

The Siliclone by Jack Lehman (AFF NL April 2010)

When you need to start preparing for fishing the coast during the spring, there are basically two sets of conditions we run into at the coast during spring; wind or not. On a clear, calm day, expect the reds to be up very shallow, and to be very spooky. In these situations, you need to throw light. On the other hand, when there is a lot of wind, expect the water to be off-color and moving. In these situations, you need to be prepared to throw a larger fly that will create some commotion to get attention. The Siliclone is a Bob Popovics creation that, while designed to be fished for striper on the coasts of New England, can work well here for redfish and trout.

The fly has enough bulk to punch through the winds of spring, yet it still floats, or almost so, to allow fishing over weeds, oyster, or other structure. The large, solid profile of the head will push a lot of water, creating a shock wave that can be readily found in off-color waters. Yet the fleece body holds a lot of air, even when thoroughly soaked, to keep the fly on top. This fly can also be fished over deeper structure using a sinking line. The fly will stay deep, but will avoid hang-ups by floating over any obstructions.

Popovics' original flies of this type had hard, epoxy coated bodies that were extremely durable, if sometimes very heavy. The silicone used instead of the epoxy here can be a lot easier to work with. There is little smell from the silicone, and its non-toxic nature removes some of the problems of working with epoxy. Softex is another possibility, but does have a significant smell. I haven't tried Fabric Fusion on this fly yet, but it should work OK. There are many brands of silicone out there, as well as a variety of colors. Clear is usually used, and can be obtained at almost any hardware or paint store where it is sold as tub and tile caulking. Its very inexpensive, and you don't need much, so try a small tube of any brand. I usually use Dap brand clear silicone caulk, which is actually applied white and clears as it cures, but any brand should work.

You will also need some kind of wetting agent to keep the caulk from sticking to your fingers. Many tiers recommend Photo-flo, which is a photographic developing solution sold in photo stores, but I have found that a clear dishwashing soap works well and is easy to find. Jet dry, a electric dishwasher additive is also mentioned, but I have no experience with it. Wet your fingers before trying to make any final hand touches on the finished fly. Plastic knives and Popsicle sticks also work well when used to spread the caulk on the fly.

Wool head flies are tied in a similar fashion to deer hair flies such as muddlers, but the wool will absorb a lot of water and become very heavy. They also are easily shredded by toothy critters. The silicone skin of these flies protects the wool as well as helping to hold air pockets. Should the fly become waterlogged, you can squeeze the water out and the silicone will hold the fly's original shape.

For the saltwater version of match the hatch, tie these flies in smaller sizes for the spring, like the size 4 shown here, and increase them as we go through the season, moving up to 1/0 or 2/0 flies for the fall mullet migration in the surf. Shown is the typical chartreuse fly, but other colors can be tied as well, I would suggest you try the tans, whites (color the back with a blue or black marker before adding silicone), or even blacks. You should be able to find tan, brown, and black silicone for these flies.

The main advantage of this fly is that the bulk of the fly creates a wave in the water that helps predators to find it in off-color conditions. With a little practice, you can trim round, oval and triangular cross-sections on the fly body. They can be tied fat or thin, and additional tailing materials such as long or grizzley hackles can be added. Rattles, rubber legs or whatever you can think of can be added. Be sure that you use wide gap hooks or trim closely underneath the fly to keep the body from closing the hook gap. Expert tiers are even able to add diving lips to the front of the fly using only fleece and silicone.

