

*The Dahlberg Diver is
five flies in one for trout,
salmon, bass, tarpon,
snook, redfish . . .*

Super Fly!

DAVE WHITLOCK



AUTHOR'S PHOTO

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE if you successfully crossed a deerhair bug with a Muddler Minnow and a weighted streamer?

You'd have a *super fly* that would cast easily, float, pop, dive, wiggle, swim and pick up perfectly. In sizes #10 to #5/0 it would be perfect to catch trout, bass, panfish, muskie, pike, snook, tarpon and redfish! Such a fly design might seem like a fly-fisher's fantasy and a fly-tier's lifetime quest but because of Larry Dahlberg, a brilliant young angler and fly tier from Grantsburg, Wis., it is a reality. Super fly exists in the form of the Dahlberg Diver. For three years, I have tested it in various sizes, with an assortment of material and color patterns, and its versatility has amazed me. It is a great confidence-builder, fun to use and very effective on trout rivers, bass ponds, and redfish flats.

The Dahlberg Diver is a one-fly answer to the dilemma of which fly to use—floater or a subsurface swimmer. It performs the float, pop, dive, swim, resurface routines best with a *floating fly line*. Because the Diver is unweighted and relatively streamlined, it casts like a dream, lands softly and picks up quickly and smoothly. The fly is constructed of body hair from deer or elk and is garnished for specific patterns with such common materials as soft neck and saddle hackle, bucktail, marabou, Flashabou, and rubber hackle so it is inexpensive to tie and durable.

The Diver's unusual combination of actions is the result of a specially designed hollow-hair head and collar. It has a short bullet-shaped clipped-hair head for floatation and

to create water "plowing" pressure that noses the fly into and under the surface during the retrieve. The coarse hair collar, immediately behind the head on the upper sides and top of the hook, increases the water pressure on the top of the fly. Since there is no collar or other obstruction on the bottom of the hook shank, little water pressure can develop there so the fly is pushed or pressured down proportionally to the speed and length of the forward pull—resulting in a dive. Constant retrieve pressure or moving-water drag keeps the fly diving and swimming.

When the retrieve is stopped, the buoyant fly begins rising to the surface. The collar creates water turbulence directly behind it causing the soft flexible wing or tail materials to wiggle. By raising the rod from a low retrieve angle to a higher pickup angle the diving effect is stopped and it comes out of the water smoothly and easily. It is so simple and works so neatly I do not know why I did not think of it! But that is what I said about the no-hackle, Matuka and Keel Fly designs too.

The Test

LARRY INTRODUCED ME to his Diver fly four years ago. We were floating the lovely St. Croix, a river he knows and understands as a resident osprey would. He has a rare combination of intelligence, knowledge, experience, and open-mindedness. His dad's companionship and the St. Croix river has blended these traits into a very special personality.

Larry let me exercise several of my favorite hairbug and Muddler patterns with only fair results. The river's crafty smallmouth seemed reluctant to accept my surface offerings. Watching the bass turn short of my bugs, Larry suggested that it looked like a good time to use a tinsel-tail



Larry Dahlberg on Wisconsin's St. Croix River, where he introduced the Diver design to Dave Whitlock.

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Diver. I immediately urged him to try his idea as I was very anxious to watch my host fish his river.

On a floating bug-taper Larry cast a weird, scruffy-looking deerhair and gold mylar fly up next to a big uprooted river birch root clump. The bourbon-colored St. Croix provided a strong contrasting mat for the tan-and-gold floating fly. I forgot fishing and gazed at this strange concoction of deerhair and marabou-like tinsel 40 feet away with no idea what I was about to witness. This moment was to affect my own fishing success for years to come!

Larry let the fly drift slowly down toward the roots; then just before it was sure to be lost in their tangles, he twitched it twice. It made creaturelike gargling noises unlike any I had ever heard from a popper. That fly went under the surface bubbling, wiggling, and flashing like a metallic-skirted aquatic belly dancer! Not an inch or two like a Muddler or hairbug, but 12 to 18 inches—almost out of sight under the dark water! Before I could realize what I had seen, it popped back on the surface. It was an unreal show of fly actions. Larry dived it down once more and it was viciously attacked by a 15-inch smallmouth.

