

It sinks like an anvil and imitates almost all baitfish.

Clouser's Deep Minnow

LEFTY KREH

SOMETIMES BIG NEWS springs from a simple beginning. "Stop by, I have a new fly I want you to try," said Bob Clouser, who runs a fly shop and guide service in Middletown, Pennsylvania. I planned to fish for smallmouth bass on the Susquehanna River near his shop and called to get river conditions. Bob and I constantly exchange new patterns we develop.

When I walked into the shop, he dropped the new fly into my hand. At first glance it looked like nothing—almost as if Bob hadn't finished tying it. But on closer examination I could see this fly might really do the trick. It's called Clouser's Deep Minnow.

Testing the Fly

THE SUSQUEHANNA RIVER near Middletown is perhaps a half-mile wide, with a gentle flow and a bottom paved in limestone rock—perfect habitat for smallmouths. We anchored in a deep pool near a ledge that rose almost to the surface. I tied on Bob's fly, made a long cast, and allowed it to almost dead-drift. It had traveled less than ten feet when a smallmouth grabbed it. I'm not sure how many fish I caught that day, but Bob's new fly fired my imagination as no fly has for years.

That was August of 1988. Recognizing the fly's potential, Bob and I worked on a series of patterns, and during the next four months I fished the Deep Minnow in fresh water and salt water from the south Pacific to Labrador. During that time I caught 24 species of freshwater and saltwater fish—everything from sharks and bonefish to walleyes and bluegills. One of Bob's clients caught a muskie on it, and I had a ball with it on pike.

I have been an outdoor writer for 40 years, and for years I have been able to fish an average three days a week. This fly is the best underwater pattern I have fished in decades. In fact, I don't know of a better underwater fly.

The pattern is a new type of streamer that represents minnows, sculpin, or baitfish. But let's look at other streamer patterns—especially those that tiers have developed in the last decade or so. In a vise, most of them closely resemble a minnow or baitfish of some type. But if you study minnows in the water, you don't see all the detail that most tiers incorporate into their baitfish patterns. In most cases, what you see under water is a *suggestion* of the baitfish. The eyes of the baitfish and a near-transparent portion of the back can usually be seen, but the sides are barely visible. Baitfish must be difficult to see or they would have been wiped out by predators long ago. Most streamer flies I have fished resemble a picture of a baitfish—but in the water they don't really look like one. And many of the most popular ones are tied with wool, deer hair, and other materials that resist sinking.

Clouser's Deep Minnow looks and swims like a minnow, but best of all it's a streamer you can cast easily, and it sinks like an anvil in a swamp.

Making the Minnow

ANYONE WHO HAS EVEN MEAGER tying skills can make this fly—in only two or three minutes. The pattern comprises two colors of bucktail, a standard-length wet-fly hook, some Krystal Hair or Krystal Flash, and lead eyes (for most freshwater flies Bob uses $\frac{1}{36}$ -ounce lead eyes).

First, tie a pair of lead eyes on top of the hook shank, and add a drop of fast-setting glue to the thread wraps and where the eye bar crosses the hook shank. (I prefer the Sandy's Superfly, a thin cyanoacrylate glue, but any good glue that holds the lead eyes in place is okay.)

After attaching the eyes, secure about 20 strands of bucktail in front of the lead eyes. Then, holding the deer hair in position, tie the hair to the hook shank immediately behind the lead eyes. Bring the thread

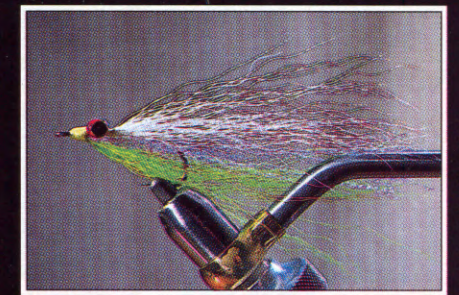
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Sculpin Deep Minnow



Silver Shiner Deep Minnow



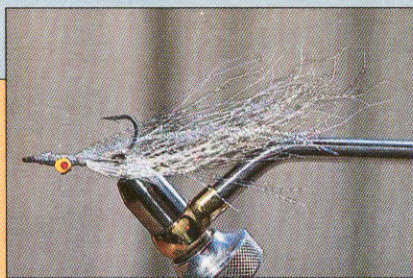
Chartreuse Deep Minnow

JOHN RANDOLPH PHOTOS





Tie in the lead eyes and then glue them with cyanacrylate glue. Tie in a sparse clump of bucktail.



Invert the hook in the vise (now the point is up). Tie in strands of Krystal Flash for the mid wing.



Tie in a sparse bucktail top wing in front of the lead-eye cross piece. The bucktail must tilt up at the eyes for proper fly action.

