

Turning Hunting Success



into Fly Tying Material

by **John Allen** photos by the author

Tying flies is an enjoyable hobby that enhances one's experience in the world of fly fishing. Fly tying materials can be rather expensive, however, many of these materials can be found in Pennsylvania's wilderness. If you're a hunter or trapper, you have access to more fly tying supplies than you will ever need. The challenge is cleaning and preserving the materials and knowing which material to use to make a fly.

Cleaning

If you want the entire skin, you must flush out as much meat and fat as possible in order to preserve it. The wing of a bird is the most difficult part of an animal to clean. If it is not done correctly, you will find maggots in your tying supplies within a few weeks. When handling any type of game, whether it is a skin or plucked feathers, you should always assume that it has some bugs in it. To be safe,

place the item in the freezer for a month. This should kill any possible eggs or larvae.

When the item is thawed, you should wash it with a mild detergent. The only items you don't want to wash are waterfowl feathers. The Cul de Canard feathers on the underside will allow a fly to float without adding any synthetic floatant to the fly.

Preserving

If you just want to dry the skin enough to tie flies with it, lay it on a flat surface such as a board or the bottom of a cardboard box. Then, sprinkle a ¼-inch thick layer of borax on the exposed flesh. After a few days, remove the borax and feel the skin to ensure that it is dry all over. If there are any wet spots, reapply the borax. Let it dry out for one to two days. Unfortunately, borax will make the skin very tough. However, this is usually your best option when preserving birds.





Above right, the wing of a bird is the most difficult part of an animal to clean. If it is not done correctly, you will find maggots in your tying supplies within a few weeks.

Opposite page, upper left, deer hair is one of the most popular materials used in fly tying. There is not a hair on the deer's body that cannot be used for a fly.

When you want a soft flexible skin, tan it. You will need to find a taxidermy supply company and purchase a tanning formula. Follow the directions on the formula or consult a taxidermist on the tanning process. If you plan to dye your materials, I strongly suggest tanning the hide. The tanning solution will thoroughly clean and remove all greases from the animal's hair, allowing the dye to hold to the animal's hair better. Remember, you cannot dye hair a lighter color. First, you will need to bleach the hair.

After the item has been preserved, you should routinely check it to ensure that bugs are not present. Store the preserved item in a separate location from your store bought materials.

Converting from game to fly

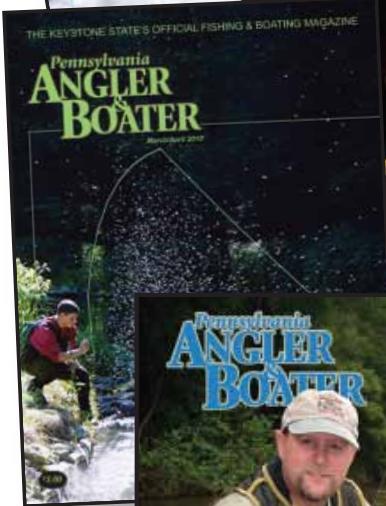
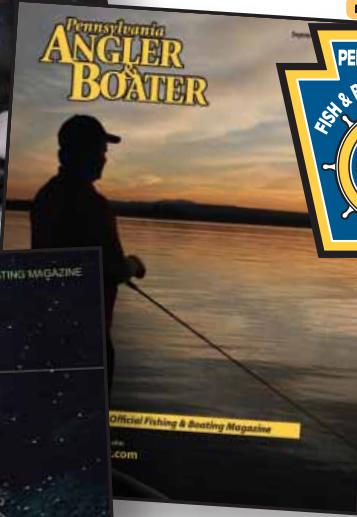
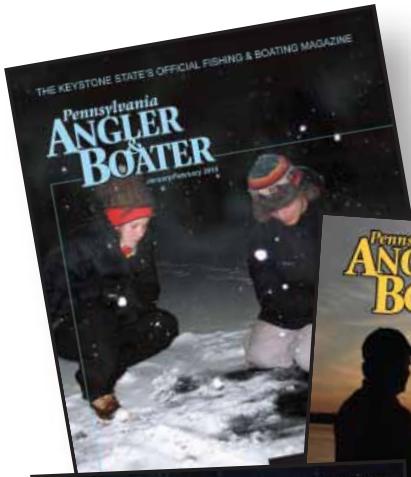
Deer hair is one of the most popular materials used in fly tying. There is not a hair on the deer's body that cannot be used for a fly. Hair around the head is used for small caddis wings and comparadun-style flies. In the area of the spine, you will find hair suitable for most caddis wings. Hair along the side of the body is great for spinning hair on hopper patterns and medium-sized bass bugs. The rump and belly hair is great for larger bass bugs, and the tail is typically used for streamers.

A turkey has almost as many uses as a deer, because many of the feathers can be used as a substitute for other types of feathers. Wings are great for biots and wing cases on nymphs. The tail also works well for wing cases. The fluffy feathers on the belly are marabou, which are used mostly for streamer tails.

Ducks and geese have similar types of feathers, but the colors and sizes vary. Like a turkey, the wings are great for both biots and wing cases. Flank feathers, which cover the wings, are popular in making dry fly wings. The breast feathers make great dry fly tails. The Cul de Canard is often used as a substitute for both wings and hackle. It is commonly used to make emerging mayfly patterns.

As for small game, almost every small mammal that you hunt has hair that will work well as dubbing. Pheasant tails are used as tails, bodies and wing cases for many different nymph patterns. Woodcock and grouse feathers make good soft hackle collars.

Hunters come across an abundant supply of fly tying material each season. The best part about using preserved game materials to tie flies is that it allows you to feed one sport while taking part in another. ☐



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