

On The Fly

May 2004

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

PATTERN OF THE MONTH – Polly's Casual Dress

Hook: Mustad 9672 or 7958, size 6 - 12.

Thread: Black 6-0.

Tail: Muskrat guard hairs with some underfur.

Body: Muskrat fur twisted into dubbing rope

Collar: Muskrat fur with guard hairs twisted in dubbing loop.

Head: Black ostrich herl.

Note: I will demonstrate this pattern at the May RFF meeting.



SOME OF THE BEST HACKLES AREN'T MADE WITH HACKLE

Polly Rosborough's Casual Dress has been described by many as the ultimate fur collar fly. It catches most freshwater fish, and works well even in smaller sizes. The nymph resembles nothing in particular but looks, to fish, like something that should be eaten immediately. In the tying of this pattern, Polly emphasized a style that involved a bushy or "fuzzy" appearance that made the fly breath with life. Basically when these fuzzy flies are fished in moving water, the legs and body are said to "pulse and tremble" with a living quality. This is accomplished with the use of the "loop."

My first exposure to the dubbing loop fur hackle was from the book, *Modern Fly Dressings for the Practical Angler* by Poul Jorgensen. He described dressing a mayfly nymph's thorax and legs using this method. I have no idea who first thought of putting hair crossways in a loop of thread, twisting the loop to make a hairy chenille, and then wrapping the mess around a hook to make a fur hackle. But I'm glad someone did, because it's an uncommonly useful trick. Not only on Polly's and pours classic patterns, but on a multitude of patterns that get their fish-appeal from their bushy fur tails and particularly their fur collars. The mix of underfur and guard hairs creates a substantial collar with plenty of protruding fibers.

Pull a wingcase over a fur collar and you have a very leggy, shaggy nymph. Tie up a skinny version with olive bunny fur and it resembles a damselfly nymph. Or tie a plump version with natural rabbit that might suggest a sculpin or some other baitfish. How about a black or chartreuse version for bass? Then there's the Bunny Muddler with its reflective dubbed body and a deer-hair head. Fur hackles can work well on wet-fly patterns, steelhead flies, and salmon flies.

Loops are worth learning to use. In fact working with loops is probably one of the top-four most useful techniques you can learn, no matter what you fish for. You can make a loop with any thread and fill it with any fur, even craft fur. I especially favor the loop when tying a pattern that calls for a marabou hackle or collar. The marabou feather can be a pain to wrap with that stiff quill at the bottom end. Twisting the fibers in a loop gives me perfect control over the length of the fly, a trick that lets me make smaller size soft-hackle streamers. Finally, using a loop allows me to make a very durable marabou fly, simply by using a tough thread.

The basic loop-twisting tools are the shepherd's crook (a hook-shaped wire in a handle) and the dubbing whirl. There're not very expensive and available at most fly shops or mail order. At the NW Fly Tiers Expo this year, I watched a very talented tier from California use a new gadget called the Magic Tool. It is used to grab and insert difficult material into a loop. A few years ago I watched another noted tier split his thread with a needle, put fur between the two strands, and twist the thread to make his fur collar. By splitting the thread, he had made a dubbing loop with one strand, a loopless loop. The technique requires that you use a flat thread, a sharp, smooth needle, have good eyes and a deft touch, to pull off this trick. When you wrap thread around a hook you automatically twist it, therefore you must first untwist, then poke the needle through the middle, and slide the needle towards the bobbin to split the thread into two strands. The advantage of a loopless loop is that there is nothing to tie off and there is less bulk on smaller patterns.

I've been tying with loops and fur hackles for the last six years and I'm still finding new uses for them. Give it a whirl. It will add many new and effective flies to your boxes.

TYING TIPS - Before you tie

Examine the hook carefully. Look for flaws such as: malformed or improperly closed eyes, badly formed barb, blunted or bent point, or a twisted shank. It's frustrating to find out that the hook is faulty after you've made your best tie of the day. If you fish barbless, it just takes a second, while you are looking over the hook, to pinch the barb flat. This will avoid the possibility of breaking the hook after you've tied your fly. Try sharpening each hook before you tie. There's less chance of messing up that perfectly tied fly. Sharpening is made easier by mounting the hook in the vise upside down and then honing it to a triangular point.