The Mayfly Project – Catch and Release

A. Generalized fish anatomy
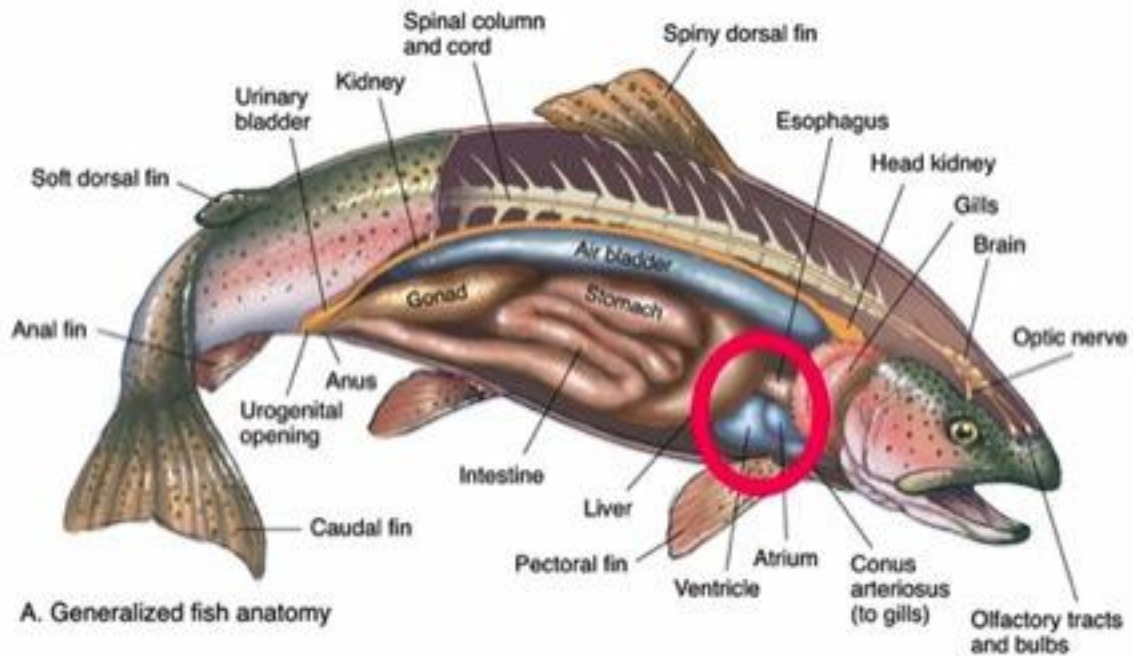
Catch and Release

1. Wet your hands before handling the fish (this will prevent removal of their protective slime)
2. Keep the fish in the water as much as possible (considered by nearly everyone the most important fish handling technique.) The fish need only be out of the water for less than 5 seconds for a photo.
3. Do not "lip" the fish, do not put them on the grass, beach, or snow.
4. Keep the fish near the water. If a large fish is dropped it risks bursting its air bladder.
5. When holding the fish, keep fingers out of gills. The join between the tail fin and the body can be held firmly as it all bone.
6. However the area around the pectoral fins must be cradled … not squeezed (aka, Death Grip), as it can do damage to the heart and/or liver. Note in the fish anatomy picture the red circle around the heart area.

Releasing:

1. Find some slow moving water to release fish.
2. Start with one hand under the belly and the other on the caudal peduncle.
3. Face fish into slow current and remove hand from belly. Observe to see if fish is stable (stays upright.)
4. Move tail from side to side. Fish should swim out of your hand, upright.
5. Stay with fish until first four steps are accomplished successfully.
6. If fish goes to bottom and sits, it is not a bad thing, but don't leave it. Let it recover some more and then gently move the tail. A surviving fish will eventually swim away from you.
7. In a lake add a back and forth motion to the side to side tail motion.

Hands versus Net:

Hands only: The basic idea is that a well-handled fish can be released with less contact and more quickly than with a net. In fact, there are tools that can de-hook the fish with no contact at all.

Using a net: The negative is that the even wet rubber can remove the trout body slime and if the fish is bound it the net, it may not be breathing properly when underwater.

We will have plastic fish available to teach fish handling, please see the order form on the conservation page to order these fish for your project.