



## Tying Bucktails

Ronald A. Howard Jr.<sup>1</sup>

### Objectives

Participating young people and adults will:

1. Practice attaching tying thread to hook in proper location
2. Practice following tying patterns
3. Practice attaching bucktail body materials
4. Practice attaching tails and hackles where required
5. Practice attaching hair wings
6. Have fun while learning

### Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders

1. Demonstrate tying the flies while explaining each step
2. Assist participants having problems tying bucktails
3. Evaluate flies and suggest ways to improve later efforts
4. Encourage young people as they learn tying skills

### 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
4. Arrange for or provide transportation
5. Arrange for or provide refreshments
6. Discuss personal experience fishing bucktails or streamers

### Youth Development Objectives

Participating young people will:

1. Practice and improve fine motor skills
2. Enhance observation and problem solving skills
3. Practice and improve hand-eye coordination
4. Increase self concept and self esteem
5. Explore recreational and vocational skills

**Best Time:** Any time

**Best Location:** Well lighted, comfortable work area

**Time Required:** 1-3 hours

### Equipment/Materials

|                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| tying vise               | hackle pliers         |
| tying bobbin             | bobbin threader       |
| dubbing needle           | black tying thread    |
| natural bucktail         | scarlet bucktail      |
| yellow bucktail          | black bucktail        |
| flat mylar tinsel        | oval tinsel           |
| scarlet wool             | yellow saddle hackles |
| black floss              | head cement           |
| #6 to #12 streamer hooks |                       |
| large demonstration hook |                       |
| light nylon cord         |                       |

### References

See Introduction

### Safety Considerations

No special considerations

### Evaluation Activities/Suggestions

1. Observe and correct:
  - a. Tying thread attachment techniques
  - b. Application of materials in proper order
  - c. Smooth build up of body materials
  - d. Even application of ribbing materials
  - e. Length and amount of wing materials

<sup>1</sup> Professor and Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M System, 7607 Eastmark Drive, Suite 101, College Station, TX 77843-2473

- f. Head proportion and finish
2. Evaluate each fly for proportion and appearance and make positive suggestions for improvement.
3. Constantly observe participants to assist where needed in developing basic skills.
4. Observe growing confidence with techniques and reinforce where needed.

## Lesson Outline

### Presentation

- I. Bucktail patterns
  - A. Imitate or suggest small fishes
    1. Variety of body materials
    2. Hair wings
  - B. Excellent practice in tying
    1. Bodies
    2. Ribs
    3. Tails
    4. Bearded hackle
    5. Wings
- II. Tying a Mickey Finn
  - A. History of the pattern
    1. Attributed to John Alden Knight
    2. Named for effectiveness of the pattern
      - a. Chloral hydrate - "Mickey Finn"
      - b. Drug used to shanghai sailors
      - c. Named by JAK's friends for impact on fish
    3. Generally considered an attractor pattern
  - B. Hook
    1. 4x long to 6x long
    2. Limerick, sproat or round bend
    - 3 Standard to heavy wire
    4. Size 10 to size 6
  - C. Attach thread to the shank
    1. Attach near back of head
    2. Crossed-X technique
    3. Trim end
  - D. Wind a flat tinsel body
    1. Attach flat silver tinsel at shoulder
    2. Wind tinsel to form body
      - a. Turns touching but not overlapping
      - b. Wind to back of shank
      - c. Wind back to the shoulder
      - d. Bind tinsel down at shoulder
        - 1) Several turns of tying thread
        - 2) Trim end of tinsel
  - E. Apply a three part wing
    1. Yellow over scarlet over yellow
      - a. Equal parts
      - b. Colors separate

### Application

**Review** the type of fly patterns involved and the skills that will be developed in the process of tying bucktails.

If desired, **discuss** the history of the pattern with the participants. **Note** that the pattern is assumed by some to be an imitation of a pumpkinseed sunfish, but that most people agree that it is primarily an attractor pattern that is effective on all types of fishes that eat other fish.

**Demonstrate** each step in the tying process as it is explained.

**Clamp** a streamer hook securely in the vise with the shank parallel to the work surface.

**Demonstrate** the crossed X techniques that were practiced when tying the black ant, attaching the thread at the shoulder of the fly and leaving enough room to tie a well formed head.

