



Tying Reversed Bucktails

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Objectives

Participating young people and adults will:

1. Practice reading and using fly patterns
2. Practice using fundamental fly tying techniques
3. Practice tying reversed bucktails using a variety of materials
4. Critique results to improve tying skills
5. Have fun while learning

Youth Development Objectives

Participating young people will:

1. Enhance hand-eye coordination
2. Practice and improve fine motor skills
3. Enhance concentration and planning skills
4. Expand patience in working toward improved skills
5. Practice goal setting and working toward goals
6. Enhance self-image and self-confidence

Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders

1. Demonstrate and explain tying procedures
2. Assist participants as needed
3. Positively evaluate flies and make suggestions for improvement on later efforts
4. Encourage young tiers as they are learning

Potential Parental Involvement

1. See "Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders" above.
2. Arrange for or provide teaching location
3. Arrange for or provide tying materials and/or equipment

Best Time: Any time, but after basic bucktail techniques are learned

Best Location: Well lighted, comfortable area

Time Required: approximately 60 minutes

Equipment/Materials

tying vice	hackle pliers
tying bobbin	bobbin threader
dubbing needle	tying thread (red, black)
head cement	4x long streamer hooks
4xl ringed eye hooks	flat silver tinsel (mylar)
flat gold tinsel (mylar)	white or cream floss
cree or variant hackle	natural bucktail
green bucktail	olive marabou
yellow marabou	yellow lacquer
black lacquer	toothpicks

Safety Considerations

No special considerations

References

See references in introduction

Evaluation Activities/Suggestions

1. Observe and critique basic tying skills
2. Observe and critique specialized techniques for reversed bucktails
3. Observe and promote participant satisfaction with their efforts
4. Observe personal interactions among tiers

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4. Arrange for or provide transportation
5. Arrange for or provide refreshments.
6. Discuss personal experience in fishing these patterns.

Lesson Outline

Presentation

- I. Reversed bucktails
 - A. Origin with "Thunder Creek" series
 1. Keith Fulsher, originator
 2. Attempt at "exact" imitation
 - a. Slim minnow shape
 - b. Minnow-like head
 - 1) Lacquered hair or marabou heads
 - 2) Lacquer eyes
 - B. Fishing advantages
 1. Sink readily
 2. Excellent imitator patterns
 3. Fly fishers answer to the jig
- II. Tying a Thunder Creek Silver Shiner
 - A. Pattern
 1. Hook: # 8 4 x long streamer
 - a. Ringed eye hook preferred
 - b. 4x long adequate
 2. Thread: 6/0 red
 3. Body: silver mylar tinsel, double wound
 4. Bottom wing: white bucktail
 5. Top wing: pale brown natural bucktail
 6. Collar: red tying thread
 7. Head: lacquered bucktail, several coats
 8. Eyes: yellow lacquer, black lacquer pupil
 9. Overcoat: clear lacquer or epoxy
 - B. Tying procedure
 1. Apply a double wound tinsel body
 - a. Leave extra shoulder length
 - b. Approximately 1/2 inch for this size
 2. Tie in the upper wing
 - a. Leave extra length for the head
 - b. Bind natural brown bucktail down
 - 1) Natural ends extending over eye
 - 2) Long enough to reach beyond tail
 - 3) Permit hair to roll slightly
 - a) Cover top and sides of head
 - b) Bind down securely
 3. Turn hook over in vise
 4. Tie in the lower wing
 - a. Similar process to upper wing
 - b. Keep colors separate
 - c. Fill in remainder of head area
 5. Fold belly wing back
 - a. Tie down at gill area
 - b. Make sure coverage adequate

Application

In the early 1960's New York banker, Keith Fulsher, developed the Thunder Creek series of bucktail patterns in an effort to dress imitations that closely mimicked forage fishes. **NOTE** that the patterns have a silhouette that closely represents minnows.

DISCUSS the advantages of these patterns.

PASS out the materials for the pattern as the pattern is being discussed. Have each participant clamp a hook in a vise and load a bobbin with scarlet tying thread. **USE** ringed eye hooks if they are available. Size 8 4x long hooks are a good compromise between utility and ease of tying.

DEMONSTRATE the process of tying the tinsel body and preparing to attach the upper wing.

