

# Confidence Patterns



Why they will improve your  
fly-fishing

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## What is a Confidence Pattern?

A confidence pattern is simply a fly that you have confidence in. And when you have confidence in your fly, you will fish confidently, and catch more fish. Here are a couple of things to look for when starting to find your confidence patterns:

You have an idea why it works. You don't have to know exactly why it works, but you need a little bit of an idea. It won't be a very productive day if the fish are eating caddis adults on the surface and you are fishing your confidence pattern for midges. If you know that it is a blue winged olive season, and you know that your fly looks like a blue winged olive, that is good enough.

## History of Success.

It may be your own experience, or it could be a brand new fly that your buddy just gave you. I have a few flies that good fishing buddies have given me to try out that they just had some luck on, and I knew right away I was going to catch fish, that's confidence. I still always carry my confidence patterns though, so that I have a go-to fly.

Sometimes sticking with the classic patterns and traditional materials that catch fish regularly is usually successful. Some patterns have been around for over a hundred years for good reason- they catch fish. That is one heck of a history of success.

## Quit Wasting Your Time Changing Flies

Have you ever seen, or been, that guy who is not catching anything and constantly changing flies to try to find something that works? I know I have. The truth, though, is that most of the time it is not the fly, but the fisherman. I can't remember the number of times I have been so excited to start fishing, spotting that perfect hole in the river and running down to get started, that I spooked that 20 inch rainbow that was holding right next to the bank. Now, don't get me wrong, I don't mind spending the rest of the day hooking up with wild 10 inch trout, but I would have at least liked to have made one cast to that big one.

What happens, though, is that we spend most of our day spooking fish with bad approaches and poor presentations, then wonder why we are not catching fish, and start changing flies to find the “right” one. The problem is there is no right fly for a spooked fish or bad presentation

When you have a fly you have confidence in, you can slow down and look at the other things that you are doing in order to increase your success. Are you approaching the river too quickly? Are you getting good drag-free drifts? Do you have enough weight on your flies to get down to the fish?

The list goes on and on, but as fisherman, we are often too quick to blame the fly. Having confidence patterns lets you focus on the important stuff so you will start catching more fish. After you have looked at you presentation and other areas of your fishing, then you can start changing flies if necessary.

How many do I need? Not that many. You do need a few go-to patterns. If you ask any fly fisherman you meet, you would find that they do most of their fishing with about a half dozen flies. They rest do come into play at various times but you would probably find that they can count their go-to flies on one hand. It's not to say that they always work, and there are times where you need to imitate a specific insect at a specific point in its life cycle, but for the most part, the go-to patterns are the choice.

# Simplifying



How often do you look at a fishing report and there is a huge list of flies and you have no idea if what you have will work? Having a confidence pattern means you can carry fewer patterns. Let's look at an example fishing report from late winter/early spring, when there is less bug activity, but the list is still big!

Let's take a look at an example:

Flies to use: Tungsten Micro Mayfly #16, Tungsten Prince Nymph #16, Psycho Prince #14 or a Pheasant Tails #16, Copper John #16, Mercury Midge #22, Rainbow Warriors #20, purple or a Copper-ribbed RS2 #22, Barr Emerger #18 BWO #18, RS-2 #18, WD-40 #18,

Dry flies to use are: CDC Cluster Midge #22, Midge Black #22, Para Adams #22, Griffith's Gnat or other midge adults #22

Wow, that is a lot of flies! Let's break it down, though.

1. Tungsten Micro Mayfly #16, Tungsten Prince Nymph #16, Psycho Prince #14 or a Pheasant Tail #16, Copper John #16

These flies all represent small stoneflies or mayflies, so pick your confidence fly for this group of bugs. The other thing to notice is that whoever wrote the report really likes tungsten-weighted flies. You may not have tungsten, you may not even like it, but make sure to bring your split shot so that you are getting your nymphs down to the bottom if you don't fish tungsten bead flies. I think the biggest reason that anglers are not successful in nymph fishing is they don't use enough weight to get their flies down to the fish.

2. Mercury Midge #22, Rainbow Warriors #20, purple or a Copper-ribbed RS2 #22

These are all small midges. Again, pick your favorite!

