

Fish & Game

ISSUE SIXTY EIGHT

NEW ZEALAND

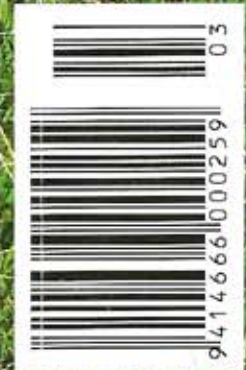
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MONSTERS
ON MICE AFTER DARK



the impact of floods
ON INVERTEBRATES

the fish
OF A LIFETIME

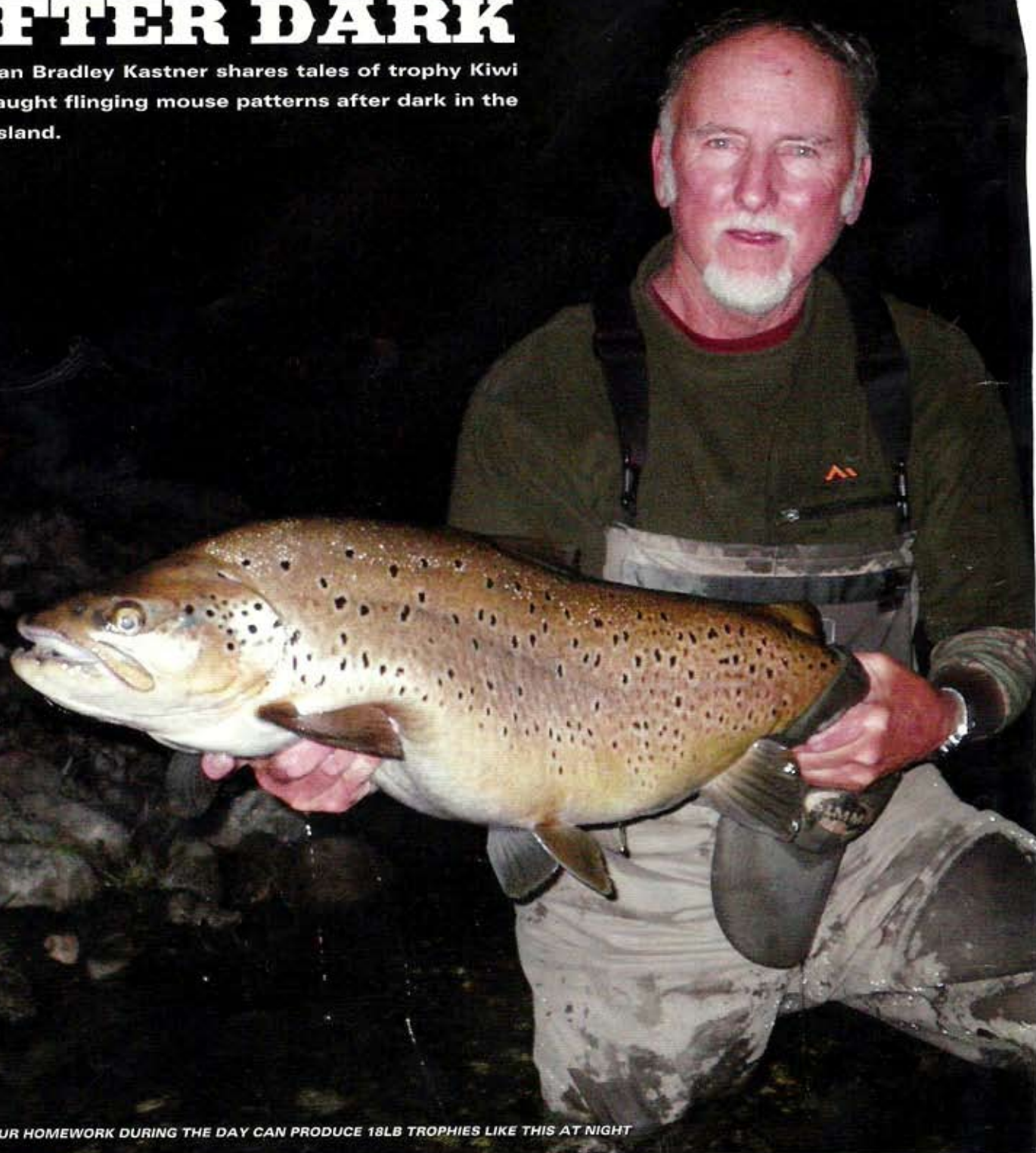


THE HISTORY
OF LAKE O

MOODS OF WILD NORTHLAND PHEASANT

monsters on mice **AFTER DARK**

American Bradley Kastner shares tales of trophy Kiwi trout caught flinging mouse patterns after dark in the South Island.



