



SMART

Angler's Notebook

by Carl Richardson

Stoneflies

The scientific name for this order of insects is *Plecoptera*, which in Latin means “braided wing.” The wings of adults have numerous veins, making them appear braided. Stoneflies, as you can guess, live in habitats with plenty of stones. They prefer fast-moving, clear streams with a bottom of rocks and stones. Small mountain brooks and large streams in wooded areas usually have plenty of this type of habitat, and often many stoneflies.

Stoneflies, like mayflies, have incomplete metamorphosis. The stages of incomplete metamorphosis include egg, nymph and adult, or “ENA.”

NYPH

Stonefly nymphs have two tails and two sets of wing pads or plates. They also have gills on the middle body segment near their legs. Mayflies may have two tails, but their gills are on the last body segment. The nymphal stage of most stoneflies is one year. There are a few species here that take as long as three years to mature. Stoneflies crawl about and cling to the rocky bottom, sheltered from the current. In small streams, many species feast on leaves falling from streamside trees. In larger waters they graze on other aquatic vegetation, like that slime or the scum that covers rocks. There are some stoneflies that are predatory.

HATCHING

Unlike most other insects, stoneflies hatch, or emerge, on dry land. Often the nymph crawls to a streamside rock and the adult emerges. Trout and other fish may eat the nymphs as they make the move to these places.

ADULT

The wings of adult stoneflies fold back flat over the body. Caddisflies also have “laid back” wings, but they almost form a tent over the body. After hatching, the adults fly to streamside vegetation, where they may live from a few days to a few weeks. Many adults do not eat, but those that live as adults longer do eat vegetation, pollen or nectar.

The adults attract mates by “drumming”—bouncing up and down on their vegetation perches. They mate on this vegetation and the female takes the fertilized eggs to the water to deposit them. She may skate across the surface, dropping egg packets. This is often when trout eat the adults. A bushy dry fly skated across the surface at this time can bring slashing strikes.

