

## THE SULPHUR PUZZLE

*JIM GRECO*

"Lets go fishing!" It's the middle of May and the Sulphurs are starting to hatch on the Gunpowder. Sound familiar? It ought to. Every year thousands of fly fishers make trips to local streams to fish the long awaited Sulphur hatch. But wait a minute. What is a Sulphur? Go on -- tell me. Just what is a Sulphur, and what flies should I use to imitate them?

OK, pretty good answer; so now we know the Sulphur is a yellowish bodied mayfly that ranges in size from a rare #12 through the occasional late season #20. Not so fast -- sometimes simple answers to simple questions work well but as we all know, sometimes they just don't.

Unless you are more than familiar with the science of entomology, the answer to that simple question, "What is a Sulphur?" is really quite complicated. An understanding of a detailed definition of "Sulphur" can help you catch a few more wary fish and extend your appreciation of the fly tying art at the same time.

In Hatches II, a book co-authored by Al Caucci and Bob Nastasi, I just finished reading the chapters dealing with the FAMILY EPHEMERELLIDAE, GENUS EPHEMERELLA, Species: *invaria* (common name Sulphur, Pale Evening Dun), *rotunda* (common name Dark Hendrickson, Red Quill -- now Sulphur), and *dorothea* (common name Pale Evening Dun, Sulphur, Little Maryatt, Pale Watery Dun). These three mayflies, plus a few less predominant species, represent the eastern hatches most commonly called Sulphurs. For a layperson Hatches II may be difficult reading, but we can all learn. For instance, in reading those chapters, I learned that *invaria* and *rotunda* are the earliest and largest of the Sulphurs (#12 and #14) and *rotunda* was once called a Hendrickson. *Dorothea* is common a little later and is usually a size #16 or #18. Add to this confusion a simultaneous hatch of another light colored mayfly, the Light Cahill, FAMILY HEPTAGENIIDAE, GENUS STENACRON OR GENUS STENONEMA, Species *interpunctatum canadense* or *interpunctatum interpunctatum* or *ithaca* (common name Light Cahill, Ginger Quill, Cahill), and you can see why we might have a problem on the stream enticing finicky trout to take our #14 *invaria* imitations when they are really feeding on a #14 *canadense*. The reason I mentioned the Latin name of these species is only to explain why there are so many variations of the mayfly we all call the Sulphur. The many different species explain why the size range is from #12 to #20, and why the color range within sizes varies, something I always had questions about.

Confused? Good, now I don't feel so alone. My advice is this; don't worry about the Latin names unless you have your nose in a book. Just take the right selection of flies with you; catch a natural insect the fish are rising for and try to imitate its size, color and shape with the imitation you tie to your tippet. Before the actual hatch, fish a nymph or an emerger as a dropper off of a dun pattern. As the hatch progresses and the spinners which hatched the day before begin to fall, use a dun with a spinner on a 20-inch dropper.

When tying, the colors you select to imitate these mayflies range from light olive-yellow to pale yellow to sulphur orange or creamy tan. The patterns I have presented are only a starting point. They will catch some fish anywhere Sulphurs hatch, but when you have tied patterns with colors and sizes that specifically match the insects hatching on your stream you will find out why tying your own versions of these flies is so much better.

These days, it is nearly impossible to come up with an original dressing someone hasn't tied before, so my thanks to all the innovative fly tiers who have dreamt of different ways to dress flies and have shared them with us.

## "Sulphur"

*invaria and rotunda*

### **NYMPH:**

Hook: Tiemco 3761 or Mustad 3906-B -- size #12 or #14 for *rotunda* and size #14 for *invaria*  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 6/0 -- olive  
 Tails: ginger soft hackle or Light Brown Pheasant tail barbules  
 Body: blend 1 part Hareline dirty yellow with 2 parts Haretron Seal Brown \*\*  
 Rib: fine gold or copper wire  
 Thorax: as above. 5 or 6 turns of .015 lead wire is optional  
 Wing case: mottled dark brown turkey wing  
 Legs: dark ginger hen hackle

### **EMERGER:**

Hook: Mustad 9671 -- size #12 or #14 for *rotunda* and size #14 for *invaria*  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 6/0 -- olive  
 Tails: Brown, barred grouse  
 Body: Flyrite - #22 Cahill tan over 10 turns of .015 lead wire\*\*  
 Thorax: Flyrite - #22 Cahill tan \*\*  
 Wings: light dun poly yarn looped or light gray deer hair clipped  
 Legs: Brown, barred grouse

### **PARACHUTE:**

Hook: Tiemco 100 or Mustad 94840 -- size #12 or #14 for *rotunda* and size #14 for *invaria*  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- Light Cahill  
 Wingpost: white calf tail  
 Hackle: light dun 1 size larger than hook  
 Tails: micro fibbetts -- 2 each side -- tan --split, or light ginger hackle fibers splayed  
 Body: PMD turkey biot or PMD quill stem -- lacquered \*\*  
 Thorax; PMD Superfine -- sparse \*\*

### **SPINNER: \***

Hook: Mustad 94833 (3x fine) -- size #12 or #14 for *rotunda* and size #14 for *invaria*  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- Light Cahill  
 Tails: micro fibbetts -- 2 each side -- tan -- split  
 Body: PMD yellow turkey biot -- or 1 sulphur yellow quill stem -- lacquered \*\*  
 Wings: cream hackle, wound 2 sizes larger than hook & tied spent  
 Thorax: PMD Superfine -- sparse \*\*

\*NOTE: A rusty spinner pattern may be used to represent male sulphur spinners.

