Spring Creek Flycraft and Guide Service
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Fly Tyers Corner
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Bill's Little Greenie

by Bill Carnazzo

Sometime when you are fishing a stream like the Upper Sacramento River, or the McCloud River, turn over a few rocks, or better yet grab a submersed branch or piece of wood and have a look at what lives in that part of the stream. You will undoubtedly find little dark green worms that have a black head—and they will likely be the most populous insect on the rock or stick. Then, during mid-to-late afternoon, use a seine net to see if you can find out what's in the drift. Again, you will likely find the same little green worms wriggling around on the screen. What are these little critters? They are caddis larvae; their taxonomic name is Rhyacophila; they and the Hydropshche are the two most populous types of caddis. Rhyacophila are "free-living," meaning that they do not build a case like other types of caddis do. They are predatory by nature, and seek their food by wandering around on the rocks. In a very few situations, they can differ in color ranging to tan; but by and large, the insect is normally a deep olive color. Why would they be found on the screen of the seine? The reason is that one of this bug's characteristics is that it engages in what entomologists call "behavioural drift," which means that for some reason during the afternoon, these little guys will launch themselves *en masse* into the drift; there seems to be general agreement that this behavior is our Mother's way of ensuring that the entire stream is populated with this species. Here is a picture of the bug:

Rhyacophila favor riffle water; when they engage in behavioral drift a larva pattern will work if worked through the riffle near the bottom. In other words it is a perfect situation for short-line nymphing—or, if you are inclined to use bobbers, be sure that you are drifting your flies near the bottom (I don't recommend that technique, by the way). Rhyacophila hatch in the afternoon from late spring through August; pupa patterns are effective during a hatch. Hatched adults will return to the water during late afternoon and evening, and trout will sometimes take them as the bugs alight on the surface. A very interesting fact regarding the adults' behavior is that when they hit the water they dive beneath the surface to deposit their eggs on the rocks at the bottom; unlike mayflies, their eggs are not deposited on the surface. Does this suggest anything to you regarding fly patterns to imitate the diving behavior? A good source of information on this interesting characteristic is Ralph Cutter's "*Trout Food;*" another is Dave Hughes book titled "*Wet Flies.*" More on this subject in later articles.

I developed this pattern over a relatively long period of time; it has undergone a few changes over the years, but it is basically the same as when I first tied one up. The most important characteristic of this fly, at least in my opinion, is the manner in which the abdomen is constructed. In the materials list you will note that I specify flourescent green 70 denier tying thread for the underbody; it is important that the thread color show through the dubbing that is applied—but not so much that it predominates. The method I use to accomplish this result is to change the tying thread to black at the right step in the tying process and employ the "touch dubbing" technique that Gary LaFontaine (rest his soul) advocated in his books on tying caddis patterns. This technique creates translucency and an impression of life, unlike what would result if the fly's abdomen was just an ordinary opaque dubbed body. The "shine through" technique, incidentally, is not new; it has been used for wet fly patterns (traditional winged wets, wingless wets, flymphs, soft hackles, and nymphs) for a very long time.

I tie this fly on a variety of hooks but as indicated in the materials list an ordinary standard wire 1x long nymph hook will work fine. The other hooks I use are the Daiichi 1260 because I like its curved shank and large gape, and scud hooks because…well, because I can. I also add a "tail" of a few strands (and I do mean few) strands of UV pearl dubbing—not the flashabou type of strands. The tail is barely visible to the eye but does catch light in the water.

Materials

Hook: Any standard nymph hook, #14-18
Thread: 70 denier flat nylon, fluorescent green, and Black "Sheer" 14/0
Beads: Black, to suit hook size
Tail: 2 or 3 wisps of UV pearl dubbing
Body base: Tying thread (very thin)
Body: Dark olive spiky dubbing
Ribbing: Fine gold wire
Legs: None
Wing: None
Thorax: Fine black ostrich herl
Hackle Starling
Weight: None
Head: Thread

Tying Instructions

1. Crimp the hook barb and mount the bead. Cover the hook shank with a single, flat layer of the black thread; stop immediately above the hook point and leave the bobbin there.

2. From the package remove 3 or 4 wisps of UV pearl dubbing; roll them between your fingers and tie them in at that point.

3. Cut a short piece of fine gold wire and tie it in at that same point. For now, just let the black thread bobbin hang there. Start the green thread behind the bead, and wrap it rearward in tight turns. Stop at the hook point, and then wrap it forward to the back of the bead, laying a nice smooth layer as you work forward. Remember: the body needs to be very thin. Whip finish the green thread there.

4. Using tacky dubbing wax, wax a 2 inch piece of the black thread; be sure to get the wax right up to the hook shank. Take a pinch of dark olive dubbing between your thumb and forefinger, and brush it along the length of the waxed thread, back and forth several times. This will result in some of the dubbing fibers sticking to the wax. Move the thread forward using relatively tightly spaced turns, ending just behind the bead. Although the fluorescent green doesn't show through much at this point, when it gets in the water there will be a significant difference.Rib the fly with the gold wire, making 5 turns, and tie the wire off at the front of the body.

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6. Tie in three barbules of fine black ostrich herl by their tips. It is good to snip off a bit of the tips before tying the barbules in, in order to obtain a stronger stem section. Wrap rearward over the herl tips to a point about 3 hook eye lengths behind the bead. The butts should now be pointing rearward.

7. Prepare a starling feather from the neck portion of the skin, as if you were preparing a soft hackle. See the July column for the method for accomplishing this. Tie the prepared feather in by its tip, concave side up, with the stem butt pointing forward. The feather should be tied in directly behind the bead.

8. Grab the 3 herls with your hackle plier and twist them counter-clockwise until they form a thin, uniform "rope." Wrap the rope forward to the back of the bead, using about 4 turns, and tie it off there.

9. Grab the stem of the starling feather with your hackle pliers and take two full wraps behind the bead, making sure that the convex side of the feather is up. Tie the feather off with a couple of tight turns behind the bead and clip the excess. Sweep the barbules rearward and whip finish behind the bead. Don't be tempted to wrap over the barbules because that will make them lie flat against the abdomen, which is not a desirable result because it inhibits their movement while drifting.

Now, go crank one of these bugs and fish it. I live by that simple philosophy.

Enjoy, and see ya on the creek...!!!