

## Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

### January, 2001- Quill Gordon



### Quill Gordon: An American first by our first fly fishing legend

By Jim Abbs

While fly fishing historians may quibble about the details, the popular vote for father of American Fly Fishing is none other than a sickly fellow from New York, who was better to know through his writings than in person. Theodore Gordon was born before the American Civil War and apparently fished the Catskill streams as early as his teens. For the 25 years between 1890 and 1915, he was a prolific fishing writer, publishing over one hundred short articles of various kinds, mostly in British magazines like *The Fishing Gazette* and *Forest and Stream*. However, his modern-day household fame comes primarily from his connection (with some question about fact versus fiction) with the development of a classic and widely admired dry fly style, the Catskill flies.

These patterns, which are particularly effective on the broken eastern U.S. waters for imitating certain mayfly species, are different from the no-hackle or low riding adult mayfly imitations. Gary LaFontaine calls these classic Catskill patterns the tiptoe flies, referring the fact that when they are properly tied, only the hackles and the tail touch the water. To achieve this high riding feature, the Catskill flies are quite different from the heavily dressed flies like the adams or the coachman. Others have described the Catskill patterns as having a particularly "clean" or Spartan appearance, which adds to their appeal.

With respect to imitation, the most famous Catskill fly, the Quill Gordon is first in another respect. It does a particularly effective job at imitating one of the earliest hatching large mayflies on many Pennsylvania and New York streams, starting as early as mid-April. The size of these flies and the time of their hatch apparently cause trout to feed eagerly. These mayflies (*Epeorus pleuralis*) are found in the faster sections of eastern rivers and thus have difficulty getting off the fast water, making them easy victims to winter-starved trout.

Why is this the fly of the month for January? Perhaps one way to survive this especially cold and snowy winter of 2001 is to keep in mind that even in the frozen northern U.S., this great hatch is only four months away.

## MATERIALS

**HOOK:** Mustad 94833, 94849, or Tiemco 5230 (# 12 to 14)

**HREAD:** Olive or gray

**HACKLE:** Blue dun stiff

**WING:** Barred woodduck flank, or mallard dyed wood duck

**BODY:** Stripped herl from the peacock eye

**TAIL:** Stiff dun hackle fibers

## TYING STEPS

1. Tie in thread immediately behind hook eye and create base of thread almost to the hook bend.
2. Select a single wood duck flank feather and separate out about one inch of tip (for a size 12-14 hook). Stroke and fold the tips to form a bunch of fibers.
3. Pinch the bunch of fibers between the thumb and forefinger and position it so it about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the distance between the hook bend and eye so the fibers extend beyond the eye of the hook roughly the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the size of the hook gap. The wings when elevated should be about 2 times the hook gap.
4. Tie in the fibers in place, wrapping the thread forward and then backward. Trim the butts of the fibers and then wrap in front of the wing fibers (4-5 wraps should be adequate) and position the wing upright.
5. Wrap thread back to bend of hook. Select stiff blue dun fibers for tail and position these fibers so the tail extends beyond the length of the tail about 2 times the size of the hook gap. Tie the fibers in place.
6. Select a peacock quill with from the eye with a distinct degree of dark and light contrast and strip the herl barbules off by scraping them off with your thumb and forefinger. If you are tying many of these flies, pre-stripped fibers can be purchased or the herl can be removed with bleach.
7. Wrap the peacock herl forward to just behind the wing and tie off.
8. Tie in a stiff blue dun dry fly hackle just behind the wings and wind thread forward to the tie off area behind the hook eye (in front of the wings). Wrap the hackle forward both behind and in front of the hook eye. Tie off and lacquer head as well as quill body.

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](mailto:flyofthemoth@fedflyfishers.org)