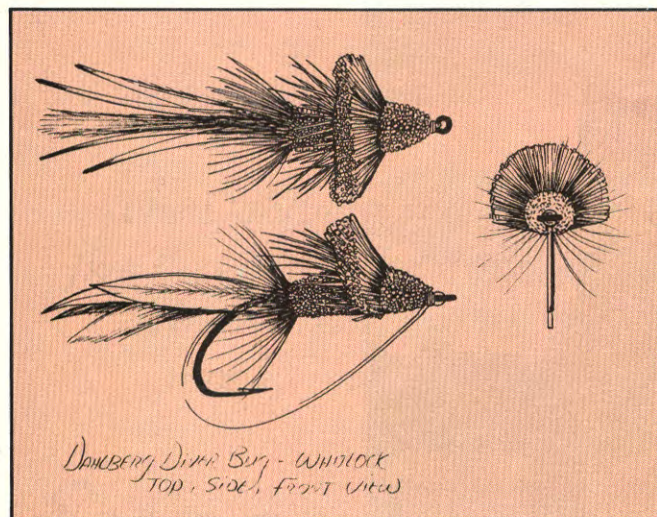
Larry knew he had a double hookup: the bass and me! I wanted a closer look at the pattern but the stubborn red-

eyed bass was determined to keep away as long as it could. Finally Larry tired it and led it close to the boat. I reached out and lip-landed the fish for him so I could get a closer look at that damn fly. I did not believe my eyes as I unhooked the smallmouth. I saw nothing that could make the fly act as it did. Larry must have a sinking tip line with this deer-hair floater, I thought—the line just did not have the customary contrasting dark-green and brown tip. I released the bass and flipped his fly on the water so he could resume casting.

When the line and fly hit the water the fly floated, popped and dived as before but the *line's tip floated!* For the remainder of that day and the next, that fly enticed strikes from a number of smallmouth, northerns and muskie. I was overwhelmingly impressed with Larry and his diving pet.

Since then I have tied and tested hundreds of Larry's Divers from coast to coast and north and south. They are fantastic on western brown trout and eastern Atlantic salmon rivers. The shorelines of bass streams and lakes belong to the Dahlberg Diver. Pike and musky hit the larger sizes with as much viciousness as strippers and snook attack them. They are a perfect choice for fishing the grassy flats of the Gulf

DAVE WHITLOCK is a professional fly tier, consultant, lecturer, teacher and author. His most recent books are *Dave Whitlock's Guide to Aquatic Trout Foods*, and the *L.L. Bean Fly-Fishing Handbook*, both published by Nick Lyons Books.

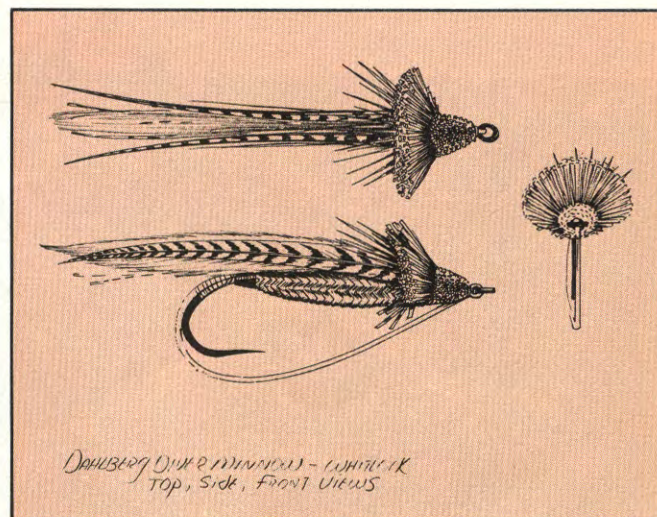


Coast and southern Florida Keys for redfish and trout (spotted weakfish).

