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JAY'S PATUXENT SPECIAL

Over the past twenty-five years, many have asked me to describe this fly and how to fish it. The Patuxent Special was discovered in a desperate attempt to catch some trout on the Savage River in western Maryland in early April 1979. After several hours with only one strike on a dozen different patterns, I tied on a #8 'Michigan wriggler' left from an earlier steelhead trip and was immediately rewarded with **two** strikes on the **first swing of the fly!** Having missed those two fish, I took several deep breaths (I was about to faint into deep water!) and recast to the far side of the deep pool below me. Over just the next 90 minutes I caught over a dozen trout and twice had three visible strikes on ONE swing of the fly. It had gone from a cold, gloomy, spring morning to a great day of fishing! I did not really invent this variation of the woolly worm out of thin air—Great Lakes anglers use a similar fly to imitate the large *Hexagenia* nymph for the steelhead and other trout of those waters. I have modified the wriggler by eliminating the shell back, adding weight, and making other minor refinements. For a photo, see Gelso & Coburn's *Guide to Maryland Trout Fishing* (2006), p. 135.

After trying this simpler pattern on several other streams, most notably the upper Patuxent River not far from my home, I started giving out this secret to my fishing buddies. We have tried varying the colors of the three visible materials and the sizes of the hook and proportions of the hackle and tail, but the basic one described below is still the most consistent producer. The original chenille was the old Orvis 'tan' color, which was a golden ginger; Orvis changed that many years ago to a real 'tan,' which does not work as well as the original. Hook and Hackle (Plattsburgh, NY; 800-552-8342) and some local shops offer a chenille in the better golden ginger color. The same shade of hackle is also needed.

I tie this pattern to survive many fish chewing on it; the extra measures below reflect my concerns on making as durable a fly as possible. I have dozens laying on my tying table with unwound hackles, shredded chenille, loose wire, etc. It is not unusual to catch 40 trout or smallmouth in a few hours on just one fly. (Be sure to check your tippet just in front of the fly from time to time!) That is a lot of teeth grinding into the fly! The few extra steps save time and flies on the water. Another very interesting feature of this fly is its great ability to be easily retrieved from a tree branch: a **gentle** tug usually flips the fly back off the twig (the large hackle, small hook gap help).

The presentation of the **well-weighted** fly is the real trick of this fly pattern. **Dead drift** gets ZERO trout and smallmouth! The fly is most effective when stripped rapidly across a pool in very brisk, relatively short, strips. (Slow water=long and rapid strips in the retrieve, fast water=short nudges or strips.) The pause should be no longer than about the time to reach up and grab another 10–20" of fly line, as **any longer pause of about 1 second or more** and the fish will not take it. It **must be heavily weighted** and can be fished when it hits the water or allowed to sink deeper before starting the retrieve. Add a large split shot about 12–15" in front of the fly for deep or very fast waters **OR**, better yet, use the Super Patuxent Special (see below). Keep your rod tip low to keep the fly as deep as possible. Casting directly upstream can be as effective as directly across, etc. When cast upstream in heavy water, only a tiny nudge to show that it is "alive" is often all that is needed to provoke a strike. A 3X or 4X tippet is best: strikes are often violent! Rapidly jigging it directly in front of a log jam or similar cover while standing upstream works well, too. Cast close to the far bank or against a log or rock, if that is possible, and allow to sink for a moment.

Precisely what this fly imitates, I can only guess: a small crayfish seems the best answer. Smallmouth, naturally, delight in smashing these, too. Several friends and I have caught many fine steelhead and salmon on this fly using a dead drift in upstate New York. It has caught bonefish, redfish, yellow perch, crappie, walleye, carp, and a large variety of other game fish, including many trout and other game fish in western and Alaskan waters. It does work, so try it, you'll like it! If you are

not catching fish, you are probably not fishing over any fish **or** not moving the fly briskly enough (except bonefish and the Great Lakes steelhead) or you are letting it pause and sink too long between the quick strips.

Tying Instructions—Jay's Patuxent Special

Hook: #8–12, Mustad 9672 3XL (**#10 is only size usually needed**); bend barb down before starting (use comparable stainless hooks for saltwater versions—sizes #4–10).

Thread: Black, 3/0 or 6/0; start at rear of hook shank; do not prewrap hook shank with thread.

Tail: Fox squirrel tail (NOT red squirrel **or** red fox), tied leaving just a **short** amount (ca. 3/16") of the subterminal black band of the hair showing just outside the end of the body, and tips only approximately evened. Hold hair at right angles to tail bone **before** cutting across base of the hair, later across the middle or base of the black band. Total length of tail should equal the length of body. Tail is **very** bulky—not sparse as in a nymph! Keep amount of hair butts short so as not to reduce the space for the lead wire body. I avoid using any hair from the top side of the squirrel's tail that has more than one black band; the side of the tail is bright ginger with a single distinct black band. I also avoid the hair around the tip of the tail, as the orange tips are too long for the standard #10 flies (they would be fine for larger flies). Lash the hair tightly to hook to avoid "fallout."

Body: Weight with .030" or .035" lead wire and wrap tightly around entire hook shank starting just in front of butts of tail hair and leaving room for the head. Wrap several turns of thread forward over the wire underbody, making 8–12 turns in front of wire to allow the chenille to 'ramp down' off the wire; wrap thread back to rear. Tie in hackle (see below) **and then** chenille (ginger, size medium for #10). Then wind thread forward to head. Apply Hard as Nails clear nylon nail polish or head cement **over** wire and wrappings around hackle and chenille butts. Wrap chenille forward, first making one complete turn **behind** the hackle stem so that the first turn of the hackle starts UP on the chenille body; the still tacky body will hold the chenille to the wire. Tie off chenille, leaving room for a small head.

Hackle: Dark to medium ginger best or very light honey brown (matched to colors of chenille and fox squirrel tail tip). It should be **very large**: 3X the hook gap; I like the large hackles found near the middle rear of a good #1 or #2 neck. Most saddle hackles do not work, ex. for smaller hooks (#14). Tie in by the butt and wrap the hackle **dull side forward** in 4–5 even turns, working it down into chenille as much as possible to help ward off teeth. Tie off with a 'double-lock' of the hackle tip: 3 thread wraps with hackle forward, then 3 with hackle pulled back before trimming tip, which can be left to mimic tail of crayfish. Good stiff hackle gives more action. Whip finish a small head and apply head cement.

SUPER PATUXENT SPECIAL: Same pattern as above but on a slightly larger hook (e.g., #8 Mustad 9672) and with a small to medium gold conehead and gold, copper or pearlescent orange Krystal Flash running down each side and extending into tail. After wrapping the chenille over the lead wire but before palmering the hackle, I tie in about ~8 strands of Krystal Flash on one side behind the conehead and then double it back over the top to run down the other side. The hackle holds this material in place on the sides of the body of the fly. The tips of the Krystal Flash do not extend significantly, if at all, beyond the tip of the tail; I also trim them unevenly. This modification is very effective for Great Lakes salmon and steelhead, and for many other sport fish that are in **deeper and faster waters**.