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Crocheted *FLIES*

*How to perform Torill Kolbu's
unusual fly-tying
technique*

RUNAR WARHUUS

RUNAR WARHUUS PHOTOS



Torill Kolbu (lower left) wears a Norwegian moose leather trash catching apron when she ties flies. An elbow harness suspended with elastic straps from the ceiling helps her avoid neck and shoulder fatigue during long sessions at the vise. Her crocheted flies have won fly-tying competitions around the world.

IN HER NATIVE NORWAY Torill Kolbu is called the first lady of fly tying, and she is on her way to international recognition. Wherever she demonstrates her fly tying and shows her crocheted flies she receives everything from quiet admiration to loud cheers. She's no mayfly that just happened to hatch in nice weather. She leaves little to chance. Her success is based on creative powers, technical skills, and hard work. This lady gives fly fishing all she has got, and her crocheted flies—tiny midges to large salmon flies—are catching on and catching fish across the globe.

Svendshaugen and Engeraa

IN THE SMALL VILLAGE OF ENGERDAL, three hours by car northeast of Oslo, there is a farm called Svendshaugen—a river called Engeraa literally runs through it. The river used to hold ten-pound wild browns and four-pound grayling, and its best pool is 50 yards from the modest farmhouse where Torill Kolbu was born, on the day before midsummer 1963. Her childhood was a mixture of romantic farm life and hard toil. There were hunters and fly fishers in the family, and the legendary Norwegian fly tier Erling Sand lived just down the road. A fly fisher and fly tier could hardly get a better start in life.

Torill was different from the other children. She was wild. Completely wild. A cunning little joker, always up to something, but never mischievous. A charming blend of benevolent troll and Dennis the Menace. But what a temper she had. Named after the Norse god Tor, her name, too, spells thunder and lightning.

Though a wild cat, Torill has always been observing and contemplative, often spending hours on her favorite stone on the river

bank. Soon the magic attraction of all the life in the water—insects hatching and fish working—got the better part of her attention, and she began fishing at age five. On her twelfth birthday she began fishing with a fly rod that her father Ole gave her. When she inherited her older brother's motorcycle, she raced off to Sand (then seventy-eight years old) to convert her allowance money into flies. She was often gone for a long time; there was so much to see, so much to talk about. Quickly Torill began tying flies herself, and her flies began to attract attention from skilled fly tiers and fishermen in Norway.

Now, at thirty-one, Torill is still at home in the deep woods. Like her father, she is an avid moose hunter, and on the water she is a ferocious hunter and cunning predator who seems to think like a fish.

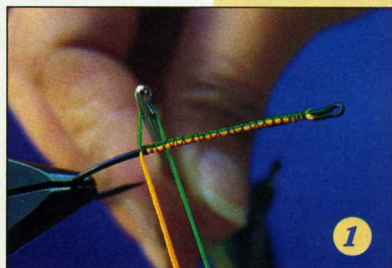
Fly-tying Breakthrough

TORILL'S BREAKTHROUGH came in 1990 when she took first prize for her Creative Caddis and second prize for her Crocheted Caddis Pupa in the fly-tying competition at the annual Fly Fishing Days at the Norwegian Forestry Museum. In 1991 she won a bronze medal in the hair-wing-fly category in the Quebec Atlantic salmon fly-tying world championships. The year after she won a silver medal. And in 1993 she submitted seven flies and took the first four places in the hair-wing-creation category.

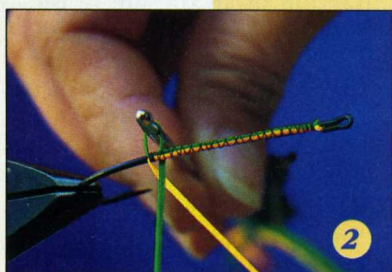
In a letter to Torill, Denys Poirier, the championships' president, explained that all seven flies were among the ten best, but the jury unanimously agreed that a maximum of four flies could be accepted from any one tier. "Your technique of weaving the hair wing to the body is a great innovation that has not been seen in the last 25 years of fly tying," Poirier wrote.



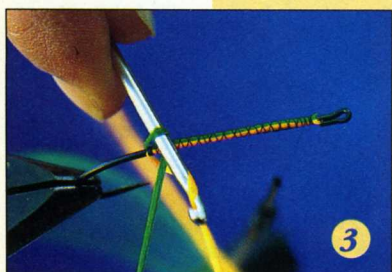
STEP-BY-STEP CROCHET FLIES



Fasten two strands of Antron yarn of different colors along each side of the hook shank. (It may help to turn your vise so that the eye of the hook points at you.) Decide which color you want on top and which you want under the hook shank. In this example the yellow goes on top and the green underneath. Pass the green yarn around the crochet hook and under the hook shank.



Pass the yellow yarn under the green yarn to form a loop.



Reach the crochet hook over the hook shank and the yarn and grab the yellow yarn.