3. CDC Cluster Midge #22, Midge Black #22, Para Adams #22, Griffith's Gnat or other midge adults#22

All small midge adults or small mayflies. Do you have a favorite one confidence pattern?

So we really have three big categories here to cover with our confidence patterns. Here are a couple of sample selections that may work for you.

Here is one way to get ready for this trip  
if this was your report:

Pheasant tail #16- to cover the mayflies and stone flies  
Small thread midge #22 – covers the midges or even small  
mayflies  
Griffith's Gnat #22 – in case of rising fish

Let's look at this another way

Hare's Ear –size 16- to cover the mayflies and stone flies

RS-2 size 22– covers the midges or even small mayflies

Parachute Adams – size 22– in case of rising fish

It is important to understand what insect activity a fishing report is referring to, and then you can match you confidence patterns to the active insect life the trout are keying in on

## A Confession:

Your list of confidence patterns may evolve over time as you experiment with new patterns and style of flies, so don't just stick with what you know.

To be honest, I tend to see new patterns and get excited. I think that it is just an addiction that comes with being a fly fisherman. Flies are just plain fun. So, yes, in my box I have some patterns that I tied on a whim. That's okay, though. Always experiment and try new things, but I always make sure that I have my confidence patterns ready. I fish a lot of two fly rigs and you can bet that when I am trying out a new pattern, the other one is one of my confidence patterns. If the new pattern works great, all the better, but I know that if I'm not catching fish, it has nothing to do with my flies, it has to do with my approach and technique, and I know that I need to make an adjustment. You will find new confidence patterns through trial and error. Materials and fly theories always seem to change. Some of these changes may just be gimmicks, but some are pure gold.

## Pattern Ideas

Here are a few suggestions that you can use to start. They are standard patterns and have a proven history of success. These flies are many anglers' confidence patterns.

# Copper John

One of the best all around nymphs. It looks like a mayfly or small stonefly, and can be fished almost year round. A size 14-16 will work spring through the fall, but you may like a few in a smaller size when the weather gets cooler. Chartreuse is good during the season as a caddis imitation as well



Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear – Another classic pattern that gives the impression of life. It imitates anything from small stoneflies to mayflies and trout eat them up. Carry a few in a sizes 14-18 and you will cover most insect hatches.



Midge larvae – Midges are available to fish year round, so you need to have at least one good pattern in your box. I like thread style midges because they offer a low profile that matches the natural. Don't be afraid to try bolder colors such a red or chartreuse.





RS-2 – A solid mayfly pattern developed for selective trout. Catches fish on almost every water. The tuft of CDC feather makes and excellent wing case and drives fish wild.

