At first glance, one may mistake this aquatic insect for one belonging to the order Plecoptera (stoneflies) due to the characteristic two tails (or cerci) of stoneflies. However, this insect is a mayfly in the genus *Epeorus*, which belongs to the family Heptageniidae, known as the “flat headed” or “cookie-headed” mayflies. *Epeorus* is among the few genera of mayflies that have only two cerci. Heptageniidae hosts over 100 species in North America, where *Epeorus* contains 19 of these species. Insects within Heptageniidae are commonly characterized as scrapers and grazers that consume algae and detritus. *Epeorus* mayflies are known for their morphological adaptations which allow them to tightly cling to rocks within swift currents—these adaptations can cause them to be poor swimmers; should they be dislodged, they face a higher risk of predation. So, one could say that they literally cling to rocks for dear life!

The genus *Epeorus* is commonly found in fast-flowing, pristine headwater streams east of the Rocky Mountains. The presence of this genus is a strong indicator of good water quality! Flyfishers may associate the genus *Epeorus*, with commonly tied flies such as Quill Gordons, Pink Ladies, and Gray-Winged Summer Quills.

As *Epeorus* nymphs develop toward adulthood, their wing pads will progressively darken. Once the nymph is fully developed, the adult stage of *Epeorus* will typically emerge in late spring as a winged non-reproductive adult known as a “subimago” or “duns.” After several minutes to days, *Epeorus* will undergo another molt, becoming a fully reproductive adult, known as an “imago” or “spinner”. Following mating, female *Epeorus* will deposit a few eggs at a time by tapping its abdomen on the water’s surface, signifying that the next generation of *Epeorus* is underway.

*By Francesca Ferguson*