



FLY FISHERS
INTERNATIONAL



FLY TYING GROUP

February 2023
FLY OF THE MONTH
"Fan Wing Ant"



Edition: February 2023
Written by: Gretchen & Al Beatty
Photographed By: Al Beatty
Creator: The Beattys

Fan Wing Ant

We've always had a few squirrel tails in our tying materials but a gift from Gretchen's father (Bill Evans) in the mid 90's changed that situation for us, big time. "I've got a few squirrel tails for you," he commented as we were leaving for home after a Sunday afternoon dinner. He placed a sizeable package in the car trunk and off we went.

When we got home and opened his package we discovered more than a hundred, prime fox squirrel tails. We were stunned! What in the heck were we going to do with all of them?

As you might expect squirrel tail fibers started sneaking their way into many of our patterns. We found it to be a really good substituted for deer/elk/moose in many of our dry-fly patterns. It also was a good under wing for the strip-wing steelhead flies we often used on some of the streams we haunted in central Idaho.

After a particularly productive day on the Clearwater River Al noted the fly seemed to lose its appeal after the strip wings had been torn from it leaving the squirrel tail fibers exposed. The fly looked ok while inspecting it in hand but it just didn't have any motion in the water. On the positive side it didn't foul around the hook bend like marabou will but it looked dead in the water column. What could we do to the squirrel wing to give the stiff fibers motion?

On our drive back to Bozeman we brain stormed ideas for making the fibers "work" in the water and really didn't identify a solution. We concluded the squirrel tail was best used on dry flies and left the problem unsolved. Several weeks later Al's cell phone rang just as he was pulling the drift boat out of the water after floating clients on the lower Madison River. It was Gretchen. "I've got the squirrel tail problem solved," she advised him excitedly.

When Al got home Gretchen showed him a fan-wing streamer constructed from the squirrel tail fibers. The wing would collapse during the strip part of a retrieve then pop open during the pause – at least it did in the bath tube at home. Would it do the same on the river? Would the fish find it attractive?

Al wasn't scheduled to work the next day so we headed for the Yellowstone River to give the wing style a test drive – it's funny, we certainly don't have a problem finding an excuse to go fishing. The flies we tested that day were a roaring success! The fish gave us a "thumbs up" so to speak and that's why you are seeing a fan wing on the Steelhead Ant we present here. It is easy to tie producing a pattern attractive to the angler as well as the fish.

Tying Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z9acVO0wmg>

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 2/0 to 8, steelhead

Thread: White, red

Tag: Small silver tinsel

Tail: Red golden pheasant fibers or dyed crest feathers

Butt: Peacock

Body: Red floss

Wing: Fox squirrel tail fibers, fanned

Hackle: Brown pheasant body feather

Cheeks: Jungle cock nails

Head: Thread and glue (regular or UV)

1. Place the hook in the vise and attach white tying thread on the back of the shank directly above the



hook point. Tie on a strip of small, silver tinsel and wrap the tag. Tie on the tail fibers and trim any waste ends. Cover the thread wraps with a butt constructed from peacock fibers. Trim any excess materials then advance the thread forward to the back of the eye loop. Whip-finish the white thread and tie on the red. We like to “burnish” the white thread to provide a smooth underbody for the floss placed in the next step.



2. Select a long strand of red floss and tie it to the shank at the front of the hook. Wrap the floss back to meet the butt then forward again to join the red thread. Tie it off and trim the waste ends. Again, we like to burnish the floss to make a smooth body.



3. Pluck a brownish body feather from a ring neck pheasant and fold the fibers back in preparation to construct a wet style collar. Tie the feather to the hook by its tip and wrap the hackle collar. Tie off the feather and trim the waste end of the stem.

4. Select a clump of squirrel tail fibers and even the tips in a hair stacker. Tie it to the

hook to form a wing long enough to reach the end of the hook. Trim any waste ends. Divide the wing fibers into four equal segments and pull the top three out of the way. Place a loop of thread between the first segment and the other three. Pull the thread forward and anchor it in front of the wing.

5. Repeat the process two more times to complete the fanned part of the wing. Adjust the tension on each thread loop to evenly spread the four segments of wing fibers.



6. Select two jungle cock nails and tie them to the hook to form the cheeks. Wrap the head, whip-finish, and trim the thread from the hook. Coat the head with cement or UV to complete the fly.

Author's note: Since writing this article in the 2000s, we've learned the whip-finish illustrated here has some problems. Check out The Whip-Finish (Good or Bad) video

on the Al Beatty YouTube Channel. It proves that after many years at the vise, we are still making discoveries.



Editors Notes: Comments from the editor.

Fly of the Month: Do you know someone who you think should be featured in the Fly of the Month? If so, feel free to refer them. 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

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