

Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

June, 2000- The Hairbug



The Hair Bug: An all-American fly for an all-American fish

By Jim Abbs

National surveys tell us that fly fishers in the U.S. prefer warmwater species over trout or even saltwater fish. Indeed, as summer kicks off, thousands of fly anglers across the American Midwest, East, South and even the West are heading for their favorite lakes and ponds, seeking the most popular fish in the country---the Largemouth bass. This fish is an American original, long said to be the best fighter pound for pound in all of fresh water.

There is simply no question that even a small bass on a fly rod is great fun and the experience is especially grand if you can catch it on top with a floating fly. With most bass strikes there is no sipping, gentle rise forms or picky last minute refusals. You present the fly perfectly into a dinner plate sized mini-pool, right between the partially submerged log and the lily pad, just 6 inches off shore. If you are a practiced warmwater fly fisher you wait patiently, counting to 10 or even to 20 slowly and then just as you are ready to pick up the fly and cast again, there is an explosion of water and the fight is on. This is a warmwater fly fishing experience that never fails to raise your heart rate.

To make this classic bass scenario complete, you need to use a classic fly. For that, the only choice is a hair bug. Hair bugs have been around a long time. Somehow, in the 19th century, fly fishers started using deer hair to form the head and body of a frog fly imitations.

The challenge was in creating a good sized fly-enough to excite the appetite of a 3-4 pound fish---that was light enough to be cast properly with a fly rod. James Henshall, author of the famous 1881 book, *The Black Bass*, is generally given credit for creating the first clipped deer hair bug. Henshall was exclusively an American angler, so the spun and clipped deer hair fly, like the bass---also are native to America.

The process of spinning hollow animal hair to form a solid appearing body or head is beyond the scope of this short note. Needless to say, it is not difficult to learn and with practice all kinds of very interesting and effective flies can be produced. The pattern chosen for this month's Fly of the Month is Whitlock's Most Whit Hair Bug. This is a basic fly for bass and it can be found commercially in fly shops across the U.S., priced between \$3 and \$5. At that price if you want to learn more about materials and how to tie a basic hair bug, follow the instructions and tie some of your own. Remember, this fly does not have to be picture perfect to be effective.

MATERIALS

Hook: Stinger type hook, Mustad 3366, sizes 2/0 to 6

Thread: Monocord to match body color

Weedguard: Stiff monofilament 20-25 pound

Tail: Marabou and wide saddle hackles in colors to complement or match body style

Skirt: Hackle to match tail

Body: Dyed deer or elk hair

Legs: Rubber

Eyes: Hollow doll eyes in size to match hook size

TYING STEPS

1. Sharpen the hook
2. Attach the weedguard along the back side of the bend of the hook, tie about halfway down the bend
3. Tie in clump of marabou for the tail (or post) approximately the same length as the hook shank
4. Select a couple of pairs of saddle hackle in colors to complement or match the body. Line up the tips and clip the butts. Tie at least two on each side of the marabou tail, spaying outward (away from each other on each side).
5. Select a complementary or matching hackle and tie in for the skirt over the tie in point for the tail fibers.
6. Select a bunch of deer hair (the size of a pencil is a good start), remove underhair by combing it.
7. Tie the deer hair on to the hook shank immediately in front of the skirt. Tighten the thread in such a way as to spin the hair on the hook so it flares.
8. Push the flared deerhair back and repeat the spinning/flaring with a second bunch of hair.
9. Repeat this process with the same color deer hair or different colors. With different colors you can achieve a layering effect often seen on hairbugs.
10. At two points (1/3 and 2/3 the distance of the hook shank) tie in some rubber hackle for legs, with a length extending at least a couple of inches on each side.
11. Pack the deer hair clumps to increase the density of the body.
12. Take a single edge razor or a sharp scissors and shape the flared deer hair so as to create the tapered body and the flat surface near the hook eye.
13. Use tying cement to stiffen the flat face of the deer hair body, tie in the weedguard underneath the hookeye, trim the rubber hackle to the desired length, and go catch some bass!

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