

The Osprey Flybox

“Tying a Durable Half Back”

By Doug Wright

The Half Back is a classic, very productive nymph pattern for trout of all species. It is a great fly for searching out new and unfamiliar waters. It is, in my opinion, the best all-purpose nymph pattern there is to date. It can represent a variety of food sources depending on shape, size, and presentation, from dark damselfly nymphs to a big darner dragonfly nymph. I never would have thought of it, but Phil Rowley pointed out to me that the Half Back also works extremely well when fish are focused upon scuds for some reason. My dad and I have had some dynamite days stalking feeding fish amongst the shallow weedbeds armed with a Half Back tied to the end of our leaders. There is just something magical about the iridescence of peacock herl which gives this pattern its great success. But, as we all know, peacock herl, aside from its brilliant look, is not the toughest of materials available. After a few fish, one of my Half Backs would usually be badly tattered and ready to be scrapped and replaced by another to go through the same, repeated process.

A few years ago Phil showed me how to make a Half Back that is much more durable. This requires the use of fine copper wire. The peacock herl, used for the body and thorax, is twisted together with a wire loop to make a tough, peacock rope. This greatly increases the fly's strength while adding a little more weight. It also gives the fly highlights of copper throughout the abdomen and thorax for a great look. This is the only way I tie my Half Backs now..

Hook:	2 extra long, straight nymph/streamer hook, such as Mustad R72
Thread:	Gudebrod 6/0 or 8/0 olive, black or brown
Rib:	Fine copper wire or colour to match
Tail:	Pheasant tail
Body:	Peacock herl twisted with a fine copper wire loop
Wingcase:	Pheasant tail
Thorax:	Peacock herl twisted with a fine copper wire loop
Legs	Pheasant tail
Head:	(Optional) Gold metal bead

De-barb the hook, start your tying thread and wrap shank. Add weight or a metal bead if needed. Take about six strands of pheasant tail if using a smaller hook, and tie in at the rear of the shank. The tail length will vary depending on what you are leaning towards imitation. Some mayflies have very long tails and dragonfly nymphs have no tail at all. Next, tie in three or four strands of peacock herl where the tail is tied in and wind your thread forward. Finally, tie in a long section of wire and bind it down to the rear. Make a loop with the wire so that it is slightly shorter than the peacock herl. Secure and break the excess wire.



Stroke the peacock herl together along side of the wire loop and grasp the wire loop and the ends of the peacock herl with an electronic test probe as shown in the example below. Tightly twist together to create a peacock rope. Don't overdo it or the rope will break where it is tied in.



Wind the peacock rope forward to from the body. Secure, and if long enough keep the excess tied in to be used for the thorax.



Measure and tie in a small clump of pheasant tail for the wing case and so that the tips can be tied back for the legs. Advance the peacock rope forward for the thorax, tie off and discard the remains. Try not to crowd the front of the hook behind the eye.



Pull the pheasant tail forward and secure behind the eye of the hook. Split the tips into two equal parts and stroke them back along either side of the fly. The legs can be tied under as a beard if preferred. Secure, build a small, neat head, whip-finish, and apply head-cement.

Tie this pattern in a variety of shapes and sizes to cover a wider range of food sources.

Try using this technique - the making of a peacock rope - on other patterns that require the use of peacock herl.

