

## What the experts say about ants

### TERRESTRIALS

"There is also the fly ant, or ant-fly, the dubbing of brown and red camlet mixt, with a light grey wing." Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Angler*, 1676.

"Match the hatch when there is one on, but if not, look to terrestrials." Charles E Brookes, *The Trout and the Stream*, 1974.

"But don't stand around these mountain streams waiting for a real hatch. You could wait for a couple of years." Datus Proper, *Trout* magazine, Spring 1988.

"The smaller the stream the more important the terrestrials." Charles F Waterman, "Funny Bugs", *Fly Fisherman*, July, 1983.

"On most streams in the country, but particularly the eastern freestone streams, the ant, beetle, cricket and other terrestrial insects become the bulk of the fish's diet." *On the Trout Stream with Joe Humphreys*, 1989.

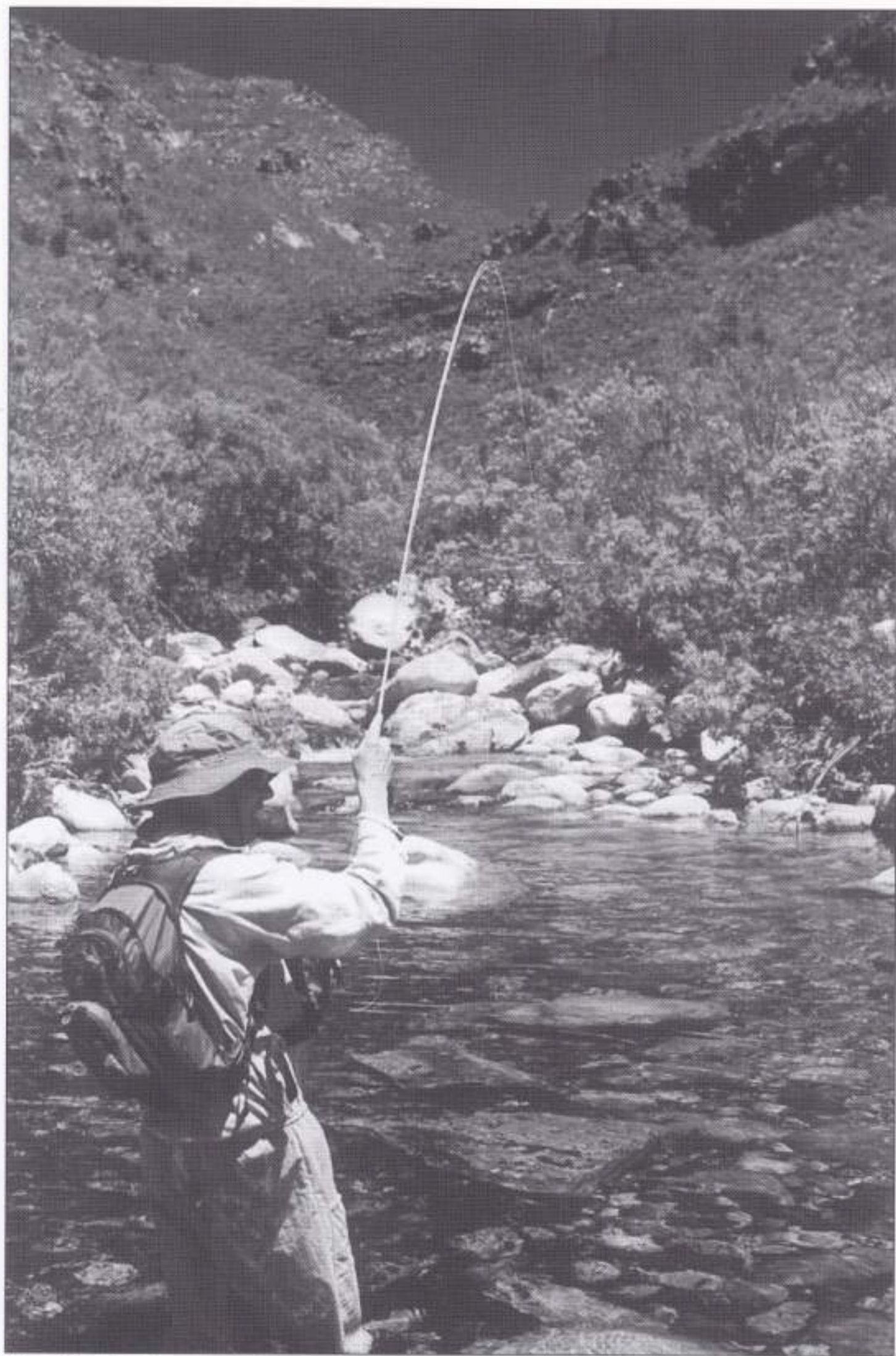
I have no doubts that if one of the more human characteristics we share with trout is the inability to resist a random snack, then an ant or beetle must be the ultimate junk food." Jim Dean, "A Trout Anthology – and Beetles, Too" *Fly Rod & Reel*, July/October 2001.

