

# Midges

Text and  
Illustrations by  
Jerry Hobbs

Third in a series

Those of us who have fished the San Juan know all about midges, right? Those little insects you can hardly see because they are so small (sizes 20 to 26)?

In some waters midges account for 3/4ths of the diet of the fish population. They are so small (usually 1/4 to 3/8th inch) their hatches are easily overlooked by anglers, and many fly tiers are intimidated by their small size, thinking they would be harder to tie than they actually are.



Larva



Pupa

Midges hatch year-round, every day, unless the lake or stream is frozen over.

In the winter months they might be the only food available to fish. If you fish Lee's Ferry, the San Juan, even Alaska waters, midge patterns from size 14 to 24 are necessary (mostly size 20 and smaller), if you want to catch fish.

Midges are true flies in the Order Diptera- having only 2 wings. They are in the Family of *Chironomids*, a term you will hear often. They undergo complete metamorphosis; egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Fish prey on all forms.

Midge larvae are very slender with a uniform profile- no well-defined head or appendages. They live in silty bottoms or under rocks.

Pupae are darker, shorter and squatter than the larvae. Inside the case are the developing wings. They wiggle as they rise slowly toward the surface, with the help of trapped air bubbles under the skin. The wings become more prominent and they hang in the surface film where they are helpless while they emerge as adults and then fly away.

Good patterns for midge larvae include: Andy Kim's "Yong Blood" and Bear Goode's "Sparkle Larva". To imitate the pupa use Andy Kim's "Yong Special", the Black Beauty, Beadhead Zebra Midge, and the Brassie. For emergers use Rim Chung's RS2 or a WD40.

Midge adults often form mating clusters on the water's surface, and can be fished with a Griffith's Gnat, Black Gnat, Adams, Blue-Winged Olive, or a Mosquito pattern, all in a size 12 or 14.

To fish larval patterns you must get the fly at or near the bottom; pupa patterns need to be fished in a jerky, slow retrieve, which imitates their rise to the surface. Emerger and adult patterns should be fished in the surface film with a dry fly or an emerger pattern. Good luck!



Adult