

The Osprey Fly Box

“The Emperor’s New Clothes”

Life of the Trojan Minnow

By Phantom Pen

Some things *ought* to be so easy, a slam-dunk, a sure thing, taking candy from a baby. Like saying all there is to golf is to get the ball in the hole. Ah, there’s the rub.

So when I was offered my first chance to chase rainbows gorging on sockeye fry, I automatically assumed that *this* too would a no-brainer. Just whip out some big silver flies and let the graphite do the talking. Little did I know who my daddy was.

If anyone has fished a big chironomid hatch without the right fly AND technique can attest, a feeding frenzy where your dance card is empty is the prescription for major tranquilizers, or at least alternating shots of Lagavulin and Prozac.

And so went my first intended dates with the fry feeding trout; some annoying plucks from the famed giant pygmy whitefish, but few rainbow fell for the flailing with Rolled Muddlers, Egg N’ Eyes, Bucktails et al. So my search for my sacred fry fly began.

First, like all realists, I followed the path of Dr. Frankenstein to sculpt some freak epoxy minnows, complete with eyes, scales from mylar tubing, external genitaliae, well, you get the picture. One mentor was carrying on with white calf tails, strange owl-feathered creations, etc. A few fish swallowed the “bait”, but there were still frustrating evenings of swirl, pluck and watching the proverbial piscine middle digit. A fishing pal (whose identity will be concealed to protect the guilty) even resorted to glueing on a ‘wiggling’ lip, constructed from plastic shrink wrap, to the front of the fly, producing the proverbial fly rod Rapala. Noble effort; I think the remaining examples would be Smithsonian artifacts (if a war crimes museum didn’t get them first). Many evenings and bottles of wine were consumed in search of the holy grail of the fry flies.

So scads of materials were consumed including polar bear, calf tail, deer hair, yards of tinsel, litres of epoxy, all to varying degrees of success. Did I neglect one small detail? Maybe I should look at the original?

To my dismay, a freshly emerged sockeye fry was **not** silver (like the one year old smolts I’d previously seen) but nearly transparent with small flecks of silver. The details of their innards were clearly visible and a significant percentage of the early season fry had at least one quarter of the body length taken up by a pinkish egg. The back had a slightly more opaque, yellowish cast. As all baitfish, the eyes were a very prominent feature.

I was faced the dilemma of trying to imitate what seemed to be barely there; transparent or at least translucent with a little wiggle. The first flies of the series harkened back to the Egg N’ Eye, but more in the lines of a saltwater buck tail. Rather than imitate a body along the shank, the flies were tied with only an under wing with a few strands of white marabou, 4 strands of Crystal Flash, plus an over wing of wood duck-dyed mallard. Two glued-on eyes completed a mini Deceiver-style that took only minutes to tie, reliably caught fish, and withstood at least 6 fish before shredding. I would have stopped here without yet another week of finicky fish that happens all too often if you think you’ve got the problem licked.

My small epiphany came after Ben’s attempt to get some wiggle thru a body/tail constructed out of latex from an old squid hootchie. *That* idea was kyboshed by the lack of flexibility and movement from such a short piece of latex. This still might work if I could find a thinner piece of latex but I’m afraid where I’d have to look to find such a flesh tone.

It was in the clear latex with flecks of silver that I found the wil o’wisp look I was searching for. This gave translucency that allowed any base colour to show through in a muted way. Hootchies are available in a multitude of intriguing colours though the one I’ve settled on is clear grey with silver flecks. I may be revisiting this material for other problems like the phantom midge or scuds sometime soon

Hook: Mustad 9672 #6-12
Thread: White Monocord
Underbody: 2 turns orange floss at throat
Body: Clear/silver flecked hootchie latex
Underwing: 4-5 strands Pearl Crystal Flash topped with woodduck-dyed mallard OR golden pheasant crest
Wing: (Undyed) Mallard Flank
Eyes: Small silver or gold stick ons. Cover eyes well with coat of Devcon 5 minute epoxy.



The body is simply wrapped from the tail of a silvery squid hootchie, though I sometimes will give this a undercoat of head cement to reduce the tendency to shred.

I tend to fish smaller sizes in the early season, with progression to # 6 WITHOUT egg sacks later on.

The faint yellowish brown on the top seems to match the young sockeye but I'll be experimenting with colour as soon as I get my paws on some specimens of pink or chum fry.

When the fish are active, I'll usually fish this in fast but short strips, though earlier in the season, there will be days when a slow twitch drifting in the current is the ticket.

Well, enough fish seem have agreed with the current combination that I haven't been moved to change for, a new record, the last couple seasons. Is this the end of my late night, scotch and skanky cheese-fueled experiments? Well, they might stop when boys grow up and pigs fly.