



# FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL

## FLY OF THE MONTH

"Muddler Minnow"



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### **Muddler Minnow**

Ask most anglers this infamous question: "If you could have only one fly to use to catch fish anywhere, anytime and under any conditions, which fly would you choose?"

Many will come up with the same answer: the Muddler Minnow. Whether used in warm or cold, fresh or saltwater; no matter if you are out to catch trout, salmon, steelhead, bass, panfish, bonefish and any other species – you name it – the Muddler will catch them all.

Originated in 1937 by Don Gapen, the Muddler Minnow was intended to imitate the ubiquitous Sculpin, and was popularized by Montana fisherman and fly tier Dan Bailey. Designed to suggest the large, blocky head and tapered body and tail of the Sculpin, the Muddler has accounted for many fish in most waters around the globe.

The Muddler incorporates matched turkey quill strips for the wing and deer hair for the head of the fly. Matched turkey quill strips provide a nice tall silhouette for the tapered body and tail of a Sculpin, yet are thin in profile and easy to cast. Deer hair is a material with unique properties allowing it to be "spun" - rolled around the hook, and "flared" – the fibers bending sharply and creating a large volume of material in a relatively small space. Another unique property of deer hair is that each fiber is hollow, thus providing buoyancy. This can be a problem when you want to sink a fly made with deer hair,

necessitating weight in the fly or a fast sinking line to counteract the hairs lifting effect. But the hollow makeup of deer hair can be an advantage too. Dry flies suggesting grasshoppers or stoneflies including the Letort Hopper and Steelhead Caddis are cousins to the Muddler. Deer is also used in flies for Bass as “Bugs” - big dry flies suggesting frogs, mice, and whatever else the fish can imagine in the sometimes wild color combinations. And variations of the original abound - including the Matuka Muddler, Spuddler, Marabou Muddler and others

The Muddler will always be a favorite pattern with its universal appeal to almost all game fish,. We'll focus on the techniques of tying the Muddler and some tricks for tying the turkey quill wing and spinning and flaring the deer hair head. From there, you're encouraged to see what you can come up with for your own variation of what is soon to surely become your new favorite fly

### **Muddler Minnow**

Hook: 2X to 4X long Sizes 12 to 1/0.  
Thread: Red.  
Tail: Matched slips of Turkey Wing or Tail Quill.  
Body: Gold Tinsel – flat or braided.  
Underwing: Fox Squirrel Tail.  
Main Wing: Matched slips of Turkey Quill – to match tail.  
Collar/Head: Deer Hair – spun and flared – trimmed to desired shape

### **Tying Steps**



#### **Step 1**

For a deeper-sinking version, a conehead or metal bead can be added first or wire for weighting wrapped around the shank. In modern times, the fly is often tied without any added weight and the depth controlled through the fishing approach or line style. Mount the hook in your vise securely with the shank level. After attaching the thread, wrap back to a position above the point



### Step 2A and 2B

Match a pair of slips (strips) of selected turkey quill material that are about half the hook gape in width. Place back-to-back. Hold the tapered tips of the strips **TIGHTLY** in your left hand (for right-handed tyers) above the hook shank, but rotated slightly toward you. Allow the strips to then roll into the final position on top of the hook instead of trying to keep them from rolling beyond the vertical. Wrap the thread around the strips and hook and back up on top again. Most importantly, bring the middle finger of your left hand up behind the base end of the quills in front of the thread. Keep the butts from rolling with this finger – the butts should only be allowed to compress vertically. **PULL UP** on the thread while holding the strips tightly to secure them to the hook. After a few more tight wraps, continue forward securing the excess along the length of the shank. Be careful to **NOT** let the quill spin around the shank while securing it. Don't crowd the front – leave at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the shank bare for the head of the fly



### Step 3

Attach the braided body material at the front of the body space. Secure it as you wrap the thread back to the tail (above the point) and then wrap the thread back to the front of the body space. Wrap the braid forward in one continuous smooth layer. Tie off and trim the excess



### Step 4

Select a small clump (two dozen fibers or so) of Fox Squirrel Tail for the underwing. Clean out the shorter fibers by holding the tips of the fibers in your left hand and removing the shorter fibers from the base with your right hand. Clean the hair well, as any extra fibers make securing the hair all the more difficult. Tie in tightly on top of the shank with the tips extending back just past the tip of the tail. Trim off the excess and wrap over the butt ends.



