

FFF Fly of the Month

February, 1999: Swisher/Richards No-hackle



No Hackle, Duck Quill Wings



No Hackle, Duck shoulder wings

The No-Hackle: A Revolution

By Jim Abbs

Sometimes, during the feeding frenzy of a mayfly hatch, almost any fly pattern will work. When we can, we should savor these times of bounty. However, the real frustration and motivator--- as heralded by Bergman, Brooks, Borger, LaFontaine, Marino, Humphreys et al--- is when trout scorn all but the most perfect of our offerings. This intense challenge is unique to fly anglers, and particularly exhilarating to those who treasure dry fly fishing.

One of the landmark advances in fooling finicky fish is found in the work by Doug Swisher and Carl Richards, described, in their now classic book, *Selective Trout*. Like some other serious fly innovators, these authors used scientific methods to determine what natural insects actually look to the feeding trout, using cameras with special lenses, microscopes, and home aquariums set up to produce natural hatch life cycles. Mayflies from rivers in Michigan, Montana, New York, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Vermont, Pennsylvania and even New Jersey were intensively studied.

A major focus was to photograph what the trout actually see when a mayfly drifts past and particularly as the fish rises to strike. Swisher and Richards found that a trout's view of a mayfly ---3 to 4 inches away--- is not even close to the "shaving brush" patterns that "look like gigantic monstrosities to the fish"·making them "wonder what strange new creature is invading their domain". Moreover, their work revealed that as a mayfly drifts into the view-window, the abdomen, tails and only part of 3-4 legs are first visible-but not the dense hackle points associated with many classic patterns. As the insect comes nearer, the wing profile is seen--- at a critical point when the fish is likely to start the rise. Without these abdomen and wing profiles, Swisher and Richards argue that the selective fish is likely to turn away and refuse the fly, if it rises at all. Apparently, the absence of these major properties, or alternatively the presence of unnatural features---like overly bushy hackle--- will prevent the strike from even being triggered, especially in a super-selective fish.

Swisher and Richards took these insights and developed several totally new flies. The most famous pattern developed from these observations is the famous No-Hackle, tied on very light wire hooks, with a tail and wing pattern that captures the critical essence of the natural.

How good is this fly? Swisher and Richards tell it better than I can: "This single pattern we consider the deadliest imitation of a mayfly dun we have in our entire arsenal." As will be apparent, the No-Hackle mayfly dun is different from most existing mayfly dry flies, both in how it is tied and how it looks. Tie it and try it in 1999. You will not be disappointed.

MATERIALS

Hook: Mustad 94833 or Tiemco 5230 3X fine wire hooks for sizes 10-18, with ring eye hooks (Mustad 94859) for smaller sizes. These lighter hooks are important in keeping this fly floating.

Thread: Pre-waxed 6/0, brown for slate wings/ tan body, tan for grey wings/yellow body, olive for grey wings/olive body, dark brown for slate wings/olive body

Tail: Tan dry fly hackle fibers

Body: Rabbit fur or synthetic (Fly-Rite) in chosen body color Wings: Dark grey duck primary wing quill sections, grey duck primary wing quill sections, or alternatively duck shoulder feather wings (not described, but easier).

Hackle: None, of course.

TYING STEPS:

1. Start wrapping the fly tying thread at the bend of the hook and lay on about 5 wraps
2. Spin a ball of fur on the thread and wrap fur on the rear of the hook shank to form a little hump or ball
3. Wrap thread to the middle of the hook
4. Tie a few strands of some good quality dry fly hackle on the far side of the hook and wrap the thread toward the back of the hook down to the ball of fur so as to crimp the fibers. The fibers should be approximately 15-20 degrees angled from the axis of the hook.
5. Repeat step four on the near side of the hook. The two portions of the tail should be symmetric and horizontally in the same plane as the hook shank.
6. Dub some more fur or Fly Rite on to the hook shank, forming the body up to where the wing section will be tied in --- about 2/3 of the length of the hook shank.
7. Lay down a thread base at the wing tie in point.
8. Select two perfectly matched sections from a duck's wing feather (one section from the right wing feather, one section from the corresponding left wing feather).
9. Hold the two sections in the right thumb and forefinger with the convex sides opposing so the wings flare out. Hold the feathers so one feather is on one side of the hook and the other feather is on the opposite side, with the thumb and finger below the tie in point. The height of the wing should be equivalent to the length of the hook shank and at an angle of 45 degrees.
10. Pinch the feather sections against the bottom of the hook shank and bring the thread up, locking the quill sections in place. Make 3-4 additional wraps and snug down.
11. Clip the butts of the quill sections and spin some more fur on the tying thread.
12. Wrap dubbing in front of the wings and if you wish the wings to stand a little more upright, put some dubbing behind the wings while pulling them forward
13. Cement the head. Dick Talleur suggests using a little super glue (Zap-A-Gap) on the rear edges of the wings to make them more durable.

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You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at flyofthemoth@fedflyfishers.org