

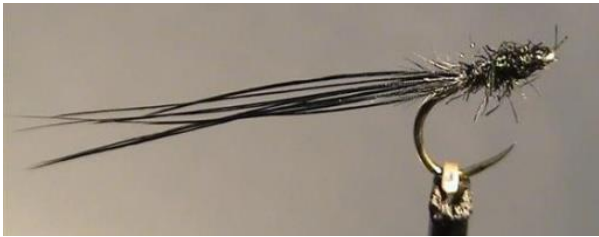
The Wiggle Tail Fly

(Installment No. 3 on the essential flies)

By Eric Palmer

Many of us find the simple "Wiggle Tail" a fascinating fly due to an utter simplicity that belies its deadly effectiveness on many of the lakes we frequent in Northern California, and I'm sure it will work on moving water too. One design of several available is typified by a recipe conjured up by master still water fly-man **Gene Goss** after being exposed to the original and more substantial Wiggle Tail created by **Jay Fair** many years ago; much more on that in a minute.

To say Gene is a minimalist with his flies is a gross understatement, but he bases all his designs



Gene Goss Wiggle Tail

on many days, if not weeks of experimentation and trial and error, and Gene has substantial dried fish stink on his net to prove his point. When honing a new idea, Gene fills a fish tank with water and repeatedly "swims" his new creation in the tank until he gets just the swimming action he seeks from both the tail and the body fibers. Gene told me he's

discarded countless flies before he gets it just right.

Previously restricted to the "Secret Flies" password protected area of the GBF website message board, Gene's Wiggle Tail recipe can now be revealed thanks to the efforts of our legal team and the *Freedom of Information Act*. It goes like this:

Hook: TMC 2499 SP-BL Size 10, straight eye, 2x heavy, 3x wide.

Thread: 8/0 black.

Tail: Strung Marabou in black, olive, orange, or other color as desired. Use only the tips of the feather to keep the tail very thin.

Body: Blend black Seal Sub Dubbing and Peacock black Ice Dub together. Pick-out the dubbing for a "buggy" look, then trim it back some to make a small tight body.

UV: *Ice Dub Shimmer Fringe* in color UV Pearl (Hareline Dubbin). Use a very small amount trimmed to 1/2 in. long at the base of the tail as a UV "hot spot".

An alternative to dubbing for Gene's fly is to use one of various forms of short shuck or chenille, and this is not limited to the dark black/olive or peacock tones, but also effective in bright rust with tail to match, or mix up the colors. In fact, there's a story circulating of success with an all bright red Wiggle Tail with dubbed body of red "Lite-Bright" and black hackle collar, so go-figure. It all depends on the fish, and there's no telling what they'll be in the mood for on any given day, although there are some still water experts in our midst who staunchly maintain "any color as long as it's black" and they are consistently successful following their mantra.

Gene tells us his inspiration for his ultra-sparse but still deadly fish catcher was in fact the original Wiggle Tail fly introduced by **Jay Fair** in the 1980s as typified by the photo below. This one with Jay Fair short shuck, an early Jay Fair innovation. Gene was impressed with its long and very "swimmy" tail, the Jay fair hallmark, which led him to further experimentation, mainly on Lake Davis where Gene fishes his designs with consistent success.



A classic Jay Fair Wiggle Tail

I recently learned from Jay's son Glenn that the Jay Fair Wiggle Tail evolved from Jay's original "**Wiggle Nymph**" developed in 1976. This fly had a chenille Wooly Worm body with a short stubby 5/8

inch tail and palmered hackle. As Jay developed his now well-known "shuck" material (to mimic an emerging nymph "shucking" its case), the fly progressed through the 1980s to a shuck body with the inch and a half wispy tail that we know today. The first national recognition attributing this fly to Jay Fair was in "Fly Fisher Magazine" in 1983 and again in 1988.



Translucent Swimming Hackle in size long

Over time Jay would go on to develop other innovative tying materials, and in 2009 he introduced his **Translucent Swimming Hackle** at local fly shops. During the retrieve the fine synthetic threads of this material create a natural swimming action that fish cannot resist any more than a cat can resist a dangled string, even on a full stomach. As I learned during a recent long phone conversation with Glenn Fair, the inspiration for this material followed Jay's 2009 chance encounter in a clothing store with some fringe string

material designed as embellishment for ladies apparel. Jay tracked down the material source to a factory in the garment district in Milan Italy, obtained a small sample and tied it to the shank of a hook. Swishing it around in a large glass coffee pot full of water to test its swimming action Jay found exactly what he'd expected, and was immediately convinced that he had a winner. Jay then purchased all remaining close-out remnants in several one-hundred pound bales. What color did it come in? Just one; pale blue. Glenn immediately got busy with the same dyeing techniques they had mastered over the many years of dyeing their famous marabou and hackle feathers to achieve the colors we see in this material today, with "buggy olive" being Glenn's clear favorite (olive with dark brown notes).

The Swimming Hackle comes in three sizes or thread lengths, micro (1/8"), medium (1/4"), and long (5/8"). The long size is typically used for a collar, and were anyone wanting to replicate Gene Goss's spartan Wiggle Tail using this material, the compact micro size would fit the bill. It's also suggested to watch Jay's videos on their [website](#) for proper instruction on how to tie in the swimming hackle, and in turn how to tie his complete Wiggle Tail fly. You can see in the photo above that there's a "set" to the threads and Jay makes it crystal clear in his video which end is up (or down).



Jay fair "Kick Back and Cast"

yet more moving parts.

This is Jay's "Kick Back and Cast" Wiggle Tail in full living color, and employs the medium size material on the body with the long size as a collar. If you "swim" this fly on a length of tippet beside you as you sit in your float tube, the appeal of the fly as fish food becomes immediately apparent, with every thread and fiber "flapping in the breeze" like crazy. Jay also recommends picking out the material with Velcro as you would standard dubbing to further thin out the thread fibers to create

So, how do you fish Wiggle Tails? Most will use either an intermediate sinking line (1 1/2 to 2 ips) or the hover line (1 ips) depending on the lake and water depth, and of course where you think the fish are holding in the water column. You make a cast of reasonable distance, if not as far as you possibly can, then either troll with a slow kick, or while stationary do a retrieve of varying length and speed. This is where experimentation and trial and error comes in until you find what the fish will respond to. It might be very slow 12 inch pulls followed by a several second pause for the fly to sink, or short and jerky movements, then pause, or something in between the two extremes. A method that often works for many is to allow the rocking motion of the float tube and

the warm sun on your face to lull you into a stupor such that your retrieve all but stops. You'll immediately know when it's "fish on" when the adrenalin snaps you to attention as you begin fumbling for line to regain control. Alternatively, pause your kicking and retrieve just long enough to chat with your float tubing partner over whether or not it's time for a lunch break. This has been known to work well too, but can take some practice, so be patient with yourself.



Mixing two colors can be effective. Here, olive and fiery brown wrapped side-by-side.

So there you have it, the full story of the humble Wiggly Tail. When you hit still water this spring and summer, and should you have that OMG moment we've all had where you suddenly realize you've left all your flies on the table in the garage, just ask your partner "Please --- do you have a Wiggly Tail I can borrow". It's likely the only fly you'll need.

[I would like to thank Glenn Fair for his time on the phone with me during which he was very helpful in providing a wealth of information, including much more than I had room for here.]