**Demonstrate** winding a double-wound tinsel body, anchoring the end of the tinsel securely at the shoulder. **Note** that mylar tinsel is easier to use and less likely to tarnish than is metallic tinsel.

**Discuss** wing lengths that may be use in tying streamers. Hook extends approximately 3/4 of the wing length in the most common dressing. Some patterns use a shorter hook that lies under the head of the fly. One of the most effective ties uses a wing length approximately the same as the length of the

2. Select a section of yellow bucktail
    - a. Trim hairs from skin at the base
      - 1) Lift and clip technique
      - 2) About 1/4 of what seems needed
    - b. Even tips of cut hairs
      - 1) Pluck and stack
      - 2) Avoid cutting natural tips
  3. Hold and bind in place
    - a. Pinch hair bundle between thumb and forefinger
    - b. Pull thread up between thumb and wing
    - c. Pull thread down between fingertip and wing
    - d. Hold tightly in place
    - e. Pull down and back on thread
    - f. Repeat process several times before releasing pressure
    - g. Lift base of hair
    - h. Trim at an angle to head
  4. Repeat with scarlet and yellow bundles
- F. Wrap a tapered head and whip finish

### III. Tying a Black-nosed Dace

- A. Use and status
  1. "Imitator" pattern
    - a. Common trout stream forage fish
    - b. Brown back
    - c. White belly
    - d. Black lateral stripe
  2. Effective in a wide range of sizes
- B. Hook
  1. 4 x long to 6 x long
  2. Limerick, sproat or round bend
  3. Standard to heavy wire
  4. Size 12 to size 4
- C. Secure hook in vise
  1. Shank parallel to the tying bench surface
  2. Securely clamped in place at the bend
- D. Secure thread to hook shank
  1. Attach near rear of the shank
  2. Open X pattern
  3. Trim tag end of thread
- E. Attach the tail material and ribbing
  1. Scarlet wool or acrylic yarn
    - a. About the length of the shank
    - b. Leave about 3/8 inch near the bend
    - c. Remainder of yarn along shank
  2. Attach ribbing material
    - a. Medium oval silver tinsel

hook. **Emphasize** that relatively sparse ties are usually more lively in the water and more effective than are heavily tied flies.

**Demonstrate** the proper method of selecting, cutting and stacking bucktails. **Emphasize** taking half what the participant thinks is needed then taking half of that to get about the proper amount of hair for the wing.

**Demonstrate** the method of holding the hair firmly between the thumb and forefinger while binding it down tightly, then trimming it at an angle to permit forming a tapered head. **Complete** applying the wings by adding similar-sized bundles of scarlet, then yellow bucktail, trimming the butts of the hairs at an angle each time.

**Demonstrate** wrapping the head and whip finishing the fly. Apply a drop of head cement to the fly and leave the fly in the vise as a model. **Encourage** the participants to tie their own using the pattern and the model for comparison.

**Provide** hooks appropriate to the age and ability of the tiers. **Note** that a hook in approximately size 8 is an excellent compromise for beginning tiers.

**Clamp** a demonstration hook in the vise and **test** it by bending it down slightly at the eye with a finger and allowing it to spring back. Have participants **follow** the same process at their tying vices.

**Demonstrate** the process, using a large hook and cord if necessary to reinforce the process, and have the participants **attach** the thread to their hooks.

**Demonstrate** how to attach the scarlet yarn tail/underbody and the ribbing tinsel. **Note** that neither of them needs to be carried to the shoulder of the hook, but that they help to form a smooth and even base for the tinsel body, making a smoother body and a more professional looking fly.

