



a fly for all species

THE DO-EVERYTHING FENCE-RIDER FROG

Here's a surface-chugging topwater pattern that every warmwater fish seems to like.

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ost warmwater anglers have a favorite topwater fly. My favorite is a clipped deer-hair pattern called the Fence-Rider Frog. Some fly fishers might question my choice, but I believe this type of frog is the most effective topwater fly you can have in your tackle bags. And, by the way, it's one of the most popular patterns among the majority of fly fishers I know. If you find that hard to believe, check out Stewart and Allen's landmark pattern book, *Flies for Bass and Panfish*.

Flies for Bass and Panfish contains no fewer than 23 frog patterns, one of which was the inspiration for my Fence-Rider Frog. Fly-fishing author Jack Ellis aptly uses "fence rider" to describe a deer-hair bug that he says is large enough to get the bass's attention but small enough to take slab-size bluegills. In a manner of speaking, it allows him to "ride the fence." So it is with the Fence-Rider Frog; unless you're sight-fishing, you never know what you'll connect with when using this little guy.

I vividly recall the muggy spring morning when I first put the Fence-Rider Frog to the test. It was a perfect topwater-fishing day with low clouds, calm water, and the welcome sound of fish feeding in the shallows. Fishing from a kick boat, I cast the little frog to the edges of the pond and worked the pockets, points, and cuts in the emerging weed line. My journal shows that I caught 11 bass ranging from 13 to 19 inches, as well as nine bluegills. The Fence-Rider Frog earned its stripes.

BY WARD BEAN

FISHING THE FENCE-RIDER FROG

Bass and bluegills have a lot in common. They often hang out together around shoreline vegetation and readily take topwater offerings. They generally move from shallow to deeper water during the brightest period of the day and return to shallower water as dusk approaches.

The most productive times to fish the Fence-Rider Frog are from dawn until midmorning, or late afternoon until sunset. But there are always exceptions to these rules. If there is heavy cloud cover, it doesn't make much difference when you fish the Fence-Rider Frog because you will generally have productive fishing in the shallows throughout the day.

Most of my fishing is done from a float tube or kick boat because my odds improve when I'm in the water with the fish—I feel that a personal watercraft is the best way to disguise my presence and get to the fish. I try to fish slowly and quietly, keeping as much distance as possible between me and the fish. It's tough to pull off, but stealth should be the order of the day, and patience a virtue.

The Fence-Rider Frog is relatively light and virtually snag-proof when equipped with a weed guard. In fact, to fish it around aquatic vegetation where the bass live, the fly should have a weed guard.

Early in the season before the vegetation appears, I cast the Fence-Rider Frog onto the bank and work it into the water. I often get a strike shortly after the fly hits the surface. Later in the season, when vegetation is more prevalent, I cast the Fence-Rider Frog into the weeds, let it set for a moment or two, and then begin swimming the fly through the vegetation.

Concentrate on fishing in those areas where the real frogs live: pockets, holes, cuts, points, or any other irregularities in the weed line. But don't pass up an opportunity to cast the Fence-Rider Frog under tree branches, shrubbery, or other land-based vegetation hanging over the water. These places often contain bass hiding in the shade.

The Fence-Rider Frog is fashioned after Dave Whitlock's diving frog pictured in *Flies for Bass and Panfish*. But unlike Whitlock's frog and other bass bugs, most of which are tied on large, heavy hooks, the Fence-Rider Frog is tied on a comparatively small Sproat hook, the Mustad 3366. Measuring only about two inches long, the Fence-Rider Frog casts easily on a 5- or 6-weight rod.

Ward Bean fishes the bass ponds in his home state of Iowa. For more instruction on tying with deer hair, see Dick Talleur's "Something Old, Something New" column in this issue.

Yellow Belly Fence-Rider Frog

Hook: Mustad 3366, size 4.

Thread: Red 6/0 Uni-Thread and Flat Waxed Nylon.

Weed guard: 15-pound-test Mason Hard Monofilament.