Materials

Hook: Saltwater standard length hook, size 4 thru 2/0 (Eagle Claw Billy Pate #4 shown)

Thread: fine monofilament thread

Tail: White Bucktail

Flash: Silver flashabou or similar material

Body: Chartreuse Sheep Fleece or Ram's wool

Skin: Clear Silicone (Dap clear silicone shown)

Eyes: Self-sticking or prism eyes

Additional optional materials: Photo-flo or clear dishwashing liquid, Popsicle sticks or plastic knife



Step 1: Shown are the three types of wool that are available to the fly tyer. On the right is streamer hair. This hair is usually very long and relatively thin. It can be used, but the other forms are more useful. On the left is a sample of sheep wool, which is usually labeled 'sculpin wool' in the fly stores. This material is thicker and fuller than the streamer wool and is of a uniform length. It is available in a multitude of colors. This material can be used for the entire fly. In the center is a sample of sheep wool that has been packaged as what the knitters and yarn spinners as 'roving'. This is sheep wool that has been shorn from the sheep and cleaned and processed into these long bundles. A knitter would take this roving and spin it into yarn. The lengths of the individual hairs are interspersed in the bundle so that it is easy to select and trim an appropriate amount for stacking onto the hook.



Step 2: Start the thread near the bend of the hook. Remember that monofilament is slicker than other tying threads so more wraps may be necessary to get a secure jam knot. Select a bunch of bucktail and tie it in so that the tail is twice the length of the hook shank. Tie it down so that it completely surrounds the hook and then trim off any excess bucktail at the butts.



Step 3: Add a couple of smaller, shorter bunches of bucktail on either side of the top of the body to form two shoulders. This will help create the correct cross-section to imitate a mullet. The tips should be about half-way back on the tail; Trim off any excess bucktail and add some flashabou down both sides to create a flash.



Step 4: If you have the tools, brush or comb the sculpin hair on the skin to clear out any tangles. Cut a small bunch of fleece from the hide. Hold the fleece against the fly to measure for length. The tips should be just short of the second bucktail bundles you added. Determine where your tie-in point is and trim off the butt ends about $\frac{3}{4}$ an inch in front of that point. (Save these off-cuts for use in step 6 if they are long enough.) Push the material back over the shank of the hook so that it completely surrounds the hook and tie it in, leaving the excess material in front of the tie-in point. Hold back the excess material with your off-hand, work the thread through it, and take several wraps just in front of the material.



Step 5: This picture shows an optional step. I have added a small amount of red or orange wool to the underside of the fly to simulate gills. Take a small bundle of the wool and tie it in at the middle, fold the front back and take several wraps in front to hold it in place.



Step 6: Cut a thicker bundle of the wool fibers off of the sculpin wool or use the wool roving if you have it. You will need a bundle about one inch long. The sculpin wool is usually long enough to get two of three bundles from each cut. Push the fleece over the shank of the hook so that it evenly surrounds the hook. Tie it to the hook in the middle of the bunch just in front of the previous bunch with several tight wraps.



Step 7: Push the front of the bunch back and take several tight wraps to hold it in place. Repeat these steps with several additional bunches to completely cover the shank of the hook. You may pack the fleece back with your fingers or a tool much as you would when spinning deer hair. Be sure to leave enough space at the front for a tie-off wrap. Whip finish and trim away your thread at the head. Pick out the fleece with the point of your bodkin so that it stands out ready to trim.



Step 8: With a sharp pair of scissors, preferable serrated, trim the hair into an appropriate shape. Round is usual, but a mullet's head is roughly triangular, so that is more authentic. Try to avoid trimming off any of the longer hairs tied back over the tail as part of the first bunch added. You'll notice that the material gets tighter as you remove the excess. This trimming doesn't have to be perfect as the silicone will even out any errors.

Step 9: Add a small dab of your silicone to each side of the face and use it to solidly attach a pair of eyes. Add several dabs of the silicone material all around the front of the fly just behind the hook eye. If you are planning to use your fingers, dip them in the Photo-flo or dishwashing liquid. Use your fingers or the plastic spreader to push the silicone back to form an even coat over the complete head of the fly. The Popsicle or plastic knife are especially helpful in working around the hook point. Add more silicone as needed. When you are satisfied, set the fly aside to let the silicone cure and harden. On larger versions of this fly, you may want to go back and add a second coat of the silicone. Once the silicone has cured, you may use scissors to trim any excess silicone and stray fleece from the fly.

