



## **Egging-On Salmon**

*by Paul Almanza*

With the return of cool night and short days, late August stirs up Great Lakes Salmon to start their spawning run. Hitting a fresh run of silver salmon is awesome, I only hit it perfectly once. It was quite a few years ago, but I'll never forget it. I popped down to one of my favourite rivers to see how high it was running after a night of light rain, and maybe spot any salmon that snuck in under the cover of darkness. The water was up, and splashing, there were salmon powering through the river everywhere. I grabbed the gear I had in the truck and for the next 5 hours I hooked one Chinook after another - they hit everything I had. Despite getting the hits, I only managed to land one (after a grueling 45 minute fight), the rest systematically destroyed my gear, smashing floats, straining the rod beyond belief and chewing-up line with one 100 yard run after another.

A couple of days later, I got the chance to get back to my spot. This time I was ready for them, I picked-up some heavy gear and lost of spare tackle. Now I was going to rack-up some impressive numbers! So I thought. The crazed monsters that were smashing everything I had a few days before, had become timid and sheepish. They could barely muster enough energy to move away from my bait. I eventually left my secret spot, disgusted with salmon. I don't even remember hooking-up with one. It was amazing to see how quickly they turned off once they hit the rivers.

I quickly discovered, as many Great Lakes anglers already know, that when salmon first enter a river system they are quite aggressive, but quickly shut down after a day or two. Once they going into full spawning mode, most anglers will either try flossing them, or aggravating them in to strike (typically with small bright "flat-fish" style crank baits or by repetitively drifting bright flies or roe bags in front of them). Flossing, or lining, salmon is a technique where the angler drifts their leader across the current and into the salmon gaping mouth. The force of the current on the line then drags their fly or roe bag into the corner of the salmon's mouth and hooks it. This is basically snagging and it is generally considered illegal in more states and provinces, but it is still widely practiced on both sides of the border. Fortunately, there is a better option, the single egg fly.

A while back a friend of mine asked my to bring him salmon fishing, because he never caught one before. I begrudgingly took him to a well known creek and quickly found a pool stacked with dark salmon. A few other anglers we there trying everything under the sun, but they mostly just snagged and released the occasional fish. We tried getting them to hit a bright Woolly Bugger drifted under the float without any success. Switched to Stoneflies and Hexagenias then to Wigglers and Woolly Worms. Nothing produced a single take. In an act of desperation, we lengthen our leader and tied on a single egg fly, figuring they would be light enough to drift the leader along the bottom, in an attempt to at least floss a fish for my buddy.



We hooked one on the first drift. The float plunged a foot beneath the surface, I set the hook and the fish went nuts tearing across the pool. I eventually landed it, with the single egg fly right at the tip on the snout, not in the corner as I expected it. My buddy hit one a few drifts later, then we hit another and another, then a

double header, then a few more. All hooked cleanly in the snout. I knew that we were really onto something because no one else was hooking anything while we were pounding them. We eventually ran out of single egg flies and couldn't hit another fish on anything else. The single eggs were like magic!

While recounting this story at a local shop, the owner, an accomplished steelheader, told me that the single egg fly has been a secret weapon for him for years and that he only shared this secret with a few of his top customers. After doing a fair bit of research with a number of professional guides and other shop owner, it seems that the single egg flies have been one of the deadliest secrets for finicky salmon on their spawning run. West Coast anglers routinely have great success on both steelhead and salmon with just a small piece of yarn on the back of a big octopus hook.



## ***Single Egg Flies***

*A selection of the single egg flies expertly tied by Jay Passmore on Raven Specialist Hooks.*

The general consensus is that salmon hit single eggs because they are trying to clear away what they believe is a stray egg. Most of the anglers I spoke with base this on the fact that the salmon generally don't strike too aggressively, the way they might hit a "flatfish" crankbait or pink plastic worm, they just gently pluck at the fly as it drifts by.

Regardless of the reason why salmon hit them, give single egg flies a try this season, you'll be glad you did.

