

### **EARL MADSEN SKUNK**



By Bob Bates

“This fly floats so well you could hang a bowling ball from it.” That was how Julie Nielsen, from Rockford, Michigan first described this pattern at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (2005) FFF Conclave in Livingston, MT. She later modified it a little to: “...hang bead heads from it.”

The pattern, also known as the Michigan Skunk, was originated in 1930 by long time AuSable River guide Earl Madsen. It is definitely a proven pattern and might even fit the category of a classic pattern. Modern guides often use it to put their clients into fish. Also, they would prefer that Julie didn't talk about it so much. Everybody wants to keep a good thing secret.

How you fish it is usually determined by the situation. If fish are clearly rising and taking large insects use dry fly techniques. In a stream cast upstream of the working fish, and let the fly drift drag free down to them. A reach cast or careful line mends might be needed to assure the drag free float. Sometimes a large pattern like this makes a good searching fly. Julie commented: “The beauty of fishing the Skunk is that you can get some vicious strikes by ‘popping’ the fly. The bushy elk hair head pushes lots of water if you twitch the fly abruptly in pockets and around structures.”

If rising fish are cruising in stillwater try to estimate where the fish will rise again and put your fly there. It is most satisfying to see your fly disappear in a mighty swirl.

If nothing is happening on the surface, hang a bead head or other weighted fly from a Michigan Skunk. Try to put the fly where the fish might be. In other words use enough

leader or tippet to suspend the fly near the bottom in stillwater. Set the hook if the fly goes under or does anything strange. In moving water the starting guide line is use a leader that is twice as long as the depth of water being fished. If the fly stops, moves sideways or goes under you are either hung up or into a fish. Set the hook to be sure. Fluorocarbon is used by many anglers because it's specific gravity is greater than water so it sinks, and it's index of refraction is close to water so it is nearly invisible. One thing, if an Earl Madsen Skunk is being used as a strike indicator your friends can't say you are bobber fishing.

The step pictures were taken while Julie tied the fly at the Conclave.