"Vern Lunde of Lunde's Fly Fishing Chalet in Mt Horeb, Wisconsin, relates that he was fishing a stream in South Dakota, casting to sizeable and finicky risers that wouldn't move an inch out of their feeding lanes. He wasn't doing quite as well as he'd liked, so he switched to an ant. The first cast was a few feet off target, but he noticed an immediate submarine-like wake approaching his ant, which was then inhaled by the first trout in the pod - sometimes trout do that with ants.

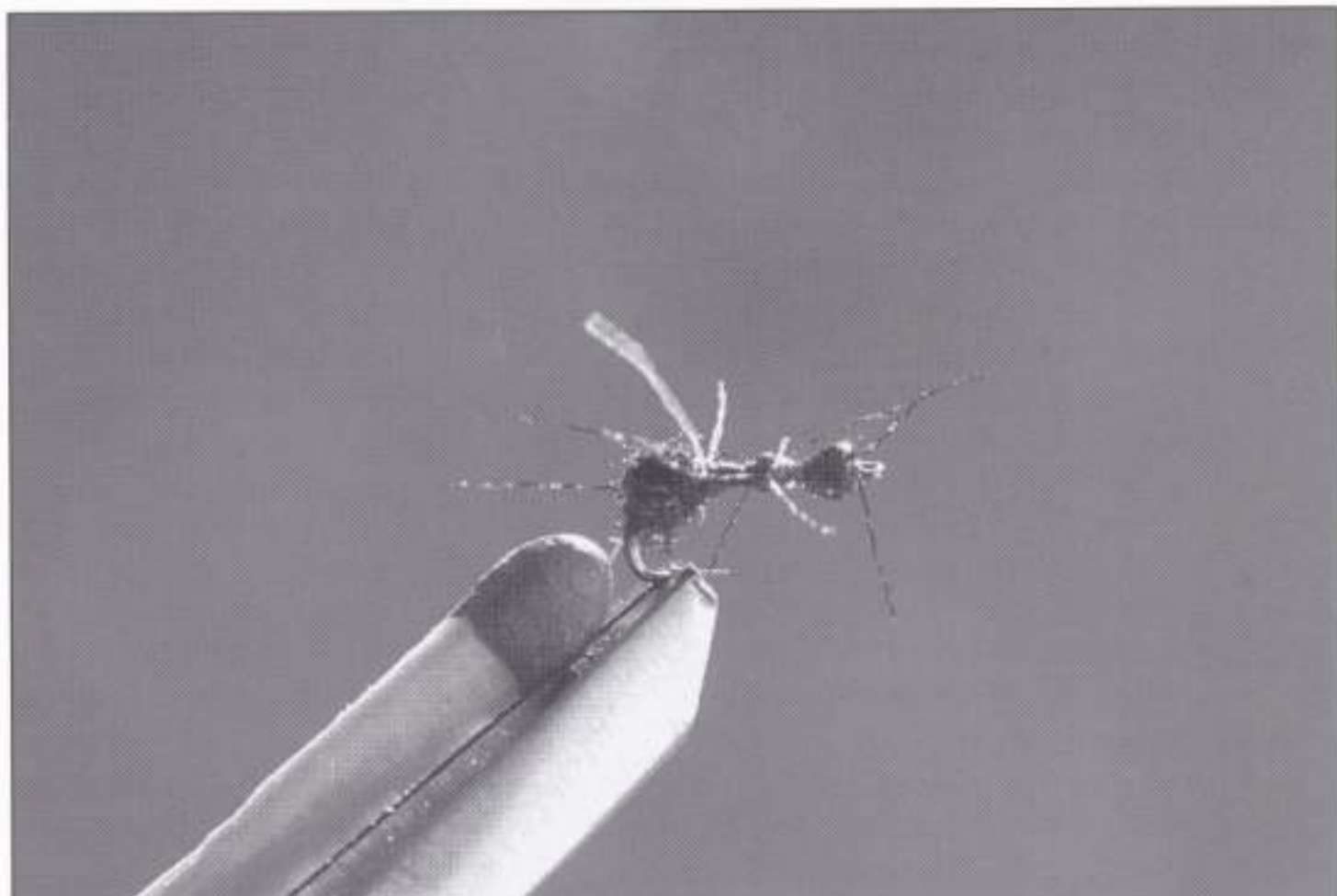
"I landed an 18-inch brown on the south branch of the Oconto that had the highest number of individual food items I have ever found in one fish - thousands of small Cinnamon Ants. Trout love to sip ants, and stomach samplings reveal ants from early spring well into the autumn. Consider ants when you see bank-side sippers. Winged patterns are definitely easier to see." Ross Mueller, *Flies That Catch Trout – and how to fish them*, 1995.

