



February 2013

Driftless Days . . .

I'm not entirely certain what initially created my interest in dry fly fishing. An old friend said "it was an accident just waiting to happen," which might be as good an explanation as any. I've always felt there's something supremely interesting in enticing a trout to take an artificial fly on the water's surface. Rainbow and brook trout often rise quite some distance to take a surface fly, as their feeding positions are generally near the bottom of the water column. Brown trout, when feeding on mayfly duns, position themselves just inches below the surface of the water, but brown trout are an extremely wary fish and are not necessarily easy to catch simply because they happen to be positioned higher in the water column. In either case, when a trout takes a dry fly it must make a firm commitment and move at least some distance to take it, and perhaps that challenge is part of what intrigues the dry fly fisherman. In a fashion the angler brings the fish, albeit ever so slightly, closer to the world above the water.

It is generally maintained that a trout's diet is primarily taken from beneath the water's surface, and that dun or other surface flies constitute only five to fifteen percent of a trout's total nutrient intake, the latter depending on whose figures one is looking at. Regardless, it is clear that the dry fly fisherman imposes a handicap on himself (or herself) by attempting to entice a strike from a fish that gets at least eighty-five percent of its nutrients from somewhere else. That lends something to the challenge as well.

I grew up in Minnesota catching sunfish, walleyes, northerns, perch, bullheads, catfish, carp, and the occasional bass, all with either bait or sub-surface lures of some sort and all with reckless abandon and great joy. I haven't fished in that manner for a great many years now but would do it again, I suppose, if the right circumstances arose. I had a young hunting and fishing friend named Billy who often went off with his family somewhere in Minnesota to fish for large and smallmouth bass, and Billy always reported that the greatest way to catch bass was with a top-water lure. I never did it myself as my father, his friends, and our extended family did not seem to go after bass much, and more or less caught them by accident, so I never learned the techniques required, and had to content myself with listening to Billy's marvelous tales of gigantic bass clobbering his red and white Hula Popper after he'd tossed it along a weed bed on some top-secret lake or pond.

As to dry fly fishing for trout, I remember years ago telling a friend that every time a trout rose from the depths and struck a dry fly I happened to have thrown, a little electrical shock emanated from the fish and travelled upwards through the line and fly rod until I felt the shock in my shoulder. My friend said that in that case he thought I should continue to fish a dry fly. I took

his advice and still do so on every possible occasion, including those presented during the months of winter.

An old-fashioned split-cane fly rod suits me best in dry fly fishing for trout regardless of the weather, casting restrictions such as trees or other obstacles, the size of the stream or river fished or the length of cast required to fish the water effectively.

I'm not entirely sure why this is the case either, but I do know without a doubt that my angling efforts improved considerably when I began fishing with cane rods fifteen years or so ago. Yesterday I picked up a nine-foot three-piece Heddon #10 split-cane rod from my friend Sam Fox, who had entirely refinished it to its original condition some months ago. Sam says he thinks the rod was built between 1939 and 1947. The ferrule size written on the butt section is "2 1/2", which was Heddon's method of describing a rod's weight. Technically, this rod would be classified as a



6/7 weight, and was built primarily for bass fishing rather than trout fishing, being a bit on the heavier side, but it will do a fine job of casting dry flies of any size on the Driftless area streams I frequent, and I suspect it will hold up well. The rod still has all the original signature markings on the butt section, which adds a nice touch. Nine-foot cane rods in good working order can still be picked up quite reasonably these days, depending on your definition of "reasonable", which in my case is well under five hundred bucks. Anglers tend to want shorter rods at the moment, and sometimes longer rods, even by collectible builders, can be bought less expensively than one might think. Another friend tells me the split-cane market is a bit soft now and good bargains can be found.

