INSECT ID

We're aware that "matching the hatch" can be a very productive fly-fishing tactic. And it's true that we can match the hatch without actually knowing an insect's name or its life cycle phase, if we are just observant of what the fish are feeding on and use a fly of similar size, color, and shape and present it in a natural manner. However, identifying the hatching insect, choosing a pattern to match, and fishing it successfully can add an additional level of enjoyment to our sport.

Here's a quick and easy take-along guide to help identify some of the common insects. Note that there may be only **one- or just a few key features** that you are looking for.
Good Luck: Dennis

Identification of major commonly important fly-fishing aquatic insects

Adults: Fully winged.

Mayfly: Has tails; wings stick upright in the air (sailboat style) or out to the side. *Duns on the water are the classic sailboat style; adults returning to the water to lay eggs and die are the "spent" or "spinners" with wings to the side.*

Stonefly: Has tails; wings are neatly folded flat atop the back.

All the rest have no tails:

Midges: Two wings folded roof-like over body with knobby protrusions on the abdomen just behind where the wings are attached. *Often confused with mosquitoes.*

Caddis fly: Fine-hairy tent-shaped wings folded like a little pup tent over the back. No coiled mouthparts.

Aquatic moth: Soft, folded pup-tent wings and coiled mouthparts.

Alderfly: Folded wings with crisp cellophane appearance. Thick shiny head and well-developed mandibles.

Dragonfly: Body long and slender with relatively large compound eyes and crispy clear wings about as long as their bodies. Wings stick out horizontal to the sides.

Damselfly: Generally smaller than dragonflies. Body long and slender with relatively large compound eyes and crispy clear wings about as long as their bodies. Resting wings folded together above and parallel with the back.

Identification of major commonly important fly-fishing aquatic insects(Cont.)

Nymphs: *Have head, thorax (with six legs) and abdomen sections. No wings.* Resemble the adult form.

Mayfly nymphs: Will have small structures (gills) attached along the sides of the abdomen (look like small rods, cups, or discs or they might look like feathers). All mayfly nymphs have gills on their abdomens. *Need to look close here, may show up better in some water*.

Stonefly nymphs: May have rod-like or feathery gills located at the legs or even on the neck, but never* (only one species does) on the abdomen.

Damselfly nymph: *Head wider than thorax and abdomen*. Easily identified by their three leaf-like tails. *The tails show up best in some water.*

Dragonfly nymph: *Abdomen wider than head and thorax.* . No obvious tail. The dragonfly nymph has a hinged, clubby, biting device under its face (labium).

Larva: Worm-like and don't resemble the adult form.

Dipteral (midge.) larva: Wormlike (many colors from clear to black *and red*) but do have head (small and undeveloped), thorax (legless-but have small/short appendages that resemble legs) and abdomen.

Caddis fly larvae: Found inside tubular houses made of sticks and gravel clumps. Head and legs may be showing and may be crawling about with house. All caddis flies have claws at the tip of the abdomen to help hang onto their house or the streambed.

Free-roaming caddis larvae: May just be homeless larvae, but more than likely these may be species that never build a case. Note the anal hooks, legs, and the hard-dark plate(s) on or behind the head.

Hellgrammites: Larval stage of alderflies and Dobson flies. Long fleshy creatures with six legs and additional soft, pointed tubercles projecting along each flank of abdomen. Head is flat, dark, shiny and shield-like with large gnashing jaws. Bite.

Pupa: *Partially developed wings, may be fused to body, or wings and legs may be free but held close to body.*

***Caddis fly pupa: Two** pair of wing pads which slope down and under thorax. Antenna as long or longer than body. Legs free, held close to body. Curved forward-pointing mandibles.*

***Midge pupa:** Head indistinct. Antenna much shorter than body. One pair wing pads. Thin hair-like tubes or feather-like gills on thorax and at end of abdomen. Legs undeveloped and fused to thorax. No mandibles.*

Condensed from California School of Fly Fishing Entomology, *amended by DJ*