

Ft. Worth Fly Fishers

August 2018

Fly of the Month - Royal Wulff



I thought with this being the midst of our summer heat wave and dry fly season in full swing in the cooler regions of the country, a classic dry fly was in order.

The adoption of the hairwing patterns that eventually became the Wulff dry fly style began in the late 1920 in several locations. Although many angling writers credit Lee Wulff with the Royal Wulff, Q. L. Quackenbush, an early member of the Beaverkill Trout Club above Lew Beach in New York is often cited as the creator. In 1929-30 both Quackenbush and Wulff had independently modified the Royal Coachman pattern, particularly the Fanwing Royal Coachman with hair wings and tails. Both Wulff and Quackenbush made the modifications because the Fanwing Royal Coachman proved too flimsy and fragile on rough water. The first Quackenbush versions were tied commercially by Rube Cross and were named Quack Coachman, Hair-winged Royal Coachman and Quack Special.

In the 1930s Lee Wulff collaborated with Dan Bailey during the development of his hairwing patterns and Bailey encouraged him to rename the flies. The original Ausable Gray, Coffin May and Bucktail Coachman became the Grey Wulff, White Wulff and Royal Wulff. Three additional patterns were created by the end of 1930, the Blonde Wulff, Brown Wulff and Black Wulff. The series would gain prominence after Wulff introduced them to Ray Bergman, another fly angler and outdoor writer who became the Fishing editor for *Outdoor Life* magazine. Bergman embraced the flies and included them in his two editions of *Trout* (1938, 1952).

The Wulff flies were designed by Lee Wulff and fill a decided need in large sizes. I consider them necessary to the well-balanced fly box. New Wulff patterns, Black Wulff and Grizzly Wulff [designed by Dan Bailey] have been added to my color plates because they are considered very important by fishermen in the Rockies as well as other sections.

— Ray Bergman, *Trout* (1952)

Wulff considered the pattern somewhat generic and encouraged variation and evolution of the pattern instead of rigid adherence to a precise recipe. Dan Bailey, who fished

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regularly in Montana and eventually established a fly shop and mail order business in Livingston, Montana in 1938 promoted the series extensively to western fly anglers.

The Wulff flies, especially the Royal Wulff, are still a staple in angler's fly boxes around the world. Angler and writer John Gierach believes the Royal Wulff is one of the most popular dry patterns over the last half century. [\[1\]](#)

In the version of the Royal Wulff I'm presenting today, I'm taking Wulff's blessing to modify it slightly by replacing the wings with calf (kip) tail.

Royal Wulff

Hook: Allen Fly Fishing D102BL size 18 -12 (tied here in size 14) or TMC 100 (or any std dry fly hook)

Thread: Veevus 14/0 Black

Tail: Coq de Leon Saddle fibers - Medium Pardo - 8-12 fibers tied in to yield hook shank length tail

Body: Peacock herl separated with red floss

Wing: White calf tail (kip tail) - wing about a hook shank length, hand stacked

Hackle: Cree or Variant saddle hackle

1). Attach the thread to the hook and lay down a minimal thread base under the tail tie in point. Select 8-10 fibers from a Coq de Leon hackle feather, stroking the fibers out perpendicular to the rachis (stem) and pull them off the rachis. place them above the hook shank and measure a hook shank length and tie the barbs in to yield a tail that is approximately a hook shank in length.



2). Select a small clump of white calf tail (about a pencil lead diameter) and cut it free of the calf tail. Using a hand stacking procedure, even the ends of the tail material. Remove any short fibers from the bundle. Tie in the wing material to yield an upright

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wing about a hook shank in height. Tie in point should be about two hook eye diameters behind the eye. Trim the base at an angle to the hook shank and wrap the base tightly to the hook shank. You may need a few thread wraps in front of the wing to make it stand up vertically (thread damn).



3). Select a single peacock herl that is fairly bushy. Note that the rachis of the herl is more prominent on one side, with the tiny barbs angled from both sides to form a wedge shape to one side. You want to attach the herl such that when you wrap (palmer) the herl forward, the rachis is pointing to the front of the hook (toward the eye). This will allow the herl to wrap around the hook and not capture barbs. Attach the herl and begin wrapping forward so that a herl body is formed starting at the tail tie in point. You want to create a herl body segment about 1/4 of the shank length, Using the thread to capture the herl and tie it down to the hook, move forward about an additional 1/4 hook shank length.



4). Tie in a length (4-5 inches will be plenty) of bright red floss (I use DMC Satin embroidery floss) at the front of the 1/4 shank length gap that you just tied the herl down onto the hook shank. Wrap the floss back over this gap (over both the thread and the tag end of the herl) toward the tail and then back forward to the thread position. You now should have created a very flat, double wrap of the floss in front of the herl body section. Tie off the floss and clip the tags off.

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5). Using the remaining tag end section of the peacock herl, create a herl body segment, mirroring the segment previously created. This will probably be wrapped over the base of the wing which was tied down to the hook in step 2. You should end this body segment so there is a small gap between the end of the herl body segment and wing (to allow room for hackle).



6). Select a section of hackle with barbs about 1-1/2 the length of the hook gape (you may want to use a hackle gauge to select the right hackle for the hook size this will usually be 1-1/2 the hook gap). The hackle should be long enough to yield 6-8 full wraps of hackle. Strip off some of the fibers from the hackle to yield a clean rachis and tie in the hackle, with the hackle extending backward over the hook shank. Palmer the hackle forward (several turns behind the wing and several in the front). Try to wrap the hackle to minimize trapping barbs (I use my fingers to direct the barbs backward while wrapping). Tie off the hackle near the eye of the hook, clip the tag end and whip finish, creating a small, neat thread head.