The Retrieves

FOR STILLWATER shoreline fishing, I cast the fly—always made with a hook snag-guard—past or up against the shoreline cover. As it alights, I follow it down with my rod tip and try to set up a straight line connection from fly to leader to fly line to rod to my rod arm. With a pull on the line I move the Dahlberg Diver into the water and allow it to sit. Then I twitch it a time or two with line pulls, not rod tip movement, to keep the slack out. With the rod tip next to water surface, I twitch, pop or slowly swim the Diver on the surface with line pulls. As the fly moves over open and deeper water, I begin the dive with a brisk pull and continue to steadily strip the line. This dives and swims the fly. I vary the length and cadence of the strips to give the fly its most attractive swimming actions. Pauses in retrieve cause the fly to nose up and rise. A long pause will allow it to return to the surface for additional surface action or another dive routine. Depending upon the area, the retrieve might only be a few feet or all the way back to the leader knot. Because it can be worked so long with so many actions, it seems to draw more consistently solid strikes than one-action flies of the same pattern.

On flowing waters I use one of two general retrieves. One is very similar to the stillwater shoreline method I have just described. It is very effective when floating streamers over trout, bass and pike that are holding near banks. The nearly



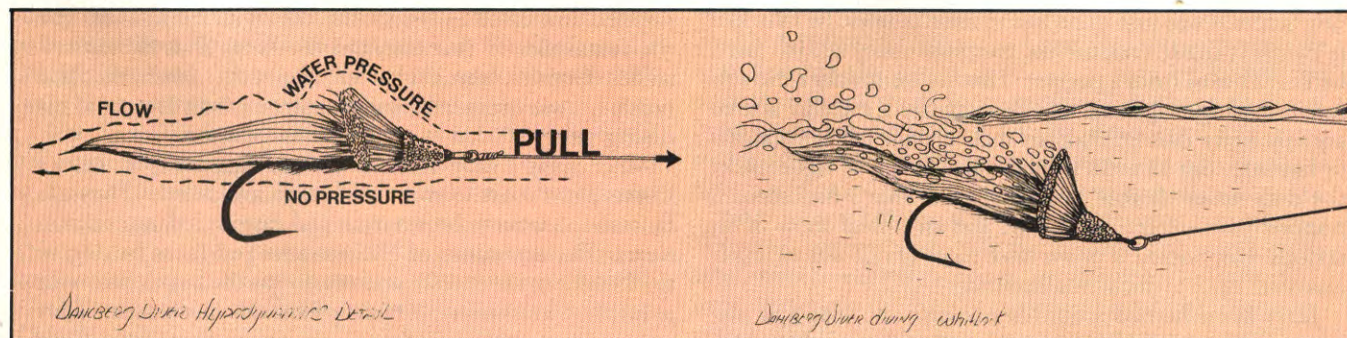
snag-proof Diver practically eliminates hang-ups in overhangs.

The second method is for more open streams and is effective for steelhead, Atlantic salmon, silvers, trout and bass. I cast the Dahlberg Diver up and across-stream and mend line to let it dead-drift downstream. When it passes me, I let the current drag the line as I lower the rod tip. This dives the fly without actually retrieving it. It continues to dive and swim as long as the current pulls on it. I let it swing around then either give it slack to make it surface or retrieve it to swim upstream. You can drive salmon and steelhead nuts with this method. Smallmouth and trout holding in slow runs or tail-outs seem to find it irresistible, especially when I spice up the downstream floats and dive with erratic twitches of the rod tip or line.

Larry likes to use a large tinsel-tail Diver coupled with a fast three- to six-foot strip and a short pause to create a large bubble chain beyond the fly. He believes that it makes the fly look three to five times larger, especially important if you need a fly to look like it is a foot long to attract big stripers, musky, snook, bass and trout. I have seen Larry use a five-inch Diver to raise trophy-sized musky that eat only two-pound suckers.