DOING YOUR HOMEWORK DURING THE DAY CAN PRODUCE 13LB TROPHIES LIKE THIS AT NIGHT

BRADLEY KASTNER



A SELECTION OF IMITATIONS
THAT DO THE TRICK

800 SOUTH

32 Fish & Game New Zealand

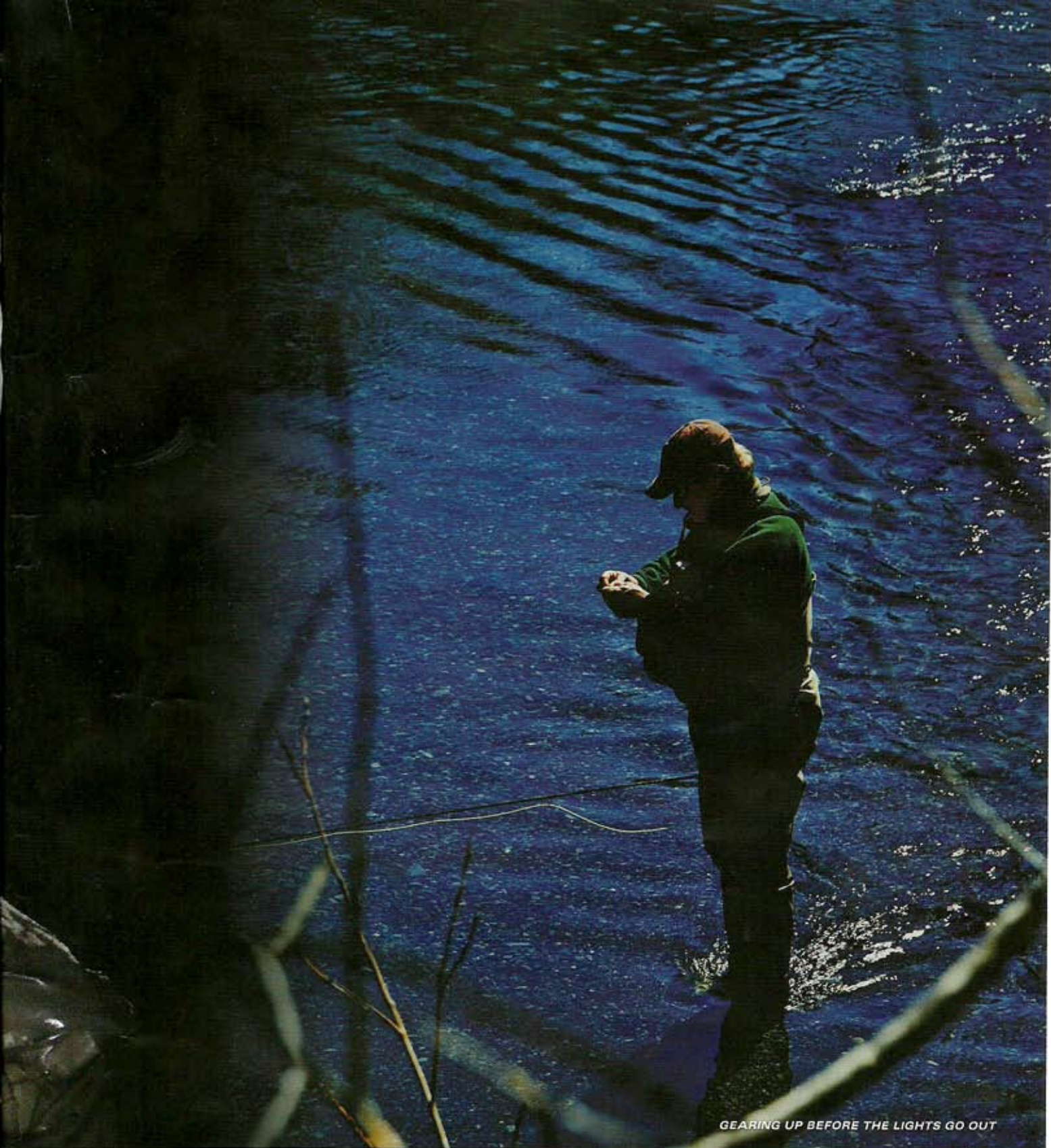
A MONTH BEFORE RECENTLY COMING TO New Zealand, I heard a rumour of a possible summer beech mast and, subsequently, a potential mouse plague affecting the South Island. When I first caught wind of this wonderful development, I started researching the location of the plagued areas. The Department of Conservation was a helpful source of information on heavily seeded areas, but DoC is definitely not an 0800-MOUSE hotline by any means. I find that sometimes you just have to do the hard yards and go fishing and see for yourself.