The rod fills a small gap in my collection that would be imperceptible to most folks. I could have lived without it, but not so well as I can live with it. The fact that Sam had priced it quite reasonably helped a lot, too. I knew as soon as I saw it I was in rod trouble once again, and would end up either making or extracting an offer on it of some sort, and that's what happened. We shall see what it can do on the water when the Blue Wings come off this coming March.



When I look over figures from my journal entries over the past few years, it appears that I catch about 95% of my trout on dry flies. That's quite a high percentage of trout taken fishing a dry fly, and something that might be quite difficult to duplicate in other geographic areas. The reason it is possible in the Driftless Region, and particularly northeast Iowa, is the almost bewildering array of mayfly hatches our streams produce, not to speak of caddisflies and many midwestern terrestrials such grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and ants, all of which can be fished on the surface. Our limestone-based karst topography provides Driftless area spring creeks with the massive nutrient inputs necessary to drive the mayfly populations our trout enjoy, which makes dry fly fishing in the midwest somewhat more predictable and rewarding.

Some of our trout get quite large, too. I had that in mind when I first looked at Sam's Heddon #10.

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Even though our northeast Iowa mayfly and other hatches might be described as "bewildering," I don't think of them that way myself at all. Over the years and seasons the astute angler notices that our hatches tend to fall into distinctive patterns, as I'm sure they do wherever one can fly fish for trout, and if the fisherman can anticipate the normal hatch for the time of year and present an appropriate pattern for the hatch of the moment, he or she stands a more than reasonable chance of success. Fly fishing and seasonal hatches can be a mysterious and perplexing endeavor, but some of the mystery and confusion can be minimalized by paying attention to what's going on and remembering or recording it.

During any given season there are occasional hatches on the water I've never identified. I am not so curious a streamside entomologist as some, and I've generally contented myself with identifying insects that hatch regularly and prolifically throughout the seasons. That seems to allow me the best opportunity to catch fish, and it tends to keep things simple. Tying flies, mainly during the winter months, becomes simpler too. I have a very good idea what to expect in terms of the main hatches I might see in the coming year, and over the years I've come up with a handful of basic patterns and sizes that will accommodate expected hatches. All I really need to do is tie an appropriate number of time-tested patterns and sizes throughout the winter months, and I'm more or less ready for spring, come what may. Fishing a dry fly as persistently as I do, I am mainly interested in patterns that represent the dun (or adult) stage of the particular insect.

Every season has anomalies to it, and one generally might have to tie a few flies here and there over the summer months to accommodate something unusual. Some hatches might be stronger or longer in duration than the norm, which might require tying a few additional patterns during the main fishing season. I like to have a rather goodly number of my favorite patterns tied up and ready to fish by early spring so I can minimize my fly tying during months when the dry fly fishing is going gangbusters. If I've got three hours to fish on a summer's evening, I don't want to spend an hour of that time tying three or four flies I know I'm going to need. I'd rather just go and catch the trout.

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The first hatch I look for early in the spring is of the Blue Wing Olive or *baetis* variety. In most seasons Blue Wings begin hatching on northeast Iowa streams sometime toward the beginning of March, and they normally are the predominant fly on the water during that entire month. They often hatch early in the afternoon, though as the month progresses and the days become warmer the hatch might begin sometime in the morning. Often the hatch ends abruptly late in the afternoon as the temperature drops, particularly earlier in the month when it's colder. As the

days become warmer toward the end of the month, the hatch can continue into the evening hours and dusk.

As with virtually all mayfly hatches, the angler can fish a Blue Wing pattern early in the season even if there is not a good hatch occurring, especially after the hatch has been going strong for a few days. Trout somewhat expect the fly and are looking up for it even though there may not be many rising trout or a heavy hatch in progress.

There are three patterns I normally use for Blue Wing Olive and *baetis* hatches, depending on the size of the fly hatching and other general considerations. A simple #16 Adams can be very effective when the hatching flies are larger, when the water is slightly stained or when it's windy and the water is ruffled. Sometimes under these conditions, or a combination of them, trout are less wary and might strike a more bulky pattern such as the Adams. Also under some conditions the angler can see a larger and gaudier pattern on the water more readily than a smaller, more delicate one, and that can make all the difference in hooking a striking fish.