Patterns

THE DAHLBERG DIVER'S SECRET is in the fly-head and collar design that provides flotation and creates audible surface disturbance, and diving and swimming movements. The design can be incorporated successfully into most imitations



of natural fish foods that have such surface and subsurface actions. I tie two basic body shapes to ape most of these foods. The first I call "Diver Bug" and tie in colors and materials to suggest toads, frogs, crabs, turtles, rodents, large terrestrial and aquatic insects, young birds, etc. The other, the "Diver Minnow," is tied with colors and materials that suggest the longer, thin silhouette of minnows, tadpoles, small fish, snakes, shrimp, salamanders.

So if I am working a bass and pickerel pond in New Hampshire I might try a frog pattern Bug Diver. If I am working a Gulfcoast redfish and sea trout grass flat I use a tan and grizzly shrimp pattern Minnow Diver. Floating the Madison and Yellowstone rivers for shoreline browns I probably would use a marabou or Flashabou muddler Minnow Diver. Get the idea? Divers should be suggestive in shapes and colors. The most flexible and softest body materials, such as marabou, rubber hackle, Flashabou, soft hackle, deerhair etc., are best as Diver bodies, legs, and tails.

A Diver's performance depends on a couple of factors besides its head and body construction. The floating fly line, especially the "bug" weight-forward taper is best for hooks larger than #4. Standard double-taper or weight-forward floaters are fine for smaller trout, steelhead, and panfish sizes. Sinking-tip fly lines do not enhance the Dahlberg Diver's overall performance and actually negate its most desirable characteristics.

The leader also affects its diving. Longer, flexible tippets allow the Diver to dive steeper and swim with more action and to surface more rapidly than short, stiffer tippets. The less vertical water resistance (drag) the leader has on the Dahlberg Diver the better the fly does its thing.

I prefer the Duncan Loop Knot (Uniknot) with loop open to fish the Diver most effectively. An improved clinch knot is okay, but it inhibits the fly's action.

The Diver's head and collar size may be altered to increase or decrease its surface float and disturbance. A small head and large collar produces more pop and a big bubble chain. I generally prefer a smaller collar for the minnow-style Diver that is supposed to swim more than float. To keep its overall weight low I dress just the head and collar with Dave's Bug Flote or another paste compound. This also enhances and prolongs deerhair flotation.

Homemade or professionally-tied Dahlberg Divers may need to be "tuned" to perform properly. This usually involves a bit of minor head or collar hair trimming on the water. Some may swim on their sides, twist or come out of the water when pulled to dive or swim. By balancing the head and collar by removing some hair they can usually be adjusted to do an excellent job. With a little tying and testing experience, less and less tuning will be necessary.

Larry, other tiers and I have experimented with more consistently reproducible collar materials like plastic and latex but they fall far short of deer and elk hair for performance. I am also a great believer in the fish magic that clipped deerhair seems to give a fly. Even if a Diver's head and collar could be made from other materials they might not catch fish as well as good ol' deerhair.

Larry has granted permission and manufacturing rights to have Dahlberg Divers produced by a major American fly-tying firm. They will be available this year in many major fly-fishing tackle stores and catalogs. If you tie your own

or have a friend who does, use the pattern recipes below to tie a supply now.

New fly ideas are introduced each year, but most fade with time and testing against traditional floating, swimming, and bottom-crawling designs. The rapidly growing stack of testimonial letters from Dahlberg Diver testers across the country and Canada confirm Larry's and my enthusiasm for the fly. The Dahlberg Diver seems to be a shoo-in for immediate and long lasting popularity for it gives us a one fly design that does the work of five—the floater, popper, darter, diver and a streamer all in one!

One to five: pretty good odds against any fish these days. Thanks Larry.



Whitlock Dahlberg Divers

Whit Saltwater Dahlberg Divers

Light Salt

HOOK: #6 to #3/0 regular ring-eye nickle or stainless.
THREAD: White flat waxed nylon floss.

SNAGGUARD: Nylon Monofilament strand 3/4 diameter of hook wire.

TAILS: 1 white saddle or neck hackle, two grizzly or light cree neck hackle, one yellow marabou feather tip and 20 strands of pearl or silver Flashabou tinsel.

SKIRT: 1 grizzly or cree neck hackle.

WAIST: Yellow deerhair.

