

## To Net or Not to Net

From: The Fish Hawk



Amazing how refined nets have become. Used to be I carried a \$5.00 aluminum net and it did the job even though after a few months the cotton netting rotted from fish slime, or the elastic bungy cord snapped after hanging on a limb while walking through the woods to the stream. Or worse, the bungy stretched to the breaking point till the net came loose and then hit me in the back of the head.

Though light and inexpensive to replace, cotton and nylon netting is bad for trout. When the slime barrier is cut on a trout, bacteria will attack and a large clump of fungal growth will develop on the trout's skin. Usually the fish will die from this infection. If at all possible stay away from abrasive woven netting, especially if you intend to release your catch.

Another frustrating problem I experience with cotton or nylon bags is the hook getting hopelessly caught in the weaving if it comes loose while the trout is thrashing in the net. It takes a pair of hemostats and a lot of pulling and prying to get it free. And more often than not the fly is trashed after the ordeal.

Fortunately there's a solution to all these woven net bag problems. To my knowledge it was the Broden Net Company that first came out with the Ghost Net. Ghost nets are fitted with a bag that is made from a rubbery nylon material. It's wider and slightly heavier than cotton or woven nylon, but it doesn't remove the slime when a fish is netted and your hook doesn't get embedded in it either. If you're releasing your fish you should consider replacing your woven netting with this material. These nets range in price from around \$80.00 to \$180.00. Replacement Ghost netting is around \$25.00.

I have at least a half dozen Broden nets in various sizes and configuration from small size for mountain streams to a long handled boat net. I have them in as many wood varieties as well and have replaced the woven netting with the rubber.

Fish Pond has just come out with a graphite net that is light but strong and it comes in any size a trout angler would need from small stream fishing to big long handled boat nets. There are several color choices. My favorite is camo. The best thing about these nets is that all models come with rubber net bags. Fish Pond nets are more expensive than wood nets, but they are way more durable. Though more expensive and not as pretty as wood, the quality is worth the investment. These nets range in price from \$125.00 to \$240.00.

Another fairly new invention that is a big help when using a net is the magnetic net holder. One strong magnet is hooked to the net holder on the collar of the vest and another is attached to the net, either to the handle or the top of the net frame. To me this

system is easier to use attaching the net magnet to the head of the net. When needed a simple tug of the net will release the two magnets, and then after the fish is released, just touch the magnets together again. Why didn't I think of this! I would be fishing everyday.

During my guiding days, further back than I like to remember, Waterworks sent me a release tool on a guide program to try. It's called the Ketchum Release Tool. This is the best tool for releasing trout that I have found. There are several different sizes that accommodate midge sized flies up to large saltwater imitations. At \$19.95 it is inexpensive for what it does. I always carry one in my top left vest pocket in easy reach. Once the fish is brought in for landing you simply slide your leader into a slot, run the release tool down until the hook is inside a sleeve, then simply turn the tool over and flick your wrist upward and the hook pops out. It saves tons of time, preserves your flies, and since the fish is not touched or goes through the trauma of thrashing around in a net, nothing could be better for the trout or angler.

In choosing a net size the angler needs to determine the size of the fish he will most likely be catching. The netting should be Ghost netting. The best, most inexpensive and simplest solution in releasing most fish is to carry a Ketchum Release tool. But there are times when it's easier and faster to subdue a large fish with a net. That's why I carry both.

-Ronnie