# Taking Care of Ferrules

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EVERYONE KNOWS THAT FERRULES are a necessary evil in a fly rod if portability is a consideration. And since most of us require rods that can be carried in the trunk of a car or on an airplane, we tend to buy rods with sections that can be joined and disjoined with ease. The ferrule is a simple device, nothing more than a socket and matching plug that allow sections of a rod to be joined. Yet ferrules can create complicated, frustrating problems: They frequently stick together, crack, bend, break, loosen up, wear out and come off. Nearly every fly fisherman has struggled with a sticky ferrule at some point. But most of the frustration created by ferrules can be avoided by learning how to care for them properly. Let's take a look at the care and handling of ferrules as dictated by their design and by the rod materials to which they are connected.

Glass-to-glass or graphite-to-graphite ferrules are most commonly used on today's synthetic rods because of their low cost. These ferrules are of the internal-spigot type or the sleeve-over type, with the female ferrule mounted on the tip of the rod or, in some cases, on the butt. Some rod makers recommend twisting their ferrules to lock and unlock them, while others suggest a straight push or pull with no twisting at all. If you follow the rod maker's directions, you should not experience any difficulty when assembling or disassembling the rod. However, you should be careful never to use force when assembling or disassembling a rod, as splitting or similar damage may result.

Whatever synthetic ferrule system the rod maker uses, these ferrules suffer a common malady—they wear out.

Almost all quality rods with synthetic ferrules have a wear factor built into them. These are spaces that are visible on most ferrules where the male side does not seat perfectly when the rod is new. On the sleeve-over style of ferrule the wear space is left inside the female ferrule and is not visible, but it is there nonetheless. In time, all of these ferrules will wear out, and the tip will not stay seated. When this happens, you may have a problem requiring major repair work by the maker. Some of these systems are repairable, and some are not.

You can eliminate or minimize wear problems by coating all glass-to-glass or graphite-to-graphite ferrules with a paraffin type of wax. You should coat the ferrule with wax the day you get the rod. This will reduce wear, so that the ferrules will last for years. You can use any kind of wax you may have handy, such as paraffin (candle wax,) beeswax, bowstring wax and fly-tying wax (hard type). They all last well. Simply coat the male ferrule with the wax and insert it into the female ferrule. Repeat this process several times to work the wax in. Once this is done correctly, it is not necessary to rewax the ferrules very often. The frequency of treatment will be determined by how often you use the rod. In most cases rewaxing is necessary only a few times each season.

Happily, waxing synthetic ferrules can also cure ferrules that already appear worn-out. This trick can bring back into service your favorite rod that, much to your dis-

may, keeps casting the tip into the drink on every third cast. Pull that rascal out of storage and try some wax on the ferrules—it might cure the problem.

If the synthetic ferrules on a rod are worn beyond whatever help the wax can give, it may be possible to build up the male ferrule with a thin coat of epoxy, layered on sparingly with a small brush. Let the epoxy cure completely and then try the fit. If you've built it up too much or have uneven spots, use 320- or 400-grit sandpaper to bring it down to the correct size. Allow for future wear by not sanding completely. This can be done by wrapping the sandpaper around the male ferrule and gently twirling the tip (or butt). Use a measure of caution here and try the fit often. Some perseverence may be necessary, but the results should please you. A coat of wax will finish the job.

FOR ALMOST 150 YEARS, fishing rods have been joined by metal ferrules. Many types of metals have been used for this, but the two that have withstood the test of time are brass and nickel-silver alloys. Both are excellent ferruling materials, though nickel-silver is preferred by most makers because of its strength and durability. Metal ferrules are costly to produce because skilled labor is needed to make them. They cannot be made quickly or inexpensively and do not lend themselves

