

## EP Mullet by Jack Lehman (AFF NL June 2011)

When I'm reincarnated, I'd hate to find out I'm a mullet. Everything likes mullet. It's a primary food source for Redfish, Speckled Trout, Snook, Jacks, Dolphin, and in Florida, people eat them. Wherever we go in the saltwater, we find mullet. From tailers back in the shallow muddy backwaters to huge schools offshore. We try to time our Padre Island trips to coincide with the annual mullet migration, when most of the smaller fish move out of the bays and form a continuous stream of four inch fish heading south along the beaches. Many of us have wasted time throwing flies at tails on the flats, only to decide they were only mullet, not redfish. (Always a handy excuse.)

I found out something interesting when researching this article. Mulletts are distinguished by the presence of two separate dorsal fins, small triangular mouths, and the absence of a lateral line organ. They feed on detritus, and most species have unusually muscular stomachs and a complex pharynx to help in digestion. It's that lack of a lateral line that allows us to get so close to mullet when gliding across the flats in a kayak. Peace and quiet while enjoying the day until suddenly there is a huge explosion right next to the boat. Without a lateral line, they don't feel us moving through the water and only react when we come into their range of vision.

We've tied an Enrico Puglisi (EP) style baitfish here before, but that fly was tied using the hi-tie method, which creates tall, flat baitfish styles to imitate sunfish, shad, and other prey with those profiles. Mullet have a longer, rounder profile that requires a different technique to imitate. After some research and experimenting, I found a different way of tying the EP materials to the hook to create the correct shape. In the hi-tie, the material is tied in on top and parallel to the shank and then folded back onto itself. In this new method, which I'll refer to as a side-tie, the material is added on the side of the shank, pulled over to the far side of the shank, and then tied in again. Repeat the process on the underside of the hook and you have created a wider profile baitfish imitation with separate back and belly colors.

I have used EP fibers for this fly. Although they may seem expensive when you look at the store display, when used carefully you can build a lot of flies out of a package or two. EP fibers come in two basic varieties and a lot of colors. The original fibers were solid colors. I have used a solid white for the belly of this fly. As tyers became used to using EP fibers, they began blending several colors together to get a closer representation of the fish they were imitating. EP now includes packages of materials that are blended to match the colors of specific patterns found in the wild. I am using EP 3-D Mullet for the back of this fly. A closer inspection would show that there are several colors included in the package. There are several other materials that can be tied in a similar manner. Slinky Fiber, Kinky Fiber (both available already blended with Angel Hair), yak hair and sheep streamer materials will work. Any long, skinny fiber that can be folded back without creating too much bulk can be used.

I have developed this fly to imitate the 4-inch mullet we find on the flats and in the surf. It's tied on a Size 1 standard saltwater hook and using the proportions given creates a reasonable copy of the 4-inch mullet. By varying the size of the hook and the lengths of materials used, you can easily adjust this fly to be longer or shorter as necessary. For instance, I'm working toward a smaller fly tied with a light green or light brown back to imitate the anchovy and sardine type baitfish we sometimes fish around. As tied, this fly will be light and will stay near the surface unless you fish it on a weighted fly line. As an option, tie a few of these with cone heads. I've found that the cone will sink the fly a little quicker allowing it to be fished deeper.

Baitfishes are usually found in those large schools for mutual protection. A predator gets confused by the numbers and has a hard time picking an individual baitfish out of the school. Make your baitfish more attractive by fishing it near those bait balls, but behaving as if it were injured or confused. Tie it on with a loop knot to allow maximum motion, and strip it back erratically. Predators will see it as easy prey and attack. Large light baits like these can be hard to cast, especially in the wind, so consider upsizing your rod and fly line to be able to deliver the fly to the target.

### **MATERIALS**

**Hook:** Standard Salt Water Hook, Size 1 (Eagle Claw Billy Pate #1 shown)

**Thread:** 3/0 or 140 denier

**Back:** Puglisi EP Fibers (Mullet 3-D)

**Belly:** Puglisi EP Fibers (White)

**Flash:** Angel Hair (Pearl Green)

**Eyes:** 6mm Dome Eyes (Gold)

**Optional:** Cone Head (Large Nickel)



**Step 1:** To complete this fly in just two colors you will need three small full-length bunches of each color. It doesn't take very much. Each bunch, when pulled tight and twisted slightly, should be no larger than the lead on a #2 pencil. To tie this fly on a size 1 hook, I have found that about seven pieces of each color are enough. Here they are shown prepared prior to starting the fly, but it can be easier to cut them as you need them. As shown the first matched set of pieces cut to  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  the length of the material. A second set is cut into two halves ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ). The third set is cut into three pieces; one a little more than a third ( $\frac{1}{3+}$ ), one about a third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ), and the remaining piece is a little less than a third ( $\frac{1}{3-}$ ). They will be tied onto the fly moving from longest to shortest, with the exception of one of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  pieces, which is used last.



