

Dry flies with life vests

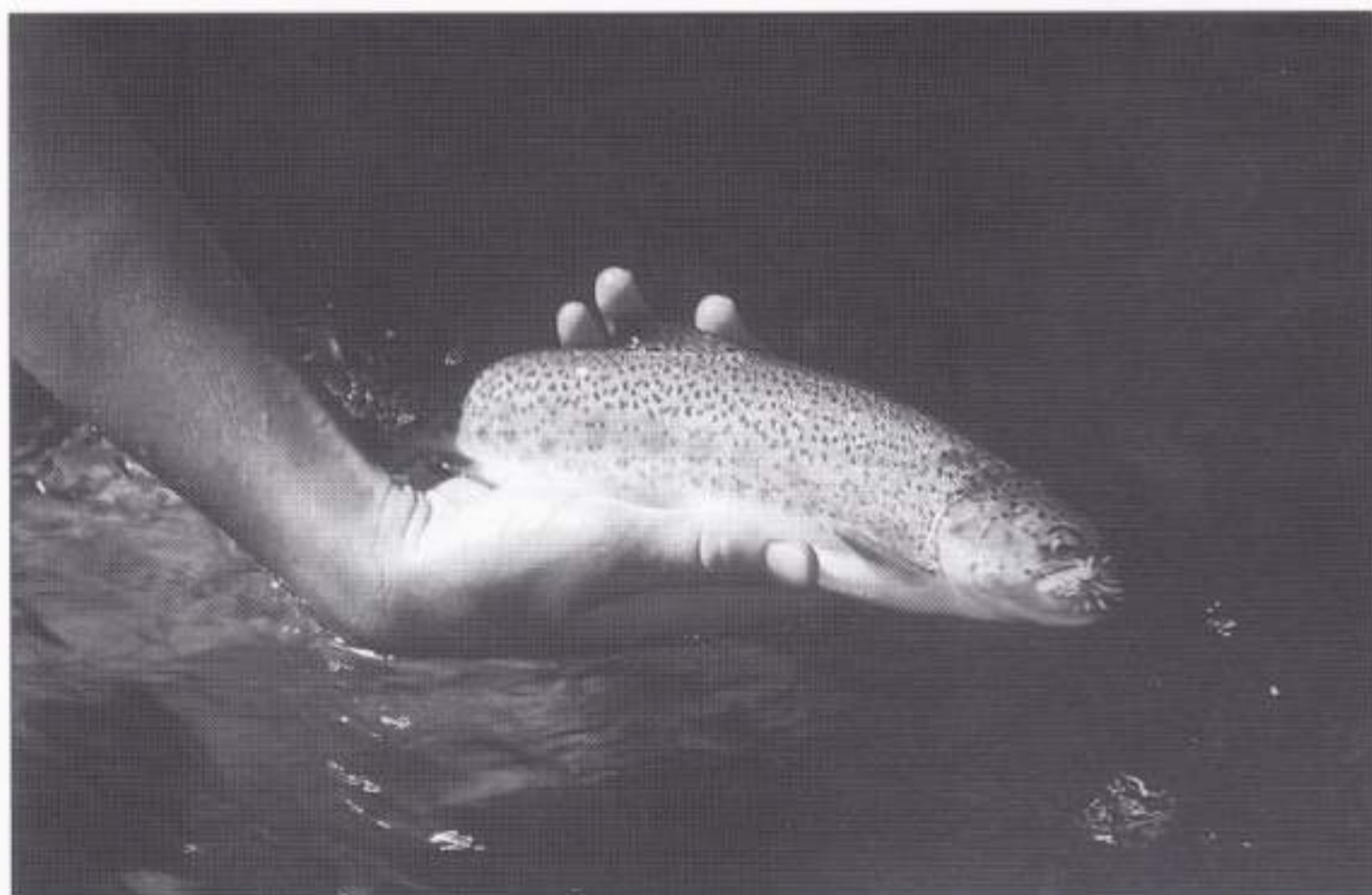
by Eddie Gerber

Being a Halford convert and a total dry fly junkie has its highs and lows. Seeing a fish rise to accept your fly must be the ultimate high and staring in disbelief at the price of a premium cape or saddle, the biggest low. Enter the "no hackle revolution"! The DDD as tied by Tom Sutcliffe with a spun hair collar, the G&B low-floater of Gavin Grapes and Jimmy Baroutsos and Al Caucci's Comparadun are widely used and extremely effective examples. These patterns are easy to tie, durable, offer very good flotation and fish love them. Art Schecks' pattern has the same qualities!

Art Scheck, an American fly fisher and editor of the *Southern Anglers' Journal* calls his pattern a Spundun, a reference to the spun deer hair that forms their wing and thorax. In profile, a spundun resembles the Comparadun but the two flies are built in entirely different ways. The butts of the wing hair on the Comparadun are tied down by thread, adding bulk and weight to the fly. On the Spundun the butt ends of the deer hair wing surround the front of the body to form a plump, buoyant thorax that acts as a miniature life vest. Spunduns have only three components: tails, body and deerhair wing. It is a simple pattern that progresses from one end of the hook to the other. They can be tied to represent all but the smallest mayflies and they eliminate the "expense" of the dry fly hackle. When treated with a good floatant, Spunduns float for a long time.