If the trout seem more selective, the water conditions are clear and pristine and the hatching Blue Wing is a larger fly, I frequently try a #16 Blue Wing Quill. The quill pattern is more streamlined and delicate in appearance and works well for me when the fishing, for various reasons, seems difficult or demanding.



The third pattern I might employ is a very simple Thread Wrap pattern, which is the most delicate and unobtrusive mayfly imitation I happen to tie. I use Thread Wraps when the hatching flies are smaller and are of the *baetis* variety, and I tie and fish them in #18s through #24s. I suppose my most effective Thread Wrap size is the #18, though I catch many trout on the smaller sizes too. When fishing the small Thread Wrap pattern, some experimentation might be in order to determine what size fly the trout happen to be taking. In my experience trout can be quite selective as to size during a *baetis* hatch and it is important to find the correct hatch size, but once that has been accomplished my percentage of good strikes goes up dramatically.

The Thread Wrap pattern also happens to work very well in quieter or still water, I suppose because of its lower and more delicate profile. In those cases I generally am fishing a leader of some length, perhaps sixteen feet or even somewhat longer, tied down to 7X tippet. The Thread Wrap pattern can also double as an excellent spinner pattern late in the day, again because of its delicacy and unobtrusive profile.



To summarize, when I go out to fish early in the spring season expecting to find hatching Blue Wing Olives or *baetis*, I have plenty of #16 Adams, #16 Blue Wing Quills and #18-#24 Thread Wraps in my fly boxes. All that then remains is to figure out which pattern works best on a given outing,

always keeping in mind that things can certainly change from day to day or even hour to hour depending on various situations and circumstances.

Many anglers prefer Blue Wing Olive and *baetis* patterns other than the ones I happen to have suggested, and of course that is perfectly acceptable and perhaps even preferable, depending on one's individual fishing style.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the *baetis* mayfly happens to hatch throughout the entire year. If the angler notices a very small mayfly hatching late in the day on a summer or early autumn afternoon, chances are good that it's a *baetis* variety. Small Thread Wrap or similar tiny imitations can be fished effectively when this occurs regardless of the time of year.

Lastly, Blue Wing Olive and *baetis* hatches "bookend" the fly fishing season in northeast Iowa, being a fly that likes colder water and ambient air temperature conditions, so a similar scenario develops in the autumn of the year. Late September, October, November and even early December mayfly hatches are often strongly of the Blue Wing or *baetis* variety, and the same techniques and fly patterns can be employed during autumn outings as the ones utilized earlier during the spring.

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The second major hatch we see in northeast Iowa is the Dark Hendrickson, arguably our best hatch of the year. Dark Hendricksons generally appear on area streams around the first of April, though in some seasons they come off as early as the third weekend of March. Often the Dark Hendrickson hatch continues on through the very end of April, with some days of course being better than others. It is important to remember that northeast Iowa is located within the extreme



southwestern-most section of the Driftless Region and that our progression of mayfly hatches generally occurs at least a week to ten days before their appearances in Minnesota or Wisconsin. I have often travelled to central Wisconsin early in May and had wonderful Dark Hendrickson fishing after the hatch is entirely over in northeast Iowa.

The Dark Hendrickson mayfly traditionally hatches late in the afternoon, continuing on until dusk, though it may hatch earlier in the afternoon or perhaps even late in the morning. Generally speaking, the warmer the day, the earlier the hatch. I have fished many Hendrickson hatches in late March or early April during driving snow or sleet storms, so nasty spring weather does not necessarily affect either the hatch or the fishing. Occasionally, it even seems to help the hatch for reasons entirely unknown to me.