STRESS the use of fine hair from the tip of the tail to produce a better fly. **EMPHASIZE** the need to leave a bit of extra space at the head. **DEMONSTRATE** measuring and tying in the upper wing. **STRESS** using enough material to cover the sides and top of the head when the hair is reversed. Have participants repeat the process if necessary to get a head they can manage.

NOTE that turning the hook in the vise makes it easier to tie in the belly or lower wing materials.

OBSERVE the participants as they tie the lower wing in place, stressing the importance of keeping the materials separate.

While the hook is upside down in the vice, **DEMONSTRATE** folding the hair of the lower wing to cover the throat and form the lower body, pulling it back firmly and surrounding the throat

- 1) Lower sides of head
 - 2) Throat and chin area
6. Fold back upper wing
 - a. Tie down at gill area
 - b. Cover remainder of head
 - 1) Both sides of head
 - 2) Top of head
 - 3) Tie off at gill area
7. Whip finish gill tie-down
 - a. Trim end of tying thread.
 - b. Seal with a drop of head cement
8. Finishing the head
 - a. Saturate the head with fixative
 - b. Three to five coats of head cement
 - c. One or two layers of clear epoxy
9. Apply an eye to each side of the head
 - a. White, yellow or red lacquer iris
 - 1) Toothpick or paint pen
 - 2) Experiment for effectiveness
 - b. Black or red and black pupil
 - c. Allow to dry completely
 - d. Cover with head cement or epoxy

III. Tying a reversed olive marabou

A. Pattern

1. Hook: #12-6 4x long ringed eye
2. Thread: scarlet 6/0
3. Body: Silver mylar tinsel
4. Top wing: medium olive marabou
5. Bottom wing: yellow marabou
6. Collar: scarlet tying thread
7. Head: lacquer or epoxy over head
8. Eyes: yellow, black pupil, epoxy over

B. Tying instructions

1. Attach and wind a silver tinsel body
 - a. Leave extra length at the shoulder
 - b. Tie off with several turns of thread
2. Tie in yellow marabou for the belly
 - a. Turn hook upside down in the vice
 - b. Bind down marabou at the throat
 - c. Trim butt of marabou cleanly
 - d. Wind thread to back of eye
3. Tie in olive marabou, back and sides
 - a. Must cover sides and top of head
 - b. Wind back to tie down area and trim
4. Reverse the olive marabou and tie down
 - a. Cover top and sides of head
 - b. Tie down at gill area
5. Reverse yellow marabou and tie down
 - a. Cover bottom of throat and belly
 - b. Tie down in gill area
6. Wind, whip finish red band at gill area

and lower sides of the head. **TIE** the hair down with several turns of red thread at the back of the head. **NOTE** that the thread simulates the flash of gills. **REPEAT** the procedure with the upper wing, allowing it to form the sides and top of the head. **EMPHASIZE** that the tie down area should be neat and compact.

DEMONSTRATE applying a whip finish to the gill area.

Using flies in various stages of completion, **DEMONSTRATE**, coating the head with either head cement or epoxy, applying painted eyes, and sealing the head to prevent damaging the eyes.

PASS out the materials for the fly while **DISCUSSING** their use in this pattern.

DEMONSTRATE attaching and winding the body while discussing the process.

DEMONSTRATE measuring and attaching the yellow marabou belly. **STRESS** the importance of developing a smooth and slightly raised head area that will be covered by the winging materials when they are folded back. **NOTE** that the wing material should be spread over the head base to allow for about a to 2 coverage of the head when the belly material is pulled back into place.

TURN the hook right side up in the vice and **REPEAT** the demonstration with the olive marabou back material. **NOTE** that the back and sides of the streamer must be covered by this material, so it must be distributed evenly around the sides and top of the head area.

DEMONSTRATE pulling the back and side materials backward and tying them in place at the "gill" area on the fly. **TRY** to slick back any loose fibers to eliminate as much fuzziness as possible from the head. **DEMONSTRATE** making any required adjustments before completing the tie down.

Once all the materials have been distributed evenly, **DEMONSTRATE** tying a thin "gill" at the base of the head.

