

Sunriver Angler's Fly Tying Corner

By: Phil Fischer



The Sunriver Anglers held a recent trip to the Crooked River with a group of our newer to fly fishing folks, and expert fly guide, John Olschewsky from the Hook Fly Shop. We arrived at the Crooked River mid-morning, long before the sun peaked briefly over the canyon walls. It was a chilly morning, and multiple layers of clothing and hot coffee was the order of the day. Despite to temperature, the enthusiasm to get out fly fishing was contagious.

I spent some time with a good friend, Jim Nelson, who told me that this was his first ever fly fishing trip. We started a bit upstream of the parking lot and began by learning short casts to the seams in the river, followed by learning to mend the line. I tied on a small Sawyer Pheasant Tail nymph under a strike indicator. The Sawyer is a fly I had learned to tie and fish many years ago in Montana. I has been a staple in my fly box for years. I tie it in several colors to match the size and color of whatever mayfly happens to be hatching that day. We expected Blue Wing Olives to hatch later, when the sun warmed things up a bit. So the Sawyer Pheasant Tail we used was a smaller size 18, and was tied a bit darker to imitate the Blue Wing Olive nymph.

Jim worked down the run with increasing confidence as his newfound casting abilities got better and better. The first few times the indicator stopped, Jim was just a little late on the trigger. Whether bottom or a rainbow trout, we couldn't be sure, as the indicator resumed its float downstream each time before Jim set the hook. Immediately I began coaching Jim to strike quickly, and I told him that these were indeed rainbow trout, and certainly some of the largest fish

in the river. It never hurts to exaggerate a bit when one can't be held accountable. Learning the subtle art of exaggeration is a critical part of learning to be a fly fisherman and I could tell quickly that Jim was going to pick this artform quickly!

Soon after, Jim started fishing downstream under the watchful eye of John. He was casting across a slower section of river, and the indicator drifted very methodically downstream. At one point it disappeared and this time Jim was on it. The epic battle lasted for a couple minutes, and finally John slid the net under Jim's first trout on a fly. But not just any fly, a Sawyer Pheasant Tail. It was a pretty exciting moment and made an otherwise tough day a success.



John Olschewsky with Jim and his first fly caught trout

The Sawyer Pheasant Tail Nymph was designed by Frank Sawyer many years ago for use on English Chalk Streams. It is a pattern that is pretty easy and very quick to tie. But the beauty of the pattern is that it is an excellent imitation for many different mayflies, and it sinks quickly to get down into the trout's feeding zone. It is tied with only two materials; copper wire and barbs from a ringneck pheasant's tail. I have used this pattern extensively in many waters, including those in Central Oregon. It is a go to fly when anticipating mayfly hatches. I especially like it for Blue Wing Olives and for Pale Morning Dun's. Give it a try!

Pattern Recipe:

Hook: Tiemco 3769, or Daiichi 1560 in sizes 14-18 to match the size of the natural mayfly. For a Blue Wing Olive, use a 16-18

Thread: Fine Copper wire in colors to match the natural. For a Blue Wing Olive, I like a darker color wire like bronze.

Abdomen and Thorax: 5-7 Pheasant tail fibers

Tying Instructions:

1. Cut an 18 inch piece of fine copper wire in your preferred color. Wind the wire onto the hook at the middle of the shank, leaving a 6-8 inch tag end hanging off the back of the fly. Wind the wire forward in consecutive wraps to the head, leaving space to tie off when the fly is complete.
2. Continue winding the wire in consecutive wraps, but reversing direction and over the first wraps and towards the rear of the hook all the way back to the tail set position. The thorax should now have two layers of wire, and the abdomen one layer.
3. Clip 5-7 barbs off the pheasant tail. Tie in the tail at the tail set position with one wrap immediately behind the prior wrap of wire and over the barbs, and one wrap in front of the tag end of the butts of the pheasant barbs. It is important to pinch the fibers between these two wraps of wire tightly so that the material doesn't pull out easily when wrapping the abdomen of the fly. The tail should be about 1 ¼ times the gape of the hook.
4. Continue winding the wire forward through the abdomen with several spaced wraps. Then wind consecutive wraps over the thorax to establish a third layer of wire on the thorax. Leave the remaining wire hanging at the head of the fly. It is needed in the next step.
5. Wind the butts of the pheasant tail forward over the wire body and up to the head. Tie off with one wrap of wire. Half hitch this piece of wire at the head and clip the excess wire. Leave the pheasant tail butts.
6. Take the tag end of wire we left hanging off the tail of the fly in step one, and rib forward to the rear of the thorax. Fold the remaining butts from the pheasant tail back to the rear of the thorax and tie off with this wire. Continue wrapping the wire to the head. Fold the pheasant tail butts once again forward to the head and tie off with the remaining tag of wire. Half hitch or whip finish the wire and trim the excess. Place a touch of glue on the head.

If you have questions or would like additional information about this pattern, please don't hesitate to email me. Or if you have suggestions on future patterns to feature in this column, I welcome your input. I can be reached at Philfischer@sbcglobal.net.