

# On The Fly

## December 2005

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

### PATTERN OF THE MONTH: Brad's Brat

Hook: Steelhead size 6 to 4/0  
Thread: Black, 6/0  
Tag: Flat or oval gold tinsel  
Tail: White or orange bucktail or kid goat  
Body: Rear 1/2: orange yarn; front 1/2: red wool yarn  
Rib: Flat or oval gold tinsel  
Collar: Brown hackle  
Wing: Orange over white bucktail or kid goat  
Head: Black thread



### Tying Instructions:

- 1) Start the thread at a position on the hook shank that allows the proper room for the head. Use this as a marker and don't tie anything past this mark.
- 2) Wrap a thread base to a position just above the hook point; tie in the tinsel at this point.
- 3) Wrap the tinsel three turns forward to form a tag. Tie off but don't trim the tinsel. You will need the tinsel for the rib.
- 4) Tie in the orange and white fur to form the tail just in front of the tag. The tail should be 1/2 the length of the shank.
- 5) Tie in the orange wool yarn and wind it forward 1/2 the body length. Tie it off and trim it.
- 6) Tie in the red wool yarn and wind it forward the rest of the body. Tie it off and trim it.
- 7) Rib the body with 5 or 6 turns of the gold tinsel then tie off and trim the tinsel.
- 8) Tie in and wind three turns of brown hackle.
- 9) Tie in a small clump of white hair in front of the hackle. Make the wing the length of the body.
- 10) Tie in a small clump of orange hair on top of the white.
- 11) Form a neat thread head and apply cement.

The summer and winter races of steelhead go about their migrations with very different agendas. Summer fish migrate in leisurely manner, taking all summer and fall to get around to the actual spawning. Winter fish, on the other hand, get right up to the spawning grounds and get with the program of reproducing. Winter fish enter the system sexually mature and ready to spawn while summer fish must mature sexually while in the system.

With this in mind the steelheader must change tactics departing from the classic dry-line, wet-fly swing and adopt techniques that fish the fly closer to the holding level of the winter fish. Winter conditions cause streams to change quickly due to heavy rains or snow melt. Fly choice must match the prevailing conditions but still remains a personal preference. We rarely have the opportunity to test the fish's comparative response to different patterns. Therefore we tend to choose a fly based on our confidence or knowledge that getting the fly in front of a steelhead's face is more important than the particular pattern. John Shewey says "Just choose a fly that is reasonable and then fish that fly with diligence and confidence. A reasonable fly for an off-color, swollen winter stream might differ considerably from a reasonable fly for that same stream during a low-water period."

Newcomers to steelhead fishing might be overwhelmed by the endless patterns available. What color works best on any particular stream under what particular conditions? The answer may be as simple as asking more questions. Call your local fly shop or one of the many helpful RFF members. Most would gladly share their knowledge and experiences.

This month's pattern, Brads Brat, was devised by Enos Bradner and introduced on Washington rivers around 1937. This classic hairwing design continues to be a popular and effective winter steelhead pattern. Tie some up, give them a test flight and let me know how you do.

### Tying Tips - Spey Versions

You can create a spey version of your favorite hair-wing steelhead fly by simply substituting long flowing material for the collar and wing. You don't even have to own a Blue Eared Pheasant skin to get good results. Try more affordable and accessible materials like: schlappin, guinea, mallard flank, pheasant rump, or marabou for collars and bronze mallard for tent-style wings.