



MATCH THE HATCH

by Glenn Zinkus

Make the Flycatcher

Once you master making the standard Clankbug, try your hand at tying the Flycatcher. Here's how

The Black Drake: Evolution of a Mayfly

Polly Rosborough and Dick Winter created two classic patterns you must add to your fly box.

Imagine a mayfly hatch so thick, it looks like a cumulus cloud transforming into a towering thunderhead. Insects freely land on nearby anglers, covering their backs, necks, ears, and faces. There is an unabashed orgy of mating mayflies in the streamside brush. Next, the spinner fall forms a blanket on

the surface of the water that can thicken into inches of drowning insects at every bend and eddy of the river. How can an angler resist tying on a black drake imitation during this time, or making a fishing pilgrimage to black drake waters?

E. H. "Polly" Rosborough was a pioneer of matching western hatches; some of his patterns date back to the late 1920s. He was an Oregon legend, a nationally recognized fly tier, and an author of several books, including *Tying and Fishing the Fuzzy Nymphs*. The Black Drake was one of Polly's signature flies; he tailored it to match the prolific hatch on the Williamson River.

That's a real black drake spinner, and this picture should be in a fly fishing calendar. That's all we can think to say.



Origins of the Black Drake

Polly started his fly tying exploits in 1928 in order to have more durable flies and to develop patterns that more closely resembled local insects. If you follow what Polly says in *Tying and Fishing the Fuzzy Nymphs*, and in his rare autobiography, *Reminiscences from 50 Years of Fly Rodding*, we can determine that he tied his first black drake nymph imitations in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Polly writes that the black drake mayfly nymph is probably the most widely distributed and populous of all nymphs. There are huge hatches of black drakes on Oregon's Williamson and other rivers. In *Tying and Fishing the Fuzzy Nymphs*, he says that the Black

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Drake Nymph was not his first pattern, but that it became his “greatest and most consistent fly.”

Polly tied variations of the Black Drake Nymph. He wrote about a variation made with blue dun seal’s fur, a short blue dun hackle tail, and an “owl’s eyebrow” on the sides to simulate legs. Even in those days, eyebrows from owls were a rare, if not forbidden, fly tying material. Polly’s variations even included clippings from the family pet, and he wrote, “If your wife has a pale maltese cat, you will have a constant supply of just the right fur shades.”

Dick Winter began a professional fly tying partnership with Polly in 1971. Dick met Polly more than 40 years ago. Dick had arranged a display of a bunch of his flies at U.S. Bank in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Polly noticed these flies and called Dick, telling him that he liked what he saw and said that he would be interested in working with him. One thing led to another, and they introduced their catalog, titled *Custom Flies*, that same year. In the introduction to the catalog, Polly wrote that Dick was “still on the sunny side of forty.” He referred to Dick as “my newly acquired partner,” and said that he was “an all around great guy and sportsman, fine fly-caster, and of most importance to our future endeavors, a top-drawer artist at the fly vise.”

One day I spoke with Dick about Polly’s use of alternative materials. Dick thinks that cat fur is “not bad.” He advises that if you use cat fur, however, you should thoroughly wash the material with detergent to remove any dirt and smell; he thinks that more fish will strike a fly if the fur is properly treated.

Although Polly started tying his Black Drake dry fly in the 1940s, he did not abandon his nymph imitation. In the first chapter of *Tying and Fishing the Fuzzy Nymphs*, titled “History and Research,” Polly introduces some of his first fly fishing experiences and wrote that he used a nymph during those times when the trout would not rise to a dry fly. During this period, Polly tied his Black Drake Nymph with slightly softer, sparsely wrapped hackle and soft hackle fibers for the tail. Dick explains, “Polly believed you would catch more fish subsurface than you ever would on top.”



You’ve heard of the birds and the bees, right? Well, we’ll just title this photo of two mating black drakes “Insect Love.”

Polly also figured that the bigger fish were beneath the surface feeding on the subsurface or drowned insects.

Going Dry

Polly’s Black Drake dry fly is more elegant and perhaps the star of the show. Dick learned as much as he could from Polly, but over time, he made his own observations. Dick noticed that during black drake spinner falls, the insects float for quite some time and distance. He developed a parachute-style imitation that floats for long stretches in the surface film.

