
FLY OF THE MONTH

CHIRONOMIDS

Chironomids or midges are found throughout the world in both lakes and streams. They are the predominate food source for trout found in the tail waters San Diego fly fishers frequent, such as Lee's Ferry, Green River, and the San Juan River. Chironomids are located in large numbers in most if not all of the lakes we fish. I was taught to believe that big fish were caught on big flies. That ain't necessarily so! Chironomids are small, very small.

Eric Schubert mentioned chironomid fishing in his presentation at our November meeting. The next day I received a couple of phone calls inquiring about chironomid fishing so I thought it may be a good subject for an article for the finny facts. I certainly don't want to come off as portraying myself as an expert on chironomids because I am not. Without a question the recognized expert is Brian Chan who has authored several articles and books on chironomids.

Several years ago while cruising around on Lake Crowley on my pontoon kick boat, and not having any luck, I observed a fisherman who was catching a fish on nearly every cast. Naturally I was not only interested but somewhat envious. I spent some time trying to figure just what he was doing that made him so successful. He was the only fisherman using a floating line with a yarn strike indicator. That was my first observation. My fish finder indicated we were eight feet of water. The lucky fisherman was measuring the water by pushing his rod straight down into the water. He then would check his strike indicator, cast out, and wait. It wasn't long before the indicator disappeared and a fish was on. I was brazen enough to let my curiosity get the best of me and I asked him a few questions. Not being properly equipped, I continued my normal moving about trying to find fish, with very little success.

Recently Bob Camp, Jack Bentley and I fished with Tom Loe from Sierra Drifters Guide Service on Lake Crowley. Tom had us fishing with floating lines, a strike indicator, and chironomid flies; little ones, like size 20's & 24's. We were using the identical method I had observed on the earlier trip.

On a later trip to Crowley with John Beckstrand, Bob Rubel, Paul Britting, Floyd Lee and Lee Anderson we made some inquiries at the Lake Crowley Marina and we were told just what we should do to be successful chironomid fishermen.

I'll do my best to explain the procedure. And by the way it worked!

First you need a floating line. Sinking lines and sink tips don't work. It is important that your float tube or boat be anchored. The life stages of the chironomid do not swim through the water. They rise from the bottom and emerge slowly to the surface. You need to get your fly down near the bottom. About eight to ten inches off the bottom. We used a lead sinker with a rubber core to reach the bottom. We hooked our fly to the rubber core and dropped it over the side, letting it sink to the bottom. Once we were sure the sinker was on the bottom we raised the fly about eight inches off the bottom and attached our strike indicator to the leader just at the water level. We then retrieved our fly, unhooked the sinker and cast the fly. If we did everything right our fly was eight to ten inches off the bottom being held in place by our floating strike indicator.

Once your fly is down near the bottom and your indicator is bobbing around, you just wait for the take. Don't take your eyes off the indicator, as many times the take is very subtle. It seems to be a pretty sure way to catch fish, but after a time watching that indicator, my eyes started to cross and I became bored. It reminded me of when I was just a sprout setting on the bank of the Teton River in Idaho fishing with a willow, worms and a cork bobber. (My grandfather who inspired my interest in fishing wasn't a fly fisherman).

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The Fly of the Month is the Chironomid of which there are a variety of species of sizes and colors. The instructions are for a Bead Head Pupa, (a [Chironomid Pheasant Tail](#))¹ and a Yong Special. These are patterns that work. The Yong Special works well at the Green River. You should not go there without an array of these in your fly box. The Zebra Midge, another chironomid pattern, does the job at Lee's Ferry. This pattern is very similar to the Bead Head Pupa. It is tied without the white gills, has a silver bead head and a silver wire ribbing. Just remember to think small. San Diego Fly Fishers Video library has a video by Bob Newman, "Chironomid Patterns", which has a number of good patterns.

Tom Smith¹

¹Editor's note: (5/23/2010)

The January 2002 Finny Facts provided several pictures of good midge patterns but accidentally pictured Chan's Chironomid Pheasant Tail as a Yong's Special by Andy Kim. Both patterns are useful but represent entirely different midge families. The Chironomids are slow water silty bottom dwellers while the Net Wing Midges (represented by Yong's Special) live in very shallow fast cobblestone river bottoms like the Green and San Juan Rivers). Tom Smith explained the accident in the following edition of the Finny Facts. Above, some blue text has been added to be consistent with the fly patterns shown below.

