

Housatonic River Monsters

by Harry Desmond



There is something truly beautiful about a species of fish, that not only has no natural predators, but also wants to eliminate everything moving across its path. This makes for an exciting and addicting fish to chase. More and more over the past few seasons fishing pike, my clients have started saying “what a hit!”

When I first started my fly fishing business five years ago, I naturally took all of my clients out to fish for trout. I had been fishing for trout most of my life. Two and a half years ago, I decided to do a mid-summer mission for northern pike to see what the possibilities were in my local river. The Housatonic River in Western Massachusetts, which weaves its way through the hills of the Berkshires, has many different faces. With six top water fed dams over the 25 river miles that I fish, each section can be quite different, depending on what set of dams you are in between. I have always had good luck fishing the trout sections due to abundant bug life.

While trout feed on small patterns, like nymphs and dry flies, pike will chase huge patterns, making for fun takes. I had been hearing rumors about a very pikey section of this river, which really peaked my interest. After a little research, I found myself in pursuit of these river gators. I remember dropping my drift boat into this particular section of river and thinking that it seemed slower and murkier than what I’m used to in the trout sections. I was in for a fun learning experience! After about two hours of floating in my boat and seeing nothing, I grew impatient and felt as if I was on a wild goose chase. All of a sudden, there it was. Had this fish just followed the fly all the way to the boat? He couldn’t have. Then he came again! This time he swiped and missed. Had he just gone after this fly twice? Hell with it, I threw it in there again, figuring he would surely be long gone, but this time he was strictly business!! Like a shot of lightning he was not letting this one get away. He was very close to the boat, so I was able to watch the whole take. With my heart racing, I knew something had just changed in my small freshwater world. This was much different than the hits I was used to.

I was confused about the whole experience and fished the rest of the day with no luck, but I knew I.





was onto something. I had hardly ever seen a trout chase the same streamer more than once. This felt like a different ball game and I was intrigued. From this point forward, I decided to dedicate a great deal of time trying to figure out this species. The following spring I started advertising pike fishing on the fly in addition to my other guide services. That summer it was very successful, and I was beginning to build a clientele who wanted to fish strictly for them.

Two years into pike fishing on the fly, I still have a lot to learn but have come a long way. This past summer, we had a great deal of success with the pike and were just getting started. There is so much more water for us to explore in this region.

I have learned up to this point, that pike are very skilled stalkers. It took me a whole season to wrap my head around this concept. I asked myself, if I were a fish and wanted to hide, lurk and wait for the perfect opportunity to eat, where would I hide? The Housatonic River is a pike fisherman's dream, when it comes to this concept. It is filled with downed logs, root balls and boulders and many slow back water channels, which are perfect hiding places as well as stalking areas.

Many anglers ask me what type of patterns I like to tie for these fish. I usually tell them that "I tie whatever extra materials I have lying around into some type of hot mess." With these fish, it has less to do with the pattern itself and more to do with how the pattern is being presented to them. Again, this fish is opportunistic. Generally, we throw sink lines for them with flies that consist mostly of deer hair. I have found myself throwing more and more red colored patterns. The red color helps me pick up the fly faster in the water, which is important. Half of the trick of pike fishing, is spotting the fish. when they first look at the fly. If you are able to get it back into where they came from quickly enough, they usually will hit it and you'll hook up!

This winter, I will be experimenting with tying fly patterns that will bring more flash and undulation. I am also hoping to learn more about their seasonal habits and stalking process, which hopefully will result in more hook ups, throughout the seasons. I am looking forward to discovering more of the secrets surrounding these creatures and to many more seasons of pike fishing as well as getting as many of my clients as possible, to enjoy the thrill of catching one of these Housatonic River monsters.

Harry Desmond, owner, head guide, and founder of [Berkshire Rivers Fly Fishing™](#), grew up fishing and exploring in the Berkshires. Harry has an extensive knowledge of Berkshire river geography as well as Berkshire history. Large trout and pike are their specialty.