

any flies, including some trout patterns, have rubber hackle as part of their dressings; the Girdle Bug and the Bitch Creek are two that come to mind. Rubber hackle really comes into its own when used on warmwater flies, especially surface bugs for bass and bluegills. Used properly, rubber hackle provides the kind of action that bug tiers want in their flies.

The Rubber-Hackle Hair Bug is a great producer that is made with two sizes of Living Rubber hackle for the tail and legs, and stacked deer hair for the skirt and body. You can find Living Rubber (also called Live Rubber) in many fly shops and catalogs; it's the old-style, square-section rubber hackle. If you can't find it, some replacement skirts for spinnerbaits make a good substitute.

The size 10 Tiemco 8089 is my hook of choice. By using the smallest of the standard bass-bug hooks, the finished fly looks like a runt compared to patterns tied on size 2 and 4 hooks. But that works to your advantage. The Rubber-Hackle Hair Bug is a joy to cast, even with a 6-weight rod, and the rubber legs make the fly appear much larger than it really is.

The construction process incorporates some procedures and tools that help eliminate common tying problems. By using a technique that I call "spin stacking," you can create a beautiful mottled effect on the bug's back with a solid color on its belly. Essentially, you spin a clump of belly-color hair (yellow, in the case of the bug in the tying sequence), and then use a fingertip to flatten the spun clump, pushing all the hairs above the shank down and to the sides. After flattening the first clump of hair, you flare a bunch of darker hair on top of the hook, and then a smaller clump of even darker hair on top of that. When the body is trimmed to shape, the belly comes out one solid color, and the back sports alternating bands of color.

With the help of steam, Flexament, and half of a double-edge razor blade, you can sculpt perfect bug bodies every time. Some tools that simplify finishing the bug include a large sewing needle for attaching the legs to the body of the bug, and a hair guard made from a sandwich bag. The latter tool keeps hair out of the way while you tie off the weed guard.

Rubber-Hackle



PHOTO: DAVE KLAUSMEYER

Hair Bugs

These easy-casting, lively poppers not only catch bass, but they'll teach you a few tying tricks, too.

BY WARD BEAN

Why would anyone want to tie this pattern? For openers, it's the fly fisher's answer to a famous topwater plug, the Hula Popper. More important, you will create a great-looking deer-hair lure that's durable, easy to cast, and a consistent producer throughout the season. Throw the Rubber-Hackle Hair Bug into the weeds or lily pads and hang on; if there is a bass in the vicinity, you can bet he's going to bite your fly.

Tying a Rubber-Hackle Hair Frog

The Rubber-Hackle Hair Frog can be tied in a variety of colors. My favorite version calls for a yellow belly with a chartreuse, black, and green back. The tail and legs are a mixture of yellow and chartreuse fine-diameter Living Rubber accentuated with medium-diameter green Living Rubber.

Hook: Tiemco 8089, size 10.

Thread: 6/0 Uni-thread for tying the tail and skirt; Danville's Flat Waxed Nylon for spinning and stacking the deer hair.

Weed guard: Seventeen-pound-test Mason hard nylon monofilament.

Tail: Yellow and chartreuse fine rubber

hackle, and green medium-size rubber hackle.

Skirt (bottom): Yellow deer-hair tips.

Skirt (top): Green, yellow, and chartreuse deer-hair tips.

Body (bottom): Yellow deer hair.

Body (top): Green, black, and chartreuse deer hair.

Legs: Yellow and chartreuse fine rubber hackle, and green medium-diameter rubber hackle.

1 Crimp the hook barb and place the hook in the vise. You'll start tying with the size 6/0 thread. Attach the monofilament weed guard one-third of an inch forward of the hook point. Size the weed guard now, while there are no materials in the way. Insert the free end of the mono through the hook eye, kink it, and flatten the kink with needle-nose pliers. Remove the mono from the hook eye and pull it in back of the hook.

2 Clip eight 6-inch-long strands of yellow and chartreuse rubber hackle. Mix the strands, clip the ends even, and fold them. Grasp the ends and slip the folded material under the hook shank, bringing it back to the tie-down area in front of the thread wraps. Hold the

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Rubber-Hackle Hair Bugs

strands together and pull up slightly while you secure the hackle with several wraps of thread. Repeat these steps with the green rubber hackle. Wrap the thread evenly around all the strands of rubber hackle, tie off with a couple of half-hitches, and coat the wraps with cement.

3 Tie on the Flat Waxed Nylon at the eye of the hook and wrap back to the front of the weed guard using close, tight wraps. Stack and spin a bunch of yellow deer-hair tips; this bunch of hair should be about equal to the diameter of a soda straw. Flatten the spun hair with your fingertip. Without moving the thread, stack smaller bunches of the other colors of deer hair directly on top of the yellow. The tips of hair should extend slightly beyond the bend of the hook. Push the hair skirt back against the tail windings and make several wraps of thread against the base of the skirt.

4 Spin a pencil-size bunch of yellow hair and flatten it with your fingertip. Without moving the thread, stack smaller bunches of the other colors directly on top of the yellow hair. Pack the hair and make several thread wraps tight against the base of the hair. Wrap the thread forward, repeating these steps until the shank is completely covered with hair. Tie off and clip the thread.