There are many large drake patterns that are very effective in fishing the Dark Hendrickson hatch, but again I have found my most effective pattern to be a simple #14 Adams, though I

might often fish a #12 with equal or even better success. The Dark Hendrickson is a large mayfly, and occasionally the #12 pattern might better represent larger anomalies of the hatch, which bigger trout in particular often key on. Sometimes, however, the larger pattern will result in less hook ups, as there is more tying material to rather bounce away from the trout's mouth at the strike. By trying either size I generally can figure out which one is going to be most effective on a particular outing. The #12 is often the better choice in faster water.

For Dark Hendrickson patterns, I always use a dark brown dubbing rather than the standard Adams gray, the rest of the fly being tied exactly like a standard Adams. The Adams pattern is particularly versatile and a fly tier can use whatever color dubbing, hackle feathers or upright and divided wing sets he or she might choose to represent a particular mayfly.

The Dark Hendrickson hatch often brings the first big trout of the season to the surface. Large brown trout in particular grow careless during good Hendrickson hatches, and for this reason I often fish my Dark Hendrickson patterns on 4X tippet.

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During the month of May, northeast Iowa streams can enter a slight lull in mayfly hatches, particularly just after the Dark Hendrickson hatches are over. Some anglers refer to a Light Hendrickson mayfly that hatches in May after the Dark Hendricksons, but most mayfly identification books do not reference a fly called a Light Hendrickson, including Dick Pobst's *Trout Stream Insects: An Orvis Streamside Guide*. The fly in question is an *Ephemerella invaria*, the Dark Hendrickson being an *Ephemerella subvaria*. A pale yellowish mayfly commonly called a Sulphur can hatch on northeast Iowa streams in May and June, and perhaps this is what anglers refer to as a Light Hendrickson, though the Sulphur seems to hatch more aggressively on warmer bodies of water such as the Upper Iowa River (or the Root River in southern Minnesota) than it does on the colder spring creek waters of northeast Iowa. Sulphur mayflies hatch in two sizes, a #16 and a #18, and occasionally either size might indeed hatch on northeast Iowa streams in May and June, especially as the days grow warmer. For both #16 and #18 Sulphur hatches I tie an appropriately sized Adams variation using yellow dubbing and paler hackle wraps, and I have a selection of both sizes nestled in a fly box at the beginning of each season.



Throughout the month of May, a standard #16 Adams can often be used as a good searching pattern when other ideas seem to fail. It's a generic enough pattern to illicit strikes regardless of what specifically might be hatching on the stream, which is one reason the Adams is generally so effective on northeast Iowa waters.

Caddisflies also begin hatching on northeast Iowa streams in May, though in recent years caddis hatches have been somewhat weak as compared to hatches fifteen or twenty years ago. Why this happens to be the case is unknown, though it's possible that a series of major floods in years culminating in 2008's "500 year" flood could have damaged the caddisfly population. Last year's caddis hatches were as good as I've seen them in quite some time, so perhaps they are rebounding and we can expect better hatches once again in coming years. There are many good caddisfly patterns one can employ and any number of them can be effective. To keep it as simple as possible, I generally carry #16 and #14 Deer Hair and Elk Hair patterns only. These patterns and sizes seem sufficient to me for caddisfly fishing throughout the entire spring and summer seasons.

As is commonly known, an Adams mayfly can work wonders during an afternoon or evening caddis hatch. Though caddisflies do not have a tail, some anglers think the tail of an Adams might represent a caddisfly's trailing shuck to an eager trout, yet another instance which makes a #16 Adams a good searching pattern during the month of May.

In late March and throughout the months of April and May, the Little Black Caddis hatches on northeast Iowa streams, and for those so inclined a #18 or a #20 Black Deer Hair Caddis pattern might be in order.

Sometimes pronounced and unexpected Blue Wing Olive and *baetis* hatches occur in May, well after the April Dark Hendricksons hatches are over, and I keep an eye out for those too.