"Perhaps the best thing about fishing any of the terrestrial patterns is you can fish them any time! No waiting around for the hatch. Terrestrials are 'out' any time of the day you wish to fish. Fish them early, mid-day, afternoon or evening. The ant is one type of insect that is always there - except below freezing. And I have seen ants scurry across melting snow." [www.flyanglersonline.com](http://www.flyanglersonline.com).

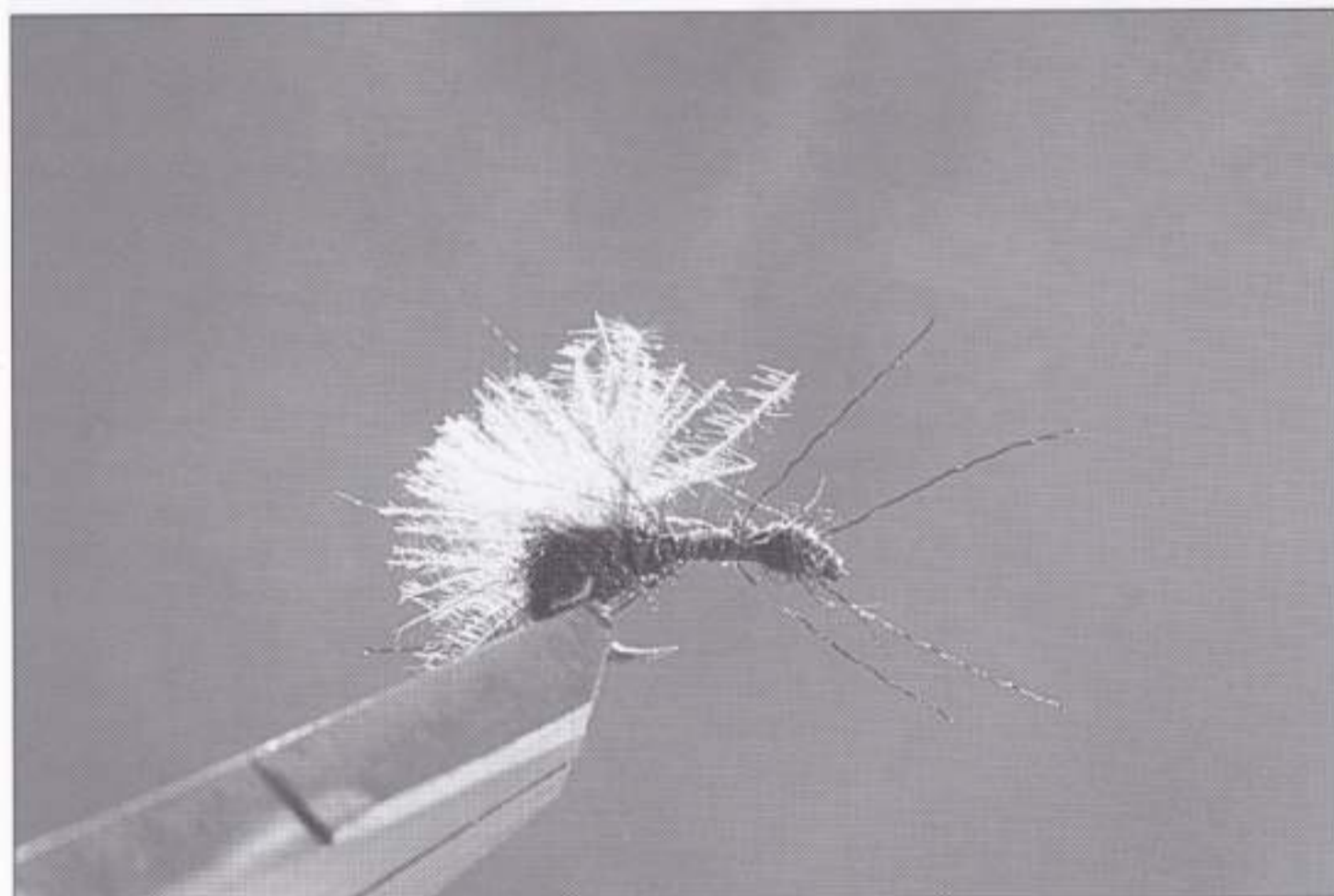
"Trout seem to gorge themselves on ants. One evening while fishing during a swarm, I checked out the stomach content of a rainbow trout. It contained forty four winged ants; yet it took one more bogus ant." Al Moore, "Flying Black Ant", *Fly Tyer*, Winter 1984.



