

Fishing the Light Hendrickson

by Carl Haensel

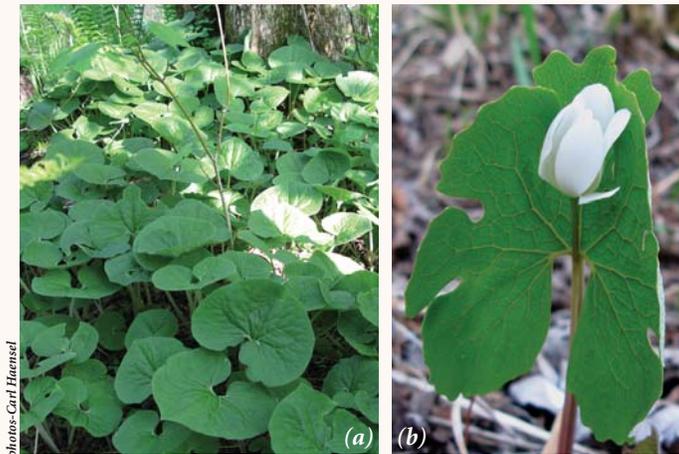
Stepping into a trout stream during a Hendrickson mayfly hatch is a magical experience. Even the Latin name of the genus *Ephemerella* suggests the transient beauty that these pretty little mayflies possess. However, I believe that trout look on the hatch in an entirely different manner. The term buffet line comes to mind, and indeed a strong hatch can be just that. Anglers for years have extolled the virtues of fishing a Hendrickson hatch, if for no other reason than to catch lots of fish. Not merely a creature of grace, the diminutive mayfly is also a sure-fire way to get trout feeding freely on the surface. The mayfly behind all of this action, *Ephemerella subvaria*, is found throughout Pennsylvania. If you pull up your car to the edge of the creek, and see trout rising, here's what to do:

Start by making sure that the mayflies that you're seeing are Hendricksons. There are many other insects that can emerge on a spring day, and you want to be imitating the right critter. More than one time I've seen beautiful mayflies go sailing past on the current unmolested while caddisflies were being savagely attacked as they emerged. Next, begin fishing to the rising trout closest to you. It's probably not the biggest fish, and that's okay. What is important is that it presents the easiest cast. Concentrate on getting a drift that presents the fly as still on the water as possible. In this type of fishing, surface drag is your enemy. If the fish takes your fly—great, you've got it figured out. If you get no hits after ten casts, you've got two options: try another trout or try another fly. A classic Catskill pattern, the Light Hendrickson originated around World War

I. The many variations that have developed over the years are well worth tying and carrying in your box, since trout often key on a certain aspect of the hatch. The Light Hendrickson does a specifically good job imitating the female of the species. A Dark Hendrickson is a good option to try during this hatch as well. It can be a challenge to predict on a specific day what fly will work best, so having a variety along is helpful.

If you're looking to go out and find a good hatch of Light Hendricksons, you'll need to work on your timing. In Pennsylvania, the hatch occurs roughly from the first week through the fourth week of April. It's a perfect hatch to keep your eyes peeled for right around opening day. If you want to get a closer idea of when the mayflies might hatch, you can try using some phenology. Phenology is the science of the relationship between climactic conditions and periodic biologic phenomena, like mayfly hatches or

flowers blooming. In many cases, you can relate the occurrences together. Before going fishing, you'll want to pay close attention in the woods, and look for wild ginger or bloodroot flowering. The Hendrickson hatch often starts right after these flowers begin to bloom. While most trout streams will experience a Hendrickson hatch, limestone streams in the state offer a better chance to find a strong hatch. Don't take these flies out of your box as the season progresses. Another similar mayfly, *Ephemerella invaria*, starts hatching soon after its cousin, and your flies can be useful as a good backup in upcoming hatches of sulphurs in May. ☐



(a) A patch of Wild Ginger in spring. Look for tiny maroon flowers near the base of the leaves on larger plants.

(b) Look for flowering bloodroot or wild ginger around the same time Hendrickson mayflies, *Ephemerella subvaria*, begin to hatch.

Photos: Carl Haensel