

Luminous Lakenvlei

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The flustered packing and last minute shopping all passed in a blur as the excitement for a weekend of fishing started building. A last minute cancellation of the Lakenvlei cabin was the perfect reason to head out into the mountains for the weekend. Fitting in all our food, sleeping bags, tackle, float tubes and tying kits challenged our patience as we were all raring to go. By the time we reached the outskirts of the mother city, dusk had already settled and we felt as if we were finally making some progress towards our destination. After the customary one-stop detour for fuel, coffee and Wimpy burgers we were ready for the balance of the trip to the dam.

Driving is never boring when going on a fishing trip, there is always a babble of conversation that adds to the hype. Weather, water levels, tactics and fly selection are discussed and new ideas are seeded as the engine drones in the background and the odometer ticks over irrepressibly. And then, before you realise it, you are through the tunnel, past the streams in their wintry spate, over the burgeoning banks of the mighty Breede, through sleepy Ceres and up the pass into the mountains. Arriving in the dark, digging out torches, unloading the car and settling into the cabin all happens in a haze. A bottle of hard tack emerges from a bag to help fight the winter chill and improve the atmosphere in the cabin.

Rods are rigged, tying kits come out and weird and wonderful patterns start emerging from the vises. Marabou, gold and tungsten beads, deer hair, chenille, zonker strips, flashabou and hackles cover the table. A pack of glow-in-the-dark beads finds its way onto the table! The idea suddenly dawns - why wait for tomorrow to fish when you can fish now? Four unique flies, all incorporating glow-in-the-dark beads emerge from the vises. They vary from some very bushy streamers to small sliders and even a flipper imitation with rubber legs.

The new creations are attached to leaders, jackets and beanies are donned and armed with our glow-in-the-dark arsenal of flies we make our way clumsily down the water. With the waning moon there is very little ambient light to spot your way to the water or to find a good position on the bank with a clear back cast. Crouching next to the water, I hold my newly created fly up to my headtorch, waiting for the beads to absorb some light and start to glow. I strip line off my reel and clumsily start casting in the dark, eerily watching my glowing fly shoot out past my ear.

The fly settles on the water and I pause, to let the ripples disperse. Then I start an erratic twitch and pause retrieve to allow the fish to home in on my fly. The winter chill is not far off and I start doubting this crazy escapade - my warm sleeping bag beckons. But the effort has already been made and now I want to get something out of this crazy midnight excursion.

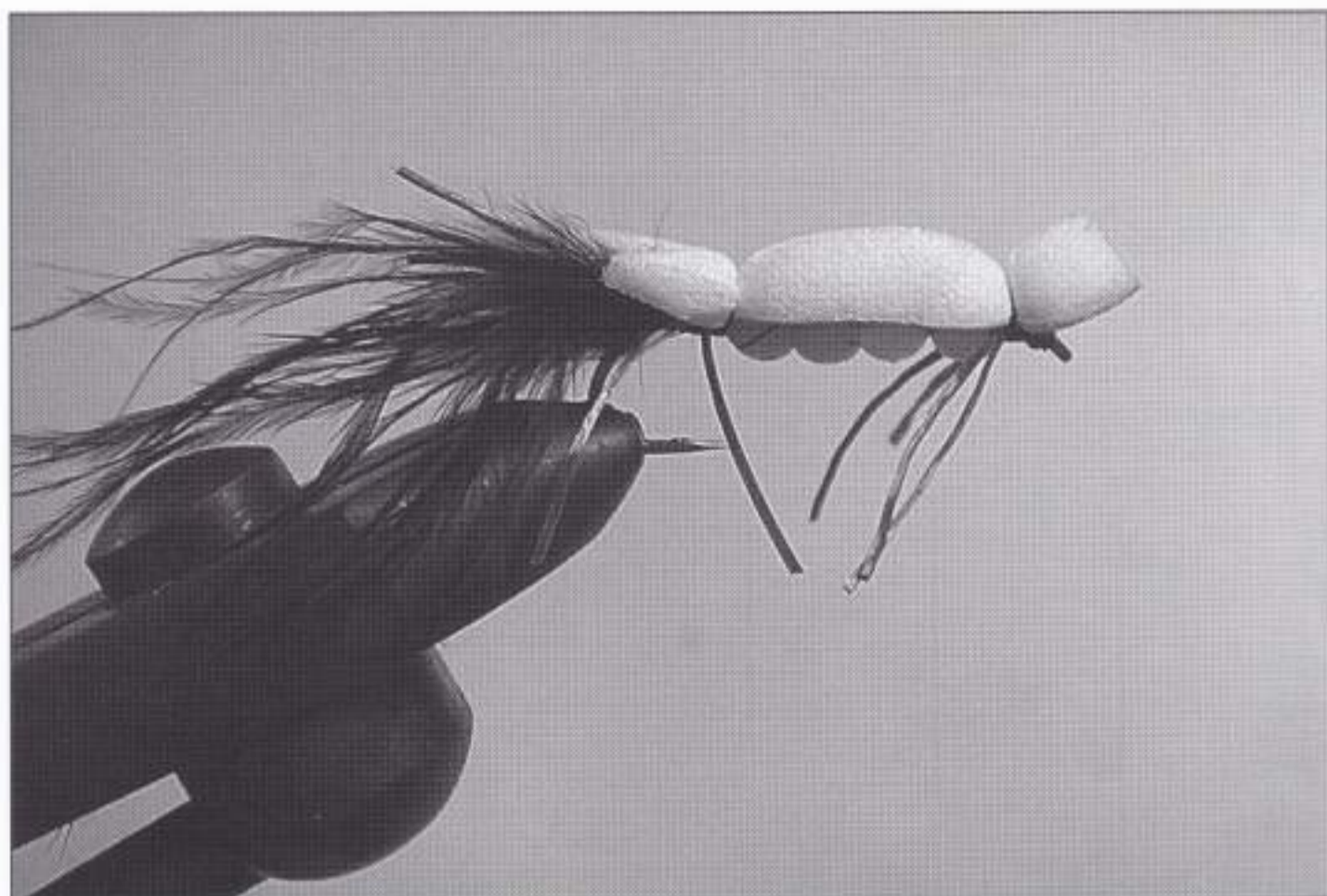
After a few more casts there is no response from the fish, I recharge my fly with my headtorch and cast some more. The chugging and gurgling and occasional blink of light from my fishing companions spaced out along the bank distract me from the task at hand.



