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hotels and  
cottages

# TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

## Conwy calling

The lure of salmon and  
sea-trout in Snowdonia

## BEETLE INVASION

Match the new hatch  
sweeping the country

## Cobbinshaw capers

Sparkling rainbows at an  
historic Edinburgh club

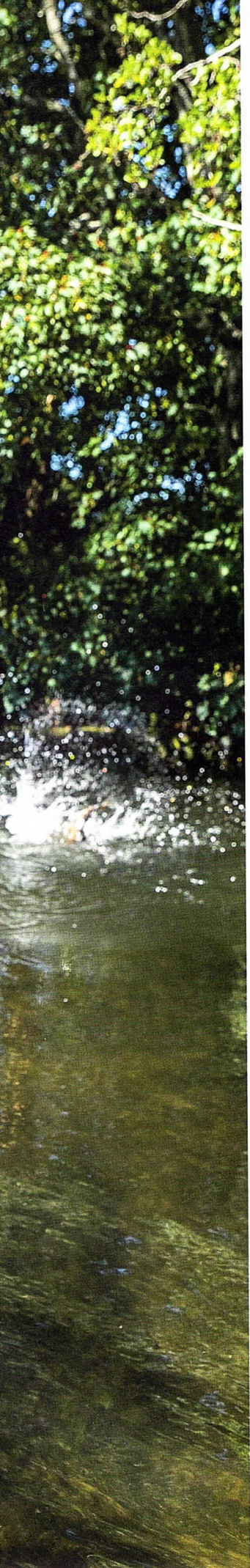
## Trout in the foothills

Where to find peaceful summer sport









Alder beetles ensuring they will continue to spread across the country.

# BEETLING ABOUT

Don Stazicker encounters a juicy black bug that is much to the trout's liking on the Dorset Frome

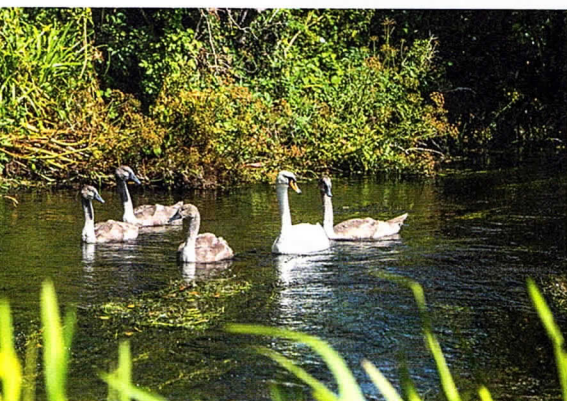
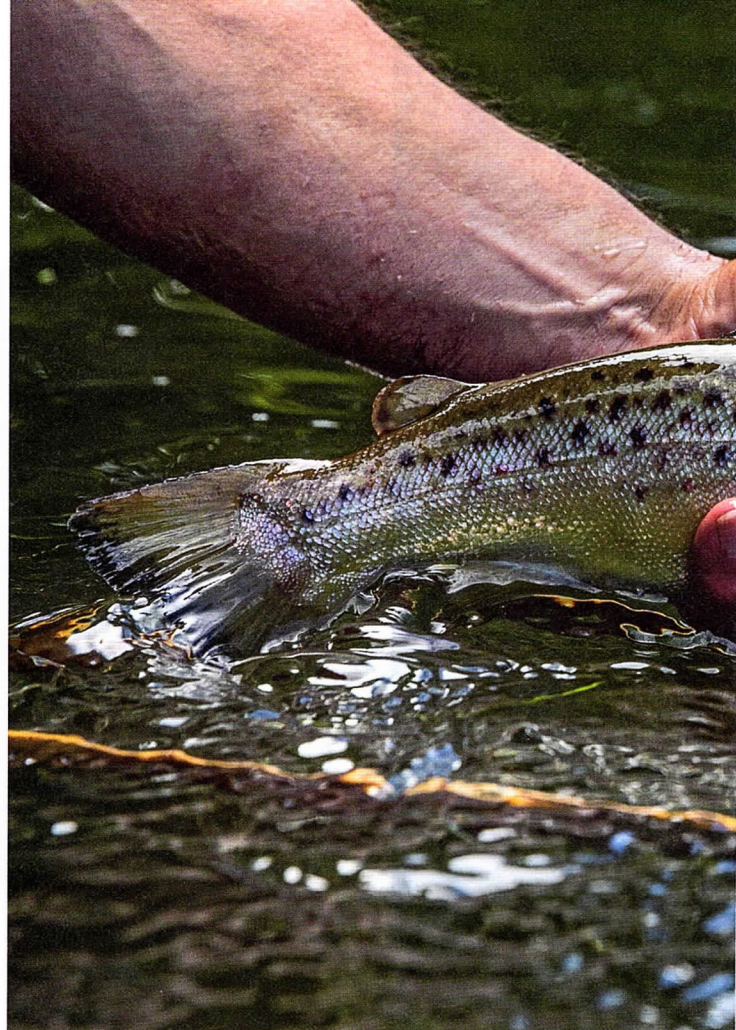
**T**HE CHALK STREAMS OF Dorset used to have a bit of a Cinderella reputation when compared to their better-known cousins in Wiltshire and Hampshire. This situation is rapidly changing, particularly with the River Frome, which has established a superb reputation as one of the premier big grayling rivers in the UK and one that in 2019 produced the current record fish.

