

FIRST FLIES: THE BLUEGILL IT'S-A-BUG

**BLUEGILLS LIKE TO EAT
FOAM-BODIED BUGS.**

BY GARY R. YADEN

PHOTO AND DRAWINGS: LARRY LARGAY

I tied this new pattern to fish for bluegills in a local pond. I expected to catch a few fish with it, but nothing compared to what happened: I caught two bass and 17 platter-size bluegills in just under two hours using only one fly. I caught the bass and two of the bluegills on the first five casts, and the last five bluegills of the evening were so large I couldn't get my hand around them to unhook them. My brother-in-law said that he didn't realize there were such big bluegills in his pond.

To be honest, the Bluegill It's-a-Bug resulted from a failed effort to tie a pan-fish popper using foam. I found several Internet sites containing information about using foam rubber, and I read Skip Morris's book *Tying Foam Flies*. My first attempt at tying a foam popper was a total failure: The thread wraps I used

to secure the foam to the hook were visible and awful-looking, and I had failed to form a neat foam collar on the top and bottom of the fly. It just so happened that an open fly box was lying on my tying table, and a Girdle Bug and a Bitch Creek Nymph caught my eye. These patterns are super bluegill flies, and I picked up features from both.

There are some unique traits to the Bluegill It's-a-Bug, starting with the foam eyes on the sides of the fly. The second is that the pattern sits on the water with the butt of the fly sinking under the surface; when retrieved with a slight twitch, the entire body rocks on the surface. But best of all, the Bluegill It's-a-Bug is easy to tie and is very durable.

Check out Gary Yaden's Web site at www.msnusers.com/bluegillfliesnotebook.

Hook: Mustad 3906B, sizes 10 to 6 for bluegills, larger for bass.

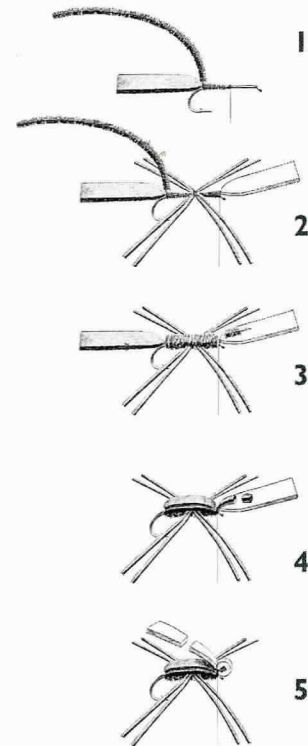
Thread: Danville's size A Waxed Flymaster, black or to match the body color.

Overbody: 1/8-inch closed-cell foam.

Underbody: Small to medium chenille, color to match the overbody.

Legs: Four 2-inch strips of rubber hackle.

Head: 1/8-inch closed-cell foam.



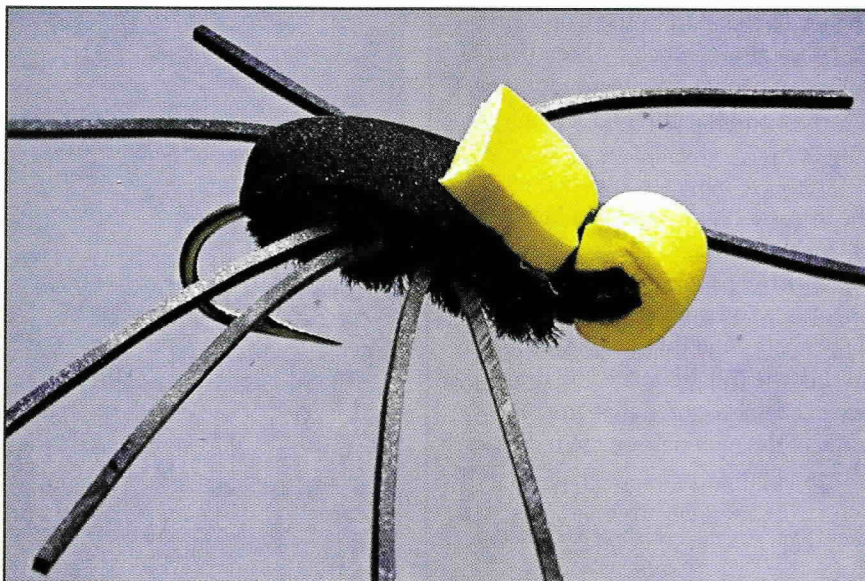
1 Start the thread at the hook bend. Cut a foam strip 1/4 inch by 1 inch. Cut a pointed tip in one end and tie this in as shown here. Tie in the chenille on top of the foam. Wrap the thread forward.

