

On The Fly

January 2007

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

PATTERN OF THE MONTH-Rusty Rat

Hook: Standard salmon/steelhead.
Thread: Red 6/0.
Tag: Oval gold tinsel.
Tail: Peacock sword.
Body: Rear half of orange-yellow floss, veiled above by one strand of floss extending to the middle of the tail. Front half of peacock herl.
Rib: Oval gold tinsel.
Wing: Grey fox guard hairs.
Collar: Soft grizzly hackle.
Cheeks: Jungle cock (optional).
Head: Red thread.



Tying Instructions:

- 1) Start the thread two eye-lengths behind the eye. This is the start of the thread base for the body material and this location is the marker for the wing tie-in point. Wind a thread base back to just above the point of the hook.
- 2) Tie in the tag material, make 3-4 turns, tie-off, leaving the tag end for the rib.
- 3) Tie in the peacock sword as the tail. Advance the thread forward on top of the sword butts to where the floss body ends.
- 4) Tie in the floss at this point, binding it down on top of the shank to the front of the tag. Wind the tying thread forward to the floss tie-in point. Wind the floss forward in close, flat wraps, and then tie-off the floss.
- 5) Wrap the ribbing tinsel forward over the floss in four equal turns. Tie off the ribbing tinsel and pull the tag end of the floss back toward the rear of the hook shank. Tie back on the floss and trim it to length at the middle of the tail. Trim the tag ends of the tinsel and sword.
- 6) Tie in four peacock herls, form a dubbing loop, advance the thread to the marker, twist the herls in the loop, wind the peacock rope forward to the marker and tie it off.
- 7) Select a bunch of Grey Fox guard hairs, remove the under fur, and tie in the guard hairs with tight turns at a low angle over the body.
- 8) Select a soft grizzly feather and tie it in at the base of the wing. Form the collar by winding the feather forward while stroking it rearward. Tie off the feather and trim excess. Form a neat head with the red thread, whip finish and apply cement.

The “Rat” series of Atlantic Salmon hair wing patterns was originated by Roy Angus Thompson in 1911 and his initials R.A.T. are the inspiration for the name. This is another series of flies that have migrated west with proven results on our Pacific steelhead. Variations of the original fly patterns have been introduced by other tiers, in fact the most popular and successful pattern of the series, the Rusty Rat, was developed by J.C. “Clovie” Arseneault.

Even though there are a number of components and tying steps, the Rusty Rat is not difficult to tie. I chose this pattern to introduce new techniques and disciplines to those of you who follow my column. These techniques will apply to many of the more complex flies you may attempt in the future. And for those who just want to produce a killer pattern for steelhead, tie some up, give them a test flight, and let me know how you do.

TYING TIPS

Floss can be difficult to use for a variety of reasons. Having it flair out when being applied and getting it to lie flat are two of the biggest challenges. The further away from the hook while you wrap the floss, the more it will try to splay out. So hold it as close as possible with the filaments parallel. If you apply the floss with a bobbin you will be adding a twist with each turn. Compensate for this by holding the bobbin perpendicular to the hook shank as you wind. For a smooth, flat look make sure you untwist the floss after its tie-in, keep a steady tension, and concentrate on laying the wraps right next to each other.

If Grey Fox is not available you may substitute Grey Squirrel. Be sure to remove the under fur to reduce bulk. Try to get into the habit of untwisting or flattening the thread before you tie in the guard hair, and keep a steady tension on the thread. A flat thread and a little head cement on the butts of the guard hair will help hold them in place.