

Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

Hendrickson December 1998



Comments by Jim Abbs

Last month, I promised that Flies of the Month for the winter season would be those 20-80 flies. These are the flies that make up only 20% of your fly box, but catch 80% of the fish.

This month we will focus on a long time favorite, the Hendrickson. Basically, the Hendrickson is a hatch of several different mayflies, not a fly pattern as such. The Hendrickson is of the *Ephemerella subvaria* sub-species (depending upon classification) and important for several reasons. First, it is found in almost all states east of the Mississippi where cold water harbors trout, including, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota---places where fly fishing in America started. Second, for a great number of fly fishers, it is one of the earliest mayfly hatches and indeed, it takes place as early as the first week of April in southern Pennsylvania and Maryland.

The Hendrickson is described by Al Caucci and Bob Nastasi in their book *Hatches II*, as "truly the exalted king of the early season". Others have called it the most exciting early mayfly hatch. In fact, if you would have the time and inclination to travel, it should be possible to fish the peak of the Hendrickson hatch every week for two months, slowly moving from Southern Pennsylvania through New York and finally into Michigan, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and then into Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Finally, the Hendrickson is not only a hatch or species of mayflies; it is also a distinct fly pattern (the best known and most traditional of many) to represent the Hendrickson mayflies, of course. As a fly, Eric Leiser calls the Hendrickson our most important early fly---a good reason to make sure your fly box is well supplied. The Hendrickson was first developed in 1916 by Roy Steenrod of Liberty, New York and named after A. E. Hendrickson.

Interestingly, this classic Catskill pattern includes one of the most unusual materials: urine-stained belly fur of a red fox. I don't know how you can tell if the fur is properly stained and I have even heard of some fly tyers trying to accomplish this critical step on their own. Who knows where they obtained the fox urine. The staining requirement was not part of the original Hendrickson, but came to be the standard based upon the colorful imagination of famed fly tyer and author Art Flick.

The materials and tying steps for the Light and Dark Hendrickson are very similar. As described, the differences are in the darkness of the blue dun used for hackle and tail, as well as the material used to dub the body (urine-stained fox fur versus muskrat). These differences are noted in the materials described below

MATERIALS

- **Hook:** Dry fly-Mustad 94840 or equivalent, sizes 10-16

- **Thread:** Gray
- **Wings:** Barred lemon wood duck tied upright and divided
- **Body:** Dubbed light red fox fur (Light Hendrickson), Dubbed Muskrat fur (Dark Hendrickson)
- **Tail:** Blue dun hackle fibers (Light Hendrickson), Dark blue dun hackle fibers (Dark Hendrickson)
- **Hackle:** Blue dun (Light Hendrickson), Dark blue dun (Dark Hendrickson)

TYING STEPS

1. Lay down a base of thread.
2. Select a bunch of barred wood duck flank fibers. For a size 14 hook, about an inch of fibers-measured at tips is about right. Choose fibers with even tips.
3. Fold the selected wood duck fibers into a neat bunch and tie them about 1 inch back from the hook eye, facing past the hook eye. Observe proportions in choosing the length of fibers; the height of the wing should be 2 times the hook gap.
4. Position the wing material upright and divide into two sections using a figure eight around the base of the two clumps of fibers.
5. Wrap the thread back to the bend of the hook and tie in 8-10 hackle fibers for the tail.
6. Spin the dubbing material onto the thread and wind it on the hook shank to create the body up to just behind the wing position.
7. Tie in the hackle and wind forward in front and behind the upright wings.
8. Whip finish and put a drop of tying cement on the head.

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