

# Eggs All Day

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Fly patterns and  
photography by  
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Eggs aren't just for breakfast anymore. In many waters, eggs are an important component of a piscatorial diet for much of the year, from autumn and stretching into the early days of summer. Eggs, for one reason or another, are taken by all salmonids and should be included in the fly box of anglers wanting to get into fish. Of course eggs can be the focus of most fish during the salmon spawning periods, when the inevitable loose eggs escape the redds and make for tasty pickings. But even when eggs aren't a prevalent food source, egg flies can still trigger aggressive takes that can only be described as instinctual.

Traditional egg patterns have always been effective, often constructed of yarn and chenille. Realistic egg materials are also available, including Otter's Soft Milking Eggs or Hareline Dubbin's Reel Eggs. Not only are these materials perfectly shaped and available in a range of colors, they also have a realistic translucence similar to an unfertilized fish egg and a soft texture that sets a new standard for egg flies.

## Egg Cycles and "Matching the Hatch"

Egg season begins in the autumn, with chinook eggs first on the menu. Chinook eggs are the largest eggs anglers will encounter during the "egg season". Chinook eggs are light orange and a hair under a 1/2-inch diameter. Coho eggs are slightly smaller in diameter and just over 1/4 inch, followed by the still smaller eggs from whitefish, various trout and steelhead that are around 3/16 inches diameter.

None of these patterns are intended to be exact imitations of an egg, but rather attractors suggesting a single or cluster of eggs with added color to increase visibility under various water conditions and clarity that just may be that something extra to induce a strike.

Reel Eggs are good imitators of salmon eggs and provide the widest range of colors, with my last count at 24 colors. Soft Milking

Eggs are available in a variety of sizes, from tiny 2mm egg clusters up to 10 mm eggs, and up to 16 different color and opacity combinations. Keep this in mind when designing variations on these patterns.

There are different techniques for tying Reel Eggs and Soft Milking Eggs onto a hook. Reel Eggs have a yarn running through the center; Hareline suggests the yarn be cut off at the ends, then pass the hook point through the yarn. Apply a drop of glue on the hook, then slide the egg up to the final position. An alternative method that provides for a wider hook gap is demonstrated on the Reel Egg Cluster fly.

A thread base is not necessary when tying with Reel Eggs, however, when using Soft Milking Eggs, a thread base is necessary to form a foundation for the fly. With either egg-cluster material, a couple of figure-eight wraps around the egg cluster help to secure the egg formation.

The hooks recommended for these patterns have a wide gap and long shank in order to fit all the pieces that make up this pattern without crowding the eye. Of course, tiers are free to experiment and select other hooks.

## Fishing Egg Flies

### Dead Drifting for Steelhead

My first steelhead came a few decades ago, and only after fishing with some old-hands that taught me where to fish. I could read water, and was fishing a good run that often held steelhead. The only problem was that I was stepping out into the water to begin casting. That first steelhead came from the very spot that I was wading to; still being green, I gave little thought to this holding location. I couldn't have used any sort of traditional down-and-across swing presentation in this location, as my gaze was always fixed on a fishy-looking slot along the opposite bank where I could swing a fly. It was



then that I realized the power of dead-drifting flies for steelhead, just as I would on any river while targeting trout with nymphs.

Eggs are most prevalent during winter steelhead runs. Dead-drift nymphing is killer for winter steelhead. Sometimes it takes a natural-looking presentation to induce steelhead to take, so a natural drag-free float can work wonders, particularly for winter steelhead that are notoriously difficult to catch. The cold waters of winter keep steelhead sluggish and results in fish that won't move very far for a fly. The same anglers who taught me where to catch the fish also claimed "you have to hit them fish on the nose with your fly a time or two" before expecting a take.

I like this presentation method for steelhead in pocket waters, and often fish current seams and other "shifts" in the water for winter steelhead. Cast upstream and allow a drag-free float. When dead drifting with an indicator, keep an eye on it and, when possible, watch the fish. Watch for fish-feeding behavior—like the "winking" mouth, that bright white mouth opening to take a fly, or anything else that looks edible. Watch for a fish quickly darting in the direction of the fly. The ability to immediately detect strikes results in more hook-ups.

## Fishing Egg Flies

### Down-and-Across Swing

Whenever I can, I fish attractor-type egg patterns in a down-and-across swing. This method provides some of the most exciting takes possible, backs coming up just before taking a fly on the swing. When fishing these flies on the swing, look for good steelhead holding water that's conducive to this method. The best water has some depth, but not too deep, with the ideal depth being 3 to 6 feet.

