

Woolly buggers are responsible for a lot of sore fish mouths!



Woolly Wonders

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Originally published in Real Fishing Magazine.
Summer, 2009

Yes, I am a closet Woolly Buzzer lover. No, I am not talking about your curmudgeon relatives. In case you haven't heard, the woolly buzzer is probably the most versatile and effective fly pattern on earth.

The first person to whip up one of these creations was Russ Blessing from Pennsylvania. In the early 1980's he designed this fly to imitate hellgrammites in his local stream. Since then, fly fishers around the world thank him and fish have been licking their wounds.

The original woolly buzzer was tied on a #6 nymph hook and consisted of a black marabou tail, dark olive green chenille body and an oversized black hackle feather wrapped up the fly. Anglers have taken liberties with the original and you can now find woolly buzzers and countless variations in an assortment of sizes and rainbow of colors. Most of which are incredibly effective.

I have to say, the original doesn't look a lot like a hellgrammite in a fly tying vice (he originally planned to trim the hackle) but add water and stand back! A woolly buzzer would actually deliver on infomercial fishing bait promises. It simply looks alive and edible when you put it in the water.

I don't know exactly what a buzzer imitates. The fact that it looks alive, vulnerable and edible means the fish can decide what they are eating. If you tie this fly in a variety of colors and sizes, leeches, minnows, nymphs, crayfish, squid, salamanders and other things all vaguely resemble a swimming woolly buzzer.

Some patterns through history are looked down on by experienced fly because they are too easy to catch fish with and thus "unsporting" The buzzer and egg flies are two patterns that definitely get his bad rap.

But, think about this "I don't want to use that fly because it works too well". Would you say that? If you do, thanks for leaving more fish for me and my friends to catch.

When I teach beginner fly tying lessons woolly buzzers are the fly of choice. Buzzers are simple to tie with cheap and easily available materials. As a bonus, even ugly buzzers that don't look great on the vice often look really good to the tough critics at your local fishing hole. It is difficult to fish this pattern "wrong" If it is in the water the materials come alive. If you can get it in front of a fish, you are on your way to fooling them!



A bead head woolly buzzer... look out fish!

But, matching local fishing conditions with appropriate buzzers can help. I often add a bead head or lead wire to get it down to more fish. Flash material can improve a buzzer and I have also used other things like deer hair heads, rubber legs and even spinner blades to adapt to different conditions.

I like to mix different colors of hackle, chenille and marabou. One of my favourites is an olive buzzer with a splash of orange in the tail. Many salmon and steelhead anglers add a head of bright chenille or bead head to create what is called an "egg sucking leech". Feel free to experiment.

Give this, "unfair" fly a try. I am sure you can get over using a lowly woolly buzzer when you look at the photos of you holding a nice fish that ate your buzzer.

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