

# Fishing the Baetis Emerger

by Carl Haensel

Fly-fishing in winter conjures up images of wader-clad folks bundled up to their noses, fishing an ice-choked stream. While this is occasionally the reality of fly-fishing in January and February, Pennsylvanians are also blessed with some warm days. On those days, it's time to put away the nymphs, watch for rising fish, and start thinking of spring. This is because, on those special warm winter days, anglers can experience a mayfly hatch. Fly anglers often call them "Blue-Winged Olives," or "baetis." More accurately, they are almost all mayflies in the family Baetidae. Calling them "baetis" is just a whole lot easier than saying *Pseudocentropiloides*. However you feel like greeting them when you meet, you should be happy as an angler. In many streams they can compose up to 20 percent of the stream's total macro-invertebrate biomass, and if they're active, the fish love them. When they start to hatch, look for emerger patterns to be important.

When you start fishing an emerger, it can be a sign that the fishing is tough. The fish are usually refusing every other offering that you've tried. So you tie on an emerger. If they start eating it like there's no tomorrow—well, you're set and my job here is done. However, when you're fishing to trout that are eating tiny blue-gray mayflies, this is rarely the case.

Trout often seem to key in on a specific component of the tiny mayfly's life stage, and will refuse many offerings. To combat this issue, there are quite a few things you can try. With emerger patterns, remember that variety is the key. Since there are many different species of actual mayflies that you might represent with your flies, keep on hand a handful of sizes as well as some with subtly different color variations. Using some synthetic dubbing of the many varieties available can assist in capturing tiny air bubbles on the fly, which add realism and can provoke a strike.

Try fishing throughout the water column with your emerger. Sometimes the fish will want the fly drifting along the bottom, and sometimes in the surface film.

Even if you don't see chasing fish, a classic fishing tactic, the "Leisenring

Lift," developed for fishing nymphs on spring creeks, works wonders when used with emergers. Developed before World War II by Jim Leisenring, it is a technique that dead-drifts a fly into a prime holding location. Then, just as the fly reaches the fish's holding position, the angler causes it to rise suddenly toward the surface, enticing the fish to strike.

Begin this technique by standing next to a run or current seam. Cast up and across the stream with a short amount of line. After the fly settles to the water, raise the rod tip so that there is just enough line on the water so that the fly sinks. As the fly moves toward you, raise the rod tip higher to prevent slack line from forming on the water. Once the fly passes you and heads downstream, slowly lower the rod tip and follow the line with it to keep pace with the current. These motions will keep the fly on the bottom and drag-free during the length of its drift. Once you have lowered the rod to the horizontal position, hold it still, allowing drag to set in and the current to swing your line across the stream. As a result, the fly will swing to the surface like an emerging mayfly nymph. The fly's upward sweep is the "lift" part of the Leisenring technique.

Note that to make this work, it is important to get the fly on the bottom quickly, so make sure to add enough weight about 8 inches above your fly. To get this technique to work well for you, time the swing of your fly so it begins to move upward right before it reaches the fish that you are targeting.

Practice this technique in clear water with a fly that you can see to get the swinging technique down. When you're fishing an emerger, try adding a small amount of motion or short strip to your swing. It's a good idea that can sometimes convince a reluctant fish to bite. Lastly, when you get a hit when using this technique, set the hook toward the side of the stream, so you don't pull it directly out of the fish's mouth. ☐