7. Apply head cement to gill and head area
 - a. Saturate the fibers thoroughly
 - b. Smooth fibers back to form head
 - c. Allow several coats to dry
8. Paint large eyes on the sides of the head
 - a. Yellow iris
 - b. Black or red pupil
 - c. Allow to dry thoroughly
9. Coat entire head with head cement

Use several nearly completed flies to **DEMONSTRATE** the processes required in forming the hard, shiny head and pronounced eyes of the flies. **STRESS** the importance of allowing each coat of head cement to dry thoroughly before applying the next layer. **NOTE** that 3 to 5 coats of cement may be required before the head is properly completed. **USE** a toothpick, nail or large dubbing needle to apply enamel eyespots on the sides of the head. For this pattern, my experience is that a yellow and black or yellow, red and black eye is most effective. **COMPLETE** the fly by applying a final layer of head cement over the entire head. **NOTE** that this protects the eyes from abrasion and wear and makes them more shiny and prominent.

SHARE some of the remaining patterns commonly tied in this series, noting that Bate's book (see *References*) lists them.

IV. Additional patterns

- A. "Thunder Creek" patterns
 1. Bates, *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing*
 2. Other pattern sources
- B. Adaptations of other patterns
 1. Black-nosed dace
 - a. White belly
 - b. Brown back
 - c. Black stripes
 2. Emerald shiner
 - a. White belly
 - b. Green back
 - c. White iris, red dot, black pupil
 3. Golden shiner
 - a. Yellow or amber belly
 - b. Green back
 - c. Yellow iris, black eye
 4. Steel-color shiner
 - a. Pale blue back
 - b. White belly
 - c. Silver body
 - d. White iris with red and black eye
 5. Smelt
 - a. Belly - white
 - b. Back - green over blue
 - c. Eye: white iris and black pupil
 6. Menhaden
 - a. White belly
 - b. Silver tinsel marabou
 - c. Yellow upper flank
 - d. Pale blue back
 - e. Large silver prismatic eye
- C. Personal designs
 1. Local forage fish
 2. Colors that work well

DISCUSS some of the modification of these patterns that can be used to simulate other types of baitfishes.

NOTE that this approach is also useful for many saltwater fishes.

ENCOURAGE young people to try designs of their own and to **TEST** them in their local waters.

Summary Activity

Review the flies tied by the participants being positively critical of their technique and proportion. Be sure that all criticism is lodged in a sandwich of support and praise for elements that have been done well, and remember that fish are generally much less discriminating than are fly tying critics. If time and energies

permit, discuss strategies for fishing these patterns and/or personal experiences with them. The ideal capstone is to get the kids on a local body of water and let them fish with the flies they tied.

Lesson Narrative

Origins

The origins of reverse-tied bucktails are lost in antiquity. Some early flies have been found that demonstrate the technique, even adding eyes of bone or ivory to the pattern. While relatively crude, the flies doubtless caught the fish for which they were intended. The modern technique seems to have been developed or expanded greatly by a New York banker and fly fisher, Keith Fulsher, whose Thunder Creek patterns of "exact" minnow imitations were developed in the 1960s. A reverse-tied bucktail presents a slim, minnow-like appearance that can be extremely effective in catching fish. In addition, the head, saturated with head cement and denser than the rest of the body, tends to act somewhat like a jig head,, although the sink rate is much lower than that of lead eyed or lead headed flies. The lacquered hair or marabou heads are complimented by lacquer eyes, which add significantly to the effectiveness of the flies.

These patterns are tied in reversed fashion. That is, the wing material is tied on at the head or throat end of the fly before being pulled back and tied down at the gill area to form a smooth head. Slightly tricky at first, the technique becomes much easier with practice. If a weighted version is desired, the tier could combine the brass or lead eyes used in Clouser-type bucktails with the reversed tying style. Simply tie in the eyes before the remainder of the fly is tied and allow less material for forming the underbody for the head. As with the Clouser patterns, these deep versions should be tied with the hooks reversed or pointing upward to reduce the number of snags encountered.

Tying a Thunder Creek Silver Shiner

The Thunder Creek Silver Shiner is tied with natural brown and white bucktail and a silver tinsel body. A size 8 streamer hook (4X to 6X long) with a ringed eye is preferred for this pattern, but down eye hooks can be used effectively. For sucker imitations, the down eye hook helps to create a sucker-like profile. If desired, you may use black or brown tying thread until you are ready to tie down the head at the gill area, but most tiers avoid the bother of switching threads by using red tying thread throughout. Head cement and both yellow and black lacquer complete the required materials. The pattern follows.

