

Phil's Flybox

By Phil Rowley

"The Egg Sucking Bunny"

Water temperatures hovering in the mid thirties, air temperature at or near freezing, wind, rain even snow isn't out of the question. This is the harsh realm of the winter steelheader. From late December through early spring, a dedicated, questionably sane group of fly fishers chase this magical giant, the winter steelhead. With successes measured in subtle bumps and hook ups actual hook ups are rare and the fish of a thousand casts jumps to one of millions.

Dredging fish up under these conditions often requires heavy sink tips, shooting heads or that casting wonder, lead core. When it comes to flies, I favor simple, animated dressings with a life of their own. Favorite materials include soft hackles, marabou and rabbit, anything to suggest life. This preference is no doubt founded in my love of these materials for stillwater flies. It is tough enough getting fish to eat a fraud as it is, so any and all help is welcome. Tempering the desire to get complicated is the reality that bouncing patterns on or near the bottom results in lost flies, lots of them. Rocks, sunken logs and debris all take their toll some even have the audacity to feel like a take. Setting the hook in a fleeting moment of excitement sentences yet another pattern to the river. With these two criteria in mind, my winter steelhead box is stocked with a limited selection based upon the hope that presentation and finding a willing fish is over three quarters of the battle.

Anglers all over the world are well acquainted with Russell Blessing's Woolly Bugger. This shaggy dressing has probably accounted for more species of fish than any other fly. Like it or not, no one can't knock the results. A popular variation of the Woolly Bugger is the Egg Sucking Leech. Nothing more than a Bugger with a colorful head the Egg Sucking Leech has become a favorite with both steelhead and salmon anglers alike. A common by product on many winter steelhead waters, Dolly Varden like it too. In Alaska, it's a "don't leave home without it pattern." Tied in a variety of sizes and colors serious salmon and steelhead anglers need not tie another pattern. For years, I made do with using the Egg Sucking Leech in its original form. Happy with the marabou tail and

palmered hackle I began to wonder if I could inject more life into this fly. A big fan of dubbing loops, I decided to swap the bright chenille head for a collar of gaudy rabbit fur. The end result gave me a fly that pulsed and breathed from head to tail.

Most tiers dread dubbing loops, avoiding them all together. With a little perseverance and practice dubbing loops offer a world of opportunities to develop some truly creative patterns. For a rabbit fur collar keep the dubbing loop short and manageable, less than three inches works best. Cut an inch and a half length of dyed rabbit from a Zonker strip and slide it into the dubbing loop from the bottom to the top. Pull the loop tight, using a dubbing twister turn the loop a few times locking the rabbit into place. Once in place position the rabbit fur for length depending upon the overall size of the fly. Once sized trim the hide gently from the rabbit strip using two to three short snips. Aggressive scissor action leads to disaster and frustration. With the hide removed spin the dubbing loop tight until the rabbit fur radiates out at right angles. Wind the fur hackle forward placing each wrap directly in front of the preceding wrap while sweeping the fibers back along the fly. The finished result looks bulky and unkempt. Once wet the rabbit slims down dramatically.

My favourite method of presentation is either a type 4 or 5 sink tip, such as those made by Scientific Anglers or a shooting head set-up. Recently, I began using Airflo's versatile shooting head system. Used in conjunction with their interchangeable Poly Leaders I can cover every potential depth and current combination with confidence. Beginning at the head of the run I make a series of casts, sweeping all likely looking water. Pay particular attention to natural current breaks such as rocks and boulders. Try to get the fly as deep as possible in order to bounce the fly down the steelhead's throat, hold back on the drift to present the fly low and slow. Be prepared for lots of casting, frequent fly changes due to casualties and few fish, but that's winter steelheading.

The Egg Sucking Bunny

Hook:	Tiemco 5263 #2-#8 (Weighted)
Thread:	Red or Black 6/0
Tail:	Marabou Mixed with Holographic Flashabou. Mix the Colours, A Favourite Combination is Black and Purple
Rib:	Fine Silver Wire
Body:	Chenille
Hackle:	Black Saddle Palmered Over the Body
Collar:	Bright Orange or Pink Rabbit Fur Spun In a Dubbing Loop

TYING INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1

Place the hook into the jaws of the vice. Weight the mid section area. Attach the tying thread just behind the hook eye. Build up a thread ramp on either side of the lead wire to lock it into place.



Step 2

Strip a clump of marabou from one side of a marabou plume. Tie it in place so it extends roughly shank length behind the hook.



Step 3

Take 3 strands of holographic Flashabou and double it around the tying thread. Slide the doubled Flashabou down the tying thread to the top of the fly and secure in place so it trails back on top of the marabou tail. Trim the Flashabou slightly longer than the marabou tail to prevent the tail from fowling around the hook.



Step 4

Prepare a contrasting color of marabou in the same manner as the first. Tie the second marabou clump in place onto of the first sandwiching the Flashabou in between. Tie in a length of fine silver wire.



Step 5

Strip the end of a length of chenille exposing its thread core. Tie the chenille in place by the thread core. Wind the chenille forward to the $\frac{3}{4}$ point forming the body. Tie off and trim the excess chenille.



Step 6

Select a suitable hackle saddle hackle. Strip the flue from the base and tie it in place at the front of the chenille with the shiny side facing the tier.



Step 7

Wind the hackle rearwards, palmering it over the chenille body. Attach a pair of hackle pliers to the tip of the hackle. Let the hackle pliers hang at the rear of the fly temporarily holding the hackle in place.



Step 8

Wind the silver wire over the body and through the hackle using open wraps. Tie off the wire rib, break off the excess wire using a pulling and twisting motion.



Step 9

Form a small dubbing loop no longer than 3 inches. Cut a 1½ inch length of rabbit fur including the hide from a Zonker Strip. Slide the rabbit strip into the dubbing loop from the bottom to the top. Twist the dubbing loop a couple of times to lock the rabbit strip into place. Adjust the fibre length by pulling on the rabbit strip to match the size of the fly. I like my rabbit collars to extend halfway down the body. Using 2 to 3 small snips, trim the hide from the rabbit fur.



Step 10

Twist the dubbing loop tight until the rabbit fur radiates out of the dubbing loop in a perpendicular fashion.



Step 11

Wind the rabbit fur “hackle” forwards to the hook eye. Place each wrap directly in front of the previous wrap to ensure a full collar, at the same time sweep the fibers rearwards, try not to trap any down. With the collar, complete tie off the rabbit hackle and trim any excess.



Step 12

Sweep the fur collar back and build a neat head. Whip finish and cement as necessary.



**Got a favourite pattern you would like to share with fellow club members?
Please let me know and I will feature it in a future issue. - Phil at
flycraft@uniserve.com**