The recipe for Chan's Chironomid Pheasant Tail and the subsequent picture and information about Yong's Special appear below courtesy of Lucky Ketcham.

MAROON BEAD HEAD PUPA

Hook: TMC 2457(curved shrimp hook) Size 10-18
Thread: Maroon 8/0 or 6/0
Ribbing: Fine Copper Wire
Body: Burgundy Super Floss
Thorax: Peacock Herl(Collar)
Head: Small Copper Bead
Gills: White Antron Fibers



1. Tie in short piece of white antron fibers, extending forward over the eye of the hook. Tie off at this point with a two-wrap whip finish and cut the thread.
2. Slide the copper bead forward pusig it over the tied down antron and forcing the bead up against the hook eye. Tie the thread back on behind the bead and wrap a taper behind the bead. Wratp a smooth wrap of thread back to the bend of the hook.
3. Tie in the copper wire ribbing. It should be tied in about 1/3 of the way around the bend.
4. Tie in the Super Floss at the same point you tied in the ribbing.
5. Wrap the super floss forward to right behind the bead and tie it off. Super floss is a stretchy material and you should stretch the material as you wrap it forward. Wrap the ribbing forward in approximately 5 wraps. The ribbing should be reverse wrapped in equally spaced turns creating segmentation.
6. Tie in one strand of pecock herl behind the bead. Wrap the herl around the thread creating a herl rope. Make 3 turns of this rope just behind the beard forming a collar.
7. Whip finish behind the bead.

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CHAN'S CHIRONOMID PHEASANT TAIL

Hook:	TMC 100 dry fly hook size 18 or 16
Thread:	Black 8/0
Tail/Gills:	White poly yarn fine
Rib:	Very fine gold wire
Body:	Pheasant tail
Thorax:	Peacock herl
Wing Case:	Pheasant tail
Gills:	White poly yarn or white CDC hackle, split each side.
Head:	Black thread (Bead heads of Tungsten, brass or sliver lined glass are optional)



About Brian Chan's Chironomid Pheasant Tail

Chan's Chironomid Pheasant Tail, fished on floating line and a long leader, works well on stillwaters on both sides of the Atlantic. Tom Loe, Sierra Drifters, would call it the "Gillie" as the gilled stage of the midge life cycle. Fish it as the second or top fly under an indicator at Crowley Lake. A standard Tiger or Zebra midge would be the terminal fly fished within 6 inches of the bottom. The body of the first midge looks like pheasant tail. The Miracle Midge would have pearl flashabou and the Zebra Midge Gillie has a black thread body ribbed with very fine gold wire. Tom Loe likes to use Tungsten Beads for extra weight. The enertia of the heavier fly helps it go into the mouth of a cruising trout, while a lighter version would bounce off the nose giving you the dreaded "Drive By." The flies are tied on fixed loops to give extra movement and hang in the correct emerging position.

YONG'S SPEACIAL

The ribbing of heavy brown thread is very important on this pattern. Use the Coats and Clark, Summer Brown, #51 button thread, not the finer dual use fabric thread. The body is a fat little oval and not just a straight cigar of thread. This pupa is very specialized to live on cobblestones where the water level can drop leaving them to dry out. The thick pupa case keeps them from drying out and dying. The net wing midge adult is so specialized for shallow fast water that it has very long hind legs to hold on to the empty pupa case stuck on the cobble while drying its wings. It does not need to drift down the river into the pools where the brown trout are waiting.



Yong's Special by Andy Kim.

Chironmids are fished in still water lakes or slow deep eddies of rivers. While the Yong's Special, Net Winged Midges are fished in very shallow riffles. The kind of riffles that filter out all the floating algae in the river and feed the special midges, scuds, snails and caddis that can be exposed to hot sun and damp rocks part of the day. If the riffles are so shallow they scratch the bottom of your pontoon boat, think Young's Special. Andy Kim became famous guiding and tying flies on the San Juan, the Green and the Big Horn Rivers. The trout in Lake Crowley or the Owen's River have never seen the pupa of a Net Winged Midge. A Yong's Special might work, but it is out of place in a lake. Lucky Ketcham, May 11, 2010

