

BEGINNER'S CORNER

Column and photography by Ward Bean

ONE OF THE BEST TIMES TO FLY FISH is when the bass and panfish are feeding on the surface. Fishing with a popper provides a heady and exciting angling experience. Seeing and hearing your lure pop and gurgle across the water, followed by an explosive strike, is about as good as it gets. You can find commercially made poppers in the bins of most fly shops, but they cost four or five bucks apiece. No self-respecting fly tier is going to stand for that, so the best bet is to make your own.

You have a couple of options for building poppers. First, you can carve, sand, and

Perfect Poppers for the Topwater Bite

Making poppers is a great way to get into fly tying, and it's easier than you think!

shape popper bodies out of cork, balsa, or foam blocks, then paint and seal them with acrylic paint and varnish. This entire

process requires considerable skill, special tools, paints, and brushes. It's also tedious and time-consuming work, taking hours



Use the author's simple instructions to make a box full of bass and panfish poppers.

to accomplish. Or, you can build poppers the easy way, as I do, by using ready-made bodies painted with waterproof markers and sealed with nail polish.

I construct poppers in three stages. The first stage involves welding the pre-made popper body to a hook with superglue. The second step involves attaching molded plastic eyes, applying appropriate colors using waterproof markers, and then sealing the body with Sinful Colors finger-nail polish. The final stage involves attaching the tail materials, wrapping a soft-hackle skirt, and sewing rubber legs through the body. It takes less than 30 minutes from the time you clamp the hook in the vise until you place the finished popper in your fly box. If you use a production-line

Perfect Popper bodies, distributed by Wapsi Fly. Perfect Popper bodies come 10 to a pack in four different sizes, and retail for about four bucks. The size 6 body is just right for a size 2 Mustad 3366 bass-bug hook, and the smaller size 8 body fits nicely on a size 4 hook. If your local fly shop doesn't stock them, go to www.wapsifly.com to find a dealer that does carry them. *(Note: The author's instructions also work when using other brands of premade foam popper bodies. — editor)*

Using waterproof marking pens is the most efficient way to color a popper body. There are three brands of waterproof markers available in most craft and office supply stores: Sharpie, Prismacolor, and Copic. Any one of them will

remember: The fish see only the bottom of a popper, so all the artsy stuff you do on the top is of no consequence to them. However, your effort to give the body frog-like spots might impress your friends.

Once the popper body is painted and the adhesive-backed eyes are in place, I apply two coats of Sinful Colors Opal Glitter nail enamel as a sealer. Opal Glitter dries quickly and gives the body a bright, durable, fish-scale appearance. You can purchase Sinful Colors nail enamel at any Walgreens or almost any large discount pharmacy or retailer.

Polishing Off Your Popper

After completing the head, but before installing the tail assembly, you might want



approach by first gluing several popper bodies to a bunch of hooks and proceeding from there, you can crank out half a dozen poppers in a couple of hours.

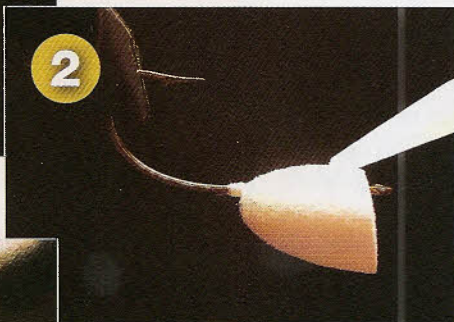
Getting the Goods

Several manufacturers offer pre-formed popper bodies. I prefer the soft-foam, tapered, cupped, and slotted bodies, called

do the job, but I prefer Prismacolor and Copic pens because they have a wide tip on one end for broad strokes and a fine tip on the other end for detailed work. I don't spend a lot of time painting popper bodies, preferring to paint most of them a solid color. If you have an artistic flair, go for it, and use as many different colors, spots, and stripes as you like. But

to consider adding a weed guard. To attach a simple single-loop weed guard, cut a three-inch-long piece of hard monofilament about equal to the diameter of the hook shank. Tie it to the top of the shank slightly beyond the hook bend. (You should also position the popper body slightly behind the hook eye to expose enough shank to tie down the tip of the

The Perfect Popper



1 Start the Flat Waxed Nylon thread at the hook eye. Wrap a substantial thread base on the shank. Tie off and clip the thread.

2 Press the body in place; be sure that the body is straight, not cocked to the side. Fill the slot in the belly with superglue. Allow the glue to dry before moving to the next step.

3 Attach the eyes to the side of the body. Color the popper using waterproof markers. Color the face orange. Allow time for the ink to dry before moving to the next step.

4 Apply two coats of Opal Glitter nail enamel to seal the body. Allow time between coats for the enamel to dry properly.

5 Start the 6/0 thread behind the body. Wrap a thread base to the end of the shank. Fold and tie on two pieces of rubber-leg material.

6 Tie on a marabou plume at the rear of the body.

7 Tie on a hen neck hackle at the base of the marabou tail with the cupped side facing the hook. Wrap the hackle forward until you run out of usable feather. Tie off and clip the excess, and add additional feathers until you reach the popper body. Tie off the final hackle with a whip-finish and clip the excess. Tie off the thread and snip.

8 Sew the legs through the popper body with the leg-sewing tool described in the text.

The Perfect Popper

Hook: Mustad 3366, size 2.

Thread: White Flat Waxed Nylon (210 denier) and 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Wapsi Perfect Popper, size 6.

Eyes: 5/32-inch molded plastic eyes.

