

Leonard's Wolf Spider

by Peter Brigg

Every now and then something special happens. In this case it was my meeting with Leonard Flemming and, through our common interests, my introduction to his truly indigenous Wolf Spider. The minute I saw the first little size 16 specimen come off his vice, I knew that it had the kind of qualities I like and strive for in my own attempts at finding the ultimate dry fly. A good searching dry fly must have three elements – it must float well for a long time, it must be easily visible to the angler and, in the eyes of the trout it must have the bugginess that suggests the real thing. I prefer to tie flies that resemble something like real bugs, and although there have been those that have tried to prove that flies like the Royal Wulff actually pass as a caddis emerger or a flying ant, Lee Wulff was right when he said it was like a 'strawberry cake'. However, there is no doubting what the Wolf Spider represents. That's why I like it and that's why the trout take such a fancy to it. It suits our conditions and the food forms of our waters and it will rarely leave you without an answer to feeding trout.

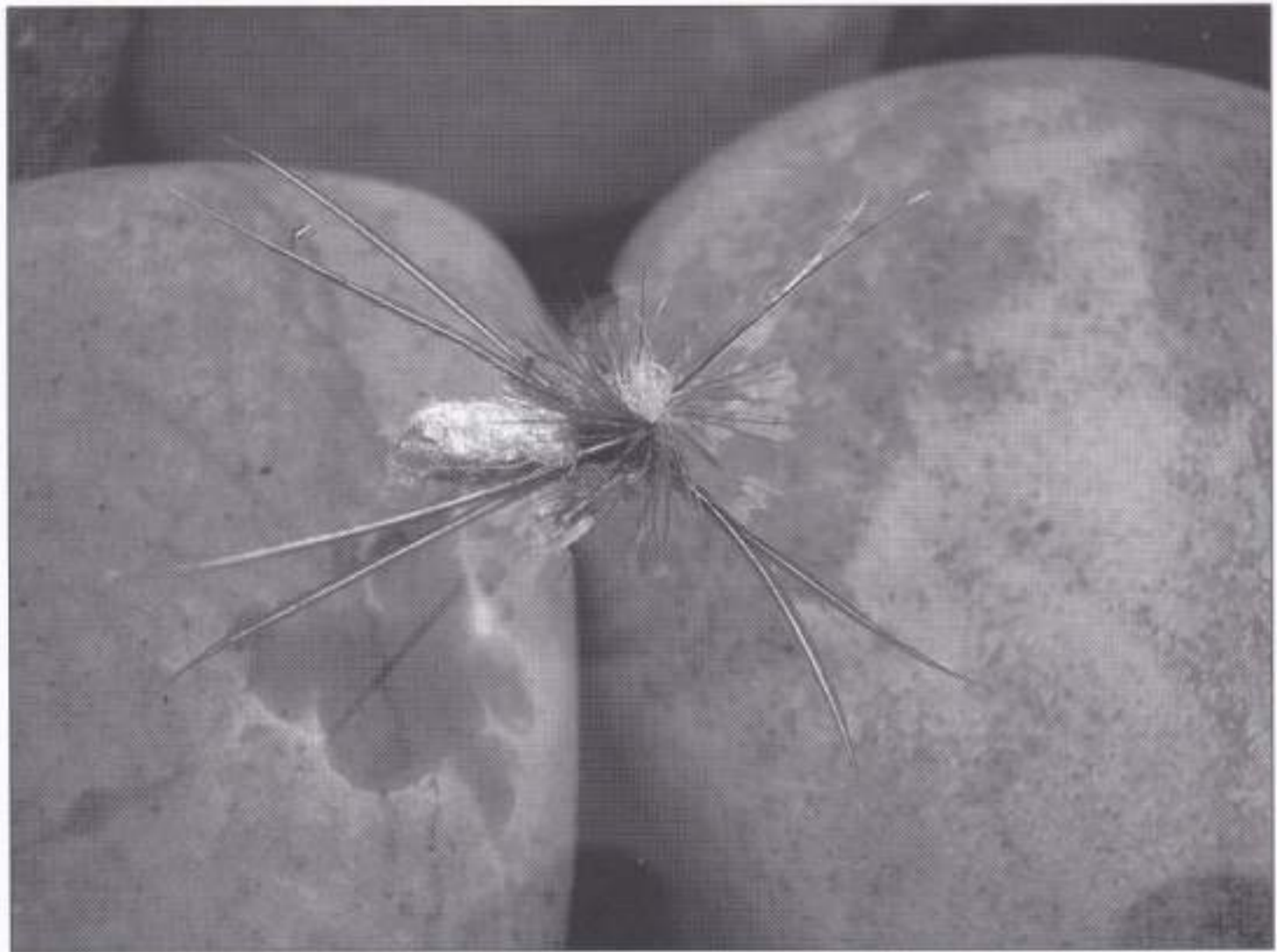
What makes the Wolf Spider so easily recognisable as an imitation of the natural is the shape of distinctive abdomen and the long front and back legs. Important also is the sparse dubbing over the foam abdomen that provides a fine hairy silhouette which imitates the bodies of these spiders that occur across the length and breadth of South Africa.