It was a warm sunny day in July when I made the trip down to Dorset to fish the Frome at Wrackleford with Peter Hayes. The Wrackleford Estate lies two miles north-west of Dorchester. It is a true sporting ►

A violent response to Don's foam beetle.



*“It’s rather special to fish for trout that are feeding on an insect that didn’t feature on any angler’s radar until recently”*



Careful keeping benefits all wildlife, including this family of swans.



The Shooting Lodge provides self-catering accommodation for eight.



The spectacular lodge interior.

estate with one of the best shoots in England, seven fly-fishing beats on the middle Frome, each suitable for one or two rods, and Langford Lake, stocked with rainbow trout and accommodating four rods.

We met at Wrackelford House, a beautiful Georgian property on the banks of the Frome, home to six generations of the Pope family. Oliver and Katie Pope manage the estate. Oliver showed us the beats and the luxurious accommodation, ideal if you want to stay close to the fishing.

The Frome meanders through a lush floodplain lying between low hills. Some beats are more open than others: the Stratton has enough tree cover to provide shade on a bright sunny day without being difficult to fish; Muckleford, immediately upstream, is significantly more open if you prefer your casting to be as easy as possible. The river varies from 20ft-30ft wide, and all the beats can be waded, although this is not essential. The riverbanks are sympathetically maintained, mown grass paths retaining enough riparian vegetation to provide concealment for the angler and shelter for emerging flies.

We fished the Stratton beat from the thatched fishing hut at its mid-point, a short walk from Stratton village.





**This lovely trout took Peter's floating larval pattern.**



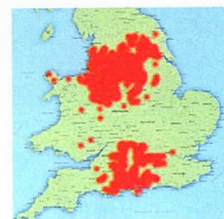
## ALDER LEAF BEETLE

The Alder Leaf Beetle (*Agelastica alni*) is common in Europe but was thought to be extinct in the UK. It was re-discovered in 2004 and since then has spread across north-west England and north Wales and is now widespread in the south-east (see map).

It is predominantly found on alder trees but also on hazel, birch and hornbeam. The adults overwinter in soil near alder trees, emerging in April. The beetles and their larvae are present on the alders through to July and early August. They eat the leaves, leaving them with a skeletonised appearance; often the leaves turn brown. This does not kill the trees but markedly alters their appearance.

The 7mm-8mm long beetle appears black but is actually dark metallic blue with purple reflections while the larva is around 10mm long, black with a shiny, segmented abdomen and six short legs at the head end.

It is not related to the Alder fly (*Sialis lutaria*).



Trout were rising in the shade of bankside alder trees whose skeletonised brown leaves indicated the presence of alder leaf beetles. Peter and I first encountered these insects in 2017 on the River Itchen where we found trout and grayling feeding voraciously on both the adult beetles and their larvae. Thought to be extinct in the UK, in 2004 the alder leaf beetle was re-discovered in Manchester and in 2014 it was found in Hampshire. Since then, it has spread across England to the rivers of the Peak District and South Yorkshire and to many southern chalk streams.

Fish take both the adult beetle and the larva, a jet-black armour-plated caterpillar about 10mm long. It's rather special to fish for trout that are feeding on an insect that didn't feature on any angler's radar until recently. You won't find information about this creature in any of the standard books on trout fly identification.

