

Ian's Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph



RandRFlyFishing.com



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IAN'S RUBBER LEG TELLICO NYMPH



I first came up with the Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph around 1999 or 2000 after a fishing trip to Yellowstone National Park. The Girdle Bug is a very simple, old school Montana fly that is nothing more than black chenille and white rubber legs but trout attack it. It was clear that the motion and wiggle of the rubber legs of the Girdle Bug triggered the strike.

For some reason the Girdle Bug didn't attract trout around the Smokies so well as it did in the Northern Rockies but it was clear that a little extra wiggle in a fly could be a valuable addition. I wanted to add that same lifelike trait to a Smoky Mountain fly pattern and the Tellico Nymph was the perfect choice. For years I preferred the Blackburn Tellico Nymph to the standard pattern. This is an extremely local version of the regionally known Tellico Nymph. Rick Blackburn, a native East Tennessee fly fisher and fly tyer, altered the original pattern by tying it on a longer streamer hook and using a dirty yellow dubbing instead of yellow floss.

This fly more closely imitates the large Golden Stonefly nymphs that are found all year long in our streams. Golden stonefly



Golden stonefly husks are a common sight on boulders in the summer.

nymphs are most active in the summer when they hatch. Their husks are often seen on boulders along streams. Even as they are most active in summer we prefer to use this nymph pattern in the winter when fly hatches are sparse. Golden stones take three years to fully mature and hatch so there is no time of the year when they are absent from the stream.

We started fishing the fly in the late fall that year and fished it all winter long. The first time I really remember it working was when I fished North River in the Tellico River watershed with my good buddy Tim Doyle. We spotted a large brown trout in a riffle and put five or six flies on him without a response. I tied my new pattern on and decided to see if it would do any better than a Prince, Pheasant Tail or other “go to” nymph. The first cast was pretty clumsy because of the fly’s weight and the Rubber Leg Tellico fell to the water well away from the intended drift. To our surprise the brown moved three feet to take the fly! I was so surprised I barely managed to set the hook and the brown was free after two or three shakes of the head. The Rubber Leg Tellico has caught many nice trout since then.



Average size wild trout in the Smokies will have tough time eating a nymph larger than #8. This 9" rainbow trout was hooked by a #10 Rubber Leg Tellico.

In the past I only fished this fly in large sizes, usually #6 and #8. Mature stoneflies are large and it's always good to have a large hook when a larger fish takes the fly. After many seasons fishing the fly I've decided that bigger isn't always better. The main reason is that you will find many trout in the Smokies that just aren't large enough to take a fly that big. You can always use a larger nymph like this to reduce the number of small fish you catch, but you can also reduce the number of decent fish as well. A big nymph can be quite a mouthful for even a 10" fish and there are limited numbers of fish bigger than that in our wild streams. A size #10 is probably the best compromise to keep you in fish will still being able to reliably target larger fish.

There are several things to consider when fishing the Rubber Leg Tellico. It's important to realize that it is best fished right along the bottom. The fly is tied heavy, but additional split shot might be in order for some drifts to get deep enough. We'll typically fish this fly about 3' - 4' under a strike indicator but this is a fly that lends itself very well to tight line nymphing without an



Deep, calm pockets in the middle of rapids are ideal places to fish stonefly nymphs

indicator. The heavy fly plus an extra split shot sometimes cause a strike indicator to get pulled or pause momentarily as the fly touches bottom. After a while anglers come to expect the indicator to go under and lose that predatory edge. It's not uncommon to watch the indicator swim off without setting the hook because you've become conditioned to seeing the indicator pause when it ticks bottom.

When fishing nymphs without a strike indicator you should use a short amount of line; only the leader and 3' - 9' of fly line depending on the spot. Keep your rod tip high and downstream of the fly. Move the rod tip at the same speed as the current and you'll easily see your leader and fly line jump when a fish takes the fly. You'll have a much better sense of the difference between the fly sliding over rocks and a trout grabbing it.

DO NOT USE LIGHT TIPPET WHEN FISHING THIS FLY OR OTHER LARGE NYMPHS. There are several reasons and all are critical to success. The first reason is that a large, heavy fly is difficult to cast with 5X or 6X tippet. This is even more true



This exceptional wild brown trout from Great Smoky Mountain National Park at a Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph on a winter day.

when there is a heavy fly, a split shot, and a strike indicator on the leader. Light tippet isn't stiff enough to turn over a heavy fly and tangles are much more common as a result. Want a real mess? Add a second fly and a split shot to this rig using light tippet.

The second reason to use heavier tippet is because you can expect a heavy fly to occasionally hang on the bottom. Stout tippet brings more flies back than light tippet does.

Any time you fish a fly this large you exclude smaller trout from getting hooked. They may peck at it, but it takes a larger fish with a larger mouth to eat a big nymph and get the hook. This is the last reason for not using light tippet. If you hook a large trout there's no point losing it in heavy water because your super light tippet broke.

We recommend 3X tippet as the best all round size for the Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph. It provides enough stiffness and strength to get the job done. In this day and age of tippets going as fine as 8X and fluorocarbon material in many vest pockets we see fly fishers wince at the idea of fishing a fly on 3X monofilament,



A fly fisher dredges a deep slot with a pair of nymphs in a Smoky Mountain stream

but there is no reason to shy away from it. Trout in Smoky Mountain streams will eat a fly tied to 3X just fine.

