

# TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

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Proven flies  
to tie and tr

## Searching the shallows

Explosive dry-fly sport on  
a Midlands reservoir

## INFLUENTIAL LEADERS

A trout-fisher's guide to  
length, strength and taper

## SUMMER SALMON ROD TESTED

## A drift in the Hebrides

Breathtaking wild trout next  
to the Atlantic swell





# CATCH A WHIFF

There may be something in the water,  
suggests Simon Cooper



**H**OW MUCH IMPACT DO OLFACTORY senses have on successful fishing? I once knew a river keeper who swore he could smell the presence of grayling in the air on a still, frosty morning. One of my early fly-fishing mentors encouraged me to rub my fly into the mucus of my first fish of the day. Even then, as an uncertain teenager, I rather wondered about this. After all, if the fly had worked fine without the mucus, why should it work any better with the mucus? Did trout sniff a fly before taking it? I rather doubted it. Or was the mucus meant to help the fly sink or float? To this day I have no idea, and I abandoned the practice as soon as my mentor disappeared from view.

Of course, salmon fishing is famed for female pheromone lore with all sorts of — how shall we say? — personal additions to flies. And as for coarse fishing, there is a multi-million-pound industry based around the smell of your bait — strawberry, tobacco, chewing gum — you name it and there will likely be a bait for it. But it makes a certain amount of sense. *Cyprinids*, such as carp, roach, barbel and their like, have a far greater sense of smell than *salmonids*, using smell to not only seek out food in less-than-clear water but also avoid predators, find mates and identify fish to which they are related.

So, not all fish are born equal when it comes to a sense of smell. The pike might be ahead of the trout, but the eel is far ahead of both with an olfactory capacity 1,000 times greater than the pike. Well, I suppose if faced with a 3,500-mile return journey from a British river to the place of your birth in the Sargasso Sea off the coast of Florida some 20 years after you left, you are going to need some sort of inbuilt guidance system.

But successful bait fishing is not always about the bait, but what the fish do with the bait, namely eat and

digest it: the excreted product, bile acids. All fish have a heightened sense of smell for these acids, so they are drawn to a feeding area in anticipation of food to come, hence the success of ground-baiting. Likewise, the natural things they like to eat, such as worms and snails, are largely odourless, but fish seek them out by following the bile trail.

Does this help us fly-fishers? Well, it might explain why trout gravitate to particular sections of a river. I've always assumed that pools are simply great places for trout to live for all the obvious reasons. But maybe the fish are drawn to pools by the bile scent that travels downstream and once they are there, they become locked into a virtuous (or vicious circle) that keeps them there. It is also clear from bait research that fish will stop eating a substance that has been enhanced with flavour but which has little nutritional value. I'm guessing that we can assume much the same for artificial flies, but simply more so. Maybe not so much hook-shy but food-wise?

Ultimately, however, whichever way you cut it, successful fishing comes down to not what you use, but how, where and when you use it. As my mentor used to endlessly say, and on this I did not ignore him, the wrong fly well cast will always out-fish the right fly badly cast. ■

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