



Holiday Wild Brown Trout

by Vic Attardo photos by the author

Cranberries, sweet potatoes and wild Brown Trout go great with a holiday turkey—right?

Well, I don't agree either. Wild Brown Trout from Pennsylvania streams are just too precious to be "used" as a condiment or side dish, or for any non-emergency meal. Put a wild Brown Trout on a plate and it cannot be caught again. Indeed, anything other than catch and release deprives anglers of the opportunity to catch that trout again.

But, the fact is that during the holiday season, with its cooling water temperatures and hungry fish, wild Brown Trout are a great target for anglers. Indeed, other than fishing over intricate spring hatches, mid-fall to early winter puts wild Brown Trout back on the menu—so to speak.

Just because it's cool or cold doesn't mean that trout won't come to the table for dry flies. At this time of the year, I look first to the miniscule floaters or subsurface emergers to help catch the biggest wild Brown Trout. Blue Winged Olives and midges are certainly hot dishes during the holidays.

From emergers to duns or spinners, Little Blue Winged Olives are often the main course for Brown Trout. Though these tiny insects—now classified as *Acentrella turbida*—are much smaller than a pinhead, trout can easily see and feed on these late-season mayflies. Little Blue Winged Olives seem more prolific in water temperatures between 45 and 50 degrees F and that fits the holiday season. *Acentrella* has been recorded as an October hatch in Pennsylvania. However, with global warming, I've seen the large-eyed males on Spring Creek, Centre County, in November.

To meet any number of *Baetis* or what-have-you, I carry a designated medium-sized fly box just for Blue Winged Olive patterns that I tie and buy.

A key material for about 75 percent of these patterns is cul de canard (CDC). There's something about CDC's flimsiness and its never-looks-the-same-way-twice appearance that makes the duck feather keen for Blue Winged Olive use. Some of the most effective patterns incorporate CDC as a parachute post or as a laid back "wing."

In waters where I can stretch a good cast, I like to string two different Blue Winged Olive patterns on a leader. The lead fly is often a size 18 or 20 Cannon's Bunny Dun, which has a full puff of CDC at the head and wing of the fly. The thorax of the fly is dubbed olive fur, and the rear third of the body is made of thread with the wisp of a stiff tail.

The dropper is a simpler CDC Blue Winged Olive emerger, a no hackle pattern that is more generic. This fly is tied sparse with the CDC set as a wing with a dubbed body and head. It has a full tail of either stiff blue dun hackle or microfibbers. The length of the small bunch of tail fibers is equal to 1½ times that of the body. The dropper is size 20 or 22, one size below the lead fly. Both patterns are tied on straight-eye hooks. In big water, I'm using a long 11- to 12-foot leader with a series of hollowed fly-line nibs as strike indicators.

The reason for using two flies is to give the fish a look at two different patterns. Two flies, separated by 12- to 20-inches of tippet, also work, because the leader puts the flies in different spots.

Working two flies in this manner, I've found that the trout that I was casting to and placing the fly in its path was not the trout that got hooked. A number of times, I watched the leader drift over my target trout only to have the strike indicator announce that another wild Brown Trout had taken the second fly. Not a bad problem to have.



Saucon Creek, Lehigh and Northampton counties



West Branch Perkiomen Creek, Berks and Montgomery counties

Midges are another game. Here, I use pupa and adult patterns. In the holiday season, you don't want to be without the precious Zebra Midge. And, you need them with beadheads and without beadheads. When fishing a weightless Zebra Midge, I coat the first 3 or 4 inches of tippet with fly floatant. It's a dynamite technique. Rather than a nymph-like presentation, I actually like to swing the slightly subsurface fly into a pod of midge-rising trout, so it rises slightly on the arc. This has been very effective under the shoreline vegetation on Spring Creek, Centre County.

With a beadhead Zebra Midge, I use the high-stick approach, probing every dark piece of water I can get a straight line over. This is a winning game on Penns Creek, Centre County, where the trout often lurk in the unlikeliest of places.

I really don't know anyone who uses a size 20 half-hackled cream midge adult as much as I do. When I see wild Brown Trout sipping on snowflakes, the floating midge comes out.

Half-hackle refers to trimming the underside of the fly so that it lies flush. Because I'm using a thin 6X or even 7X tippet with dry midges, I make a spaghetti cast, which throws curly cues into the end of the leader. By wiggling the almost horizontal rod tip just a breath or two before the fly lands, it does two things. First, it helps create slack for a drag-free float. Second, it acts as shock absorber for such a fine tippet.