When placing Dick’s and Polly’s Black Drakes side by side, any angler will notice distinct differences. The most obvious difference is that Polly tied his dun in as a semi-wet fly; Dick’s Black Drake Spinner is a parachute pattern. In sunlight, both flies display a dark red wine color, as if inspired by a good bottle of pinot noir; a quick study of streamside black drakes reveals this purple/periwinkle hue in the wings. Dick says that he dyes his own feathers to get just the right purple tint. Look for similarly colored feathers in your local fly shop.

Dick ties his parachute Black Drake with a white wing post to increase its vis-

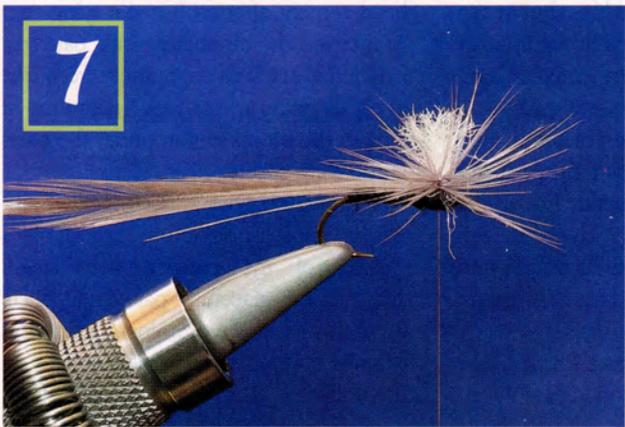
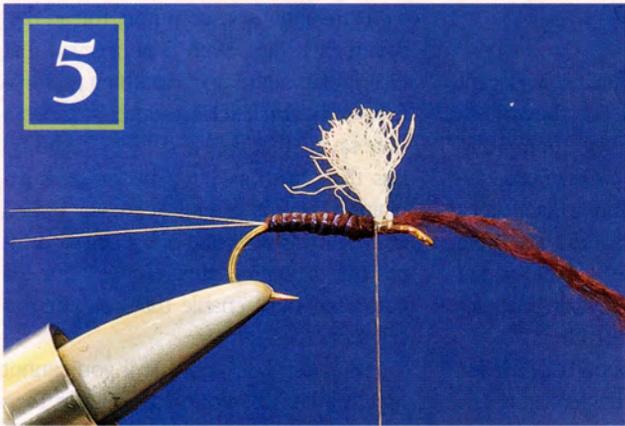
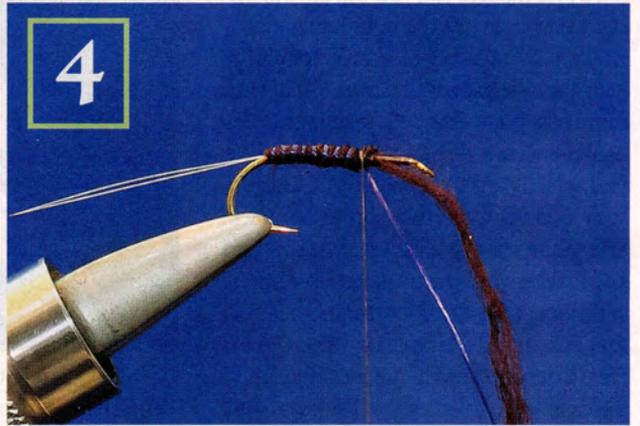
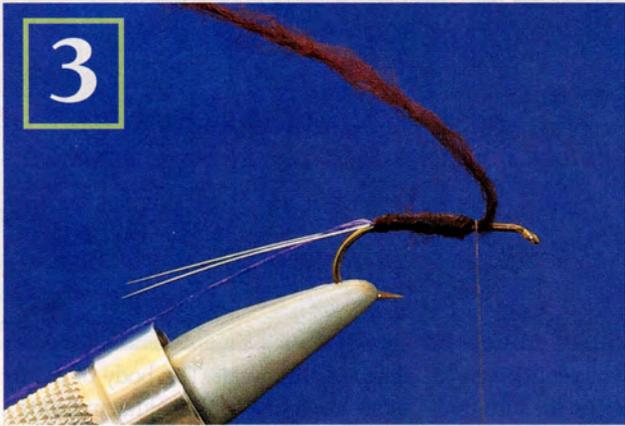
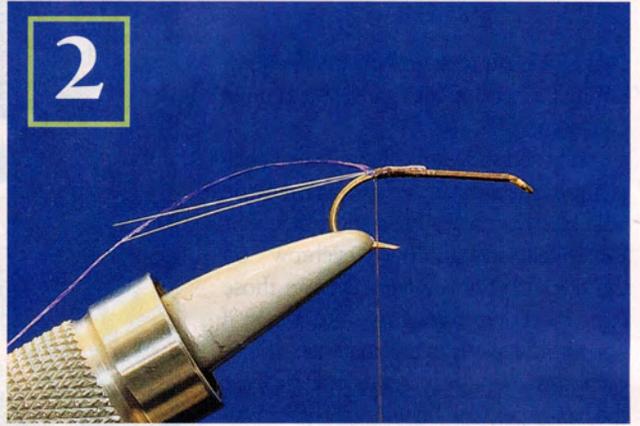
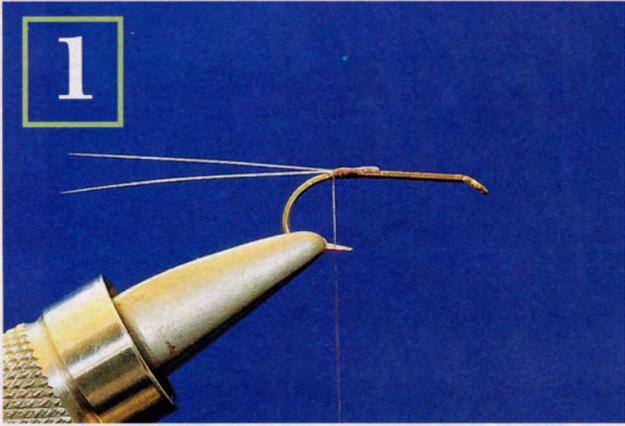
ibility on the water. The body of the fly floats low in the surface film, emulating a floating spinner.