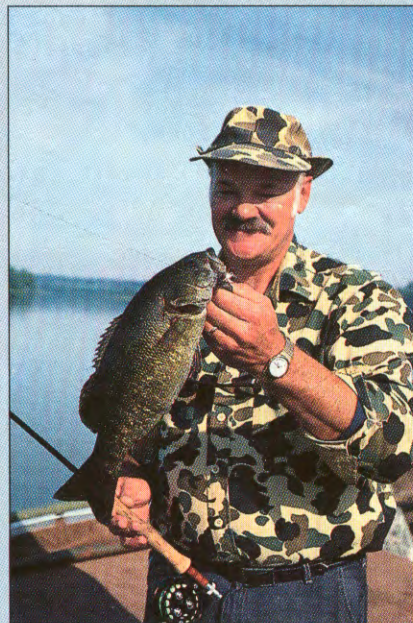
JOHN RANDOLPH PHOTOS

Tying Clouser's Deep Minnow

YOU CAN TIE the Clouser Deep Minnow on saltwater or freshwater hooks. For most of my freshwater flies, I use a Mustad 3906B hook in sizes 2 and 4. My saltwater patterns are tied on Mustad 34007 stainless-steel hooks in a variety of sizes. Although lead eyes come in a range of sizes, the 1/50-, 1/36-, and 1/24-ounce eyes are the easiest to cast with 7- or 8-weight fly lines. I tie my trout-size flies on smaller hooks with either the 1/50- or 1/36-ounce eyes.

I developed the tying style used for the Deep Minnow fly for a variety of reasons. The eyes are attached to the top of the hook so the fly rides with the point up. The hair for the belly is secured in front of and in back of the eyes to keep the hair in the shape of a minnow's belly. The top or back hair is secured only in front of the eyes so it angles up, and when wet it forms a body with a deep front and thin rear profile—the outline of a real minnow's body. This tying style also allows the hair to undulate in an up-and-down motion, somewhat like an injured minnow lying on its side. Tied sparsely, with Krystal Flash or Flashabou in the center of the hair, the fly takes on the transparent illusion of live baitfish. When tied the same length as the body hair or 1/8-inch longer, the Krystal Flash or Flashabou adds a rocking motion to the fly, giving another illusion of life to the pattern. The lead eyes make the fly dip and dart with an action and speed similar to a live baitfish fleeing from a predator.

To add durability to the finished fly, glue the eyes in place while tying the



Bob Clouser with a Susquehanna River smallmouth that fell victim to the Deep Minnow.

BOB CLOUSER PHOTO

BOB CLOUSER

Deep Minnow. Sandy's Super Fly Medium or Zap-a-Gap glues are my choice, but you can use any top quality instant Cyanoacrylate (CA) glue. Brands such as Goldberg Jet, Hot Stuff, and others found in hobby shops that stock radio-control model airplane supplies are good.

Clouser Deep Minnow/Silver Shiner
 LOWER WING: White bucktail.
 MIDDLE WING: Rainbow Krystal Flash.
 UPPER WING: Pale-gray bucktail.

Clouser Deep Minnow/Golden Shiner
 LOWER WING: White bucktail.
 MIDDLE WING: Gold or copper Krystal Flash.
 UPPER WING: Light tan bucktail.

Clouser Deep Minnow/Chartreuse
 WING: White bucktail.
 MIDDLE WING: Rainbow Krystal Flash.
 UPPER WING: Chartreuse bucktail.

Clouser Deep Minnow/Sculpin
 LOWER WING: Pale-orange bucktail.
 MIDDLE WING: Gold Krystal Flash.
 UPPER WING: Rusty-brown bucktail.

BOB CLOUSER OWNS Clouser's Fly Shop in Middletown, Pennsylvania, and guides on the Susquehanna River.

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—Lefty Kreh

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forward of the eyes again, turn the hook over in the vise so that the point sits up, and tie in a center wing, using about 20 strands of Krystal Flash or Krystal Hair. Then tie in another 20 strands of bucktail in front of the lead eyes to form the upper portion of the wing. That's it. When finished, the entire wing on the fly should not be more than 1/8 inch in diameter when pinched together.

This fly must be tied sparsely to be effective. If it is constructed with very little material, the Deep Minnow perfectly resembles a minnow in the water. It's transparent—just a little of the back and side can be seen under water—and the lead eyes are truly visible. The fly also sinks quickly when sparsely dressed. Overdressing spoils the pattern's appearance and its appeal to fish and slows the sink rate. Because the pattern is tied with a reverse-style wing, the hook point rides up and rarely snags on bottom.

Bob and I tested a number of color combinations of bucktail and Krystal Flash and have developed four that will do the job nearly everywhere.

If I had to settle for one pattern color, it would be the one Bob calls the Clouser Deep Minnow Silver Shiner. No other fly that I have fished has looked so much like the average baitfish. My second choice is the Golden Shiner pattern, which resembles a number of baitfish that have tannish backs. This color combination has also proved extremely effective on saltwater flats that have light-colored bottoms. It is a superior fly for large bonefish when dressed on a size 2 hook.

