

Scuds

By Beth Jappay



This is my second in a series of articles intended to discuss **how** to fish particular patterns, and this month my focus is on scuds (you're welcome, Scott!). Just like last month I am drawing on information obtained from the Rick Hafele/Philip Rowley Entomology course I took in January, Hal Janssen's book "Stillwater Fly Fishing Secrets", as well as other internet sources.

Scuds are small freshwater shrimp and are present year-round. They are rich in calories (Phil Rowley describes them as "the french fry of the underwater world") and are a particularly good pattern to fish in the early spring and late fall, when they may be the main source of food available to trout. Scuds usually shy away from light and are more active in the mornings and evenings and on overcast days (the only times they may be found swimming just under the surface). Otherwise they are usually found swimming near the bottom around and among vegetation in the shoal or drop-off zone of a lake (6' to 20' depths would be typical). They take on the color of what they eat, so patterns in tan, olive, and olive brown are good choices to imitate live organisms. Interestingly, scuds have a "copper-based blood system" so when they shed their exoskeleton they often take on a blue or blue-gray hue, so keeping a few flies with blue and blue-gray dubbing in your box is a good idea.

When I thought of scuds I used to imagine orange patterns, but with this course I learned that there are only three situations where scuds are orange:



1) Scuds turn orange when they die, just like their shrimp/lobster/crab crustacean cousins (also rich in Beta-carotene) that turn orange when they are cooked



2) When scuds are pregnant their orangish progeny mature just below the underside of the thoracic exoskeleton (in a pouch called “the marsupian”), giving that area an orange blush (when they shed that exoskeleton the eggs “hatch”)



3) Scuds are preyed-upon by a particular and peculiar parasite that looks like an orange spot on the back of its thorax. I find it fascinating that a parasite-ridden scud has a forced change in its neurochemistry that makes it swim **towards** light (eg the surface) so it will be eaten by a duck, thus allowing the parasite to take the next step in its life cycle

As a result of all of the above, Philip Rowley frequently incorporates a little orange in his scud patterns in the form of an orange bead or hot spot, a spot of orange dubbing, a small amount of orange in the dubbing mix, or spot of orange UV resin on the back of the pattern. Hal Janssen uses thread to put an orange, red, or yellow-green stripe lengthwise along the pattern’s back.

How to fish scud patterns:

Scuds move with quick darting movements, and will slowly sink when they pause ([here is a video demonstrating how they swim](#)). While the fish are attracted to the darting movements, often they “take” the pattern on the pause, which can make strike detection difficult. Therefore it is important to use visual cues such as a tightening of the line, and not wait to feel the take before setting the hook. The most common technique to fish this pattern is to anchor up and cast towards shore and/or the shady side of a weed bed. When the vegetation is shallow, a floating or Hover line with lightly-weighted flies is appropriate. When the target depth is below 6’ or so, both Philip Rowley and Brian Chan advocate using full sinking lines and unweighted or lightly weighted flies (for example an intermediate for a 3’-8’ target depth or a type 3 full sink for an 8’-15’ target depth). After casting, count down the appropriate number of seconds and then Here is a great [Brian Chan video](#) discussing this method of fishing scuds. Hal Janssen’s approach for targeting a medium depth is to use a long leader plus tippet 1.5 times the depth of the water. He ties his patterns with 6 turns of 0.15 mm lead wire to imitate a natural sink rate. This method requires patience to allow the flies to sink. His preferred retrieve is about ten quick 2-3” pulls, followed by a 15 second pause.



Though it doesn’t reproduce natural movement, sometimes scud patterns (especially balanced patterns) are effective when fished under an indicator. Consider this technique when fishing in shallow water and when there is a chop. This is a semi-balanced pattern called the [Fuzz Ball Scud](#) that is designed to be fished under an indicator.

Most pictures of scuds show them in a curled position, however when they are freely swimming and not endangered they are usually in a straightened or out-stretched position; therefore a standard or 2XL nymph hook is a good choice. Philip Rowley prefers the Daiichi 1760 hook’s shape in particular. The most common hook size for a scud is a size #14, but a size #12 is often more attractive to the fish, and occasionally a #16 might be needed.

Here are some great scud patterns:

Simple Scud





Janssen's Scud



[Pregnant Simple Scud](#)



[Soft Hackle Scud](#)



[Diawl Bach](#)



Hare's Ear

Scuds are an important food source for trout in stillwater fishing. Having learned quite a bit researching this article, I am currently tying up a better selection for my lake box.