

# CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

## Finding and Catching Giant Brown Trout After Dark

By Micah Crider



It's a cool September night. Dark, with the exception of the light provided by the nearly full moon. All is quiet except for the occasional pestering mosquito and the pack of coyotes across the creek celebrating a fresh kill. We don't talk much, instead we focus on the task at hand: trying to limit the noise we add to our surroundings. Concentration is crucial in these circumstances; it can happen at any point and when it does, you better be ready. You see, we don't do this because it's comfortable or enjoyable, we do it for the potential reward and the chance to witness something not commonly seen, especially in our area.

We move up the stream, and the casting becomes repetitive. We are entering what I like to call "robot mode." Many of my big fish-chasing friends know this point, where you've made so many casts with no result that you start to lose focus. We've been at it for hours and are approaching the end of the stretch. Then... it happens.

"Fish on," he yells with a sort of excitement, yet anxiousness, "Big fish!" The focus that was waning is now locked in as he battles the creature at the end of his line. We haven't seen it yet, but we know it is what we came here for. As I flip my headlamp on, I immediately become anxious myself, knowing that I need to ensure this beast successfully makes it into my net. You see, netting a trophy fish for someone is a lot of pressure, because you don't want to be responsible for losing a fish like this. I'm patient, making sure to move in at just the right moment and successfully land the fish. We interrupt the coyotes with audible cheers and high fives, snap a few photos and release her back into the dark water from which she came. Just like that, the night resumes to its homeostasis and we begin the trek back to the truck. It was a good night.

This story recaps just one of my many night fishing experiences this past season. Night fishing is not new, but is a technique that many of my friends, my wife and I have adopted in recent years. It isn't comfortable or relaxing like most daytime outings tend to

be, instead it's tense and often spooky. Raging mosquitoes, angry beavers, dangling spiders, mud and the unknown around you are all realities when you're night fishing. Many people ask why I do it, and I've often asked myself that question as well. The same thing that hinders many people from going out after dark is the same thing that keeps me out past dark—the unknown. I am by no means an expert on targeting trout after dark, but I have done it enough to observe a few tips to share with those who might be considering night fishing:

### Rod and Leader

I prefer to use a rod in the 6-8wt range. I've found that the trout I've caught at night are not leader shy. They see the fly and attack. In most cases I use a leader in the 5ft range ending with straight 10lb Maxima leader material.

### Bugs Can be Awful

Some of the worst mosquitoes I have experienced have been during night fishing. I would highly recommend wearing a buff over your face, as well as long sleeves. I also wear casting gloves because any exposed skin will be found.

### Fish Familiar Water

I always recommend people fish water that they are familiar with at night. When it's dark, it's hard to tell what you are wading into. You won't necessarily know if there is a deep hole ahead, or an unseen stump or rock that will trip you. Familiar water also helps reduce much of that anxiety that naturally comes from being out in the dark.

### Obey Your Local Fishing Regulations

Different states have different curfews for trout fishing. Do your research and make sure that you are fishing during legal hours.

### Fish Flies That Move Water

I've been most successful when I use bigger flies that cause a commotion when fished. When night fishing, the goal is to target large trout. Most of these fish are not out looking for a small bug, they're looking for meat. I like to use flies such as mice or large streamers that push water and draw the attention of these predators. Don't be afraid to fish these flies with some aggression, but be open to changing your retrieve based on what you find is working.

### Plan Your Casting Lanes

If you think getting your fly caught in a tree or on the bank is frustrating in the



DREW WITH THE GIANT BROWN TROUT LANDED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ARTICLE

day, it's worse at night. Pay attention to your surroundings and make sure you have a casting lane before throwing your fly. Limit your false casts as much as possible. The less time your fly spends in the air, the less the chance you will end up in a tree. Remember, the cover of darkness will often allow you to get closer to these fish at night than you would during the day without spooking them. You don't need to worry about making extremely long casts, most of my casts at night range from 10–20 feet.

### **Don't Get Trigger Happy**

It isn't uncommon for a trout to swipe at your fly, but not fully commit. When this happens, don't get trigger happy. If you hear a strike, but don't feel any tension, keep stripping, often the fish will return for another attempt. If you rip your fly out of the water after hearing the first swipe, you may spook the fish or your fly may end up in the tree behind you. A good way to prevent this is to always strip-set.

### **Pay Attention to Your Fly**

I often see people starting to lose concentration as their fly is approaching them. I can't tell you how many times a trout has followed my fly all the way to where I am standing and strikes at

the last second. If your fly is in the water, don't lose focus, because a strike can come at any moment.

### **Fish With a Partner**

I always try to go with someone if I'm out after dark. You never know what may happen, so it's always smart to have someone else with you in case of emergency. If nothing else, having a partner will keep the nerves down and your mind at ease. They also come in handy as a photographer when you land your monster.

### **Light**

You'll want to make sure you have a working headlamp, I don't think this needs much more explanation. We use the light when walking to and from the stream, but fish with the light off. You'll also want to make sure you have a camera with a flash to take a picture of your catch!

Night fishing is a unique experience that heightens your senses and allows you to notice little sounds and details that you may not catch during a day trip. If you're looking for a relaxing and peaceful outing, it may not be for you, but if you're looking for an adrenaline fix, it may be just what you need. Who knows, maybe our headlamps will cross paths someday.



ABIGAIL CRIDER WITH A GREAT NIGHTTIME BROWN TROUT