



FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL

FLY OF THE MONTH

"Steelhead Bee"



Edition: October 2017

Written by: Kevin W. Erickson

Photographed By: Kevin W. Erickson

Creator: Roderick Haig-Brown

Guest Tier: Kevin W. Erickson

Originated by noted British Columbia fly fishing author/conservationist/angler Roderick Haig-Brown, the Steelhead Bee was well ahead of its time in many ways. The Bee's design allows it to be fished not only in the traditional upstream drag-free dead-drift dry fly approach, but also cast downstream on a tight line and fished with a "waking" or "skating" technique. Waking flies sit low in the surface and create a disturbance with either wings and/or bodies designed to resist the currents flow. Flies in this category include Harry Lemire's Greased Liner, Bill Bakke's Dragon Fly and Bill McMillan's Steelhead Caddis. Skating flies are tied with traditional stiff, bushy dry-fly hackle intended to lift the fly up so it rides mainly on the hackle and tail. Traditional dries scaled up in size for steelhead include the Royal Wulff, Humpy, and Hairwing Black Gnat among others. There is a crossover between flies designed as "wakers" being fished as a "skater" and vice-versa. The only thing that matters is if the fish likes the presentation.

Materials

Steelhead Bee

| | |
|---------|--|
| Hook: | Light wire Salmon Dry Fly Hook – Sizes 4 to 10. |
| Thread: | Red. |
| Tail: | Fox Squirrel Tail. |
| Body: | Equal sections of brown, yellow, and brown dubbing. |
| Wing: | Upright divided wings of Fox Squirrel Tail slanted forward at a 45° angle. |
| Hackle: | Brown - stiff dry fly quality or soft wet fly quality –discussed within the instruction. |

Tying Steps



Step 1

Attach your thread of the shank and wrap back to a position above the point.



Step 2

Select a small amount (30 to 50 fibers or so) of Fox Squirrel tail and trim the clump off the tail. Holding the very tip ends of the hair **tightly** in your left hand (for right-handed tyers) and begin pulling out all underfur and short fibers with your right hand. This evens the length of fibers (I usually prefer not to stack the hair for a more natural look) and removes unwanted shorter fibers thus reducing the bulk, making it easier to secure the fibers to the hook somewhere around the middle.

Transfer the clump of remaining fibers for the tail to your left hand with the tips pointing to the left over the bend of the hook. Measure so the tips extend a shank length beyond the back end of the shank and tie in tightly. Trim the butt ends at a taper to the midpoint of the shank and finish wrapping over the butt ends securely. Advance the thread to a position slightly forward of three-quarters of the way up the shank.



Step 3

Repeat the process with slightly less than double the amount of hair used for the tail. Again, it is important to clean out as much underfur and all possible shorter fibers **thoroughly** to minimize the amount of hair to be tied in. This time, transfer the hair to the right hand with the tips pointing to the right over the eye of the hook. Measure the hair and tie in so the wings are equal to the shank in length and are extending forward on top of the hook over the eye. Trim the butt ends at a taper to the back of the shank. This should overlap the taper of the butts from the tail and provide a smooth even underbody. Tie the butts down tightly and securely.



Step 4

Lift up the hair for the wings and wrap the thread tightly underneath the hair and against the base to start lifting the hair up from the hook. Now take the hair and divide it into two equal wings. Start “criss-cross” wrapping between the wings, by alternately taking a few wraps from **behind** the near wing to **in front** of the far wing, then switch to wrapping from **in front** of the near wing to **behind** the far wing. Help divide and define the wings with every wrap.



Step 5

Now you want to “post” the wing bases. Take the thread and wrap tightly around **only the hair** at the very base of each wing. For either waking or skating flies, this is an important step if you have upright divided wings. You may need to support the hair between each complete wrap to keep the wing from folding over and allowing your thread wrap to slip off. Post one wing then make a few wraps around the shank and then post the other. Work the thread up the base of each wing about a sixteenth of an inch or so. Once completed, add a drop of head cement to the base of each wing to help lock the thread wraps and stiffen the wings.



