

FLY OF THE MONTH

Lady McConnell and Tom Thumb



Lady McConnell



Tom Thumb

The "Racoon" is similar to the Lady McConnell. It has the fine grizzly hackle tip as a shuck, but lacks the hackle at the front of the fly. The Tom Thumb is another good variation on this deer hair dry fly. SDFP member, Jim Brown has found the little **Tom Thumb** patterns useful in the coves of Lake Murray when midges are hatching and the Swallows are skimming the water. Use it as an alternative to the small Adams and black gnat patterns.

- Hook:** Dry Fly, TMC 100 or light wire dry fly, 18 to 16 for the midge, 16 to 12 for the caddisfly.
- Thread:** Black 8/0
- Tail/Shuck:** Fine narrow tips of a grizzly rooster hackle. Take hair like hackle from behind the head.
- Gills:** Peter Patricelli added two small tufts of white poly yarn at the base of tail as an option.
I have never seen gills filaments on this pattern before.
- Shell back:** Fine coastal deer hair for midge, fatter hair can be used for caddis.
- Body:** Black thread on midge, black fine dubbing on the larger patterns.
- Hackle:** None on the Racoon or Tom Thumb. Grizzly rooster hackle on the Lady McConnell.
- Wing:** None on the Racoon or Lady McConnell. Fine deer hair tips for Tom Thumb.

These are pretty simple little flies. The hardest part is to select the right hair for the size of fly and get the length of deer hair correct for the shell back and wing on the Tom Thumb. The hair tips are cut for the Racoon making it even easier. This is a good pattern to practice thread control and "soft pinch loops" to prevent the "thread torque" from pulling the deer hair bundle to the far side of the hook.

Pinch the barb and mount the hook in the vise. Attach the thread with a jam knot at the $\frac{3}{4}$ shank mark.

(We use the knot to remember where to stop the body and not crowd the head.) Make a smooth thread base to the bend. Select a very thin grizzly rooster hackle from the smallest feathers on a cape. Attach the hackle by the base at the bend of the hook. If you are a fanatic, try to make it lay flat on the water, shiny side up, concave or dull side down. There should only be one shank length extending to the rear. This black and white hackle represents the segmented empty shuck of the midge. The Tom Thumb uses a few hair fibers for the shuck. This pattern represents one of the stillborne midges that can not escape from its

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shuck. Peter Petricelli added two small tufts of white poly yarn tied with X wraps at the bend of the hook. Trim the few fibers of yarn very short, maybe 1/16 inch.

This step is optional. I have never seen it on other Racoon or Tom Thumb patterns. It is good to be creative, and to see if a minor change improves an old pattern.

It pays to have a few varieties of deer hair and light elk to choose from. This little fly wants to float like an Egyptian papyrus reed boat. If the hair is too fine and hard it will not float well. If you use a pithy light elk hair for the midge it might be too fat and look like a caddis. Definetely use the elk for the larger size 14 to 10 patterns. The midge needs a medium coastal deer hair or a fine elk hair. The hair needs to be long enough for 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 shank lengths for the Tom Thumb. The tips are trimmed on the Racoon and Lady Mc. Select and clean the underfur from a small bundle of hair, you probably only need 20 hairs for a small midge. Stack the deer hair to even the tips. The length of the hair bundle will vary on these folded hair bodies, depending on how fat you make the underbody. A thin little midge might have the length be 2.5, while a larger size 12 Tom Thumb might need a full 3 shank lengths to get the wing length correct. Since we are making a size 18 midge pattern with no wing, it is easier. Trim the butts of the hair bundle even at 2.5 shank length. Bring the thread back to the $\frac{3}{4}$ hook shank spot. Place the tight bundle on top of the hook with the butts at the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark, fine tips extending to the rear. Use a soft pinch loop wrap or two to capture the butts of the hair. Pull the thread bobbin straight down or straight up while holding the bundle securely on top of the hook. If you just wrapped it, the thread torque would want to move the bundle of hair. Make a few more tight wraps. Now practic your thread control and make looser thread wraps toward the bend of the hook. You want this fly to float. Make tight wraps again at the bend of the hook, just in front of the little white gills. A half hitch knot never hurts at this point. Make sure you

go all the way to the bend of the hook. A common mistake of this fly and its cousin the Humpy is not to go far enough back, or to make the end wraps too loose. The error will be evident when you fold the deer hair forward. You will see too much tread at the hook bend.

The little midge patterns usually have a black thread or silk under body. Larger patterns may add silk or fine dry fly dubbing. I like to rib or segment midges. I might add a white or yellow 6/0 thread a this step and hang it to the rear while making a smooth black thread body to the hook eye. Keep it thin on the midge pattern. Spiral wrap the white thread forward with 4 or 5 wraps. Tie off and trim the rib. Bring the thread bobbin back to just in front of the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark in preparation for the fold. Grap the tips of the hair bundle and manipulate the hairs into a tight group. Some people twist the hair bundle a little to tighten it up. I like all the fibers to be straight and parrallel. Pull and fold the shell back forward and make two soft pinch wraps at the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark. Pull on the hair bundle keeping all the hairs on top of the hook shank, while you pull on the thread straight up or straight down. Now make two tight wraps on top of each other. Pull up the wing and make a small thread dam in front to prop up the fibers. Make one or two half hitches behind the eye and relax.

At this point the pattern changes with the type of fly. For the Racoon, just clip the deer hair short as a small head. Whip finish and you are done.

For the Lady McConnell, clip the deer hair short, add a grizzly rooster hackle and make 4 or 5 wraps. Trim the excess hackle and whip finish.

For the Tom Thumb, flare the fine deer hair tips into a fan shape and whip finish. (If you added a hackle and make three wraps behind the wing and three wraps in front, you will have a small Humpy.)

Add dry fly floatant to these flies to help them float.

--Lucky

