

# The REZ Mayfly Hatch



# Identification – *Hexagenia Bilineata*



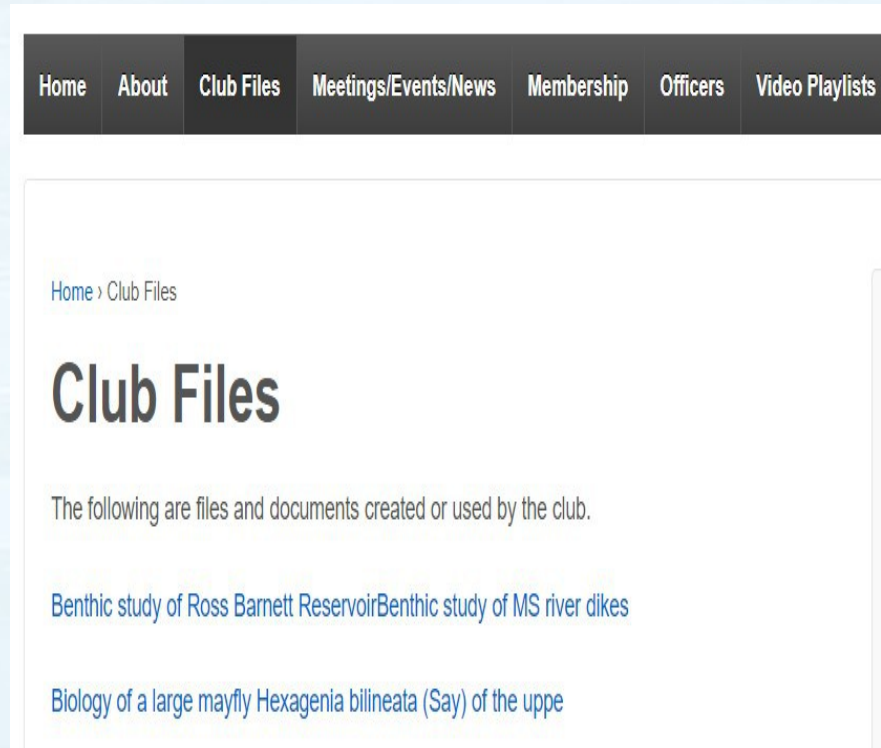


Two black dots on the hind wing



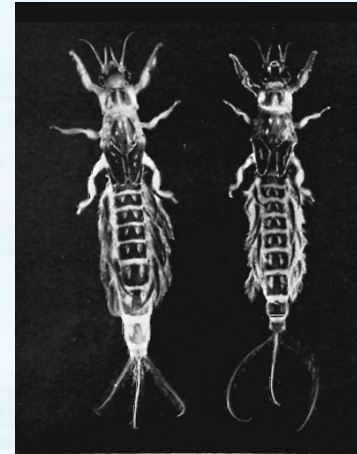
# Sources - Hexagenia Bilineata

- Source 1 - Macrobenthos-sediment relationships in Ross Barnett Reservoir, Mississippi
- Source 2 - Biology of a large mayfly, *Hexagenia bilineata* (Say), of the upper Mississippi river Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station Research Bulletin: Volume 33, Issue 482
- These documents are on our club files page of the web page





# The Nymph



- A reservoir mayfly lives for a year in the mud as a nymph before emerging at night from its U-shaped burrow and rises to the surface as a winged insect.

# Molting: Nymph to Emerger to Dun



- After rising to the surface of the Rez, the emerger, now no longer a nymph but instead a completely different winged animal, waits for its wings to fill with fluid on the surface before flying to a tree or structure near or on shore. As a somber colored dun, (subimago) it hangs there 8 to 18 hours.
- It starts out as a gray insect but darkens as the day wears on, becoming brown.



