

THE SECRETARY'S LAMENT

By Maxie Holder

Editor's note: At the time this article was written the author was the personal assistant to Dr George Hughes, head of the Natal Parks Board. She is an extremely talented flyfisher in both fresh and saltwater.

You unlock the back door, the phone starts ringing, you rush through to the bedroom, pick it up and hear yourself say: "Dr Hughes' office, good afternoon." Okay, so it's time for a break.

It's early morning – a pair of crowned cranes calls in the distance. The dam is glassy calm and the mist lies suspended as you glide off in your canoe. And then you hear it – *glop!* – alongside the reeds. The fly lands quietly and you retrieve slowly, muttering "eat it" under your breath. And then you're telling that fish it's her lucky day as you slip her back gently into the water. And a desk-bound secretary starts to unwind! Personally I find flyfishing a river even more enjoyable because there is so much more to contend with – rifles, noisy runs, quiet pools, the odd fly-eating bush – and the odd puffadder to stand on!

And then there is ... drum roll ... saltwater flyfishing! Okay, so I'm biased.

Now, how many people can boast that they've hooked a "Vaalie" with a back cast? Can't claim it as a species – but if you crave the buzz, try Sodwana on the Natal north coast at peak holiday season. It's not difficult – flyfishers soon attract one or two puzzled spectators who will insist on standing behind you – right in the line of fire!

There was one amusing incident at Mapelane a few year's ago. The "manne" were into the Klipdrif at 5.30 in the morning when along came these two people carrying flyrods. "*Komaan, is julle deur die son getik – hier's geen forelle in die see!*" A short while later all became quiet in the other camp as they watched in amazement while the flies caught shad after shad.

But seriously, there is nothing on earth to beat the adrenalin rush when the sea boils as baitfish are thrashed by hungry Kingfish. The knees shake, you're all thumbs and you just about drown trying to reach the action with your fly. Suddenly your reel screams with the initial knuckle-smacking run and you watch panic-stricken as your new flyline disappears towards the horizon – 150yds, 200yds, and the swine hasn't changed into second gear yet!

But steady pressure gets the upper hand and you eventually regain enough backing to see your flyline slowly approaching home. Then the Kingfish spots this apparition, doesn't like what it sees – and it's off for round No. 2! Eventually you cradle this beautiful creature, plonk a "thank you" kiss on its snoot and revive it to go forth and pursue baitfish for another day.

The other exciting aspect of saltwater flyfishing is offshore, deep-sea flyfishing. It can be frenetic in the extreme, especially when the birds start diving and you spot a shoal of bonito frantically thrashing on the surface. Every now and then you get in a lucky shot, but for the most part you spend ages chasing these things. Very frustrating – they pop up, you rush over, they disappear, they pop up 300yds away, you rush over – repeat from "they pop up".

One incredible moment that I will never forget was having the opportunity to rub the "nose" of a whale shark. This magnificent creature decided to "adopt" us and remained right behind the boat's transom for quite a while. It didn't take long to notice the "passengers" and soon the flyrod notched up another species – a remora!

It's the last evening on holiday. Oh, you needn't check the calendar – the signs are all there. The wind has died down completely and the sea looks fantastic – the first time it's deigned to do so in six days. Grudgingly, you pack up the fly tying kit, wash down the rods and reels and head back for work – nursing bruised knuckles, "line burn" and fading bluebottle stings.

Maxie's Inhaca Fly (Offshore purposes)

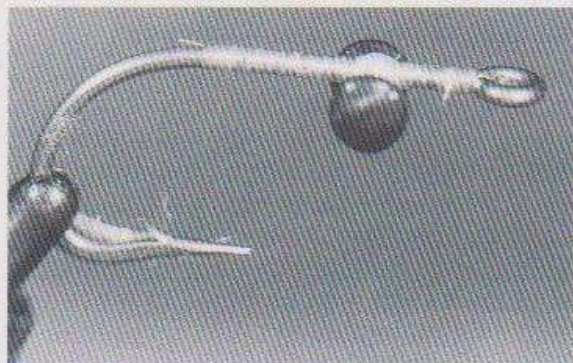
You will require the following:

- Short shank stainless steel hooks, size 1/10 for offshore
- White bucktail
- Lead dumbbell eyes



Maxie Holder with a bluefin Kingfish caught near Cape Vidal.

