

photos by the author

A Crane-Fly Larva

by Carl Haensel

As an angler I'm drawn to bridges. My wife jokes that I'll eventually wind up in a ditch because I try to look at every waterway I cross. When I pull up to a trout stream, the first thing I like to do is sneak up on a bridge and look for fish.

Watching fish in clear water can be mesmerizing. They can tell you a lot about what kind of fishing you'll have for the day. I'm always hoping to see rising fish and small mayflies drifting with the current. More often than not, I arrive midday and all I see is trout swinging lazily back and forth in the current, scarcely feeding at all.

This fly, a Crane-Fly Larva, was designed to catch those kinds of fish.

On some of our clearer limestone spring creeks, stealthy anglers can often watch the trout they hope to catch—even without a bridge. Creep your way to the stream bank and you can see them occasionally taking insects with a slight opening of their mouth. When casting the imitation of what you think is drifting by—scud, midge larva or mayfly nymph—it is almost impossible to tell how close your fly is getting to the fish.



This frustrating situation is where the Crane-Fly Larva was born.

If you tie this crane fly as the lead fly on a two-fly nymph rig and then cast it into a clear spring creek, it will show you the path of your other fly. Essentially it acts as a strike indicator fly. If you make slight alterations to your drift, you can “spoon feed” the fly right into the fish's drift lane.

One of the best ways to use this fly as a strike indicator is to cast from upstream of the fish. Position yourself 10 to 25 feet upstream of the fish, depending on the stream and current. Then cast farther across the stream than you need to reach the fish. Pull back your flies until

they are directly upstream of the fish you are targeting, and then feed out slack line. Watch the flies carefully as they drift (hopefully) drag-free to the fish. Keep a sharp eye on the fly for any twitches or movement.

Now that you know how to fish this fly, there is one remaining question: Does the fly catch fish? The answer is most definitely yes. Used as a strike indicator, the fish you're targeting will often eat the Crane Fly before the other more natural imitation. Fished using standard nymphing methods, it works well singly and in tandem in both clear and off-color water. Crane flies are present in most trout streams, and even though they aren't often as white as this fly, the fish don't usually seem to mind.

In the course of designing this fly a number of years ago, I sent out trial flies to friends, family and anyone willing to report back. I used everything from plastic bags to Angora goat hair. I finally settled on Teflon® plumbers tape because it does not discolor when wet or rubbed into dirt. It also maintains its form after a few fish have chewed on it.

Tying this fly is simple. All it consists of is a piece of the Teflon tape. Twist the tape into a roll, tie it on at the rear of the hook, and wrap it to the head. □

