

FFF Fly of the Month

X-CADDIS



By Wayne Luallen and Bob Bates

Years ago this pattern became one of my (Bob) favorites when it allowed me to catch fish that were refusing my friends flies. They are excellent fly anglers so it wasn't that I was a better fisherman I just had a better fly. This version of the pattern has some advantages over the way most people tie it. Wayne has shown these methods to students attending his workshops at annual FFF Shows.

The X-Caddis was originally tied about 1980 by Craig Mathews and company at Blue Ribbon Flies, West Yellowstone, Montana. Early patterns were tied with dubbed beaver bodies, but now most tiers use Antron because it is "buggier." It is a fly for spring, summer and fall, and will take fish during the day when there is no hatch, during a hatch and during the "evening rise." Most of the time fish it drag free using a floating line. Some anglers put floatant on the whole fly, but there is an advantage to putting floatant only on the wing. This makes it float low like a crippled caddis that hasn't freed itself from the shuck.

Tying the X-Caddis is simple: Zelon shuck, dubbed body and deer- or elk-hair wing. However, how these materials are handled can make a difference.

The shuck is made of Zelon if it came from Blue Ribbon Flies and Z-Ion if it came from John Betts, Colorado Springs, Colorado. It represents the sheath that protected the insect (pharate adult) as it moved upward to hatch. As the adult caddis hatches it leaves behind a shuck that is nearly transparent so the tail on our flies should be pretty thin. With too much Zelon the shuck is stiff and opaque rather than ethereal, translucent, and natural as it should be.

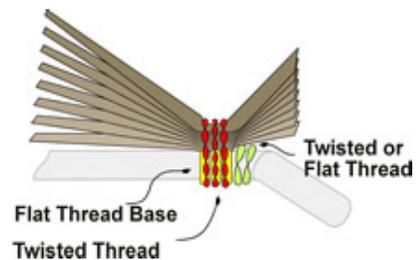
For a number of years George Bouvoine of Union City, California and Jan Kurahara of Cupertino, California worked closely with a real student of the trout and its habitat, Ralph Cutter of Truckee, California. Together through some rather progressive thinking, scuba diving, and aquarium testing, they observed, among other things, that caddis patterns with a shuck of crinkled Zelon yarn that has been cut off straight splays outward when fished,

looking very unnatural. This splayed appearance did not match the elongated bubble appearance of the caddis' natural husk. They changed the caddis shuck by twisting and looping the Zelon back onto itself to better represent this bubble. The left fly above, tied by Wayne Luallen, shows a bubble shuck. The other fly, tied by Bob Bates, shows the cut shuck style on the original X-Caddis.

Many tiers have been frustrated with their elk or deer hair caddis wings. After only a few fish, the wing comes loose and twists around the hook shank. The problem is that thread mounted simply over the hair butts is not adequate to hold the wing in place. There is a solution, but it is not placing 49 more wraps of thread around the hair! The solution is the proper placement of thread to apply the most force.

A flat thread base made with un-twisted thread is needed at the wing location. When it comes time to mount the wing, secure it directly on top of the forward-most wraps of the thread base with a few wraps of well-twisted thread. This does several things: **1)** the base thread on the hook acts as a friction point; **2)** as with a rope, flat untwisted fibers are not as strong as when they are twisted (to a point); and **3)** twisted tying thread is narrower than flat thread, so it bites deeper into the wing, thus pinching the hair onto the base thread tighter.

A flat thread base made with un-twisted thread is needed at the wing location. When it comes time to mount the wing, secure it directly on top of the forward-most wraps of the thread base with a few wraps of well-twisted thread. This does several things: **1)** the base thread on the hook acts as a friction point; **2)** as with a rope, flat untwisted fibers are not as strong as when they are twisted (to a point); and **3)** twisted tying thread is narrower than flat thread, so it bites deeper into the wing, thus pinching the hair onto the base thread tighter.



The wings on the two flies above were tied with this technique. However, the amount of hair on the two flies is radically different. Both styles have caught fish, so it is up to the tier to decide what is best for their fishing situation.

Materials:

Hook: Tiemco TMC 100, 5210, 100BL, 900BL, Daiichi 1310, Mustad 94840, etc., sizes 12-20

Thread: 6/0, 8/0 color to match body

Tail: Zelon, amber gold or caddis gold, crinkled

Body: Dubbed beaver or Antron: tan, brown, olive or black to match the naturals

Wing: Deer or elk hair

Tying Steps:

1. Smash barb on hook with smooth jaw pliers or your vise.
2. Attach tying thread near bend and wind forward to within 1-½ to 2 eye-widths of the eye.

3. Separate out a quantity of Zelon equal to about half or less of what you would normally use. (The material will be doubled onto itself, thus the need for less than you would use when just trimming the Zelon to length.) The length of material should equal at least 3 shank lengths or more for ease of handling. Secure it where the thread was left in step 2 and trim excess. Next twist it about one turn clockwise. While holding the twist, fold the Zelon back onto itself forming a loop that is more than a gap width, but less than a shank length. Secure this now overlapping end just behind the first, and trim excess.
4. Twist the bubble shuck tightly counterclockwise. While holding the twisted bubble shuck wind thread toward bend to secure it on top of hook. Stop where you want the shuck to begin: Before, at or after the bend.
5. Dub thread and wind a body forward to a point just behind where the wing will be tied in.
6. Untwist the thread, and lay a flat thread-base for the wings
7. Start the bobbin spinning to twist the thread by moving the thumb toward the hook's eye relative to the first finger. (This will spin it counterclockwise for right hand tiers and clockwise for left hand tiers. A picky detail that will make the thread naturally wind toward the hook bend and away from the wing butts, which keeps them from spinning around the hook.)
8. Select a portion of deer or elk hair clean out under fur and stack it. Place hair on top of the hook with tips at rear of body. Secure the wing with twisted thread placing each wrap to rear of the first wrap. If the hair flares too much, un-twist the thread and wind rearward from the tie down point to make the hair lay more along the body.
9. Pick up the butts and put four or five whip-finish wraps tightly against the wing. If the thread furls with your whip finish technique, untwist the thread before whip finishing.
10. Trim butts leaving a small stub. Natural caddis have a small head.
11. A touch of flexible head cement (like Dave's Fleximent) will help the thread and wing stay in place.

This is a simple but effective pattern. We don't have the space to regale you with a bunch of fantastic X-Caddis fishing stories. We encourage you to go out and collect your own stories.

A foam fly box is best for storing these flies. If stored in a compartment they will tangle even with barbless hooks. If barbed hooks are stored in a compartment you will spend all of your fishing time untangling flies. Have fun and good fishing.

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