The Bead Revolution Continues

Beadhead nymphs took fly-fishing by storm a few years ago. As the Flymen Fishing Company is demonstrating, fly-tying beads should be more than just pieces of buckshot with holes in the middle.

For the most part, however, tiers have been limited in their creativity by the selection of available beads. Do you remember the saying attributed to Henry Ford about buying one of his cars? “You can have it in any color just as long as it’s black.” Well, the color selection in fly-tying beads hasn’t been much greater: gold, copper, silver, dark brass, and black, as well as painted chartreuse and orange. And most fly shops don’t even carry all these colors.

Then along came a little business called Flymen Fishing Company, spouting an uppit attitude that fly-tying beads should be more than just pieces of buckshot with holes in the middle. This new company believes fly-tying beads should
come in a broad selection of colors, including colors that match the insects we are trying to imitate with our flies. And it believes beads should even have small eyes, just like real insects.

Flymen Fishing Company is the just the sort of small company that might play a major role in the way we tie some of our most popular trout flies.

**Birth of a Business**

I had an opportunity to talk with Flymen Fishing Company owner Martin Bawden about the brief history of his company and its products. With fellows like Martin around, you and I will never be short of new materials to use or fresh patterns to tie.

I launched the Flymen Fishing Company in 2007 because I had the simple idea that I wanted to improve fly-tying beads. I’d been tying and fishing a lot of beadhead nymphs, and it struck me that I could improve the overall profile and performance of flies simply by adding some realistic 3-D nymph eyes to the beads. That’s how I came up with the original Nymph Head tungsten bead. These beads actually have about twenty percent more tungsten, so the flies are also heavier and sink faster.

Most tiers are familiar with gold, copper, and black beads, but Nymph Heads come in a wide variety of colors, don’t they?

“Yes, they do. We figured out how to anodize the beads in different colors that previously were never available to fly tiers.”

A Nymph Head bead features small eyes on each side. You may leave these plain, but I know some fastidious tiers will dab drops of paint or nail polish on these bumps to give their flies an added sense of realism. Hey, stoneflies and some mayflies have obvious eyes, so why shouldn’t your imitations?

Nymph Head beads come in both brass and heavier tungsten. Martin suggested that if you use only tungsten Nymph Heads, and add some additional wire to the hook shanks before tying your flies, the small eyes indicate that these are Colorado’s Al Pitt made these streamers using Fish Skulls. Tying a fly with a Fish Skull is easy. First, make the streamer in the normal manner, but do not wrap a finished head; instead, just tie off and clip the thread. Apply a drop of superglue in the head area of the fly, and slip the Fish Skull over the hook eye. Restart the thread behind the hook eye. Wrap a small dam of thread between the front of the Fish Skull and the hook eye. Next, whip-finish and clip. How simple is that?

your extra-heavy patterns for fishing really deep, fast water. That’s an excellent idea for tiers who make flies to fish different levels of the water column.

**It’s about Innovation**

Marten Bawden is constantly thinking about new ways to tie flies. He’s a very inventive fellow, and believes that he’ll be successful if he stays focused and continues seeking out new products.

“As a small but growing company,” Marten said, “it is important to stay focused and strive to be the best in your category. Therefore, looking ahead, our focus is to design best-of-breed new fly-tying products and flies for the weighted-fly category: nymphs and streamers.”

Fish Skulls are an obvious example of your creativity. Why did you develop them?

“I wanted to design a product that would make it quick and easy to tie a weighted streamer. It had to be an exciting alternative to using cones or dubbells, and, of course, the finished flies had to catch fish.

“It took almost two years to design and bring Fish Skulls to market. We have built a lot of functionality into the product that
Yes, you can tie small beadhead nymphs. The largest fly here was made on about a size 14 hook.

Flymen Fishing Company packaging is easy to spot in the fly shop. With respect to the beads, the Heavy Metal beads are tungsten; the Fly Color beads are brass.

provides a lot of flexibility to create different styles of flies using a wide range of materials. For example, we built in a keel that helps balance the fly so you can even tie a pattern with the hook point on top. We also put slots on the top and bottom of each Fish Skull to give the other materials freedom of movement and allow for a taller profile. And finally, we designed Fish Skulls to use what we call a ‘front-fitting’ tying technique to make it quick and easy to make a neat-looking fly."

You recently won an award for Fish Skulls, didn’t you?

“Yes, we exhibited at the 2010 International Fly Tackle Dealer Show, and Fish Skulls were awarded the Dealers’ Choice Award for the fly-tying products category. We are very grateful for the support and validation shown by the retailers and buyers at the show.”

I used to think that fly-tying beads were hardly more than round pieces of metal with holes in the middle, but not anymore. I tie a lot of beadhead nymphs—you probably do, too—and Nymph Heads look great on my flies. I especially like the baetis green, caddis green, mayfly brown, and shrimp pink Nymph Heads. And because Nymph Heads are anodized—not painted—the finish is very durable.

I am also experimenting with Fish Skulls. The copper Fish Skulls are ideal for making the heads on minnow imitations. These flies are working well for catching trout, salmon, and smallmouth bass.

Will new fly-tying beads or a way to weight streamers shake up the world? Of course not. But, for those of us who have a passion for tying, Nymph Heads, Fish Skulls, and the other products from Flymen Fishing Company will make some waves.

For more information about Flymen Fishing Company, go to www.flymenfishingcompany.org. There you will find product information, tying tutorials, and a whole lot more.

Al Ritt, who lives in Colorado, was nice enough to send some flies made with Fish Skulls. Al is currently a fly-fishing guide operating in Rocky Mountain National Park and several private waters in Northern Colorado. To contact Al, go to www.rittflies.com...