- b. About 5 to 6 inches adequate
- c. About a shank length along hook
- d. Remainder behind the hook
- 3. Wind tying thread to shoulder
  - a. Smooth, even base
  - b. Secure yarn and tinsel in place
- 4. Trim excess tinsel and yarn at shoulder
- F. Build tinsel body
  - 1. Attach flat silver tinsel at shoulder
  - 2. Wind tinsel to back of shank
    - a. Smooth, even wraps
    - b. Touching but not overlapping
    - c. Cover tie-down area for tail
  - 3. Continue back to shoulder
    - a. Continue smooth, even wrap
    - b. Tie down at shoulder
    - c. Trim excess tinsel
- G. Wind ribbing tinsel over body
  - 1. Regular, evenly spaced spiral
    - a. Open turns of ribbing material
    - b. About 3/4 inch apart (for this size)
  - 2. Tie off at shoulder
  - 3. Trim off excess ribbing material
- H. Attach the wings
  - 1. Hold tightly, bind tightly technique
  - 2. Sparse wings generally best
    - a. Use 3 the material you think you need
    - b. Keep colors separated
  - 3. Bottom wing white bucktail
    - a. Lift and clip hairs at the base
    - b. Even hair tips slightly
    - c. Pinch hair between thumb and forefinger
      - 1) Tips in selected position
      - 2) Pinched section at shoulder
    - d. Bind tightly in place
      - 1) Thread up between thumb and bucktail
      - 2) Down between index finger and bucktail
      - 3) Pull down and toward bend slightly
      - 4) Repeat at least four times
    - e. Trim butts of hairs at an angle
      - 1) Lift and cut
      - 2) Wind over bases
  - 4. Middle and upper wing sections
    - a. Middle wing of black bucktail
      - 1) Same size and length as bottom wing
      - 2) Colors should remain separate
      - 3) Hold tightly, bind tightly
      - 4) Trim hair butts at an angle
    - b. Top wing of natural brown bucktail
      - 1) Hair near end of tail best
      - 2) Same size and length as other wings
      - 3) Colors remain separate
      - 4) Hold tightly, bind tightly
      - 5) Trim hair butts at an angle
- I. Wind and whip finish the head

**Demonstrate** how to wrap a smooth, even body. **Stress** the need to have a smooth base for the tinsel and to allow each turn to touch but not overlap as the body is wound in place. **Make sure** the participants carry the body back far enough to cover the tie-down area for the tail and ribbing tinsel. **Stress** the importance of maintaining tension on the tinsel until it is tied off at the shoulder of the fly.

**Demonstrate** and have participants complete the ribbing process. **Have them wait** until you have inspected their flies before trimming the end of the rib. **Emphasize** the need for care to prevent cutting the tying thread.

**Demonstrate** the process of attaching the bottom wing, emphasizing the technical elements of tying a wing in place. **Note** that the hold tightly, bind tightly process is one of the most important techniques in all fly tying. Have participants **complete** the bottom wing on their flies before going on to the upper two wings.

**Complete** the demonstration by applying the other two wings. **Demonstrate** that the natural hair at the base of the bucktail is hollow and springy, while the hair toward the tip of the tail is harder and more easily managed. **Inspect** each fly to be sure the wings are well applied and the butts of the hairs are trimmed in a fashion that will make wrapping a well-proportioned head easy for the tier.

**Inspect** the finished flies and comment on each one, offering

1. Wrap a smooth, evenly tapered head
2. Whip finish the head
3. Trim the thread
4. Apply a drop or two of head cement
5. Add lacquer eyes if desired
  - a. Yellow or white iris
  - b. Black pupil

#### IV. Tying a hairwing Black Ghost

##### A. Use and status

1. First developed as a streamer fly
  - a. Will tie one later
  - b. Excellent attractor fly
  - c. Good big fish locator

##### B. Hook

1. 4 x long to 6 x long
2. Limerick, sproat or round bend
3. Size 12 to size 2

##### C. Tying in the tail and rib

1. Secure tying thread near back of shank
2. Bind on a hackle fiber tail
  - a. Yellow saddle hackle fibers
    - 1) Grasp a small bunch
    - 2) Pluck or pull from the feather shaft
  - b. Tail reaches about to end of wing
    - 1) About 1/2 to 3/4 inch for size 8
  - c. Natural tips to the rear
3. Bind in ribbing
  - a. Medium flat silver tinsel
  - b. 5 to 6 inch length adequate
  - c. Bind in at base of tail
4. Carry tying thread to shoulder
  - a. Open spirals adequate
  - b. Several tight wraps to finish