*The editor hooks a trout in low, clear water using an ant pattern.  
Photo Neil Hodges.*



*A #22 ant with glass bead head, abdomen dubbed Gary Borger para-ant style, fluorofibre legs and antennae and Gliss 'n Glow wings.*



*The editor's version of Tim Rolston's CDC-wing Compara-Ant with added fluorofibre legs and antennae.*

"When the winged ant lands on the water in great numbers in autumn you're in for some great fly-fishing—all day long. Trout take up feeding positions and rise to these terrestrials for hours. I have fished over trout rising to these winged ants for more than five hours at a time." Charles Meck, *Patterns, Hatches, Tactics, and Trout*, 1995.

"Other than the mating ritual, ants are ground dwellers and commonly live adjacent to waterways where they climb over rocks and vegetation and continually fall or are blown onto the water. This small but consistent supply of ants usually goes unnoticed by anglers, but trout eagerly await them." Randall Kaufmann, *Tying Dry Flies*, 1995.

"The ant in its many forms has long been a great favourite with anglers. Edward Ringwood Hewitt once said 'Ants are a trout's greatest love.' In my own experience, the Black Flying Ant has proven one of the greatest fish-takers throughout all my fishing life." Joe Brooks, *Trout Fishing*, 1972.

"When ants appear, trout will feast on them – often to the exclusion of everything else. We have encountered this on lakes and on the hallowed chalk streams. Jeremy Herman (world fly fishing champion in 1995) has exploited ant patterns in various parts of the world and has consistently proved its effectiveness on the English chalk streams. Charles Jardine has enjoyed a lot of success with para-ants on Henry's Fork where the aquatic insect life is so rich that the fish live in a sort of 'bug soup'. To the trout, ants are like caviar. Martin Cairncross/John Dawson, *Trout Fly Fishing – An Expert Approach*, 2000.

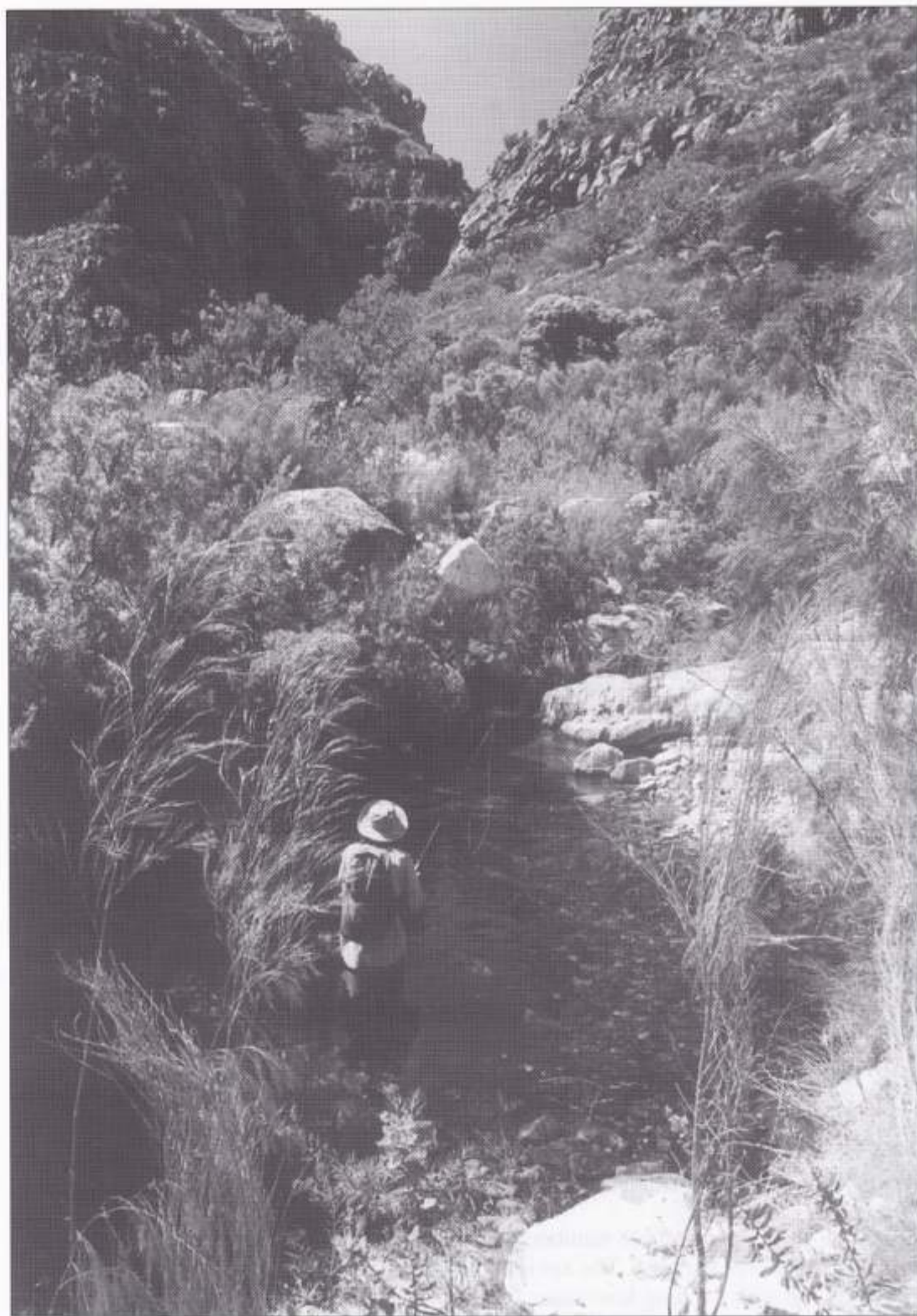
Many species of fish seem to regard ants as delicacies. The Carpenter Ant was originally developed in the 1950s as a bluegill pattern for our daughters, who were then learning to fly fish. It was taken by panfish with such enthusiasm that we decided to try it on trout water. There it met with such success - on the browns of the Letort, the rainbows of Falling Springs and brookies of the mountain streams - that we began to take the pattern seriously. While it was originally dressed in size #12 to represent real carpenter ants, we found smaller sizes, #16 to #20, more typical of the common varieties of worker ants." Chauncey Lively, "Deerhair Terrestrials", *Fly Fisherman*, July, 1983.

