mountain runoff. These streams will run low and clear during the Salmon fly hatch providing reliable dry fly fishing that can be extremely rewarding.

