

TELLICO NYMPH



By Bob Bates

Tellico Nymphs are absolutely necessary for many anglers. If they are not in your fly box go home and get some. The Tellico Nymph is an old pattern that was developed around 1927 by a priest along the Tellico River in Tennessee and North Carolina. The Tellico River basin is one of the Southeast's premier trout-fishing destinations. According to website promos it offers year-round fishing for wild and stocked trout in secluded mountain streams. It seems like every guide or fly shop in Tennessee and North Carolina that has a website mentions the Tellico Nymph. I also see references to huge brook trout, a 20-pound brown and also smaller fish (stockers) that apparently love Tellico Nymphs. It is an approximate imitation of many insects like Golden Stoneflies and bees. Probably most of the time it is fished in streams, but it has been successful in lakes.

There are many variations of the Tellico Nymph, at least 7 or 8 according to Mike Stewart. Mike was tying his version at the 43rd FFF International Fly Fishing Show and Conclave in Whitefish, Montana, July 22-26, 2008. Mike lives in North Granby, Connecticut. This is an easy fly to tie. This is the third pattern (without the reinforcing over-rib) that Mike teaches in his beginner fly tying classes.

Use your favorite nymph fishing technique. One person describing his experience said he made sure it was right on the bottom.

Whenever you do demonstration fly tying you frequently run into a variety of atmospheric conditions from air conditioners or heaters. Mike uses his pet "Dubbing Doggie" (carved by Mike) to keep materials from flying away.



Materials list:

Hook: Mustad 3906B or similar, size 8 (this can be tied down to 16, but Mike swears by size 8)

Thread: Black, 3/0

Tail: Hen back hackle, mottled brown

Over-Rib: Copper, brassy size or smaller

Weight: Lead or lead substitute, 0.020 inch dia.

Rib and shellback: Peacock herl

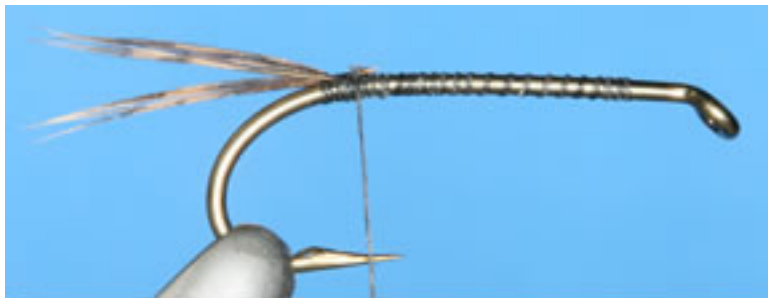
Body: Floss, bright yellow

Legs: Hen back hackle, mottled brown; (alternatively you can use any brown feather)

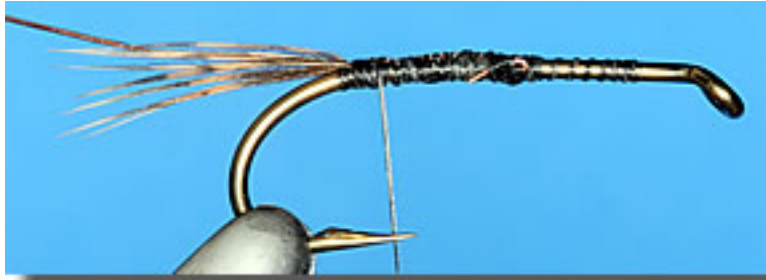
Tying steps:



1. Start thread about 1/4 of the way back from the eye, and wind toward a point near the barb.



2. Tie on a few fibers of hen hackle to make a tail that is a shank length long.



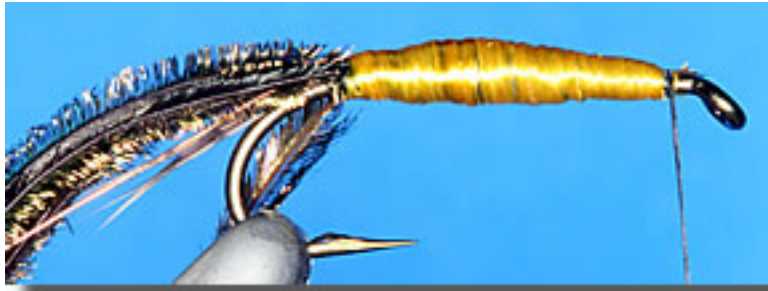
3. Tie on the over-rib. You could use a finer wire than what he used because you really do not need the flash. He folds a little of the wire back and wraps the thread over it to be sure it is secure. The wire reinforces the peacock shellback and rib that will be put on later. The Tellico is easily shredded by the sharp teeth of fish. The wire over-rib solves that problem.