### IMPORTANCE

"In point of sheer numbers ants surpass all other kinds of trout food." Gerald Almy, *Tying and Fishing the Terrestrials*, 1978.

"Checking the water on the Letort or the Yellow Breeches with an insect net, we found that for every leafhopper or beetle there were probably two or three ants. The trout could feed on ants two or three times as often as they could on leafhoppers or beetles." Ed Koch, *Terrestrial Fishing*, 1990.

"Because of their incredible numbers and constant presence, ants are the commonest insects available to the trout. The ant imitations I have tied on size 16 and 18 hooks have provided me with exciting low-water fishing; these flies have fooled so many selective fish that I cannot recommend them too highly. Ant feeding is far more common on all trout waters than most anglers realise, but those who know the secrets of the soft midsummer rises under wind-tossed willows sing the praises of the lowly ant." Ernest Schwiebert, *Field & Stream*, May, 1961.



*On narrow, vegetation-shrouded streams terrestrials play a major role in trout diet with ants being more prevalent than beetles except in early spring when flowers are in blossom. Photo: Neil Hodges.*

"If I were to make a selection of the most productive and consistent trout-taking patterns of the terrestrials, I suppose it would have to be the ants. All round, I don't think they can be beat." Ed Koch, *Terrestrial Fishing*, 1990.

"Trout relish ants and will feed wantonly on them for as long as the current continues to serve them." Craig Matthews and John Juracek, *Fly Patterns of Yellowstone*, 1987.

"Were we to actually be limited to a single pattern, I would have to choose the ant in its various modifications. With the various ant patterns I have taken almost every species of fish likely to be taken in fresh or brackish water." Loring D Wilson, *Tying and Fishing the Terrestrials*, 1978.

"The saying goes, 'When all else fails, try an ant.' My saying goes, 'Fish an ant first as all else might fail'. This terrestrial can be your single best fly of the summer. If there isn't an obvious hatch, start with an ant and see how trout appear from nowhere to eat it. Finicky trout in spring creeks might refuse every aquatic imitation you have, but will rarely pass up a dead-drifting ant. Take my advice, use it as *the* fly rather than a back up. You will catch more fish sooner if you do." Bob Marriot, [www.flyshop.com](http://www.flyshop.com).

"Trout, given the choice, seem to prefer a meal of ants above *anything* else." David Quammen, "Go To The Ant", *Fly Fisherman*, December, 1984.

"Even in a heavy hatch of mayflies, an ant imitation drifted over the head of a highly selective trout is seldom refused." Charles Jardine, "Terrestrials", *Trout & Salmon*, October 1995.

"We have a mating flight of ants size 16 to 18, here each April that happens with the Hendrickson (mayfly) hatch. I really think the trout prefer ants. [www.flyanglersonline.com/features/nqento/part25.html](http://www.flyanglersonline.com/features/nqento/part25.html).

"Many skilled fly fishermen, if forced to choose one pattern for day-in and day-out fishing, would point to the fur ant. It is a deadly pattern that has stood well the test of time." Gerald Almy, *Tying and Fishing Terrestrials*, 1978.

Ant patterns are the nearest thing to universally productive flies anglers have. Over the time of the day and flow of seasons, in diverse regions of the country, there is rarely a situation where the right ant fly will not afford good to excellent dry fly fishing." Gerald Almy, *Tying and Fishing Terrestrials*, 1978.

