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Copper John

Fly Patterns brought to you by Charlie's FlyBox

print this page

step: 1

Pattern Description

Here it is: The Copper John. I have been asked to demonstrate this fly by more people in the past few years than nearly any other, and with good reason. While not a complicated fly by any means, this pattern is somewhat involved and has a lot of parts. There is simply a whole lot going on in a Copper John, but with planning and practice it's really pretty simple. One of the reasons that the Copper John works so well is its heavily weighted underbody and bead head. I go so far as to tie all of mine with tungsten beads and lead wire! The wire overbody adds segmentation, flash, weight and durability, and the epoxy coated Thinskin flashback is bullet proof. This fly was originally designed by my good friend and UBER Fly Designer John Barr as a heavily weighted dropper pattern to drag down a smaller fly fished in tandem. It turns out the fish love the Copper for what it is and eat it as readily as the dropper. This is one of, if not THE, most popular flies in the country right now and is an integral part of John's Hopper/Copper/Dropper System. The

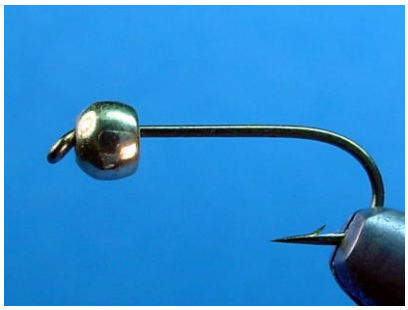
Materials Needed:

Hook: TMC 5262 #12-18 Thread: 70 Denier, Black Bead: Gold colored Brass or Tungsten, sized to hook. Tail: Dark Brown Goose Biot Body: Wapsi UTC Wire, Color of Choice, sized to hook. Flashback: Pearl Flashabou Wingcase: Black Thinskin Thorax: Peacock Herl Legs: Hungarian Partridge Wingcase Coating: 5 Minute Epoxy

H/C/D System consists of the BC Hopper (a large, foam bodied hopper, designed by John and myself that floats incredibly well and is highly visible) tied to the end of a 6-71/2 foot, 3X leader. About four feet of 4X fluorocarbon is tied to the bend of the hopper on one end with an appropriately sized Copper John tied to the other end. Tie another twelve to eighteen inches of 5X fluorocarbon to the bend of the Copper and attach your favorite hatch matching nymph pattern to the terminal end. Some good choices include Barr Emergers, Jujubee Midges, Jujubaetis, Barr's Graphic Caddis Pupae and many other small patterns. The idea being that all portions of your normal nymph rig are represented but are also all viable options for a bite. The Hopper acts as an indicator and attractor, the Copper as a split shot and the Dropper as your fly. Rather than having only one or two flies in the water at a time, this system allows you to cover all depths at the same time with a viable pattern. I believe that fishing a combination of flies like this attracts fish to the flies better than fishing any of the patterns alone. I've had many times when a fish busts the hopper and I set the hook a little late but find that the fish had taken one of the nymphs on his way up. One fly gets their attention, the other reaches out and grabs 'em! I admit the rig does sound cumbersome to cast, but as long as it is built with the above leader system it casts like a breeze. Be sure to keep an open loop and follow through with the cast. Check out the directions and tie up some Coppers for your box. Give the Hopper/Copper/Dropper system a try this year and see if you don't become a believer too!

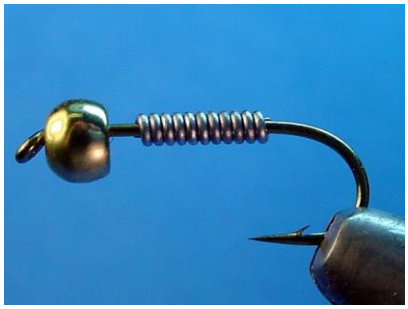
step: 2

Start by threading the bead on the hook with the small hole toward the hook point. This will put the small hole next to the hook eye when it is slid around the bend.



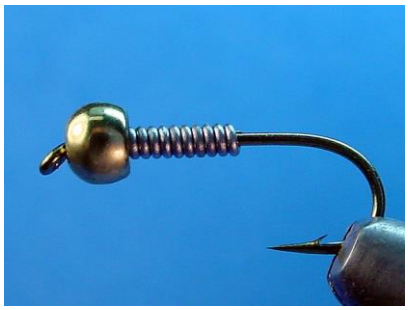
step: 3

Make eight to twelve turns of appropriately sized lead wire around the shank behind the bead and break off the ends. Be sure to flatten the ends of the lead so they don't stick up.



