

On The Fly

May 2008

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

PATTERN OF THE MONTH: Bird's Nest

Hook: Daiichi 1560 or equivalent, 1X long nymph hook, size 8-16.
Thread: Tan 8/0, or color to match body.
Tail: Wood duck flank feather barbs.
Rib: Fine gold or copper wire.
Abdomen: Australian Possum or rabbit dubbing in brown, gray or olive.
Legs: Wood duck flank feather.
Thorax: Same as abdomen.
Head: Thread.



Tying Instructions:

- 1) Start the thread one eye-width back from the eye. Lay down a thread base, stopping just above the hook barb.
- 2) Select about 10-12 barbs from a wood duck feather and tie in the bunch just above the hook barb. Bind down the butt ends along the hook shank. Tail length should be equal to the length of the hook shank. Trim the butts and return the thread to the tail tie-in point.
- 3) Tie in the ribbing wire at the base of the tail and let it hang to the back.
- 4) Form a dubbing loop, insert the dubbing material, twist the loop, and wind it forward to form a tapered abdomen covering 2/3 of the shank length. Tie-off and trim.
- 5) Wind the ribbing wire forward four even turns, then tie off and trim.
- 6) Select a wood duck flank feather, snip out the tip, remove the fluff and softer barbs at the base of the stem until you have 10-12 barbs on each side. Hold the stem forward, concave side down, and tie in the feather with two wraps only. Pull the feather forward by its stem through the two wraps until the legs reach halfway back on the tail. Pull the legs down on each side and bind them down with tighter wraps and trim.
- 7) Form another dubbing loop using the same dubbing as on the abdomen and form a thorax covering 1/3 of the shank length. Tie-off and trim.
- 8) Form a neat head, whip-finish and apply cement.

The Bird's Nest was designed by Cal Bird in 1984, tested on Hat Creek and fished for trout on the Truckee River. Since that time this pattern has been a favorite nymph on all western rivers and streams. All of Cal's well known flies are generalist patterns, without individual legs or precise structure that limits the fly to a single genus and species. Cal was a trained artist, a calligrapher by trade, and his artistic skills with color and shape are evident in all of his flies.

The original natural pattern was a precise blend of fur available at that time. Abdomen and thorax consisted of 50% gray Australian Opossum, 40% hares mask, and 10% seal fur. The rear of the fly was left naturally unruly, a combination of guard hairs and seal fur. The thorax was combed out to increase the visible spike of hair and merge it with the wood duck flank. The Birds Nest debuted in two flavors, natural and spectral. The Spectral Birds Nest was pure art, using a combination of dubbing in all the primary and secondary colors on the color wheel as a substitute for the 10% seal fur.

The Bird's Nest is one of the best ever all-around searching patterns. Fish it dead drift in the film or along the bottom with a split shot to mimic a nymph. It can be fished on the swing to imitate an ascending caddis pupae or stripped along the edges of weed beds to simulate a nymph of baitfish. It is even more deadly when treated with a dry fly powder to make it repel water and hold air bubbles like an ovipositing caddis.

TYING TIPS

Today's tiers can substitute any coarse synthetic seal substitute or angora goat for the original seal fur formula. The important part is for it to look buggy. This is best accomplished using a dubbing loop and then picking out the guard hairs with a bodkin or dubbing brush. Pre blended rabbit or hare's ear also can be used if you don't have the Opossum fur, just be sure to pick it out. The method mentioned above to get the legs the proper length is very useful for many other patterns using flank feathers or pheasant rump feathers that are too long for smaller sizes.

This is a moderately easy pattern using common materials. So tie some up and give them a test flight. Let me know how they work.