"One of Australia's greatest fly fishermen, the late Reg Lyne, once said, 'I really believe that if I had to limit to one fly to be used all the year around I would choose an imitation ant' " Lance Wedlick, *Fly Fishing in Australia*, 1965.

"Ants are probably the most important terrestrials in eastern America. Crawling ants fall into streams regularly in hot weather and imitations are accepted greedily." Datus Proper, *What the Trout Said*, 1982.



*In low, clear water tiny ant patterns on 7 and 8x tippets can prove exceptionally effective. Stephen Boshoff watches Tom Sutcliffe trying his luck.*



*The mass of ants in any given hectare of veld usually outweighs the mass of all other prevalent insects together and trout lying beneath undercut banks are accordingly susceptible to them. The editor fishing the lower Tsitsa river in Maclear.*

"There are two flies that I always carry with me for difficult fish. One is the ant. Wherever there are trout, there are ants of some kind. The other dry fly that has helped me take hard-to-catch trout is the Griffith's Gnat. I tie this usually on a size 18, 20, or 22 hook." Lefty Kreh, *Advanced Fly Fishing Techniques*, 1992.

"My revelation with ants came during a massive feeding study on trout in the Missouri River. The work, done for *Caddisflies*, sampled over 2 000 fish. The stomach pumpings showed that while most of the trout ate a few ants, some fish consumed a lot of them." Gary LaFontaine, *Trout Flies – Proven Patterns*, 1993.

"When most of the daily *Trico* mayfly hatch is over and the wind starts, my only choice is the Furry Ant. Trout are aware that ants can show up anytime, and being opportunists, they take advantage of their appearance. Trout must surely look for ants during these windy periods because one thing ants don't do well is swim and any ant falling into the stream is doomed. Good ant patterns can be deadly at any time, and the Furry Ant is one of the best." Bob Miller, *Tricos*, 1997.

"The debate continues as to whether trout actually prefer the taste of ants. I'm not an expert about the biological behaviour of trout, but my experience indicates that trout do show a marked preference for ants when there are sufficient numbers of them on the surface. I have seen too many examples of this behaviour to believe otherwise." Mike Lawson, "Terrestrials on Spring Creeks." *American Angler and Fly Tyer*, Autumn 1990.

"I know a few people who fish an ant pattern during a hatch of pale morning duns or blue-winged olives and they often catch as many fish as us hatch-matchers with our realistic mayfly patterns. This can be disconcerting if you're really proud of your mayfly imitations." AK Best, *AK's Fly Box*, 1996.

#### AVAILABILITY/ABUNDANCE/LIFESTYLE

"A single colony of half a million weaver ants can maintain 150 nests in as many as 20 trees and patrol 1 600 square metres, one of the largest insect territories known.

"In fact ants are little chemical factories, continuously producing an array of substances, called pheromones, that serves as the ants' language. Through these pheromones the ants can convey messages ranging from the location of food to the presence of danger. They use pheromones as well to orchestrate social behaviours as diverse as tending the young, grooming the queen, marking their territory, and mating." Bert Holldobler, "Ways Of The Ant", *National Geographic*, June, 1984.

"The Ants form a vast, cosmopolitan Super-Family (Formicidae) which contains 6 000 known species, most of them social and the vast majority tropical or equatorial." *World Treasury of Insects in Colour*.

"*Doryline* colonies are usually very large and it is estimated that a single colony of African army ants, *Anomma wilverthi*, may contain as many as 22 million workers. This is possibly due to efficient group raiding and a nomadic way of life." AJ Prins, *Insects of southern Africa*, 1989.



"Ants are everywhere! They are among the most successful group of insects on the planet, terrestrial or aquatic. There are incredible numbers of ants, surpassing any other group of animals on the face of the earth, and they are found in all terrestrial habitats." Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch, *Terrestrials. A Modern Approach to Fishing and Tying with Synthetic and Natural Materials*, 1944.

"Very early in this strange game, I was immensely impressed by the abundance of ants, in the meadows, on the water, and as revealed by the autopsies of trout. And, truthfully, if I were to choose one pattern above all the others, day in and day out, from fish to fish, the most enduring in its season, it would be the ant in its various sizes and colours." Vincent C. Marinaro, *A Modern Dry-Fly Code*, 1950.

"The bill of fare for most headwater trout streams during the summer is terrestrial insects. Charlie Fox once told me that his favourite fly for these waters is a #14 or #16 Crowe Beetle. Additionally, I've had many great days with small ants in these small waters. I honestly believe that trout in headwater streams catch more ants than any other insects, because the ants are present in great numbers all season long. A #16 or #18 McMurray Ant in either black or cinnamon seldom lets me down in the summer." Harry Murray, "Mountain Trout Tactics", *Fly Fisherman*, July 1994.

