

WING BURNER



By Bob Bates

Opening comments:

Fly tiers use a few tools in plying their craft: scissors, bodkins, hackle pliers and a vise to name a few. This month the emphasis is not on a pattern but on a tool: **The wing burner**. Carl Ronk demonstrated it at the 2011 East Idaho Fly Tying Exposition in Idaho Falls, ID.

Many tiers feel they need to provide a good silhouette so the fish will hit their fly with abandon. Some use wood duck flank feathers others go for hackle tip wings. All the effort is to make the fly look like a living mayfly. When a mayfly nymph breaks through the surface film it must rest and dry its wings. If it is a drizzly day the dun will sit on the surface a long time before it takes off to nearby vegetation. This gives the fish a good opportunity to look it over carefully before taking it. On very dry days the fish has to make up its mind quickly. Either way you want something that looks real and doesn't move on the surface. Fifty years ago I believed that "drag free float" was something Outdoor Writers thought up to sell more articles. However, the Madison River rainbows and browns at Madison Junction in Yellowstone National Park taught me otherwise.

There is a bewildering collection of wing burners available. Some are made of stainless steel and others are brass. They look like tweezers, forceps and alligator clips. Almost any wing shape you can imagine is available: mayfly, caddis fly, stone fly, grasshopper and more. They come in sizes from 10 down to 22. Many fly shops carry the larger ones, ask around. Carl's collection is for mayflies, made of brass and look like alligator clips: See below.



Wing burners in sizes from 22 to 10



Wing burner with jaws open.

Use feathers from the head of the grouse or other bird for the smallest patterns. Feather or synthetic wings can be sandwiched to make a more attractive pattern. That makes them more attractive to the fish as well as the tier. Carl talked about a pattern that, with the sun behind him, looked like spotlight on the water until a fish hit it. If you want wings with veins on then, they are available also. Check the internet.

Materials list:

Hook: Any dry fly hook

Thread: 6/0 or finer recommended, color your choice

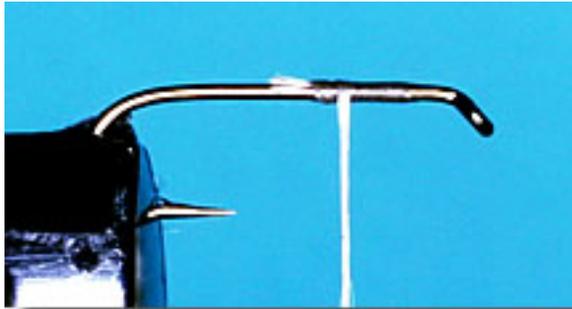
Wings: Grouse, etc. Tea bags, some synthetics.

Tail: Your choice; hackle barbs, moose, Microfibrites or paint brush fibers.

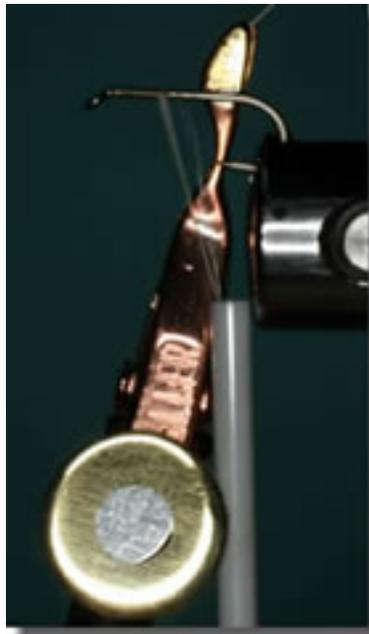
Body: Your choice; biot, goose primary, dubbed, thread, etc.

Hackle: Your choice

Tying steps:



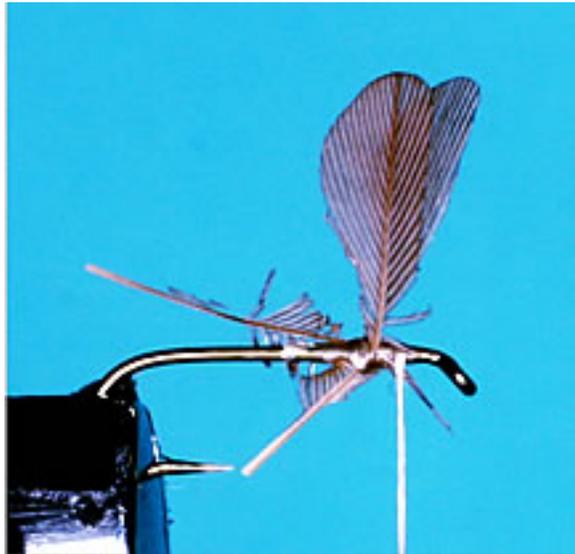
1. Start in the usual way by attaching the tying thread on hook about mid shank, and winding it forward to a point $\frac{1}{3}$ rd shank length back from the eye.