Durability is a common thread between their flies. Both tiers believed that flies should stand up to catching multiple fish. Polly and Dick’s catalog includes a note saying that they tied each fly with no less than five half hitch knots. Dick explains that this careful approach placed Polly at odds with one of his largest commercial accounts; after all, less durable patterns would enable that company to sell more flies.

Dick also believed that if you cannot “catch a limit of trout with one fly, then something’s wrong.” He adds a drop of head cement after each major tying step to increase the durability of his patterns. I pulled a Black Drake Spinner from one of my fly boxes and can see a neat drop of glue in the thorax region under the parachute wing post.

The tail on Dick’s Black Drake Spinner is another departure from Polly’s version of the pattern. I’ve always admired the gracefully paired tail fibers on Dick’s fly; it is a prominent feature on the real insect, and it is eye catching on the imitation. Dick uses the bristles from

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Dick Winter's Black Drake Spinner

1 Wrap a layer of thread on the hook shank. Tie the tail to the end of the shank. Adjust the tail fibers into a splayed V using fine pliers. Lock the tail in place using firm thread wraps.

2 Tie on a piece of purple thread at the base of the tail; we will eventually use this to make the rib of the fly.

3 Tie on a piece of yarn at the end of the hook. Wrap the yarn two-thirds of the way up the shank to form a slender abdomen. Tie off but do not cut the excess yarn.

4 Spiral-wrap the purple thread over the abdomen to create the rib. Wrap the thread in the opposite direction of the yarn abdomen; try to make eight body segments between the tail and parachute. Tie off and clip the remaining piece of thread.

5 Tie on the white wing post. Trim the post equal to the length of the body.

6 Continue wrapping the yarn to make the thorax. Tie off the yarn and clip. Wrap the thread back to the base of the parachute post.

7 Tie the hackle to the base of the wing post; the shiny side of the feather is facing up. Wrap the hackle two or three times around the post. Tie off the excess hackle behind the hook eye and clip. Carefully make a neat thread head, tie off, and snip.

8 You may dress the finished fly with Water Shed. I place the fly pointing down and apply a drop of Water Shed at the tail end of the body.

Black Drake Spinner

Hook: Regular dry fly hook, size 12 or 10.

Thread: Dark brown 8/0 (70 denier).

Tail: Gray nylon paintbrush fibers, Mayfly Tails, or Microfibbets.