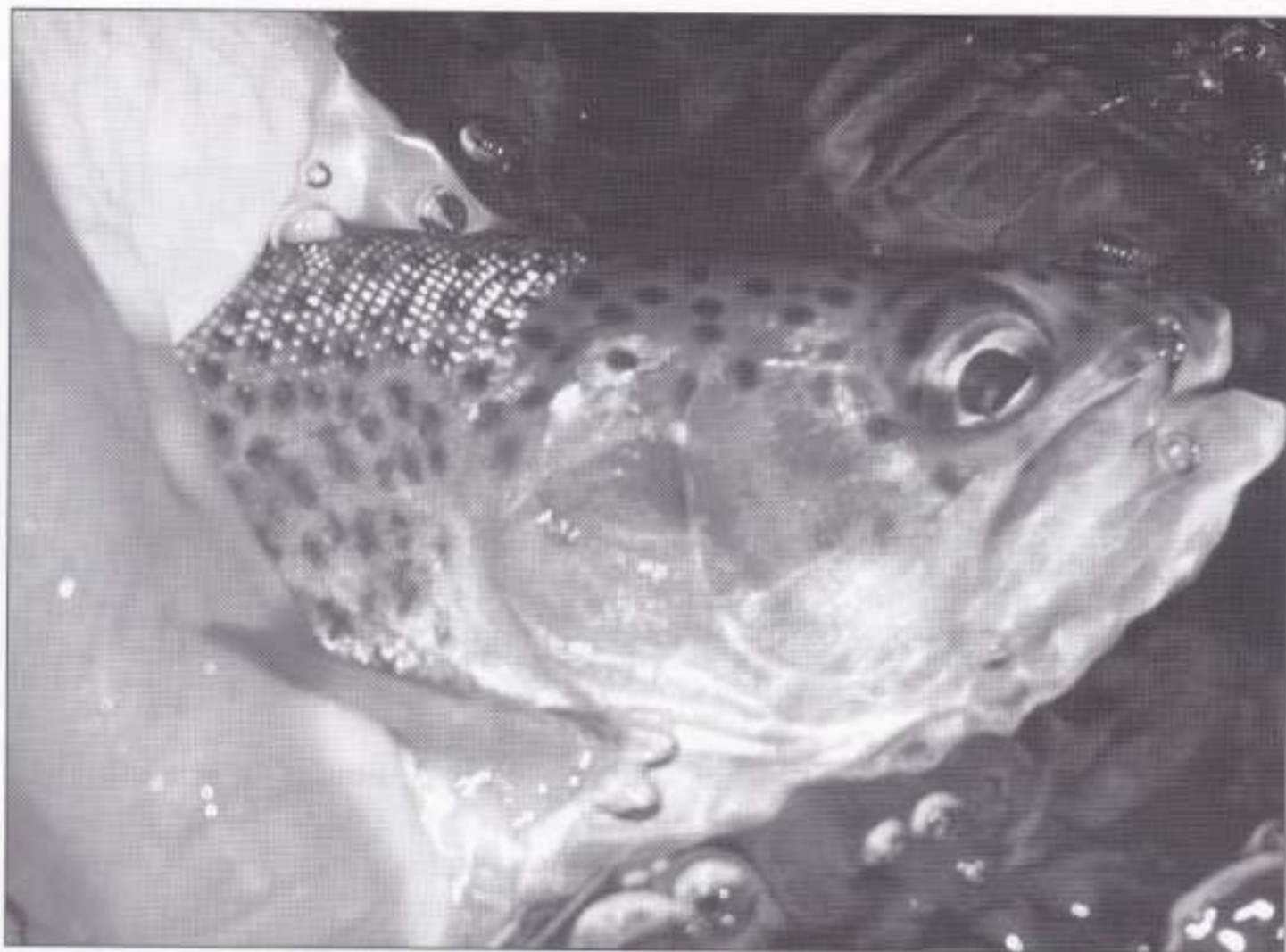
"Ants top my list of terrestrials for the limestone waters. If ever I were forced to choose one fly to fish for trout for the rest of my life. This would be it." Gerald Almy, "Terrestrials and Limestone Trout", *Fly Fisherman*, July, 1983.

"Ants are probably more susceptible to being washed into a stream than most anglers realize. Their colonies are usually located on sloping, well-drained ground to avoid standing water that would drain into their colony's underground network of tunnels. This sloping ground adds velocity to the runoff water, which increases the chances of workers being caught outside the colony and being washed away." Jerry Meyer, *How to Catch Trout between the Hatches*, 1982.

