

Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

Big mayflies: Paradrakes & T-Bones

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Comments by Jim Abbs

As the 1999 trout season begins in earnest, super hatches of summers past motivate fly anglers to scrutinize their fly boxes and dream of fly fishing Nirvanas. When you are in the right place at the right time with a pattern that works, there is simply no fly fishing experience that is more fulfilling than an intense mayfly hatch.

Depending on the location of your home waters, the typical May-to-June-to-July sequence of hatches starts with from Gordon Quills and Hendricksons early to Sulphurs or Pale morning duns a little later, with a somewhat later concentration of hatches in the West.

In the adventure of chasing hatches, the big mayflies are especially exhilarating, because they generally bring up much bigger fish. During the famed *Hexagenia* hatch in my native upper Great Lakes waters, I have caught (and released) a half dozen browns all over 15 inches--and all in a less than 30 minutes. Upon landing these fish, I needed a light to release them, because the peak of this extraordinary event happens after nightfall. Similar experiences of above average fish are seen with hatches of Gray, Green and Brown Drakes, and the Gray Fox. No matter what the time, hatch or place, the abandon with which trout gulp these big mayflies puts a fever into your fishing that gets your heart pounding like nothing else. So all you need is a good big mayfly pattern, right?

While most people find tying small flies difficult, tying big flies that attract and catch fish may be even more challenging.. As Dick Talleur points out, tying an effective big fly is more difficult than tying a good small fly. First, the trout get a very good look at big flies because they often are found in slower (smoother) water. Second, the trout can afford to be more picky because it does not take as many bites to get a good meal. Another problem is the long bodies of large mayflies, seemingly requiring a hook with an extra long shank, but which in turn can result in missed hook-up. As an answer, Talleur and several earlier tying experts have offered a special

solution for big mayflies--- in particular, a pattern with an extended body (beyond the bend of the hook) and variations in wings not seen on conventional dry flies.

The extended hair body was first described by Doug Swisher and Carl Richards in their best-selling book, *Selective Trout*. Chauncy Lively added to this technique (see Chauncy Lively's *Flybox*) and Dick Talleur, in two books on tying, offered even more detailed descriptions on how to tie both the body and wings of these extended body patterns. Swisher and Richards called the extended body mayfly a Paradrake, referring to the fact that their version of the extended body fly used a parachute hackle (wound around the base of the wing in a horizontal fashion). Talleur, his sense of humor showing, refers to his versions of these extended body flies as Drakeburgers or T-bones, presumably due to their size and effectiveness in attracting big hungry trout. Talleur's patterns did not use a parachute hackle, but rather a wing of deer hair or dry fly fibers, without conventional hackle. Yet other tying experts have modified (improved?) the extended body fly with the addition of synthetic fibers for parts of both the body and the wings. These innovations offer several alternatives in tying these very effective patterns for imitating large mayflies.

MATERIALS

Hook: Standard dry fly hook like Mustad 94840 or equivalent, sizes 6-14

Thread: 6/0 color to match natural, i.e., yellow to match the Hexagenia, Tan or brown for the Green and Brown Drake, etc.

Body: Deer or elk hair, hollow and extended-in some versions wrapped around an internal core of poly.

Ribbing: Same as thread

Tail: Extension of the body hair, or moose body hair fibers tied in separately

Wing: Clump of elk hair, in color appropriate for natural-yellow for Hexagenia, olive for Green Drake, brown for Brown Drake. Alternatively the M & M Paradrake uses a very natural-looking wing of combed poly.

TYING STEPS

1. Lay down a thread base on the hook shank, wax the thread liberally before laying down.

2. If the tail is to be moose or condor fibers, tie in three separated strands. If you want to use the tips of the hair body as a tail, proceed to step three.

3. Cut a bunch of hair (deer or elk) with a quantity that when it is compressed by the tying thread it will be the desired thickness of the body. Remove all short fibers and under-fur. Cut this bunch

of hair so it will form a body the appropriate length extending beyond the bend of the hook. Some practice will be necessary to get these proportions correct.

4. With the hair butts toward the hook eye, hold the hair over and around the hook shank. Tie the hair in about $\frac{3}{4}$ the length of the hook shank with a couple of turns as you hold it with your thumb and forefinger. . [Note: Talleur recommends tying the body hair in with the butts toward the back and only after it is secured on the hook shank, bringing the tips back to form the body]

5. Wrap the tying thread around the hair to create a ribbing, past the bend of the hook to the intended body length. When the intended end of the body is reached (beyond the bend of the hook), with some fibers extending for the tail, reverse the thread and criss-cross the original wrapping back to the tie in point. Trim off the excess butts of the body hair.

6. Tie in a clump of Elk or deer hair upright for the wing. [Other tyers use poly for a single upright wing, or alternatively Talleur recommends using the same feather for a both the wing and a thorax type hackle].

7. Tie in a quality dry fly hackle along side of the wing and wind around the base of the wing. Tie off, finish head and cement.

8. Go catch some big fish!

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

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