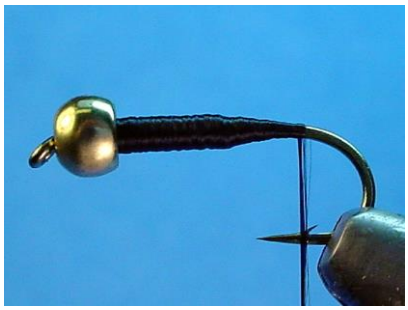
step: 4

lide the lead wraps into the back of the bead. They should countersink into the hole in the backside of the bead.



step: 5

Start the tying thread behind the lead and build a taper from the bare shank at the rear up onto the lead. Continue wrapping the thread to cover the lead wraps and create a smooth underbody. Return the thread to the bend of the hook.

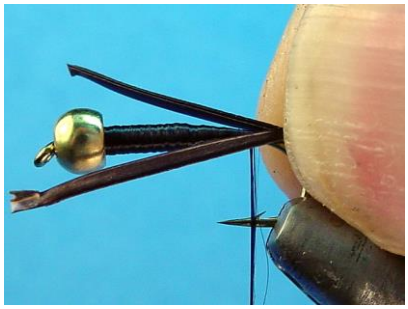


step: 6

Cut two goose biots from the quill, oppose the curves and even the tips.

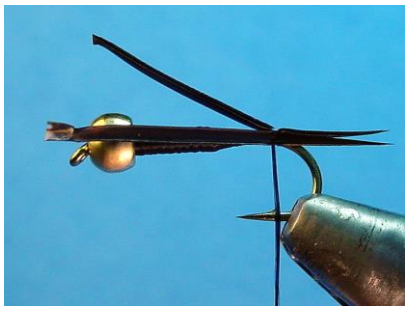
step: 7

Measure the biots so they are about one half a shank length long and place them at the bend of the hook with one biot on either side of the shank. I find it helps to place them at a slight angle toward the near side in preparation for the tie in.



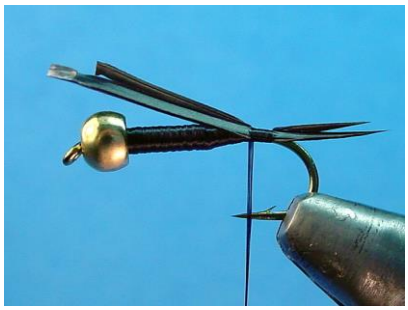
step: 8

Place two turns of thread over the biots. These turns will only hold the biots in place, which is slightly to the near side of the hook. (Over the years I have learned that biot tails will never stay where you put them if you try to tie them directly in place so I always attach them at a slight angle and let the thread torque pull them onto the correct position.)



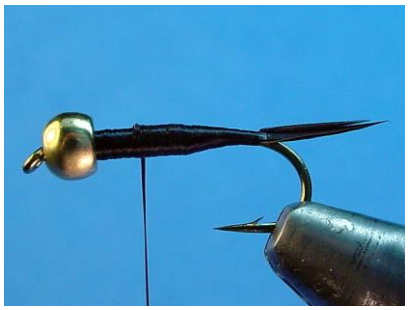
step: 9

Pull on the thread and let the thread torque pull the biots to the top of the shank. Once the biots are square on top of the hook, make a few more wraps of thread over the front ends to bind them in place.



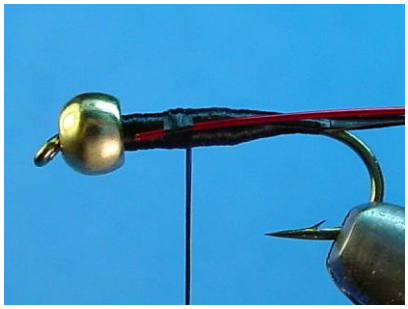
step: 10

Work the thread forward over the remaining butt ends of the biots to the sixty percent point on the hook. This will assure that the underbody taper remains smooth and level. Cut the remaining butt ends off.