THROAT: 4 to 6 strands of red Flashabou tinsel.

COLLAR: Light natural tan dun deerhair.

HEAD: White or pale grey deerhair.

Dark Salt

HOOK: #6 to #3/0 regular ring eye nickle or stainless.
TYING THREAD: Orange or black flat waxed nylon floss.

SNAGGUARD: Nylon monofilament 3/4 diameter of hook wire.

TAILS: 1 dark brown grizzly neck hackle, 2 dark orange grizzly neck hackle, 1 very dark brown or black marabou feather tip, and six strands of copper Flashabou tinsel.

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SKIRT: Black and orange grizzly hackle.
WAIST: Dark orange deerhair.
COLLAR: Dark brown deer, moose, or elk hair.
HEAD: Dark orange deer hair.

PROPORTIONS FOR WHIT SALTWATER DAHLBERG DIVERS:

TAILS: 2 times hook shank length.
WAIST: 1/4 hook shank.
SKIRT: 1/4 hook shank.
HEAD: 1/4 hook shank.
COLLAR: 1/4 hook shank.

Original Dahlberg Tinsel Tail Diver

HOOK: Stinger #10, #6, #2.
TYING THREAD: Red flat waxed nylon floss.
SNAGGUARD: Nylon monofilament.
TAIL: Gold and pearl Flashabou.
SKIRT: Natural dun brown whitetail deerhair.
WAIST: Natural dun brown whitetail deerhair.
COLLAR: Natural dun brown whitetail deerhair.
HEAD: Natural dun brown whitetail deerhair.

PROPORTIONS FOR ORIGINAL DAHLBERG TINSEL TAIL DIVER:

TINSEL TAIL: 1 1/2 hook shank length.
SKIRT: 3/4 hook shank length.
WAIST: 1/2 hook shank.
COLLAR: 1/2 hook shank.
HEAD: 1/2 hook shank.

Whit Muddler Minnow Dahlberg Diver

HOOK: Mustad 9674, #8 to #1/0.
TYING THREAD: White flat waxed nylon floss.
TAIL: Speckled turkey wing section.
BODY: Gold oval tinsel.
UNDERWING: Grey squirrel tail and 6 strands of gold Flashabou tinsel.
WING: Speckled turkey wing quill.
COLLAR: Natural dark dun brown Northern whitetail deerhair.
HEAD: Natural dark dun brown Northern whitetail deerhair.

PROPORTIONS FOR WHIT MUDDLER MINNOW DAHLBERG DIVER:

TAIL: 1/2 hook shank length.
BODY: 2/3 hook shank.
UNDERWING: 1 hook shank length even with tail.
WING: 3/4 hook shank length.
COLLAR: 1/6 hook shank.
HEAD: 1/6 hook shank.

Whit Dahlberg Diver Bug

Black Bee Bug

HOOK: Stinger, #10, #6, or #2.
TYING THREAD: Black flat waxed nylon floss.

SNAGGUARD: Nylon monofilament 3/4 diameter of hook wire.
TAIL: 4 black neck or saddle hackles, one black marabou feather tip.
SKIRT: Black hackle and 8 or 10 peacock sword herls.
WAIST: Yellow deerhair.
COLLAR: Black deerhair.
HEAD: Yellow deerhair.

Frog

HOOK: Stinger, #10, #6 or #2.
TYING THREAD: White or yellow flat waxed nylon floss.
SNAGGUARD: Nylon monofilament.
LEGS: 1 pair each of grizzly, light olive grizzly and dark olive grizzly neck hackle.
WAIST: Pale yellow or white deerhair.
COLLAR: Light olive, dark olive, and black deerhair.
HEAD: Light yellow or white deerhair.
PROPORTIONS FOR WHIT DAHLBERG DIVER BUGS
TAILS: 1 1/2 times hook shank length.
SKIRT: 1/4 shank.
WAIST: 1/4 shank.
COLLAR: 1/4 shank.
HEAD: 1/4 shank.

