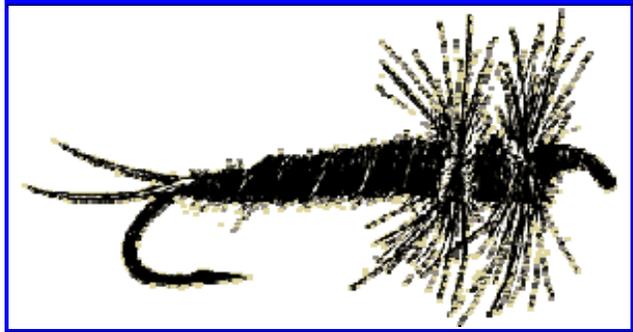


Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

**Charlie Brooks' Montana Stonefly  
March 1999**



**Comments by Jim Abbs**

Retired U.S. Air Force Major Charles E. Brooks spent over 25 years just a short distance from what some consider the best trout fishing in America, Montana's Yellowstone River. Over that time he fished, developed new fly patterns, fished, improved some old fly patterns, fished, wrote a few fly fishing books and fished some more. The Brooks Montana Stonefly Nymph is one of his many contributions.

Brook's innovations came largely from prolonged periods of observation, research and collection. He was one of the first fly anglers to put on a diving mask and enter the world of the feeding trout. One of his discoveries came from watching drifting stonefly nymphs and how trout responded to them underwater. The common way to present a nymph---whether mayfly, stonefly or caddis fly--- is dead drift. This technique is aimed at simulating a nymph that is drifting naturally in the current of the stream---and most importantly drifting at the speed of that current.

Brooks made two critical discoveries in these early observations. First he observed that as nymph drifts into the trout's field of view, the trout is usually interested and will approach it at once--- unless the nymph "behaves" in a decidedly unnatural manner or appears to deviate from the actions of normal insects. Obviously if the insect moves slower or faster than the current, or moves erratically, it is ignored or rejected. This first observation confirms the ideas of many other fly fishing authors. However, the second thing Brooks observed was that natural insects drifted near the bottom and while the current was the moving force, they stayed upright---with their backs up and their bellies toward the bottom. Their bellies were never seen by the trout.

Apparently, naturally drifting nymphs maintain some control over their drifting position. By contrast, he observed that artificial nymphs rolled over and over, revealing a whirl of rotating back and belly, usually with different colors or shapes. When this happened, Brooks noted that the trout would "flare wildly away, and usually stayed away". Importantly, most nymph artificials are tied with a distinct top and bottom. In fact the original Montana Stonefly pattern has a black body and top of the thorax, but the bottom of the thorax is yellow.

In interpreting his observations, Brooks noted that he commonly got more strikes on a woolly worm-- which does not have a two-toned body-- than he did on more exact imitations of a stone fly with a different-colored belly and back. He reasoned that a two-toned body turning over unnaturally caused flies to be rejected by trout. For Brooks, designing a better stonefly nymph thus involved tying a pattern that would look the same no matter how it turned and twisted. The Brooks Montana Stonefly ---to use his term--- is tied in the round". Specifically, as described in the tying instructions for this pattern, the legs are

found on both the top and bottom of the fly and there is no distinction in color or material between the bottom and the top of the fly. While Brooks offered this innovation for stonefly patterns on western rivers, there is no reason to expect trout (or insect) behavior to be different in other places. Indeed, there now are a number of fly patterns tied this way, with Charlie Brooks as their inspiration. Interestingly, this improved pattern is easier to tie than one with a distinct back and belly. Try this modification with your favorite nymph pattern.

**MATERIALS:**

**Hook:** Mustad 9672 or equivalent 3X long, in sizes 4-8, depending on stonefly

**Tail:** Six fibers of a raven or crow primary, tied in forked manner

**Rib:** Brown flat nylon monofilament

**Body:** Black fuzzy yarn, four strand

**Hackle:** One brown dyed grizzly and one regular grizzly, with hackle fibers stripped off one side of each.

**Gills:** Gray or white ostrich herl wound at the base of the hackles

**Thread:** 3/0 black monocord

**TYING STEPS**

1. Tie in thread behind the hook eye and wind to the hook bend. Lacquer thread on hook shank.
2. Tie in tail fibers and split to form a forked tail, three fibers on each side.
3. Tie in monofilament ribbing and body yarn
4. Wind thread forward to eye break off. Lacquer shank again (Note: for larger flies such as this, Brooks felt that the best way to build a durable fly was to lacquer and lay the dubbing or yarn down on the lacquered surface; he used the same technique-without dubbing wax-for fur).
5. Wind yarn to eye, back to bend, forward to the eye and back to the base of the thorax (about 2/3 distance from bend to hook eye). Tie off yarn, tying in thread at the same time.
6. Wind rib forward and tie off.
7. Tie in one strand of ostrich herl and both hackles by the butts. Strip fibers off lower side of both hackles.
8. Wind two separate turns of hackle (as shown), one at the base of the thorax and one half way between the base of the thorax and the eye. The two hackles should lie against one another. Tie off the hackle.
9. Wind ostrich herl at the base of the hackles and tie off.
10. Spiral thread forward and finish head large and lacquer well.

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You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at [flyofthemoth@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:flyofthemoth@fedflyfishers.org)