2 Tie in the rubber legs as shown here. Cut a strip of different-colored foam 1/4 inch wide by 3/4 inch long for the head. Cut a "V" point on one end. Tie the end of the strip at the front of the hook.

3 Wrap the chenille underbody. Place one wrap of chenille between the rubber legs—you can adjust the position of the legs later. Tie off the chenille and clip the excess.

4 Pull the strip of foam extending over the hook bend up and over the chenille to form the overbody. Keep the strip tight and secure it with three or four thread wraps. Trim the excess, leaving about 1/8 inch.

5 Pull the front strip back over the foam "eye." Secure the foam as before. Whip-finish and clip the thread. Trim the excess foam, leaving a 1/8-inch-long case. Adjust the rubber legs on each side of the body.



LITE-BRITE BAITFISH

Hook: Mustad 94831, size 6.

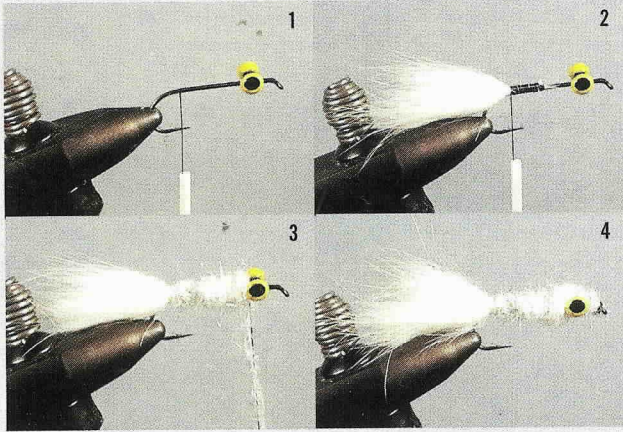
Thread: Black Flat Waxed Nylon.

Eyes: Painted dumbbells.

Tail: White rabbit fur.

Body: Pearl Lite-Brite dubbing.

Big bluegills eat lots of fry, especially in the early summer when the hatchlings of all species begin venturing away from home. Fish the Lite-Brite Baitfish along the outside edges of weedbeds, along drop-offs and points, and along old creek channels. A slow retrieve that makes the fly rise off the bottom and then sink back down works best. The hook specified for this pattern is actually a dry-fly hook. I like this hook, as opposed to Mustad's 79580 streamer hook, because it has a slightly shorter shank. The shorter shank makes for a better baitfish profile, at least to me.



1 Tie in the dumbbell eyes about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the shank length behind the hook eye; then wrap a smooth layer of thread along the shank.

2 Clip a small clump of white bunny fur; then tie it in at the hook bend. Secure it with some tight wraps. A drop of superglue doesn't hurt.

3 Spin some Lite-Brite dubbing on the thread. Spin the dubbing as tightly as you can; then wind it forward along the hook shank.

4 Build a tapered baitfish body, and make a figure-eight wrap over and around the eyes. Taper the dubbing sharply ahead of the eyes; then whip-finish.

PENNELL DRY FLY

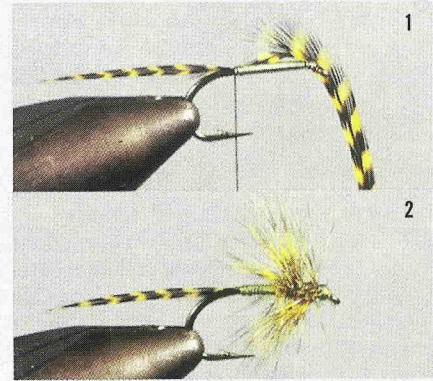
Hook: Mustad 94836, size 10.