Also ideal is water littered with current breaks such as rocks and boulders. Look for current speed that's about walking pace. Cast across and slightly downstream; try for a downstream cast at a 30- to 45-degree angle. Mend the line, which allows the fly to

sink and swing. From this point on, let the fly start the downstream swing. The fly will drift down and across, and that first and only upstream mend puts the fly in the zone. Once in the zone, a steady swing is key. Another mend could very well spook a steelhead or interrupt a take. Don't do it! Take a step down and repeat the process.

### More Tips on Using and Storing Soft Egg Flies

The patterns included in this article use eyes, bead heads, and cone heads for some additional weight on the flies. Match your fly selection to the type of water you are fishing. If you are fishing faster water, deeper water, or some combination of these variables, then select a heavier fly. Because the specific gravity of salmonid eggs is higher than that of water, eggs sink quickly near the bottom. Those few eggs that escape the gravel depressions of the redds drift or roll around near the bottom, bouncing along at a speed slower than the current. So if fishing with the dead-drift method, keep these egg flies down! Tie up more than a handful, because to fish these correctly, the flies will be down near the bottom and in a vulnerable place.

These flies include a range of colors, from dark ruby red to light apricot. With turbid water, darker colors are usually more effective. While all of these flies are bright, use the darker hues for higher, more turbid conditions, and work your way down the scale as water conditions clear. Use ruby red for the more turbid waters, greens and cerise as conditions clear, and the lighter apricots for the clearest water. Stock your fly box with both cluster patterns and single-egg patterns. The cluster egg patterns are best used for high-water conditions and single-egg patterns are designed for low-water levels.

When storing these egg flies, be careful not to let the various colors touch each other; there is the chance the colors may bleed together. Direct sunlight can fade these eggs over time, so it's best to store them out of direct sunlight. Fishing with these flies doesn't seem to have any effect, so fish away!

### Sparkle Ruby Cluster

**Hook:** Alec Jackson's Tube Fly Hook, size 3

**Thread:** Ultra Thread 140, red Eyes: Montana Fly Sparkle Eyes, gold with holographic blue, size medium

**Body:** Otter's Soft Milking Eggs, Ruby Cluster

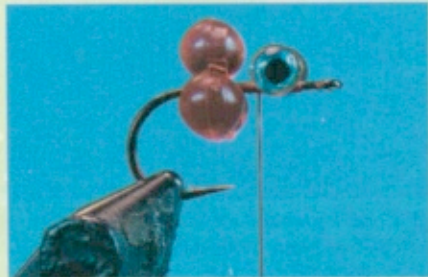
**Tail:** Hareline Dubbin Baitfish Emulator Flash, about a dozen strands

**Top of Tail:** SLF Prism, Ice Pearl

**Wing:** Hareline Dubbin Pseudo Marabou, fluorescent flame red



**1** Pass the hook point through the center of the 3-egg cluster, then set the hook in the vise. Tie a base of red thread on the hook shank. Tie on the sparkle eyes using a figure-eight wrap.



**2** Apply your favorite brand of super glue to the thread base and eyes. I use the Loctite brand that comes in a bottle with a brush that helps put the glue where it is needed. Slide the egg cluster forward to leave just a small space before the eyes.



**3** Tie in the Baitfish Emulator flash for the tail. Tie in a piece twice the length needed, tying this just in the center of the material then double back the forward strands.





**4** Wrap forward a couple of figure-eight wraps around the egg cluster, this helps to hold the egg cluster to the hook shank. The thread should end up at the flash material ready to tie the next step.



**5** Tie in the Pseudo Marabou wing between the egg cluster and the eyes, apply head cement to the thread before the tie-down of the wing. Comb the Pseudo Marabou with a fine comb to spread the fibers out.



**6** Advance the tying thread through the egg cluster and whip finish at hook eye.

### Emulator Single Egg

- Hook:** Gamakatsu Octopus, size 6  
**Thread:** Ultra Thread 140, fluorescent pink  
**Bead:** 1/8 inch, gold tungsten  
**Body:** Reel Eggs, pink  
**Tail:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, fluorescent hot pink  
**Top of Tail:** Senyo's Laser Yarn, fluorescent chartreuse  
**Under Wing:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, fluorescent pink  
**Top Wing:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, fluorescent fuchsia



**1** Place the bead through the hook and position up against the eye of the hook. Pass the hook point through the center of the egg, then set the hook in the vise and tie a thread base.



**2** Tie the Baitfish Emulator Flash onto the hook. Tie-in a piece twice the length desired at the centerpoint, then fold the flash back and tie off.