I am not a dendrologist, but my understanding is that these beech masts can happen every three to five years. The last plague I am aware in New Zealand was in the 2006-07 season. Because of the abundant food

source of seeds, the population of mice can grow to plague proportions. In certain areas, fish soon recognise the abundant food source of mice swimming the lakes and rivers. Opportunistic feeders that they are, trout begin feasting on these swimming 'rump steaks', which can lead to tremendous conditioning. (For a great article on how and why the beech seeding occurs, refer to an article by Garvin James and Steve Fox published in Issue 32 of Fish & Game Magazine in April, 2001).

Many flyfishers have an infatuation with catching fish on a mouse imitation. The lure of fishing at night is something that we all talk about, but never actually go out and do.

It was early December 2009 and a good friend,



GEARING UP BEFORE THE LIGHTS GO OUT

Joe Hyde, was visiting me in New Zealand for a week of fishing. Joe had great fishing for his short trip. He landed several big trout while sight fishing during the day, which included a beautiful 11lb brown. After a hard day fishing, we mustered up enough energy to tie on a few mouse patterns and head to the river for an additional evening quest to catch that big fish. As we walked to the river, we joked about the possibilities of catching a big brown at night. When we got to the river, I sarcastically said to Joe: "Just think buddy, this could be the part of your trip that will be known to us as the...", and then it got better. And boy did it ever!

That night we fished three pools. Together we

landed fish of 5lb, 7lb, and an eight and a half pounder. As we walked back to camp from our first successful night mousing experience, we started to talk about a systematic approach to this new game.

When we woke that morning at the crack of 10:30am, we decided we would ease into our day. Eventually, we did go day fishing at around noon. When we hit the river, we were both looking at each pool very differently.

Certain pools are easier to fish during the night than others, for sure.



STU HASTIE



THIS BIGGEST OBSTACLE IS CASTING room. The pools on a bend of the river are easier to backcast without fouling your rig. Snagging bushes and trees behind you can soon lead to frustration. It pays to 'do your homework' during the day. This extra step can make or break you during your nighttime adventure. Prepare yourself and intimately study the environment that you plan to fish in the dark of night before you get 'blindfolded' by Mother Nature.

Safety is of utmost importance. Take the time to get organised before you go out on your adventure. Make a list of things you will need, such as a good headlamp with extra batteries and don't forget your wading belt. I highly recommend checking the weather report. You don't want to get stuck having to wade a flooded river at night. I also suggest always fishing with a friend or two.

A six or seven weight rod, with a floating line, seems to do the job. I like to keep my leader length at around 6-8ft. Anything longer is harder to cast with a bulky fly on the end. Heavy tippet is of importance, for sure. I use 10lb or 15lb Maxima. Remember, it's dark, so the fish aren't exactly leader shy. Take the time to tie a good knot during the light. It would be a heart-breaker to lose a big brown trout because of human error. I do tend to ruffle hitch the head of my deerhair mouse. The extra step ensures that the imitation is skating on the surface properly.

One thing to remember is to always de-barb your fly. Flailing a deerhair mouse at night is not the safest thing in the world for you or your buddy to do. The most important reason, however, is for the fish. These mousing trout inhale the fly softly and they can take it deep. There would be nothing worse than catching a big boy and watching it bleed to death in front of your eyes.

It can also be harder to look after your gear at night, so always check your leader for wind knots and ensure that your hook point is still sharp. Casting in the dark can easily foul your gear. Be patient and take the time to check it often.

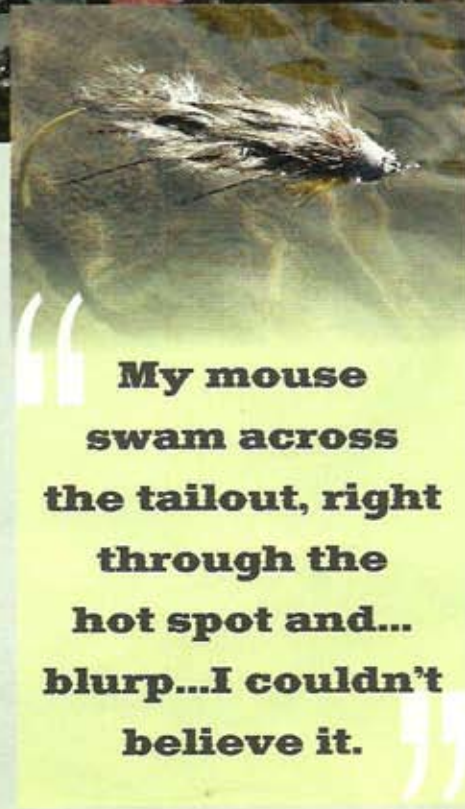
The mouse pattern with which I have had most success is my personal imitation called the Magnet. I have used several other patterns and, honestly, I don't think it matters, as long as it forms a nice wake in the water – that's the main objective.

