

# A THREAD CONTROL METHOD OF FORKING TAILS ON A DRY FLY

By Wayne Luallen

When tying forked tails on spinners and parachutes, I have never been satisfied with the method that required first making a ball of thread or dubbing, and then forking the tails around and/or over that. In my opinion, the appearance of the end product leaves much to be desired. My preference lies with slender bodies that take on the silhouette of the natural insect with color (when wet) matching the underside of the insect that is being imitated. Through a fairly simple method of controlling thread, there is an approach that works well, does not leave a lump at the end of the abdomen, and allows the use of a wide variety of tailing materials; natural or synthetic.

First off some basic understanding of thread is important. With thread attached to the hook shank and the bobbin holder hanging loosely below, look down onto the bobbin holder and imagine the face of a clock. Twelve o'clock is away from you, three o'clock to your right, six o'clock toward you and nine o'clock is to the left. If the bobbin holder is rotated clockwise, a twist will be placed into the thread such that when the bobbin holder is gently lifted toward the hook, a loop will be formed in the thread that will naturally "throw" to the right. The opposite will occur with an anti-clockwise rotation, throwing the loop to the left. (Throughout the rest of the article, it will be assumed that the tier is tying right handed.) Many advantages can be found with thread that is judiciously twisted clockwise, anti-clockwise, and untwisted. The amount of twist determines the amount of tightness that the resulting loop will have. Place a small amount of clockwise twist into the thread, lift the bobbin holder, and a loop will naturally throw over the hook eye such that with the push of a finger the loop goes back onto the hook forming a very quick and simple half hitch. Twisted thread (to a point) is actually stronger than untwisted thread, as with a rope. Twisted thread is thinner in width, but thicker in height and round versus flat thread. Flat thread will reduce bulk and cover more area in less wraps. Twisted thread will cut deeper into a material. Deer hair, for instance, that has been secured with stronger and more deeply cutting twisted thread may flair too much, but is easily brought back under control with appropriately laid wraps of flat thread. Dubbing twisted onto flat thread can easily slide up to the hook shank or down. (With twisted thread,

attempting to slide the dubbing while still maintaining its integrity is very difficult since the dubbing has to spiral with the various twists as it moves up or down on the thread.) In order to evenly migrate a twisted ribbing material up the shank (i.e., twisted thread or floss) a clockwise twist will almost automatically lay the rib into position. The tighter the twist, the faster the migration, resulting in fewer wraps. To keep twisted material such as yarn, loop dubbed furs, etc. in tightly adjacent wraps, twist the material anti-clockwise before wrapping. The tighter the twist, the more the material will push back against the prior wrap. Too much twist will actually force the material to crawl over prior wraps. On and on the applications can go.

Now finally to the subject at hand. In the process of beginning to better understand thread control, among other things learned, it quickly became obvious to me that by proper understanding and use of thread, my tails did not need to have an unnatural appearing lump at the back of the fly. Simply by using thread control I could achieve the results I wanted. I knew that anti-clockwise twisted thread would throw a left loop under the tailing material that could produce enough pressure to force the material to the sides splitting them away from one another. This worked fine on the short tails of Pheasant Tail Nymphs, but not with consistent quality on the longer tails of spinners and parachutes.

It was discovered that with some advance planning, consistent forked tails could be achieved on dry flies with basically two key wraps for two tail flies. (For three tails, the process is more complex and frankly not as satisfactory. That process will not be discussed here.) The method is simple as long as the fly is thought out in advance, as we must all agree any fly should be.

**DRAWING #1** Tie in a *flat* thread foundation that satisfies the requirements of the fly. The only difference over any other method of tying a fly with a forked tail is that the foundation wraps be placed two or three *flat* thread widths shy of where the end of the body will ultimately be just forward of the hook bend.

Tie in the wing, or whatever comes next before the

tail. The body will be wrapped after the tail.

