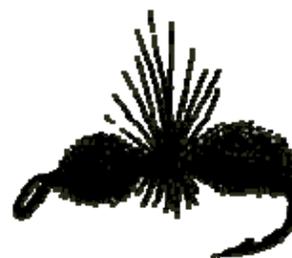


Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month
August, 1999 - Three patterns for 3000 species: Ants



Ants - Our most abundant terrestrial insect
Comments by Jim Abbs

While ants are not an aquatic insect, they appear to have a special place in the diet of many fish, including brook, brown and rainbow trout as well as all kinds of panfish. When ants are super-abundant, such as when a bunch of flying ants get blown into the water during a hatch in the fall, fish seem to eat nothing else. Even when no fish are rising, small ant imitations (sizes 18-22) are very often deadly, even in very clear and smooth water. The intriguing question is why. Edward R. Hewitt tried to figure this mystery out by tasting the ants himself. He found them tart, and suggested that ants offered a savory pleasure to the trout--- like a dill pickle. But there are probably more basic reasons for the effectiveness of ant patterns, especially late in the season.

First, ants are especially abundant late in the summer, a fact that August picnic goers know well. **Secondly**, mayflies are less common as summer goes on, and there is some research indicating that for some lakes, terrestrials make up over 50% (and up to 80%) of a fish's diet during August and September. None other than Ernest Schwiebert argues that ants, because of their incredible numbers and constant presence, are the commonest insects available to trout. **Third**, like spinach and broccoli for my kids, ants are good for the fish! Biologists in California tested the food value of various insects and found that ants are pretty nutritious for their size. For example, it takes almost 10 midge pupa or over a dozen caddisfly larva to equal the calories in one ant. **Finally**, once an ant falls into the water, it is pretty much at the mercy of the fish... it does not float well on the top of the water and certainly does not have the ability to swim away.

Interestingly, the many ant patterns are not dry flies, but rather ride within the surface film---being neither wet nor dry. This means that ant patterns must be carefully designed and tied to be effective. The other challenge with ant patterns is that there are an estimated 3,000 different species of ants, varying from the size 8-10 carpenter ants to the 22-24 minute black ants. They also vary in color from red to reddish brown to black of course, and some are even two colors like red and black or red and brown ([see table for variations in color and size](#)).

There are three basic ant ties: (1) the so-called ant wet fly, that is fished subsurface, particularly effective in fast and/or deep water, (2) the "suspended" ant, with a fur body that is somewhat more buoyant than the wet ant so that the fly rides within the surface film... definitely not on top, and (3) the flying ant, to imitate the fall hatches that excite even the avid mayfly angler, which rides low in the water.

MATERIALS

Hook: Mustad 94840 or 94833 sizes 8-24

Thread: 6/0 black

Thorax: (1) wet ant: Wrapped and lacquered thread, (2) suspended ant: Dubbed fur, (3) winged ant: dubbed fur or poly. Note that deer hair (folded back and tied down) has also been used in ant patterns by Chauncy Lively and Paul Calcaterra, with legs from deer hair fibers that have been picked out.

Head: Same segment as thorax. Some tiers recommend creating a separate segment for the head (yielding two segments in front of the waist) in flies size 14 or larger.

Abdomen (also called the gaster): Same material as the thorax, but segmented from the thorax by a very thin waist.

Hackle: Dry fly hackle to match body color (**see table below for eight color/size variations**)

Wings: (Only for flying ant) Hackle tips or a bunch of white poly, tied behind the thorax and pointing toward the rear.

TYING STEPS

1. Create the abdomen (gaster) with layers of tying thread (for the wet ant) or dubbed fur or poly (for the suspended or winged ant). With the wet ant abdomen, apply tying cement until the abdomen is smooth and shiny.
2. Tie in the wings (for the flying ant) and hackle (sparse dry fly style) for all three patterns.
3. Wind hackle around waist and trim the bottom so the fly rides down in the water.
4. Form the thorax in the same way as the abdomen with a separate segment for the head, if the fly is size 14 or larger. Apply tying cement until the thorax is smooth and shiny
5. Whip finish head, cement and go fishing.

Variations in Ant Pattern Colors and Sizes

Abdomen	Thorax	Hackle	Sizes
Black	Black	Dark Dun	16-18
Black	Black	Dark Dun	8-10
Black	Black	Dark Dun	22-24
Red-Brown	Red-Brown	Rusty Brown	12-14
Yellow/Amber	Yellow/Amber	Ginger	20
Black	Redish Brown	Dark Brown	12-14

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