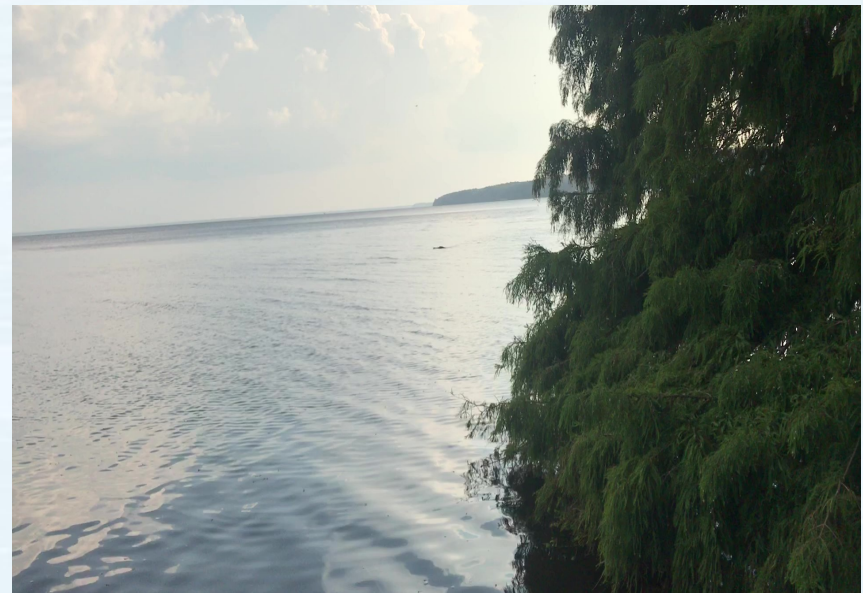
# The Last Molt – Dun to Spinner

- The dun continues metamorphosis until finally molting into the adult form. The wings of the adult spinner (imago) are transparent, the thorax is a peachy or cream color with a little gold ring around its neck. It's flight capabilities are much better in this final form.
- Sometime during the day, the adult, also called a spinner, mates. After mating, the females fall on the water and die (spinner). The males, if they don't go into the water with the female, continue mating until they die from exhaustion or get eaten by birds.



# Mating process

- The male begins flying just a couple of feet off of a bough of a tree. It has its zone and if anything flies through that zone, he will attempt to mate with it. Try swinging a fly or throwing a small stick and watch as the males try to clasp on to it.





The female Spinner falls to the surface and dies.  
Many males also fall as cripples as some don't  
accomplish the transition completely.



# When

- There's a Bell curve, starting end of April, the peak is mid-June to 1<sup>st</sup> part of July, August and September
- They can occur during the winter, we just don't notice them. My saltwater guide sent me this photo (right) of a *Hexagenia Bilineata* Mayfly in February!





# Telltale signs of a hatch...



# Location

*“You can observe a lot just by watching” - Yogi Bera*

- Mayflies have been observed just about everywhere on the lake. The wind determines largely where they are found.
- The bugs typically hatch out in the lake, possibly the old river channel, and the wind brings them to one side or the other
- Best to find them on the islands or along the Trace



# How to locate a hatch (*an emergence*)

- The mayflies hang mostly on the outside of trees on the water side making them hard to see and they're also hard to see flying, unless the wind pushes them right out into the road.
- Watch for birds – especially red-winged blackbirds. (The female red-wing is a basic brown sparrow-looking bird.)
- If no birds, then probably no bugs
- If birds are spotted, then watch their behavior. If they are active, hopping along limbs, especially in limbs close to the water, then look closer.
- Also look for rafts of spinners on the water. These are easy to see (right)



# False Alarm

- Something to watch for is mayflies in the grass or low hanging shrubs, but none in the trees. This means the hatch was on the previous day and you've missed it! These are males, they have no mouth or digestive system so the end is near, they only managed to survive the night.
- To be certain they are ONLY males, check the end of the abdomen of some for two small appendages, claspers. The male uses these to hold on to the female during mating. If you happen to find a female, that's a good thing, it could be an early volunteer prophesying a hatch is on they way!



# The Early Volunteers

- If you do find small numbers of duns in the trees (but not in the grass), especially females, they are what might be called “early volunteers”. The presence of a few females usually means a bigger hatch is coming!
- The wings of duns that are new arrivals will be closed.
- As the duns age on the tree they become browner and if their wings start to open wide, then the spinner fall is coming soon!

# Myths

- “Emergence occurs on dark nights” - They can emerge almost any night, full moon even. Possibly because the moon sets and emergence may occur after it sets?
- “Rain and storms will ruin the spinner fall”. - (photo at right taken during thunderstorm)
- The bream won't congregate under the hatches in the warm bathwater of summer.  
- Yes they will!





# Predicting what time the Spinner fall will occur

- The bugs are guaranteed to do their final molt at dusk, but sometimes with very little time before dark with little time to fish.
- *Biology of a large mayfly, Hexagenia bilineata* mentions a mid-afternoon spinner fall, basically starting around 2:00 and slowing around 4:00

On warm summer days, *H. bilineata* subimagos usually begin molting about 2 p.m., 8 to 18 hours after emergence. Molting continues into the evening, with a peak being reached about 4 p.m. In cool weather, however, the insects remain longer as sub-



# Best Fishing

- This mid-afternoon (2-4) molt/spinner fall is the best for fishing. After 4 pm the bugs tend to want to stay on the limb until dark, and the fishing slows down.
- Towards dusk, the massive spinner fall can happen, but it can happen so fast there's little time to fish. In addition, when there's numerous bugs on the water, the fish catching can be difficult.





# The Fish





# 54 bream – a day's catch





# Gators – wade at your own risk

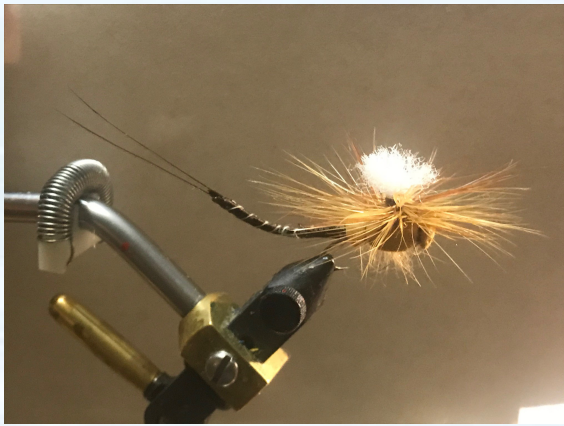
***According to Rez officials,  
there's never been an alligator  
attack on the Rez***



