

Fly Tying Bench— Bendback *by Charlie Most*

Choosing a fly for fishing the flats can be a real crapshoot. It should suggest a baitfish or maybe a crab or shrimp. And if there are weedbeds and grass on that flat, the fly should be at least semi-weedless. With emergent weeds at low tide, and the bottom grass just a couple of feet below the surface, a fly that won't snag on every other cast is almost vital; not to keep you from working a little harder but to reduce splashing around and spooking any fish that might be there.

Bendback flies seem to fill this need rather well and I feel this tying method is the ultimate approach for fishing shallow, weedy flats. And it is a tying method, based on a hook that keeps its point pointing up. That lets the fly sink down to the grass tops or be stripped in and around those emergent weedbeds without catching in the vegetation.

Materials:

- Hook: Mustad 3407 or similar
- Thread: 3/0 flat waxed nylon
- Body: chenille, braid, etc. materials your choice
- Wing: bucktail colors your choice
- Flash: Krystal Flash color to compliment fly
- Vailing: dyed grizzly hackle color to compliment fly
- Head & eyes: see instructions

Tying Instructions:

This fly pattern is very simple to tie, once you have the right hook. Tiemco makes a special bendback hook but the tying section right behind the eye seems too limited. John Homer showed me how to modify regular saltwater hooks by putting a 20-degree bend in the shank about ¼-inch back of the eye. Just use pliers to grip the hook right over the eye (to prevent twisting) and use a finger in the hook bend to pull it down. Use two pliers for smaller hooks.

This fly is tied with the hook upside down. Mount it in the vise making sure that straight section behind the eye is horizontal. Attach the tying thread right at the kink you made and wrap it down the shank just past the beginning of the bend. As you wrap, use a somewhat elliptical motion so that the thread won't be cut by the hook point. Tie in a length of body material and wrap the thread over it back to the kink and half hitch it.

Chenille, body braid, yarn or whatever can be used for the body. I like a tad of flash and have various synthetics that add that. In fact, I recently found some rod-making braid that is perfect for smaller flies. Wrap that body material up the shank but stop at the kink. Don't clutter up the straight section just behind the eye, as that's where you're going to tie every thing else.

I prefer bucktail for "winging" this fly. Although somewhat bulky for the small space, it has the length and also the buoyancy to help keep the hook point up. I like two colors for the wing and start with white or yellow bucktail. Measure the length against the hook to get it two to two and a half times the hook length and a bit more than matchstick thick. Lash the bucktail down back near the kink and the pull the butts up slightly and cut them off behind the eye on an up and back angle for a smoother head. If you want more sparkle, now is the time to add some Krystal Flash.

For the second or topping color, I use blue, chartreuse, tan, rusty brown, or gray. Tie this over the first clump of bucktail and again trim at an angle. Don't use really tight thread wraps to cover the head. Lighter wraps keep the bucktail from flaring in all directions. Stop the wrapping at the back with several, somewhat loose wraps to control any flared strands.

The fly is essentially finished if that's the way you want it but I greatly prefer adding a "veiling" of two dyed grizzly feathers on each side to provide a barred effect. Several of our baitfish species have this barring and others do not. I just think the fly looks better and the fish seem to appreciate it. Tying these in is a bit tricky! The shafts of feathers are seldom perfectly round and when you tighten the thread on them they roll out of alignment.

I prepare two sets of paired feathers the same length as the bucktail and strip away the excess fibers below the tie in point. Hold the feathers so the stripped area and the shafts are lined up and place a drop of super glue right where the remaining fibers begin. Let this dry for a couple of minutes and they'll tie in perfectly when you wrap back over the glued area.

My main effort in tying these flies is painting the heads and spotting in the eyes. They just seem unfinished without this and it does add a classier look. I won't go into the details of how this is done as it has already been written up in the September 2007 issue of On the Fly. This is easily accessed via the SFF's fine website www.suncoastflyfishers.com



Copper Head Bendback tied by Charlie Most
Paul Sequeira photo