

RED BUTT ANT



By Bob Bates

Comments:

Ants are found all over the world. They have been labeled our most abundant terrestrial insect with some 3,000 species worldwide (August 1999 Fly of the Month by Jim Abbs). Ant sizes range from #8 to #32 or smaller, and they come in variety of colors. Where Dave Millard lives in Tumwater, WA he thinks about the larger species of ants, and successfully fishes his ant pattern in many waters. He tied this pattern at the March 2010 N.W. Fly Tying & Fly Fishing Expo in Albany, Oregon.

Ants hatch on land, and the only way they can get into the water is by falling into it. They drop from overhanging vegetation or crash when trying to fly over a water body. When there is an ant fall fish feed actively on the hapless insects. There is an advantage for the fish because ants have much more food value than mayflies or caddis flies. Also, some people say they have a tangy or spicy flavor, but I have not checked out that claim. Lakes or streams with a predictable ant fall also attract anglers. Some of my friends plan a spring trip to a lake in British Columbia to fish the “ant hatch.” Trout seem to lose their natural wariness and hit flies with abandon.

Sometimes at the beginning of the rise you can't tell what is happening because you don't see anything on the lake surface except rising fish. Usually the angler unsuccessfully offers a variety of dry flies to the wildly rising trout. When I heard a thunk behind me in my aluminum boat, tactics changed. A large black carpenter ant was trying to crawl up the side. I offered a low floating black pattern, and the fish cooperated. I let the fly float a little bit. If a fish didn't hit, a wiggle usually brought a strike.

Ant patterns work in streams also. Usually a drag free float is recommended. Anytime and anywhere be alert for a potential “ant hatch,” and carry a few ants.

Materials List:

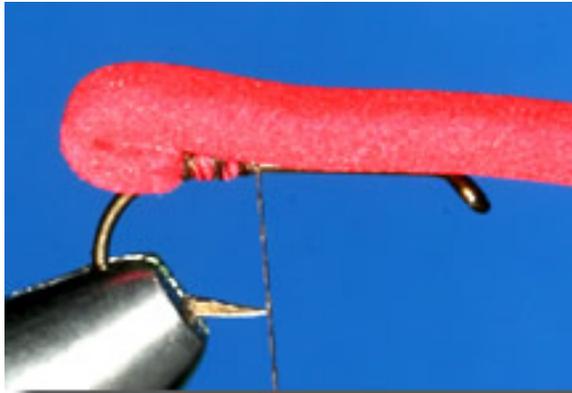
Hook: Any dry fly, Eagle Claw, Mustad 94840 or Tiemco 100, size 12

Thread: 6/0 black

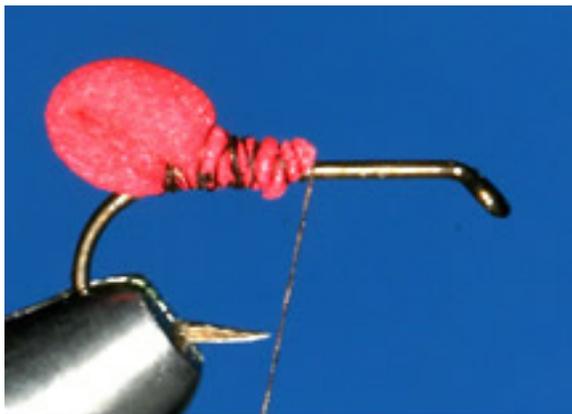
Body: Foam, 2mm thick and 3/16 inch wide, red and black

Legs: Grizzly saddle

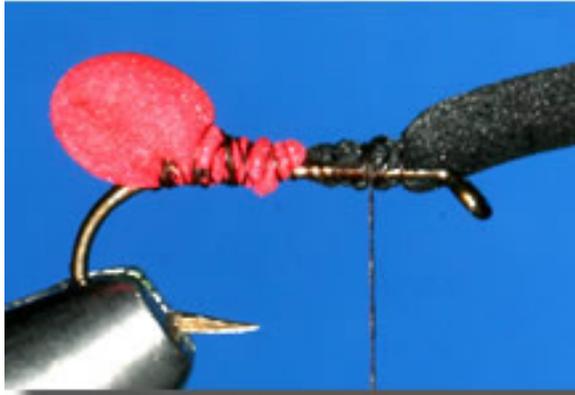
Tying Steps:



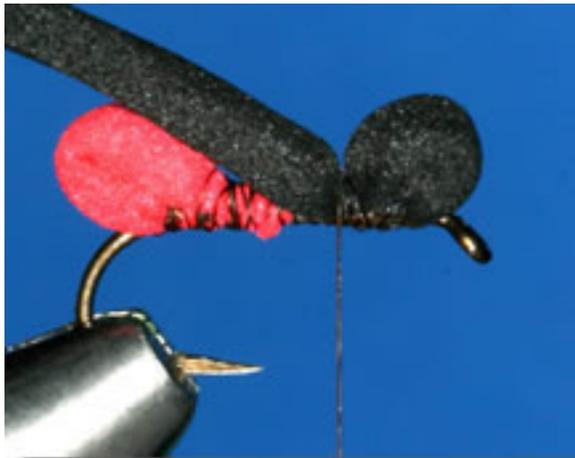
1. Attach thread at back of hook. Attach red foam and fold it over. (Here it stays folded over because Dave was using sticky back foam. It is what he had left from other tying projects.) Regular foam is just fine.



2. Tie down foam and trim excess as shown.



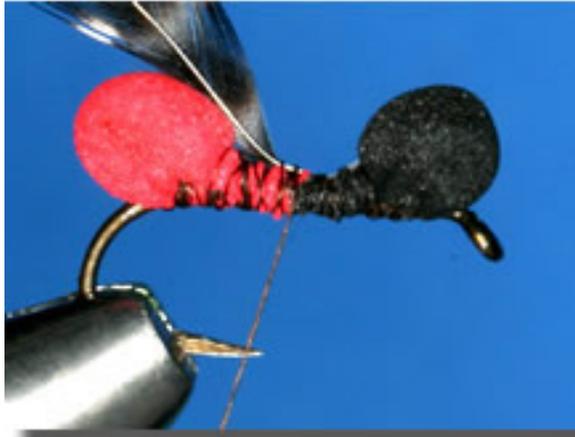
3. Attach the black foam at front of hook as shown.



4. Fold black foam back, tie down securely.



5. Trim excess foam, and wind thread over any pieces of foam that are sticking out.



6. Select a dry fly feather with barbs that are about a gap width long, and tie it over the red foam with the longer part of feather pointing rearward. Leaving some bare shaft helps keep the wrapping neat.



7. Wrap feather from red bulge forward to near black bulge. Tie securely and trim excess.



8. Whip finish thread and trim. Turn hook over and trim bottom fibers even with hook shank. This makes the fly float low in the surface film.



9. Put a drop of head cement on thread winds.

Closing comments: This is not a difficult fly to tie, and at the right time you will be happy you made the effort. Look at the ants around your fishing waters, and tie a few patterns to match them. Especially, have a few black ants, in two or three sizes, in your fly box for emergencies. Then add a few others like the Red Butt to be on the safe side.

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