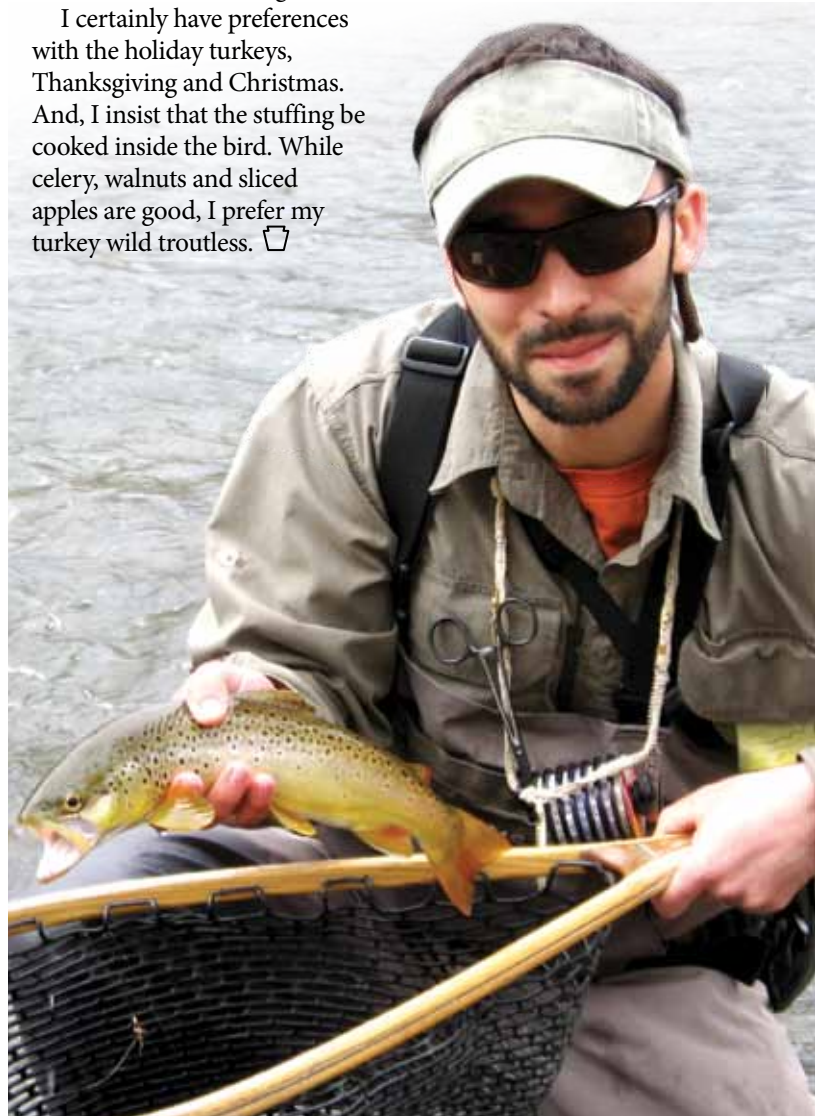
I also make midge emergers with CDC, and these are fished tandem like Blue Winged Olive emergers.

The holiday season also presents chances for dry caddis fishing. With sun on a southeastern Pennsylvania limestone pool or tailout, Brown Trout will move to that location in colder water. Even if you don't see heads, you can get them with a size 16 tan Elk Hair or Henryville Special. Be sure to add a trailing shuck of Z-lon to the former.

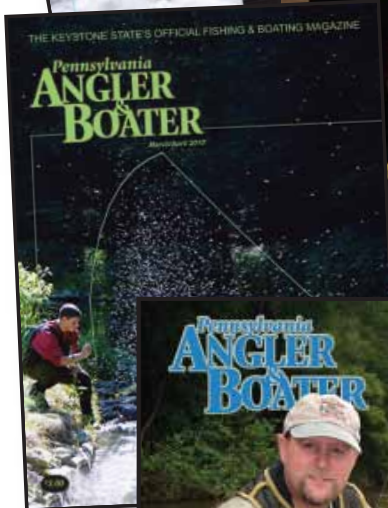
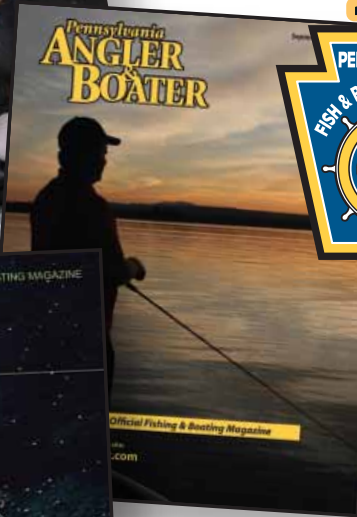
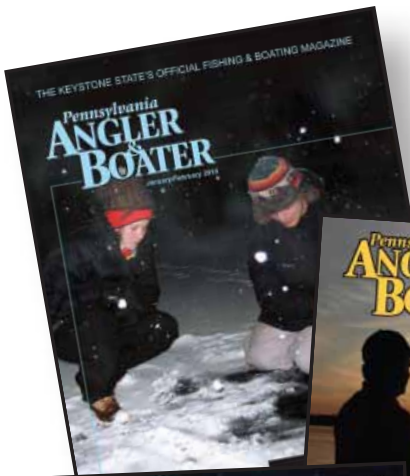
In the dry fly selections, I also like to prospect limestone anglers with a size 12 Slate Drake. *Isonychia* are a real possibility before and just after a warm Thanksgiving. Like the caddis, I'll employ this pattern even without heads breaking the surface constantly. Indeed, the announcement of one trout that rises intermittently has me tying on the Slate

Drake or caddis. Deciding which goes first depends on the vegetative shadows on the water. If there are a lot of shadows, I'll go with the bigger drake, so I can see what I'm doing.

I certainly have preferences with the holiday turkeys, Thanksgiving and Christmas. And, I insist that the stuffing be cooked inside the bird. While celery, walnuts and sliced apples are good, I prefer my turkey wild troutless. ☐



Penns Creek, Centre County



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