

# The Baby Hopper

by Carl Haensel

Some years ago, an angler I knew from Florida traveled north to fish with me for trout in limestone streams. Even though it was mid-May, the temperature predictions told us we would be sweating in short sleeves by 11 a.m. every day. On the first day we chose to fish, we were on the stream just as the sun crept over a low line of trees. I selected a pair of nymphs from a box in my vest and started casting to a likely run, as I do regularly. My friend walked down to the stream and sat down on the bank to rig up his rod. Not more than five minutes later, his line was tight with a nice brown trout on the end. I kept casting, and only after watching him catch four more trout did I ask what he was using.

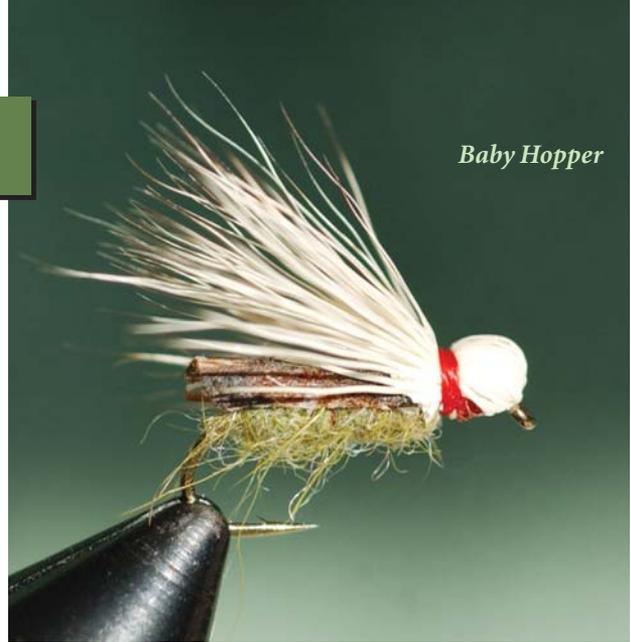
A windy fellow, he proceeded to hold forth with a lengthy explanation about the fly, who tied it, its travels in a fly box, his travels fishing... I just wanted to catch some trout.

When I finally got a word in, he said that he had seen a bunch of sluggish young grasshoppers on the bank when he sat down, and he picked the fly that best matched them—a Baby Hopper.

I have always used terrestrial insect patterns in my fishing, but I often wait until mid-summer to pull them out of my box. This day, we continued fishing almost until noon, picking off nice browns through a grassy meadow on the smallest grasshopper patterns we could muster out of our boxes. We even clipped down a few large flies with scissors until they started catching fish.

Baby Hoppers are best tied on hooks in sizes 12 to 16. Size 14 is my favorite. Use standard-length hooks to keep the body size small relative to the hook gap. I use bullet-head patterns because they're easy to build in small sizes. Cement the turkey wing section before construction for better durability. The body is made of a green Antron®-hare blend. The overwing is elk hair.

Since that first day, I've taken advantage of similar opportunities almost every spring,



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though not always at the same time on the calendar. Grasshopper populations vary greatly in size from year to year, and emergence times can differ by weeks. Even development times vary: It can take roughly 35 to 50 days for an egg to become an adult grasshopper, depending on the species.

Keep an eye out for the critters in your lawn, and you'll have a good idea when to take your own little hoppers fishing. Take special note that these small grasshoppers cannot fly. That means their populations will be localized early in the season. That usually also means that fishing them tightly to the bank is the best option, since fish will rarely see them mid-stream.

As with other terrestrials, a firm "splat" on the water can often bring up fish that don't respond to a softly landed cast. This can also mean that long drifts are not needed to bring up the fish. If they don't respond in the first half-dozen feet of drift after the "splat," pick up and cast again. Some of my favorite places to look for good hopper fishing are on waters that flow next to cattle pastures and grassy meadows.



Get out this year and take advantage of this early season opportunity for some great terrestrial action. ☐