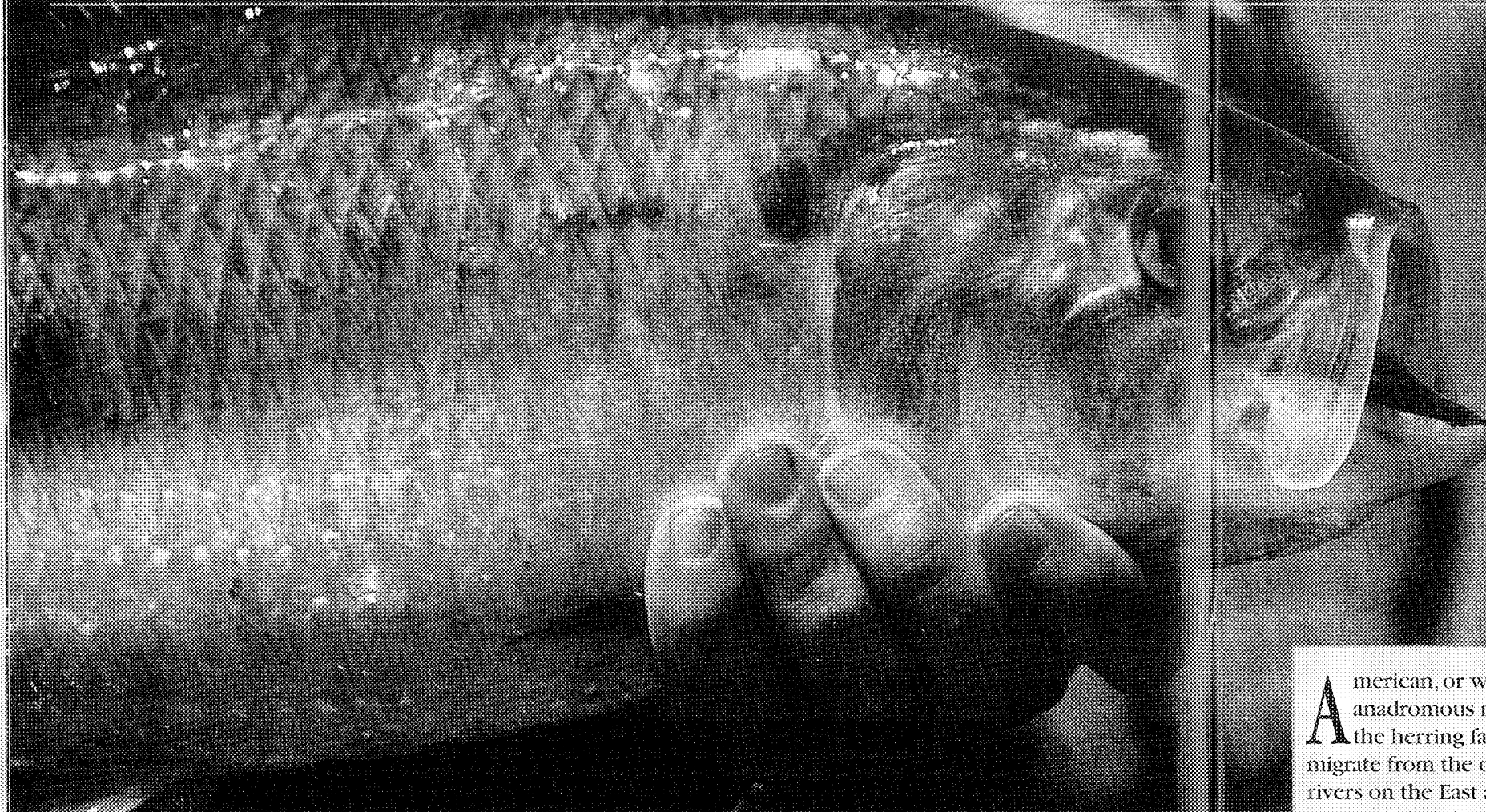


*Flies, tactics, and top spots  
for shad on both coasts*

# ADVANCED TACTICS *for*

BRIAN M. WIPRUD

# SHAD



*American shad (above and right) were a staple food source for colonial Americans and were successfully introduced to rivers in California, Washington, and Oregon where they now reproduce naturally. Anglers must understand their peculiar feeding and migration habits to catch them consistently. Richard Franklin photos*

**T**HERE ARE THOSE SPECIAL DAYS when shad fishing is easy. They usually happen when huge numbers of fish jostle for position in the current and when circumstances and conditions most closely approximate their feeding environment in the ocean. However, this scenario usually presents itself only at the peak of the run at any given location—a rare, fleeting opportunity.

For weeks before the peak of the run, shad ascend the river in increasing numbers of smaller schools, or pods. These smaller groups of fish are not as inclined to take a fly, and taking fish requires a refined skill set. A number of tactics, techniques, and equipment can help you catch them and a better understanding of your quarry is the most essential tool in your box.

## Shad Behavior

**Location.** In shad fishing, location is everything. It's crucial to cast to a location where you can present your fly to the greatest shad concentrations—hopefully fish

that are on the move. In the ocean shad feed in schools and much of their feeding behavior in the river is predicated on how and where they collectively stack up and move.

Typically, the tail of a rapid is the most likely place to find large numbers of shad. They gather in the pools overnight and ascend the rapids in daylight.

Shad have huge eyes surrounded by a hard, clear membrane that allows light to enter the sides and back of their eyes. Their eyes are light sensitive, providing an acute visual awareness of potential danger. They are skittish about swimming through shallow riffles and rapids and do so only in the safety of numbers, but there seems to be a point at which a pod gets the collective courage to push through shallow water.

Rapids ending with a large, deep pool are likely to hold many fish, and they can sometimes be teased into hitting. But shad on the move and just entering the rapid are always more willing to strike a fly.

**Current and temperature.** Shad schools in the ocean

**A**merican, or white, shad are anadromous members of the herring family that migrate from the ocean up rivers on the East and West coasts. Male fish (bucks) weighing 2 or 3 pounds are the first to ascend the river followed by females (roe shad) that regularly weigh 5 pounds and can weigh 8 pounds or more. The best time for fly anglers is late May and early June, when large numbers of fish have migrated sufficiently far upstream to where they can be caught in tributaries or relatively narrow, shallow segments of the river. The migration is over by mid June when water temperatures top 75 degrees F and the fish spawn. Hickory shad are smaller cousins of the American shad and are more frequently found in rivers south of the Washington, D.C. area. 