

**O**vergrown edges, massive jumbles of streamside tree roots, deeply undercut banks and an occasional 3-foot or 4-foot deep pool characterize one of my favorite trout streams. Early one morning, a companion and I approached this stream, and from a few yards away we crawled on our bellies to the edge of a deep pool. When we separated the blades of tall grass and peeked into the water, we could hardly control our excitement: The pool was filled with several 15- to 18-inch brown trout.

I regularly caught fish in this stream, but I didn't know that the stream held so many big fish. I wondered why I hadn't caught more fish there. I also wondered why I had never caught any large trout there, like the ones we saw.

Over some weeks I began to understand that most of the time the trout saw me long before I started false casting. In some instances, the trout also heard me and my companions before we were ready to cast.

I studied up on how to present my offerings to these wary fish so that I was neither seen nor heard, and I was amazed how making a few adjustments in my approach helped me raise my score.

I started wearing muted colors—no reds, yellows and whites, and no other colors that would stand out against the greens, grays, tans and browns of the surrounding terrain. Long-sleeved shirts contributed to my new muted color scheme and helped protect my

artwork- Mark A. Susinno





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arms from mosquitoes. “Dressing for success” this way is important because biologists believe that fish can distinguish between brightness and darkness and that they can see colors.

You blend in to the background when the colors you wear reflect the same amount of light as the background colors. You don’t have to wear clothes of the same colors as the background, although that would best conceal you. This is because in grayscale (as if you were viewing the scene in black and white) colors that reflect the same amount of light appear to be the same colors. That’s why, even in color, spotting a motionless blackish-green largemouth or smallmouth bass against a brownish stream- or lake-bottom background can be difficult.

I also wore no jewelry—watch or rings—that might reflect light into the water and alert the fish to my presence, and I pinned my fishing license to the back of my hat, fishing vest, life jacket or shirt.

If you’re fishing from a boat, consider buying a new life jacket in a muted color like gray or green.

## Sight

Fish have both monocular vision and binocular vision. Eyes on the sides of the head mean that fish can see nearly all around. Their binocular vision extends conelike about 30 degrees in front of them and above. In this area, fish see in three dimensions, and they can accurately judge an object’s size and distance. Fish have a blind spot behind and above them and behind and below them.

For these reasons, fish most often face upstream, watching for food to float into their area of greatest visual sharpness. This is why it’s best to approach a fishing spot from downstream.

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For this reason, in tight fishing situations approach low or crawl to a fishing location and crouch or kneel to cast. Stand up only when you know you’ll be making long casts.

Plan your movements on the stream bank so that you can use natural cover as much as possible—let the bank’s rocks, trees and vegetation conceal you from the fish’s view. Move slowly, too.

Even though fishing upstream is best, to reach some places with a fly or lure you’ll want to cast downstream. You’ll need to make long casts to increase the chances of remaining unseen. Long casts with spinning tackle are easy. With fly-rod tackle, stop the line just before it settles onto the water so that the line recoils into “S” curves as it falls onto the water. In addition, as soon as the line

reaches the water, shake the rod a bit side to side to place more line into “S” curves on the water. In this way, the fly will move naturally downstream for a longer period. Remember, though, that you’ll have to gather in line very quickly to hook fish this way, so don’t let too much line fall into “S” curves, and stay especially alert for strikes.

## Hearing

Fish have ears, too—inside their bodies, one on each side of the head. Sound waves travel through water and enter the fish’s body. Ear bones, called otoliths, detect sound. Fish also sense vibrations through the lateral line, a series of pores that runs on both sides from the fish’s head to its tail. The pores connect to a nerve that sends signals to the brain.

Through its internal ears and lateral line fish can detect boat sounds, even quiet ones, and motor noise and vibrations from great distances. If you row your boat, silence the oars first by cleaning the oar locks and lock stems with a water-displacing, penetrating product and then by lubricating them with lithium-based white grease. Glue carpet swatches on the deck where your oars, gas tank and anchor rest. Carpeting the entire deck also mutes the sounds of feet and gear against metal.

In your canoe, glue foam pads in front of and on each seat. EVA, or ethyl vinyl acetate, foam works well for this purpose. It’s the stuff used to make sleeping pads, non-slip handles and some shoe and boot parts. It’s available in camping stores. You could use other kinds of foam padding, but EVA is impervious to sunlight and resists tearing. The padding silences vibrations, cushions your knees and even insulates your feet against cold water. You’ll have to buy a larger piece than you probably need. Cut out what you need and use contact cement to glue the pieces in place.

Consider also using a thin paddle blade, one of 6.5 to 7.5 inches wide. Strokes from wider paddles create circles of bubbly, noisy water. A thin, traditional straight-shaft ash or maple beavertail paddle is quieter going into the water and coming out of it.

Whether you’re in a boat or wading, hush up, too. Fish can hear these kinds of sounds from surprisingly long distances.

What of the big browns in that stream? After modifying my approach, in addition to catching more trout, I caught several 18-inchers one year and a 19-incher the next. ☐

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*For more information about fish senses, read the online text of the Commission’s book Pennsylvania Fishes, written by Linda Steiner. On the left side of the Commission web site’s main page, click on “Fishing.” Then at the top of the “Fishing” page click on “Gallery of PA Fishes.” On the top of the “PA Fishes” page click on the first chapter, “Fish Biology.”*