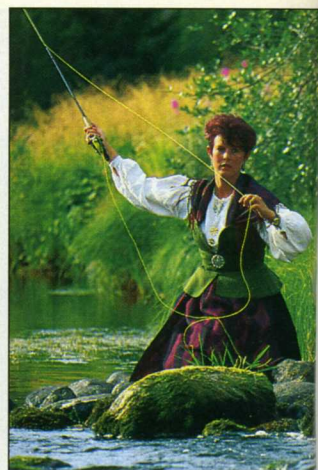


Pull the crochet hook and the yellow yarn through the loop formed in the green yarn. Turning the crochet hook point down against the hook shank makes it easier to avoid booking any green strands of yarn.

In 1992 Torill signed on with the Mustad hook company, which now ties her fly patterns at a plant in the Philippines and sells them (dozens of different patterns) worldwide. Torill has helped train the Philippine tiers, and she has been active in Mustad's product development and marketing.

As a Mustad product developer and designer, Torill has introduced some ladylike tools to the art of fly tying.

The crochet hook, sewing machine, hair curler, hair spray, eye brush, and coffee grinder are examples.



Crocheted Caddis

TORILL GETS IDEAS IN BED—just before falling asleep, or not falling asleep. She had long wondered how to create more realistic fly bodies—broader, flatter, and with different colors on top and bottom. One night while she was lying in bed the old craft of crocheting struck her mind like lightning—though she had never seen a woven fly body. She leaped from bed, grabbed a crochet hook, and rushed down to her fly-tying room. It worked. The Crocheted Caddis Pupa was born. It took a woman to conceive it.

Since then she has developed her crochet weaving in various directions. As a finished product her basic methods do not differ from conventional overhand knot weaving. But with the use of the crochet hook, the thread does not have to be tied off. This gives two major advantages: It allows materials like wings and hackles to be introduced with ease between the knots. And it is faster, once you get the hang of the crochet technique.

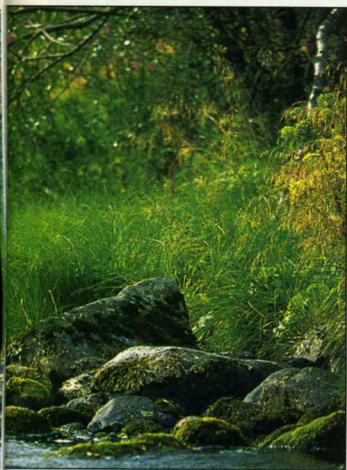
World patents are now pending for Torill's ingeniously simple crocheting methods. In practical terms this makes it illegal for unauthorized retailers to sell flies tied with her patented techniques, but fly fishers who tie their own flies can certainly use them.

Torill's Flies

FEW WOULD DENY that practical fishing experience, good old-fashioned no-bull farmers' logic, and a probing and creative mind stand behind all the good fly concepts that have been created. Trout and grayling cannot tell the difference between Latin and Engerdal dialects. They simply ask: Grub or no grub? Torill's flies may seem both intricate and advanced, but they don't just catch fishermen; they catch fish.

Torill's imitations of Scandinavian Drakes. The wing material on the dun and spinner is white Organza colored with a marking pen.





Wearing a traditional Norwegian dress, Torill Kolbu fishes one of her local streams.

Torill has left few stones unturned in her study of aquatic insects. Where she fishes she found caddis larvae to be predominantly cream-colored, light and dark olive, or brown and orange. So she chose those colors for her own personal assortment. Little did she care that nobody seemed to have heard of a cream-colored caddis before.

Swede Lars-Ake Olsson wrote after fishing the Crocheted Caddis Pupa: "I had some white pupae in the same series. The shape was OK, but the color was hopeless—white! Who had seen a white caddis pupa? But I had to try them all, so I tied it on the leader. My first cast, which was quite long, was to the edge of a current. The pupa had hardly hit the water before the fly was taken by a 1½-pound grayling, which jumped three times before getting off. Gosh, what luck. A hit on the first cast.

"My second cast was down-and-across-stream to the head of a small current that ran between two rocks. Another take, by a grayling of the same size as the first one. Only this one finished up in my net. This excellent fishing continued for 45 minutes, until a strong and wild grayling broke my leader and took the fly with it. I had one more of the same type in my fly box, but did not dare to use it. I had to keep it to find out how it was tied and what it was called. The white caddis pupa was definitely the best fly I used that evening. It outfished dry flies, nymphs, wet flies, and other pupae."

Torill only uses materials that are easily obtainable and inexpensive. Fox fur and Antron are found in most of her patterns. Fox fur is soft and lively, light and full, simple to dye in many colors, and can be used for everything from dry-fly dubbing to wings on large tube flies. Antron has good reflective qualities, does not absorb water, and therefore does not change color when wet, and it is strong. A crocheted Antron body can withstand a lot of fish teeth.

