

FFF Fly of the Month

KNICKERS



By Bob Bates and Chad McPartland

This pattern by Chad McPartland, San Luis Obispo, CA, has a proven track record. It is responsible for hooking fish in dozens of waters. A few that Chad talked about while he was tying the pictured fly were: Madison River (browns and rainbows); Quake Lake (rainbows); waters around San Luis Obispo, California; Manzanita Lake in northern California and even the Snake River. There were always people around his tying table at the 2002 FFF Show in Livingston, MT. One of the reasons was the great bug he was tying with a good dialog of how to do it. Another, he gave out a printed materials list and tying instructions, which makes reporting on his fly easy.

There are several ways to fish this fly. In lakes some anglers use a full sink or sink tip line, cast and let the fly sink to where the fish might be. Then use a slow hand twist retrieve until a fish hits or you are ready to cast again. Some say that if you don't drag up a few weeds once in a while you are not letting it sink long enough. However, you don't want too many weeds and the fish might not be on the bottom, so the key is to experiment when necessary. Another way is to fish it on a strike indicator called "chironomid fishing" by some and denigrated by others as "bobber fishing." Decide how deep you want to the fly, attach a strike indicator to the leader at that distance, cast, let the fly sink and relax while you watch the strike indicator. Most of the time when a fish hits the indicator goes down forcefully, and you can set the hook with a sweeping arm motion. Sometimes it goes down an

inch and pops up; then a quick set as the indicator starts down is worth a try. Fluorocarbon is a popular leader material because it sinks fast and is almost invisible in water. The strike indicator may be yarn; stick-on, flexible-foam patches; a variety of hard foam floats with or without tooth picks or a little corky with a tooth pick.

Streams provide many opportunities to use Knickers. If fish are occasionally taking bugs on the surface the double team them. Attach a dry fly to the main tippet, and suspend a Knickers under it. Dead drift the flies as long as you can. If the fly does anything strange (stop, move sideways or sink) strike. It could be only a rock but it also could be an 18- to 20-inch brown. At the end of the dead drift let the flies swing, lower the rod and lift up. Spend a little time with the flies hanging below you. Sometimes fish will hit after the fly hangs there for a few seconds. If there is no hope for a surface take then use a strike indicator. The usual rule for length of leader between the floating fly or indicator and the wet fly is: Use a leader that is twice as long as the desired depth for the wet fly.

Materials List

Hook: Dai-Riki 135, or equal, sizes 10-16

Weight: Brass bead

Thread: Black Uni 8/0

Rib: Medium amber v-rib

Body: Gold Mylar tinsel

Dubbing: Olive brown, Hairline Ice Dubbing

Herl: Brown ostrich

Hackle: Hungarian partridge

Collar: Peacock herl

Tying Steps

1. Pinch barb
2. Put on bead. An easy way to do it is hold the hook in pliers, and scoop it through the beads. He learned this from Britt Phillips.
3. Attach thread on front third of hook, wind thread base rearward to half way around bend and spiral thread forward stopping a bead's width back from bead.
4. Attach v-rib on top of hook tightly, pull v-rib to stretch it and wind thread over it to past the bend.

5. At back of hook tie in ostrich herl, dubbing loop and tinsel. Wind thread forward stopping a bead's width from bead.
6. Wrap tinsel forward, secure and trim. Make a sparse dubbing loop and spiral it forward in wide open turns. You only want to tone down the flashy tinsel. Trim excess material.
7. Pull ostrich herl forward, make one wrap of v-rib behind herl and one in front of it to lock herl in. Spiral v-rib forward leaving space between wraps. Secure last wrap with four turns of thread. Trim excess. Leave plenty of room behind bead for more material.
8. Spiral ostrich herl forward in the gaps of v-rib, secure and trim excess.
9. Prepare the hackle by pulling off any fluffy fibers, and secure to hook by the stem so barbs curve toward rear of hook when wrapped, make 1-1/2 turns of hackle, secure and trim excess.
10. Attach peacock herl, wrap forward a turn or two against the bead, secure and trim excess.
11. Whip finish head, trim thread and add a drop of head cement if you want the added security.

Now is a good time to start practicing with this pattern. If you are in the northern areas, midges will hatch any time there is open water. Sometimes that is why there is such good catching just off an ice shelf. If you are in a more moderate climate there might be enough activity for some real fishing. This is the kind of pattern that will work almost anytime and anywhere. (We say "almost" because thankfully there are no absolutes in fishing.)

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You can direct any questions or comments to flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org