

The Ghost Whisper
By Al Quattrocchi

Hook: Size #4, Mustad® S74SZ-34011

Eyes: 5/32 oz. black Dazzle eyes

Thread: Clear mono

Legs: Hareline Loco-Legs (bonefish pink) with one white hackle splayed on each side.

Body: White fleece, Hareline cross-cut rabbit flesh strips (two-toned peachy pink) and orange Poly-Yarn.

Tail: White Poly-Yarn

Finish: Tuffleye & Sally Hansen Diamond Strength nail polish (pearl).

One of the most highly regarded live baits used by west coast surf fishermen and considered gourmet to many inshore species are the mud or ghost shrimp. Ghost shrimp are mud-eating invertebrates that can be found from Southern Alaska to Baja California. They live and thrive in and along inter tidal estuaries, bays and coastal waterways. They prefer living in soft muddy sand where they will channel, creating dome-shaped mounds that can easily be identified during minus low tides. It is during these extreme tides that their volcano-like mounds are easily exposed to the naked eye. Ghost shrimp act very similar to the garden earthworm by filtering and burrowing in the soft muddy bottom and maintaining a healthy balance in the ecology of the bay. As filter feeders they are constantly cleaning and irrigating the muddy bottom. These soft-shelled albino-like crustaceans are translucent and internally colored in pinks, oranges and mustard yellows. On high tides, when their dwellings are covered, the shrimp are commonly rooted and sucked out of their holes by predators scanning the bottom for their tell tale entrance holes.

To capture these shrimp, serious surf bait fisherman venture back into the bays using home-made PVC suction pumps that can extract these invertebrates out of their silted burrows where they can easily be collected flopping on the sand. When fished as live bait, ghost shrimp are the equivalent to crack cocaine to many prized surf species. A free-swimming ghost shrimp skipping along the bottom, isolated from it's sand condo would immediately find itself in a tough neighborhood with no place to hide.

Tying a realistic looking ghost shrimp pattern was something I have been trying to accomplish for a while. I wanted to use natural materials that were soft and pliable and use colors that matched the ghost shrimp's modeled appearance. I started playing with white rams fleece as a soft outer covering. The fleece looked transparent when wet. After cutting the wool off the hide and brushing out the loose ends, you can easily pull and tear the wool ends to achieve a natural taper. By enveloping and draping the white wool over the peach, yellows and oranges of the rabbit you can achieve the internally colored shrimp.

The fly is tied in two stages. The first stage is the head of the shrimp with feelers and feathers, ending with the wraps being secured with Tuffleye or epoxy.

The second section or tail of the shrimp is tied completely on the top of the shank, ending with a tuft of wool that acts as a tail. This tail section is secured on the shank, perpendicular to the shank and trimmed with an angle towards the eye of the hook.

This fly was developed for primarily targeting back-bay San Diego bonefish and corbina. Both of these species have been landed on the Ghost Whisper including spotted bay bass, calico bass, sand bass, croaker, mackerel and halibut. I like to fish this fly on a long tapered leader with a Kreh or Non-slip mono loop to impart a more life-like action to the fly. A Non-slip loop in combination with a fluorocarbon tippet will keep the fly down in the feeding zone. A single hand strip with a slow cadence will allow the fly to skip and bounce along the bottom where it can be served up on the dinner plate. I hope you are inspired to tie and swim a Ghost Whisper in your local waters. Here's how to tie one:

Step 1: Begin by securing your eyes 2/3 way back on a long shank mustad 34011 hook. Invert hook and tie in a small clump of white wool at the bend of the hook. Pull the ends of the wool to create a taper prior to securing the material onto the hook. Add some trimmed two-toned peachy pink rabbit to flank both sides.

Step 2: Add a small tuft of tapered wool on top.

Step 3: Add two pink Loco-legs to each side. and some white loco-legs (two on each side) to finish the head section

Step 4: Continue fly by first adding a small tuft of white wool on top of shank.

Step 5: Then add pink/peach rabbit (remove hide). Flare out rabbit with fingers before securing.

Step 6: Continue working towards the eye of the hook by adding another small piece of wool, then some orange poly yarn. From here continue with wool, rabbit then wool.

Step 7: Once you get behind eye, secure wraps and hit with cement.

Step 8: Finish fly by tying in some white poly yarn merkin-style by crossing the thread in a figure eight. Trim tail to an angle. Tie off and trim underbody of fly. Coat with Tuffleye or five minute epoxy under and around eye. Finish with Sally Hansen Diamond Strength pearlescent nail polish over Tuffleye or epoxy