**Step 2:** C Start your thread just behind the eye of the hook and cover the shank of the hook all the way back to the bend of the hook. Take the back (darker)  $\frac{3}{4}$  piece of the EP fiber and tie it in at the midway point over the back of the shank. Tie it on top of the hook so that one half goes straight forward over the hook and the other end goes back as a tail.



**Step 3:** Pull the forward half of the material back over the 'tail' and bind it down with a few wraps. As an option, you can tie this piece in a little off the center of the piece so that the tail end is somewhat tapered.



**Step 4:** Rotate or turn the hook over in your vise. Take the  $\frac{3}{4}$  piece of the white and tie it on the underside of the hook to match the back piece. Split the white fibers around the hook bend to balance the tail on either side. Move the thread about  $\frac{3}{16}$ th of an inch forward to prepare for the next step.



**Step 5:** Return the hook to the upright position. Take one of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  pieces of the back pieces and tie it to the near side of the hook, halfway between the center and top, Tie it in so that it angles across the hook with the nearside going back toward the tail, and the forward fibers moving to the far side of the shank. Note that you can adjust the length of the material by pulling on its end once it has been bound down.



**Step 6:** Shown is a top view of the fly. Once you have bound the material down to the side of the hook in the previous step, pull the forward half of the material around to the far side of the hook, pull it back tight, and bind it to the far side of the hook with several thread wraps. Adjust the material so that it is all above the center of the hook shaft.



**Step 7:** Turn the hook over and repeat the previous step using the white belly material. I call this type of binding the material a side-tie as opposed to the hi and lo tie used in the first, tailing step. Take a very small amount of the angel hair and tie it to the hook just ahead of the last bunch. Tie it in the middle and stroke the ends of the fibers back along the body.



**Step 8:** Advance your thread about  $\frac{3}{16}$ th of an inch forward of the previous bunch. As you move forward with the addition of materials, remember that you have 7 sets of the material and you want to tie in the last piece right behind the eye of the hook. Adjust your separations as necessary to achieve this goal. Set the other set of  $\frac{1}{2}$  length pieces to use last and take the  $\frac{1}{3}+$  pieces and tie them in just as you did before. Add a little angel hair in front and repeat with the  $\frac{1}{3}$  pieces and then the  $\frac{1}{3}-$  pieces. Add angel hair between each set. After adding the  $\frac{1}{4}$  piece left from the tailing material, you should now have one set of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  pieces and your thread should be just behind the eye of the hook, with room for one more bunch.



**Step 9:** If you feel that you have left too much space between the last bunch of material and the eye, you can cheat a little by cutting a one inch piece from each of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  pieces you have left and tie them in using the side tie technique. Take the last piece you have left and tie it in just behind the eye of the hook using the hi and lo tie techniques you used back in step 2 to create the tail. If you plan on tying up several of these flies and have the material, consider using a black or dark blue for the back material in this step to add contrast. The picture shows the entire fly at this point before any trimming takes place. The material has been combed back to smooth it and remove any tangles.



**Step 10:** Take the fly out of the vise and hold it by the hook point or the eye. Take a pair of long tipped scissors and begin trimming the fly to the shape you want. Take a little off, re-comb, and then take some more. Be careful not to take too much off at a time, and choose a good time to quit. You can easily keep going until you don't have anything left. Once you are satisfied with the shape, add the dome eyes. I use a clear silicone caulk. Take a bodkin and work a small amount of the caulk into the body fibers where the eye will go. Add another small glob of the caulk over this spot and place the eye. Repeat on the other side of the fly.



**Step 11:** Shown is a view of the fly from above. When trimming the fly, I try to leave the back material a little fuller and broader than the belly material.

**Step 12:** Shown is a picture of the fly from the front.

