

Early Black Stonefly

Oh those cold winter blues! Cabin Fever has finally sunk in and your ready to get outside! But where to go, what to do? You have pretty much exhausted yourself chasing birds through the mountain, fields and preserves. Its time for some relaxing fishing time. But, its March and most streams are covered with snow and the hatches are very limited. Well. You are in luck, March can ve a very fun and exciting time on your local stream.

Check your weather conditions to be sure they are not covered in ice and get out fishing. Your going to run into a very common hatch at this time and it is the Little Black Stonefly.



Little Black Stonefly is the common name used to describe a prolific early Spring stonefly hatch that occurs on many trout streams around the Pennsylvania and the northeast The Little Black Stonefly are very small, the nymphs are approximately a size #16 and the adults are generally a size #18. In Pennsylvani the hatch generally will occur from sometime in February through April depending on how cold or mild the Winter is that year.

The Little Black Stoneflies (*also called Winter Snowflies*) are part of the Capniidae family (probably *Allocapnia granulata*) and are the first stoneflies to appear each the year. These tiny Winter stoneflies have anti-freeze compounds in their body fluids to help them stay active during the cold snowy months. They hatch by crawling out of the water to the snowy bank edges to hatch and become adults. Then crawl up on to the snow to look for safe places to hide from the cold elements until ready to mate, lay their eggs and die.

"Stoneflies in the Capniidae family only hatch in the winter, even on the coldest days," says Robert Younghanz, a Colorado trout fishing guide and aquatic entomologist who gives streamside classes to fishermen (the-bug-guy.com). "They're jet black to help them absorb heat from the sun, and they don't fly. They mate right on the snow. It's the only significant insect fauna in winter, and you can find them in rivers from coast to coast."

"These stoneflies will mate on a cloudy day when the air temperature is in the teens," Younghanz says. "But big hatches will happen during ideal conditions. Bright sunny days are best, and if they coincide with a window where the temperature climbs into the 30s or 40s, all the better.

Subsurface or Surface?

Why not both! That's right many an early season trout have been caught fishing the nymphs, emerger and/or adult fly! Even give the old tandem, double fly trick a shot. For example; An adult stonefly with a soft hackle emerger of the bend off the hook. When fishing the nymph try tagging along an egg pattern as a teaser fly

The Nymph

Stonefly nymphs are present year around in rivers with clean, cold water, and are effective searching patterns that can be fished when there are no fly hatches. Many species take 3 years to mature, and trout are accustomed to seeing them, and rarely ignore the opportunity to grab a big stonefly meal. Nymphs spend nearly all of their time living under rocks. Turn some rocks over, and check them out.



Here is a little tip when you're at the tying bench this winter that will make your nymphs a little more irresistible. Occasionally, they lose their cling on a rock, and drift down river with their bodies arched. Try bending the shank of the hook to imitate the natural insect using a dead drift.

Any small dark nymph pattern in a size #16 fished in the shallows should work for trout feeding on the migrating little black stonefly nymphs working their way to the snow banks. And don't forget about a teaser fly such as an egg pattern off the back of the hook. This just might save the day!

Emerger

During spring or early summer, stoneflies migrate toward shore. During this migration, opportunistic fish will also be found close to shore, and dead-drifting a matching stonefly nymph close to the bank can be very effective. Eventually, these nymphs crawl out of the river to a blade of grass, a rock, or a branch, where the exoskeleton breaks open, and the adult stonefly dries off and flies away. Clinging exoskeletons are evidence of this emergence.



Here is an excellent emerger pattern that will increase your catch ratio

Hook: 3906B size 16 to 18

Thread: Black

Dubbing: Black

Hackle: Black

Fish these effective emerger patterns either swinging or even dead drift and you will soon feel a tug on your line. These effective patterns work really well as a dropper fly off an adult stonefly pattern

Adult

Adult stoneflies typically live for 1 to 4 weeks, drinking only water or nectar. During this period, they mate, the female returns to the water to lay eggs, then die.

Imitate this part of the lifecycle with a dead drifted adult stonefly matching the color of the natural. If dead drifting doesn't produce, try skittering or hopping the fly.



Winter is long and its time to get out and do some fishing! Go explore your local stream and have some fun with the Little Black Stonefly!

See you on the stream!