

try night fishing for shad with small glow-in-the dark flies.”

While a remote possibility, the fresh-water prey of shad fry might also resonate with adult shad as food targets. Boyd Kynard identified the primary river food source as plankton called *Cladoceran bosmina*. They bear a resemblance to copepods, but without any tail. I asked John to expound on the coloration of these small crustaceans.

Color, Eyes and Current

“Most crustacean prey of shad have little bright coloration or are reddish to orange due to pigments and oil droplets in their body. It is likely that the shapes and perhaps colors of lures do match the natural prey. Shad probably think they are eating some krill-like crustacean,” John added. “If indeed they do prefer the ones with eyes, perhaps it would be neat to try a shad dart with a single black dot on the top of the jig head, as copepods have only one eye. Mysid shrimp and krill have two eyes and are much closer to the size of the shad dart. The shape, color and action of the lure likely mimics some crustacean, ether copepods, mysids or krill. These prey species span a size range from less than a millimeter to larger than 5 cm, so they are well within the range of prey naturally consumed by shad.”

The observation about eyes is one often noted by shad anglers. Large eyes, or any eyes at all, don’t add to the attraction of a shad fly, and are not a usual component of the vast array of fly and dart patterns. Many contend that an eye

Cone-shaped shad darts resemble mysid shrimp — relatively large prey items that shad have to chase, rather than gather passively through filter feeding.



actively detracts, but its been my personal experience that the small black dot suggested by John is preferable to none at all.

One of the most integral aspects of river fishing for shad is that they seem to strike a fly only at certain places in the flow, and almost always where there is some substantial current. I asked John whether turbidity and current played a factor in how and where shad feed in the ocean.

“Turbidity likely has an effect upon feeding, but various studies conflict upon exactly how. Likely turbidity reduces the ability to particulate feed and makes filter feeding a more advantageous strategy. As to the relation of prey and currents in the ocean, oceanic currents and ocean circulation determine the distribution of water masses, nutrient availability and ultimately the zooplanktonic food of shad. If you look at a satellite sea surface map you can see great differences in the sea surface temperatures due to oceanic currents. Often it is where temperature breaks occur that large concentrations of oceanic life occur. It is likely that shad seek these temperature breaks and areas of upwelling due to higher concentrations of prey. Currents also carry along prey in rivers so, yes the association between shad and currents in rivers and in the ocean may be similar.”

This leads us directly into the issue of temperature. Anglers know that shad are slow to hit below the 12°C/54°F, and effectively cease to hit once river temperatures exceed 24°C/75°F. I asked how this corresponds to shad feeding behavior in the ocean.