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JAY'S PATUXENT SPECIAL

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!** 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 fish of those waters. I have modified the wriggler by eliminating the shell back, adding weight, and making other minor refinements.

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 fly 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 chenille is a 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. 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 extra large hackles v. 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, 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 a large bead or cone head on the fly. Keep the 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 and Alaska. It has caught bonefish, redbird, yellow perch, crappie, walleye, carp, and a large variety of other game fish, including many trout and other salmonids 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 steelhead) or you are letting it pause and sink too long between the quick strips.

Tying Instructions—Jay's Patuxent Special

This is a revision of all previous descriptions and combines the standard pattern with the 'Special'.

Hook: #6–12, Mustad 9672 3XL (**#10 is only size I usually need**, #8 with a bead/cone head); bend barb down before starting (use stainless hooks for saltwater versions—sizes #4–10).

Lead underbody: Wind shank with .030" or .035" lead wire and wrap tightly around entire hook shank starting just in front of where butts of tail will be placed and leaving room for the head. If using cone/bead head, force wire up inside rear of it. Gold, brass or black cone/bead heads are preferred.

Thread: Black, 3/0 best; start at rear of hook shank; do not prewrap hook shank with thread. 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; repeat if desired for added security.

Tail: Fox squirrel tail (**NOT** red squirrel **or** red fox); I avoid using any hair from the top side of the squirrel's tail that has more than one black band; the sides of the tail have bright ginger tips with a **single distinct black band across the hair**. I also avoid the hair around the tip of the tail, as the ginger tips are too long for the standard #8–10 flies (they would be fine for larger flies). 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 after cleaning the cut bunch and evening tips slightly. Total length of tail should equal the length of body. Tail is **very** bulky—not sparse as in a nymph! Lash the hair tightly to hook to avoid "fallout" by making one wrap of the thread at very rear that is **only** around the hook shank before returning to wrapping around tail butt.



Body: After tail is secure, tie in the hackle (see below) **and then** chenille (golden ginger, size medium for #8–10). Next wind thread forward over the lead wire to head. Apply clear nylon nail polish or head cement **over** wire and thread 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 or behind cone/bead head, if being used.

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 is ideal; I like the large hackles found near the middle rear

of a #1 neck. Most saddle hackles do not work, ex. for smaller hooks (e.g., #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 tip pulled back before trimming, which can be left to mimic tail of crayfish. Good stiff hackle gives more action. Whip finish and apply head cement.

SUPER PATUXENT SPECIAL: Same as above but on a slightly larger hook (e.g., #8 Mustad 9672) with a small to medium gold, brass or black cone or bead head 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 the near side behind the conehead and then double it back over the top (i.e., right behind the conehead) to run down the other side. The hackle holds this material in place on the sides of the body of the fly; a counter-wound copper wire that was tied in first after the tail and wound last over hackle and Krystal flash would be better for real durability. The tips of the Krystal Flash do not extend 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**.

(Illustrated: Standard Jay's Patuxent Special with large bead head on #8 Mustad 9672.)