Whit Dahlberg Diver Minnows

Silver Shiner

HOOK: Mustad 9674, sizes #8 to #1/0.
TYING THREAD: White flat waxed nylon floss.
SNAGGUARD: Nylon monofilament, 3/4 diameter of hook wire.
BODY: Silver mylar braided tubing and red thread.
WING: 2 narrow light grizzly saddle or neck hackle, one white marabou feather tip and 20 to 30 strands of pearl or silver Flashabou.
THROAT: 8 to 10 strands each of red and pearl Flashabou tinsel.
COLLAR: Light grey muledeer hair and black deerhair.
HEAD: White deerhair.

Chub

HOOK: Mustad 9674, #8 to #1/0
TYING THREAD: Yellow flat waxed nylon floss.
SNAGGUARD: Nylon monofilament.
BODY: Gold braided mylar tubing and red thread.
WING: 2 narrow dark cree saddle hackles, 10 strands each of gold and pearl Flashabou tinsel.
THROAT: 6 or 8 strands of red and pearl Flashabou tinsel.
COLLAR: Pale yellow, grey, and dark brown deerhair.
HEAD: Pale yellow deerhair.

PROPORTIONS OF WHIT DAHLBERG DIVER MINNOWS:

BODY: 2/3 hook shank.
COLLAR: 1/6 hook shank.
HEAD: 1/6 hook shank.
WING: 2 times hook shank length.

CONSTRUCTING THE DAHLBERG DIVER fly is similar to tying the various Muddler Minnow or Marabou Muddler deerhair-head flies, but the Diver's head and collar must be shaped and proportioned more carefully than the Muddler's deerhair head and collar for correct performance. Enhance such patterns as Zonkers, deerhair bugs, leeches, sculpins, Muddlers, and marabou streamers with the Dahlberg Diver head and collar.

There are two basic body-and-wing designs that encompass most possibilities: the "bug" and "minnow" designs. The bug is a more buoyant, compact fly, suggesting such foods as frogs, mice, turtles, large terrestrial insects, crabs, crayfish, etc. The minnow has a less buoyant, elongated shape suggesting such forage fish as shad, shiners, sculpin, chub, stickleback, salamanders, and shrimp.

Larry's original design, the tinsel-tail Diver, is almost a perfect hybrid of bug and minnow shapes. His goal was not to imitate, but to create as much surface sound, diving, swimming, flash and soft texture as possible. The small-mouth and muskies he fishes for are attracted by these Diver properties.

Notes On Collar And Head Proportions

LARGE COLLAR AND SMALL HEAD gives the fly an initial surface disturbance and more "popping" noise, but less floata-

tion. The large collar causes a very large bubble chain and more tail or wing action. It does not cast as easily as the smaller collar Diver.

Small collar and large head gives the fly less surface noise but much more buoyancy. It goes under more smoothly with fewer bubbles and less violent tail or wing action. It casts much easier.

