



Photos © by Brian M. Wiprud

THE GROUCHO FLY

by Brian M. Wiprud

If you want to target bass with a fly next season, here's a very effective pattern — designed with helpful anti-pickrel qualities — that you can tie this winter as you anticipate the return of open water...

Like most fly tyers, I was moved to innovate by a lack of any existing patterns to meet my needs. Specifically, I needed a fly for the lakes I fish that are loaded with nice bass, but also with pickrel. Don't get me wrong, I love catching pickrel on the fly, but they are such eager quarry that they were getting to my fly faster than the bass. In effect, I wanted

an anti-pickrel fly as much as I wanted a top-flight bass fly.

Anyone who has fly fished for pickrel knows that bright, flashy flies — often incorporating red and white and yellow — are the way to go. They also tend to like an aggressive retrieval. So to keep the toothy critters away from this new fly, it had to be devoid of color and designed

for a slow retrieval. What I pictured was a big black floppy bass jig, like the ones spin fishermen use. Could I re-create that in a fly, something that would actually be castable with an eight weight fly rod?

My thoughts immediately turned to marabou, a bigwad of it, and some rubber legs, to get the languid flowing motion that entice bass to strike. So I tied up some prototypes and took them out for a test run. I got some bass, but I actually saw others follow and turn off. Perhaps my fly was too plain? So I added some silver flash. That got me into the pickrel again, so I substituted dark flash material, with some strands running through the marabou. I also wrapped the hook shank in black polar chenille. Now the bass were paying rapt attention to the fly, and the pickrel were making only occasional strikes. It could be flashy, just dark flash. Could I get away with adding just a little more accent — a long, banded hackle feather on each side? That addition turned out to be just the thing to help trigger more bass to strike.

Other variations followed: using brown and black marabou together for contrast,

and blue-black flash material. I've also tried white-and-black-banded rubber legs to good effect.

Yes, but what does this fly, this thing, imitate? A jellyfish? A squid? An octopus? Nothing I know of in fresh water. But I guess it really doesn't matter as long as it works.

I was at the bench tying up a bunch of these new flies, pondering what it should be called, when my girlfriend drifted in to see what I was up to. She wrinkled her nose at the mass of black marabou and rubber sprouting from the hook shank.

"What the heck is that you're tying?" She's used to seeing me tie up little dainty things, mere wisps.

"New fly. For bass."

She paused uncertainly. "Looks like Groucho Marx's mustache."

As apt a name as any.

*Brian M. Wiprud is an outdoor writer and novelist. His sixth book, **Feelers**, is coming out from St. Martin's Press this year. Directions for tying his new fly creation are on the following page.*