My third choice is the Clouser Deep Minnow Sculpin, which has a dark brown back and an orange belly and resembles many foods taken by trout. When using it I have caught a number of trout species in both lakes and rivers. The fourth pattern is the Chartreuse Clouser Deep Minnow, which has been deadly on walleyes and has proved to be an all-around pattern in salt water.

The Globetrotting Minnow

WITHOUT GETTING TOO enthusiastic, I will relate several experiences I've had with this fly. Last November at Christmas Island, Duane Calkins and I waded in a lagoon off Cook Island, and although I can't recall how many reef fish we caught, we counted nine different species. Clouser's Deep Minnow was also effective on six-pound-plus bonefish on the flats.

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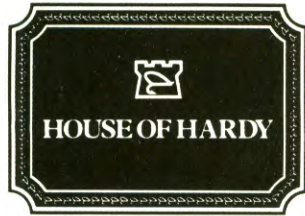
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The Chartreuse pattern worked best around the coral heads, and the Golden Shiner style was best on the flats. We had such good success fishing the channels with these flies that several of the fellows on the trip used up all of their available tying materials making more Deep Minnows.

On another trip, Dick Gaumer and I anchored off a coral patch near the Andros Island Bonefish Club in the Bahamas last December. He used what we knew was a deadly lure: a small jig with a pale pink, three-inch grub tail. I fished the Clouser Deep Minnow, using all four color combinations, knowing that I could do well fishing against Dick's proven lure. Our catch was equal. We caught jack crevalle, several kinds of grouper and snapper, blue runners, bonefish, sharks, and several other species.

On a lake in Pennsylvania that holds nice yellow perch and crappie, I used two-inch-long Silver Shiners dressed on #6 hooks and caught more of these fish than I have ever caught before on a fly. Walleyes fell to the new fly, as did largemouth and smallmouth bass. And the list goes on.

Minnow Gear

BECAUSE THE FLY IS SPARSELY dressed, even with the lead eyes, it casts about like a medium-size bass bug—no problem with a 7-weight or larger rod. Not only does this fly resemble a baitfish in the water, it *sinks*, and that's its major attribute. No need for sinking lines and split-shot. When using a weight-forward line and a 10-foot tapered leader in moderate current and a slow retrieve, you can fish bottom in eight or ten feet of water. In lakes you can easily fish deeper. The length of the pattern can be adjusted, too. The sink rate is directly related to the size of the lead eyes you use. For most freshwater situations 1/36- or 1/24-ounce eyes are ideal, and for many saltwater situations I use either 1/18- or 1/10-ounce.

Bob Clouser's Deep Minnow pattern combines all the best features of a truly great fly: It's easy to tie, easy to cast, closely resembles real baitfish, and it sinks like a rock. But best of all, fish of all kinds just love to eat it.



LEFTY KREH is a FLY FISHERMAN Editor-at-Large. His latest book is the *L.L. Bean Guide to Outdoor Photography*.

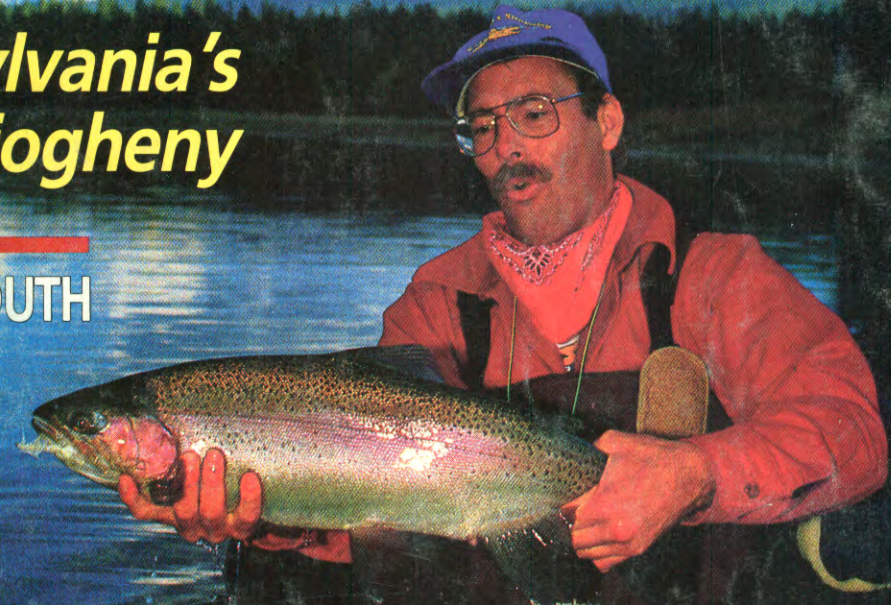
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