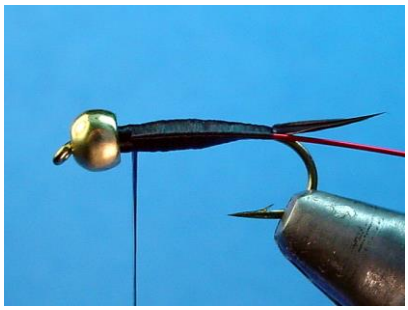
step: 11

Tie an eight-inch length of copper wire along the side of the shank. Pull the wire down to length so the front end is only about an eye length from the back of the bead.



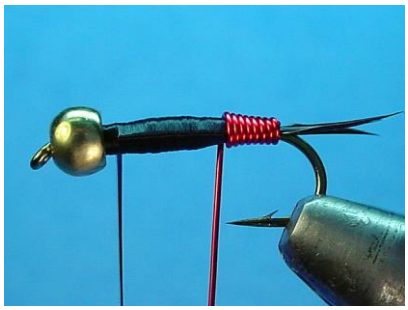
step: 12

Wrap the thread over the wire (keeping it along the side of the hook) back to the bend. Be sure to wrap tightly, particularly at the bend.



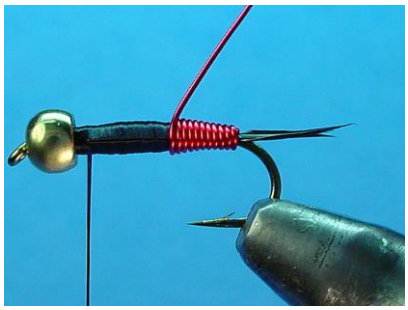
step: 13

Return the thread to just behind the bead and start wrapping the wire forward. Make the wraps as close together as possible, with NO spaces between the wraps.



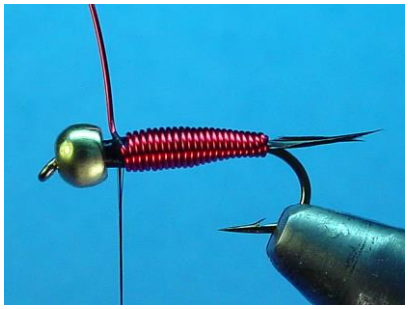
step: 14

I find that if you tilt the wire toward the rear of the hook as you wrap it is much easier to keep the wraps butted up to one another. This lets the previous wrap act as a guide for the next, rolling it off the front edge and nestling it into place in front.



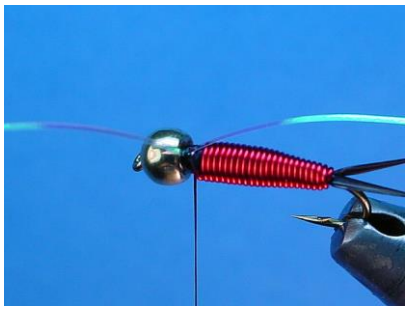
step: 15

Continue wrapping the wire forward to one eye length behind the bead. Tie off the wire and twist the leftover stub to break it off.



step: 16

Tie in a single strand of pearl flashabou at the middle of its length.

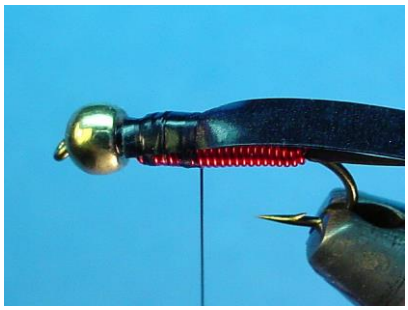


step: 17

Double the front end back over the body and tie both strands down to the midpoint on the shank.

step: 18

Cut a strip of Thinskin from the sheet that is just a bit narrower than the hook gap. (DO NOT remove the paper backing from the sheet beforehand. Leave the Thinskin on the backing, cut the appropriate sized strip and then peel the backing off.) After cutting the strip, peel off the backing and tie the Thinskin in at the rear edge of the bead with the shiny side down. Wrap back over the Thinskin to the midpoint on the hook.