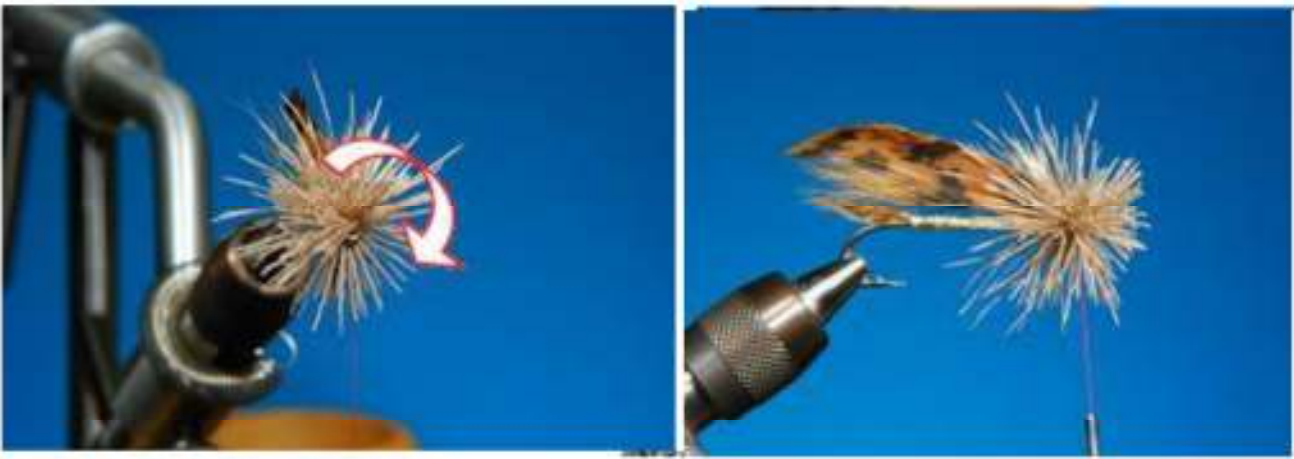
### Step 5

Select either a symmetrical turkey quill with even length fibers on both sides or a matched pair of quills with similar length fibers on opposite sides of each quill – one has long fibers on the left side and the other has long fibers on the right side. Open your scissors to where the points are the same width as the hook gape. Slide them into the quill to separate out a strip that is then the same width as the hook gape. Cut the strip out as close to the base of the quill as possible. Match the strips and place back-to-back the same as the tail. Follow the same steps to secure the wing as used to tie in the tail. When viewed from above, you should have a narrow knife-edge view of the strips. Trim the excess and secure the butt ends.



### Step 6

Select deer hair that is on a **GOOD QUALITY TANNED SKIN**. It is imperative to get good quality hair that is soft and hollow and therefore will spin and flare correctly. Avoid hair that is on a hard, stiff dried skin. If the skin is dried and hard enough to drive nails with, the hair will be thin, brittle and have lost its' hollowness – all factors you want to avoid. Cut out a clump about the size of a pencil or pen in diameter. Clean out the short fibers and underfur thoroughly. Place the hair against the fly and measure the tips back to the middle of the wing. Transfer the hair to your left hand. Trim the butts about ¼" beyond where the tie in point is. Place the hair on the **BACK** side of the wing and take three loose wraps around the hair and the hook. Placing the hair behind the wing allows it to spin freely before encountering the wing



### Step 7

Follow the techniques description – “Spin and Flare.” Roll the hair and spin it around the hook completely, then tighten the thread and flare the hair. Often the hair will tend to clump and not distribute evenly, leaving a large amount on one side and not much on the other. If you have this happen, **SLOWLY** unwrap first one wrap, then another. As you undo the second wrap, a point will come where the hair springs loose from the hook. **DON'T UNWRAP ANY FURTHER!** When this happens, the hair is now loose and can be spun further to even out the distribution. As long as you are slow and careful this process can be repeated until the hair is nicely spread around the hook. Make a few more tight wraps, pull the thread forward through the hair add a few more wraps and then finish the head



### Step 8

Trim the head to the desired shape. A standard “bullet” shaped head will be bulky and buoyant. A shallow, wide “wedge” shape is effective to make the fly dive and dart with an enticing swimming motion. Experiment and see what you like best for your fishing. One option is to leave the head larger and simply carry a pair of scissors with you when fishing. This way a quick trim can modify the head and therefore the way the fly fishes to suit your needs at the time.

Give the Muddler Minnow a try – in any color or style it is an effective fly for anything that swims!

If you need help or have any questions, feel welcome to email me anytime at

[info@professorfeather.com](mailto:info@professorfeather.com)

All of the patterns featured in Flyfishing & Tying Journal are available in detailed step-by-step Flash Slideshows on my website: **professorfeather.com**. I also encourage you to contact me with any questions or suggestions for other patterns you'd like to see tied and featured. Email me at **info@professorfeather.com**

**Author Bio:**

Kevin W. Erickson is the author of the new book published by Stackpole Books titled "Feather Craft – The Amazing Birds and Feathers Used in Classic Salmon Flies" Get a preview of what it has to offer at [www.FeatherCraftBook.com](http://www.FeatherCraftBook.com).

He worked in the flyfishing business for over 40 years as a full-time professional outfitting anglers, booking flyfishing trips worldwide and instructing fly fishing, fly casting, and fly tying classes at all levels. He has traveled extensively and acted as host of angling groups to both fresh and saltwater destinations around the globe. Also a published fly tyer and author, his work includes contributions in Randy Stetzer's book "Flies: the Best 1000" and Randall Kaufmann's epic "Bonefishing." He currently works in the software industry in Beaverton, Oregon.

**Fly of the Month:**

Do you know someone who deserves to be featured in the Fly of the Month? If you have a camera and computer, you can write a Fly of the Month article to honor your favorite tier tying their best creation. For details contact Jerry Coviello at [ftg@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:ftg@fedflyfishers.org).

Please note: The demonstration you are viewing makes no claim, implied or otherwise, that the presenter or demonstrator of the fly pattern was the original creator of the fly.

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