

THE SULPHUR PUZZLE

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"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

NYPH:

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

NYPH:

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.

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

"Light Cahill"

canadense, interpunctatum, ithaca

NYPH:

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.

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