

Madam X by Jack Lehman (AFF NL April, 2009)

Well spring is finally here. We've had some rain and the grass is greening up nicely. The fish are starting to look up - for insects. This month we will tie an old standard; the Madame X. Not only will this give you a chance to create some grasshopper imitations, but it will give you some more experience working with hair. The bullet head profile and the long legs make the Madame X an ideal imitation of several insects which are likely to fall in the water. Natural colored hair can be selected to match specific insects, or dyed hair can be used to add color when fish are keying on specific colors. And don't forget the cricket hatch we have here in Central Texas during August and September.

Deer hair will work for these flies, but elk usually works better. Elk hair, like deer, is hollow and helps add buoyancy to the fly. Elk is more durable than deer, and works better than deer because it doesn't flare as much so is easier to handle with these tying techniques. Look for hair that is consistent in texture, long enough for your application, and relatively straight.

There are several ways of folding the hair back to form the head. The most readily available is already there on the end of your hand. Use your thumb, index and middle finger together to surround the hook eye and push the hair back evenly around the hook. Stroke the hair back several times until you get it balanced evenly around the fly. Griffin sells a set of rubber washers with different sized holes that can be used to evenly push the hair back. Other tools that have been described are short lengths of straws and the barrel from a ballpoint pen. The inside diameter of the tool should be the same size as the clump of hair you are using for the head.

Even though elk hair floats, it will become waterlogged and sink lower into the water film. This is OK; a grasshopper or other insect that becomes trapped on the surface will sink as it struggles to free itself. Some tyers will extend the life of their fly by substituting foam for the overwing.

I have tied this fly on a size 10 hook. Early in the season, this may be too large, but as we get through the year into summer and fall, the insects we are trying to imitate will get larger and you will need to tie the fly on larger hooks. I have chosen to tie the orange leg version which is more of an attractor than an imitation of the natural, but you can use whatever you have available as it is the profile of the fly and the movement of the legs that attracts the fish. Or you can change the colors to match the naturals that you see around the water. As you are walking to the water, take notice of the insects that that are scaring up and use this information to determine the size and color you will use.

Wiggling rubber legs will draw the fish in, but if you aren't getting any hookups, consider that it may be smaller fish attacking the legs on your fly. Consider going smaller or moving on to a better location. Round rubber legs sold for fly tying work well, but replacement skirts for spinner baits are an excellent source of leg materials.

Materials:

Hook: TNC 700, Dai-riki 270m sizes 4 thru 12

Head: Elk body hair, light to ark to match the real

Overwing: Orange antron or synthetic

Thread: Orange 3/0

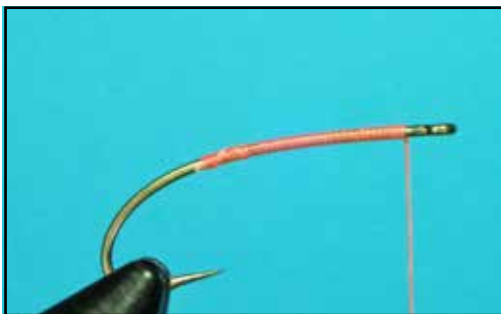
Body/Tail: Elk

Indicator: 2mm craft foam

Rib: Orange tying thread

Legs: Orange medium rubber

Wing: Elk



Step 1: Start the thread at the back of the hook shank and wrap a tight body forward to just behind the eye.



Step 2: Clean and stack a clump of the elk hair about half the hook gap in diameter. Hold the clump of hair with the tips out over the hook eye so that it extends about half the length of the hook shank and take a couple of loose thread wraps. Adjust the hair so that it spreads evenly around the hook then secure it with several more tight thread wraps.



Step 3: Trim the butt ends of the hair. This hair will later be pulled back to form the bullet head.



Step 4: Clean and stack another bunch of the elk hair, about the same amount as used for the head. Hold it against the hook so that the tip ends extend about a half-shank length behind the hook. I find it easier to trim the butt ends of this section before the tie-in but find what works best for you. Tie the hair in with a couple of loose thread wraps and adjust the hair so that it surrounds the hook. Tie the hair in securely with several more tight wraps. Trim the butt ends if you haven't already.



Step 5: Hold the tips of this hair with your non-tying hand so that it surrounds the hook and doesn't get a chance to flair. Wrap the thread back to the bend of the hook in wide spiral wraps. Make a couple of wraps at the back and then spiral wrap the thread forward, back to the front of the tail section.



Step 6: Clean and stack a bundle of elk hair that is slightly larger than the previous two. Line the tips up with the existing tail to get the correct length and cut the butts of this bundle so that it is the same length as the tail. Securely tie this bundle in the gap between the previous two while maintaining a grip on the tips to keep the hair from flaring. A drop of glue where the butts of these three bundles meet will help improve the durability of the fly. (Note that there is an 'Improved Madame X' pattern that substitutes foam for this wing.)



Step 7: Tie in a small piece of orange antron or other synthetic fiber over the wing. This will help serve as an indicator to make the fly more visible.



Step 8: Move the thread to a point about one-third back on the hook shank to prepare to form the bullet head. Use your thumb and first two fingers of your tying hand to push the hair on front to form the bullet head. Hold the material back with your other hand and make a couple of thread wraps. Pinch the head with your fingers and adjust the hair around the hook shank. When you are satisfied, make several more tight wraps. Trim any stray hairs from around the head. Some tyers will also trim away the collar fibers from the bottom of the fly.



Step 9: Prepare a couple of long rubber legs, about 2 1/2 to 3 times the shank length. Tie one of these on either side of the body with a couple of thread wraps. You can adjust the position of the rubber legs by pulling them up, down or back as needed. When you are ready, secure them with several more thread wraps.

Step 10: Adding a small piece of foam on top of the body behind the thread is optional, but it can make the fly easier to see in poor lighting conditions. Whether you choose to use this or not, whip finish the bullet head at the back of the head. A long reach whip finisher can come in handy for this step. Trim off the excess thread. Add some glue to the thread wraps to finish the fly.