##### D. Build a tapered body

1. Attach heavy black floss at shoulder
2. Wrap floss to base of tail, back to shoulder
  - a. Taper body on both ends
  - b. Keep body contour smooth
  - c. Bind down at the shoulder
  - d. Trim excess floss
3. Wrap 3-5 turns of tinsel as a rib
  - a. Open spirals
  - b. Even spacing
  - c. Bind down at shoulder
  - d. Trim excess tinsel

##### E. Apply yellow hackle

1. Plucked hackle clump beard method
  - a. Easier for most beginners
  - b. Hackles tend to bunch
  - c. May turn hook over in the vise to assist
  - d. Process
    - 1) Pluck bunch of hackle fibers from quill
    - 2) Hold hackle fiber bundle in place
    - 3) Bind tightly in place
    - 4) Trim butts of fibers

**constructive criticism** of the tying job. Remember to use the **oreo technique** and to **build** the tiers' confidence while aiding them in tying better flies.

**Pass out** size 8 streamer hooks and have the participants **clamp** them securely in their tying vices. Clamp one in your vise and prepare to demonstrate the tying approach.

**Demonstrate** this whole process and have the participants **copy** the demonstration on a fly of their own. **Note** that the tight wraps tend to make the body and shoulder region more stable.

**Demonstrate** the method of making a tapered floss body and applying a flat tinsel rib to the fly. Have participants **follow** the steps to build one of their own following your pattern.

**Demonstrate** the bearded hackle approach using a clump of plucked fibers. **Note** that it is often easier and that it can be more conservative of materials, even though it may be a bit more difficult to get a nicely flared hackle using this technique. **Encourage** participants to try all of the techniques demonstrated in order to have a better grasp of basic techniques.

2. Hackle section beard method
  - a. Slightly more demanding
  - b. Hackles flare more
  - c. May turn hook to assist
  - d. Process
    - 1) Strip base of hackle quill
      - a) Remove webby fibers
      - b) Work down to thin quill
    - 2) Clip short section of hackle free
      - a) Trim off tip of quill
      - b) Leave base and broad V of hackle
    - 3) Tie hackle quill in at throat
      - a) Upper side of hackle down
      - b) Hackle tips to either side
      - c) Quill toward eye of hook
      - d) Three or four turns of thread
    - 4) Pull hackle under thread
      - a) Pull on quill gently
      - b) Leave hackles slightly flared
    - 5) Bind in place tightly
    - 6) Trim butt of quill
3. Wound hackle method
  - a. Similar to dry fly hackling techniques
  - b. Hackles may flare too much
  - c. Requires binding or clipping to shape
  - d. Technique
    - 1) Select hackle by fiber length
    - 2) Strip away webby base fibers
    - 3) Bind hackle quill to throat area
      - a) Tip of hackle to the rear
      - b) Tightly bound to shank
    - c) Trim quill butt
    - 4) Grasp hackle with hackle pliers
    - 5) Wind hackle around shank
      - a) One to three turns adequate
      - b) Bind hackle quill at base of winding
    - 6) Trim hackle tip
    - 7) Moisten index finger and thumb slightly
    - 8) Draw finger and thumb down, back over hackle
    - 9) Wind thread over hackle to set in place

#### F. Apply wing and finish

1. Select a small bunch of white bucktail
  - a. Lift and trim from the hide
  - b. Even natural tips slightly
  - c. Select tie-down area on the fibers
2. Hold tightly and bind tightly in place
3. Trim bucktail butts at an angle
4. Wrap a well-proportioned, tapered head
5. Whip finish
6. Apply head cement
7. Add lacquer eyes if desired

#### V. Summary

- A. Basic techniques for traditional bucktails
  1. Body types

**Demonstrate** tying in a hackle throat using the hackle section method. **Note** that the throat can be mixed or increased in density by tying in additional hackle sections as desired.

**Note** that this technique can be used with wet flies and nymphs with a wide variety of hackle materials, but that they may result in fairly heavy hackling unless the number of turns used is restricted.

**Demonstrate** the finishing process and have participants **finish** their flies. **Critique** each fly, encouraging the participants and giving **positive feedback** on their progress. **Remember** that each participant learns at his or her own rate and that these skills are developed by practice and patience.