Step 6

Finally, make several wraps **tightly** behind both wings to force them forward to about a 45° angle sloping over the eye. The final position should be as shown – a 45° slant toward over the eye and each wing at about a 45° angle off the vertical (90° between the wings) when viewed from the front. Again, add a drop or two of cement to lock the thread wraps and wing bases in place and help stiffen them up for their work ahead pushing back against the currents you fish them in.



Step 7

Next is the body. Three equal sections of dubbing consisting of brown, then yellow, then brown again. Decide on the style of the fly you're going to create at this point. If tied to be a Skater, deduct the amount of room the hackle will occupy behind the wing and divide the remaining space back to the tail into thirds. This way you'll not be crowding the wing or hackle space. If you're making a Waking style, then build the body in thirds all the way up to the wing base.



Step 8

Select the hackle you will use depending on the style of tie you are creating. With either style, you want hackle that has fibers about one and one-half the length of the hook gape. If tied as a waking fly, simply add three or four turns of a soft, wet-fly grade hackle in front of the wing, tie it off at the back of the head space, build a small head and finish. If tied as a skater, select two good dry-fly quality hackles and trim the stem at the beginning of any soft fibers at the base. Strip off a few fibers from the base and tie them in one at a time good side (shiny side) down at the front of the body pointing back toward the hook bend. Tie in one on top of the other with good tight wraps. Advance your thread to the back of the head space. Wrap three to five equally spaced wraps behind the wing and the same number in front of the wing. The goal is to leave one stem-width worth of space between every wrap for the next hackle to fill in. Don't spread the wraps too wide or crowd them too close. Tie off the first feather but don't trim it yet, in case you need to unwrap and rewind it. Now wrap the second feather in between the wraps of the first, Move the feather forward and backward as you wrap to allow the fibers of the first hackle to move out of the way as you work forward. Tie off the second hackle as well then inspect and untie, unwrap, rewrap and tie off again as needed. Once you're satisfied make a few extra wraps, trim off the excess, wrap a small head, finish and you're done.



SIDE FINISH



TOP FINISH

All of the patterns featured in Flyfishing & Tying Journal are available in detailed step-by-step Flash Slideshows on my website: www.modernclassicsflytying.com. I also encourage you to contact me with any questions or suggestions for other patterns you'd like to see tied and featured. Email me at info@modernclassicsflytying.com

Author Bio:

Kevin W. Erickson is the author of the new book published by Stackpole Books titled "Feather Craft – The Amazing Birds and Feathers Used in Classic Salmon Flies" Get a preview of what it has to offer at www.FeatherCraftBook.com. He worked in the flyfishing business for over 25 years as a full-time professional outfitting anglers, booking flyfishing trips worldwide and instructing fly fishing, fly casting, and fly tying classes at all levels. He has traveled extensively and acted as host of angling groups to both fresh and saltwater destinations around the globe. Also a published fly tyer and author, his work includes contributions in Randy Stetzer's book "Flies: the Best 1000" and Randall Kaufmann's epic "Bonefishing." He currently works in the software industry in Beaverton, Oregon.

Editors Notes: Comments from the editor.

Fly of the Month:

Do you know someone who deserves to be featured in the Fly of the Month? If you have a camera and computer, you can write a Fly of the Month article to honor your favorite tier tying their best creation. For details contact the Fly Tying Group at ftg@flyfishersinternational.org.

Please note: The demonstration you are viewing makes no claim, implied or otherwise, that the presenter or demonstrator of the fly pattern was the original creator of the fly.

This is the guest tyer's version of this fly and it may differ from the creator's or other versions and variations.

Please Credit FFI Website or FFI Clubwire with any use of the pattern.

You can direct any questions or comments to
ftg@flyfishersinternational.org.