



Brownies on the Swing

by Michael Kensinger

To my delight, March 12, 2024, was warm and sunny. It was a welcome departure from the cold, severe rain and wind that had made it impossible to get out on the trout stream. Luckily, the first wave of feathered spring migrants is arriving including hordes of grackles, red-winged blackbirds and robins. Coltsfoot beginning to bloom is a signal that winter's jarring cold will soon come to an end.

After a long day of sitting at the computer, resting my weary eyes on the Little Juniata River was a real treat. As I approached, the air was filled with birdsong, midges and what appeared to

be Blue Winged Olives coming off the water. It was exciting to finally see some flying insects hatching, though no trout were rising to take the winged tidbits. So, I tied on a Walt's Worm, one I had tied myself garnished with an orange collar. This pattern worked before when the trout were feeding more under the water as they appeared to be today.

Traditionally, I have only fished with spinners and a 5-foot ultralight rod, so traveling through the brush with my 9-foot fly rod was a challenge. Navigating the streamside through brambles and thorns, while trying not to startle any trout, was enough to work up a sweat and a bit of frustration.

Finally, I found an opening where deer had slid into a shallow portion of

the river to cross. And, perhaps not as gracefully as a deer, I slid down into the river. Below me, I saw an area where the river cuts under the bank, but I thought it best not to waste my time at that location. I knew the leaves and sediment I stirred up in the stream would likely startle any trout in that hole.

I continued across the stream where I noticed the boughs of a mighty rhododendron dangling just over the water. Beneath the surface, I detected a long piece of wood with my polarized lenses. The surface water movement, combined with ample shadowy hiding places, told me this may be a good place to try my luck. The water, running high and clear, put



my balance to the test. Meanwhile, a small flock of birds known as golden-crowned kinglets flitted in the branches overhead. These dainty delights were taking full advantage of the insects coming off the water.

I made several casts, sometimes clumsily, but as my nymph drifted downstream behind me each time, I learned to let the current “load” my line for the next cast. This time, the cast was better. My nymph and my line were in the same lane of current until they drifted below me. I intended on letting the line load again, and I watched it swing down and drift behind me. I went to make another cast. Suddenly, there was a tug on my line. A flash of gold told me immediately that I had a

Brown Trout, and it took the swing. This is precisely what happened to me weeks prior with the first trout I caught on a nymph.

After a brief fight, the golden beauty made it to my hand for a quick photo. It sparkled in my palm as I slipped the barbless hook out of its jaw. One last look, and I sent it back into the water to catch another day. The trout measured about 12 inches long as it darted back under the bank.

I fished the remainder of daylight but only managed to catch a beech tree, a shrub of some kind and my fishing net before I finally decided to call it a day. Now, having landed two fish on flies I tied, I knew there were better days ahead. ☐