### **Materials List:**

**Hook:** TMC 101, size 10

**Thread:** Dynacord Superfine

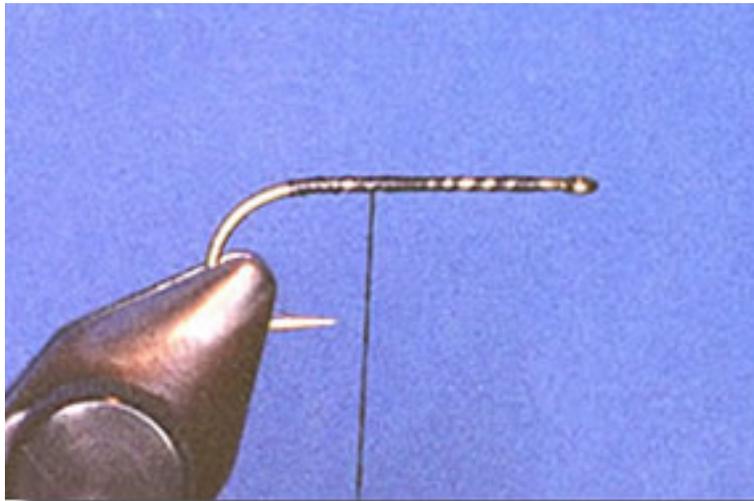
**Tail:** White calf tail

**Body:** Tinsel chenille

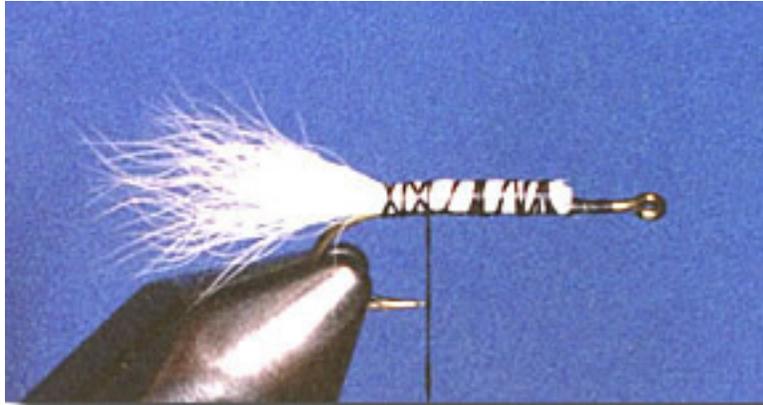
**Wing:** Premium elk

**Legs:** White round rubber

### **Tying Steps:**



1. Put hook into vise at the bend, and line it with thread. Leave the thread a little in front of point.



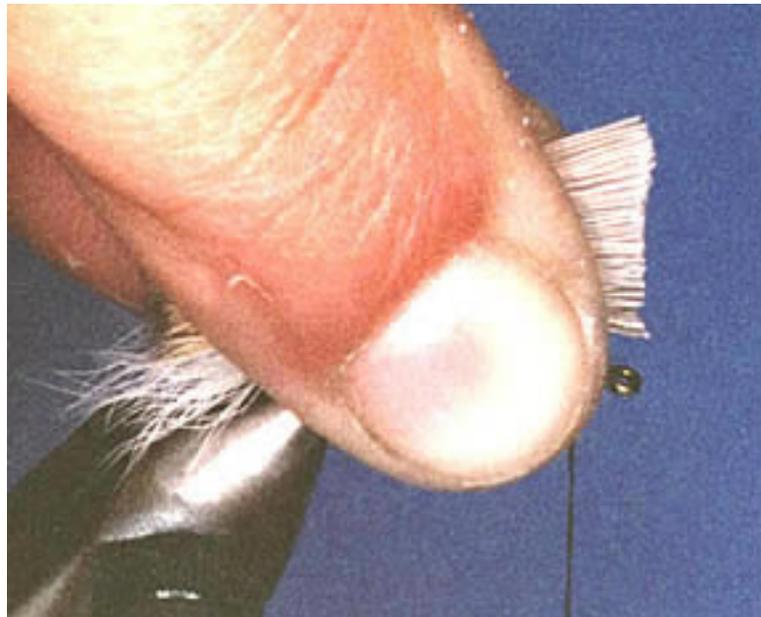
2. Cut a bunch of calf tail about the diameter of one or two wooden match sticks. Hold the bunch by the tips and pull out the under fur and short hair. Hand stack it, measure the bundle to give a tail 1-1/2 gap widths behind the bend. Hold hair on the hook and cut the butts at a point about 1/3 rd shank length back from the eye. Secure hair on top of hook. Leave thread at point of hook.



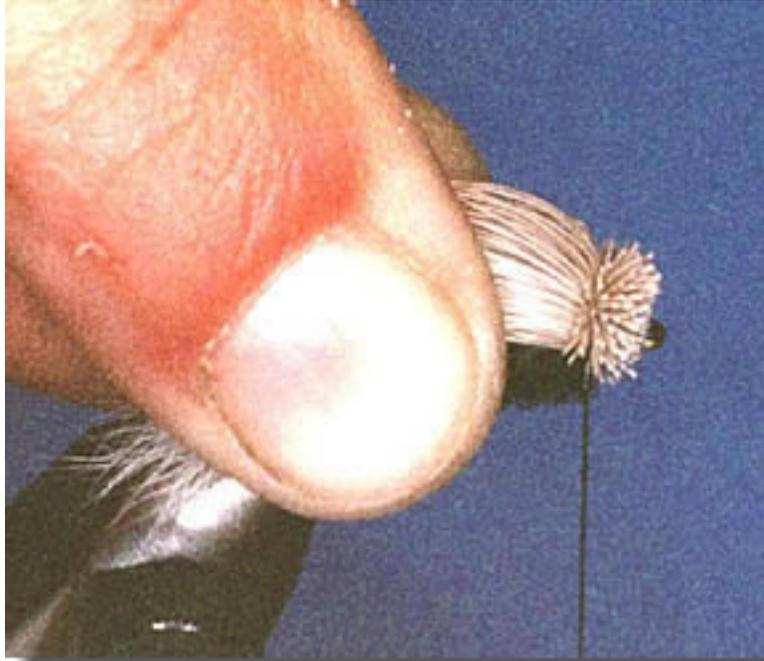
3. Strip some of the fuzzy part off chenille to expose the thread core. Attach the chenille on top of the tail by the thread core. Wind thread backward to bend of hook securing thread core.



