

## Fly fishing on the East Verde River

Jim Strogon

The East Verde River is a great place to try some stream fishing for trout that is at its closest, less than ten minutes from Payson. Since the trout are stocked weekly from April to September, they are generally very cooperative for bait fishermen, spin casters, and fly fishermen alike. If you check the summer stocking schedule on the [azgfd.gov](http://azgfd.gov) website and click on the East Verde River, a map with the various locations will appear. I generally fish the East Verde at spots all within 30 minutes of Payson. They include: 87 Bridge Crossing, just north of town; and east up Houston Mesa Road at 1st Crossing, Waterwheel, 2nd Crossing, and 3rd Crossing.

In an earlier article, I described fly fishing Tonto Creek and using a traditional upstream approach with an indicator a foot or so above small midges as my preferred method for catching trout on Tonto Creek. That same approach will work on the East Verde River in the pools, which are often deeper than Tonto Creek. The indicator will just need to be further up the leader to get the flies down near the bottom of these deeper pools.

More often though, I have to change my tactics from what I do on Tonto Creek to catch fish on the East Verde. While Tonto is a small, generally clear creek, the East Verde River is currently running with a strong, deep flow, which occurs every year once SRP releases water from the C.C. Cragin Reservoir. The water is often stained through long stretches of the East Verde. That coupled with the faster, and deeper flow seems to make a small fly less attractive than something larger and a little flashier. My fly choice on the East Verde is usually about size 12. I often use two flies about 18 inches apart, but unlike Tonto Creek where I fish upstream predominantly, I almost always fish the East Verde River downstream. I have found trout in the quiet pools, but many times I catch them in the faster stretches of the river.

If you are unfamiliar with fishing faster water for trout, look for resting areas or attack positions for the trout to dart out from. The trout will often be located in front of or behind large rocks that provide a cushion to the current in front of the rock, or a block to the current behind the rock. If there is shade or an undercut bank, that is a great place for trout to avoid predators and attack any unsuspecting prey coming downstream. The trout will often position in slightly calmer water adjacent to a faster current that acts like a conveyor belt bringing food to them, and then grab it as it passes by.

Bass fishermen are familiar with the term reaction strike. That is the kind of strike that I feel I get many times on the East Verde River. As I cast across to a likely spot, I always keep the flies moving and try to make them flash and look vulnerable as they are working downstream. I generally have two flies that provide contrast to each other in the water so that one may be more visible to a trout from below than the other. Usually, my first fly is weighted and my second fly is unweighted, but that depends on the depth and speed of the water I am fishing. I may cast a short way upstream to bring the flies past a likely holding area, but I am focused on continuing my drift downstream into productive water. The flies often are just below the surface of the water for much of the time, but the weighted first fly seems to bounce up and down when retrieved or as it reacts to the current, and the second unweighted fly often just sways back and forth

from side to side right under the surface. That difference coupled with contrasting colors definitely offers the trout a choice of what they might like.

As I fish downstream, I am looking for places where I think a trout will be positioned. If I can see my flies, so much the better; but if not, I watch the end of my fly line to know where my flies (about 9 feet further downstream) are swimming as they work their way downstream. At this point, I am not casting at all, but merely releasing line gradually and moving my rod and line to get the flies into certain parts of the stream far below my hidden location on or near the bank. Once I have covered an area that looks really good to me with no action from trout, I often will strip in line in short sections with pauses and then release the line again slowly over the same water to entice a strike. That second pass is sometimes too much for a trout to ignore again.

This downstream approach often results in violent strikes as the trout bolts out to grab the fly. Another fun aspect of this technique is that you sometimes get a second try with a fish. If you watch your fly closely, you will sometimes see a flash as the fish just missed your fly. Often if you bring it back through there a second time, or rest the fish for ten minutes before you try again, you can catch that fish.

Give the East Verde River a try with a fly rod. There are some nice sections to walk along the river and try this downstream approach that requires minimal casting and keeps your fly in the water and not in the trees and bushes behind you.