

On The Fly

March 2007

“Fly tying is a school from which we never graduate”

PATTERN OF THE MONTH - Gartside Sparrow

Hook: Mustad 9671 or similar, sizes #4-14.
Thread: Olive 6/0.
Tail: Pheasant rump marabou, one shank-length long.
Body: Rabbit and squirrel blend, olive.
Hackle: Pheasant rump hackle
Head: Pheasant aftershaft (philoplume) feather.



Tying Instructions:

- 1) Start the thread one eye length behind the eye. Wind a thread base back to just above the point of the hook.
- 2) Choose a short marabou feather from the rump area of a pheasant skin. Draw the fibers into a clump and tie them on at the hanging thread. Do not trim the butt ends.
- 3) Spiral the thread forward over the butt ends about $\frac{3}{4}$ up the shank. Trim butt ends to length, bind them down, and return the thread to the base of the tail.
- 4) Dub the thread with the rabbit and squirrel blend and wind it forward to form a tapered body up to where the underbody ends. Tie off at this location.
- 5) Select a proper-sized pheasant rump hackle. Tie it in, concave side down, just in front of the body, and make $1\frac{1}{2}$ turns, folding the hackle to the rear as you wind it. Trim off the excess material and bind down the hackle. The hackle should reach to the end of the tail.
- 6) Tie in an aftershaft (philoplume) feather just in front of the hackle. Wind the aftershaft feather forward, tie it off and form a small, neat head.
- 7) Whip finish the thread and apply cement.

The Sparrow Fly was developed by Jack Gartside over 25 years ago on the Madison River just outside West Yellowstone, Montana. He was looking to come up with an impressionistic fly that would combine some of the common features of both insect and baitfish, a fly that could look, depending on how it was fished, like lots of things in general. The name for his new combination of materials and structure was given to the fly by his friend, Pete Laszlo of New Hampshire. Gartside, a former English teacher, often tied at FFF conclaves and has a number of patterns to his credit in which he uses Ring-necked Pheasant feathers. Jack's nymphs and emergers are known for their fluffy, soft and pulsating properties, indeed the appearance of a natural insect.

Jack Gartside lives in Winthrop, MA, and has a website (jackgartside.com) with valuable information and tips on his flies. During my research I discovered an article by Jack titled “What To Do With A Pheasant Skin.” This article first appeared in the 1982 catalog of Blue Ribbon Flies. I found this article fascinating and very useful. Take a look for yourself at WWW.BLUERIBBONFLIES.COM/HOWTO/FLYTYING_PHEASANTSKIN.SHTML. “There's probably not a bird that flies that has more uses for the fly tyer than the ringneck pheasant.” The Sparrow is a fly of many uses in rivers and stillwater. Tie some up, give them a test flight and let me know how you do.

TYING TIPS

The Sparrow is very simple to tie but has one challenge: the aftershaft (philoplume) feather. You will soon discover its tip is quite fragile and difficult to wind without breaking off. The best suggestion seems to be a combination of the right hackle pliers, and a soft touch. Try breaking off the fragile tip before starting, then use hackle pliers with cushioned jaws or use an electronics test clip to grab the stem. Just wind it on, don't worry about folding, tie it off, wet your fingers, pull the fibers back and tie back on them slightly while forming the head.

The Sparrow can be tied in a variety of colors and sizes to match the naturals. There is a black version Jack calls the Evening Star, that uses black dyed feathers and a peacock herl body. This could be especially effective where dark stoneflies are found.