

Indicators

By Beth Jappay

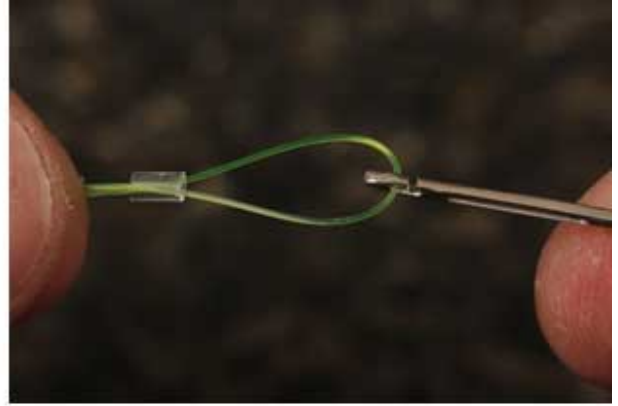
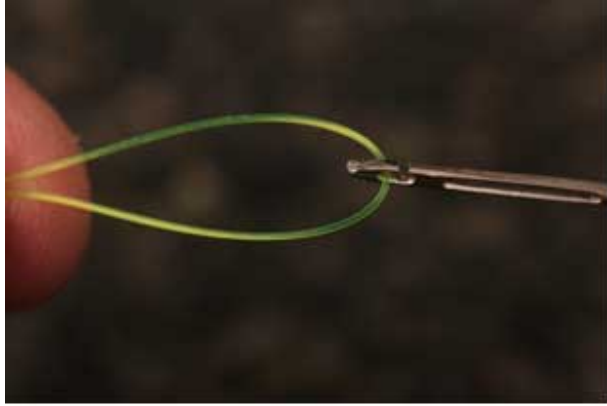
Indicator fishing is not my favorite style of fishing, but it can be extremely effective and I have been doing so much of it on Klamath Lake the past 6 weeks that I decided to make it the subject of my most recent article. Casting an indicator, especially with multiple flies can be tricky. I have written a prior article about this, and if you want to read it again here is the [link](#).

My first experience with fishing with an indicator was about 30 years ago with a guide who took me on the McCloud and upper Sacramento rivers. He used the same type of tiny rubber band I had used with my braces decades ago, and a piece of wool coated in floatant.



This style of indicator was made famous by Pat Dorsey many years ago, and many guides still prefer this system today (though most use polypropylene yarn). The dental rubber bands can be bought off of Amazon for under \$6 for a pack of 100. To [set up](#) this indicator the leader is folded in half and the dental rubber bands wrapped 3-4 times around it, forming a loop. The yarn or wool is slipped into this loop, which is then pulled tight, and floatant is applied. It is easy to side up and down the leader.

The more recent New Zealand indicator system is similar, but uses a short piece of tubing instead of the rubber bands. It comes with a dedicated applicator that will grab on to the leader to slip the tubing over the loop.



New Zealand wool is high in natural oils, but I usually add floatant. The wool or yarn will sink if pulled under, but with a few false casts it will usually dry enough to float again. If it remains water-logged I will sometimes pinch the wool between the fabric of my shirt, then use a desiccant, or just change to a fresh clump of wool. The starter pack comes with 2 colors and extra tubing, but I ended up buying a 4 pack of wool because I preferred the orange color the most. I find the system easy to use but was sometimes frustrated trying to get larger amounts of wool to seat in the tube. The New Zealand indicator is now my favorite lake indicator.

For me the biggest advantage of the Dorsey and New Zealand indicator systems is that they can be cast greater distances and will land lightly. I found I was less likely to tangle my flies up as well, since I casted fewer tailing loops. I have also discovered that if my fly is being suspended more than 9' below the indicator, I can with care reel the wool through my guides to land the fish. I also find this indicator system is more sensitive to subtle takes. The biggest disadvantage of both is that they can't suspend heavier flies, and the wool or yarn tends to sink in rough water. Both indicators can be used with the Euro nymphing rod systems.

Loon also makes a yarn strike indicator that has a loop.



I don't have much experience with it, but have heard it isn't as sensitive to strike detection as the Dorsey and New Zealand systems.

