

On The Fly

July 2012

"Fly tying is a school from which we never graduate"

PATTERN OF THE MONTH – Crystal Wooly Bugger

Hook: Daiichi 1720, 3x long nymph, size 4 to 10.
Thread: 6-0 black.
Weight: Gold cone-head bead.
Tail: Black marabou.
Flash: Pearl crystal flash.
Body: Black crystal chenille.
Hackle: Black saddle or hen hackle.



Tying Instructions:

Step 1: Mash the barb and mount the hook in the vise.

Step 2: Slip a cone-head bead onto the hook, pointed end first.

Step 3: Start the thread behind the cone and lay down a smooth thread layer to a point just above the hook barb.

Step 4: Select a sparse bunch of marabou, measure one shank length, and tie on as the tail at the barb position. Do not trim the butts until you have bound them down to the top of the shank forward to just behind the cone. Trim the excess now and return the thread to the base of the tail.

Step 5: Select a hackle feather with barbs as long as the hook gap, tie it on by the tip with the butt end of the stem pointing towards the rear.

Step 6: Select 4 strands of crystal flash and tie two strands to each side of the tail. The butts should be pointing forward on each side of the shank. Pull them to the rear and secure with a thread wrap out of the way for now.

Step 7: Prepare the end of a length of chenille by stripping the fluff to the thread core. Tie in the chenille at the base of the tail, advance the thread to just behind the cone, and wind the chenille forward in touching turns evenly covering the hook shank up to the cone. Tie off and trim.

Step 8: Now pull the crystal flash forward along each side of the chenille body, secure behind the cone and trim excess. These imitate the lateral line.

Step 9: Wind the hackle feather forward in 5 evenly spaced turns to behind the cone. Take one additional turn of hackle at the cone, tie off and trim the excess.

Step 10: Whip finish and cement just behind the cone.

I guess it was inevitable that I would eventually write this column on the Wooly Bugger. Subconsciously I had been putting it off a lot longer than I should have. You just figure that since it's the first fly most beginners start with that everybody already knows all about it and how to tie it. I will admit to passing over one nestled in my fly box in favor of a more complicated and challenging pattern. I'm now more convinced than ever that the straight forward uncomplicated aspect of the Bugger is exactly why it works so well for any number of fish species, imitating a multitude of aquatic insects, in stream or stillwater, anywhere in the world. Now that's a versatile pattern.

The Wooly Bugger was invented by Russell Blessing of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1967. The original was tied to imitate a hellgrammite for smallmouth bass. The fly was named by his daughter Julie. The pattern has been tied on every imaginable hook style and size. Material and color choices are endless for the creative tier as well as the names given to its variations. Entire books have been written about the subject and there is no end in site, tiers just can't leave it alone.

My own experiences with the pattern have lead me to my own set of conclusions about the success of the Wooly Bugger and why. The tail is always marabou for movement and life. This is the only material I refuse to substitute. I add some flash occasionally and vary the length. My first buggers were weighted with lead wire wraps. They had a nice even swimming action. Lately I have been more prone to using beads, cones, or dumbbell eyes, which puts all the weight up front for a lively jigging action and a trimmer body. I still use mostly chenille for the bodies, although I have expanded my selection to include some of the new sparkle and crystal versions. I'm partial to black and shades of brown and olive colors, maybe because that's what has worked so that's what I tie. I tie the hackle in by the tip for a more swept-back look like a wet fly and an increase taper toward the front. It just looks right to me.

Up at my home pond, Fish Lake, the locals came up with a variation that seemed to rip some lips on a regular basis. We added a 1/8" tuft of red poly yarn to the top of the base of the tail. We fish it with confidence and often, no wonder it works. You just need to have something new to believe in. Anyway the fish are impressed.

So tie some up, give them a test flight, and let me know how you do.