

Purple Peril

Sunriver Angler's Fly Tying Corner

By: Phil Fischer



This morning was a cool, crisp 30 degrees in Sunriver, with the distinct feel of fall in the air. I think fall is my favorite time of the year, as the days get shorter and the fishing gets better. After a short walk with our golden retriever, I came back into the house to a nice hot cup of coffee and sat down at my computer to see what was happening in the world. The first site I checked was the steelhead counts over Sherars Falls on the Deschutes River. I've been hearing reports of steelhead being caught near the mouth of the Deschutes for a few weeks now. Each year there is a significant and predictable rise in the count from early September through mid-October at Sherars Falls. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife page listing fish counts confirmed for me that fish are moving up through the Deschutes system. It won't be long now before I rig up the eight weight and take that drive north on Highway 97 in the wee hours of the morning!

For this month's Sunriver Angler Fly of the Month, I chose a variation on a classic steelhead fly, the Purple Peril. This fly dates back to the 1930's and is originally attributed to Ken McLeod from Washington. The pattern has been around for a long time and has withstood the discerning test from many steelhead fishermen, and many steelhead. But I chose this pattern for a different reason. It holds a special place in my heart as the fly that caught my very first steelhead on the swing. She was a beautiful hen of about 8 pounds and took the fly with a sharp pull that made me understand "the tug is the drug" mantra of hardcore steelhead fishermen. I had caught lots of steelhead fishing nymphs under an indicator, but had never managed to catch the fish of a thousand casts on the swing. On one of my trips to the Deschutes a few years ago, a good friend gave me a piece of advice. He told me, "Phil, if you're not fishing purple on the Deschutes, you're not fishing." So with that guidance, I rigged my rod with the only purple steelhead fly in my box, the Purple Peril. On one of my favorite runs on the Deschutes below Warm Springs, I cast repeatedly, and took a step downstream at the conclusion of each swing of the fly. Right about the sweet spot of the run, after my umpteenth cast, I suddenly felt that tug. I released the fish and immediately clipped the Purple Peril fly off my leader, to be placed in my Fly Hall of Fame, accompanying other memorable patterns from days spent on the water fly fishing.

If you haven't checked and rechecked your steelhead gear for the run this fall, now is the time!

Pattern Recipe:

Hook: Tiemco 7899 Size 4-8

Thread: Danville's Red 3/0 Flat Waxed

Tail: Purple Hackle Fibers

Body: Medium Purple Chenille

Ribbing: Medium Silver Oval Tinsel

Hackle: Whiting Purple Spey Hackle

Throat: Light Purple Krystal Flash

Wing: Red Squirrel Tail

Tying Instructions:

1. Tie on the thread at the mid-point of the hook. Strip a sparse bunch of fibers off a hackle feather for the tail. The feathers near the throat of the neck generally have the longest barbs and offer stiff characteristics for the tail. Tie in the fibers to extend beyond the bend of the hook. I like to wind several wraps of thread underneath the tail to tilt it upward to match the cant of the wing.
2. Strip a short section of the chenille to expose the center threads and tie on the hook back to the tail set position. Stripping the fibers out of the chenille helps avoid bulk on the fly. Similarly, strip the oval tinsel to expose the core and tie in back to the tail set. Wind the chenille forward in tight wraps to the wing set position and tie off. Wind even wraps of tinsel forward over the chenille to form the ribbing on the fly. Tie off and trim excess.
3. Clip about 4-5 Krystal Flash fibers for the throat. Fold the fibers over the tying thread, effectively doubling them over the thread, and gently slide them up the thread to the underside

of the hook and tie in place to form the throat of the fly. Trim to the approximate length of the hook.

4. Prepare the hackle by stripping the fluff off the base of the feather. I like to choose a feather with a slight amount of web and barbs that will extend approximately the length of the wing. The Whiting Spey hackle barbs are longer and are wavy in the water in a way that make this fly so enticing. Tie the hackle stem wet fly style (Shiny side forward and dull side back) on the hook at the front of the chenille and wind forward with 3-4 wraps. Tie off and clip the excess. Gently stroke the hackle fibers apart on top of the fly to leave room for the wing. As you split the fibers, pull down and back, and wind a few wraps of thread over the hackle. The finished hackle should splay backwards on the hook and have an empty wedge where the wing will lay.
5. Prepare a sparse bunch of Red Squirrel tail fibers for the wing. Clean the hair carefully to eliminate short fibers and any guard hair. Place in a hair stacker tool to even up the tips. Remove from the hair stacker and tie in at the wing-set position on the hook, with the tips extending to the curve of the hook. Wind over the hair with a number of wraps to hold the material firmly in place. Clip the excess hair at a 45 degree angle and wind additional wraps to fully cover the butts of the hair and form a nice neat tapered head. Whip finish and glue using a clear nail polish to fully coat the head of this fly and give it a finished appearance.