However, although I had already taken a fancy to it when I saw it for the first time, the proof of the pudding is in the eating and I wasn't prepared to comment on its virtues until it had been put through its paces. Well, that is as they say, is 'history now'. This, in my opinion, is a remarkable fly, an irresistible morsel with enough key trigger features to fool the shyest of the trout. I have used it frequently this past season on my favourite upland streams in the Drakensberg and have yet to have a day when the trout have not come easily to this fly, and it often pulls them from their lies even when there is no sign of surface activity.

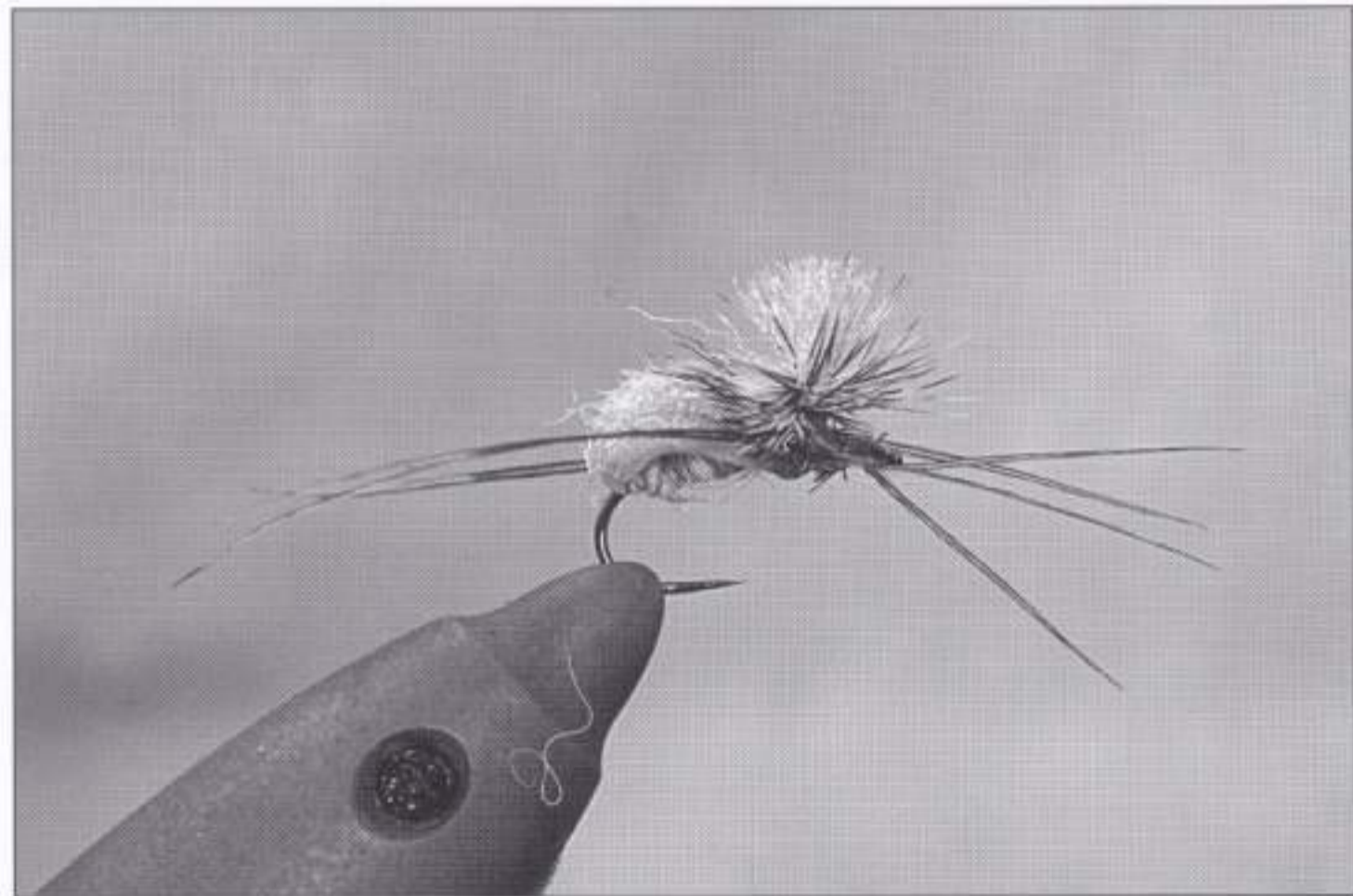
I like to fish it upstream on a longish leader, concentrating in particular on the water close to the banks and below overhanging vegetation where they are most likely to fall in. Occasionally, I will cast across stream and allow the fly to drift down past me with rod tip held high and then, just as the fly shows signs of drag, skate it sideways across the stream. Quite often this has resulted in a slashing take from below. I think this action probably imitates the spider running over the surface as they are inclined to do at times in their attempts to reach terra firma. I have seen them running like this and hesitating for a second or two and then running again. Try and imitate this movement and the fly's distinctive features will complete the deception.