- Unless your name is Amos Moses, beware of alligators (and remember Amos only had one arm cuz a gator bit it.)
- If big ones are present, IMHO get out! – and there are many big ones
- Late evening they can begin acting aggressive



Flies – my circular journey began with the white popper, included many mayfly patterns





My quest ended with a foam “flip-flop” popper or Triangle Bug with deer hair tail and white rubber legs

- I call it the “Maggie May”



## How to fish the DH Popper or Triangle Bug

Without movement – letting the fly sit on the surface like a dead spinner seems to be the go to tactic in the mid-afternoon molt

Tiny strips with tight line, rod tip on water or under water – this can be done anytime, simulates a cripple. The tight line and weight of the popper seems to help in hooking up, especially with small fish

Dapping - hold rod high, with only two or three feet of fly line and skitter the fly along surface – use at dusk when the spinner fall is at peak, just before it's too dark to fish. It helps direct the fish to your fly to help compete against the numerous real bugs on the water - Albert is the originator



All well and good, but how does one know when there will be mayflies?

Back to the sources. Scientists wanted to predict hatches to mitigate their effect on cities along the Mississippi, to take precautionary measures – what the scientists concluded was the only way to

**approximate hatches is historical dates.**

I have kept a personal record of hatches, but the only “best bet” time I can offer is – Memorial Day Weekend

# Generalizations

- Every 6 to 11 days there will be a hatch (sourced from Biology of a large mayfly, *Hexagenia bilineata* (Say),)
- About three days in a row is the most to expect and often only one day
- The fish are not always on the hatch. Depends on whether hatches have occurred recently, multiple day hatches and “we just don't know” but don't expect fish to always be on a hatch
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- Sometimes there are only small fish on a hatch. This often can be remedied by just looking for another area with bigger fish.



# Nymph or sub-surface fishing



My own personal journey included:

- numerous attempts at match the hatch bilineata patterns with no success
- And trying many subsurface patterns. Try all the sub-surface flies you want, sometimes they will catch a few fish but generally the bream are eating mayflies off the top because why eat spinach when you can eat ice cream.

# The Downside



- A sore stripping finger!

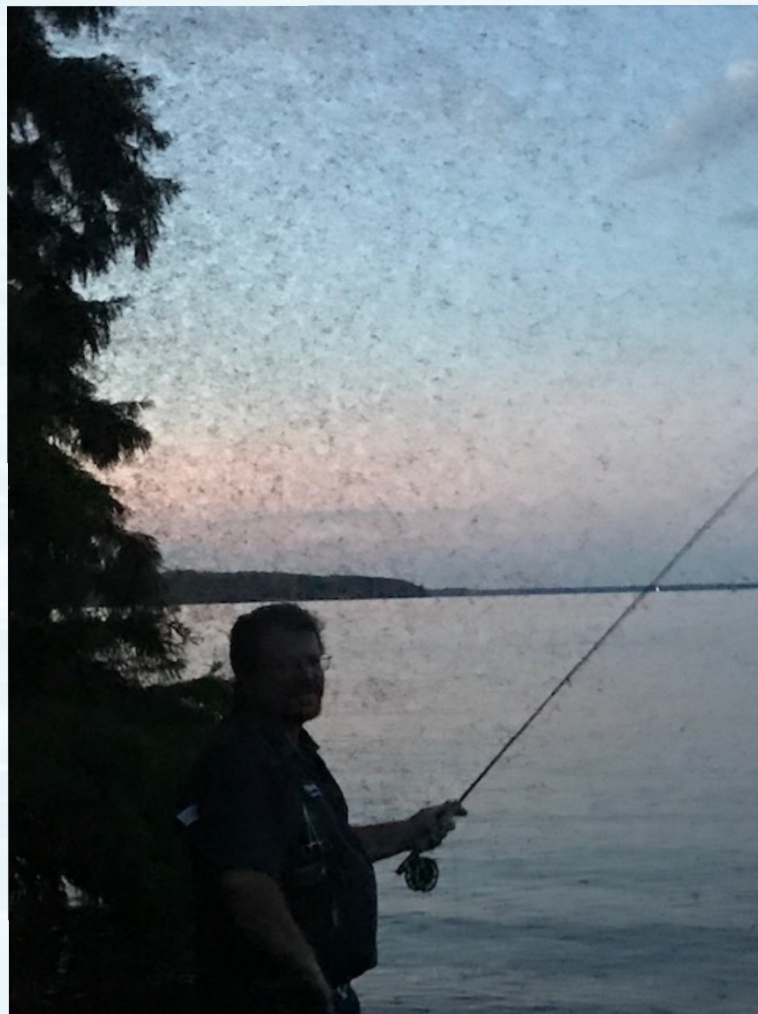


# The Upside





...And, nice evenings!





# Reservoir blood midges

## Chironomid Attenuatus





# Pond fishing in early Spring, Late evening

- Midges rising in last 30 minutes of daylight
- Griffiths gnat, size 14 to 18

