

## Small stream terrestrials

by Ed Herbst

My fascination with terrestrial imitations started in the early nineteen eighties when I read the articles of Mike Weaver, a small stream specialist, in the British magazine, *Trout & Salmon*. What intrigued me was that Weaver fished a small, sunken beetle like a nymph. It had a peacock herl body and a wing case made of slip of crow feather. I was later to discover that a famous Australian flyfisher, Dick Wigram, had used an identical pattern from the thirties onwards. He called it the Riffle Beetle and he found it equally deadly. Tasmania's most famous guide, Noel Jetson recommends it unequivocally for streams and lakes.

I fished the sunken beetle for years with a poly yarn strike indicator until an exceptionally hot, mid-summer day on the Holsloot a few years ago when I realised that I had not seen a beetle for weeks but that ants were everywhere.

In spring, when streamside flowers are blooming in the Cape, the Brown Monkey Beetle, *Pachynema marginella*, among others is exceptionally prolific and, in Barkly East and Rhodes, at the same time, the willow trees are full of *Chrysomelidae* leaf beetles. My mid-summer, however, they have disappeared but the ants have not.

Looking at ants in a slant tank filled with water so that you can see them as the fish sees them, I realised that their legs are in constant motion, their antennae are almost as long as their legs and their wings project from the thorax, just behind the head and not in the middle of the body which is the way most imitations are tied.

The key to creating the desirable separation between abdomen and head which is such a characteristic of the ant silhouette is to dub the abdomen on top of the hook shank at the bend of the hook. To do this, use the technique which Gary Borger popularised with his floating nymph. You put an oval blob of dubbing on the thread and then, holding the thread vertically above the hook shank, you slide this ball of dubbing down to the hook shank and on top of it. You then use a modicum of dubbing at either end of this ball of dubbing to anchor it on top of the hook. This has the desirable consequence of not occluding the hook gape on small imitations.

For legs and antennae, I use one of the crinkled nylons used in salt water streamers like Wonder Hair and a technique popularised by US master fly tyer, John Betts. Take a single strand of Wonder Hair and bend it into a loop. Tie the loop in at the middle of the hook shank with the bend of the loop facing forward. Fold the loop backwards and tie it in at the point where you attached the Wonder Hair strand. You now have two trailing sections pointing backwards and two small loops facing the hook eye. Secure these loops with a few x turns of thread and a drop of superglue. Cut the two forward facing loops and you now have six legs, two facing backwards, two sideways and two forwards.

For the head of my ant I use the Czech-manufactured Jablonex glass beads that are available from Bead People shops in most cities – the 16/0 for size #16 and 18 ants and the



14/0 beads for bigger ants.

For wings, nothing beats stretched kitchen cling film like Glad Wrap. It looks just like real wings but is soft enough not to twist fine tippets.

A few years ago, just before Tom Sutcliffe was about to set off for Barkly East to fish the section of the Sterkspruit on Basie Vosloo's farm, Birkhall, I gave him an example of this ant pattern with a red glass bead as the head. One of our most common ants is *Caponotus fulvopilosi* - colloquially known as a "Balbyter" so I gave the pattern the alliterative name of "Basie's Birkhall Balbyter". His scepticism as he took the fly was tangible - but he did not remain a sceptic for long. Attached to the hook bend of a Zak Nymph, New Zealand -style, it turned a quiet day into a memorable one and the fish tore it to shreds.

I tie a deep-sinking version of this pattern, inspired by a passage in Vincent Marinaro's pioneering book on fishing small terrestrial patterns, *A Modern Dry Fly Code*, (Crown Publishers, New York, 1970). "Consider, for example, the startling fact that in two different examples of the same family, the black and red ant, there is tremendous variance, the former being absolutely opaque in the body and the latter glimmering and glowing as though lighted by some inner fire."

It is tied on an up eye sedge hook like the Tiemco 206BL or its Grip equivalent, the 14723BL. First tie a piece of lead wire along the top of the shank at the bend, then cover this with an egg-shaped oval of copper wire. Flatten this oval with needle-nosed pliers. This turns the fly upside down in the water and, again, does not occlude the hook gape. The head of the fly is a 1.5mm tungsten bead, the legs a few wisps of black CDC and wings are made of cling wrap. You can either just epoxy the copper wire or cover it with a layer of super glue and stick on the fuzz stripped from a peacock feather or a fine dubbing such as UV Ice Dub.