\*\*NOTE: In different environments body colors may vary. Local knowledge is invaluable. Learn your stream and select colors accordingly.

## "Sulphur"

*dorothea*

**NYMPH:**

Hook: Tiemco 3761 or Mustad 3906-B -- size #16, #18, #20  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- dark brown or black  
 Tails: pheasant tail barbules tinted yellow  
 Body: pheasant tail barbules tinted yellow with fine gold wire rib \*\*  
 Thorax: blend 1 part Hareline dirty yellow to 2 parts Haretron Seal Brown, 4 to 5 turns of .015 lead wire for #16, #18, or .010 lead wire for #20 is optional \*\*  
 Wing case: mottled dark brown turkey wing  
 Legs: amber dyed mallard flank or webby cree saddle hackle

**EMERGER:**

Hook: Mustad 9671 for size # 16 and #18. Tiemco 3761 for size #20  
 Thread: 8/0 Light Cahill UNI-thread  
 Tails: brown grouse hackle barbules splayed over thread ball or dubbing ball  
 Body: Flyrite #22 Cahill Tan \*\*  
 Thorax: dub Flyrite - #22 Cahill tan over 6 to 8 turns of .015 lead wire for #16 and #18 or .010 lead wire for #20 \*\*  
 Wings: light dun poly yarn looped or light gray deer hair clipped

**PARACHUTE:**

Hook: Tiemco 100 or Mustad 94840 for size #16, Tiemco 101 for size #18, #20  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- Light Cahill  
 Wingpost: white calf tail  
 Hackle: light ginger or cream 1 size larger than hook  
 Tails: micro fibbetts -- 2 each side for #16, 1 each side for #18, #20 -- tan – split, or light ginger hackle fibers splayed  
 Body: sulphur orange turkey biot or sulphur orange quill stem -- lacquered \*\*  
 Thorax: sulphur orange Superfine -- sparse \*\*

**SPINNER: \***

Hook: Mustad 94833 (3x fine) -- size #16, #18, #20  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- Light Cahill  
 Tails: micro fibbetts -- 2 each side for #16, 1 each side for #18, #20 -- tan -- split  
 Body: Sulphur orange Turkey biot or 1 Sulphur Orange quill stem -- lacquered \*\*  
 Wings: cream hackle, wound 2 sizes larger than hook & tied spent  
 Thorax: sulphur orange Superfine -- sparse \*\*

\*NOTE: A rusty spinner pattern may be used to represent male sulphur spinners.

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## "Light Cahill"

*canadense, interpunctatum, ithaca*

### **NYMPH:**

Hook: Tiemco 3761 or Mustad 3906-B -- size #12, #14  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 6/0 -- olive  
 Tails: Natural Pheasant tail barbules – gray/brown  
 Body: dub a blend of 1 part Haretron gray, 2 parts Haretron Lt. Cahill, 1 part Kaufman #41 tan rabbit. Abdominal overbody of natural gray/brown Pheasant tail barbules \*\*  
 Rib: Fine gold or copper wire  
 Thorax: dub as above -- 4 to 5 turns of .015 lead wire is optional.  
 Wing case: natural gray/brown pheasant tail barbules  
 Legs: light ginger hen hackle

### **EMERGER:**

Hook: Mustad 9671 -- size #12, #14  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 6/0 -- olive  
 Tails: tan or light dun stiff hackle barbules splayed around small ball of dubbing or thread  
 Body: mix 1 part sulphur yellow and 2 parts light tan antron or superfine \*\*  
 Thorax: dub as above. 10 turns of .015 lead wire under dubbing \*\*  
 Wings: light dun poly yarn looped or light gray deer hair clipped  
 Legs: light ginger hen hackle

### **PARACHUTE:**

Hook: Tiemco 100 or Mustad 94840 -- size #12, #14  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- Light Cahill  
 Wingpost: white calf tail or light gray barred mallard flank  
 Hackle: light ginger or cream 1 size larger than hook  
 Tails: micro fibbetts -- 2 each side -- cream or light dun -- split, or light ginger hackle fibers splayed  
 Body: light Cahill turkey biot or light Cahill quill stem -- lacquered \*\*  
 Thorax: Flyrite #22 Tan -- sparse \*\*

### **SPINNER: \***

Hook: Mustad 94833 (3x fine) -- size #12, #14  
 Thread: UNI-thread -- 8/0 -- Light Cahill  
 Tails: micro fibbetts -- 2 each side –tan or cream -- split  
 Body: yellow Turkey biot or sulphur yellow quill stem -- lacquered \*\*  
 Wings: cream hackle, wound 2 sizes larger than hook & tied spent  
 Thorax: Superfine – pale yellow-- sparse

\*NOTE: A rusty spinner pattern may be used to represent male Sulphur spinners.

\*\*NOTE: In different environments body colors may vary. Local knowledge is invaluable. Learn your stream and select colors accordingly.