Hook: #12-6 4x long, ringed eye
Thread: scarlet or red 6/0
Body: flat silver tinsel
Bottom wing: white bucktail
Top wing: fine brown bucktail
Collar: scarlet tying thread band, lacquered
Head: wing materials smoothed back and lacquered
Eyes: yellow lacquer iris, black lacquer pupil, epoxy over all

Start by placing the hook in the vise and attaching the thread near the shoulder area. Leave a little extra room at the shoulder to allow for the longer head. Apply a double wound tinsel body, leaving about ¼ inch of hook shank from the body to the back of the eye. Clip a small amount of natural bucktail and even the natural tips of the hairs slightly. Carefully measure the length that is required to fold the hair back over the body from the front of the head, and leave slightly more material. Holding the materials in place with the natural tips out over the eye of the hook, bind the hair in place. Keeping the materials on the top and sides of the hook, bind the material tightly in place to the eye of the hook. Trim the butt ends of the hair at an angle to allow for a smooth tie-down area. Rotate the hook in the vise so the belly area is upward, and repeat the process with the white belly materials. The belly materials should be slightly more sparse than the back materials. This permits the fly to ride upright naturally, and it presents a very effective image of a brown-backed baitfish.

Once the materials have been tied down, carry the thread back to the gill area. Pull the white belly hair back and bind it in place at the gill area, arranging the head materials so they cover about a of the head along the bottom and lower sides. Then rotate the hook so it is upright, and repeat the process with the

brown back and side materials. Wrap several turns of red thread around the gill area to form a thin, red band, and whip finish the thread in this location.

Next, saturate the head and gill tie-down with head cement. Set the fly aside to dry completely. Repeat this saturation and drying process several times (usually 3-5 repetitions is required) until the head is hard and smooth. Once this is achieved, use a toothpick, small nail or large dubbing needle to place a dot of yellow lacquer on each side of the head. When it is dry, add a tiny drop of black lacquer to form the pupil. Let the eyes dry completely before give the head a final coat or two of head cement to protect the eyes from wear and to make them appear more life-like. Epoxy over the head makes it tough and durable.

Tying a Reversed Olive Marabou

The reversed olive marabou requires silver mylar tinsel, medium olive marabou, yellow marabou, red tying thread, head cement or clear epoxy, yellow enamel and black enamel. A 4x to 6x long streamer hook in size 8 is an excellent compromise between tying ease and fish catching ability for most species. Larger or smaller hooks can be used, even for large fishes. Simply adjust the size to the size of the baitfish being suggested. While having the hook bend about 1/2 of the length of the wing is most common, having the wings about the length of the hook is often most effective as a fish catcher. The pattern follows.

Hook: #12-6 4x long ringed eye streamer
Thread: scarlet 6/0
Body: silver mylar tinsel
Bottom wing: yellow marabou
Top wing: medium olive marabou
Collar: tying thread, lacquered
Head: wing materials lacquered until smooth and hard
Eyes: yellow lacquer iris, black lacquer pupil, epoxy overcoat

Start tying the streamer by applying a double wound silver tinsel body. Mylar tinsel is preferred, since it tends not to tarnish. As with the other reversed bucktails, be sure to leave some extra material at the shoulder area - about 1/4 inch for a size 8 streamer. Reverse the hook in the vise. Select a small clump of yellow marabou, using slightly more material than you would use in preparing a bucktail. Measure the marabou carefully so it will have the proper length when folded back into position. Once that is accomplished, turn the hook so the shank is upward. Measure and attach the olive marabou for the back and sides of the streamer. Wind the tying thread back to the gill area. Pull the olive marabou back and secure it in place. Check the distribution of the material around the side and top of the hook before winding several tight turns of thread to hold it in place. Next, reverse the hook in the vice, pull the marabou back to form the belly and lower sides of the fly, securing it in place with several turns of tying thread. Whip finish the thread, forming a gill area. Trim the end of the thread and saturate the head and gill area with head cement or clear epoxy, making the head and throat as smooth as possible. Once the cement has dried completely, saturate it with another layer, continuing until a smooth, shiny head is built up. Add enamel eyes, either white with red and black pupils or yellow with a black pupil. After the eyes have dried completely, coat them with one more layer of head cement or epoxy.