The indicator I prefer to use on rivers is the Thingamabob. It's easy to apply and comes in multiple sizes and colors



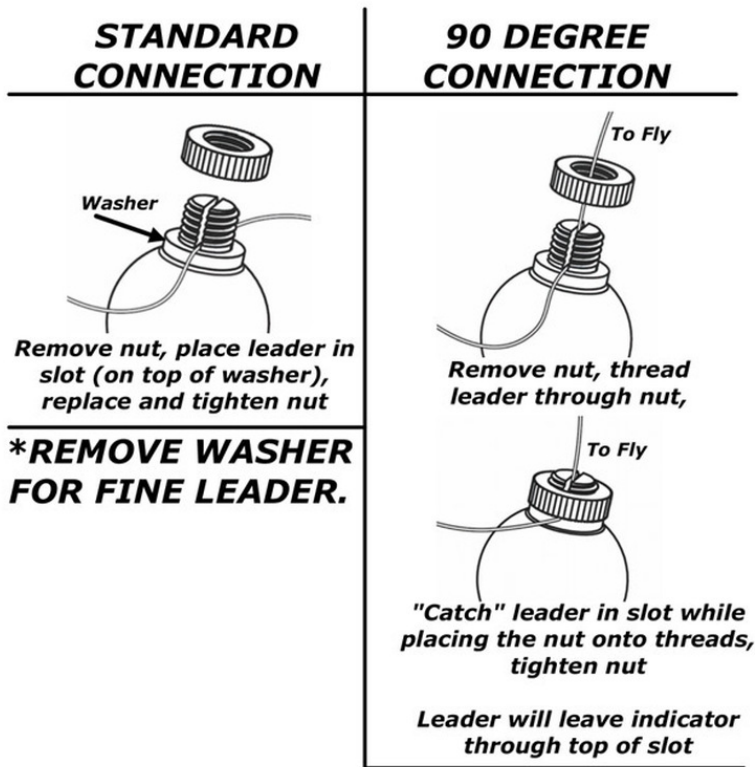
It is the best system I have found to use with tapered leaders, which other indicators seem to slide down on. Like all of the heavier indicators it can be more difficult to cast and I recommend

using the smallest indicator that can both be seen and float the flies. What I don't like about the Thingamabob specifically is that it is a little difficult to slide up and down the leader, and that after a few times of doing so the leader ends up with difficult-to-straighten curls. It also tends to slip on smaller tippet, though Orvis has come up with a new Jam-Stop Thingamabobber that is supposed to overcome this problem.



Another indicator that is good with smaller diameter tippets is the Air-Lock strike indicator.





To set up this indicator, the nut must be removed and the leader put through the slot. The packages come with an extra nut and washer, as they are easy to lose. I have found the Air-Lock system easier to cast than the Thingamabobber and I really like that the new Air-Lock is biodegradable. The other advantage of the Air-Lock over the Thingamabobber is that it doesn't kink the leader. The biggest disadvantage over it is that it slips on tapered leaders.

For those of you who attended the Zoom talk by Ernie Gulley, this is the system he uses for midge fishing. He often fishes with his midge pupa at a depth of greater than 9', and has learned to tighten the nut just enough that it will slide when reeled up to the tip of the rod, allowing him to land a fish hooked at depths greater than 9'.

The last indicator system I have experience with that I wanted to mention is the slip strike indicator. This is another idea to try to solve the problem of landing a fish that is caught with a fly that is suspended more than 9' under the indicator. The leader is threaded through a tapered peg, and then through the foam indicator before the fly or flies are tied on. The fly depth is adjusted by pulling a loop of leader out of the top of the foam indicator, then pushing the peg in.



The idea is that when a fish is hooked, the loop will be pulled out and the indicator will be free to slide down, allowing the fish to be landed. I tried the system a few years ago at Crane Prairie after it was recommended at a Bend fly shop. What I didn't like about this system when I used it is that sometimes the loop came out while I was casting, and I ended up wasting 10 minutes or more of my time fishing with a fly that was only a few feet under the indicator.

There are many other indicators on the market, but hopefully this article will give you a basic understanding of the pros and cons of several of the most common options.