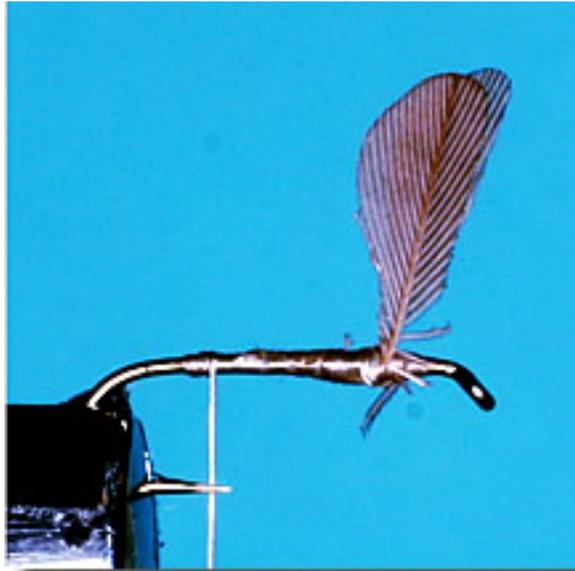
2. Next get out your wing burners, and select the size for the size of fly you are planning to tie.



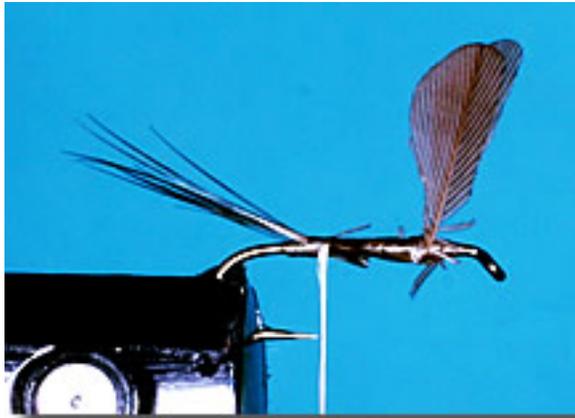
3. Put grouse breast feather into wing burner. (Use feathers from the back of head for small flies, and from breast or back for large flies.) Be sure to put stem in center of burner so it is protected. Orient the first feather so that either the shiny side or the dull side is up. Then when you burn the second feather reverse it in the burner. Then you have right and left wings. The Bic burning tool is available at Rite Aid, Rosours and similar fly shops.



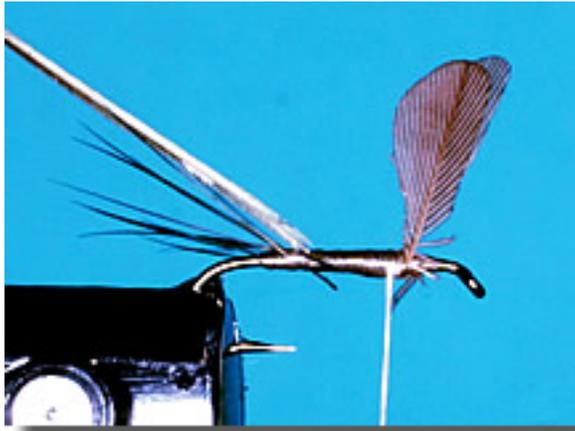
4. Put the two wings on top of the hook with the tips forward and the larger side up. Tie it in like you would a regular quill wing. Bring thread up between thumb and hook. Move thread down between first finger and hook. Pull thread straight down so wings do not roll around hook. Put a couple of thread winds rearward. Then pull up the wings and put a few thread winds in front to prop them up.



