



# Where the Trout Lie

by Michael Kensinger

With failure comes insight. Over the course of the past several weeks, I've had plenty of, shall we say, insight. Luckily, I'm patient and persistent—qualities I attribute to being an artist. This is not a journey to be rushed, and after tangling a few flies in overhanging tree limbs, I'm happy to report I've finally arrived at some satisfaction in my fly fishing journey.

When last I wrote, I'd been practicing my cast in a plunge pool not far from my home. The water

temperatures were around 37 degrees F when I arrived, and I was having no luck. Closer inspection revealed the plunge pool was entirely devoid of fish. It was interesting because the pool does hold trout at times. Last summer, I saw trout swimming in the shadows to avoid the heat and predators. I figured, lethargic from the cold, trout would hole up here in winter as well. I was wrong, because my camera lens revealed nothing but bubbles and the occasional leaf on the bottom. On the bank, some mink tracks in the snow revealed a potential culprit. Although I'll never know for sure, I speculated that the mink had

scared the trout downstream into other holding water.

A second adventure a few days later took me to Cambria County to fish a medium-sized stream. I fished this creek before with spinners and had some luck with Brown Trout. I know this spot is annually stocked, and it also has a wild Brown Trout population. When I arrived, the water was running clear but high and still quite cold. Considering some of the warmwater species that inhabit this location, I assumed the water would be warmer. With water only 38 degrees F, I didn't catch anything, but I got some good practice drifting my nymphs and testing





MICHAEL KENSINGER

# Modified Walt's Worm



different weights and sizes in varying sections of stream. After that, I decided to investigate and make a game plan for later that week.

After days of snowmelt and rain, I was finally greeted by a sunny February morning. Water conditions had improved, so I drove a short distance to a popular river. Fed by limestone springs, I learned that the water quality was great, and the water temperature here would be around 10 degrees warmer than the frigid freestone creeks where I'd been practicing. I immediately recognized an increase in biodiversity as lush aquatic vegetation swayed and danced in the stream current.

I grasped one plant and lifted some damaged portions out of the water. I was seeing stonefly and midge larvae all over the plant. My hand was covered with tiny midges, which told me I was in the right habitat for hungry trout. As I walked through the stream, I even saw what appeared to be a hellgrammite twitching its way through the current beside me. The water temperature checked at 45 degrees F, so I placed myself at a long deep run that cut under some fallen trees.

Above me on the hillside, a great horned owl called. I cast my nymph up the feeding lane. My

fly was made with brown hare's ear dubbing, sparkly green hare's ear dubbing mixed in and accented with a hot pink collar behind the black beadhead—my own variation of a Walt's Worm. I made another cast and found I had finally hooked a trout.

A 10-inch wild Brown Trout found a fly I tied enticing enough to eat. I reeled the fish closer admiring its red speckled sides and amber colored fins. Before I could snap a photo, it jerked its head, threw the barbless hook and was free. Just like that, the brown beauty slipped back down into the water, leaving me longing for another catch. ☐