

Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing

Every spring, streamer fly tyers eagerly anticipate the opening of lake fishing and the chance to troll their creations, like tandem streamers, in the domain of aggressive trophy fish. The goal is to trigger the instinct of wary fish to strike. All streamers are effective in catching salmon and trout, but nothing does this better than tandem streamers.

I cannot say for sure when the first tandem streamers were tied. Some say it was the famous 9-3 pattern and that tandems were being tied before WWII but in the early 1960's they started gaining prominence with trolling fishermen pursuing Landlocked Salmon in Lake Winnepesaukee, Lake Winnisquam, and Sunapee Lakes in NH. Other large lakes in ME, VT, NY, and MA were also prime locations for these special streamers.

A tandem streamer is basically a streamer that has two smaller hooks connected with either a wire line or a piece of monofilament fastened between the front and back hook. Each hook is individually finished with tinsel or mylar or floss to create a certain pattern. Underwing material like peacock herl, bucktail, mylar flash, Fishhair, Big Fly Fibers, DNA and many more create the foundation for balancing matched saddle hackle feathers, creating the wing.

Further triggering the salmon and trout's instinct to feed on these imitation smelt is the addition of highly reflective glass bugles in fish catching colors of silver, gold, yellow, red and many shades of purple that will bend and reflect light. Brass, gold, silver and copper beads also contribute to a nice profile.

Streamer fly tying is a generational pursuit in that it seems each generation develops their own ideas and techniques. Applying new materials to create new and unique patterns and trying new trolling techniques are used to trigger trophy fish to strike streamer flies. These new streamers are like creating original artwork. *(Insert picture of Fire Tiger Streamer in this area)*

Materials and Synthetics

New materials on new streamers can be a key to triggering wary trophy fish to strike a streamer. Do these fish get big and wary because they get accustomed to and ignore certain presentations and only feed on the naturals or new imitations? These trophies, and every lake has plenty of them, are seldom triggered to strike an imitation. The tandem streamer should duplicate the form and function of a rainbow smelt to encourage landlocked salmon to strike, or to trigger their feeding instinct. Many factors influence triggering a strike but the one we tyers can impact the most with our streamers is using the right material with the right balance of color. The right material is material that imitates a smelt and manipulates light in varying ambient conditions. *(Insert Northern Sunset Streamer here)*

My experience has proven that glass beads, both seed and bugle style, on the wire between the front and back hook are one “secret” to an effective trophy taking tandem streamer. Also consider using Chinese Red Uni-Stretch as a floss for the hooks. All colors of Uni-Products are very good to tie with and many of my floss and mylar bodies take advantage of the wide selections available from Uni-Products, a supplier from Canada. I encourage new tyers to pursue any material or technique that satisfies their artistic drive and encourages the passion that comes with pursuing trophy trout and salmon.

Manipulating Light

Without getting too technical, consider this. Beads and bugles are not to simply make streamers shiny and thus easier for the fish to see underwater. Actually, it is almost the opposite of this as the shiny scales on a smelt are not to attract predators. The primary purpose of beads is to absorb, bend and refract light. This happens naturally on smelt due to their shiny, angled scaly sides. *(insert smelt group pic here)* Bending and refracting light makes it harder for a fish to focus on exact details so a strike on a smelt or a streamer is quick and vicious. This is one of the smelt’s inherent defense mechanisms. The patterns you choose to fish with, on any given day, can be determined by the ambient color of the water

which changes throughout the day as the sunlight angle changes. All lakes have their own dominant color with varying visibility.

Understanding light and color and what happens to them underwater has contributed greatly to the success of my trolling with streamers. Experiment with light manipulation and you will tie better producing streamers.

FEATHERS

It almost goes without saying among streamer fly tyers that Golden Pheasant Crest, Peacock Herl and Jungle Cock Eyes are the undisputed leading natural material for featherwing streamers. Cheek feathers like wood duck flank feathers, mallard flanks and Teal flanks are prime choices as well. Then there is the married saddle hackle feather. It is the married saddle hackles that gives the name featherwing to the tandem streamer pattern. For me the featherwing is the best part of the streamer. By married I mean choosing four individual saddle hackles, two on each side, and laying them together so that they look like one feather. While underwater these saddle pairs actually split apart at the ends during a jigging action and create a fork like, rainbow smelt like, tail. Imitating the rainbow smelt form or shape of the smelt applies here. *(insert Four married saddle hackles Pic)*

Featherwing streamers are such great fish catchers because the feathers provide both form (*look like a smelt*) and function (*swim like a smelt*) when underwater. To tie consistently effective featherwing streamers you need to sort through many saddle hackles to find the matched sets you will require.

Color is critically important to success. Dying the right color is a fleeting and challenging pursuit. Not only is it hard to repeat consistent color dying on custom feathers it is equally as hard to determine the right color for the right lake for the right time of day at the right time of year under the right weather conditions! Whew! Five different conditions that can impact the success of triggering trophy fish just in color alone. Eric Leister's book on **Dyeing and Bleaching Natural Fly-Tying Materials** is the best book I

have seen on bleaching saddle hackles and other fly-tying materials. Consider it the go-to bible for dyeing.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Experienced tyers and aspiring new streamer fly tyers are forever developing skills that include feather manipulation, how feathers are dyed and married for best performance, what light does to color underwater and more. I often reveal personal secrets about new materials that I discovered and use that are effective fish takers and my process for developing and testing new patterns. I am always willing to explain how I grade feathers and why grading is important, how to build sturdy streamers that will catch fish after fish and how to develop new patterns on tried-and-true foundations.

Tying and fishing streamers today is still the rewarding experience it was 100 years ago. After all, even though streamer fly tying has been around for over 100 years in this country it feels like new patterns and new tying techniques are reborn every year. Every season fishermen sit down to the tying bench and fly tying is reborn like it was the first streamer ever tied. It is that way at my bench as I relish my passion for tying tandem streamers.

After all, any endeavor to create beauty, to balance form and function to create a life like imitation, is a rewarding experience, whether perfection is achieved or not. For some, there is no better opportunity to realize this experience than with streamer fly tying. To many of us tyers, just the satisfaction realized when others connect with your work and tie your patterns on for a day of trolling ranks as good as anything.