On hot, bright, cloudless days, aquatic insects are unlikely to emerge until the evening and terrestrial insects, like this beetle, can really save the day. When there is no hatch, fish will feed opportunistically, taking whatever drifts past. At these times, a searching pattern will work well, and a foam beetle is one of my favourite

prospecting flies for the summer. On this day, the beetles and their larvae falling into the river made it an obvious choice.

A size 16 black foam beetle cast under the alders and into the rings left by a regular riser was rewarded with a strike from a lovely 1½lb brown trout. I like to tie a short pearl Krystal Flash "tail" on my beetles because when they get trapped on the surface, their transparent wingtips often protrude from the wingcases.

Peter waded into position and used a floating larval pattern, tied with black micro-chenille on a size 18 hook, to catch two more rising brownies from the shade under the trees. One trout had ►







The classy, thatched fishing hut was ideal for lunch in the shade.



Leaf skeletonised by alder beetle larvae.



alder beetle larvae clearly visible in its mouth. I waded carefully upstream casting to rising fish but also searching likely shaded spots. Wading avoided me being silhouetted against the sky but required me to roll cast to avoid entanglement in the bankside vegetation. I roll cast the fly on a short length of line, controlling the slack by raising the rod tip as the line floated back to me, before using a roll-cast pickup to lift off and present the fly. The pickup involves rolling the line into the air and, before it lands on the water, performing a single back cast and forward delivery. This avoids false casting, which can easily spook fish with line flash and line shadow. It works beautifully at short to medium range, but if you add a haul, it is possible to present the fly at 50ft, a distance rarely needed on a medium-sized river. A buoyant foam beetle is well suited to roll-casting, which tends to drown dry-flies, especially those tied with CDC. It proved devastatingly effective, catching fish taking the alder leaf beetles and their larvae but equally effective when searching “fishy” water.

On bright days, when the contrast between sun and shade is high, it is hard to see into the shadows beneath trees. A hat that completely shades your glasses and eyes helps, but it is always best to get close to the shaded area so that it occupies as much of your visual field as possible. Allow a little time for your eyes to accustom themselves to the shade.

Remember that you are visible to the trout when brightly lit, so make use of vegetation and shadows to make yourself less conspicuous. Wading achieved ►



## FOAM BEETLE

**Hook** Size 16 Tiemco 100SPBL dry fly  
**Thread** Black 8/0 Semperfli Classic Waxed Thread  
**Tail** Five or six strands of pearl Krystal Flash  
**Wingcase and head** Black closed-cell foam  
**Body** Black Semperfli Straggle String  
**Sighter** Hot pink Uni Nylon-Stretch



## PETER'S ALDER BEETLE LARVA

**Hook** Size 18 nymph hook  
**Thread** Black 8/0 nylon  
**Body** Black Veniard  
Easy Dub micro chenille  
**Head** UV resin



*“Something as apparently insignificant as taking a single step can transform failure into success”*

both aims. It got me close so I could see into the shadows and it made me less obvious to the trout.

