



The Bronze Goddess

This lead-eyed beauty is a “Blessing” in disguise.

In the early 1970s, Russell Blessing, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, created one of the most effective flies ever developed. His famous pattern, the Woolly Bugger, was intended to imitate the dobsonfly larvae found in Pennsylvania’s smallmouth bass streams. For more than 30 years, the Woolly Bugger and its many variations have continued to catch smallmouth bass

and dozens of other species of gamefish.

Several years later, another innovative fly tier attempted to design a way to weight rabbit-strip flies to give them more

movement in the water. Tom Schmuecker, the owner of Wapsi Fly, Inc., initially wrapped the hook shank with lead wire, but the resulting fly did not exhibit the

desired jiggling movement he wanted. Tom next tried bead-chain eyes, but he found that they weren’t heavy enough to give the pattern undulating motion. After more experimentation, he designed what we now know as Wapsi Lead Dumbbell Eyes. Today, dumbbell eyes are used on many freshwater and saltwater patterns, including variations of the Woolly Bugger.

Over the years, I have developed several subsurface flies with lots of wiggle provided by a combination of lead eyes and soft materials. For the last few sea-



The Bronze Goddess has become one of the author’s favorite go-to flies for catching smallmouth bass.

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sons, I have been fishing a little Woolly Bugger-style streamer with burgundy-colored lead eyes that I call the Bronze Goddess. It has been extremely successful, especially on smallmouth bass. Even though the Bronze Goddess looks a little scruffy in the vise, it lights up and comes alive in the water. Smallmouth bass just can't leave it alone.

The Importance of Bronze Mallard

The original components of the Bronze Goddess included a Tiemco TMC200R hook, small lead eyes, a tail of brown grizzly marabou highlighted with copper Flashabou, a root beer-pearl chenille body, and a brown grizzly rooster body feather palmer-wrapped up the hook. The final component, which I added much later, is a collar made using a bronze mallard body feather. I discovered that a bronze mallard collar greatly improves the catch rate of the little streamer.

You'll find bronze mallard feathers on a mallard drake; the largest of these feathers, when matched in pairs, are prized for making the wings on some classic salmon flies. I have paired many prime bronze mallard feathers for customers who tie salmon flies, and in the process was left with smaller feathers that were too short for their purposes. I always thought that these beautifully marked feathers were too nice to throw away, but I was hard-pressed to figure out how to use them until I added one as a collar on the Bronze Goddess.

A couple of seasons ago, I was busy tying some flies for a float trip for smallmouth bass. My first Bronze Goddess was almost finished when I noticed a pile of small bronze mallard feathers lying on my tying bench, and I decided to wrap one of the feathers on the pattern as a collar. The finished fly looked really good, so I tied half a dozen more. I put the completed flies in a prominent place in my fly box to ensure I would remember them.

I began the float trip fishing my Black Leech, a fly that has earned my trust over the years. I caught several bass on the Leech, but when the fishing slowed a bit, I thought it was a good time to try a Bronze Goddess with the new collar.

I knotted the fly to the leader, glanced downstream in search of the next stretch of good water. A sandbar on my side of the stream looked like an ideal spot to beach my kick boat. There was a beautiful bluff-lined and boulder-strewn run downstream from the sandbar; it looked like perfect habitat for bronzebacks. I cast slightly across-and-upstream, and then worked the fly back to my side of the river. The line suddenly stopped and I set the hook. A smallmouth bass immediately went airborne, and I could see that it was a nice fish. After a brief but spirited fight, I brought the 15-inch fish to hand. Several more bass fell for the Goddess that day, including a plump 16-inch fish that seemed about as round as it was long.

The Goddess performed well that day, so I gave some flies to several of my friends and asked them to try it. Since then we have all fished the Bronze Goddess many times on smallmouth bass waters and trout streams. The Bronze Goddess works well on these diverse waters and under varied conditions, and it has earned a prominent place in our fly boxes.

Secret of Success

The secret to the success of the Bronze Goddess is its coloration, the enticing movement, and the bronze mallard collar. When it's wet, the Bronze Goddess is a reddish brown that closely resembles the baitfish food found in a wide variety of waters. In addition to being a great smallmouth bass fly, this pattern is excellent for catching largemouth bass and even catfish.

I prefer fishing the Bronze Goddess using an 8½-foot-long 6-weight rod, a weight-forward floating line, and a 7½-foot tapered leader. Sometimes, especially early in the season when the water is higher and faster, a sinking-tip line comes in handy. Tie the Goddess to your tippet with a Duncan loop (Uni-Knot) to help increase the fly's action. Fish the fly slightly up-and-across or directly across the stream. Draw the fly across the current to give the fish a broadside view. Retrieve the fly with short strips of line and small twitches of the rod tip.