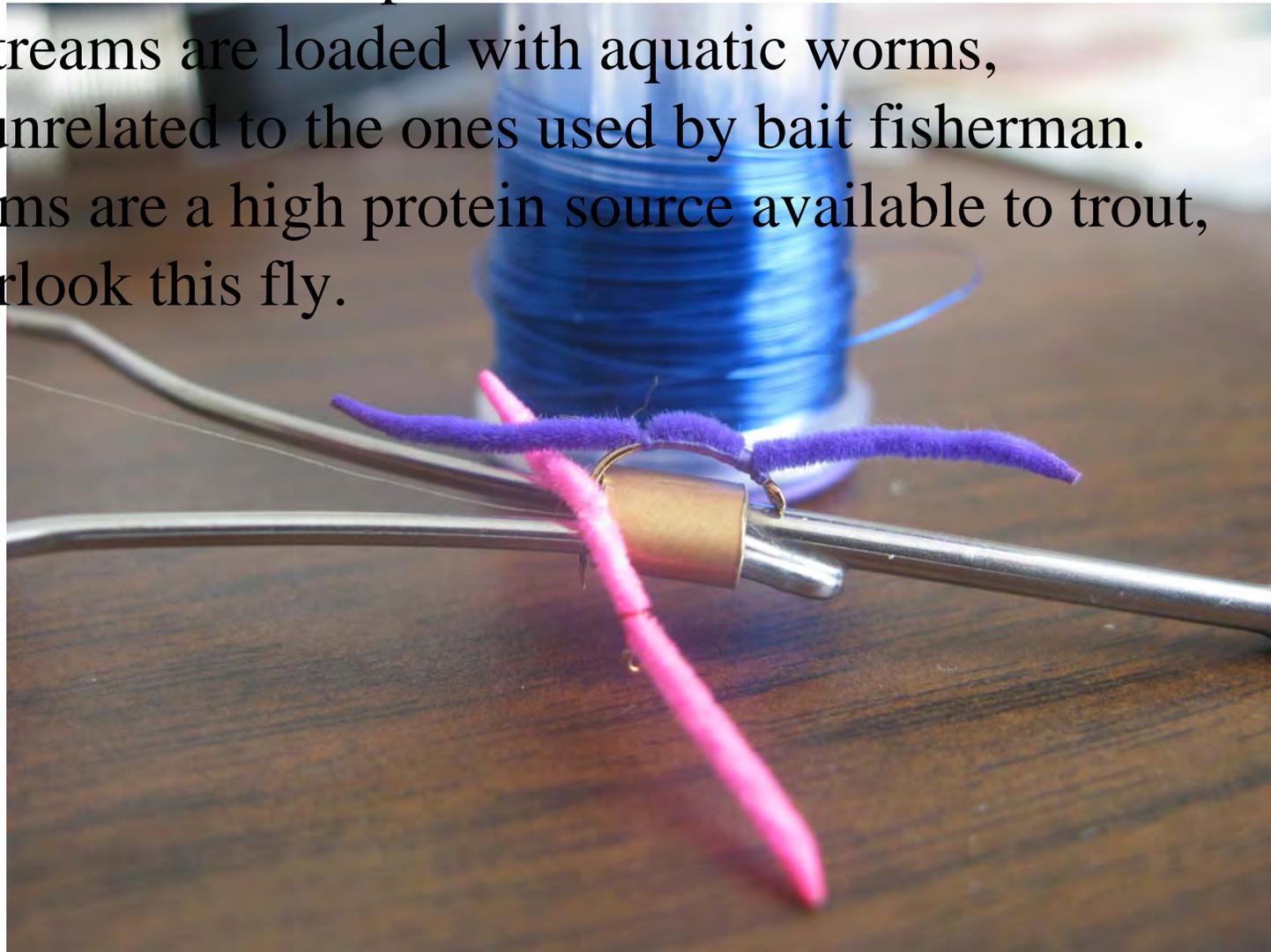
Adams or Parachute Adams- Two quality dry flies, tied in a different style. They both work and you will find that people will always tell you why one is better than the other. Change the color and you can change the bug they imitate, but a gray, brown or olive colored fly always seems to work.





Stimulator - This dry fly represents the big stuff from medium sized stone flies, to large caddies that appear just after runoff, to grasshoppers. Because it is big, it is easier for most fisherman to see and can be used in a dry-dropper rig. It's a great summer pattern and good for searching.

San Juan Worm- This is probably one of the most overlooked flies. Maybe it has to do with the fact that it has worm in the title. It does represent a worm, but not the one you think. Streams are loaded with aquatic worms, completely unrelated to the ones used by bait fisherman. Aquatic worms are a high protein source available to trout, so don't overlook this fly.



By using Confidence Patterns you will be able to focus on your presentation, approach to the river, and other areas of your fishing. By being able to put more attention into these other important areas of your fishing, you will begin to enjoy greater success. Even small improvements in these other areas will yield exponential results in your success.

The last and most important tip that I can give you to improve your fishing and developing confidence patterns is to get out. I hear so many times that people didn't get out because it was too far to drive and they didn't have time. The truth is they didn't have time to drive to a trophy trout water 2 hours away and overlooked the little trout stream 20 minutes away. Sure it may not have 20+ inch trout in it, by getting your line on the water and paying your dues on these little streams will teach you more and improve you fishing, so that when you do have time to travel to trophy waters, your chances of hooking up with a big fish will be greater.

So get out, find your confidence patterns,  
pay attention to your techniques, and have  
**FUN!**

Tight Lines Everyone,  
Joshua Rickard

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