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At some point near the first of June, the last of our distinctive early season hatches appears. These are the magnificent March Brown and Gray Fox mayflies, our largest regularly hatching mayflies of northeast Iowa streams. Many entomologists no longer make a distinction between the March Brown and Gray Fox mayflies, and suggest that variations in body coloring are regional rather than genetic, but in northeast Iowa the color differences have always seemed distinctive enough for me to adhere to the older-fashioned descriptions of two distinct insects.

As one would guess, the March Brown generally has a darker brown body and the Gray Fox a lighter gray, and at times appropriately colored mayfly imitations have startlingly different degrees of effectiveness. It's entirely possible that the differences noticed while fishing may be due to other factors, such as lighting or water clarity, and that differentiating between the two flies might be splitting some very fine entomological hairs. Nonetheless, I still tie my #12 Adams in both a brown and gray dubbing for the June hatches of this mayfly (or mayflies) and often enough find that either one or the other proves the best choice on any given day. I have also found that either color pattern might work best for *part* of a day, or perhaps for a particular section of stream.



The March Brown and Gray Fox mayflies are large insects and true #12s. They tend to hatch late in the afternoon and early in the evening, and very warm early summer days precipitate bigger hatches. As with most mayfly hatches, however, once the flies have been hatching for three or four days the angler can often fish a dry fly pattern at any time of day with effective results, particularly from mid-morning on.

The March Brown and Gray Fox hatches of June bring large trout to the surface, especially brown trout. I've caught more than my share of big trout during April's Hendrickson hatch, but the June Gray Fox and March Brown hatches commonly bring noticeably big fish out of hiding. Generally I find that in June, I'm really beginning to tag some good-sized fish, occasionally a number of them on a single outing.

March Brown and Gray Fox hatches normally continue until the end of June or the very first few days of July at the latest, but once these hatches are finally over, the early-season hatch progression in northeast Iowa has come to an end.

In the past twenty years I have stumbled into four or five Brown Drake hatches during the first week of July, but I believe that to be a very unusual occurrence. I never expect to find them, but I look for them every season nonetheless. I have found early July Brown Drake hatches on only two northeast Iowa streams, but those occasions were very remarkable and I have never forgotten them. The Brown Drake is a true #10 mayfly, and the handful of opportunities I have had to fish a #10 pattern to rising trout in northeast Iowa were absolutely amazing experiences.

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In July, August, September and sometimes October, midwestern terrestrial patterns are effective almost every day, most commonly from late in the morning through the afternoon and early evening. Grasshoppers and crickets begin moving more aggressively after the morning dew has dried, and a mild breeze helps blow them into the water, where of course good trout lie in wait.



My favorite terrestrial patterns happen to be hopper and crickets, and I generally tie them both as #12s. I suppose the main reason they've become my favorites is that I've had the most success with them over the seasons. They are highly visual patterns to fish, and it's quite exciting to raise trout to either fly. I dearly love following hopper and cricket patterns on the water after a good cast and anticipating that surprising strike, and perhaps that is the main reason I have never become much of a night fisherman.

Not surprisingly, I've also found hopper and cricket patterns to be very effective in Minnesota, Wisconsin and South Dakota in addition to northeast Iowa, which lends something to their mystique and appeal for me too.

But every angler has favorite patterns, including terrestrials. Many fishermen have great success with ants, bees and beetles as well as hoppers or crickets, and I think one should fish whatever terrestrial pattern one wishes, and for whatever reasons. Experimenting and developing favorite patterns is half the fun of fly fishing.



