



# The Red-Faced Wobbler

Sometimes simple is better. This easy-to-tie fly spells big success for catching smallmouth bass.

**T**HE BLAZING SUMMER SUN WAS barely on the horizon. It was promising to be another scorcher in a long stretch of abnormally hot July days as my fishing partner, Mike Jacobs, and I launched our kick boats on the Little Turkey River, one of Mike's favorite northeastern Iowa smallmouth bass streams. Our intention was to float and fish about five miles of the stream, which by Mike's estimate would take 10 hours if the fishing was good. With the temperature predicted to reach the 100-degree mark by noon, it wasn't going to be a spectacular day, at least not by Mike's standards. He typically catches 50 or more smallmouths on that stretch of the Little Turkey during a day's fishing, but with the unbearable heat, the fish

stubbornly held in deep, cool water, and we ended up taking half that many fish. That's not a bad day by my standards, but Mike was disappointed.

Because of the warmer-than-normal

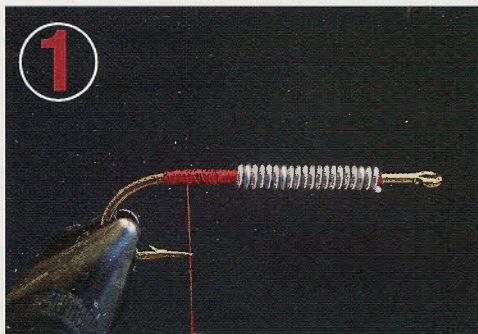
The Red-Faced Wobbler is a basic pattern that you can tie in many colors. Fill a fly box with Wobblers and enjoy some great spring and summer bass fishing.

water temperature, topwater offerings were out of the question, and we fished streamers for most of the trip. Mike stuck with a leech pattern, but I tried a number of different streamers with minimal success. However, one nondescript white streamer that had a couple of turns of bright red Estaz wrapped around its lead eyes took three fish right off the





# Tying a Red-Faced Wobbler



**1** Wrap a substantial thread base on the hook shank. Make about 18 wraps of lead wire to the front of the thread base; be sure you leave enough room in front of the wire for the hackle face and thread head.

**2** Tie on the marabou tail behind the lead wire; the tail should be slightly longer than the hook. Next, tie several strands of pearl green Lite Brite on the far and near sides of the tail; you may substitute with pearl Flashabou, but it's not so subtle as Lite Brite.

**3** Cut a 10-inch-long piece of Estaz. Wrap the thread to the front of the lead wire and tie the Estaz to the top of the hook. Bind the Estaz along the top of the lead to create a smooth underbody.

**4** Wrap the Estaz forward to form the body of the fly; stroke the fibers back as you work. Tie off and clip the excess Estaz.

**5** Use scissors to taper the sides, top, and bottom of the body. Curved serrated scissors work best for this task.

**6** Strip the fluffy fibers from the base of a saddle hackle. Tie the feather tip to the hook with the cupped side facing the fly.

**7** Make two or three wraps of hackle in front of the body. Tie off and clip any remaining feather.

**8** Wrap a neat thread head and whip-finish. Clip the thread and coat the head with cement.

## Red-Faced Wobbler

**Hook:** 4X-long streamer hooks such as the Tiemco 9395 or Mustad 9674, size 6.

**Thread:** Red 6/0 (140 denier).

**Weight:** .025-inch lead wire.

**Tail:** White marabou and pearl green Lite Brite.

**Body:** Pearl Estaz.

**Hackle:** Red.





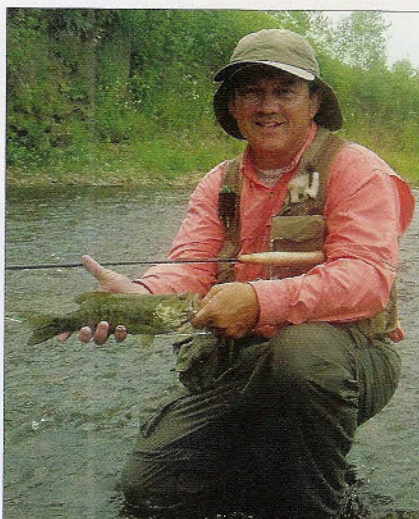
bat. Unfortunately, after the third fish, I made an errant cast that wrapped the fly around a tree branch 20 feet above the water, and it was there to stay.

