

Diptera: The Fly for All Seasons

... and most trout in many places

ART LEE

What follows here is some *practical information* about fishing flies to represent Diptera, those wee, two-winged insects found balling up by the trillions year-round along trout streams from coast to coast. Excluded is the entomology of Diptera, which is so complex that I gave up trying to fathom it long ago, at the loss of not a single fish. In fact, I'd been fishing Diptera imitations, simply calling them *midges*, for a long, long time before I was even aware they'd gotten the going-over from anglers determined to dabble in science. Blissfully I fished them then and continue to do so now, knowing little more about their body segments or wing veins than I did the day I discovered that trout like to eat them.

For clarity, I will say that the tiny bugs of the Diptera family, including mosquitos, crane flies and a host of midges (gnats, no-see-ums, black flies, snow flies, and on and on) all have a common Latin derivation: *di*, meaning *two*, and *ptera*, meaning *winged*. Unlike mayflies, caddis or stoneflies, Diptera have no secondary sets of wings. But, then, the Diptera that interest me most as an angler are so small that secondary wings are hard to spot anyway.

Many anglers don't like to fish midges. They view flies smaller than #18 with a disdain akin to that I have for the de-romanticizing of fly fishing with too much science and

its wicked step-sister, verification. Nonetheless, fishing experience at home and abroad has afforded me some insights into fishing midges, worthy of all but perhaps the ultimate purist and the incurable romantic.

First: Diptera constitute a kind of common denominator among the world's trout fisheries. I've never struck a trout stream where I didn't find these insects, usually in abundance. For example, while scouting for fins in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco recently, I discovered a lovely spring creek where plump browns were sipping emerging Diptera, just as browns sip Diptera on the Letort of Pennsylvania, Nelson's Spring Creek of Montana, and the Test, Itchen and Avon of Great Britain. Similarly, clouds of Diptera shade feeding trout on the Beaverkill, the Delaware, the Madison, the Big Horn, eastern and western American rivers, and on the Risle of Normandy, the Elle of Brittany, both in France, and Laxá I Laxádalur, the magnificent river of northern Iceland where they represent the staple of the brown trout diet. Thus, it is fair to suppose that when encountering an unfamiliar trout fishery the angler shouldn't go entirely wrong when he's carrying Diptera imitations and knows how to fish them.

Second: Diptera tend to abound along trout streams, at least the streams I know best, for longer sustained periods each year than all other aquatic insects. Fishing the Beaverkill near my home, for example, I've taken trout on the surface or in the surface film using Diptera imitations during every month of the year. And these small flies have proven

ART LEE, FFM's Eastern field editor, is author of *Fishing Dry Flies for Trout On Rivers and Streams*, published by Antheneum Publishers.

KRIS LEE PHOTO

Diptera . . .

notably effective in the late fall, winter and early spring when the only viable alternative is to fish down, dirty and slow. According to my stream notes, I hooked 32 trout on March 19, 1982, for instance, 29 on a surface midge and but three while probing the bottom with a small dark stone-fly nymph. Reliability, then, would seem to demand that attention be paid to Diptera's potential.

Third: The largest trout of many waters—including fish you'd expect to take perhaps only on streamers—rise readily during Diptera emergences. Time and again, I've witnessed and sometimes caught trout on midges (#22 to #28) fished on top, particularly along flat stretches, after failing to lure the fish to conventional dries and emergers representing the prevailing hatches. The key to understanding why a trout of apparent cannibal size might shun, say, Hendricksons while feeding freely on minnows probably derives from the sheer numbers of Diptera frequently available to the fish at given times. True to its opportunistic nature, a big trout can leave just beneath the surface for protracted periods, expending no more energy than is required to tip its head up and down while ingesting its fill of tiny insects. Paradoxical though it may seem, therefore, my experience teaches that I stand a better chance of hooking big trout when fishing midges than when using more typical dry flies, except perhaps when the conventional dressings imitate the very largest of aquatic insect species, such as the eastern green drake that shows for no longer than three weeks each season.

Midge Technique

A typical angler prejudice against fishing midges issues from a sense of insecurity born of the inability to see his fly on the water. Why some anglers confidently fish nymphs upstream while distrusting midges, I'm not certain, but the root of this prejudice represents the perfect starting point from which to discuss techniques that enhance Diptera fishing.