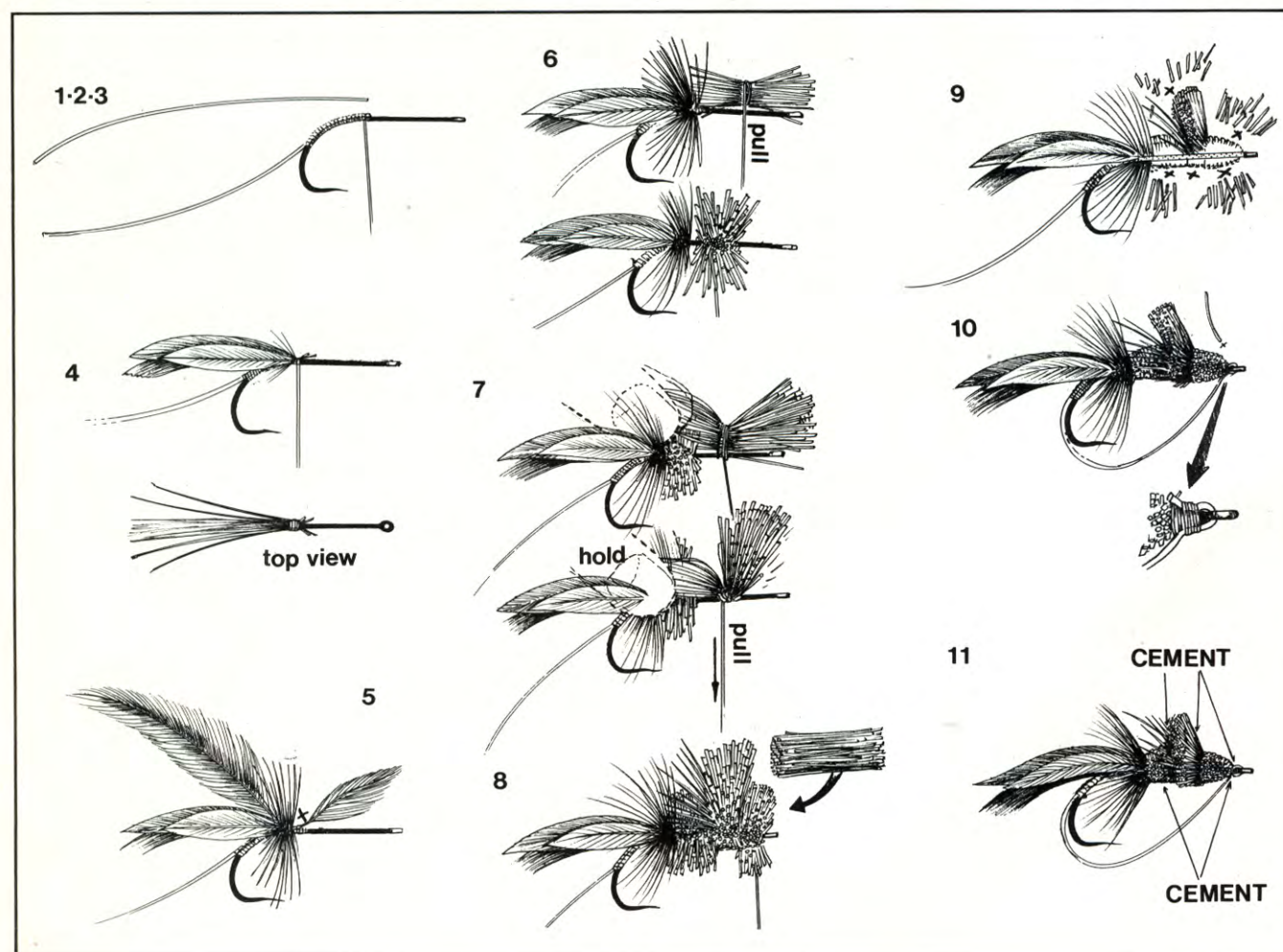
Cement for the Diver head and collar should not harden. I use a new thin latex cement called Flexament. Thinned flexible Pliobond and vinyl and acrylic cements also will do an excellent job. After the fly is finished and trimmed lightly, apply cement to the front of the collar and place one or two drops at collar's back base. This keeps the collar surface together and durable without making it too stiff.

Tying The Bug Dahlberg Diver

THE BUG IS TIED on straight ring-eye Stinger hook or regular length shank ring-eye hook one or two sizes larger than you would normally use for better hooking.

1. Hook preparation: Sharpen point and lower barb angle or remove barb.
2. Thread attachment: Attach thread on hook shank just in front of bend and wrap back and 1/3 down bend.
3. Snag-guard (Part I): Position nylon strand so that end is directly over thread wraps on bend and rear shank. Wrap

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thread over strand to top side of hook bend and shank. One layer of wraps is enough. Coat wraps with head cement. Place strand in material clip until Step 10. (Part II).

4. Tails (A): Tie in Flashabou strands and marabou feather tip just over and in front of snag-guard shank tie-down area. These should extend back approximately the length of hook shank—but no longer.

(B): Set two pairs of hackles, one pair on each side of hook shank in this same area. For best action have each pair turning away from hook. Make first pair ¼ longer than second pair. Cement tied-down bases. Their length should equal hook shank length.

