

Pumpkin Head

March 23, 2001

Maybe it doesn't look like it outdoors, but ice-out in the great Northeast is only a few weeks away. That means the smelt will be running, and the landlocked salmon will be chasing them.

Last year, I did fairly well on landlocks. This required spending quite a few hours on the water. In order to square this with my Russian wife, I decided to take one salmon for the table. It was a pretty good-sized one; almost four pounds. When I opened the fish, what I found was a lot of very small smelt; pin smelt, as they are called in these parts. Apparently, this is the dietary staple of our New Hampshire landlocks at this time of year, and I suspect they are fairly widespread throughout the region.

I caught landlocks on a variety of flies last season. Two were outstanding; my Conehead Smelt pattern, and a Maynard Marvel variation called the Pumpkin Head. One looks a lot like the natural baitfish, while the other is purely an attractor. It was the latter that fooled the large salmon. Here are the dressings and some tying instructions.

The Dressing:

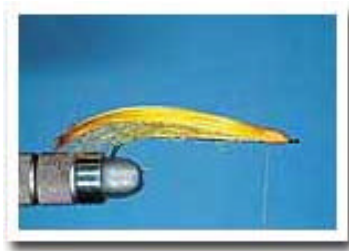
Hook	Long streamer. Here, a Daiichi model 2370.
Thread	Pumpkin orange, fairly fine.
Body	Gold embossed tinsel.
Underwing	Gold synthetic material to supplement golden pheasant crest.
Wing	Four to eight golden pheasant crests; number depends on hook size.
Overwing	A double layer of brown mallard.
Shoulder	A short golden pheasant tippet.
Head	Orange, built up.
Eyes	Black with white pupils.

The synthetic underwing greatly reduces the number of golden pheasant crests required to form the wing, and also gives the fly some additional sparkle. Two brands that work well are Golden Rod and the gold Poly Bear, seen here. When tying on the crests, I do them in pairs. The cross section of a golden pheasant crest feather isn't round; it's oval, and it stands on edge. Two quills tied on together tend to support each other, and maintain the desired attitude. Also, strip only the very butts of these feathers, leaving the golden fibers in place to further stabilize the feather during tie-in.

For the eyes, I'm using a water-base acrylic paint I found in a crafts store called Delta Ceramcoat. It's the ideal viscosity for this task; not too thick, but with enough body that it doesn't try to run all over the place. I'm sure there are lots of other brands that would work just as well. For applicators, I use the butt ends of two small drill bits. The one that applies the white pupil is two sizes smaller than the one that applies the black outer part. I recommend applying a coating of clear head lacquer as a base for the eyes. Allow it to dry thoroughly.

Wrap a double-layer tinsel body, then tie on the underwing. Tie on the crests in pairs, as mentioned, neatly trimming each pair of butts as you go. Add the brown mallard on top of the wing, then the short golden pheasant tippet fibers as shown. Lacquer the head, let it dry, paint on the eye, and after it's dry, apply another coat of clear head lacquer.

Pumpkin Head continued



Happy Opening Day to all! Dress warm.

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