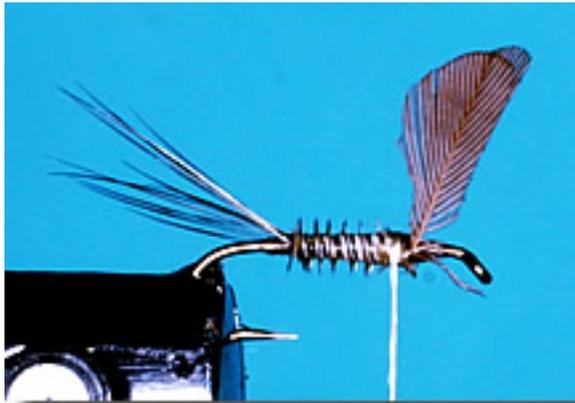
5. Trim excess feather on a slope, and while you are doing that the thread usually unwinds. This is good because the thread flattens, and you will produce a smooth taper while winding the thread rearward. Each thread wind may overlap the previous one a little.



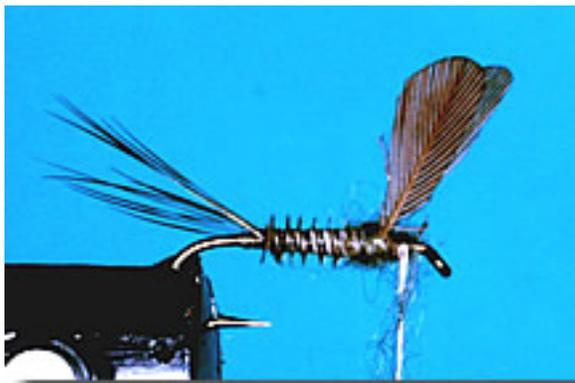
6. Put a shank length tail on using hackle fibers or a paint brush fiber.



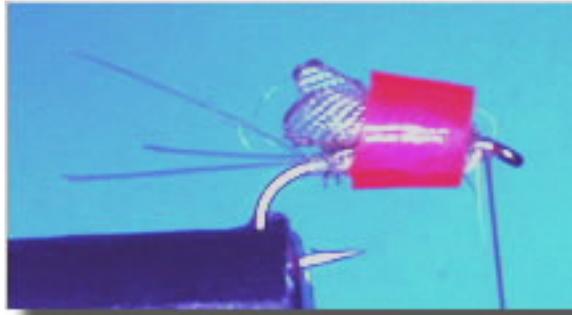
7. Body on this fly will be a goose primary fiber. Pick from side of wing quill opposite the biots. Trim the tip a little, and tie it in. Put a little thinned Sally Hansen's Hard as Nails (50/50 Sally Hansen's and lacquer thinner) on the hook to help protect the fiber. If it is tied in one way a smooth body will be produced; turn it over to produce a fuzzy body. Move thread forward to back of wings. Keep at least one thread wind away from the wings.



8. Wrap single primary fiber forward, secure and trim.



9. Put a few more thread winds in front of wings.



10. At this point a regular or parachute hackle may be installed. Carl chose to post the wings, and tie on a parachute hackle. He wrapped the hackle around the post, picked up the front hackle barbs, put two thread winds over the hackle to secure it and cut off the excess. Then he moved a special hackle guard (red thingy) from the bobbin to push back the hackle barbs and wings. Now he had plenty of room to build a small head, whip finish with the Materelle tool and add a little thinned Sally's Hard as Nails.



11. I usually worry about treating the barbs and wings so roughly, but the red thingy didn't seem to bother them. He trimmed the thread. When the head cement was dry, he remove the hackle guard and pulled the wings upright. Then put a drop of thinned cement on the parachute. It soaked in immediately and waterproofed the thread.

Closing comments: If you study this pattern you can see several different things. First, the Step 10 picture is of a different fly (Carl tied different patterns during the two sessions I photographed him. Second is the use of hackle burners to make beautiful wings. Third is the wings can be made out of different materials (See Step 10 picture). When a synthetic material is burned, like in the Step 10 picture, the charred ash will have to be brushed off with the fingers. Carl uses bags from Revolution Sweet Ginger Peach Tea (Premium Full-leaf Black Tea) from Safeway. Fourth is the tail can be of different materials (See Step 10 picture). Sixth is the body was tied using goose primary barbs rather than the biots. The "red thingy" (hackle guard) is a cylinder made from a tapered bottle cap (also straws of different diameters work, Ruth Zinch from Calgary, AB uses wide rubber bands from broccoli bunches). So many different materials and things can be used to tie a fish catching fly. That is before we start talking about color. Have fun with fly tying, and do not get locked on a particular pattern.

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