One of the more interesting things about mousing at night is actually figuring out when a trout has eaten your fly. Our eyes play an important role as we flyfish – whether it's simply looking at the scenery, or watching a trout rise to your dry fly during a great hatch. Well... guess what...you don't get any of that visual stimulation in the dark.

The sensation of a trout strike at night is closest to a streamer fished down and across. A strike with a streamer can be hard and easier to recognise. A strike with a mouse fly can be surprisingly soft. It basically depends on the speed of the current. It's a combination of feeling the tightening of the line and trying to hear the "blurp" of the fish eating your fly. Hearing the bite is what I most rely on more than anything. If it's windy or the water flow is too loud, you must rely on your sense of feel. I softly retrieve my mouse at all times during the retrieve, trying to stripe strike at all things that may be a fish. But, when in doubt, set the hook.

On one occasion, my keen 16 year-old fishing buddy, Jarred Nicolson, and I went for a night fish. We were walking to a pool where I had seen a large trout during that same day. I marked the spot with some scrub that was growing on the bank. We arrived to our fishing pool just on dark. Soon after our arrival, I couldn't wait anymore and started casting. The river valley was well lit with a near full moon. When my first cast landed, I soon realised I could see my mouse on the water skating on the surface. Then all of a sudden...blurp! The sound of the strike startled me, but I never felt the line tighten. My mouse continued through the swing and nothing else happened. I laughed out loud and said to Jarred: "He missed it!" I quickly made another cast in the same area. I just started the swing and...wham! He did not miss it this time. I followed with: "Oh shit, buddy I got him!"

Quickly turning on our headlamps trying to catch a glimpse of its size as it rose from the depths, we both stared at the impressive thickness on the fish's shoulders. Then I quickly started to swing the trophy to the bank. Just as Jarred climbed in the water to net the fish, the hook flew out of the fish's mouth. It was gone. As the giant swam away, we spotted him with our torches and got a really good look. He was a biggy. Taking a deep sigh, I then began to cuss at myself for a few seconds. Still trying to convince



My mouse swam across the tailout, right through the hot spot and... blurp...I couldn't believe it.

myself the fish that I had just lost was not the big one that we spotted during the day, I felt sick to my stomach and cast a few more times with no luck. I took a few steps down river and skated my fly right past my marked piece of scrub, praying to the trout gods to let me have another shot. My mouse swam across the tailout, right through the hot spot and...blurp...I couldn't believe it. I set the hook like it was a 200lb tarpon. This time it didn't get away.

After a short fight, Jarred scooped him up with the net. The brown tipped the scale at 14lb – my biggest brown yet.

As a fishing guide in Montana, Mongolia, and Alaska, my list of priorities for success has always been, in the order of importance, location, presentation, and then the fly. Most flyfisherman are too proud to admit that their poor presentation could ever be the real reason their fishing has been slow. So most anglers go to the flybox and look for the answer when times are tough.

With night fishing, the presentation doesn't get any easier. Down and across is the standard method of walking your mouse across the current. Covering the water thoroughly is the hardest part. Make sure you have covered the entire area without wasting too much time. One or two passes in a piece of water is enough – trout are either going to eat it, or not. You are better off covering new water. Depending on the current,



BRADLEY KASTNER

you can allow the fly to swing with the flow. In some places, the current may have very little flow, so a soft and slow retrieve is needed to stay in contact with your mouse. A keen sense of feel may be all you have during your adventure.

Because of the sheer number of places to fish, New Zealand holds its secrets well. Some may say that there are no more secret fishing spots anymore. Maybe. But who am I to add increased fishing pressure to an already sensitive fishery because of some silly fishing article. However, I will say that I successfully fished seven different rivers and lakes at night this past season, as far north as the Nelson District and as far south as

Fiordland. I can only encourage you to explore your local waters. It just may turn into a pot of gold for you.

I used to say that sight fishing was my favourite way to catch a fish. This new game of night fishing has certainly changed my ways. It's ironic that I have become an addicted night fisherman lately. Maybe it's the mystery behind the darkness.

Back in my younger angling days, I didn't know much of anything at all about catching fish. Yet I still had a ball fishing every nook and cranny, blind fishing all day long and eagerly anticipating the next fish to jump on my hook. In

recent years, I have been extremely lucky to have worked and travelled to some amazing fisheries in this world. After seeing these wonderful places and beautiful fish, I have become slightly jaded. But this new game of night-time mousing has changed my thinking. It's like being a little kid again, chasing the unknown well into the night.

One of my favourite quotes about our sport is: "Until the fish start talking to us....flyfishing is simply organised bullshit!" With that being said, I urge all anglers to get out and explore the unknown. Try something new! And why not go night mousing. You might just catch a gigantic brown trout.



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