

Tying Clouser Minnows for Speckled Trout... Jerry Aldridge

In Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the annual "One Fly" competition pits anglers from all over the world to see who can catch and release the most and largest trout (the fresh water variety). Hoppers, stonefly nymphs and dry flies, chernobyl ants and club sandwiches are just a few of the many different flies used. If a similar contest were held for speckled trout in the Pensacola area, the majority of anglers would use a Clouser Minnow. A few topwater enthusiasts would use their poppers and gurglers, others might try their Crazy Charlies, Gotchas, deceivers, epoxy minnows, etc. but most would stick with the Clouser.

So let's take a look at a possible winning Clouser starting with the hook. Standard length steel hooks such as the Mustad 3407 and 34007 fill the need nicely. The 3407 is cadmium steel that will corrode fairly quickly if you have to break a fish off. The 34007 is stainless steel that is shinier, less likely to corrode quickly and is a hook-eye longer for a given hook size. Other manufacturers produce similar hooks as good or better but probably more expensive. Whichever brand you choose, buy sizes 2 and 4 to start with. Those who would like to tie in a wider range of sizes could go as large as 1/0 and as small as 8. The size of the rod you fish with and your casting competence should be factors in choosing the right hook size. Yeah I know there are some who can cast a 2/0 clouser with heavy lead eyes 90 feet with a 2 weight rod. But for the average angler casting with a 7 or 8 weight, size 4 clousers are an excellent choice. Don't forget to sharpen the hook and bend down the barb!

Size 3/0 or 6/0 thread in white, black, red and brown will more than cover thread needs as far as the fish are concerned. The advanced or intermediate tyer will probably buy a wider range of colors to match or complement the color of wing material chosen.

The distinguishing feature of the clouser is the eyes tied on top the hook shank usually 1/3 shank length behind the eye of the hook. It is these weighted eyes that cause the fly to ride "hook point up" and to stream through the water with an up and down "jigging motion" like a wounded minnow. Eyes can be light (bead chain) to fish fairly shallow or very heavy (lead or even tungsten) to fish deep. A look at a tying catalog will show lots of choices including bead chain, cast lead, machined lead, brass in hour glass shape, brass indented to hold decal eyes, etc., some finished or pre-painted in a variety of colors. My favorite is the silver finished brass eyes, hour-glass shaped and indented for decal eyes, either flat or 3-dimensional. The decals also come in many colors; I usually use silver or gold with a black pupil. An eye unpainted or without a decal may catch just as many specks but a tyer must tie to please himself as well as the fish.

Clouser wings may be tied with many natural and artificial materials. Bucktail and other tails (squirrel, calf, fox, raccoon, etc.) plus body hair (bear, yak, goat, etc.) will do for folks who choose to tie with natural material. Artificial include fishhair, ultra hair, super hair, unique hair, neer hair, craft fur, etc. Some of the artificials foul easily but are generally more durable, sink quicker, cost less per fly and are easier to work with. However, nothing artificial that I have seen will so accurately mimic the shape of a minnow as high quality bucktail with its tapered hairs. The material I use for most of my clousers is super hair.

These days, lots of accent materials are available to the tyer to add shiny stuff and flash to the wing. Brand names such as flashabou, holographic flashabou, crystal (or Krystal) flash, angel hair and sparkle flash, all available in lots of colors, are widely sold. My favorites are the simple, cheap and most widely stocked - flashabou and crystal flash. To start with, you don't need many colors; silver, gold and pearl will do just fine.

So, how do you tie all this together (and in what color combinations) to tie the winning fly? It would really be nice to be able to give an unqualified answer. If there really was one magic fly for specks or any other species for that matter, what would fly tyers do with their time and how would purveyors of tying materials make a living? If I had to choose one fly knowing nothing of conditions beforehand, it would probably be the red and yellow (see Kevin's article on front page). Shown below are some other favorites that are always in my tackle bag when I'm not in a one-fly contest.



PUMPKIN - This one is tied with "fishhair", the only artificial I can find the right shade of orange. I usually tie it with bucktail. The inner accent is copper (gold would work fine) flashabou; the outer is orange crystal flash. The eyes are brass with orange decal inserts. A great color for fall and winter.



TAN/OLIVE - "Super hair" is the wing material. The inner accent is copper flashabou; the outer is root beer crystal flash. The eyes are brass with pearl 3-D holographic inserts. A good all around color combo.

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SMOKE/BLACK - Super hair, silver flashabou, black crystal flash, brass eyes with silver inserts. The “go to” fly in deep or murky water or winter time.



CHARTREUSE/WHITE - Super hair, gold flashabou, chartreuse crystal flash, brass eyes with pearl inserts, red thread “gills”. The go to fly for summertime grass bed or “under the lights” fishing. For some reason, this color doesn’t work as well in the winter, for me anyway.



OLIVE/BLUE/WHITE - Fishair, rainbow flashabou, blue rainbow crystal flash, brass eyes with silver decal inserts. A good all around combo. I would tie this one even if it didn’t catch fish because it’s so pretty. I think I first saw it tied by “member emeritus” Vance Cook;

A “Unique” Clouser Trout Can’t Resist....Kevin Cohenour

It was just a couple weeks before Christmas, when former Fly Fishers of Northwest Florida President Jerry Aldridge called me to ask if I would like to go fishing for speckled trout. He said he had been out the previous day with another club member, and each had caught over 50 trout. My answer (of course) was “Let’s go!”

Jerry and I met right after lunchtime. It seems like the winter trout fishing here is better in the afternoon when the water has warmed up a little. We motored to a small bayou off of Pensacola bay, and began casting. Jerry had a red and yellow “super hair” Clouser minnow tied on. He told me it had done real well the previous day and offered me one. We fly tyers are a funny bunch (well at least me), and would rather fish with a fly we have tied ourselves, so I thanked Jerry for the offer and tied on another Clouser I had tied in



olive and white. Jerry immediately (as he so often does) began to catch trout. By the time he had caught his tenth I finally hooked my first, a nice 15” speck. Jerry asked if I wanted to reconsider and take him up on the red and yellow Clouser. I said no and tied on a Chartreuse and White Clouser. I had a hit right away and thought this might be the right fly. Jerry continued to catch fish after fish as I periodically had a hit. About the time he had his fly in the lip of the 30th trout, I decided to swallow my tyer’s pride and ask for a Red and Yellow Clouser. He handed me one in size 4, which I quickly tied on, and made a cast.

Wham! I had a hit. A short fight and release, another cast and again...Wham! This pattern continued until just before what proved to be a gorgeous sunset. We motored in at days end with Jerry being over the 50 mark and me at 30 trout. It was a great day of fishing and I was a believer!

As I went to buy some red and yellow super hair, I saw a new material called “Unique Hair”. Super hair is quite durable, but maybe a bit stiff. Bucktail is not as stiff but doesn’t stand up real well (I can sure tear one up with my hemostats removing a fly from a fish’s jaw). Unique Hair is kind of in the middle. It is a bit finer than super hair but every bit as durable. It is also easier to work with than the super hair, tying in much like bucktail does on a clouser. Unique hair and super hair are both available in a wide variety of colors to cover most any pattern combination we need. I think if you give it a try you will be very pleased with the results. Tying instructions for the Red and Yellow Unique Hair Clouser are on the next page.