

OSPREY FLY BOX

ELK HAIR CADDIS

contributed by Edgar Lau

MORE IS LESS

OR

HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE ELK HAIR CADDIS

There was a brief, impressionable phase in my flyfishing youth when I admit I actually cared if my flies looked 'good'. I was intrigued with the intricacies of married feather wings and carefully blended bodies although looking for jungle cock seemed an endeavor left to 'other' folk. Steelheading changed everything and my flybox would need to be restocked PDQ after a late meal, glass of scotch and AquaSeal had fixed some of the days indignities. Now all I care about is having two strong legs and weak impulse control, the better to get into more mischief the next day.

This has translated into a streamlining of fly boxes, and my dry fly armamentarium has been largely reduced to two patterns; the Comparadun for upwing mayfly profiles and the ubiquitous Elk Hair caddis for anything else. Skated, dead-drifted, fished in the wash in the fast water, this has been my staple dry fly for steelhead and trout for 25 years and is my 'weapon of choice' due to simplicity and floatability.

The recipe is simple but the devil is in the details. It'd be like saying all there is to do to make good wine is crush some grapes and let them ferment.

"All" you need is:

- Dry fly hook
- Body: spun dubbing
- Hackle: Palmered saddle or neck
- Wing: Elk, Deer or Moose hair.

Tiny EHC's, size 14 to 20 are deadly on rivers like the Skagit and Stellako which see strong evening hatches. In these sizes, hook selection is of utmost importance. Most Mustads I have used in this range including the 94840 are essentially useless when it comes to holding any fish beyond 12". I practice catch and release but 6 seconds of pull before getting a staple back rates as an unsatisfactory, short-term relationship. The finest hooks for my money in these sizes are the Tiemco 921's (1x fine, 2X short) allowing one to fish a slightly larger gap. They're harder to find, well worth the effort. I've been amazed at actually being able to land 20" fish on #18's without straightening them.

Hook selection for size 10-12 does not matter as much and I even though I'm partial to the 921's, I've had satisfactory results with 94840's. I have steered clear of the 94833 (3X F) in sizes less than 10, again due to lack of temper. I do fish this hook in # 8 as floatation becomes more of an issue with a larger hook, and the temper is satisfactory in this size. I'm partial to fine wire hooks (either Mustad 39841 or Tiemco 2302) in the 2-3XL jumbo sizes as well.

I generally use tan or green rabbit or other fine dubbing, though am not convinced that color makes any difference in smaller sizes. Theoretically, polypro or water-dwelling animal fur like muskrat or beaver float better as they do not absorb water as quickly, though I can't be convinced this makes a bit of difference in sizes less than 12, especially with a good whiff of fly grease.



*A fly to meet the majority of your dry fly needs the Elk Hair Caddis.
Tied above on a Size 4 and Size 10 hook.*

What is crucial is selection of hair. Spend time finding a good patch of short fibred elk where the diameter is maintained thru the tips is key importance in floatability in flies smaller than 12. Longer elk and deer hair often has thick shafts with thin tapering tips which are not only fragile, but are short on floatation. Deer hair is acceptable in flies from 8-12 but stacking is important to get maximal floatation with minimal bulk. I use longer elk or moose on super size flies, as the thicker hair tends to float better if you can secure it properly. Avoid caribou which is fragile and suitable only for spinning.

Decent hackle is nice but not critical especially in larger sizes as the hair provides most of the floatation value. Webby is bad, everything else is acceptable. Save the Metz #1 for fish (or people) that care. What I do like is to give the hackle a good trim on the underside, partly so the fly tends to land upright, but because it exposes more of the hook's bite. This can be an issue on the four, not red, letter days fishing large stoneflies (large EHC almost =sofa pillow) when fish will push the fly up but not necessarily take cleanly. Much like skating big dries for steelhead, the only solution seems to be total sedation of one's reflexes, so as to avoid yarding the fly out of the fish's craw. 'Tis as easy as "not shooting 'til you see the whites of their eyes". Alternatively, pretend you are fishing a wet fly, close eyes 'til you feel the weight.

Having said many variables doesn't matter, what combinations do I gravitate to? In 10-14, I particularly like a tan body, any color wing and grizzly hackle for the summer evening swarms on some freestone rivers. The best fishing is always at nightfall (who can tell what color!!!), which makes wading and navigation a game for the brave and not so smart. Fish then seem to concentrate in fast riffles and take the fly more readily on the swing/tight line/straight downstream presentation than dead drift, leading me to suppose that the egg laying females are being targeted. I'll skate a #6 or 8 3XL in green for the large sedges in the Kamloops lakes and am fond of the same size in cream for the lighter stones in the freestone streams.

Relying on one fly for 60% of my dry fly needs has made fishing time far more enjoyable, leaving more time to savor the other elements which make up a good day on the river.

MATERIALS



- Hook:** (Dry Fly) Mustad 94840
Size #10 to #4
- Thread:** Thread to match colour of body
- Dubbing:** Dubbing to match colour of Hatch
- Rib:** Fine Gold Wire
- Hackle:** Match colour of Body
- Wing:** Light Cream Coloured Elk Hair

TYING INSTRUCTIONS



- Debarb the hook.
- Lay down a thread base.
- Tie in the hackle by the tip.
- Tie in the Gold Wire

TYING INSTRUCTIONS (cont'd)



Dub the body.



Give the dubbing a light trim.



Palmer the hackle forward with the concave face facing forward.

Counter wind the Gold wire through the hackle to hold it down.



Lightly trim the bottom of the hackle to allow the fly to sit down on the water.

The Finished Fly



Elk Hair Caddis

Tie in a nice bundle of Elk Hair behind the eye of the hook.

Whip finish and add a drop of head cement.

Trim the butt ends of the elk hair to finish the fly.