To the angler, the most important stage in the life-cycle of a typical Diptera (i.e., the egg, larva, pupa, and adult) is the pupal stage. Even fished on the surface, a pupal imitation that represents a helpless insect struggling in the film to free itself from its shuck prior to flight, has proven considerably more effective than a dry midge that floats high on the water. However, the dries you do opt to fish from time to time will likely be so small (my favorite is nothing more than clipped hackle wound on a short-shank #26 or #28 hook) that the best pair of eyes seldom will see them on the surface, except when fishing the shortest of lines.

The kicker, then, isn't to be able to see your fly at all, any more than it is to be able to see a nymph as it dead-drifts downstream toward you under water. Instead, the trick is to *know precisely where the fly is at all times*, so that when a trout rises for it, you are prepared to set the hook. Certainly it requires considerable practice to develop this skill, but with time, most anglers can learn to monitor fly drift without actually seeing their flies, to sense the speed and direction of drift by relating stream velocity and bearing of current to the ability to put their flies exactly where they want them. With no arrogance intended, I respectfully suggest that an angler's time is much more productively given to mastering this skill than to mastering complex data attendant to Diptera entomology.



Through the years, I've had minimal success trying to fish Diptera larvae or pupae imitations deep. This does not imply that trout don't feed on these midges near the bottom, but rather serves to illustrate that trout are reticent to move far up, down or to the left or right to take tiny insects. Thus, unless you've spotted a fish feeding in deep water and are able to put a Diptera imitation on its nose, you are, in effect, relegating fly presentation entirely to chance, like trying to sink a long birdie putt while wearing a blindfold. No, midges are not the flies for prospecting.

Happily, Diptera imitations are best fished to rising trout whose feeding rhythms you've carefully monitored in advance. Wiring the feeding rhythm is essential, because the typical abundance of the natural insects dictates that you insure that your target fish spots your offering among the multitudes. To accomplish this you must time your presentation so your fly passes over the trout's feeding station at precisely the instant the fish is prepared to sip a natural. Ideally, then, by means of meticulous timing, your fly must be the only fly the target trout sees as the fish opens its mouth to take.

To show your fly correctly to the rising fish requires that you be positioned to get an *absolutely* drag-free drift. Although your midge pattern may be no more than a wisp of dubbed fur on a #28 hook, if it drags the trout usually will reject it and the trout will likely spook. Your task is facilitated by planting yourself across and somewhat downstream of your target trout, then three-quartering the fly upstream, casting either a right or left curve into your line



KRIS LEE PHOTO

Kimball's Diptera Emerger

As simple as the pattern appears, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hours of Mike Kimball's matchless skill and expertise went into the research and development of his Diptera emerging pupa, shown in the accompanying photograph, as dressed by Galen Mercer. This pattern has proven itself uniformly and remarkably effective on rivers and streams across America, as well as abroad. It is, by the way, the fly with which Mike created quite a stir when he was observed solving the apparent enigma of those evening rises on Armstrong's Spring Creek in Paradise Valley of Montana.

Here's how it's tied:

- HOOK: #20-#28, Mustad 94833 (TDE, 3X fine).
- HEAD: Black, brown or cream midge thread, depending on the body shade chosen.
- TAIL: Several fibers of teal flank feather, tied long and splayed to represent the pupa's body shuck trailing behind it prior to falling away.
- ABDOMEN: None.
- THORAX: Dubbed fur or poly in black, brown, rusty brown, olive, pale yellow or cream.
- WING CASE: A small section of white or light gray poly yarn, tied in so there's an exaggerated hump at the rear of the case and a gradual slope toward the eye of the hook.

ART LEE

and leader, depending on whether the stream flows from right to left or left to right.

Long fine leader tippets are generally essential to Diptera fishing, because (1) typical Diptera water is flat and clear, (2) heavy tippets will just not pass through the hook eyes of such tiny flies, and (3) a fine tippet enhances the impression of a free-floating insect to most trout. Frequently, I opt for eight feet of 7X or 8X tippet material, which, ironically, makes presenting the midge a more manageable

Continued on Page 68



CASTLE ROCK
AN OLD FASHION DUDE RANCH
EXCELLING IN RIDING AND FLY FISHING HOLIDAYS
WILDERNESS PACKTRIPS
AND
BIG GAME HUNTING
FOR
ELK, DEER, ANTELOPE, MOOSE,
BIG HORN SHEEP AND BLACK BEAR

FOR DETAILS:
JOE AND ALY TILDEN
412 ROAD 6NS
CODY, WYO. 82414
(307) 587-2076
(307) 527-7515

FOR THE FLY FISHERMAN



North Fork continues its support of Federation of Fly Fishers and its building Fund for the International Fly Fishing Center.

