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CHALK TALK

When locals go fishing

*It's a quiet and fruitful time to catch trout, writes **Simon Cooper***

WE OFTEN SAY SEPTEMBER IS the month the locals go fishing. Those of us who have guided and advised since May without ever having had the urge to pick up a rod quite suddenly become obsessed. The question is why?

It might be because this is, from a physical labour point of view, our quietest month of the year. It is too early to start the winter projects. The last weed-cut happened in August. The grass just needs the occasional mow. Fishers are fewer in number as the shooting season peels off some first to the grouse moors and then for early partridge. You might go days without seeing or talking to a living soul. Maybe we don't have anything better to do.

Or is it because the river and fish are in such beautiful condition? Fish, like river keepers, untroubled for days on end without a fisher in sight, become emboldened as they start to feed up in preparation for the deprivations of spawning and then the winter beyond. But I wonder if the reasons are more complicated.

Autumn starts in September. You can see it everywhere. Light gusts tug leaves from the trees. The river fringes are brown and dusty, cruel magnets for a carelessly dropped back cast. For the first time in months the chill of early morning sends you back inside for a jacket. The combine-harvesters have returned to their sheds for another year. Mother Nature is talking to you. The words are faint but the message is clear. Another season is slowly closing upon us. It is a reminder of our mortality. That one more year will soon be ticked off our allotted span.

And so we feel compelled to fish. Walk the banks we know so well. Cast to fish in lies that others never spotted. Enjoy the serenity. Capture in the mind that one last cast. That one last fish. Squirrel away some memories for the long winter to come.

Or maybe it is because the fishing is just so damn good. I will let you decide.

Hatching in September

If you, like me, have dozens of fly-boxes, with hundreds or maybe thousands of patterns that mostly gather dust, take heart. September is when you might actually get to use them.

This month "of mists and mellow fruitfulness" is a piscatorial compendium of hatches. It is common to see five or six varieties of insect appearing simultaneously. You really do have to keep your observational wits about you.

Olives, sedges, midges and terrestrials will all come to the party but on some days, with so much choice, your best efforts will be ignored by fish that have seen it all. At that point you have my permission to delve into the depths of your box to select that fly you bought on a whim. Just because you liked the look of it. And now is the time to give it a try.

For if it works against all logic and good sense, that will be one of the most memorable fish of the season.

The keeper's fly

Peter Cockwill has carved out a name for himself over many decades as a stillwater fisher par excellence. But his heart lies with rivers.

If you have ever met Peter, and have an ear for accents, you will immediately recognise his Cornish accent, with a burr that always puts me in mind of the TV detective *Wycliffe*. He learnt his craft on the streams in the north of the county, particularly the Upper Tamar. But he earned his living hitching his wagon to the trout lake boom that began in the late 1960s. His shop in Albury, Surrey was one of the places to buy tackle until it closed earlier this year.

Today you will find Peter reconnecting with his first love, living on the banks of the Dever, a tributary of the Test. His advice for successful river fishing is disarmingly simple: take your time. Don't rush. Sit and observe. As he points out, river keepers don't spend hours constructing a comfortable seat every hundred yards or so for no good reason. Use them! And on the chalkstreams take advantage of the gin-clear water. Watch the fish. Pick out the most likely candidate. The one that is alert. In a feeding position. Cast to that fish alone.

Of course, the corollary of clear water is that the fish, with months of observing us, are tippet-shy. They are fit, strong and know how to use the heavy weed to their advantage. So Peter is a great believer in low-diameter, extra-strong fluorocarbon to fish his three favourite flies. Beneath the surface he has two: a small, weighted Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear and, Sawyer-like, lead wire on a hook. On top, Peter's favourite is the Balloon Caddis, as small as size 14, which sits low in the surface but is easy to see. **TNS**



Peter Cockwill's favourite flies for September (clockwise): A weighted GRHE, lead-wire nymph and Balloon Caddis.

■ Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks, the chalkstream fishing specialists (fishingbreaks.co.uk). He is the author of two books: *Life of a Chalkstream* and *The Otters' Tale*. Peter Cockwill may be contacted at deversprings.co.uk