Throughout the day, our conversation frequently turned to the kind of streamers that might produce under tough fishing conditions, but especially in hot weather. We agreed that the fly should have as much minnow-imitating action as possible, especially a wobbling, darting motion similar to the "lipped" lures that spin fishermen use so successfully. The next morning, on the six-hour drive back to my home, I thought about our discussions concerning the presumed characteristics of an exceptionally productive smallmouth bass streamer. I thought about my brief but productive experience with the red-faced fly that ended up on that tree branch. The challenge, I reasoned, was to use that color scheme on a pattern that was designed to wobble or dart.

## Designing the New Fly

As I pondered the possibilities of a new fly, I recalled that Tim Holshlag, the author of *Smallmouth Fly Fishing*, said that Art Shenk's White Streamer was one of his 20 favorite patterns. The secret of the White Streamer, Holshlag suggested, was the darting action caused by the spun rabbit-fur body that is fatter at the front than at the rear. Harry Murray, another noted smallmouth bass angler, touts a similar fly he calls the Strymph. If those two nationally recognized smallmouth anglers recommended streamers that have darting and wobbling actions, maybe I could come up with a fly with a similar action.

Upon arriving home, I quickly sat down at my tying bench. Borrowing the best features of both flies, I added some touches of my own and hoped that my streamer would be as good as and maybe even better than the others. I clamped a 4X-long streamer hook in the vise, laid down a substantial thread base, and added some lead wire for weight. I then borrowed the marabou



Even a modest-size smallmouth bass puts up a terrific fight. The Red-Faced Wobbler, with its natural movement, catches these feisty fish under the toughest conditions.

tail from Art Shenk's streamer, but replaced the Flashabou with a few strands of Lite Brite. Lite Brite is a product of the Spirit River company. It is a finely shredded Mylar material that's a good substitute for Flashabou in some applications. It's available loose or in .000 hanks, and either works fine.

Applying spun rabbit fur with a dubbing loop is a difficult, messy, and tedious task, so I substituted pearl Estaz for the body and trimmed it to a tapered, wedged shape. Estaz is a great body material that has very long fibers densely woven through the cotton core, and it's easy to trim with serrated scissors. The tapered shape gives the streamer that all-important wobbling action of Shenk's fly. I remembered the red-headed fly I

Uni-Knot, and cast it into my neighbor's swimming pool. It looked even better than I had hoped; it wobbled and darted, the marabou tail undulated, and the Estaz body shimmered. The Red-Faced Wobbler was a success in the swimming pool, but would it be successful on a smallmouth stream?

## Sweet Success!

I immediately returned to my tying bench, cranked out more Wobblers, and mailed them to Mike. A few days later, I received an excited late-night phone call telling me that the Red-Faced Wobbler had saved his bacon that day. On a brief late-afternoon outing on his home river, the Maquokata, Mike caught several nice bass on the little streamer when nothing else worked. The Red-Faced Wobbler had earned its stripes, and since then it has been one of our favorite streamers.

The Red-Faced Wobbler is as easy to fish as it is to tie. I like to fish it in rocky structure using a strip-strip-pause retrieve along with occasional twitches of the rod tip. My favorite smallmouth rig is a 6-weight rod matched with a floating line and a 3X leader. It's a good idea to attach the fly to the tippet with a Duncan loop to improve the streamer's wobbling action. The Uni-Knot, also known as a Duncan loop, allows the fly to move freely, unlike other knots that are tightly cinched against the hook eye. The Red-Faced Wobbler rides

low in the water column and occasionally snags on rocks; when that happens, use a forceful roll cast to free it, and you're on your way.

There is no doubt that patterns such as Art Shenk's White Streamer and Harry Murray's Strymph are outstanding. The Red-Faced Wobbler may not be quite as exceptional, but it's been a consistently great

producer for me and my friends. 🍷

*It's been a few years since Ward Bean appeared in our magazine; we guess he's been busy fishing. Ward lives in Council Bluffs, Iowa.*



left hanging in the tree, and replaced the speckled feather that Harry Murray uses on the front of his Strymph with a bright red hen hackle.

I took the finished streamer from the vise, attached it to a 3X leader with a