Legs (tail): Pearl Krystal Flash inside white, yellow, and olive grizzly hackle tips.

Skirt: Yellow hackle.

Body: Yellow, black, and olive deer body hair.

Front legs: Yellow rubber hackle.

Eyes: Yellow plastic.

Dressing the Fence-Rider Frog

1 Start the 6/0 thread at the end of the hook shank. Tie the mono weed guard to the end of the shank and down into the hook bend. Coat the thread wraps with thinned Flexament. Size the weed guard now so you won't have to do it later when the deer hair is in the way: Insert the tag end of the mono through the hook eye, make a kink, flatten the kink with needle-nose pliers, and cut off the excess at the kink. Tie six to eight strands of pearl Krystal Flash off the bend of the shank.

2 Make two sets of feather legs, each containing one white, one yellow, and two olive grizzly hackles. Tie one set on the far side of the shank, and the other on the near side of the shank. The feathers should splay out and be about 1½ inches long. Coat the thread wraps with Flexament.

3 Tie on a yellow hackle by the tip with the curved side facing the end of the hook. Wrap the hackle from the base of the feather legs to the front of the weed guard. The hackle tips should extend slightly beyond the hook bend. Tie off and clip the thread.

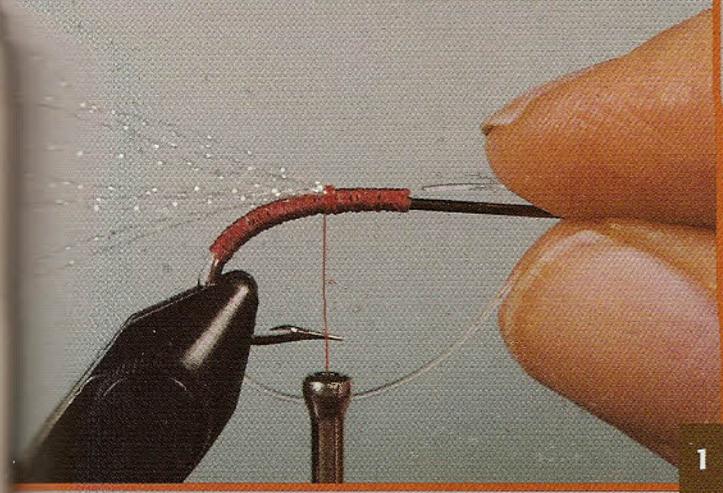
4 Start the Flat Waxed Nylon thread at the hook eye. Cover the shank with close, tight wraps to the front of the weed guard. Clip a soda-straw size bundle of yellow deer hair. Comb out the underhair and short fibers, even the tips, and trim the butt ends. Tie on and flare the hair. The deer-hair tips should extend slightly beyond the hook bend. Flatten the yellow hairs with your fingertip so that none is above the hook shank. Without wrapping the thread up the shank, stack soda-straw size bundles of the other colors of hair directly on top of the yellow—first olive, then black, and another bunch of olive. Pack the hair back and make several turns of thread to form a thread dam against the front base of the hair.

5 Make a couple of wraps forward. Spin and stack more bunches of hair, except this time use slightly larger bundles. Spin and flatten the yellow bundle for the belly and stack the other colors directly on top. Pack the hair and make several wraps of thread to keep it in place. Keep adding bunches of hair until the hook shank is full. Tie off with a couple of half-hitches and clip the thread.

6 Remove the fly from the vice and trim the bottom with a curved-blade scissors. Return the fly to the vise. Cut a 1-inch-square piece of plastic from a sandwich bag. Poke a hole in the center of the plastic. Place the plastic on the front of the fly to protect the hairs. Tie off the weed guard in front of the plastic. Tie off and clip the thread. Cut the plastic from the fly after the weed guard is in place.

7 Remove the fly from the vise. Shape the head of the fly with a razor blade.

8 Thread a rubber band onto a large sewing needle. Push the needle through the side of the body, threading the rubber leg through the bug. Clip the legs to length. Complete the Fence-Rider Frog by sewing additional rubber legs through the body.



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