C'mon, Girls

THERE IS NO REASON why men should dominate fly fishing the way they do, Torill says. Who decided that it is masculine to fly fish and feminine to cook the catch? Or masculine to tie flies and feminine to knit sweaters? Along a river, patient observation beats "first one in." In casting, rhythm and technique surpass physical strength. And at the vise dexterity and patient

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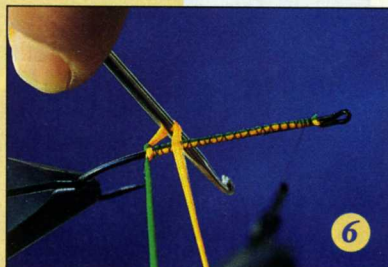
NATHAN BLOW PHOTO

Tighten the yarns by stroking your finger tips along the yarn until all the strands are equally tight. Then make some up-and-down, see-saw tightening movements to set the knot precisely.



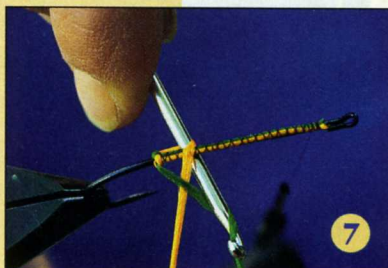
5

Pass the yellow yarn around the crochet hook and over the book shank. Note that the yarns are on opposite sides of the book shank now.



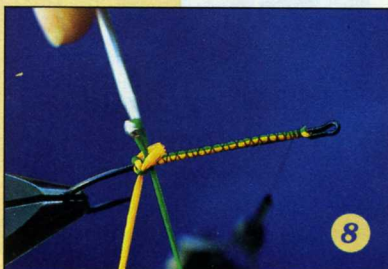
6

Pass the green yarn over the yellow yarn and book it with the crochet hook.



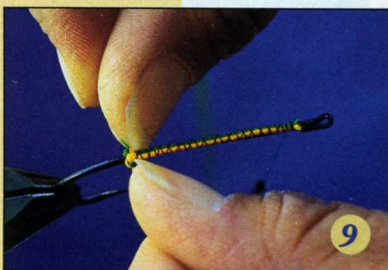
7

Pull the green yarn through the loop formed in the yellow yarn.



8

Tighten up the yarns as in step 5 above. From this knot onward make it a habit to press your thumbnails against each knot to make them sit tight against the previous knot. Repeat the crocheting. Add other materials in the knots as desired.



9

NATHAN BLOW PHOTOS



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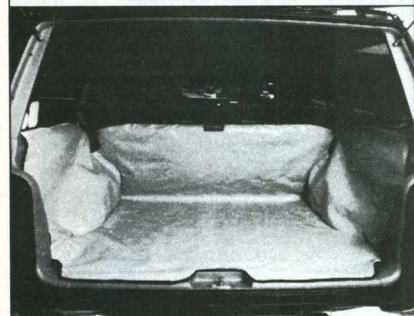
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CROCHETED FLIES . . .

Continued from page 63

attention to detail make for better flies. The typically feminine traits of character make women better suited to fly fishing and fly tying than men.

Stick that on your fork and chew on it, boys, Torill says. "And c'mon, you girls. If I can do it, you can, too. Fly fishing is a sport that men and women can enjoy together."

Mustad's 80000 Series

TORILL AND OTHER NORWEGIAN fly fishers have worked with Mustad to develop a new series of hooks made from a steel alloy containing vanadium. The new hooks, according to Mustad, are 30 percent stronger and have mechanically sharpened knife-edge points that need less force to penetrate than any other hook point.

It has been really exciting taking part in this development process, Torill says, because the fly tiers' needs have been paramount. Each hook shape is tailored to specific types of flies. All hooks from #12 and bigger have knife edge (KE) points and smaller barbs.

In total Torill is launching 56 salmon and sea-trout patterns, both new and variants of traditional patterns, on singles (#12 to #5/0) and doubles (#12 to #2/0), as well as 31 different flies for trout and grayling, which will all be tied in various sizes and color schemes.

Crocheting Techniques

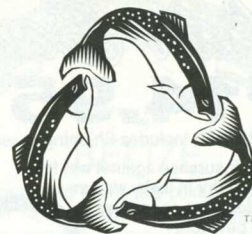
THERE ARE MORE POSSIBILITIES than rules to crochet weaving. Here are a few general hints that should help you get started.

Lots of different materials or combinations of materials can be used. Torill prefers Antron, for reasons stated above. Antron comes in multistrand threads that are too thick for most weaving purposes, so it must be split. Do this by cutting off the length you need and aligning the strands by repeatedly brushing them with a stiff toothbrush that has been cut down. This brushing makes it possible to separate the strands with your dubbing needle without tangling.

When you are crocheting, you should use a smooth rhythm to get an even result. For a straight weave, pull repeatedly, evenly, and in the same direction when you tighten each knot.

There is a basic difference between starting a salmon-fly weave and a caddis-pupa abdomen weave. The latter is started with one single overhand knot over the hook shank to taper the end of the abdomen. On a salmon fly you go straight into weaving.

Runar Warhuus is an advisor to Norway's *Villmarksliv* magazine, which co-arranges the Norwegian Fly Fishing Days. He lives in Oslo, Norway.



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