

Seeing Better

The observant angler is always the more successful angler. To observe is to see and we need to see our dry fly or strike indicator floating on the water, so that when a fish takes out fly, we can respond by striking and setting the hook.

To locate fish, we need to see the rise forms of feeding fish or underwater profiles of fish whenever possible. Being able to notice "nervous water" will tell us of the presence of a fish and perhaps the direction it is travelling. And the glimpse of a tailing fish, or the flash from the bottom of the stream, helps us locate them. We need to take advantage of any opportunity to see fish because fishing "to the fish" will always increase our odds of catching the fish.

How can we see better? To start with, always wear a hat with a brim, or a visor, that will shield unwanted glare or light from your eyes. If you have any doubt, here is an easy test. The next time you're at the stream, look into the water where it is shallow enough for you to see the bottom, without your hat. Now put on a cap or visor and look again. You'll automatically be able to see more of the bottom. The visor will shield your eyes from unwanted glare and light, allowing your eyes to relax and you'll see better

The underside of hat brims are often available in a darker shade from the rest of the hat. Always chose these darker colours, when possible. The lighter shades reflect some of the glare coming off the water into your eyes, restricting your vision. Probably the most popular hat styles are the baseball cap for freshwater fishing and an up-n-downer with slightly longer brim for saltwater use.

The position of the sun can have a distinct effect on how well we see. Always try to keep the sun at your back or side. Surface glare is increased when we're looking into the sun. On a calm piece of still water on a bright day, fishing into the sun makes seeing fish almost impossible.

Next, and most importantly, wear a pair of polarised sunglasses. Polarised sunglasses will not only give you eye protection while you are fishing, but the polarisation will help eliminate surface glare. There was a time not that long ago, when anglers had to look hard to find a pair of polarised sunglasses. But today they are easily found in local pharmacies and tackle shops.

A frequently asked question is which lens colour to choose. Unfortunately for the fishermen, the answer means buying a couple of pairs. Tan and gray are two favoured colours, and many anglers carry both shades everywhere they go.

Tan lenses warm the light on gray or lower light days and help build contrast against the stream or lake bottom which makes seeing fish a lot easier. But on bright sunny days, a medium to dark gray colour will cut through the surface glare. Eventually, most fishermen end up with more than one colour and shade to cover the various light conditions that exist throughout the fishing season.

Glass or plastic lenses will be the next decision you'll have to make. Plastic is the economical way to go, but most plastic lenses scratch easily and are short lived. Glass, on the other hand, is scratch resistant, and, even though glass is a little heavier,

it is still the best choice. Glass lenses are more durable and have superior optical clarity resulting in less eye strain. Some companies offer photochromic capabilities along with lens coatings that are impervious to detergents, oils and most solvents.

Radiation protection is something else to consider. We all know that danger exists from the sun's harmful ultraviolet light. You'll be wise in choosing a manufacturer that offers 100% protection from UVB and UVA radiation.

Because your sunglasses are going to be an important piece of your gear, look for models that offer frames made of a material that is tough enough to withstand some abuse. Avoid light metal wire frames because they never seem to hold up under hard use. If you can try on several different frame styles, choose one that is comfortable for you. Avoid sunglasses that pinch or slide down on the bridge of your nose. Not only will they be annoying, but they can also set the stage for a good headache.

If you need a little more help with those small flies, but aren't yet into prescription sunglasses, there are polarised glasses available with built-in magnifiers, in both tan and gray shades. And, there is good news for anglers who wear prescription glasses. Several companies now offer a prescription service for polarised sunglasses that covers either single vision, bifocal or trifocal requirements. The only other option for prescription wearers are the clip-on polarised lenses, or the large-frame sunglasses that fit over regular glasses. If you have ever used either, you know how frustrating and difficult it is to keep them on your glasses. Prescription polarised sunglasses may be expensive, but in the long run they're worth every penny.

Side shields should also be considered. They can help eliminate unwanted glare coming in from the sides of your sunglasses which can reflect light back into your eyes. Side shields are especially good when fishing in wide-open areas like calm stillwater flats. But, remember to take them off if you plan to use your sunglasses for driving. The side shields can be dangerous, cutting out your peripheral vision.

It's also important to keep your sunglasses clean. Ammonia based cleaners can damage the lamination process that is used in many sunglasses. A piece of clean cotton material is much better than scratchy tissues, paper napkins and paper towels which will scratch the lenses. Always follow the manufacturer's advice and directions for cleaning. Treat your fishing glasses as if your sight depended on them. That's good advice for all of us to follow.

Some of us make a part of our living guiding fishermen. Our first and foremost job is to find fish for our clients to catch. In most cases, finding fish means being able to see fish. Anything we can use to help us see better makes our job easier. Polarised glasses and a good hat are two very important pieces of gear -- as important as the flies in our boxes. They should be to you too.