

Fly of the Month Pat's Nymph



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PAT'S NYMPH



Like many fly tyers, I really like an elegant fly that I find pleasing to the eye. There are a few exceptions and the Pat's Nymph is one of them. It's a scruffy little nymph pattern that can be tied a variety of ways. In fact, the rougher it looks, the better Smoky Mountain trout seem to like it.

I probably first saw a Pat's Nymph in the mid-1990's and was completely unimpressed. It didn't have a braided body, rubber legs, a segmented body, or any other traits that make some trout flies look as if they might crawl out of your palm. The fly fisher who gave it to me was one I held in high regard, but I really couldn't bring myself to fish it for some time. Many years have passed since that time and the pattern is one I just can't imagine having to live without.

The Pat's Nymph has a true Smoky Mountain pedigree, derived from the fly tying desk of Pat Proffit. Pat is a well known fly fisher from Cocke county which includes Cosby, Newport, and the Pigeon River system. Every well versed fly fisher I've ever met from Cocke county has an innate "fish sense" and native fly patterns produced there get straight to the heart of the matter. They catch trout.



Tightline nymphing a Pat's Nymph together with a Zelon Nymph dropper

This is a great fly pattern for those with limited tying materials because it seems to work equally well in several incarnations. A variety of dubbings from gray squirrel to superfine dry fly dubbing will all produce a winner. The same goes for hackle. A high quality hackle is not necessary, so this pattern affords the opportunity to use some of the less desirable feathers on saddles or necks you may already own. Hen hackle or cheap Indian necks also provide good hackle for this nymph pattern.

I can't ever remember tying the Pat's Nymph any other way than with a brown tail and collar. However, I did some research on the fly and every other reference to it lists a mix of grizzly and brown hackle. That's always a good combination and while I'm sure it will work great, I've grown accustomed to tying and fishing this fly with only brown hackle.

I did find an interesting reference to a fly in Charles Brooks' "Nymphing for Larger Trout." Brooks was a resident of West Yellowstone, Montana and the Madison River drainage was his home water. He mentions a pattern listed as the Gray Nymph with the same recipe as a Pat's Nymph. The main difference was he fished it as large as a #6, but he said it was always a deadly fly.

I'm convinced that this combination of color and scruffy appearance allows the nymph to morph into whatever a trout has its mind on at the moment. Drift the fly in turbulent water and with limited time to inspect it the Pat's Nymph could be a larger mayfly nymph, small stonefly, caddis larva, or caddis pupa.

Perhaps the best reason we hold this particular nymph near and dear is because of the way it performs after a few fish have eaten it. Many flies start to lose effectiveness when the legs get crooked or hackle comes undone. The Pat's Nymph just never seems to get too beat up to catch trout! This December we fished one individual fly for almost a solid month to see how much abuse and how many trout we could catch on it. That one fly caught trout up and down Little River, Middle Prong, West Prong of Little River and Abrams Creek. We lost track of how many fish we caught, but putting a pencil to paper shows it had to be in excess of 100. Honestly, I would never keep a fly this long, but it kept working and the experiment was to see when fish would stop eating it. Turns out I got sick of fishing the same old fly and got rid of it just to mix things up.

Fishing the Pat's Nymph

The secret of the Pat's Nymph's success is its heavily weighted core. If an angler keeps drag off the leader this fly will sink like a rock. Use this factor to your advantage.

We'll typically use this fly when water conditions are on the high side or when water temperatures are cold and fish are holding right on the bottom. The Pat's Nymph lends itself to being fished in tandem with other nymph patterns. We fish it most often with a Zelon Nymph, a Copper John, or just a second Pat's Nymph.

We fish the pattern all year long, but once dry fly season comes around we tend to reserve it for times when the fish won't rise. February and early March are prime for this fly since Quill Gordon Nymphs are about this size and moving about as they prepare to hatch. Later in the summer we fish this nymph in the hours after a thunderstorm when creek levels rise.



This rainbow and many others continued to take this Pat's Nymph even after most of the dubbing was chewed off! How many will you catch?

The weight of this fly does not make it a good choice to fish as a dropper under a dry fly. This can work, but the dry fly has to be really big and pretty bushy to stay afloat in rough Smoky Mountain streams.

This is not a fly that demands ultra light tippet. We typically use 4X or 3X when fished with a bigger nymph. You can fish 5X, but be prepared to lose a few when they hang on bottom.

My favorite way to fish the Pat's Nymph is with no strike indicator at all. This is a devastatingly effective method for catching trout once it's mastered. The weight and quick sink rate of the fly make it ideal for this type of fishing.

I would not label this a tailwater fly, but I do see possibilities. A couple of seasons ago I was about to shove the drift boat off the ramp on the Holston River when I realized I was missing my tin of split shots. The section of river I was guiding that day has a number of deep, swift riffles that require additional weight beyond a #16 beadhead pattern to sink flies to the depth where the fish eat. Fortunately I had some Pat's Nymphs in my bag and tied them on the leader where I would typically pinch on a split shot. The set up worked perfectly and the Pat's Nymph hooked a few trout for my anglers even though I was strictly using it as weight. This showed me that if selective tailwater trout will eat a #12 Pat's Nymph, you can be sure they would eat one in a smaller size closer to the natural foods they eat.

HOW TO TIE THE PAT'S NYMPH

Hook: #10 - 14 Standard nymph hook or 1X long nymph hook

Weight: .015 No Lead wire used generously

Thread: 6/0 Black or Dark Brown

Tail: Brown or Brown and Grizzly Hackle Fibers

Body: Muskrat, Gray Squirrel, or Sow-Scud Dubbing

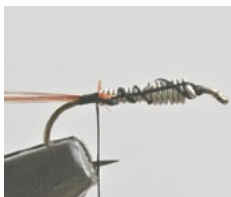
Collar: Brown or Brown and Grizzly Hackle

I guess I just can't resist tinkering with the original pattern, but I just think the fly looks better if I use Sow-Scud dubbing in the color Light Sow Bug. That dubbing has just the slightest amount of sparkle while keeping a scruffy appearance. Muskrat is the "official" dubbing of the Pat's Nymph, but the flies you received are tied with Sow-Scud.

The original pattern calls for a 1X long hook, but for whatever reason I just think the proportions look better on a standard hook. Feel free to use the one you prefer.



Step 1 Start about a hook eye's length beyond bend of the hook and wrap the .015" lead free wire the length of the hook shank, then start wrapping back over the first layer until you get about half way back. This gives the fly that weight to sink fast and also builds a base for a tapered body. Be sure not to crowd the eye of the hook.



Step 2 Start your thread behind the eye of the hook and wrap over the wire until you get to bare hook shank. Make a few more wraps with the thread to lock the wire in place. Now take a clump of hackle fibers and tie them in at the bend of the hook. Clip any excess from the butts.



Step 3 Twist dubbing on the thread and build the body. Course dubbings like squirrel may require some wax on the thread. The body dubs best if you use the dubbing sparingly and build the shape as you go. Large clumps of dubbing don't adhere to the thread very well and are harder to shape as you move up the hook.



Step 4 Tie in your hackle. Make two turns and tie it off. If you are using a brown and a grizzly hackle only make one turn of each. Less is more. Give the impression of legs. Don't use enough hackle so it looks like a dry fly.



Step 5 Stroke the hackle fibers back and hold them down with your thumb and forefinger. At the same time use your bobbin to wrap thread back and over the hackle so it lays back. Form a head and tie off.

Now go fishing!



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