

Phil's Flybox

By Phil Rowley

The Clouser Minnow

Recently I had the opportunity to chase Coho for the first time in the protected waters of Clayquot sound. While I have pursued Coho on the fly for years my experience had been limited to the coastal estuaries, rivers and sloughs in and around the lower mainland. Although fishing could have been better I thoroughly enjoyed myself and I can't wait to get back over to Tofino and the fabulous folks at Weigh West Resort. Weigh West offers packages that cater to saltwater fly fishers. I can't say enough about their setup. I recommend their services to anyone. During the time I spent in Tofino I was amazed that the skills I had developed fishing British Columbia's rivers and lakes blended perfectly with the requirements needed on the salt. The long casts, double hauling and various mending techniques all came into play as I plied the various tidal flows, eddies and kelp beds. During either an ebbing or flooding tide the current flowed so fast through the narrows that I swore I was fishing on a river. Only the swaying fronds of kelp reminded me of where I was.

Another attraction to this new venture was the variety of fly patterns creative tyers such as Shawn and Lise Bennett of Moonlight Flies have developed specifically for open water Coho. Compared to the tiny patterns needed for our interior lake fishing it was fun just tying on larger hooks. Preparing for this trip I became a sponge for fly patterns and presentation techniques. Nestled in my fly box where various colored streamers, Shim Hogan's Sardina, and a number of Shawn and Lise's designs including their Catface Streamer and Flashy Glow. But for this particular trip I had my best success on a fly pattern originally designed for Smallmouth Bass on Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River, Bob Clouser's universal minnow. No matter what species an angler is after, if they eat baitfish then there is a Clouser Minnow to suit them. The Clouser Minnow has evolved into a tying style, by varying the color and size of the pattern any baitfish can be imitated. Looking at a Clouser one wonders how a fish can mistake this for food. Compared to the real thing this pattern looks like a fleeting glimpse and that is exactly the magic of this pattern. As I peered in depths around Tofino I was overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of needlefish, pilchard and anchovy but unless I managed to get a hold of one, all I saw were flashes and vague images, exactly the same view the marauding Coho see. Using a slow to moderate strip retrieve this pattern darts and dives continuously, takes are nothing short of ravenous. Another bonus for this pattern was its magic on other species. When Coho became tight lipped we worked around the numerous rocks and kelp beds for Black Rockfish. These little bulldogs hammered our Clousers with a vengeance, their strength was surprising as they easily bent an 8 or 9 weight double.

This particular variation of the Clouser comes via Peter Morrison. Peter is a well-known sales rep in British Columbia marketing products such as Sage and Scientific Angler. But Peter is an accomplished saltwater fly fisher as well, with years of experience taking Coho on the cast fly. Peter provided valuable insight as I prepared for my trip. Peter searches out tide rips, horizontal and vertical eddies, as these are natural gathering points for baitfish, and were the baitfish go so go their predators. By either anchoring or tying off to kelp Peter uses a type 4 or 5 fasting sinking line to swing his pattern through the current. Sinking his fly down to the Coho through a series of stack mends Peter lets his pattern hover and hold down below before beginning a slow retrieve back to the boat.

The Clouser is a simple efficient tie. The only trick is remembering to put the white wing on top. At first glance this looks upside down but the dumbbell eyes cause the fly to ride hook point up. The underwing ends up on top when the fly is on the job. Although Peter prefers a body of green Frostbite for his West Coast version many tyers use no body at all, the choice comes down to the individual. As for the eyes some prefer yellow with black pupils others such as Peter believe in red with black pupils. Peter's theory that when injured by an attacking Coho the gills and eyes of a baitfish are the first to bleed, again the choice is up to the tyer.

The Clouser Minnow has become one of the most versatile baitfish patterns in the fly fisher's arsenal and has quickly become a personal favorite. By altering the colors, materials, eyes and overall length and look of the pattern I can imitate everything from Needlefish to Sculpins. Good friend Brian Chan is currently experimenting with a design specific to Red Sided Shiners. I have no doubt he will be successful.

THE CLOUSER MINNOW (Peter Morrison's Version)

Hook:	Tiemco 811S or Equivalent #4-#2
Thread:	Clear Mono
Body:	Bright Green Frostbite
Eyes:	Painted Dumbbell Eyes (Red)
Wing:	White Bucktail
Bottom Wing:	Chartreuse Bucktail mixed with a few of Flashabou or Krystal Flash

TYING INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1

Place the hook into the jaws of the vise. Cover the front 1/3 of the hook with the clear mono tying thread.



Step 2

Using figure eight wraps secure a set of dumbbell eyes onto the shank. The eyes should be situated no closer than two eye widths from the hook eye. If possible I prefer the 1/3 point on the hook. Time permitting epoxy the eyes so they don't twist and move. Tying a group of eyed hooks at this point is a good idea when tying a number of Clousers. If time is an issue, which it usually is, a couple of dabs of Crazy Glue works too.



Step 3

With the eyes in place tie in a length of bright green Frostbite directly behind the eyes. Wind the Frostbite down the shank and back up to the original tie in point. Tie off the Frostbite and trim the excess.



Step 4

Prepare a **sparse** clump of white bucktail, we don't want an overdressed bulky fly. Don't stack the hair either even the tips by hand, we don't want any paintbrush looking flies! Measure the bucktail so it is at least twice the shank length. Trim the butts on an angle and secure them in place in front of the eyes. Carry the tying thread through the eyes and bind the bucktail down directly behind the eyes. Using open wraps tie the bucktail down the shank to the tip of the hook point.



Step 5

With the tying thread back in front of the eyes invert the fly by either turning the hook upside down or rotating the vise. Tie in a few strands of matching or Pearlescent Krytsal Flash or Flashabou. For this example I used some of Tiewell's UV Pearl Flashabo as it gives the fly a little glow. Remember, keep things sparse.

**Step 6**

Prepare a second clump of bucktail in the same manner as the first. This second clump should be twice the thickness of the original clump. Again not to harp on a single point but sparse is key, as the materials must be allowed to flow and not end up competing with each other. Stagger cut the bucktail and secure it in place in front of the eyes. Adjust the thread tension so the hair flows back along the fly.

**Step 7**

Build up a neat tapered head whip finish and apply head cement. Once the initial cementing is done I like to apply a finish coat of Angler's Choice Soft Body in the thin formulation or epoxy.



**Got a favorite pattern you would like to share with fellow club members? Please let me know and I will feature it in a future issue. -
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