Bunting Jacket/Grey—Patagonia's® best selling Bunting Jacket; features lightweight and maximum warmth. Popular among cross-country skiers, sailors, fishermen, and winter joggers. \$55.50

Wind Anorak/Royal Blue—Perfect as a shell over Sweat Shirt or Bunting Jacket. Folds into its own pocket/kangaroo pouch. Has drawstring hood and waist with Velcro at sleeves. \$32.00

Sweat Shirt/Slate Blue—Comfortable, stylish, cotton/polyester blend. Long sleeve with I.F.F.C. logo. \$23.00



Fly Book—Proven product, holds over 100 flies and streamers and it floats. \$7.95



Pack Vest/Steel Blue—Designed to get you and your fly fishing equipment to where the fish are. Features 6 large pockets and day pack Vest adjusts to fit all sizes over any garment. \$45.00

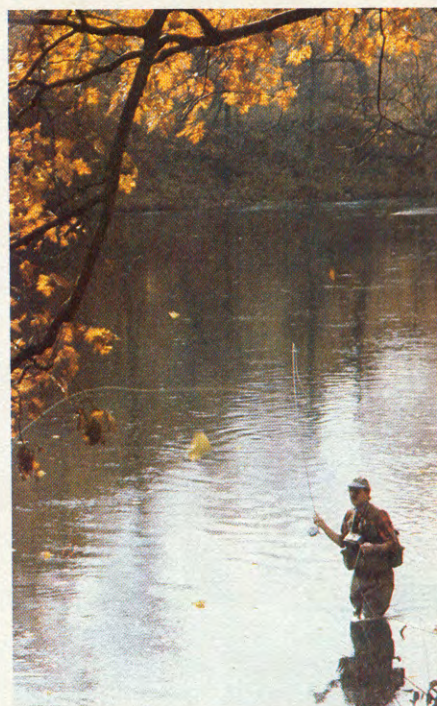
Pack Rod/Case—6 piece, 7 ft. fiberglass rod, casts #6 line. Made by the J. Kennedy Fisher Co. Comes with custom case. Fits perfect in your brief case or Pack Vest. \$130.00

Stadium Cups/10—16 oz. cups excellent gift, or party favor. Perfect for entertaining your fly fishing friends. \$5.00

TAKE THE
**North
Fork**

North Fork
728 North Brighton
Kansas City, Missouri 64124
or call: 816/483-0397 for Mastercard or Visa orders.

Diptera . . .



challenge than trying to do so while using conventional tippet lengths of two or three feet.

When presenting the midge, try dropping your casting hand to your waist immediately in the wake of your powerstroke, while maintaining the rod tip pitch high over the water. This casting technique will cause your leader tippet to tumble and bunch up ahead of your target trout's feeding station. The current, then, will catch your midge and carry it downstream toward the feeding fish as the coils and S's in your tippet slowly straighten out behind the fly.

The trick, of course, is to ascertain your fly's probable line of drift before initiating each presentation. This is made easier, incidentally, when you discover that Diptera-feeders seldom need to be led by more than a



foot. My rule is to lead a trout not one inch more than I perceive as essential to get the job done.

Despite contrary claims, fishing Diptera imitations requires no special equipment. In competent hands the same rod with which you'd fish a standard #14 dry and 5X tippet will handle light tippets and tiny flies nicely with a light (but not tentative) touch. When choosing a rod specifically for midging, however, consider perhaps a nine-footer for 5-weight line on big waters; and eight- to eight-and-a-half-footer for 5-weight line on mid-size streams, or a seven-and-a-half to eight-footer for 4- to 5-weight line on small waters or extreme low water conditions.

Effective Diptera imitations run the gamut from #20 through #28 and in colors from black to cream. Among wets, I like a simple pattern tied with a stripped peacock-quill body and a bit of fur dubbed as a collar. The dry I use most often is an emerging pupal pattern developed by Mike Kimball of Ithaca, New York, unquestionably among the world's most skilled midge fishermen.

Diptera fishing is generally associated with the sipping rise on flat water, especially spring creeks, limestoneers and chalk streams. However, most surface water streams also abound in Diptera species largely ignored by the majority of anglers. When you see trout sipping on a flat stretch along your favorite stream, odds are excellent they are working on Diptera.