In the last few seasons I've paid more attention to summer *baetis* hatches than I did a few years ago. Sometimes on summer evenings, trout are rising to something that is clearly very small, and more often than not that happens to be a *baetis*. The size of the fly can vary considerably, and I'm usually prepared with Threadwrap patterns in #18s-#24s to cover all the bases. A #20 Threadwrap happened to be very effective this past summer, for example, but it amazes me how often a #24 works on hot summer evenings, too. As with almost all *baetis* hatches, it is important to experiment and determine which pattern size the trout are taking before one is able to illicit regular and aggressive strikes. Though spring and fall *baetis* hatches are more noticeable on the water, as they're usually the only hatches occurring at those times, *baetis* actually hatch during every month of the year and it's always a good idea to keep an eye out for them. Fishing them often saves an otherwise unproductive dry fly day or evening.

Aside from terrestrials, caddisflies and occasional small *baetis* hatches, the main late summer hatch of note in northeast Iowa is of course the early morning tricos. Tricos begin hatching as early as mid-July, and the hatch can sometimes continue into the first few days of October, depending on how long it stays warm. Tricos generally begin hatching at dawn, or even slightly before, early in the summer season, but after it begins to get cooler later in the summer the hatch might not begin in earnest until eight or nine in the morning. On warmer mornings, the trico spinner fall might be over at 11:00 AM, but on cooler mornings the spinner fall occasionally lasts until the early afternoon hours. The northeast Iowa trico hatch is quite reliable, and good fishing can be had on virtually every late summer morning, depending on the weather.



High water or thunderstorms put an effective end to this diminutive hatch, and bright sunny days seem best for good hatches and good morning fishing.

After many seasons of experimentation, I have found a #24 Threadwrap pattern to be most effective for trico outings, and I now go right to a #24 without hesitation.

Last summer, I found myself on a good nearby stream in the pre-dawn hour, anticipating an early morning trico hatch. After a few tentative casts, more to get warmed up and acclimated to the water than anything else, I saw a rise from what looked like a good fish on the far bank, but it was still too early to see my fly on the water or exactly where my casts were landing. I measured out what I thought to be the correct amount of line and shot a cast over to the far bank, setting up on a rise that looked to be in the general vicinity of where I thought my fly had landed. I hooked the fish well and it shot directly downstream, taking almost all of my flyline with it on a

magnificent run. I got bold and thought I could stop the fish, but that was a mistake. Just as I was thinking about how I might turn the fish back upstream it broke off the 7X tippet, and that was the end of it. That trout was much too large to manhandle in any fashion, especially with 7X tippet, and I should have either given it more line or followed it downstream on foot. My only saving grace was that, after a rather lengthy battle, I was finally able to land a sixteen inch brown trout on my next cast, which at least made me feel a little better, having just lost a considerably bigger fish. Trico hatches are not necessarily known for bringing out large fish, but occasionally the angler can find that big, early morning cruiser before it gets light enough to drive it into hiding. The largest trout I've been fortunate enough to land during a trico hatch was a seventeen inch brown caught some years ago while fishing with my friend Altoona Joe, so I actually had a witness for that one, no small task in itself considering the time of day. We still talk about that fish now and then.

The main requirement necessary for trico fishing is the ability to get up in the morning and get out to the stream before it gets light out. My timing seems right when I have to wait awhile in the parking lot until it gets light enough to rig up. That's what my thermos of coffee is for, which is my second main requirement. After that, it's time to go fishing, regardless of how small tricos are.

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In mid to late September, the Blue Wing Olive and *baetis* mayflies begin to hatch once again, often lasting until November or even the first week or two of December if it happens to be a mild autumn and early winter. As mentioned earlier, Blue Wing Olives tend to "bookend" our northeast Iowa trout fishing season, preferring colder water and dismal weather conditions, so we see particularly heavy hatches of them both early in the spring and again later in the autumn.