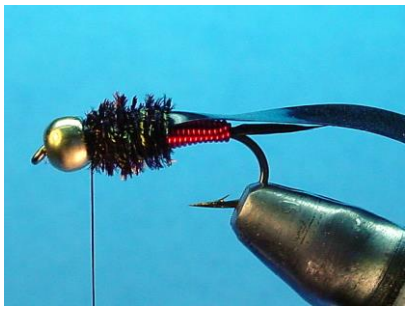


step: 19

Select six to eight peacock herls and cut their tips so they are even. Tie them in by the tips at the rear edge of the bead and wrap back over them to the base of the wingcase (50% point). This is a good place to add a thin layer of Zap-A-Gap to reinforce the peacock.

step: 20

Wrap the peacock herl forward over the wet glue, forming a bushy thorax. Tie off the peacock behind the bead and clip the excess.



step: 21

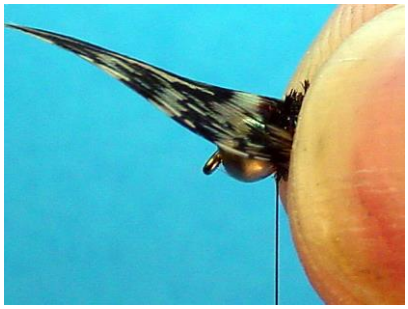
Select a Hungarian partridge feather that has a relatively square tip. Trim (only) the center quill leaving a V-shaped cut out in the feather.

step: 22

Place the partridge feather over the hook, behind the bead with the inside down and the tips extending back to the point on the hook. The "V" should be split on either side of the shank

step: 23

Grasp the tips of the partridge feather in your material hand and make a few turns of thread over the butt of the feather. The tips should extend out of the front of the peacock herl thorax. Trim the butt end of the partridge off flush with the back of the bead.

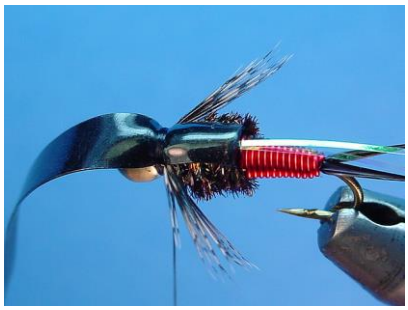


step: 24

Grasp the tips of the partridge feather in your material hand and make a few turns of thread over the butt of the feather. The tips should extend out of the front of the peacock herl thorax. Trim the butt end of the partridge off flush with the back of the bead.

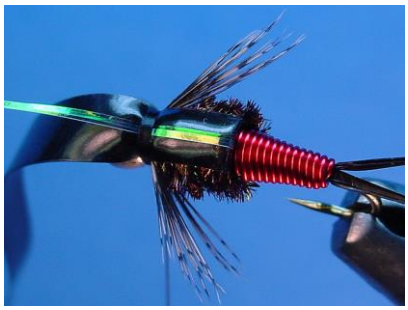
step: 25

Pull the Thinskin wingcase forward over the peacock herl thorax (with the shiny side up now) and tie it down behind the bead.



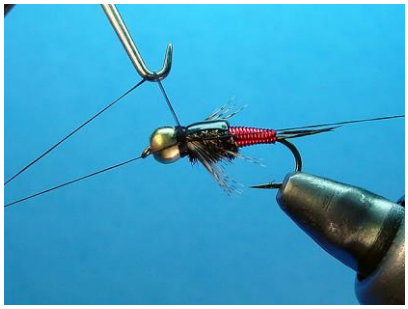
step: 26

Pull the two strands of flashabou over the top of the Thinskin, taking care to keep them centered, and tie them down behind the bead also. Cut the butt ends of the Thinskin and the flashabou off flush with the back of the bead.



step: 27

Build a narrow 'neck' of thread behind the bead to hide the rough edges and whip finish.



step: 28

Mix up a small batch of 5-minute epoxy. Be sure to keep the parts exactly even and mix them thoroughly. Place a drop on the tip of your bodkin and apply it to the wingcase. Be sure to cover the entire wingcase, edge-to-edge, and front to back. I usually work a bit of epoxy up onto the rear edge of the bead. This step covers the thread 'neck' and keeps the epoxy from peeling off later.

step: 29

Finished fly. Notice the abdomen/thorax proportions, the length of the legs, no gaps in the wire body and the angle of the biot tails.

step: 30

Top view of coated fly. Notice the highlight from the pearl flashabou strip showing through the epoxy. The epoxy really livens up the flash and adds incredible durability.