



TRAILING SHUCK / ROD WALINCHUS ILLUSTRATION

AW, SHUCKS

Instant trailing shucks that imitate insects at their most vulnerable stage—during emergence

CHARLES R. MECK

JERRY MECK AND I DRIFTED a 12-mile section of the Kootenai River in late June. Our guide, Dave Blackburn, felt apprehensive about the float trip that day for a couple of reasons. He had witnessed a few hatches on this northwestern Montana river yet that year, and the morning we selected began with a heavy downpour that gave way to a fine mist that would last most of the day.

We had already drifted downriver five miles by mid-afternoon and saw few rising trout. Only a heavily weighted Woolly Bugger fished on bottom picked up a couple rainbows. In midafternoon, almost within minutes, a heavy Pale Morning Dun hatch appeared on the surface. Kootenai rainbows sensed this first great hatch of the season and took up feeding positions in a glide in front of us.

Perhaps 30 trout fed on duns too cold to take flight. I tied on a typically high-riding Eastern pattern, cast over probably 20 risers, and caught none of them. I dug into a selection of flies that Nick Nicklas had tied for me and picked out one patterned after Craig Mathews's creation, the Crystal Compara-dun. Trout that had refused my previous imitation readily took the Crystal Compara-dun—more than 50 of them took that pattern on that gloomy afternoon.

After that trip on the Kootenai River I became a convert to floating-shuck patterns. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that trout most often take nymphs and emergers, including duns with the shuck still attached. What phase of the life cycle of a mayfly can escape most quickly from a trout? Of course, it's the dun—the phase I had been copying most often.

After that initial success copying emerging mayflies, I

added white Z-lon shucks to size 24 midge patterns. They proved to be extremely effective on the San Juan River in New Mexico. Do they work in the East? On central Pennsylvania's Spruce Creek, when nobody else caught trout, Chuck Furimsky caught a half-dozen on a midge tied with a shuck.

I even added shucks to my caddis imitations. The largest trout my son Bryan Meck caught on a trip to the Missouri River was taken on a Black Caddis with a pale tan shuck made of Z-lon. Extremely selective trout in the East can sometimes be tricked into taking a caddisfly pattern with a pale tan shuck, even after they refuse the typical downwing imitation.

I prefer using low-riding patterns with the shuck rather than one of the heavily hackled high-riding patterns. If I use one of the heavily hackled flies, I often cut some of the hackle off underneath to present a lower-riding fly.

Instant Nylon Shucks

I HAD THOUSANDS OF GOOD standard, parachute, Compara-dun, and caddis patterns already tied without shucks. How could I attach a shuck to these if I needed one quickly?

I looked for a shucklike material that I could add to my previously tied patterns. I searched for a fabric that I could attach to the rear of a dry fly to imitate the dun escaping the nymphal shuck or, in the example of a caddisfly, from the pupal case. It had to be lightweight, round, detachable, the color of the nymph or pupa, and, of course, inexpensive.

I began recycling some of my wife's nylon pantyhose. I cut them crosswise into quarter-inch-or-less strips long enough to copy shucks for flies tied on size 10 to 18

Adding a nylon shuck to your dry fly can help you fool

selective trout when conventional dries fail. Barry & Cathy Beck photo.

THE MOST VULNERABLE STAGE FOR THE INSECT BECOMES A FEASTING OPPORTUNITY FOR THE TROUT



ROD WALINCHUS ILLUSTRATIONS

Trout in clear streams and spring creeks often become selective to emerging mayflies. An instant nylon trailing shuck can give your fly the necessary lifelike look of a natural emerger.

hooks. When I stretched the strips they immediately coiled into a cylinder and gave the lifelike look of a nymphal shuck. I then used a permanent marking pen to copy the color of the natural shuck. I hooked the shuck over the hook point and under the tail of the fly and let it extend out beyond the bend about as far as the shank of the hook is long. The new patterns with a nylon trailing shuck looked great—but would they fool a trout?

I didn't have to wait long to find out. Bob Shuey, of Lower Burrell, and Tucker, Katie, and Tim Gordon, of Sewickley, near Pittsburgh, and I scheduled a fishing trip in mid-May to coincide with the Sulphur hatch on central Pennsylvania's Little Juniata River.