Thread: Pearsall Gossamer Silk, green, yellow or brown.

Tail and hackle: Narrow saddle hackle or dry-fly hackle.

H. Cholmondeley-Pennell was a 19th-century inspector of fisheries in England. He also wrote quite a few books on fishing. Most of what he wrote has been completely discredited, but in one of his books (*The Modern Practical Angler*, published in 1870) he offered his secret dry-fly recipe. Having spent most of a chapter proving that all one needs to catch trout is the proper color of dry fly, Pennell explains, "Such flies it has been further shown should naturally be three in number, embracing the three most common insect colours, green, brown, and yellow." In other words, one fly in each of three colors.

Pennell was wrong about that, too. But his fly pattern is delightfully simple, and even though it isn't the be-all and end-all of trout flies, it works exceptionally well for bluegills. You can tie them as Pennell did, with the hackle color matching the silk—or you can use contrasting colors. Either way, you get a good, serviceable dry fly that's a snap to tie. And, truth be told, I have caught plenty of freestone trout on these flies—just don't expect to match every hatch with them. (Incidentally, Cholmondeley-Pennell is pronounced "Chumley-Pennell," in case you were wondering.)



1 Wrap a smooth layer of silk along the hook shank. Tie in the tip of the hackle so that it points straight back to make the tail of the fly.

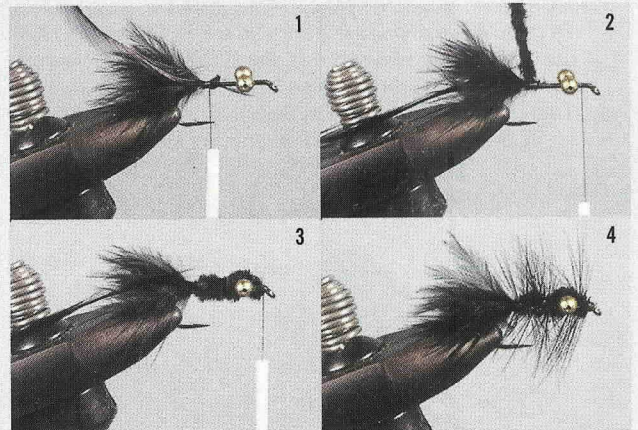
2 Wind the silk forward in smooth wraps to cover the feather. When you reach the point where the wing should be, advance the thread beyond the hackle to the hook eye. Wind three or four turns of hackle, tie it off, and clip the excess. Whip-finish the silk.

1 Tie in the bead-chain eyes positioned as shown here. Wrap a smooth layer of thread back to the hook bend. Select a long saddle hackle. Strip a couple of bunches of fluff from the base of the feather, and tie those in as the tail of the fly. Next, tie in the saddle hackle by its tip right at the base of the tail. A long, lightly webbed hackle makes for a nice, full fly.

2 Tie in the chenille over the tip of the saddle hackle. Stripping some of the chenille from the core makes it easier to tie in securely.

3 Wind the chenille forward along the hook shank. Make a single crossing wrap above the bead-chain eyes. Tie off behind the hook eye.

4 Palmer the hackle forward over the chenille. The more hackle you can get along the shank, the better. Tie it off behind the hook eye; then whip-finish.

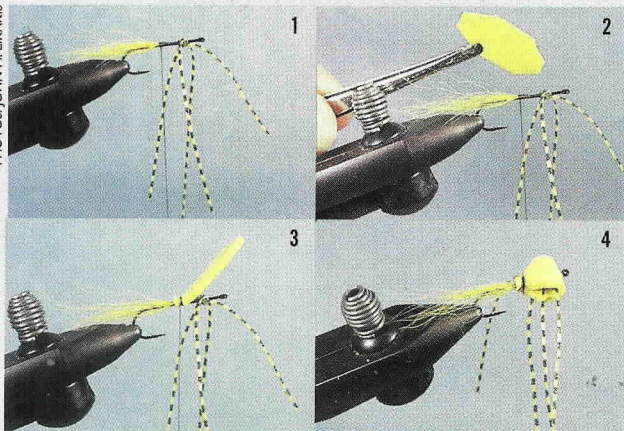


THE NITWIT

Hook: Daichi 2461 Aberdeen, size 6.
Thread: Black 6/0.
Tail: Yellow or chartreuse bucktail.
Legs: Rubber or silicone.
Body: Darice Foamie.

