

Denny Rickard's Stillwater Nymph



By Beth Jappay

I was taught this fly by Denny Rickards during a week-long stillwater trip to Montana 30 years ago. He told me he came up with this pattern while fishing the famous damsel nymph migration on Davis Lake (CA). After hours of frustration he noticed that his long-shank damsel pattern (standard at the time) did not move naturally in the water. While sitting in his truck and seeking inspiration, he noticed a pattern (gifted to him) that was hooked into his sun visor and which had a short body and long tail. Thinking this would move more naturally, he gave it a try and was immediately successful; unfortunately this resulted in less-successful fly fishermen crowding him until he left for the day. After experimentation, he settled on this final version. This is my “go to” damsel pattern.

Hook: TMC 2487 (or other scud) size #12

Thread: Veevus 12/0, Olive

Tail: Olive marabou

Wire: UTC wire, small, red

Hackle: Rooster cape, burnt orange

Body: Olive marabou
Back: Olive marabou



Start the thread an eyes-length behind the eye. Wrap back to a little way past the bend (this keeps the tail from wrapping), then bring the thread forward. Attach the tail so that the length is 1.5 to 2 times the hook shank length.



Selecting barbules that are full throughout their length (from the side of the feather), wet the clump to keep them separate and distinct from the tail; attach along the top by their tips.



Attach the wire on the far side of the hook, then the hackle by its tip on the near side.



Finally, also selecting full (and long) marabou barbules from the side of the feather, attach by the tips to the far side of the hook, and bring the thread forward.



Wrap the body marabou forward and secure.



Bring the hackle forward with 3-4 **counter wraps** and secure. Bring the wire forward with standard direction wraps, wiggling the wire during the process to avoid trapping hackle barbules. Secure. With

scissors, cut a narrow “V” in the hackle along the top.



Distinguishing the tail marabou from the tip-attached back marabou, bring the back forward. Secure carefully by eventually folding back the feathers and wrapping again (this is the most common point for the pattern to fail).



Trim the marabou, form a head, and cement.

If damsel nymphs are actively migrating (seen in late spring and early summer) this pattern is best fished with a floating line and a hand-twist retrieve. Otherwise fish near weed beds with an intermediate line and short slow pulls or a hand-twist retrieve.