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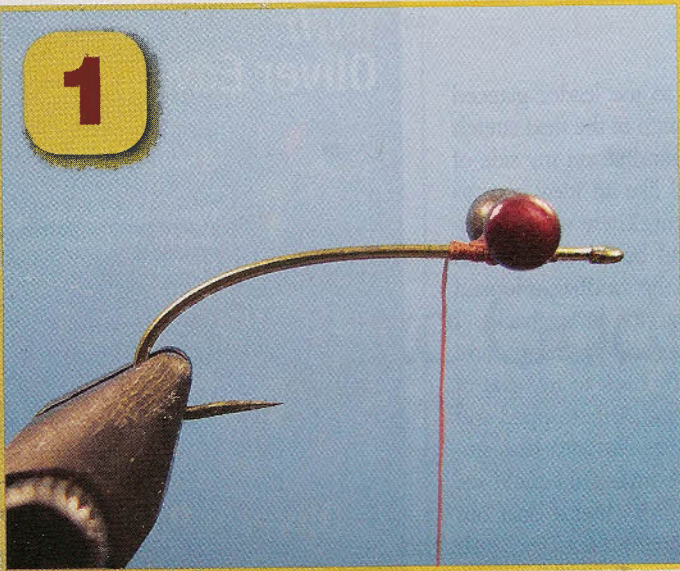
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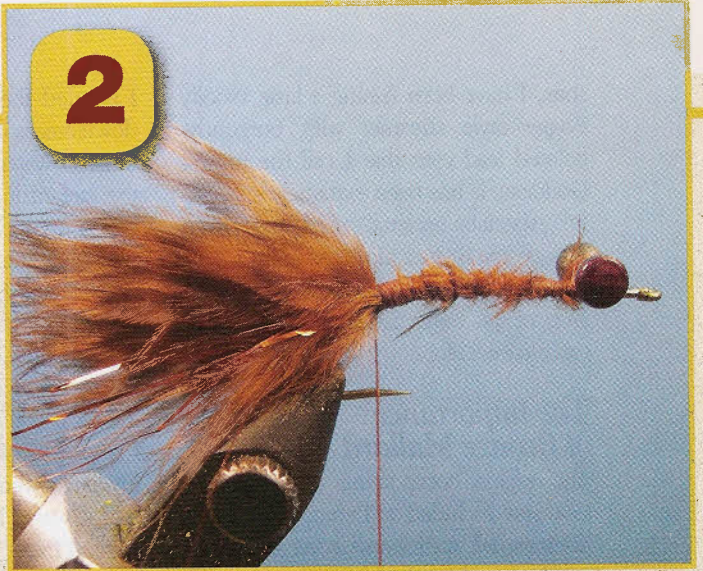
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Tying the Bronze Goddess

- 1** Start the thread on the hook and tie on the dumbbell eyes; tightly secure the dumbbell using several firm figure-eight wraps.
- 2** Tie the marabou tail and a few strands of copper Flashabou to the rear of the hook. The tail is about one and a quarter times the length of the hook shank.
- 3** Tie on the pearl Crystal Chenille, grizzly body feather, and copper wire at the base of the tail. (Tie on the materials in the order listed.)
- 4** Wrap the chenille forward to the lead eyes. Tie down the chenille, but do not cut the excess. Next, spiral-wrap the grizzly feather to the lead eyes, tie it down, and clip the excess. Counterwrap the copper wire to the lead eyes, tie it down, and cut the surplus.
- 5** Tie on a bronze mallard feather by the tip and so that the curve rests against the body.
- 6** Wrap the feather twice behind the eyes, tie off, and clip the remainder. Figure-eight wrap the chenille around the lead eyes, tie it off, and cut the surplus. Wrap a neat thread head, whip finish, and snip.

Bronze Goddess

Hook: Tiemco TMC200R or Dai Riki 270, size 6 or 4.

Thread: Brown 6/0 (140 denier).

Eyes: Small lead dumbbell painted with burgundy fingernail enamel.

Tail: Brown grizzly marabou and copper Flashabou.

Body: Root beer–pearl Crystal Chenille.

Hackle: Brown grizzly rooster body feather.

Rib: Copper wire.

Collar: Bronze mallard feather.

Head: Root beer–pearl Crystal Chenille.

Another method of fishing the Bronze Goddess, called the “crayfish hop,” is especially effective in deeper and slower water. Cast the fly directly across the stream and let it sink to the bottom. Retrieve the fly by lifting your rod tip upward only enough to hop the fly about six inches off the streambed, and then let it settle to the bottom again. Let the fly rest for a few seconds and then repeat the process. Continue this retrieve until you have only

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a few feet of line out or you have a fish on, whichever comes first.

The Bronze Goddess is quick and easy to tie, and it requires no rare or hard-to-find materials. Like all other flies, it will not catch fish everywhere and all the time; however, as my friends and I have found, it will catch smallmouth bass and other gamefish frequently enough that it will soon become a mainstay in your fly box.

This is Mike Jacobs's first contribution to our magazine. He was recommended to us by longtime Fly Tyer author Ward Bean. Michael lives in Iowa.