What could be more fun than catching bluegills on the surface? The Nitwit is loosely styled after the Gaines Ninny Bug, but the wide foam body makes it less likely to get swallowed deeply. The size 6 hook keeps the little dinky fish from getting hooked, although they do like to tow it around by the legs. Fish the Nitwit around the outside edges of weedbeds or above drop-offs. The biggest bluegills will be prowling in this deep water. A fairly slow, twitchy retrieve works best.

PHOTOS: JOHN M. UKAKIS



1 Wrap a smooth base of thread along the hook shank. Clip a small sprig of bucktail, even up the tips, trim it to about hook-shank length, and tie it in. Advance the thread to about the middle of the shank; then use square knots to tie your leg material to the hook. Once the legs are in place, use X-wraps to secure them.

2 Cut a small strip of foam and trim it to shape. Measure it against the hook shank—the tips should reach the butts of the bucktail when the strip is folded.

3 Use your scissor tips or a bodkin to poke a hole in the middle of the foam. Hold one end of the foam over the butts of the bucktail, and tie it down with a few firm wraps.

4 Fold the foam over the hook eye. The eye should poke through the hole you made. Tie the end of the foam under the hook shank with a few firm wraps. Whip-finish the thread; then apply a drop of superglue to the wraps. You can also try gluing the sides of the foam shut, but I haven't found that necessary.

BLUEGILL POP

Hook: Orvis I 523-00, size 8.
Thread: Black 8/0.
Tail: Black marabou tip.
Body/hackle: Black saddle hackle, wound as dense as possible.

The Bluegill Pop is a scaled-down version of Rich Hart's Bass Dry Fly. Tied with quality saddle hackles—or even dry-fly hackles—the Bluegill Pop floats nicely when it lands. Give it a sharp twitch and it pops like a popper. You'll only get one or two twitches out of it before it sinks, but then you can retrieve it with slow, short strips. The hackle collar sets up turbulence that makes the marabou shimmy and dance. When you pick the fly up for the next cast, the hackles dry out so it floats again when it lands. Fish the Bluegill Pop where trees or shrubs hang over deep water. Any bluegills living under there will surely attack with vigor. But don't be surprised if a largemouth snatches the fly before the bluegills can get to it.



1 Wrap a smooth base of thread along the hook shank; then tie in the marabou-tip tail. The tail should be two or three times as long as the hook shank.

2 Tie in two black saddle hackles by their tips; then wind them forward along the hook, filling the shank. Walk the thread up through the barbs, then whip-finish.



This chunky panfish fell for a Horsefly.

HORSEFLY

Hook: Dai Riki 075, size 8.
Thread: Black 6/0.
Eyes: Medium bead chain.
Tail: Fluff from base of saddle hackle.
Body: Black medium chenille.
Hackle: Black saddle hackle.

The biggest bluegills have pretty much abandoned the shallows. These fish spend most of their time in deeper water where food is plentiful and the competition for it is less intense. Besides, once bluegills get to a certain size, they're no longer prey for every foot-long bass that happens by. No doubt you've noticed this fly's similarity to the Woolly Buzzer: that's intentional. Essentially, this is a bead-chain Buzzer tied on a short-shank hook. This changes the fly's profile, making it look like a nymph; it also makes the fly much easier to extract should the fish swallow it deeply. With this in mind, you need some patterns with which to probe the depths down to about six feet. The Horsefly does this quite nicely. The bead-chain eyes sink the fly quickly, but don't plant it on the bottom. I like to bounce this fly down steep banks and drop-offs. It takes plenty of big bluegills—and more than its share of bass, too.