We arrived at the river shortly after noon with a fine mist falling and saw several splashing rises throughout the pool where we planned to fish. Hundreds of Gray Foxes had already appeared, and trout fed sporadically. We didn't have to wait long for a great hatch—a major emergence of Sulphurs began at 3 P.M. Trout fed with abandon. Within sight of us on the 100-yard, two-foot-deep riffle I saw a hundred fish feeding on the emerging duns.

Tucker and I caught our first two trout on emerger patterns fished on the surface. All five of us soon switched to floating Sulphur patterns tied parachute-style. Upriver, Tim Gordon had little success with this major hatch until I attached a trailing shuck made from the nylon stocking. Tim began catching one trout after another on his first day of dry-fly fishing. Bob Shuey put one of the shucks onto his Sulphur pattern and

picked up two fish. At the end of the four-hour marathon hatch we estimated that we had caught nearly 100 trout—many of them on the detachable nylon trailing shuck.

But one trip during a hatch does not prove the worth of these instant shucks. Jim Ravasio, of Danbury, Connecticut, and I met on the Little Juniata River for several days during the Green Drake hatch. All three days we fly fished we hit unexpected Drake hatches all afternoon. If you get an opportunity to witness this hatch, especially during daylight, you'll see emerging duns quivering violently to rid themselves of their nymphal shucks. Many ride for several feet before they throw off the tannish-gray skin.

Trout splashed viciously at my Compara-dun imitation but wouldn't take. On a third frustrating day of fishing this hatch, in desperation, I added a nylon shuck to a high-riding George Harvey Green Drake pattern. I used shuck material from pale gray nylons. (To make the shucks, I dipped the nylon into a pale tan dye for a second, let it dry, then added a few dorsal stripes with a permanent pen.) The first rising trout I covered took the imitation. Within the next 15 minutes five more took that pattern with the trailing shuck. Meanwhile, down-river Jim Ravasio hooked a dark brown nylon shuck onto his size 16 Sulphur parachute. In a half-hour he picked up six trout that had refused his conventional pattern.

Some mayflies appear from their nymphal shucks on or near the bottom of the stream. Adding a shuck for these species would be ineffective. Species like those



A spring creek brown caught on a trailing shuck pattern.

BARRY & CATHY BECK PHOTO

IMITATING

THE

EMERGENCE

imitated by the Quill Gordon (*Epeorus pleuralis*) and Pink Lady (*Epeorus vitreus* and *Epeorus albertae*) emerge in this manner. Try adding a shuck to a wet fly during a hatch.

Use a permanent marker to get the desired color of the shuck. Carry with you a box of shucks in assorted colors. Remember, you want to copy the color of the natural shuck as closely as possible. To copy a Sulphur and Pale Morning Dun, you can use brown nylons. To copy a Brown Drake or Green Drake, use white or pale gray nylons and dye them tannish-gray.

The shuck doesn't affect your casting nor does it twist tippets. After you use the nylon shuck a while or catch several fish, it will begin to ball up. If you don't like the look of it, or if the shuck becomes too water-logged, just tear the old shuck off and add a new one. Remember, these are just recycled nylons. Don't attach too large a shuck. It will look awkward and sink the dry fly.

Next time you're fishing over highly selective trout and they continuously refuse your Compara-dun, parachute, or conventional dry fly, go for your special stress compartment full of nylon shucks. Add a shuck to that dry fly the fish just refused and see what happens. These emergency instant shucks just might turn your frustrating day into one that you'll remember for the rest of your life.



CHARLIE MECK lives in Pennsylvania Furnace, Pennsylvania. His latest book is *Great Waters, Great Hatches* from Stackpole Books.

Z-lon shuck



JOHN RANDOLPH PHOTO

Trailing shucks can be tied as part of the pattern or you can attach instant nylon trailing shucks onstream. The parachute Sulphur pattern above was tied with a Z-lon trailing shuck. The Sulphur pattern below has a trailing shuck attached at the hook bend.

Hook bend shuck



JOHN RANDOLPH PHOTO

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