5. Skirt—Select one or two soft webby hackles which have hackle fibers approximately the same as the hook's gape. Tie these down just in front of hackle tails. Wrap each forward to form skirt with fibers angled back, "wet fly style." Trim away excess tips and cement at tie down area.

6. Waist: Select and cut a bunch of deerhair, remove fuzz and cut away tips. Hold parallel and over bare hook shank just ahead of the skirt and make two loose wraps around center of held bunch and lightly tighten these two wraps. Now release hair and make one or two more tight thread turns to spin and flare hairs to form waist. Add more deerhair as needed for a longer waist. Push waist firmly back on the hook shank against skirt and advance thread forward.

7. Collar: Select a thick bunch of deerhair and hold it parallel over bare hook shank midway between waist and hook's eye with hair butts forward and tips pointing back. Hold tips firmly and make two loose thread wraps around hair about in the center. Hold tips in place while you tighten two wraps. Hair should flare up and to the side but not spin under the hook. Make two more tight wraps while still holding tips directly over first two. Add one or two bunches of deerhair directly over first if collar seems too sparse using the same holding and flaring procedure. Push collar back on hook shank firmly against waist.

8. Head: About ¼ hook shank should still be bare at this point in tying. Advance thread forward from collar. Select one or two bunches of deerhair and spin and flare each over shank with thread just as you would a Muddler Minnow's head until you have covered shank with tightly packed deerhair up to the hook's eye. NOTE: Use a different color hair for head to make collar and head trimming easier.

9. Waist, head and collar trim: Place two half hitches at hook's eye with tying thread. Cut thread and remove fly from vise. Re-position any collar and head hair that may have slipped or twisted out of position. Study the Dahlberg Diver head diagram closely. With scissors trim the head, waist and collar to desired Dahlberg Diver shape. Make sure you

Continued on Page 78

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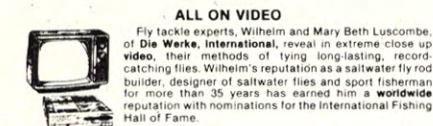
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remove most material on lower side of the head, collar, waist, and skirt so no excess water pressure builds beneath the fly. Curved and serrated blade scissors work best.

10. Snag-guard (Part II): Re-attach tying thread just behind hook's eye. Bring nylon strand under hook then pass it up through hook's eye. Make several snug threads over it and hook. Now adjust nylon loop formed so that it hangs below hook point ½ the hook's gap. Now bend end extending up through hook's eye, down and back over shank just behind eye. Make a dozen firm wraps over it and hook shank to "lock" strand to shank. Cut excess strand away.

11. Finish: Whip finish just behind eye and remove thread. With flexible head cement coat whip finish and snag-guard tie down area. Put a bit of cement along underside of head, on front of collar, and behind collar.

Tying The Minnow Dahlberg Diver

HOOKS FOR THE MINNOW should have a 3X or longer shank and a straight ring eye. Mustad's 9674 is a good choice.

1. Hook Preparation: Same as Bug Step 1.
2. Thread Attachment: Same as Bug Step 2.
3. Snag-guard (Part I): Same as Bug Step 3.
4. Body: Should be approximately ⅔ length of hook shank. Use appropriate dubbing, tinsel, or braided mylar tubing to simulate minnow's lower sides and belly. EX-AMPLE: For a shiner I use silver mylar tubing and for a sculpin I will use cream colored dubbing. If you wish to tie a Matuka style wing you must tie in the wire rib just to the rear of the body. (Illustration shows mylar tubing.)
5. Wing: Just over front part of body—not ahead of it—on bare shank, tie down strands of Flashabou and marabou tip. Next tie hackle to each upper side of hook on this same area. Add a bit of cement to secure these parts of the wing. Wing length should be approximately 1 ½ length of hook shank.
6. Throat: Bring tying thread just ahead of wing/body and tie in a few short strands of Flashabou.
7. Collar: Same as Bug Step 7.
8. Head: Same as Bug Step 8.
9. Head and collar: Same as Bug Step 9.
10. Snag-guard (Part II)—Same as Bug Step 10.
11. Finish—Same as Bug Step 11.



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