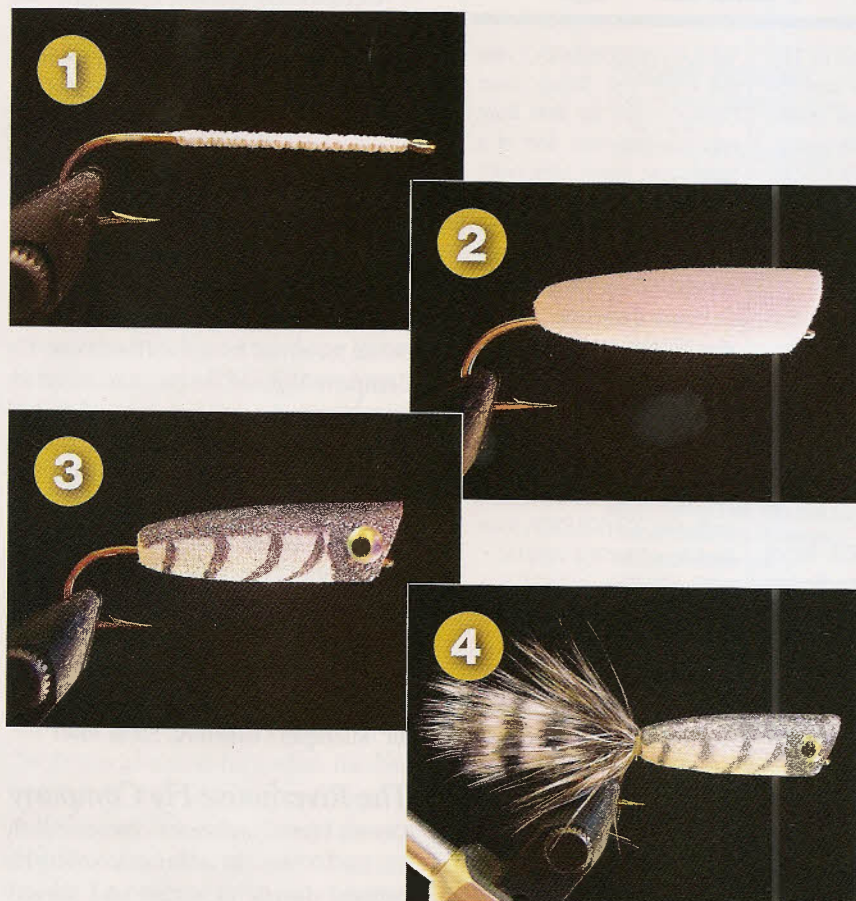
Body color: Permanent markers.

Tail: Medium round rubber and marabou.

Skirt: Grizzly hen hackle.

Legs: Medium round rubber.

Note: Feel free select materials in colors to suit your fancy.



The Perfect Pencil Popper

weed guard when finishing the fly.) You'll complete the weed guard after tying on the tail of the popper.

Make the tail assembly using almost any synthetic or natural materials, including Flashabou, Krystal Flash, craft fur, calftail hair, chicken feathers, deer hair, and bucktail. I prefer simple tails on my poppers made using marabou and a few strands of rubber, and a soft hen neck feather for the skirt. Those three materials give the popper more movement and action in the water than do other materials.

No popper is complete without rubber legs. Leg material is available in a variety of colors and sizes; some even has stripes. You can make a neat little device to sew rubber legs through the body. First, clip a six-inch-long piece of 3X tippet material,

and thread the monofilament through the eye of a sewing needle that is just large enough to accommodate it. Next, tie both ends together to create a three-inch loop, and trim the tag ends. To sew the rubber legs through the popper, push the needle through the body at an angle, insert the tip end of the rubber leg in the mono loop, and pull the loop through the body with the leg in tow. Adjust the leg material so you have two legs of equal length. Next, insert the needle and a second piece of rubber legs through the body at an opposite angle to the first set of legs so that they form an X through the middle of the popper's body.

Wapsi Fly also offers Perfect Pencil Popper bodies in two sizes: 1 and 4. A size 4 body matched with a size 4 Mus-

1 Start the Flat Waxed Nylon thread at the hook eye. Wrap a substantial thread base on the hook shank. Tie off and clip the thread.

2 Slip the pencil popper body onto the thread base; be sure that the body is straight, not cocked to the side. Fill the slit in the belly with superglue. Allow the glue to dry before moving to the next step.

3 Color the back and add parr marks using waterproof markers. Attach the molded plastic eyes. Next, apply two coats of Opal Glitter nail enamel to seal the body and eyes.

4 Start the 6/0 thread behind the body. Wrap a base of thread to the hook bend. Tie on a short marabou feather and apply grizzly stripes using a marker. Tie on a grizzly hen hackle by the tip and wrap it forward, wet-fly style, up to the body. Use additional feathers if necessary. Tie off and clip the excess feather. Whip-finish and snip the thread.

The Perfect Pencil Popper

Hook: Mustad 9674, size 4.

Thread: Flat Waxed Nylon (210 denier) and size 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Wapsi Perfect Pencil Popper, size 4.

Eyes: 5/32-inch molded plastic eyes.

Body color: Permanent markers.

Tail: Marabou.

Skirt: Grizzly hen hackle.

Note: Feel free select materials in colors to suit your fancy.

tad 9674 streamer hook makes a perfect offering when bass are chasing baitfish. Finally, many smallmouth anglers swear by the famous Sneaky Pete slider. To make your own slider, simply reverse the Perfect Popper head on the hook—the rounded end should face forward—paint it chartreuse, add molded eyes and rubber legs, and tie on a tail and skirt.

If you want to fish poppers but don't want to spend hours making them, try the Perfect Popper, which is inexpensive, quick, and easy to build. Best of all, the Perfect Popper looks and acts great in the water.

Ward Bean is a regular contributor to our magazine. When not fishing, he attends fly-fishing shows throughout the Midwest. Ward lives in Iowa.