

Midges Or Bugs That Bite

By

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Bugs that bite fall largely into the order Diptera and not unsurprisingly include flies, mosquitoes and midges. Diptera are one of the largest orders of insects and are a major food source, especially for still water trout. However it is only very recently that fly fishermen have started targeting midges as a successful means to fool fish.

One finds 14 families of the order Diptera in South Africa six of which should be of interest to trout fishermen. In truth though we only concern ourselves about one. That is the midge family or chironomidae. And the best known chironomid imitation is not even known as a Midge. It is the San Juan Worm. True it was tied to imitate a real worm in the United States but that is not the case in this country. We do get aquatic earth worms in this country. They belong to the class Oligochaeta but they are more commonly found at the bottom of stagnant muddy pools. So when we talk blood worms we mean Chironomids or midge larvae.



Chironomid larvae on the left and aquatic earthworms on the right



A San Juan Worm

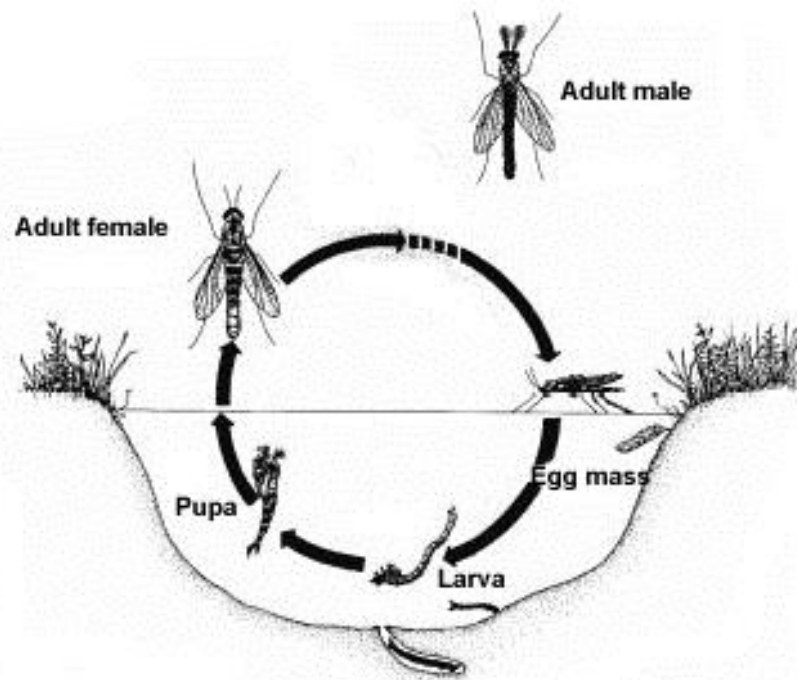
As is shown in this YouTube clip, [Life cycle of a midge](#), though Midge larvae are burrowers they do get out from time to time which makes them highly vulnerable to trout. They also occur in vast numbers often comprising a lake bound trout's only year round food source. That is why so called blood worm imitations are such a sure thing in KZN's many dams. But here is the thing. Though Midge larvae wriggle about they can't swim and as larvae they hang around on the bottom. So if you are imitating midge larvae that is where your fly should be, right on the bottom. And of course you should fish it on the drift unless of course you intend invoking an aggressive response from your

quarry. Of course the San Juan Worm is not the only midge larva imitation. The atomic worm also does the job as does _____ worm. Caroline Emmet of the UK based Fly Dressers Guild ties a deadly looking bloodworm cluster that is reputed to work well. And they don't have to be red. Midge larvae come in a muddy olive colour as well.



Carol Emmet's Blood Worm Cluster on the Left and on the right, an Atomic Worm

Although the larval stage of a midge is what most South African fisherman concentrates on, it is not in fact the stage that interest trout most. Midges go through what is called a full life cycle from egg to larva to pupa to insect and back to egg.



What makes the special is that they do not do this seasonally. Eggs become pupae, and pupae emerge as insects pretty much the whole year round. As Skip Morris' better three quarters (she is the veterinarian in the family) Jan Morris points out in an excellent three part series entitled [The Truth about Chironomids](#) the pupal stage is probably the one that is most commonly fed on by trout, because it is the stage that is most abundant throughout all the layers of a lake. And yes we are largely talking largely Stillwater when we talk about Midges. She calls Midges *fast food for trout*.

You really need to read her articles if you want to steep yourself in this subject and you should because when the competition guys talk buzzer fishing they are more often than not targeting Midges in their pupal stage.

Apparently research out of the US has shown that the freshly transformed pupae hang about on the bottom for a couple of days before making their way slowly to the surface. This, according to Jan Morris *explains why the first one to two feet off the lake bottom is often so productive, and also why trout often take Chironomid pupa imitations deep in the lake when there is no evidence of a hatch on the surface.*

The rise to the surface is slow and wriggly. They are moreover assisted in this by a layer of air trapped between their outer skin and their bodies. So pupae are best tied shiny and tied with a loop knot so as to make it easier to enhance the wriggle. Skip Morris recommends Peter Morrison's "quick strip technique". I am not going to repeat it here. Read Jan Morris's [The Truth about Chironomids](#). What I can tell you is that it is a very good basic guide to buzzer fishing.



[A selection of Buzzer patterns](#)

Midges emerge as the winged insect in the surface film. But they do so in a special way. Unlike mayflies and damselfly that punch through the surface film, most midges or at least most of the successful ones hook their tail ends in the surface film and using that as an anchor cantilever their heads through the film. The emerging midge thus presents a distinct u shape in the surface film. It has been said (not by Jan Morris) that imitating that greatly increases ones chance of success when

presenting an emerging midge. That said there are precious few patters that do this so maybe someone is blowing smoke.



You can also fish midge patterns on dry. Darryl Lampert's High Vis midge is a good example of this.



By way of a final note, Midges tend to be on the small side. In their larval and pupal forms they seldom exceed 1cm in length. As bugs they are a lot smaller. Hooks tend to range from 12 to 16 for larvae and pupae and emergers and 18 to 30 for dries. However don't be afraid to go bigger. Exaggeration works. One English competition fisherman fishes size 8 buzzers! I recently caught a lot using a size 8 hook to imitate a nymph that was about 1cm long.
