



THE HOVER DRAGON NYMPH

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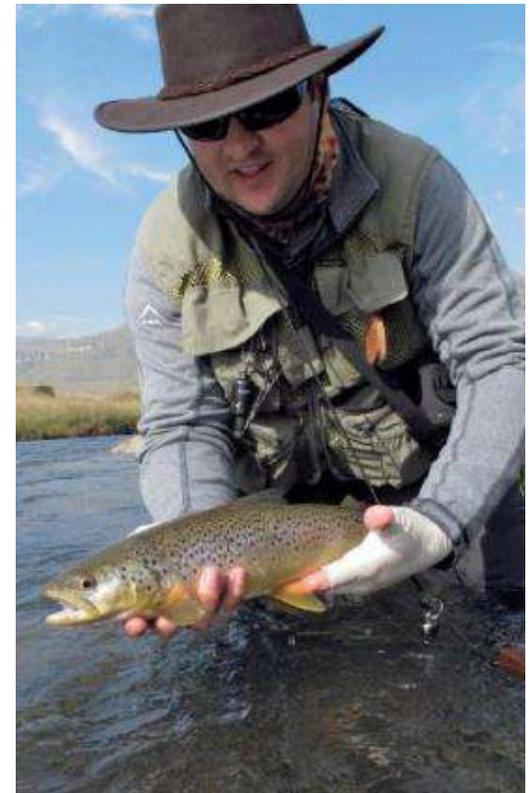
A the son of a diplomat, I was born in Shanghai, China, and my boyhood years were spent in many different parts of the world. My first angling memory was at the age of five on the coast of Japan – a broken arm prevented me from swimming and my father took me fishing instead.

My fly-fishing life, however, only began when I was 19 and living and studying in Brussels, Belgium. I learnt all about the game from Al McClane's monthly column in the American magazine *Field & Stream* and tried out his techniques on an open field near any army barracks where I kindly explained to passers-by that no, I was not fishing for grass carp. I managed to more or less master the double haul by watching my fellow countryman, Albert Godart, winning each and every casting competition hands down. Thanks to my non-fishing parents, who very kindly took their annual holidays wherever I recommended them to take me, I got some good fly-fishing experience in Sweden, Bavaria and Austria. Fly-tying was simply not the in thing in those days. That was going to happen to me much later. In Iran of all places.

It was still in the days of the Shah. Thanks to the British and American presence in that very beautiful country, I was able to land an unusual but more interesting job guiding outdoor sportsmen and photographers on trout streams, pie waters, waterfowl havens, woodcock wintering areas and mountains rich in Urial sheep, ibex, deer, wolves and much more.

The Iranian Nature Conservation Service was run largely by scientists from America. One of them was Barry Nehring, today a well-known fisheries biologist in Colorado. Barry had worked his way through college tying flies and mainly one very basic, very simple, all-purpose and deadly fly, which he modestly called the No-Name Nymph. Barry became (to me at least, and still is) the world's greatest fly-fisher when the Shabanou, that is the Shah's wife, ordered him to harvest 100 trout for a dinner she was planning.

The very beautiful Lar River below Mount Damavand, the highest in Iran, held a very fine head of indigenous brown trout. It provided exceptional breeding conditions and was thus permanently overstocked. This was where Barry took



his electro shocker to acquire the requested trout. Upon arrival, however, it failed. So Barry and the No-Name Nymph, by order of the Empress, caught 100 pan-size brownies that day.

Barry ordered my first fly-tying kit for me from Jim Poor, a fly tackle dealer in a small town in Colorado, and I still own a few matching pairs of turkey wing quills in the original Jim Poor packaging. My wife, Brigitte, just recently caught a bass on a Muddler Minnow I tied for her from those feathers. I have kept, from my early beginnnings at the vice, a tendency to tie the simplest of flies, but also the most durable. And, when it comes to nymphs, I sometimes try to keep count of the number of fish that have fallen to a single fly. My Hover Dragon Nymph is an example in point.

It needs to be tied to last, but it also needs to sink very slowly, on an even keel. It was the much-missed Keith Miller who was behind my ideas on the subject. Keith, who tragically drowned when his float tube deflated on a trout dam in KwaZulu-Natal, used to keep nymphs in a fish tank to study their movement. He told me that the dragonfly nymphs always sank, but very slowly, whenever they stopped expelling water from their rear ends. That’s where the term “Hover Dragon comes from. They fly cannot truly hover, but it needs to sink slowly and steadily whenever you retrieve is interrupted.

They buoyancy and the stability of the fly are achieved with the use of toe puff material, the stuff that shoe manufacturers use in shaping the front end of a shoe from the inside. You must cut a coffin-shaped section out of your sheet to toe puff material, of about two-thirds the length of your hook shank, and lash it onto the hook with its wide end to the rear. This material is buoyant and has a rough surface into which your tying thread can get a firm purchase when lashing it to the hook shank. This insures against the damage that a trout-s teeth can easily do to your end product. Lots of Super Glue and tying thread will ensure that this



base is properly secured to the shank of your hook. The famous fly-tyer Barry Kent was good enough to supply me with a drawing of the procedure to follow when preparing a piece of toe puff for the tying of flat-bodied flies.

Various types of dubbing can be used – synthetic or natural. My preference is olive hare’s ear fur with lots of guard hairs. The





dubbing must be wound on in several fine layers, of which the lower ones should be anchored to the toe puff base with Super Glue.

Eyes are always an important feature in the appearance of all Odonata imitations. I have used many types of eyes (but never weighted ones, of course), and finally settled for a material called Edge Bright. The original distributors of Edge Bright were a mom and pop shop which no longer exists. It is now being distributed by Hareline. The colours of the eyes that I prefer are either green or hot orange, but I could never tell which colour was the better one.

My method of applying Edge Bright eyes to a hook shank is as follows: you have covered the rear two-thirds of the hook shank with your short tail, your fat well-dubbed body and now have the front third of your hook shank free for the eyes, legs and head.

Cut a thin strip of Edge Bright (3 mm wide by 25 mm long). Lash it firmly to the top and middle of the bare hook shank with figure-of-eight turns. You now have equal lengths of the makings of your eyes sticking out at right angles to the hook shank. Fold in and lash down, one at a time, each protruding end of your strip of Edge Bright. Snip off excess eye material as you lash the bits into position.

You now pluck a few fibres from a saddle hackle and tie them onto both sides of the hook between the eyes and body, pointing outwards. Cover your tying thread with dubbing and then figure-of-eight all visible parts of the hook shank, the lashed-in eyes, the hackle legs and, possibly, and optional glitter or two of Krystal Flash. Whip finish and you are done.

Various retrieves can be used when fishing the Hover Dragon, but the basic and most reliable one seems to be long, slowish pulls followed by pauses of varying duration. Each pull brings the legs alongside the body and each pause causes them to flutter back out in a very realistic manner.



The discarded shucks of dragon flies as they hatch from their aquatic nymphal form into the adult terrestrial insect.

Dressing

Hook: Long-shank hook size 6-10

Thread: 6/0 pre-waxed, colour to match dubbing

Tail: Very short hackle fibres the same colour as the body

Body: Toe puff material cut to shape plus blend of brown/olive hare's fur with guard hairs

Legs: Saddle hackle fibres sticking out to the sides of the fly between the head and the body. A bit of Krystal Flash can be added to enhance the perception of movement in this area

Eyes: Edge Bright – green or hot orange