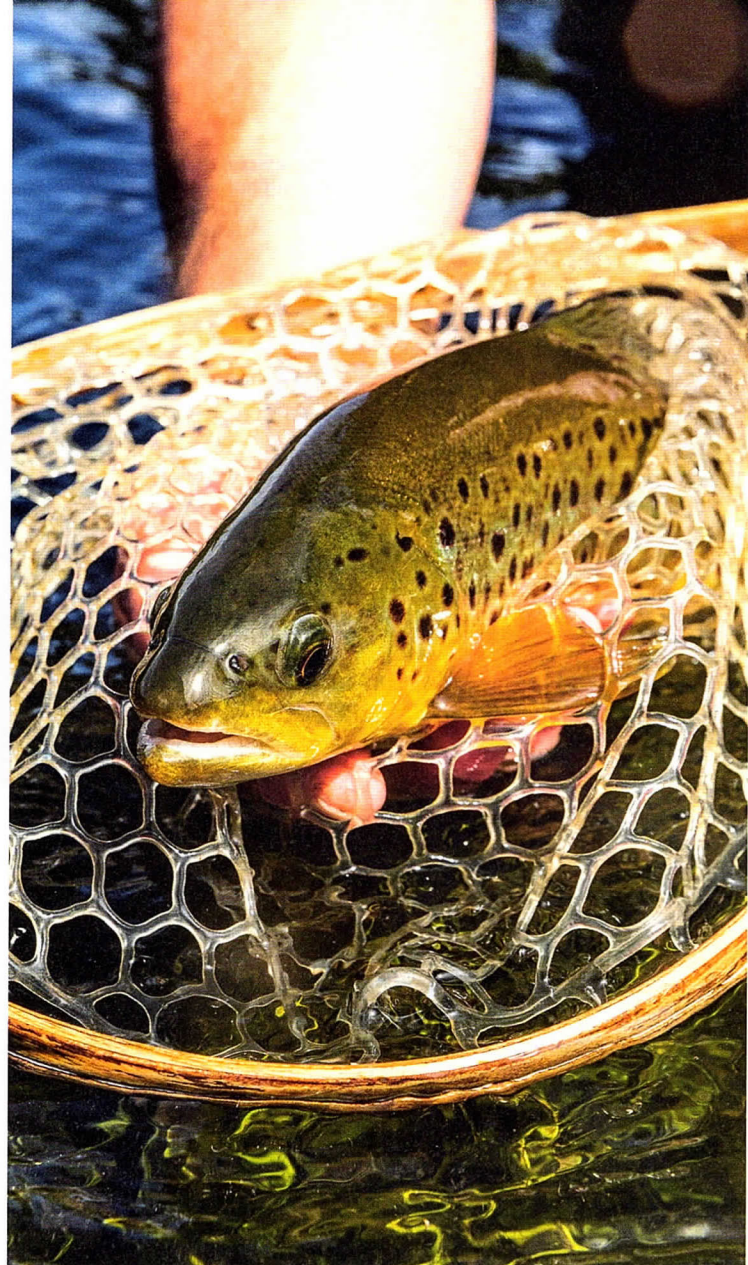
In summer, your other option is to nymph the deeper water and there were some lovely deep runs where small heavy nymphs presented upstream caught some good trout and grayling.

One run illustrated the importance of searching the water thoroughly from top to bottom.

I put several drifts through an area where the riverbed shelved from right to left. The line and fly were not falling in the same current, and drag was preventing the fly reaching the bottom. A single step to the left allowed the fly-line, leader and fly to fall in current of the same speed. The fly sank deeper and the first drift was rewarded with a nice brownie. The next ten casts produced five fish where previously they had produced nothing. Something as apparently insignificant as taking a single step can transform failure into success.

In many ways, this was a typical July day on a chalk stream. There were plenty of rising trout if you looked carefully for them in shaded areas. Peter and I both caught well with terrestrial patterns, while nymphing in the deeper runs proved highly effective. We caught lovely wild brownies and some modest grayling. The big grayling didn't show themselves in the bright sunlight. Some brown trout are stocked and all the fish we caught were in super condition.

A summer's day on a chalk stream takes a lot of beating, and this stretch of the Frome was a little bit of paradise. A great head of fish, a fascinating new insect for them to feed on and easy wading combined to give that "moment out of time" feeling that I really value. It wasn't just the fishing — the quiet, calm valley with butterflies and damselflies flitting around wild orchids was just a marvellous place in which to spend a day. ■



**A brownie that took the nymph as soon as it was presented at the correct depth.**

### *Factfile*

The Wrackelford Estate offers luxurious on-site accommodation. There are four self-catering properties, including a spectacular shooting lodge that sleeps eight in four rooms. Bed-and-breakfast is available in four double rooms at Wrackelford House. Guiding, tackle hire, fly selections and lunch hampers (available when booking) complete a very desirable package. Dorset is a beautiful county with plenty to do for the whole family, fascinating places to visit and excellent local cuisine.

### **BOOKING**

Wrackelford Estate, Stratton Beat, 2021 price per rod: April 1-April 30, £75; May 1-May 15, £120; May 16-June 19, £150; June 20-October 15, £95. Book through Fishing Breaks. Tel: 01264 781 988. | Email: [info@fishingbreaks.co.uk](mailto:info@fishingbreaks.co.uk) Web: [fishingbreaks.co.uk](http://fishingbreaks.co.uk) The Wrackelford Estate, Wrackelford House, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9SN. Tel: 01305 267643. Mob: 07980 694487. Email: [enquiries@wrackelford.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@wrackelford.co.uk) Web: [wrackelford.co.uk](http://wrackelford.co.uk)



**PHOTOGRAPHY:** RICHARD FAULKES