Floating beetles are deadly, but can be hard to see. Harry Murray, who guides on the small streams of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia says his "Flying Beetle", a deer hair pattern with a wing of white deer hair, tied caddis style at the head, is his most successful pattern. (<http://www.murraysflyshop.com/>).

I prefer foam and I realised that if I split the foam shellback, along its length, I could then use the two sections to cup a wing of cling film or ethafoam or a bright poly yarn post as a sighter.

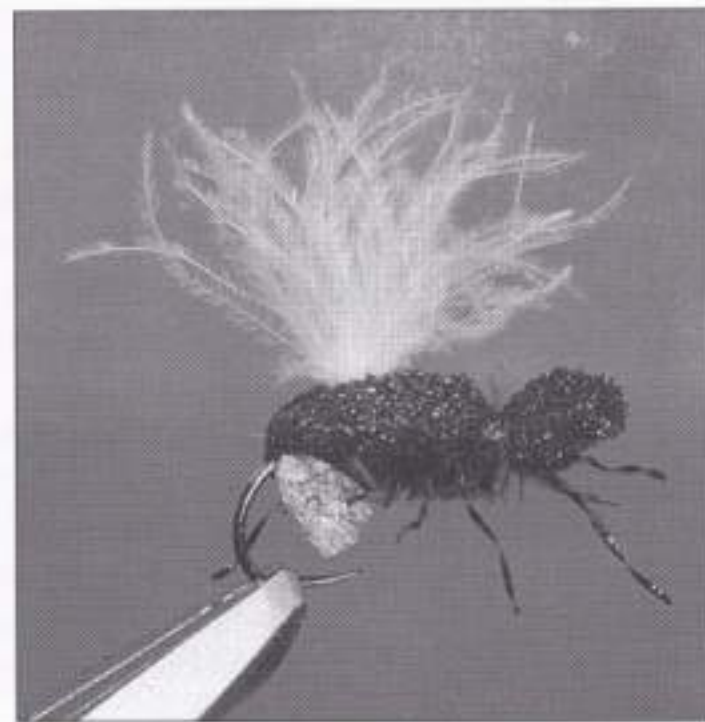
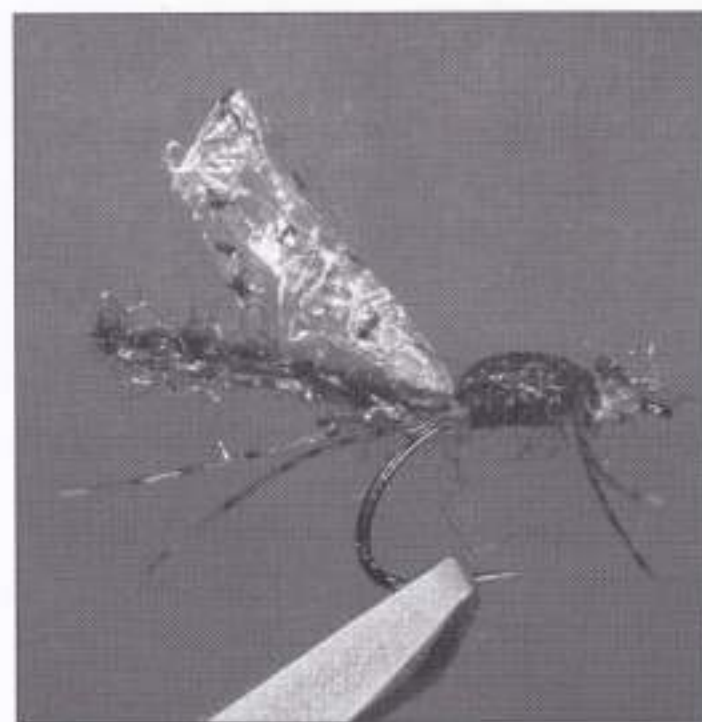
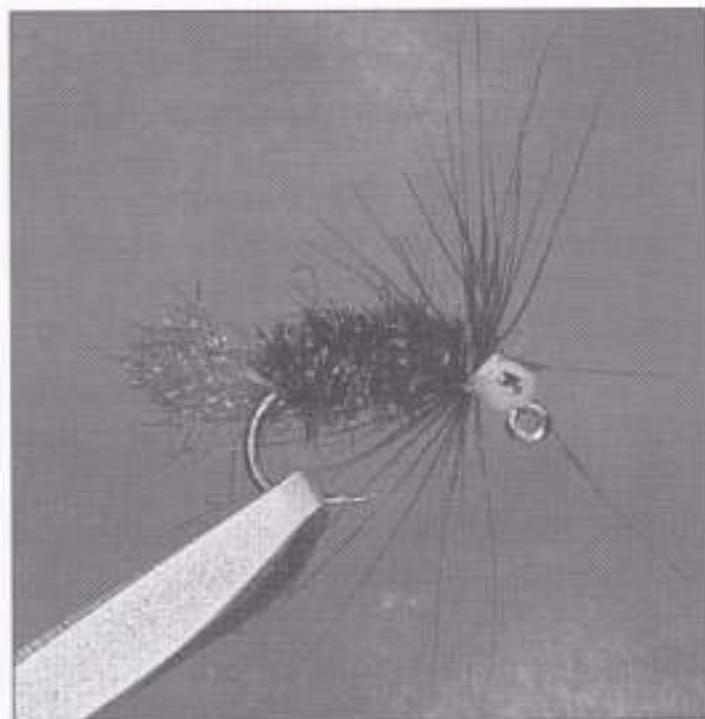
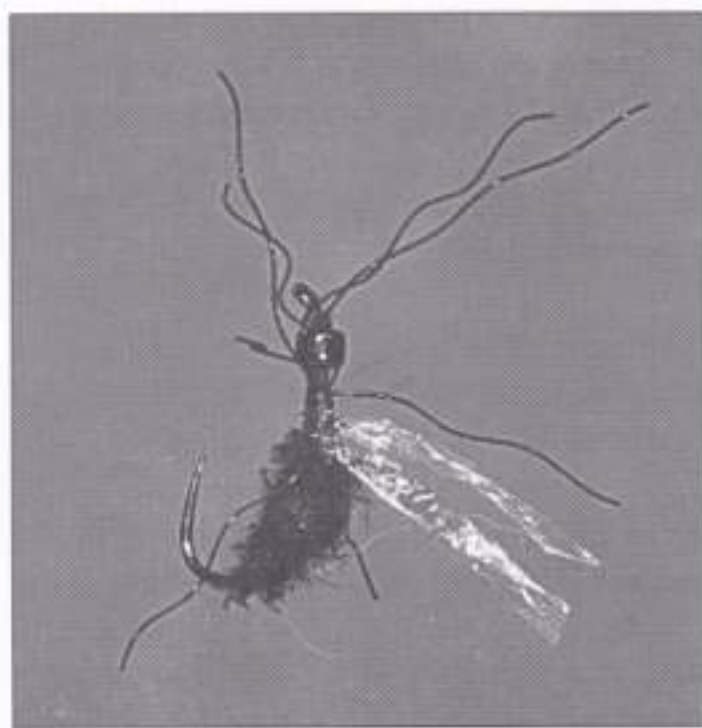
Legs on a floating foam beetle are a difficult choice. For intrinsic movement, I use "Bait Cotton" a thin, translucent lycra thread, available at tackle shops and used to attach soft baits to hooks for sea fishing. Speckled with different colour permanent markers, it almost glows when held up to the light. For implied movement, crystal flash is the answer because light ripples along its twisted length, giving the impression of thrashing legs. For slightly coloured water, the latter would be my first choice.

In meadow streams in the north eastern Cape which flow through open grass land, a rubber legged foam hopper is hard to beat, particularly when the storks are in evidence. They are not known in Afrikaans as Springkaanvoel for nothing! A hopper is the one dry



fly which can be twitched with confidence and it can be a successful antidote to dead-drift tedium.

I think I was the first to write about the inchworm invasion of the Noerth Eastern Cape highlands that occurred in the nineteen nineties and the fact that can often float for long distances causing yellowfish, in particular, to key on them selectively. Terrestrials offer both fly fishing success and the opportunity to constantly explore new fly tying avenues.



*The author's terrestrials, clockwise from top left: an ant pattern using "Super Hair" or "Frizz Fibre" legs and antennae, a glass bead for the head and cling film wings; a sunken Red Tag tied to fish hook point up on a weighted #16 Knappek jig hook; a split-back beetle with a white CDC puff feather as a sighter and a furred-bodied generic terrestrial imitation with cling-film wings, eyes made with Jablonex#16 beads and legs from "bait cotton".*