**3** Tie-in chartreuse Senyo's Laser Yarn on top of the Emulator Flash tail and wrap forward up to the egg. Wrap enough thread to secure the egg from the rear. Whip finish the rear portion of the thread and secure with a drop of glue.



**4** Begin wrapping thread between the egg and the bead to secure egg from the front. Tie in the fluorescent fuchsia Baitfish Emulator Flash with a pinch of fluorescent pink Baitfish Emulator Flash on top. Tie-in a piece twice the length needed, tying this just in the center of the material. Fold over the forward strands to create a sandwiched pink and fuchsia wing and secure with the thread.



**5** Comb the wing back with a fine-toothed comb or brush. Whip finish the head just behind the bead and apply a final drop of glue to secure the fly.

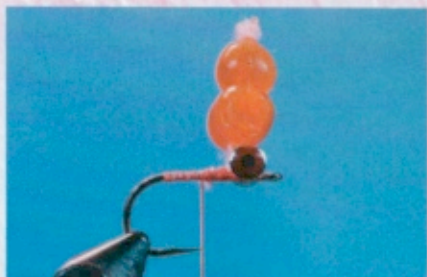


## Reel Egg Cluster

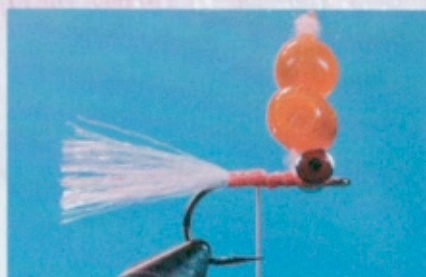
**Hook:** Alec Jackson's Tube Fly Hook, size 3  
**Thread:** Ultra Thread 140, orange  
**Eyes:** Pseudo Eyes, red eye, medium  
**Body:** Reel Egg Cluster, Orange Roe  
**Tail:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, pearl  
**Wing:** Senyo's Laser Yarn, white



**1** Tie a base of thread on the hook shank. Tie on the sparkle eyes using a figure-eight wrap.



**2** Apply your favorite brand of super glue to the thread base and eyes. Tie in the yarn that passes through the eggs nearest to the eye of the hook. Place the two eggs closest to the eye, so that when the back of the cluster is tied in, the single egg is closest to the rear of the hook.



**3** Tie in the Baitfish Emulator flash for the tail. Tie in a piece twice the length needed, tying this just in the center of the material then fold over the forward strands.



**4** Tie down the egg by wrapping several figure-eight wraps around the egg cluster. This helps to hold the egg cluster to the hook shank. The thread should end up at the flash material ready to tie the next step.



**5** Tie in the Senyo's White Laser Yarn as a top wing between the egg cluster and the eyes, apply head cement to the thread before tying down the wing. Comb the Laser Yarn back with a fine-toothed comb or brush.



**6** Advance tying thread through egg cluster and whip finish at hook eye. Glue the eyes and head.

## Green Eyed Emulator



**Hook:** Alec Jackson's Tube Fly Hook, size 3  
**Thread:** Ultra Thread 140, fluorescent pink  
**Eyes:** Hareline Dubbin Pseudo Eyes, medium nickel with chartreuse eye  
**Body:** Soft Milking Eggs, Tango Cluster  
**Tail:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, about a dozen strands, fluorescent chartreuse  
**Top of Tail:** Hareline Dubbin Senyo's Laser Yarn, fluorescent chartreuse  
**Under Wing:** Senyo's Laser Yarn, fluorescent fuchsia  
**Top of Wing:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, about a dozen strands of fluorescent fuchsia, and about half as much purple Baitfish Emulator Flash

## Blue Eyed Apricot



**Hook:** Gamakatsu Octopus, size 2 to 4  
**Thread:** Ultra Thread 140, fluorescent yellow  
**Eyes:** Montana Fly Brass Sparkle Eyes, gold with holographic blue, medium  
**Body:** Soft Milking Eggs, Apricot Cluster  
**Tail:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, about a dozen strands, hot orange  
**Top of Tail:** Senyo's Laser Yarn White (just a pinch) with yellow Pseudo Marabou on top  
**Under Wing:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, same amount as tail  
**Top Wing:** Baitfish Emulator Flash, Pearl Baitfish

## Single Tango



**Hook:** Gamakatsu Octopus Silver No. 6  
**Thread:** Ultra Thread 70, fluorescent pink  
**Head:** Bead, 1/8 inch, gold  
**Body:** 6 mm Soft Egg Material, Tango  
**Tail:** Midge Cactus Chenille, fluorescent chartreuse  
**Wing:** EP Sparkle Brush/Blue Magic  
**Veil:** Egg Veil, Milky White