Lastly, there's the ultimate challenge: fishing Diptera in or on fast water. Although not widely perceived, some prolific Diptera hatches occur on pocket water, riffles and even the most turbulent of rapids. That dusting of minuscule bugs you observed over the river last season probably one Diptera species or another, and those trout you were so proud to have spotted sipping amid all that turbulence were probably filling up on Diptera pupae.

Next time, why not test yourself. Put away the standard wets or dries, add a long, fine tippet, cinch on a #28 pupa and find out how good you really are. The fish may give you fits at first. But, ultimately, you're going to be glad you allowed yourself to go a little bit "Dippy."

Angler's Pro Shop SUMMER INSANITY SALE CONTINUES

	Regular Price	Insane Sale Price		Regular Price	Insane Sale Price
La fontaine, Caddisflies	24.95	17.50	Xuron C-Clamp Vise, black finish	64.00	38.00
Whitlock & Boyle, Second Fly			Xuron Pedestal Vise, black finish	98.00	59.00
Tyers Almanac (O.P.)	19.95	10.00	Landing Net Kit, Hand-crafted		
Cooper, Art of the Complete			21" laminated, complete	29.95	19.00
Angler (O.P.)	11.00	6.00	Presentation Landing Net		
Lamb, Where Pools Run Bright			triple laminated, solid walnut		
and Deep (O.P.)	15.00	9.00	with hand tied bag	74.95	50.00
Humphrey, My Moby Dick	6.95	2.50	Presentation Landing Net, triple		
Whitlock, Guide to Aquatic Trout			laminated, cherry with hand		
Foods	24.95	19.95	tied bag	69.95	39.95
Stewart, Universal Fly Tying			Large Chinese Capes wet & dry		
Guide	7.95	6.50	assortment of 5 different colors	32.00	15.00
Fishing with a Fly Rod by Fly			Masterline Closeout		
Fisherman Magazine	19.95	12.50	DT-4-Floating, WF-6, 7, 8, 9, 10		
Migel & Leonard, Masters on			Full Sinking	27.00	8.50
the Nympha	14.95	11.95	Half Taper Floating 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	17.00	5.00
Jorgensen, Modern Trout Flies	9.95	7.75	Asst. Shooting Heads	12.00	6.25 ea.
Wakeford, Fly Tying Techniques	29.95	21.95	S.A. Air Cell Closeout		
Arbona, Mayflies, The Angler &			DT-4-F, DT-5, F, DT-6, F	17.00	8.50 ea.
the Trout	24.95	18.95	6 Reel Carry Case, Also Holds		
Brooks, The Living River	17.50	13.75	Cameras	29.95	15.00

HUNT RIVER SALMON FISHING AVAILABLE PLEASE INQUIRE

Please include \$1.50 shipping orders under \$25.00
Check or C.O.D. to: **ANGLER'S PRO SHOP**
18 East Third (Rear), Lansdale, PA 19446
Telephone (215) 362-0122
Dealer Inquiries Welcome

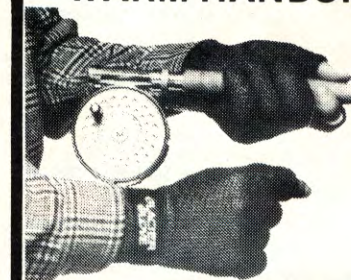
MONTANA SPRINGCREEK PROPERTY

Purchase of a 20 acre parcel provides landowner with personal fly fishing use of 1.25 miles of highly regarded stream.

The property is located 15 miles from Bozeman in the midst of Southwest Montana's finest fly fishing.

T.U. and F.F.F. Member
References Available on Request
ROSS BRUNER, Broker
1609 West Babcock
Bozeman, Montana 59715
(406) 586-7676

WARM HANDS!



GLACIER GLOVE

- New Neoprene Fishing Glove!
- Keeps Hands Warm!
- Maintains Dexterity!
- 10 Day Money Back Guarantee!

Yes I'm tired of freezing hands. Send me _____ pairs of Glacier Gloves @ \$39.95 per pair. Shipping included.

Size S M L XL

Name _____

Add _____

City/St _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

MC/VISA # _____

Expires _____ Check enclosed ☐

Glacier Glove

316 California Ave., Reno, Nv. 89509

© RLS CO 702-322-3134 Pat Pend

Dave Whitlock Introduces Super Fly

September 1983 \$2.95/£1.25

14323

FLY FISHERMAN

Nick Lyons Returns

Summer Bluegills

Idaho Treasures

New Leader Design

Midges For All Seasons

Down-Wing Mayflies

Mountain Brookies