5 Remove the bug and trim the bottom flat. Half of a double-edged razor blade works best for trimming. Cut the double-edged blade with sturdy scissors or tin snips to make two blades out of one. (Wear heavy leather gloves to protect your fingers.)

6 Put the bug back in the vise. Cut a 1-inch-square piece of sandwich bag. Poke a hole in the center of the square. Slide the plastic over the hook eye to keep the deer hair out of the way while you secure the weed guard. Start the size 6/0 thread behind the hook eye and wrap back against the plastic. Put the free end of the weed guard through the eye and make a couple of wraps of thread. Adjust the guard and trim the tag end flush with the front of the hook eye. Catch and bind down the tip of the weed guard with several wraps of thread, and make a couple of half-hitches tight against the plastic. Clip the thread, slit the plastic with your scissors, and remove it. Remove the bug from the vise.

7 Use forceps to hold the bug in the steam of a boiling kettle or pot of water. Steam causes the hair to stand at a 90-degree angle to the hook shank, making trimming much easier and more precise. The hair dries in a couple of minutes.

8 While the hair is drying, use your thumb and index finger to push back and flatten the face. Continue forming the face until the hook eye is visible, and then paint the bug's face with a light coat of Flexament. A recycled nail-polish bottle and brush work great for this procedure. Allow the Flexament to dry; a blow-dryer speeds up this step.

9 Use curved scissors to clip the face straight on the left and right sides and round on the top. The trimmed face should be about 3/4 of an inch across and have a rounded top.

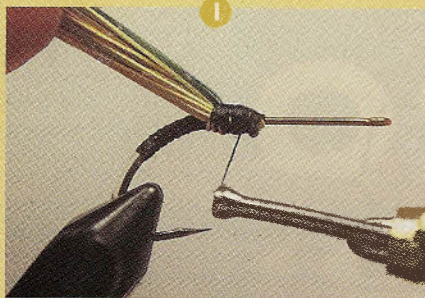
10 Hold the razor blade perpendicular to the hook and use the face as a guide to trim the sides of the body back to the skirt. When this task is complete, the sides and bottom of the body should be flat.

11 Bend the blade between your thumb and forefinger. Use the bent blade to trim the top and round the edges of the body. Use this technique to trim and shape the hair so that the body tapers toward the skirt on the top and sides. Work slowly: you can't put the hair back after it's removed.

12 Liberally paint both sides of the body above the hook shank with thinned Flexament, and allow the cement to dry. I attach the legs with a large sewing needle. Insert the needle through the bug's body. Thread the tips of the rubber hackle through the eye of the needle and pull them through the body. Place a drop of Flexament in the hair at the base of each set of legs. Trim the legs and tail to length, and the fly is finished.

The Rubber-Hackle Hair Bug may not be for beginners, but a tier with a moderate amount of experience can get the hang of making these attractive, productive flies. Experiment with different color combinations to create your own patterns.

Ward Bean casts his Rubber-Hackle Hair Bugs on the ponds and lakes of his home state of Iowa.



Tie on the weed guard using 6/0 thread. Fold the rubber hackle around the hook and tie it in place to make the tail. Tie off the thread and add a drop of cement.



Spin a bunch of yellow deer-hair tips at the base of the tail. Press down the hairs that are on top of the hook.

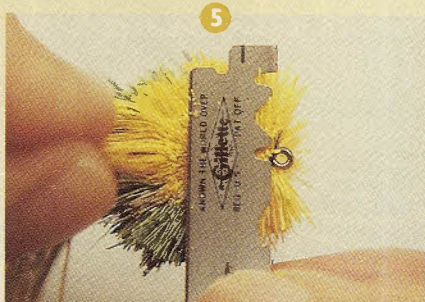


Tie a bunch of chartreuse hair on top of the shank. Add a smaller clump of green hair, and then a still smaller bunch of black. Pull the hair rearward and advance the thread.

PHOTOS: WARD BEAN



Continue spinning and stacking deer hair up the entire shank. Whip-finish and clip the thread.



Remove the fly from the vise and trim the bottom flat using half of a double-edged razor blade.



Return the fly to the vise. Cut a 1-inch square from a sandwich bag. Poke a hole in the center and place the plastic over the hook eye. Use the square of plastic to hold the hair out of the way while you tie off the weed guard.



Hold the fly over a kettle of boiling water. The hairs will stand at a right angle to the hook shank and be easier to trim. While the fly is drying, return it to the vise and use your thumb and index finger to smooth and flatten the face.



Paint the face with a light coat of Flexament. The cement firms the hair, making the job of cutting the face much easier. A blow-dryer speeds the drying process.



Trim the face profile straight on the left and right sides and round on the top. Curved and serrated scissors work best for this task.



Trim the sides of the bug, and then trim the top by bending the razor blade as shown. Smooth and shape the hair so that the top and sides of the body taper toward the skirt.



Apply a liberal coat of thinned Flexament on the sides of the body just above the hook shank. Allow the cement to dry. Thread the rubber-hackle legs through the eye of a large sewing needle. Sew the legs through the body.



Place a drop of Flexament at the base of each set of legs to ensure that they stay put, and trim the legs and tail to length. This Rubber-Hackle Frog will be easy to cast because the body is small and the rubber hackle absorbs no water.