A marabou-wing streamer with phosphorescent body that proved successful at Lakenvlei.



12:45 am and a Lakenvlei rainbow trout is seduced by a phosphorescent flipper.



A glow-in-the-dark flipper with rubber legs and ethafoam back.



A marabou hackled and tailed streamer with a phosphorescent body.

Listening to my fly gurgle its way closer to the bank, I pause and then strip my line in preparation for my next cast and then somewhere in front of me the water erupts and I am wrenched back to reality. A quick strip strike and my leader and glowing fly end up in a pile at my feet.

Wow this really works! The thought of my sleeping bag and the cosy cabin are now much further away. Quickly I recharge my fly with my headtorch and recast. Now I am really concentrating and trying to give my fly as lively a retrieve as possible. Strip-strip, pause, strip-strip bang! An aggressive rainbow cannot resist my glow-in-the-dark fly and comes to the net.

This was my first experience of incorporating glow-in-the-dark beads in my flies. Some purists may be upset by the use of such materials in fly design. But fly fishing and fly design have been evolving and no material seems to be out of reach of fly tying anymore. Using glow-in-the-dark materials is certainly nothing new. Anglers in New Zealand have been targeting sizeable trout in lakes using glow-in-the-dark smelt patterns tied with a material called aurora skirt that, unfortunately, is not available locally. The pattern is "shone up" every few casts using a headtorch or a camera flash. These patterns have accounted for many good sized rainbow and brown trout.

Conventional anglers targeting cob at night often include glow-in-the-dark beads in their chokka strip baits and yo-zuri lures also incorporate these beads. Even gimmicky bass lures come with flashing lights and glow-in-the-dark bodies. I have also had some success with incorporating glow-in-the-dark materials in bass bug patterns and there is scope for experimentation with phosphorescent and fluorescent materials into fly pattern design for targeting estuarine species at night.

Phosphor can also be incorporated into fly design, a successful pattern at Lakenvlei is a woolly worm tied with phosphor epoxied into the hackle, which imitates daphnia. Fluorescent materials have also been incorporated into dry fly design with much success by British anglers. At dusk and dawn and in cloudy periods, the proportion of ultraviolet rays in the sun's light is much higher as other rays are filtered out. Under ultraviolet light, fluorescent materials become very bright and may be seen as a different colour from that in normal daylight conditions. This gives a fly with a fluorescent floss body a dark grey to black silhouette depending on the colour of the floss, which makes the fly more visible to the fish. I still have to experiment with fluorescent floss in dry fly design, but given the success overseas I am certain that it would work in South African streams.

"Fly-fishing for wild trout on quiet waters must be one of the toughest and craziest ways to catch fish ever invented by man, as well as among the most frustrating and humiliating. Yet, when the omens are right, it can also be the most exciting and rewarding. I know; I've got a bad case of it."
Rober Traver.