Ask participants to **discuss** the things they have learned in the

2. Hackle techniques
  3. Wing attachment
  4. Wing length and density
- B. Basic techniques
1. Reading fly patterns
  2. Attaching thread to the hook
  3. Applying tails
  4. Applying tinsel and floss bodies
  5. Applying tinsel ribbing
  6. Applying bearded hackles
  7. Hold tightly, bind tightly approach

bucktail tying lesson(s). Accept any items they relate, but **make sure** that at least those listed here are covered. **Note** that they are well on the way to becoming accomplished fly tiers, and that they will continue to add and to develop skills as they practice them.

### Summary Activity

Have participants compare early attempts to later ones in this sequence. Ask them to critique their flies and discuss ways they can improve on them. Challenge them to tie several more of each pattern before the next lesson.

### Lesson Narrative

Bucktails are designed to simulate or suggest small fishes. Imitator patterns usually suggest the color patterns and form of forage fish commonly used as prey by the game fish being sought. Other patterns may not imitate any fish or forage, but they do attract strikes from game fish. In this lesson, we will learn basic techniques for tying traditionally styled bucktails. These hair winged flies are durable, fairly easy to tie, and attractive to a wide variety of fish. In addition, they provide excellent practice in tying bodies, ribbing, tails, throat or bearded hackle, and down wings. These techniques will be used in later patterns and fly types as well.

### Tying a Mickey Finn

The Mickey Finn is an attractor pattern, although some sources claim it was designed as an imitation of the pumpkinseed sunfish. Its design is attributed to John Alden Knight, who used the pattern so effectively that his friends began to refer to it by its current name. They made reference to the "Mickey Finn" that was used to shanghai sailors, chloral hydrate. This drug was added to their beer or ale, causing them to lose consciousness. When they woke up, they were at sea and "conscripted" for the remainder of the voyage. Mr. Knight's friends thought the pattern had the same effect on the trout and bass he loved to catch. The pattern is still effective today, and it is attractive to a wide variety of game fish.

The pattern for a Mickey Finn follows:

- Hook: 4x -6x long streamer hook
- Body: flat silver tinsel
- Rib: medium oval silver tinsel (optional)
- Wing: yellow over scarlet over yellow bucktail
- Head: black tying thread

The Mickey Finn can be tied in a large assortment of sizes, but hooks about size 8 offer an excellent compromise in ease of tying and fishability. The first attempt at this pattern by beginners will usually take approximately one hour or a bit more. Subsequent flies will take as little as 5 to 15 minutes. Thus a one-hour session might permit tying only a single fly. If that is the case, simply break this lesson into two sessions.

Clamp a streamer hook securely in the vise gripping it near the bottom of the bend in the hook with the shank parallel to the work surface. The hook must be very firmly held so it will not move when pressure is applied to the thread during the tying process. This can be tested by pressing up or down on the eye of the hook with the tip of the finger, putting a slight flex in the hook. When the finger is pulled away from the hook, a properly held hook will ring like a tuning fork for a few seconds.

Attach the tying thread to the shank of the hook at the shoulder area (directly behind where the head will begin). With a size 8 hook, that will be about 3/16 to 1/4 inch behind the eye. Winding away from

yourself over the shank and back toward yourself under the shank, make several open spirals toward the hook eye, then wind back over those threads making open X'es for three or four turns. Using the nails on a thumb and forefinger, press the wraps together and snug both ends. If a tying bobbin is being used, allow it to hang freely. If not attach a hackle plier or clothespin to keep some tension on the thread. Lift the tag end of the thread and cut it neatly near the wraps.

Select a piece of medium silver tinsel (mylar is an excellent choice, particularly for beginning tiers) about 8 to 10 inches long. Cut one end at a taper, and bind the tapered end firmly in place at the shoulder with several tight wraps of thread. Winding in the same direction as the thread (over the shank going away and under it coming toward your body), lay down a smooth, even tinsel body from the shoulder to the end of the straight part of the shank. The tinsel should touch but not overlap at its edges. When the end of the shank is reached, reverse the direction and wrap a smooth body back over the previous layer to the shoulder area. Holding the tinsel firmly in place, wrap several tight turns of thread over it to hold it in place; then trim the loose end. This double wound body is slightly larger (more flash) and heavier (better sinking qualities) than is a single wound one starting from the back of the hook. Most beginners also find it easier to form a smooth body using this technique.