The past season has been a good one for me if numbers of trout are any measure. However, there were two stand-out moments and they both occurred on the same day in April on the upper Bushmans beneath the towering peaks of the 'Sleeping Giant'.

There was a fresh autumn feel in the air, the day was warm with a cloudless sky – the



Peter Briggs' interpretation of Leonard Flemming's Wolf Spider pattern. Notice the fine dubbing which has been glued to the foam body.



stream was running quick and clear. After trying a variety of dries and pricking a few small fish, I changed to Leonard's Wolf Spider; after working the run from the tail, I eventually turned my attention to a pocket at the head of the run next to where the fast water plunged in. The second cast landed where I wanted it and within a split second a good fish rose and sucked the fly in. It was bigger than I had had so far and after a brief fight the 12 inch brown lay nestled in my hand – I was struck by the unusual markings with the spots across its back joined in a pattern not unlike that of a reticulated giraffe. Shaun Futter helped with a few quick underwater pictures and I released it again to its watery world. I had given early notice to Shaun and Jan Kurrobel that there was a favourite spot of mine at the confluence of the Bushmans and Twee Dassie Spruit and that they could share the water until then, provided I could have that one run to myself – they agreed.

Crouching low I flicked the fly just 15ft up the run and a small 6 inch fish appeared from now where and hooked itself. I quickly brought it to hand and released it downstream so as not to disturb the run any further. I flicked my line out again higher up the run, landing the Wolf Spider hard against the bank in the shadow of some overhanging vegetation. It bobbed and twirled in the current and, as it entered the sunlight I saw a sudden flash of colour beneath it and, in that moment, the fly disappeared leaving a diminishing ring as its legacy. The Scott Fiber Touch bent in respect to a solid fish, a really good small stream fish, nearly 14 inches of wild brown trout, slim bodied, heavily spotted with buttery flanks and a hooked jaw. My best of the season on this mountain stream in a place as pretty as you will find anywhere. I'm convinced too that the Wolf Spider is good enough to fool even the older, wiser fish – the acid test of any quality pattern.

Tying instructions

1. Tie in post - I'm inclined to believe that the foam from fruit boxes may be better than the antron I currently use.
2. Cut a 2 to 3 mm closed cell foam strip (I use tan) about hook shank length. (the width depends, of course, on the size of fly - this is for #16) Tie in at the bend and then take thread back to behind post.
3. Fold foam strip back forward to form the abdomen and tie it off behind the post. Don't pull the foam too tight - you want to create the elongated, bulbous shape of the natural.
4. Tie in two legs, back and front, on either side of the body immediately ahead of the abdomen tie-off point and manipulate them to get to the right length and placed in the right position and at the correct angle. I like to make them quite long and wide - probably a bit exaggerated. Tying them in at this point also prevents the complications of trying to manage things if the front legs are tied in later in front of the post, especially trying to tie the parachute hackle down. Knotting the pheasant is not a bad idea, although these spiders seem to have quite distinctively straight, long legs when on the water surface.
5. Tie in parachute hackle. Because of the importance of the legs as a trigger, I prefer not to make the hackle too long. I have used grizzly and reddish hackle feathers.
6. Tie off, apply suitable glue to the abdomen and sprinkle on to it very finely-cut tan/whitish antron and allow to dry. I think its important to apply the antron sparingly to give just a hint of hair and create the halo effect.



A female Wolf Spider carrying her egg sac – a feature which fly tyers have yet to incorporate in imitative patterns.



A brown trout caught in the Bushmans River in the Natal Drakensberg on Leonard Flemming's Wolf Spider imitation.