

an atavistic teleconnection

American shad - a unique fish in this watershed. Different than other anadromous fishes I chase in rivers - kings and steel - shad eat, mainly scuds and mysids, as noted in the scientific literature. I, too, have witnessed 'em slurping invertebrates in the lower American, and applying the idea that they're eating to my lure design skyrocketed my success rate. My lures: very small chartreuse/clear grubs, which aren't half-bad imitations of gammarid scuds with algae in their guts and of mysids, respectively. Like kings and steel, shad are disproportionately large relative to their context, although the context isn't only an ocean-sized fish in a river like kings but also a giant species in a taxonomic order of dinky fishes: sardines, anchovies, threadfin shad, Pacific herring. Nevertheless, like salmon and steelhead, when I connect with American shad, I connect through the river, through the estuary, and finally to the ocean, a teleconnection, that when considered in that breadth of space, colors the connection between two points - the shad and I - in a balmy summer river remarkable. And those eyes - American shad have big, puppy-dog eyes with an endless depth to 'em, as if mirroring the abyss of the ocean from where they'd come. Unlike the sea-run salmonids I've touched in the Central Valley, American shad have not been blighted by the ugly stain of hatcheries - they're Momma Nature's unadulterated gifts, purely wild. By proxy, in this damaged river system, American shad, despite being non-native, ascend closer to the atavistic ideal than our domesticated 'nooks and mongrelized ocean-roaming 'bows. American shad - they now, along with sturgeon, express most purely anadromous love, and love 'em I do.