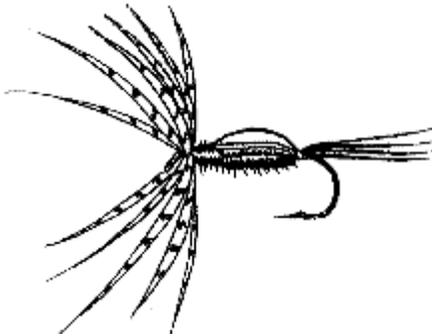


Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

May, 2000- The Mess



This illustration by Powell Swanser was originally printed in Gary LaFontaine's book, **Trout Flies** and is provided courtesy of [Greycliff Publishing Company](#), publisher of fine fly fishing books.

Gary LaFontaine's The Mess: A dynamite fly that defies the imitation school of fly tying

By Jim Abbs

Early in the study of natural systems, students are introduced to a long word that is part of a lesson in how not to think. That word is "anthropomorphism". It refers to the intuitive, but fatally mistaken tendency of trying to understand animal (mammal, insect, fish) behavior by assuming they have human traits (feelings, senses, perceptions motivations).

This lesson is important to us because anthropomorphism appears very strong in many people who develop fly patterns. A common question is "Why doesn't that fly work? It looks just like the real insect." In our case, anthropomorphism obviously refers to the common mistaken assumption that fish evaluate flies in the same way that we do, despite tremendous differences in a fish's visual system, how they choose what features are important, the variable conditions under which they view the flies and their reasons for being interested at all (to eat and thus survive).

There is one fly designer who clearly is not guilty of anthropomorphism and that is Gary LaFontaine. In practice and in print Gary sort of taunts the imitation school of fly design. He does experiments on what makes fish strike flies and his data indicate that because the underwater fish does not see the fly all at once, most often the sequence of parts that come into view are more important as the whole.

Specifically, Gary says, "The precise match may look nothing like the insect to the angler, but the fly works if it has the right parts appearing in proper sequence for the trout." "What are the right parts?", you might ask.. That depends on what the feature the trout is looking for. Unfortunately, a fly may need only that single feature, making the most effective fly a bizarre exaggeration of the real insect. The Mess, is one such unusual fly. It is designed to imitate the big mayflies, the Midwestern Hexagenia, the Eastern Green Drake or Brown Drake, or the Western Gray Drake,

This fly, developed by Gary LaFontaine is not only very effective, it is strong endorsement of the need to recognize how different a trout's evaluation of a fly is totally than that of most humans. The very name of the fly suggests that it is not a thing of humanly-percieved beauty. Rather, a double hackle is flared forward toward the eye of the hook, using both rooster and a mallard feathers. To illustrate the general character of this fly, Gary tells the story of a fisherman who asked to see what he was using during a Green Drake hatch. In showing the fly, Gary said, "It's a Mess" to which the angler replied, "That's

obvious, but what is it called?"

As a final note, I think it speaks to the personality of Gary LaFontaine to name a fly, any fly " The Mess". Obviously, he believed the fly would be judged on performance, not name appeal.

MATERIALS

Hook: 6-12, 2X long shank (1X fine wire also is recommended)

Tail: Four hackle fibers Back: Strip of foam (colored with a felt tip marker)

Body: Synthetic seal fur (dubbed)

Hackle: Rooster and mallard

TYING STEPS

1. Tie in tail (with two on each side)
2. Tie in strip of closed cell foam (with color to match the may fly species, medium gray, slate, or cream)
3. Dub a body of synthetic seal's fur (in a color to match various mayfly species - Medium gray, slate or cream)
4. Pull the foam forward and tie down over the dubbed body
5. Wrap the double hackle with the rooster to the rear and the mallard toward the eye.
6. Force the hackle fibers forward as shown in the illustration, by wrapping behind them.
7. Dub a bit more body material behind the hackles (over the tying thread).
8. Whip finish the fly and go catch fish during those big mayfly hatches - Hexagenia, Gray Drake, or Green Drake.

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