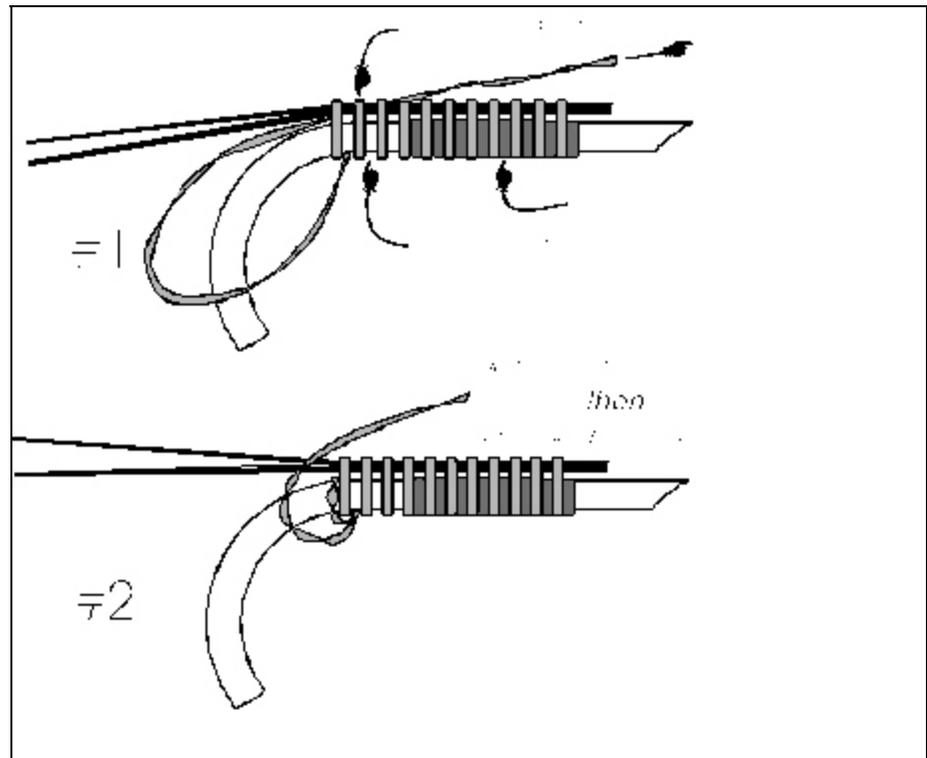
Tie in the tail material next beginning forward up over the thread foundation progressing back toward the bend with *flat*, adjacent wraps of thread. (My preference for tail material includes any hard natural hair such as elk neck. Other hairs, hackle barbs and synthetics are all satisfactory, but produce variability in the ease of the process due to hardness and the amount of material being forced apart.) The *flat* thread should continue over the tail material past the end of the thread foundation by about three or four firm wraps. The tail material will now be extending back and very slightly down. (The down turn is due to the initial foundation being two or three thread widths shy of the end of the body with now three or four wraps over those, thus with the extra wrap slightly beyond and onto the hook bend.)

(Note: The point of most pressure with each thread wrap should be upward so that the tail material will remain on top of the shank rather than rolling around it.)

Rotate the bobbin holder in an anti-clockwise direction briefly so that when tension is released the now slightly *twisted* thread will migrate toward the left and under the tail material. After allowing the thread to throw under the tails, pull the bobbin holder firmly toward the hook eye so that the *twisted* thread is forced under the tail material sliding forward on the bare shank that was initially left when the foundation was laid and tightly jamming into the *flat* thread wraps that are over. The tail material is forced up a bit, evening it now with the shank. It does this because of the slippage of thread toward the hook eye onto the bare shank. (Too much bare shank will allow the thread to slide too far forward forcing the tail material upward rather than level with the hook.) The tails, as such, are also now forced slightly out

away from one another, because they simply have no where else to go since they are trapped above by thread and below by a curving shank. The left tail will conveniently lift up a bit so that the two tails can easily be distinguished from one another for the next step.

**DRAWING #2** With still anti-clockwise *twisted* thread, let another loop swing back to the bend.



Slide the loop between the slightly separated tails. Pull the right tail(s) toward the fly's right by pulling the thread toward the hook eye. Then push the left tail(s) to the fly's left by pushing the thread at a 45 degree angle toward the far tail and away from the hook eye. With one or two additional **firm** warps around the hook shank, the tails are locked into position. Now complete the rest of the fly. (Note: In handling the fly throughout the rest of the tying process or when tying onto a leader, the tails may be bent out of position. If using a natural material, the tails will assume the position originally tied to once in the water just as natural materials will straighten when steamed.)

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