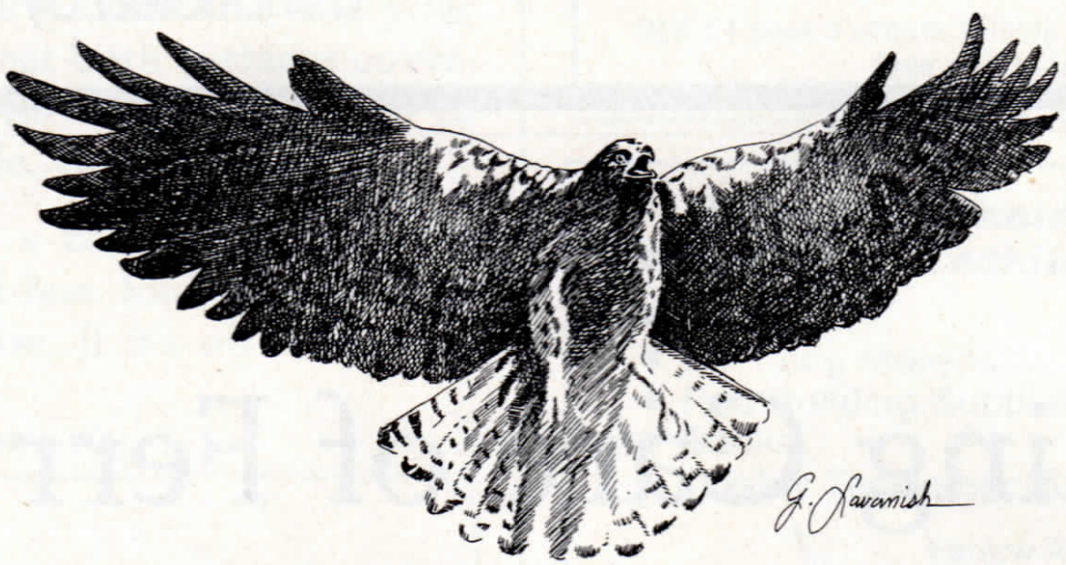


Illustration by George Lavanish

to mass production. As a result, they are seldom found on glass or graphite rods, since glass, graphite or boron ferrules are easier and cheaper to make. Recently, however, some quality glass and graphite makers have given up on the synthetic ferruling systems and have returned to the use of nickel-silver for their rods.

Metal ferrules are not without problems, however, and even the best-designed and crafted ferrules must be cared for properly. Some nitwit—apparently convinced that he was doing the fishing world a service—passed along a "tackle tip" that is responsible for more damaged rods and ruined ferrules than any other piece of angling misinformation. In substance, anglers were advised to use natural nose or hair oils as a lubricant for their ferrules. The trick was to rub the male ferrule along the side of the nose or run it through the hair to deposit a thin coating of oil on the metal, thus lubricating the joint. Unfortunately, this plays hell with the rod. The results of using this technique run the gamut from stuck ferrules that require several people to disjoin, through kinks in the cane at the ferrule joints. The extra effort required to separate these "lubricated" ferrules can cause the ferrules to loosen on the cane or, worse, to be pulled right off the stick. Finally this

"trick" can lead to internally fractured rod sections that "mysteriously" break clean off above or below the ferrule. In all of these instances the resulting tale of woe told to the rod maker when repairs are being discussed sounds something like this: "Gee, I can't understand it. I was just casting and it broke." Another variation is: "I had just set the hook, and the fish jumped once, and then the rod broke at the ferrule! It seems to me that a rod this expensive shouldn't break like that!"

Please, don't blame the guy who made the rod, but the guy who told you to grease the ferrule alongside your nose. Nose grease contains salt, which corrodes metal. Also, it contains moisture, which provides lubrication of the most temporary and deceptive sort—it will allow a dirty ferrule to seat, but it cannot be loosened after a few hours. Moreover, nose grease contains oils that mix with dust and dirt and create a fine abrasive coating on the metal that produces wear each time the ferrules are joined or separated. In the case of high-quality, precision-fit ferrules, this thin coating of oil can create a suction or gripping action on the metal that will not permit disjoining of the rod by normal methods. Moisture—in the form of high humidity or rain—can also cause this problem, making disassembly of the rod difficult. In such cases, carefully exerted force is the only answer, although unfortunately many fine rods have been broken by the effort to disjoin them. The extra force may simply be more than the rod was made to withstand, and immediate or subsequent breakage can be the result.

All metal ferrules should be lubricated, but you should use common bar soap. A small amount of good-quality facial soap (one containing no abrasives) is all that is required to lubricate properly any metal ferrule. The soap should be applied dry and will not only lubricate but will help prevent wear. Just rub some on the male ferrule and join the rod as you would normally. Lubricate only as needed.

The use of soap as a lubricant also holds a special advantage on very humid or rainy days, because it will prevent moisture from seeping into the ferrule while fishing, and it allows the rod to be disassembled easily at the end of the day. Under such weather conditions, use more soap than normal to seal the ferrule against moisture. The extra soap can be wiped off after the day's fishing is done.

ALMOST NOTHING NEED BE DONE to keep glass or graphite ferrules clean. As mentioned before, they should be coated with wax. Over the course of time, this wax may build up on the male ferrule and in the body of the female ferrule, perhaps as a result of over-zealous waxing. If this occurs, you can remove the excess wax from the female ferrule with a Q-Tip dipped in alcohol. Then wipe the male ferrule clean, and reapply the wax.

Metal ferrules may require periodic cleaning—once a season is generally enough. The male ferrule can be cleaned by wiping with a cloth dipped in alcohol, and the female should be cleaned with Q-Tips moistened with a bit of saliva or alcohol and then dried with a clean Q-Tip. In the case of badly corroded or excessively dirty ferrules, a bit of fine (8/0) steel wool can be wrapped around a Q-Tip and used dry to clean out the female ferrule. Be sure to remove any steel wool residue from the ferrule by wiping it out with a clean Q-Tip.

Many older rods have ferrules that, although worn, are actually held tightly by the build-up of corrosion and dirt inside them. Removal of this build-up can loosen the fit so much that the ferrules will not stay together. The best rule to follow with older rods is to leave them alone. Should you have a rod with a slightly loose metal-to-metal fit, then try some wax on the male ferrule. This will tighten the fit enough to fish with the rod without problems for a while, but you should take these ferrules to a qualified repair shop.