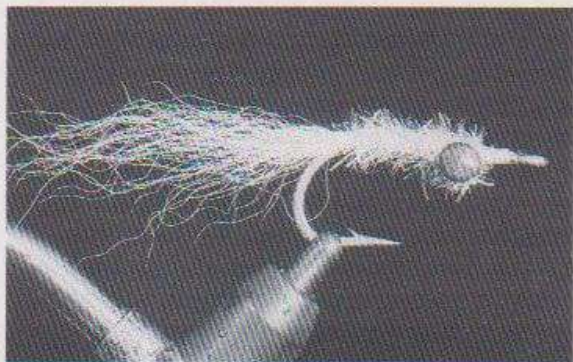
Tying Maxie's Inhaca Fly



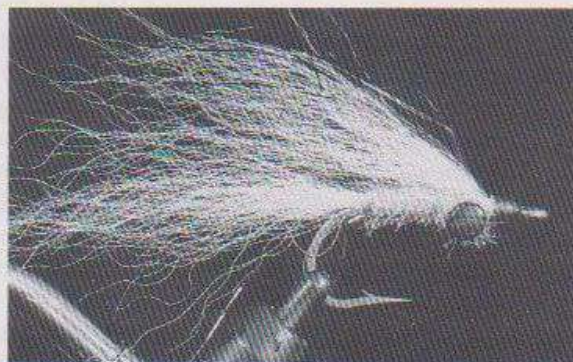
Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4

- Chartreuse chenille (ie ice or cactus chenille – I prefer cactus which has a better action, but it can be very difficult to come by, so I use ice chenille)
- Flashabou in pearl and green (ocean), or pale blue
- Thread for hook shank – pale green or chartreuse: hook eye – red

This fly is so simple, anyone matching my IQ should be able to tie it. There are four very basic steps:

- 1) Start process with inverted hook; wrap hook shank from eye to bend with thread (pale green or chartreuse) and tie lead eyes about 5 mm (1/4 inch) from hook eye. Secure with drop of varnish. Wind thread back to bend.
- 2) For those who fish with 2 wt rods, pinkies crook'd and coke in the hip flask, this is the moment to hire a block and tackle outfit from your nearest workshop. Turn hook correct way up and tie in white bucktail – sparse and not too long – roughly 1 1/2 x length of hook shank. Trim and tidy bucktail. I like to take bucktail right up to behind eyes – gives a bit more “body”.
- 3) Take thread back to hook bend and tie in chenille. Take thread to front of eyes. Now wind chenille along shank, do a figure of eight around eyes, with a couple of turns in front of eyes. Build up nose slightly with thread – this will ensure that step 4 sticks up.
- 4) Now tie in white bucktail in front of eyes – again very sparse; length to be slightly shorter than length of tail. Then tie in 10 strands of pearl flashabou, followed by about 10 strands of green or pale blue flashabou. Try to splay darker colour over the “forehead” – tie off with red thread. Varnish.

This strange-looking fly (a cross between my Dog's Breakfast and a Clouser) was designed up at Inhaca as a result of not having anything in my flybox to sink very quickly to where the action seemed to be. It also complements a fast sinking flyline (obviously using a shorter leader) by lessening the problem of having the flyline way down at a respectable level with a fly gasping to catch up. It has a peculiar “desperate” action when stripped in fast and has accounted for many decent gamefish. I'm ashamed to add that it even attracted “boots” on one occasion (“triggerfish” to the unenlightened)].

A final word of warning. Great care should be exercised when double-hauling this fly, especially with a 10 wt rod, because it is not fun to have the back of one's head seriously damaged by this monstrosity.

But then, Africa is not for sissies.

■ *Editor's note: This article first appeared in the Natal Parks Board staff magazine, The Rubbing Post.*