Discuss the choices in wing length with the participants. Three wing lengths are in common use for bucktails. The most common wing length places the bend of the hook approximately 1/2 to 3/4 of the way back on the wing. This yields a nicely proportioned fly that is effective at taking most game fish. Although it appears to be less well proportioned, many tiers like to use a shorter wing, with the wing ending approximately at the end of the hook's bend. This approach catches many fish that "strike short" or pluck at the end of the wing. The final approach, one often seen in salt-water patterns, is to use a shorter hook and to leave the bend at the throat or just behind the head of the fly.

In addition to the wing length, the amount of material in the wing is important to success. Generally, bucktails perform better with wings that are relatively sparse. In practice, I find that a wing that totals about 1/3 the amount of material a beginning fly tier would select is about as heavily dressed as one might want to allow. Very seldom will a beginning fly tier build a wing that is too sparse to be effective. My standard technique is to have the kids grasp about the amount they think they need, then to take half of it twice. Watch the amounts! Too little is much preferred to too much for both effectiveness and tying ease!

The wing of a Mickey Finn is applied in three equal parts. A yellow bucktail wing is tied in at the base, followed by equal amounts of scarlet, then yellow bucktail. Properly tied, the scarlet bucktail appears like a stripe between the two separate layers of yellow bucktail. The colors should remain separate rather than mixing. If they tend to mix, the materials were not bound tightly enough in place as they were applied. This is a common problem for beginning fly tiers and is easily corrected by putting more pressure on the tying thread during each application. Emphasize that the bucktail should be cut from its base, close to the hide. That makes it easy to obtain material that has its natural tips intact and minimizes the amount of waste for later users of the bucktail. It is often valuable to even the tips of the bucktail at least partially. This can be done by plucking and stacking the hairs in the fingers or by using a hair stacker (even an empty cartridge case will do nicely). Once the hair has been arranged, measure it against the hook to get the appropriate length and grasp it very firmly between the tips of the thumb and forefinger on the non-tying hand at the point at which it will be tied down. Holding the hair very tightly, pass the tying thread up between the thumb and the material then back down between the forefinger and the material. Next, pull down and slightly toward the bend of the hook on the tying thread to cinch it down on the hair and bind it to the hook. Repeat this at least four times before relaxing the "white finger nail" grip on the material. **This hold-tightly-and bind-tightly technique is one of the most important fundamentals of good fly tying!** Trim the butt ends of the bucktail by lifting the bunch of hair and cutting it off at an angle to the eye. This forms a tapered base for winding a nicely proportioned and smooth head. Be sure to caution the participants not to cut the thread while they are trimming the bucktail. Repeat the process with the other two wings.

Head finish is a cue to the quality of flies. Nicely proportioned and well-finished heads generally indicate a well-crafted fly. The head on a bucktail should taper smoothly from the base of the wings to the back of

the eye of the hook. No loose hairs should show through the tying thread, and the head should have an orderly arrangement of wraps. A good whip finish should be applied. After the head is whip finished, trim the tag end of the tread closely; and apply one or two drops of clear head cement or lacquer to seal the threads in place and prevent the fly from coming apart prematurely.

Critique each fly as it is finished. Be sure to notice things that are done well, progress being made by the tier, or similar positive things. Sandwich any needed improvements between positive statements and focus on the most important elements of basic tying first. Practice and self-criticism is essential to developing into a skilled fly tier.

### **Tying a Black-nosed Dace**

The Black-nosed Dace is a relatively old pattern designed by Art Flick, a Catskill tier and angler, to imitate a common forage fish found in many trout waters. It is named for one of the fishes it can represent, although many of the daces look somewhat similar, with a brown back, pale underside, and black lateral stripe. The size of the pattern should be adjusted to the size of the fish being sought and the size of the forage fish in the stream.

The pattern for the Black-nosed Dace follows:

- Hook: 4 x long to 6 x long streamer hook
- Tail: scarlet wool or acrylic yarn (short)
- Body: medium flat silver tinsel
- Rib: medium oval silver tinsel
- Wing: natural brown over black over white bucktail
- Head: black tying thread (eyes optional)

Once again, a size 8 hook in nearly any streamer pattern offers an excellent compromise between ease of tying and general utility to a fly fishing angler.