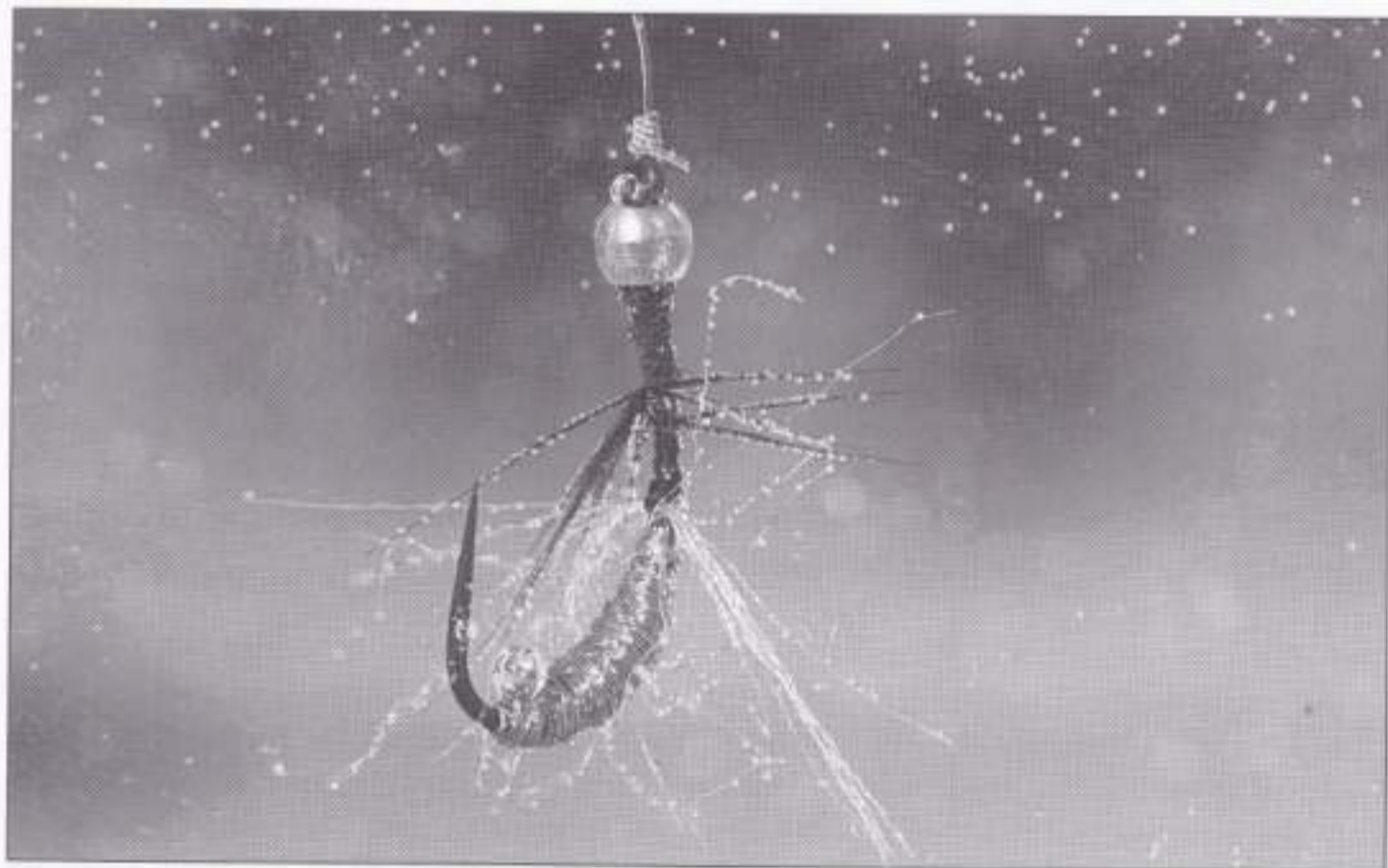
"Ants are the most numerous of all terrestrial insects and they occur in abundance in every land ecosystem except the polar regions." Gary Borger, *Naturals*, 1980.

"Ants are industrious adventurers and are great climbers in search of food. In pursuit of food on the extremities of trees, ants frequently fall or are blown off and find themselves in the water. Opportunistic fish, ever alert for a feed, eat them readily." Rob Flower, *Australian Trout Food, Trout Flies and how to fish them*, 2001.

"For years on every trip to a small stream, George Harvey has used a deer hair ant. He describes it in his book, *Techniques of Trout Fishing and Fly Tying*. This buggy-looking terrestrial has worked for me time and time again. After you catch a few trout with one of these ant patterns the hairs begin to split. After catching a half dozen trout the pattern looks anything like an ant. But I seems the more use and abuse you give the pattern, the more effective it becomes. Each of the broken hairs makes another simulated leg." Charles Meck, *Patterns, Hatches, Tactics, and Trout*, 1995.



*Last trout of the last day. A close of season Holsloot rainbow that took the editor's orange-bodied ant.*



*Tying an abdomen of lead wire overlaid with crimped copper wire will turn a light-wire hook - such as the Tiemco 206BL shown here - upside down and a metal bead at the head will make it travel head down. The editor's sunken ant pattern with an antron wing and hen hackle legs.*