

APRIL - THE MONTANA NYMPH



HOOK: Size 10 or 12 nymph.

THREAD: 8/0 black.

OPTIONAL UNDERBODY: Lead wire to add weight.

TAIL: Black cock hackle fibres.

ABDOMEN: Originally tied with black ostrich herl but commercial varieties generally use black chenille as it is easier to obtain and more robust. If you tie your own flies, try ostrich, it is much more mobile in the water than chenille.

THORAX HACKLE: Black cock.

WING CASE: Ostrich herl or black chenille.

THORAX: Fluorescent lime green or chartreuse chenille.

This fly appeared in the UK back in the late 1970's from the USA. It was originally an imitation of a large stonefly nymph and had a yellow thorax and black horns. It wasn't a particularly effective fly until some bright fly tyer changed the thorax colour to green. The difference was surprising, and it soon became a stillwater favourite.

It has been tied with several different colours of thorax, but green has stood the test of time and the combination of black and green is great for early season flies. A very useful variant to have is the Mobile Montana. This has a long black marabou tail and a gold or silver bead at the head. When tying this pattern, I usually omit the wing case.



Above: The Mobile Montana

Other flies to try at the start of the season are lures such as Viva, Humungous, Yellow Dancer, Dawson's Olive, Black Fritz, Irving's Inducer etc. Large weighted nymphs such as stickfly, shrimp, App's bloodworm etc. can also be very effective. Midge pupa imitations in black and grey are worth a swim on mild days when there may be midges hatching and the odd fish rising. Don't forget that brown trout are out of season until May 1st so if you do hook any, please return them as quickly and carefully as possible.

Sharp-eyed readers will notice that most of the following advice and information is the same as last year's. This is natural as one year is much like the next. In addition, we may have new members this year who will appreciate some help in their first season at Hallington. I would add that in my opinion, winters are getting milder, spring often seems to come earlier and consequently natural fly life often appears sooner in the year than expected.

In the cold weather of early season, and from the bank, concentrate on fishing your fly or flies as deep as you can without continually snagging on the bottom. Stripping in your flies quickly using a floating line will usually mean you are fishing above the fish, deeper and slower will work better. A floating, midge-tip or sink-tip line will usually be adequate, especially off the natural banks where you might only be casting into 6-8 feet of water. When fishing from the dams and embankments an intermediate or slow sinking line may be more useful as you are generally casting into much deeper water. If you occasionally snag on a rock or weed, you are doing it right but you have to be prepared to lose one or two flies. Check your hook if you do hit a rock and carry a stone or diamond sharpener in case the point is damaged. In most areas, the natural banks shelve away gently and most anglers will wade in to fish. Before you enter the water though, it is worth dropping in a few short casts in front of you in case there is a fish lurking in the shallows. Although I recommend fishing fairly deep, it is surprising how often you will catch a fish close to the bank in very shallow water even at this time of year. In fact if you wade too deep there may well be fish behind you! Don't forget that even if you are wearing chest waders, you are only allowed to wade as deep as if you were wearing thigh waders. This is for safety reasons and is stipulated by the water company from whom we lease the lakes. Please don't wade any deeper than allowed as we wouldn't want wading to be banned altogether.

For boat fishing, firstly make sure you have plenty of warm clothing and most importantly some good waterproofs. You are at the mercy of the elements in a boat out on the lake. If you get wet and cold at this time of year it can quickly dampen your enthusiasm. A thermos flask with a hot drink or soup is almost mandatory. As for fishing from a boat, it would probably be best to concentrate your efforts along the shorelines, especially those areas with the wind blowing onto the bank. I prefer to anchor the boat 30-50 yards from the bank and cast downwind towards it. Most bank anglers prefer not to fish directly into the wind so you are unlikely to interfere with them on a cold and windy day. Other areas to try are around the sunken island on the west lake and the large bay in the north-east corner of the east lake. When the east lake is full, most of the north shoreline can only be fished from a boat. Here the fishing can be good but there are a lot of bushes in the water which are easy to snag up on. The area around the inlet stream in the south-east corner of the east lake is always worth a few casts. Best lines for early season boat fishing are intermediates and slow sinkers. Generally a Di3 line is about as dense as you will need because you should be aiming to

fish your flies between four and eight feet deep for most of your retrieve.

Whether fishing from bank or boat, an early season tactic which will almost always put a fish or two in the bag is booby fishing. A buoyant fly on a sinking line with a short leader will fish deep and usually avoid snagging up on the rocks and weed. As a method it has been much maligned and banned on most small catch and release waters. In the early days many lazy anglers were casting out and not retrieving, letting the fly fish stationary. This resulted in most fish swallowing the fly and so were released with not much chance of survival. This is why most small waters do not allow it. If you are going to take fish home, it is a legitimate tactic providing you retrieve your line. Don't use this method if you intend to release your fish, even when a booby is retrieved, the fly can be taken very gently and the fish hooked deeply. As for flies, booby versions of all the lures mentioned above should work well, use a steady 'figure-of-eight' retrieve for best results.

During the first week or two of the season, most of the fish are freshly stocked, they are hungry and curious and are not too difficult to catch. However, once they have been caught and released a couple of times on large gaudy flies, they can become quite difficult to tempt, then it may be worth trying smaller, drabber flies such as stickfly, black and peacock spider, midge pupae, small wet flies, nymphs etc. On calm, mild spring days you might come across a few rising fish. They will probably be taking either hatching midges or small beetles at the surface. You might see midges coming off or see their empty shucks floating past but it is a bit more difficult to spot the beetles. It is worth trying a size 16 or 14 foam beetle or a similar size black Shipman's buzzer in the surface film for these fish.

Below: The Black and Peacock Spider



Phil Bilbrough