Once the hook is securely clamped in the vise with its shank parallel to the surface of the tying bench, attach the thread near the bend of the hook, using the open X's technique. Clip a section of scarlet wool or acrylic yarn slightly longer than the shank, and bind it in place with about 1/4 to 3/8 inch of material projecting beyond the straight part of the hook's shank. Allow the remainder to lie along the hook until ready to bind it in place.

Select a piece of oval silver tinsel about 5 to 6 inches long. Leaving a tag end that reaches to the shoulder of the hook, bind the tinsel in place at the tie-down area for the tail; then carry the thread forward in relatively open spirals to the shoulder area. This should bind the yarn and tinsel to the shank in a uniform position relative to the shank, allowing a smooth bed for the body tinsel to be laid. Next select a piece of flat silver tinsel about 9 to 10 inches long and bind it in at the shoulder. Double wrap a tinsel body, making sure that the tie-down area for the ribbing and tail are covered. Secure the flat tinsel at the shoulder with several turns of tying thread, trimming the excess tinsel away. Next wrap the ribbing tinsel in open spirals along the flat tinsel body, securing it with several turns of thread at the shoulder.

Using techniques similar to those used with the Mickey Finn, apply the wing material for the stream. The three wings should remain separated and be about equal in amount of material. It is important to cut the natural brown bucktail from hairs taken near the tip of the tail, since the hairs near the base are hollow and prone to flare when tied down.

Once the bucktail has been trimmed to a taper at the head, wrap a smooth, evenly tapered head, whip finish the thread, and apply a drop or two of head cement to finish the fly. If desired, you may add eyes. Many anglers feel that eyes add to the realism and attractiveness of a fly. Simply place a small dot of yellow or white lacquer on either side of the head. Once it has dried, place a smaller dot of black lacquer in the center of the eye to form a pupil.

### **Tying a Hairwing Black Ghost**

The Black Ghost was developed as a landlocked salmon fly in Maine. The original was a streamer fly, i.e. a minnow imitation tied with hackle feather wings. We will tie one of those later. This version uses a bucktail wing. This is an excellent attractor fly that often locates big fish. The white over black pattern causes it to contrast with the cover and to appear like a fish that is in distress. It is useful in a wide array of sizes, although we will use a size 8 hook to tie our version here.

The pattern for the Black Ghost (hairwing) follows:

- Hook: 4 x long to 6 x long streamer hook
- Tail: yellow hackle fibers
- Body: black floss
- Rib: flat silver tinsel
- Throat: yellow hackle fibers
- Wing: white bucktail
- Head: black tying thread (eyes optional)

Clamp a size 8 streamer hook in your vise and attach the thread at the rear of the shank. Strip (pluck) a small bunch of yellow hackle fibers from a hackle feather and bind them in as a tail. For this size fly, the tail should be about 1/2 to 3/4 inch long. Tie the fibers in with the natural tips to the rear. Trim the bases of the hackle fibers and bind in a length of flat silver tinsel as a rib. Since a floss body is being used, there is no need to lay any tinsel along the hook shank, and a length of 5 or 6 inches should be plenty. Once the tail and rib are secured, carry the tying thread to the shoulder area with open spirals, ending with several tightly laid turns. Next, tie in a length of heavy black floss at the shoulder and trim the tag end. Wrap the floss smoothly from the shoulder to the rear of the shank, being sure to cover the tie-down area at the base of the tail. Then wrap the floss back to the shoulder, making a nicely tapered (cigar-like) body. Trim the end of the body material neatly; and apply the rib in evenly spaced open spirals, binding the end down and trimming the tag end neatly.

The Black Ghost has a yellow hackle throat that can be applied using any of three methods. Using a clump of plucked or stripped hackles, as a bearded throat is one of the easiest methods. Although the hackles tend to clump or bunch, this technique produces very acceptable results. Some tiers like to turn the hook over in the vice to apply the throat, so they can use the same techniques used to apply wing materials. Pluck a small bunch of hackle fibers from the quill, grasp them at the tie-down area and bind them in place with several turns of tying thread. Trimming the butts of the hackle fibers completes the throat.