4. Put about 12 wraps of lead or lead substitute. Use a half hitch tool to roll and smooth the ends of the wire.



5. Use some "Sally Henson's Hard as Nails" clear fingernail polish over the wire and build up a thread ramp at each end. Select a bunch of peacock herl. How many you need depends on the bulk of the fibers. Some strung herls are thin so more are needed. Mike used 12 on this fly. Tie them in near the eye so the materials can be tied down smoothly over the back. Put all the herls in a material clip. Select a nice full herl from a feather. This will be the rib. Tie it in with the others and secure it in the clip so you can find it later. Leave thread near bend of hook where you tied-in the tail. Tie the yellow floss just in front of the peacock herl. Use 8-10 inches of floss for size 8 hook. Double the floss over the thread, slide it to the tie in point and secure it. Smooth out lead with thread to get nice ramps front and back of lead. Wind thread forward to about an eye length from the eye.



6. Wetting your fingers before starting to wrap helps prevent fraying the floss. Also, when wrapping floss pass it from one hand to the other rather than sliding it through the fingers, again to prevent fraying the floss.



7. Take the full herl and spiral it forward in five wraps. Secure it at front of floss.



8. Pull herls forward and put one wrap of thread over the top.



9. Now start counter wrapping the wire. First make one wrap at the back like a tag. Counter-wrap wire over the shellback and ribbing at evenly spaced wraps as was done for the rib. Use your thumb to keep the shellback on top. When you get to the last wrap, stop and unwrap the thread while keeping tension on the wire. Tuck shellback herls out of the way. Take one more spiral wrap of the wire, then tie down the wire with three wraps of thread, pull the wire back to lock it in place and tie it down. Use “kluncky” (a new fly tying term??, for those poor quality, inexpensive scissors used on bulky and hard, tough materials) scissors to snip off the wire. You have to get down with the point of the scissors to cut the wire, and that will damage good scissors.



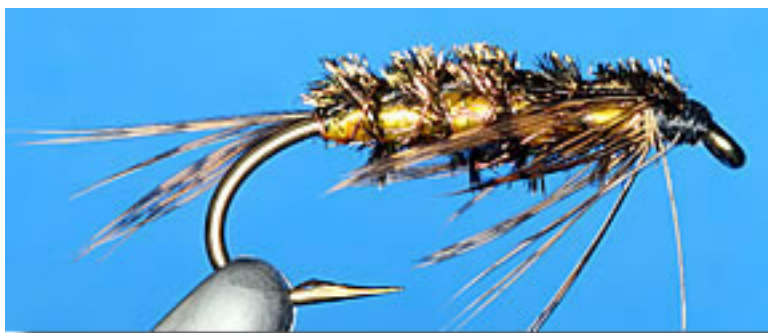
10. Select a hackle with barbs that will almost reach the point of the hook. A hackle gauge can be used. Stroke the fibers back, and tie it in softly by the tip. Then Mike pulls it back through the thread a tiny amount (about 1mm) so a tiny amount of shaft is exposed. Trim the barbs sticking out front.



11. One wrap of the hackle is usually enough. If the feather is not webby you might need two wraps. Finish wrapping on top of hook, so it not critical if you clip a fiber or two when the feather is cut.



12. Collect all the herls, pull them down and then forward. Make a soft wrap, check to make sure everything is centered. Then put on two more wraps, first one soft and second tight.



13. If you have a stray fiber, grab it with tweezers and snap it off. Form a head and finish with a whip finish. Put on head cement or “Sally Henson’s Hard as Nails.”

Mike goes through a hundred Tellico Nymphs each year. He uses so many of them because they catch fish. If you really want it to sink fast put a bead on it. There is so much great fish catching history attached to this fly,

particularly in the eastern U.S., that fly anglers in the rest of the world should check it out. Mike actually caught his first striped bass using a Tellico while smallmouth bass fishing on the Connecticut River.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.
You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org