Additional Patterns

Many addition patterns can be tied in this fashion. All of the Thunder Creek patterns are listed by Joseph Bates in *Steamer Fly Tying and Fishing* and numerous other sources can be found for fly patterns on this design. You may adapt other patterns to this design. For example, the Black-nosed Dace could be reverse-tied by simply adding a few strands of black hair at the sides, centering the head, to the basic silver shiner design. It gives the brown over black over white pattern of the natural baitfish, and the slender, compact silhouette. Emerald shiners or "buck-eye minnows" can be tied with a green back and white belly. In making the eye, paint a white iris with a red dot somewhat off-center and a centered black pupil. In some waters the tiny rim of red seems to be important. Golden shiners can be made by combining a green or olive back with an off white or yellow belly. Blue, white and silver is another excellent combination, and smelt or similar fishes can be mimicked by adding a touch of green to a pale blue and white side with silver tinsel marabou to add some flash. Even saltwater anglers can use the techniques to imitate ghost minnows, spearing, sand eels, eels, or menhaden. For the latter, a pattern with a white belly, silver tinsel marabou

flanks, yellow upper flanks and a pale blue back with a large prismatic eye can be very productive if tied in an appropriate size for the forage being taken.

Use your powers of observation and your experience as an angler to determine local baitfish species that could be simulated with patterns of this type or combinations of colors that might work well on the fish. Very few fishes are orange on the belly and bright red on the back, but many fish are caught on that combination every year. Perhaps a slim, reverse-tied bucktail in those colors would be productive for you. Experiment to see what works on your waters and on the fish close to home. The reverse olive marabou came about in that fashion. It was designed for the Atlantic salmon in New York's Finger Lakes Region, but it has proven effective for many species all over the country.

Exhibit or Sharing Suggestions

1. Prepare a poster, models or photographs to show the steps in tying reversed bucktails or streamers.
2. Study fly-fishing books or magazines to see what other types of reversed bucktail patterns you might try to tie to catch fish in your area. Share the results of your studies with your group or other interested persons.
3. Prepare a method demonstration on tying a reversed bucktail or streamer and present that demonstration in an appropriate setting.
4. Prepare a photographic story of tying a reversed bucktail of your choice from the beginning of the tying process to using the pattern in fishing.
5. Record your experiences with tying and using flies in a tying and fishing journal. Share that journal with others in an appropriate setting.
6. Make a series of flies and fly pattern cards that can be exhibited at a fair or similar gathering.
7. Try variations of reversed bucktails patterned after baitfishes in your area. Test your pattern to see if it is effective in taking the target species of fish. Record your experiments and experimental patterns in a journal and share your findings with others in your group.

Community Service and "Giving Back" Activities

1. Consider ways of helping other young people learn how to tie flies, setting up tying clinics or instructional programs for interested people.
2. Tie a set of flies that can be used as auction items or door prizes in community events or fund raisers.
3. Donate flies to a local fishing program.
4. Participate in a National Hunting and Fishing Day celebration, demonstrating and teaching fly tying to interested persons. Consider giving away flies to young people who show an interest (protect the hooks), and invite them to participate with your club.

Extensions or Ways of Learning More

1. Observe fish and the forage fishes they eat in your local waters. Using what you know about tying flies, try to develop a pattern that imitates or suggests those forage fishes. Research existing bucktail or streamer patterns to see if someone has developed a fly that does what you want. Modify existing patterns or create your own pattern in an attempt to catch the fish you are seeking.
2. Collect forage fish from the stomachs of fish you keep for the table. Observe which species and what sizes are taken at various times of the year. Consider what the variations in species and size might mean to the angler or fly tier.

3. Observe fish actively feeding on forage fish in a local stream, pond or lake. By careful study, see what they are eating and how they feed. Consider how your approach to fishing for those species might be modified to make your angling sessions more successful.

Links to Other Programs

The link to the rest of the sportfishing program is obvious. Fly tying is a natural link to fly fishing as well as to crafting other types of tackle. Rod building can be a means of having an excellent fly rod at a lower cost. The feathers, furs and other materials needed by a fly tier can lead to interests in hunting, trapping, waterfowl, poultry science or other seemingly unrelated fields. Understanding aquatic ecology as well as keen observation skills are important to success in both tying and fishing flies. This can provide entry into the sciences, either as a future vocation or as an avocational activity. Fishing flies can lead to an interest in several fields of engineering. Tying flies can be a great introduction to economics and marketing for young entrepreneurs. Finally, the hobby of tying flies is both craft and art. It can lead into many other areas of activity from writing and photography to science.