A second technique requires a bit more effort but produces a better throat. The hackle section technique produces hackle fibers that are slightly flared and more evenly distributed. As in the previous method, the hook may be turned over to make the throat area more accessible to the tier. Start by stripping the webby hackle fibers away from the base of a large hackle feather. Ideally, the feather should be stripped down to the point where the quill is relatively thin and hard. Working from the tip of the hackle, snip the quill to leave a short section of hackles on the quill. Keeping the shiny side of the hackles facing away from the hook and with the V of the hackles to the rear, bind the quill down at the shoulder with one or two turns of tying thread. While supporting the thread, grasp the quill and pull it gently forward to pull the hackle fibers under the thread. Once the throat is satisfactory, take several more turns of tying thread and trim away the butt ends of the hackles and quill. If desired, mixed hackles or a second section of the same hackle may be added to create a denser throat.

The same techniques used to apply dry fly hackles or the hackle on the black ant can be used to apply a throat as well. Hackles may flare too much or be too heavy when this method is used, and the technique requires binding or clipping the throat to shape and a sloping angle. Start by selecting a hackle for its fiber length. Strip away the webby fibers from the base of the quill. Bind the quill in place with the tip of the hackle to the rear and the shiny side of the feather facing upward. Grasp the tip of the hackle with a pair of hackle pliers (or the fingers if the hackle is long enough) and wind one to three turns of hackle around the hook before tying it off. Trim the excess hackle and quill. Next, moisten the tips of the thumb and forefinger on the non-tying hand and draw them down and back over the hackles. This will pull the fibers down and backward at the appropriate angle. Holding them in place, bind them down with several turns of tying thread and trim any "wild" fibers that are not controlled. Avoid applying excessive amounts of hackle.

Once the hackle throat has been applied, the wing is applied in the conventional manner. Select a small bunch of white bucktail, even the tips slightly, and hold the wing material firmly in place while binding it tightly in place. Trim the bases of the hair at an angle and wind a nicely tapered head. Apply one or more drops of head cement or clear lacquer to finish the head. Lacquer eyes may be applied if desired. Although they are not part of the traditional pattern, many anglers believe that eyes add significantly to the effectiveness of all streamer and bucktail flies.

### **Summary**

The basic techniques used in tying traditional bucktails were sampled in this lesson. Several types of body materials, methods for applying hackle throats, and methods of wing attachment were practiced. The options on wing length were discussed with advice and critique offered on the amount of wing material for effective bucktails. Participants gained experience in reading fly patterns, selecting appropriate materials, attaching thread to the hook, applying tails, applying tinsel and floss bodies, applying tinsel ribbing, various methods of applying bearded hackles, and more practice with the hold-tightly-bind-tightly technique that is central to good fly tying.

### **Exhibit or Sharing Suggestions**

1. Prepare a series of flies tied to show the steps in completing a bucktail. Mount them on a poster and use them as a teaching aid or exhibit.
2. Prepare a method demonstration on tying a simple bucktail and present it in an appropriate setting.
3. Tie a series of locally useful streamer and bucktail patterns and exhibit them in an appropriate forum.
4. Research the history of a bucktail pattern. Prepare a report and present it to your club or another interested group.
5. Tie an assortment of bucktail and streamer patterns that show a wide variety of techniques. Exhibit them with legends describing the techniques and the origin (if known) of the technique.

### **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.

### **Extensions or Ways of Learning More**

1. Study tying methods used in other types of streamer and bucktail flies, using a variety of sources and reference books. Attempt those patterns and techniques to develop your own skills
2. Study food habits and behavior of game fishes in your area. Attempt to design a pattern that will work effectively for those species.
3. Interview other tiers or anglers to discover additional tying and fishing techniques.
4. Keep a journal on your tying and fishing activities, and review the content periodically.

### **Links to Other Programs**

Links are easily established with conservation and natural history, heritage, crafts, or entrepreneurship programs. Extensions to foods and nutrition, photography, woodworking and similar programs are also possible. Where interest exists, challenge the young people to explore these other types of programs as additions to their sportfishing project activities.