

FFF Fly of the Month

DF DAMSEL



By Bob Bates

New fly patterns come about in a number of ways. Often a current pattern is not a consistent producer, and a new one is needed. The DF Damselfly fits into this class.

Damselflies hatch in the spring. The nymphs live in aquatic vegetation most of the year and then come to the surface when they are ready to hatch. They swim just under the surface film toward shore, reeds, float tubes, boats and wading anglers. There is much side to side motion with slow forward progress. Once a nymph finds something, it climbs out of the water and hatches into a teneral (immature adult). A nice thing about them is they are considerate of the fly caster who chases the fish feeding on them. In many waters the migration starts about 10 am and quits about 2 pm.

Years ago a fly angler was struggling with the problem of catching fish regularly during a damselfly nymph migration. All of the patterns in books and fly shops were tied on hooks that were too heavy. In other words the flies sank far below the level of the naturals and were ignored by feeding fish. He tried various foam bodies, some worked a little and others were failures.

Then he decided to minimize the pattern. What were the design parameters? The lightest wire hook available at that time was 3X fine Mustad 94833. Natural damselfly nymphs have big eyes so some weight had to be sacrificed by adding eyes. Just about everybody uses marabou on their damselfly

nymphs, so marabou it was for tail and body. Test patterns were taken to a lake with migrating damsel nymphs. They looked good in the water, but they sank a bit farther than he wanted.

That was solved by applying a paste fly floatant to the leader and tippet but not on the fly. Casting toward deeper water and using a slow (slow) hand twist retrieve worked, and fish hit it like a natural. However, every fish broke off on the strike, even with 3X (8 lb.) tippet. After losing a lot of flies the situation was finally revealed to our angler.

A damsel nymph was swimming toward his boat, and a rainbow was on its feeding path two or three feet in front of the boat. In a flash (0.1 second or so) the fish took the nymph and was back on its feeding path. That quick turn around and drag from the lightest hand twist retrieve broke the tippet.

Solution, cast to where you want to the fly to be and put the rod out to the side 90 degrees. Now there is big shock absorber when the fish hits. This is violating the rule in many books about pointing the rod at the fly when nymph fishing. Hooking and holding many fish was nice but a little disappointing because they were only 14 to 17 inches long (no 8 pounders). Check every cast or two, and re-grease the tippet if the fly sinks more than one half inch.

Materials List:

Eyes: Burned 50-pound monofilament

Hook: Mustad 94833, #12, (size to match naturals)

Thread: 6/0 Olive

Tail and body: Olive blood marabou, shade to match naturals

Tying Steps:

1. Cut a piece of the monofilament about an inch long. Hold it by the middle with narrow jaw (1/16-inch wide) hackle pliers. Set fire to one end with a cigarette lighter. Blow out the fire before the melting ball touches the pliers. Do this carefully so you don't touch the hot monofilament. Do the same thing to the other end, and put the pliers and eyes on something to cool. Don't let the eyes touch anything before they are cold.

2. Put a hook in the vise, and build a small thread base at the front of the hook where the eyes will be.

3. Take the eyes out of the pliers and hold them along the shank on top of the hook. Put two or three thread wraps over the middle of the

monofilament connecting the eyes. Then twist the eyes to be across the shank. Lay in several thread wraps diagonally in both directions to hold them in position before wrapping a smooth tread base to the bend. Put head cement on the tread holding the eyes now if you like.

4. Pull four to six herls from a blood marabou feather. Try to keep the ends together. Position the herls, tips to the rear, to make a shank length tail, and tie them down with two or three thread wraps.

5. Hold the thread and marabou together. Make the first two wraps backward to hide the tie down thread; then wrap thread and marabou forward to the eyes. By holding the thread and marabou together as you wind you automatically twist them together. Secure marabou, trim excess and whip finish. Apply a little head cement if it wasn't done in step 3.

It is a pretty simple fly as I have demonstrated at FFF Conclaves. Most important it catches fish during a damselfly nymph migration. I have a bunch of them ready when my favorite lake opens. A variation of this pattern, the Backpack Damsel Nymph, is on a 2X long hook and has a tight loop of foam tied at mid shank before the tail and body are wrapped on. It will float where it should on windy days with a rough surface or if you have to sink the tippet when there is a mirror surface.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.
You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org