

Valley Angler

Flies For Early Season Trout

by Bill Thompson

It's official; this Saturday marks the long awaited opening day for trout ponds. It would seem that "Mother Nature" has cooperated with us and the ice has gone out in most of the local ponds. Considering the recent spell of warm weather I am predicting the best opening day that we have had in several years.

For past few days the excitement has been building and the talk at the shop has been centered on the prospects for the new season. Eventually the conversation comes around to the best flies for the early season. On the whole anglers are some of the most opinionated human beings that are put upon the earth. Needless to say everyone has their own secret killer fly; however there are a few old standbys that seem to work just fine year after year.

With a few exceptions it is rare to find a full blown hatch in our neck of the woods in the early season. It is not uncommon to find early midge hatches and generally with in a few days of opening day black flies will start to make their appearance. The trout, of course, will take advantage of these early pests and rise to them. In the absence of any real hatching caddis or mayflies the wise angler will think subsurface flies. My all time favorites are soft hackle flies.

Soft hackles come in hundreds of variations, but the typical soft hackle consists of a body of dubbed fur or floss with a collar of partridge or other suitable webby feather. These flies have a long tradition with fly-fishermen and go back hundreds of years. One of the more well known patterns is the Partridge and Orange which has its roots in Britain and is mentioned by Dame Juliana Berner in The Book of Saint Albains published sometime around 1425.

Soft hackle flies are also refereed to as wingless wet flies, North Country flies, soft hackle nymphs and flymphs. Over the several hundred years or so that they have been around they have continually gone out of style only to be rediscovered by the next generation of anglers. Numerous famous fly-fishermen have made their reputations by rediscovering them and publishing their own books with only slight variation of what was already known. None of this would be true if these flies were not deadly. I carry a box of these flies with me all the time and like most fly tiers have tried to add my own twist to the fly, but in all honesty I have probably added nothing that has not already been tried.

Like those anglers' of old I still carry a few Partridge and Orange as well as a couple of Partridge and Yellow and a few Partridge and Peacock. Last year I discovered how deadly the Starling could be. Remember I said that black flies would soon start making their appearance; the Starling is a perfect imitation of the emerging or still born black fly. I also tie a few Hare's Ear versions and pheasant tail makes a good body also.

Tie the fly on a nymph hook with a tail and you have what some refer to as a flymph. The hare's Ear version is no doubt the most common version. One popular version is a tail of wood duck divided, a gold rib, hare's ear dubbing for the abdomen, a turkey quill wing case, soft partridge hackle palmered through the thorax also made from hare's ear dubbing. The fly may be weighed to make it sink a little faster.

In recent years a bead has been added for extra weight. The bead is usually placed behind the hackle. It has become common practice to fish a bead head version with a non-weighted fly of the same pattern tied on behind. There is nothing new about fishing wet flies in tandem, however the weighted fly can make this method even more effective.

The usual theory as to why soft hackles are so effective is that they give the appearance of a struggling insect trying to emerge from its nymphal shuck. This is probably as good a theory as any. What ever the reason soft hackle flies work and they work especially well in the early season.

See you on the river.