You can also fish the Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph with other nymph patterns to create a highly effective dropper rig. A second large pattern like a #10 Prince Nymph creates a real depth charge rig for hitting deep pockets. We like this combination because it pairs two patterns that are not at all similar so it gives fish a choice. This rig is best fished when water conditions are on the high side, even in the summer months.

Fish the Rubber Leg Tellico with a smaller #12 - 16 Pheasant Tail, Zelon Nymph, or Pat's Nymph when water levels are average. We like to fish the smaller fly on top if fish are active. This way the mayfly / caddis imitation is higher in the water column as if it's ascending to the surface. Fish the smaller fly on the bottom if water temperatures are in the low 40's or colder. This will put both flies right on the bottom. This also gives you a smaller fly that 6" - 8" fish can eat and keeps the action going.

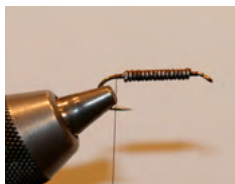


A fine Smoky Mountain brown trout fooled by a Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph

Tying the Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph

The Rubber Leg Tellico Nymph isn't necessarily a difficult fly to tie, but it isn't so quick to tie as most other flies we prefer. There are a number of steps that make this fly relatively slow to tie compared to many other nymphs including a standard Tellico Nymph. None of the materials should be hard to find and there's no point in using expensive hackle. Any hackle from an inexpensive neck or saddle should do well.

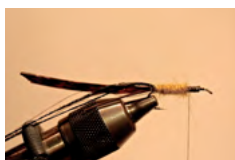
- Hook:** #6 - 10 Tiemco 5262 or equivalent
- Wire:** .030 Lead Free Wire
- Thread:** 6/0 Brown
- Legs:** Round Rubber, Small, Brown
- Back:** Turkey Tail
- Rib:** 2 strands of Peacock Herl
- Dubbing:** Wapsi Life Cycle, Stonefly Yellow or similar
- Hackle:** Brown Indian or Chinese Hackle



Step 1. Wrap the wire over approximately 80% of the hook shank. Be sure the wraps are tight with no space in between. Also be sure you have enough space in the front and rear to tie in your materials without jamming the head or tail of the fly. Wrap your thread from the front of the hook, over the wire, to the rear to lock the wire in place.



Step 2. Take about 3"-4" of round rubber and double it over. Tie it onto the rear of the hook shank. The forked tail should be symmetrical. Don't worry if the rubber appears too long you can trim it to size later.

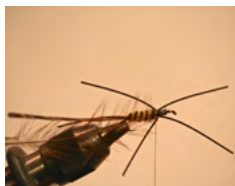


Step 3. Take a segment of turkey tail feather approximately as wide as the gape of the hook. Tie it in near the tips of the feather fibers. Be sure to tie it in at a sturdy section of the feather. The tips are often too fragile. Now pull an extra 8"-9" of thread from the bobbin and create a loop by tying it down in the same location as the turkey feather.

Step 4. Tie in two pieces of peacock herl near the tips. Similar to the turkey feather, the herl tips are fragile so be sure to tie them in where the feather is strong. Now dub the body over the wire approximately 2/3 of the way up the hook shank. It's important not to go too far because you can get yourself jammed into a tight spot at the head of the fly if you don't leave enough space.



Step 5. Now twist the peacock herl and loop of thread together. This will reinforce the peacock herl and prevent it from breaking later when you're fishing. Make even spaced wraps over the dubbing to create a rib. Now tie in your hackle. Rub the hackle fibers the wrong way and tie the feather in near the tip.



Step 6. Take two more pieces of rubber about 3" long and tie them in on each side of the fly. They should be symmetrical and horizontal. This photo is looking down from above. Again, don't worry of the rubber appears to be too long. You can trim it to size later.

Step 7. Now dub over the point where the rubber was tied in as well as in front of the rubber. Use the dubbing to help shape how the rubber points away from the hook. Continue to dub forward, but be sure to leave space for the following step.



Step 8. Wrap the hackle forward. This should be 3 or 4 wraps. Now take a 3"-4" segment of rubber and tie it in above the eye of the hook. Be sure the rubber doesn't obscure the eye of the hook. Fold the turkey feather over and tie it down. Clip the excess and wrap enough thread to cover entirely. You may want to pull the rubber up and place a few wraps of thread under it to keep the rubber even further from the eye of the hook.



Step 9. Now coat the turkey feather with head cement or flexament for added durability. Some have even coated it with epoxy for maximum longevity. Trim the rubber legs and antennas to size if they are too long or uneven.



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Ian & Charity live in Townsend, Tennessee where their guide service, R&R Fly Fishing is based. Together they log hundreds of days on the water each year guiding anglers inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park and on tailwater rivers in East Tennessee. They are avid anglers who travel extensively outside of the Southern Appalachians to fly fish. They regularly host groups of fly fishers in Yellowstone Country on the legendary Henry's Fork River in Idaho and Montana's Madison River, as well as the Turneffe Atoll in Belize.

Ian & Charity keep a busy schedule speaking at fly fishing expos and groups around the country. They have appeared in New Jersey, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. Anyone can keep up with their fishing report and blog on their website; www.RandRFlyFishing.com

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