

Fly of the Month

The Red Hackle



Hook :- Kamasan B170 or similar 14-8

Thread :- Red 6/0

Body :- Red wool or floss

Rib :- Gold tinsel

Hackle :- Brown cock

The Red Hackle is probably the oldest fly for which we have a written description. That description comes from the Roman historian Aelian who, in the third century BC, tells of Macedonians fishing for ‘the speckled fish of the streams’ using, “ *A hook bound with red wool, fit on to which they add two feathers which grow under a cock’s wattles, which in colour are like wax*”.

The fly gets another mention in the famous *Treatyse of fysshynge with an angle* by Dame Juliana Berners from 1496. Dame Juliana was a member of court who became a nun but retained her liking of outdoor pastimes. She recommended a fly for the month of May.... “ *good flye, the body of roddyd wull and lappid abowte wyth blacke silke; the wynges of the drake of the redde capons hakyll.*”

There’s a description of the Red Hackle in Izaak Walton’s *Compleat Angler* in 1653 and also in Charles Cotton’s additions to that book in 1676.

No doubt the Red Hackle had more mentions in angling literature between 1676 and 1833 which is when an article in the Hobart Town Magazine tells of a party fishing the Plenty River and the author catching mullet using the Red Hackle. (The Plenty River is fresh water so those mullet were probably Tasmanian grayling.) That article was possibly the inspiration for the Red Hackle being included in the logo of the Australian Fly Fishing Museum. Incidentally, 1833 is 31 years before the first surviving shipment of trout ova arrived in Tasmania so they didn’t wait for the trout to become established before getting the fly rods out.



The Red Hackle is an easy fly to tie. Red foundation thread from eye to bend where the gold ribbing and red wool or floss are attached. The red wool is wound forward to form the body and tied of just back from the eye. The tinsel is then wound forward in 3 or 4 spaced turns and tied off in the same place. The brown cock feather with barbs a bit longer than the hook gape is then attached and given three or four turns. Form a head with the tying thread using it to make the hackle slope to the rear over the body. Done.

The Red Palmer is a variant of the original, and a variant of that is the more modernearly 1800s.....Soldier Palmer, which commonly has a red wool tail.



Two thousand years. The Red Hackle has truly stood the test of time. It must be worth a try.

Alan T.

