

FFF Fly of the Month

DRAPER DRAGON



By Bob Bates

There are many dragonfly nymph patterns in existence. Some are so simple that one wonders how they can be called a "dragonfly nymph." Others are so realistic that it might be better to let them crawl back into the water. This pattern solves one of the problems with tying good dragonfly nymph patterns: Making the body flat and wide without smashing down something like a lead wire body. The two shank welded construction of the Partridge Draper hook, model H3ST, makes the flat, wide dragonfly body easy to tie. The current cost for this hook (2003) is about \$9.75 for a package of ten hooks, but if you look around the fly shops as I did recently you might find some with the 1994 price of \$7.50 for a package of ten hooks. John Newbury introduced the Draper hook to Northeast Washington many years ago when he began tying this pattern. Newbury is a demonstration tier at FFF conclaves. Several local tiers copied the pattern, and as expected added their own touches to it. The late John Propp tied the fly above.

Dragonfly nymphs live two or three years, making them an important year-round food source. Some species are less than an inch long and others are up to 2-1/2 inches long. They make a good mouthful for any fish. Dragonfly nymphs are real bullies and will eat anything smaller than they are. According to Ernest Schwiebert in *Nymphs*, 1973, "The nymphs catch other subaquatic organisms by lying motionless like a muskellunge in the weeds. Although they are capable of rapid movements, they usually trap their victims with a

lower labium that snaps out like the tongue of a frog, its hooks pinioning them securely." So when you fish a dragonfly nymph, use a full sink or sink tip fly line. Let the fly sink into or near weeds, and then start working it with a hand twist and an occasional "jet propelled" strip. Vary the retrieve until you find one that fish like. Years ago Propp said: "This pattern is the most effective one around. I catch fish with it all the time."

The original pattern called for seal fur, but there isn't much legal seal fur around. Therefore, substitutes such as Angora goat, Turrall dubbing or other seal substitutes are used. Also early patterns used picric acid dyed feathers that had the exact yellow-green olive color needed around Northeast Washington. However, it is a dangerous material: The crystals are explosive. "Close enough" colors can be achieved with safer dyes. Besides, your dragonfly nymphs might have colors from olive-gray to muddy brown matching their environment.

Materials List:

Hook: Partridge Draper H3ST, 6-8

Thread: Olive, 6/0

Eyes: Black Mono, medium

Tail: Pheasant tail, dyed yellow-olive, optional

Body: Seal or seal substitute, dark olive

Wingcase: Church window pheasant back feather, dyed yellow-olive

Legs: Pheasant tail fibers, dyed yellow-olive

Head: Seal or seal substitute, dark olive

Tying Steps:

One thing to remember when tying, don't tighten your thread too much over the two-wire-shank or you will break the weld.

1. Start thread just behind the hook's eye and build a thread base for the mono eyes.
2. Hold the eyes parallel to the shank, and put three or four thread wraps around them and the hook. Then move the eyes into their final position perpendicular to the shank, and put three or four thread wraps diagonally to hold them in position. Repeat wrapping on one diagonal and then the other to secure them.
3. Bring thread to the bend, and attach a tail that is a little less than a gap width long. Newbury's pattern doesn't have a tail.

4. Make a dubbing loop in your thread, over eight inches long, and while holding it, put thread back onto the hook where the tail is tied in. Wrap thread forward to just behind the eyes. Put a little dubbing wax on the loop and start stuffing dubbing into it. Put very little material in near the bend and increase the quantity as you move away from the bend. It helps to use a dubbing loop tool when doing this. When you think the dubbing loop is full enough, about eight inches long, twist it to bind fur into a tight yarn. Wrap the dubbed yarn forward to the mono eyes, and secure. There should be about two inches of dubbed yarn left for later use; do not trim it off.

5. Take a feather from the center back of a ringneck pheasant. Strip fibers from sides to make it about 1/4-inch wide, clip the center stem to remove tip and give the appearance of two wings. Tie feather right behind the mono eyes pointing rearward and laying flat over body so the wingcase extends to about midpoint of the abdomen.

6. Attach five or so pheasant tail fibers on each side of hook behind the mono eyes. The legs may extend from a little behind mid shank to a little past the end of the hook. The legs look nicer if the brown fibers from the pheasant tail are used. Trim excess leg fibers. Move the thread to behind the eye.

7. Now use the left over dubbed yarn, figure eight around and between the mono eyes to form a head, secure and trim excess. Half hitch and whip finish.

According to some the Draper Dragon is the best pattern in the Eleven Western States and two Western Provinces of Canada. Tie a few, try them yourself and see what you find out.

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