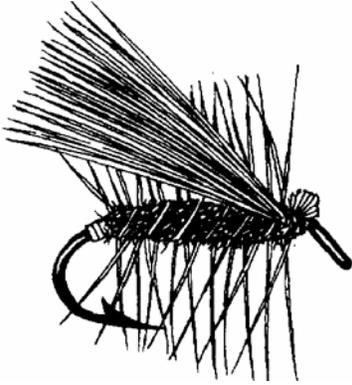


Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

Al Troth's Elk Hair Caddis
November 1998



Comments by Jim Abbs

Winter is almost here and unless you are fly fishing for steelhead or heading to tropical waters, your fly fishing is probably at low ebb for the year. How can you struggle along for five months until April? How many fly fishing videos can you watch before your eyes get bloodshot and the family kicks you off the VCR?

One way to deal with these sleepless nights and fishless days is to start filling your fly box for next summer's fishing. For every fly you tie, you can dream of the fish it will attract and catch. For every variation in color and style, you can imagine the exhilaration of fooling those particularly challenging hold over fish in your special honey hole.

To help you with this winter fantasy, for November-February, the FFF Fly of the Month will focus on flies that are certain to be used, almost as soon as your favorite waters open. Someone, somewhere has asserted that 20% of the anglers catch over 80% of the fish. Whether that is true or not, it certainly seems that 80% of the fish are caught on 20% of the fly patterns. So, to make you mid-winter tying especially worthwhile, I will be featuring bread and butter flies---those flies that catch the most fish, every year. Let's call them 20-80 flies.

One of these 20-80 flies is the Elk Hair Caddis. While this caddis imitation originates in the mountain west---based on its inventor's residence and the materials used---it has become a standard for fly anglers the world over. Al Troth, a school teacher from New York, transplanted to Dillon, Montana is the guy who is given credit for this pattern. While it was not new at the time, he first described it in a 1978 issue of ***The FlyTyer Quarterly***. Western fly fishers, like Craig Matthews of West Yellowstone describes the Elk Hair Caddis as one of the most important patterns for fishing the Yellowstone, particularly on the Yellowstone and Madison Rivers. Jack Dennis of Jackson Hole says the same thing about his waters, which include the South Fork of the Snake. Likewise, Eric Leiser of New York, Terry Hellekson of Utah and Taff Price of the U.K. sing the praises of the Elk Hair Caddis as well.

Basically, this is called a hair-wing fly, since elk body hair is used to imitate the down wing or tent wing of the caddis. The popularity of this pattern is enhanced due to the toughness of the elk hair and its buoyancy, as well as the way the palmered hackle body makes it ride high on the water like a real fluttering caddis.

Tie these flies in a bunch of colors, with variations in both the dubbing for the body and the color of the elk hair. The most useful sizes are 12-16, but a 10 on a June midwestern evening or a 18 in Western Montana in July will also be deadly. Finally, tie up at least 6 for each color and size, when the fish start

taking these flies, you will need more than a couple.

MATERIALS

Hook: Dry fly hook, Mustad 94840 or equivalent, sizes 6-20

Thread: Tan or to match colors of body dubbing

Body: Dubbed hare's ear fur (synthetics also work well)

Rib: .005 inch gold wire

Hackle: Furnace or brown hackle, tied palmer style

Wing: Tan colored elk hair fibers

Head: Trimmed butts of elk hair wing

TYING STEPS

1. Tie in gold wire ribbing at rear of the hook. Dub body forward and tie off.
2. Tie in hackle behind eye of the hook and wrap over the dubbed body, palmered style, toward back of hook, using 4-5 spiral turns. Tie off hackle with 4-5 turns of the gold ribbing wire.
3. Wrap wire forward through the hackle and tie off at the head.
4. Tie in elk hair wing, sloping toward the hook eye, tilting slightly upward.
5. Clip butts of elk hair to form a squared off head. Cement base of wing.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.

You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at flyofthemoonth@fedflyfishers.org