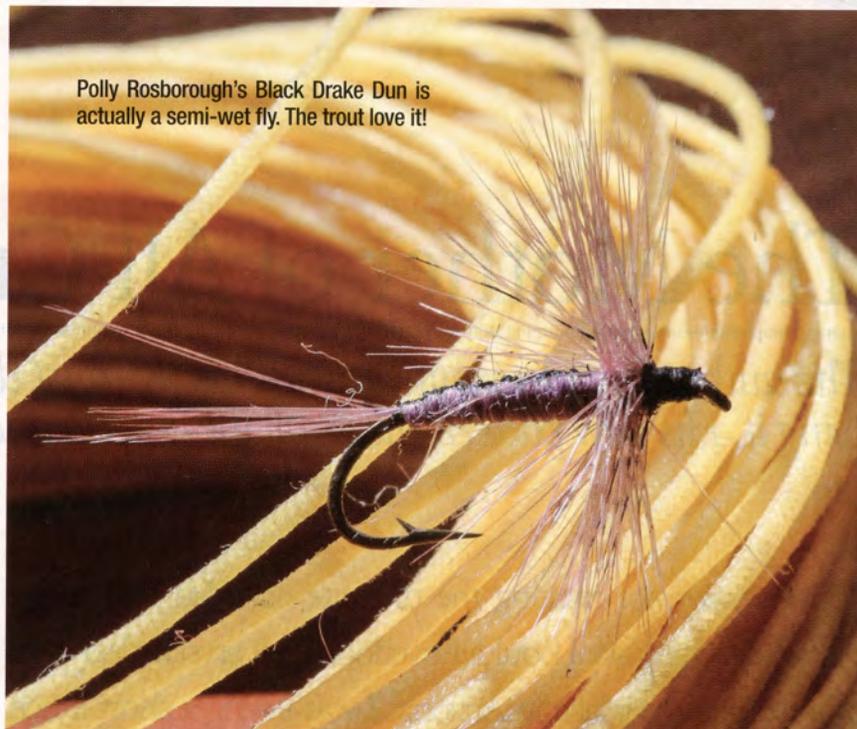
Body: Brownish red yarn.

Rib: Deep purple thread.

Hackle: Purple.

Parachute post: White polypropylene yarn.

Notes: For the body, Dick and Polly used brownish red yarn containing distinct burgundy or maroon highlights. Dick advises to make a nicely splayed tail. He says that a proper tail provides a good silhouette to the fish. Dick explained, "This gives the fish something to look at."



Polly Rosborough's Black Drake Dun is actually a semi-wet fly. The trout love it!

a nylon paintbrush matched in the correct color to emulate the tail of a living black drake.

Finally, Dick applies Water Shed to all his dry flies, including the Black Drake Spinner. A drop of Water Shed, applied after tying the fly and allowed to cure for 24 hours, will not wash out and does not change the color or texture of the pattern. Dick will tie about a dozen flies, stand them with their heads down, and place drops of Water Shed at the tails so the liquid runs into the bodies. Water Shed is a permanent fly floatant, and adds to the appeal of the patterns when fishing.

Fishing the Black Drake Spinner

The Black Drake Spinner is effective anytime during peak black drake hatches. The black drake duns come off in the evening and at night, and the spinners are active in the afternoon and late afternoon. As a result, most of our fishing during the day focuses on matching the spinners.

On the fabled Upper Williamson River on Yamsi Ranch, John Hyde watches over 10 miles of water, including the springs that feed the river. These waters are among the most prolific producers of

black drakes, and the hatch is an anticipated annual event. John says that "Dick would make a parachute spinner, while Polly's traditional fly is almost like a soft hackle that could be stripped under the surface." According to Dick, Polly's version seemed like a drowned insect in the surface film or just below the surface, and Polly told Dick that his Black Drake Dun was supposed to sink. As Dick always professes, "Polly did catch big fish under the surface with his Black Drake."

When I asked John Hyde which pattern works best, he whispered, "Dick is king of the black drake." It's a really hard hatch to match. It is also difficult to achieve the right combination of color, proportions, and the overall look in an imitation. Polly, and then Dick, did match this insect that is so prevalent in the Klamath Basin.

The far reaches of the Upper Williamson have always been Dick's favorite waters. I've spent hours listening to Dick tell stories about his friends and the "trout camp" they established on the banks of the river. It is fitting that his pattern is one of the best for matching this great hatch.

Glenn Zinkus writes for this magazine from his home in Oregon.