4. Then move thread forward to just in front of the tied down tail. Wrap the chenille forward, secure and trim excess. The final position for the thread should be 1-1/2 to 2 eye widths behind the eye; this is the first wing tie-in point.



5. Cut a generous (about a wooden pencil diameter) bunch of elk hair. Comb out any under fur and stack. Place the tips not quite to the end of the tail, and trim butts at the front of the hook's eye. Hold the elk hair tightly with cut ends about over the middle of the eye. Slide the thread between thumb and hair and back down between hair and finger then tighten. Do it again tighter, and again tightest. The thread wraps should be on top of each other. Look at Julie's fingers in the pictures; she is holding everything so tightly her finger tips are white.



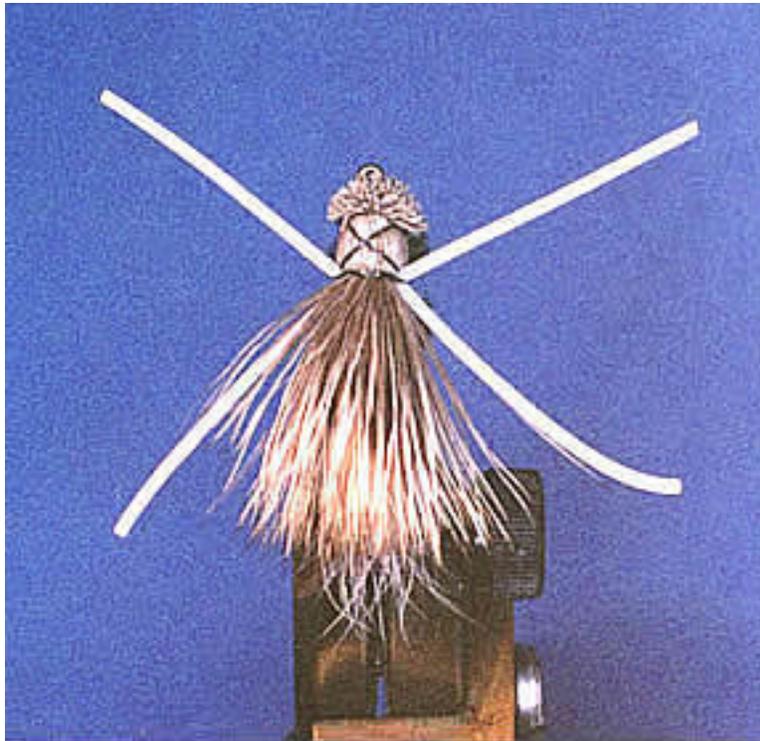
6. Slide the fingers toward bend of hook another 2 eye widths; this is the tie-in point for the legs. Keep the thread tight, and bring it back to the fingers, wind thread straight up and down around elk hair bundle. Make the first wind a little loose and follow it with two tight winds.



7. When the fingers are released the fly should look like this.



8. Put on legs one at a time with tight winds of thread so they stand out from body.



9. After securing the legs bring tight thread forward through the head, and put two half hitches behind the eye. A few spots can be put on the legs with a permanent felt pen.

**Closing comments:** This is a very durable fly so all you have to do grease it once in the morning, and then fish with it all day. From the stories I heard many many fish have been caught using it dry or as a strike indicator.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.  
You can direct any questions or comments to [flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org)