The Wisconsin and Minnesota trout seasons presently close sometime in September, so often we see our northern neighbors finishing out their fly fishing seasons in northeast Iowa, where the trout season happens to be open all year long. Our brown and brook trout spawn in the fall of the year, so of course our season runs directly through spawning time. Whether one should fish through the spawning season is a debatable point, but I have never felt I've ever particularly bothered spawning trout by fishing in the fall of the year. If I see trout on the redds I leave them alone, which I'm sure most anglers are considerate enough to do. Generally trout won't strike anyway when concentrating on building redds and spawning. In the fall of the year, I make an extra effort to fish from the banks and rarely enter the water to wade, and I make sure that I don't step in the redds, which are quite easy to see on the stream bottoms. Any open gravel patches amidst stream foliage are generally redds, and it's important not to disturb them by



clumsily wading through them. Sometimes I fish "put and take" streams during the autumn season, which effectively takes spawning issues, particularly with brown trout, out of the equation.

In the fall of the year we frequently see an unusual and sometimes misidentified mayfly, the *Paraleptophlebia debilis*, more commonly known as a Mahogany Dun. In *Hatches II*, Caucci and Nastasi state that the *Para debilis* can indeed hatch sporadically in the upper Midwest through the fall season, though further east of the Mississippi River the fly hatches in the spring of the year. It looks very much like a Blue Wing Olive but sports a very pronounced set of larger hind wings and three tails, which distinguishes it from a two-tailed Blue Wing. Very large hatches occur on many good northeast Iowa streams during autumn, but standard #16 Blue Wing imitations work extremely well for the hatch and I suspect many anglers have done well during a *Para* hatch thinking they were fishing to autumn Blue Wing Olives. I did it myself for many years.

Larger rivers such as the Upper Iowa have autumn hatches that are not found on northeast Iowa spring creeks. The two of note are the Leadwing Coachman (*Isonychia bicolor* or *sadleri*) and the Big White Mayfly (*Euphoron leukon*). Both of these mayflies are common to the Upper Iowa River in September and early October and are large insects in the #10 range. In some seasons their late afternoon and early evening hatches can provide great sport for both trout and smallmouth bass fishing.

During the winter months of January through February, and other than the sporadic *baetis* hatches we sometimes see, various midges of the *Diptera* species often hatch on northeast Iowa streams. Winter midge hatches occur when one might least expect them, at mid-morning when it might still be quite cold and any balmy afternoon temperatures are hours away. Often winter midge hatches are long over by early afternoon, the last of the spinners having fallen around the noon hour. If there is snow on the ground, the angler might see the tiny midges crawling about upon it, which is perhaps why I have heard them called "snow midges." I normally fish winter midge hatches with a #24 Threadwrap pattern, though Griffith's Gnats in the same diminutive size are also a good option. Midges do not have a tail and I sometimes nip the tails from my Threadwrap patterns, though frankly on most occasions I can't tell that it makes any difference at all. Often an across-and-down cast fishing the pattern like a wet fly really triggers strikes, most probably because the moving fly appears wind-blown or struggling to get off the water.



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As might be clear from the preceding commentary, I catch the vast majority of my dry fly fish on a rather simple collection of patterns. Standard Adams flies in #10s-#16s, Brown Adams flies in #10s-#16s, a handful of #16 and #18 Sulphurs, a #16 Blue Wing Quill, Threadwrap patterns in

#18s-#24s and #12 Grasshopper and Cricket patterns will catch a phenomenal number of dry fly trout in northeast Iowa when fished appropriately. I believe that an angler's approach and presentation are the most important factors to consider when fishing a dry fly, assuming a fly of the relatively correct size and shape is presented. Good approach and presentation techniques don't help much at all if an angler throws a #12 Adams during a late summer trico hatch, though the odd fish might indeed take that, too, out of morbid curiosity.



It goes without saying that rather than attempting to fish early morning winter midge hatches with hand-warmers, twenty mile-per-hour winds and frozen rod guides, the astute angler might consider staying home and tying that vast but simple arsenal of dry flies he or she might need come the first Blue Wing Olive hatches of spring, and perhaps even putting a new coat of varnish or tung oil on the split-cane rods that fish them best.

Be Vigilant!

*“Red” Canoe
Trout Unlimited
Iowa Driftless Chapter*

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