

FFF Fly of the Month

CIRCLE SCULPIN



By Bob Bates and Marvin Nolte

When an angler first sees a circle hook they KNOW that you can't catch a fish with it. The point is bent in so much it points toward the shank. This must be a joke!! Actually, this design can be traced to the earliest days of fishing with bone and wooden hooks. As strange as it looks it hooks and holds fish.

According to Dr. Hook (Product Manager Geir Sivertzen, O.Mustad & Son A.S., Norway), "The more modern version of Circle hooks are known to be a result of 'product development' among commercial fishermen fishing the reefs of Australia early last century. They lost lots of hooks and lines due to their classic Mustad hooks hooking up the reef. By modifying the point, curling it in as much as possible, they experienced that less hooks were lost. In addition to this fact, they found that their catch ratio increased!!" (Then they had the new designs manufactured by Mustad.)

During the last two or three decades commercial long line fishermen adopted circle hooks for several reasons: * Increased hookups, up to 85 percent in some cases. * Just about all of the fish were hooked in the corner of the mouth. * Generally, the fish didn't get off. * Fish hook themselves. * Fish were easier to get off the hook once on board the boat. Observing this, sport saltwater anglers began experimenting with circle hooks, and their experience paralleled the commercial fishermen. When a fish swallows a bait the hook and bait will slide out of the gullet as the line is tightened and not catch on the gills or other

sensitive parts. The hook catches on the corner of the mouth. Mortality was so much lower than with traditional J hooks that many saltwater tournaments and some states like California require circle hooks for bait fishing in saltwater.

Ok they work with bait, but can you tie a fly on them? The saltwater fly tiers found they could and the fishing experience paralleled that of the bait fishermen. Some care was needed to keep the gap free, and a common complaint was that the shank wasn't long enough. Hook manufactures are coming out with longer shank hooks like the one Marvin Nolte used to tie this pattern. Now freshwater fly anglers are slowly checking out circle hooks. One thing to remember on selecting circle hooks is to pick ones with no offset. With too much offset you lose the advantage of a circle hook.

Eliminating the instant strike reaction is the biggest circle hook challenge for many fly anglers. We have to wait until the fish has turned away. That is when the hook will pull out of the throat, slide around the corner of the mouth and embed itself. The fish sets the hook; you don't need to. Recommendations include: Let the fish swim away before tightening the line. Continue with a regular strip speed. Line strike not rod strike. Hang on to the line as the fish pulls away. You will have to experiment.

Sculpins are a bottom dwelling fish that big browns and rainbows like to feed on particularly when there are no massive insect hatches. Usually it is the bigger fish that will look for sculpins. Since the sculpin is a bottom dwelling fish that is where your fly should be. Let the fly drift along the bottom. How you do this is up to you: sink tip line, full sink line or something else. Be ready to control yourself and your strike when the fish hits.

Materials List

Hook: Mustad C71 S SS, Circle Streamer, 2X heavy, 2X long. Sizes 2-10

Eagle Claw, VMC America Corp., Gamakatsu, USA International also have circle hooks.

Thread: Red, through application of the gills; Brown for the head

Underwing: Pearl Krystal Flash

Wing: Strip of Australian Opossum

Pectoral Fins: Speckled feathers - pheasant body, hen saddle, partridge, or similar.

Gills: Red Antron dubbing

Head: Australian Opossum fur in a dubbing loop, trimmed flat on the underside.

Eyes: Your choice, 4mm doll eyes were used on the sample.

Tying Steps

1. You may smash down the barb, but be careful not to damage the point. Barbless hooks hold as well as barbed hooks.
2. Wrap a thread base with red thread on the front part of the hook.
3. Attach 6 or 8 strands of Krystal Flash, and trim to uneven lengths with none longer than wing.
4. Cut a piece of opossum 1/8 inch wide and one hook shank long. Attach it at mid-shank.
5. Select your favorite speckled feathers, pull off any fuzzy fibers leaving about 2/3 rds of a shank length of intact feather. Attach to hook forward of mid-shank.
6. Put a little red dubbing on the thread, and cover the tie in area.
7. Tie off and trim the red thread and attach the brown thread. Make a dubbing loop, put some trimmed opossum fur into the loop, twist it to trap the fur and wrap it on the hook. Stroke the fur rearward as you wrap toward the eye. Secure and trim any excess. Whip finish right behind the eye.
8. Trim the hair flat on the underside of the head.
9. Glue on eyes.

If you want to see some more circle hook patterns check the FFF Fly Pattern Encyclopedia: Poly Eel p169, Clarks Offshore Delight and Cobia Crab p. 210. Also check Flyfisher, Spring 2000, pages 39, 41 and 42. Circle hooks work as advertised with streamers, nymphs and larger chironomids. The jury is still out for #16 or smaller dry flies. Just remember don't set the hook like you were taught from the beginning. Let the fish hook itself.

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