On a recent trip to Dwarsberg, the farm of Ernst and Anchen Stofberg on the Holsloot stream, I arrived to find it discoloured and a cold front with rain had moved in overnight. The following morning saw the same conditions and after two hours on the river, and numerous changes in tactics and fly patterns, I decided to try the Spundun. This was the first time I was to use this pattern and it changed what I believed would end in a blank day, to one of those unforgettable days when the gods smile on you and it all comes together. Man, did I bless Art Scheck! By noon 18 fish up to 18" had been landed on the same fly. Even though the fly now looked more like an emerger with most of the wing chewed off, it kept taking fish. On a different section of the river in the afternoon I took a further 15 fish, the first four on the same fly I used that morning. Twenty two fish on one fly says a lot for the durability and buoyancy of the pattern. I found that by rinsing off any fish slime, drying it between a folded tissue and one or two false casts, it stayed perfectly buoyant. On numerous occasions I have had fish refuse a high riding hackled pattern, cut off the bottom of the hackle with the clippers, cast to the same fish and the same fly is taken without hesitation. All the abovementioned patterns sit low on the water and I believe this is one of the factors that make them so successful.

The next test for the Spundun came shortly afterwards on a very low and clear Witte river in Bainskloof. Due to very poor summer rainfall, the water was extremely low and clear, causing the normally very wary and skittish browns in this challenging river to become paranoid. The Witte is known as the "character building river" in the Western Cape and offers good sight-fishing opportunities so, in most cases, the fish's reaction to the fly can be closely observed. Even under the difficult conditions mentioned, if my approach and



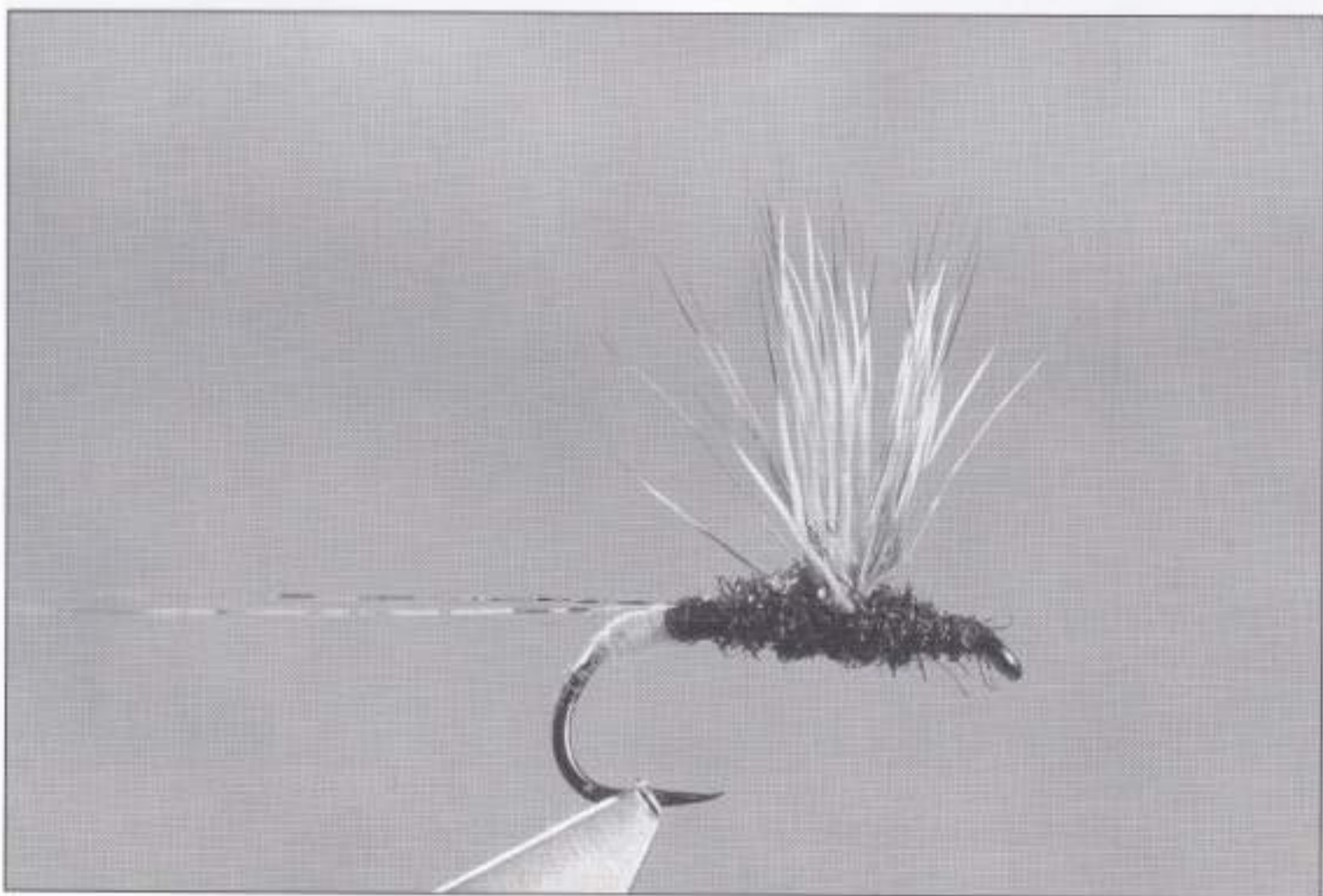
Success on the Ho;sloot with a Spundun.



A Smalblaar rainbow seduced by Eddie Gerber's tying of the Spundun .



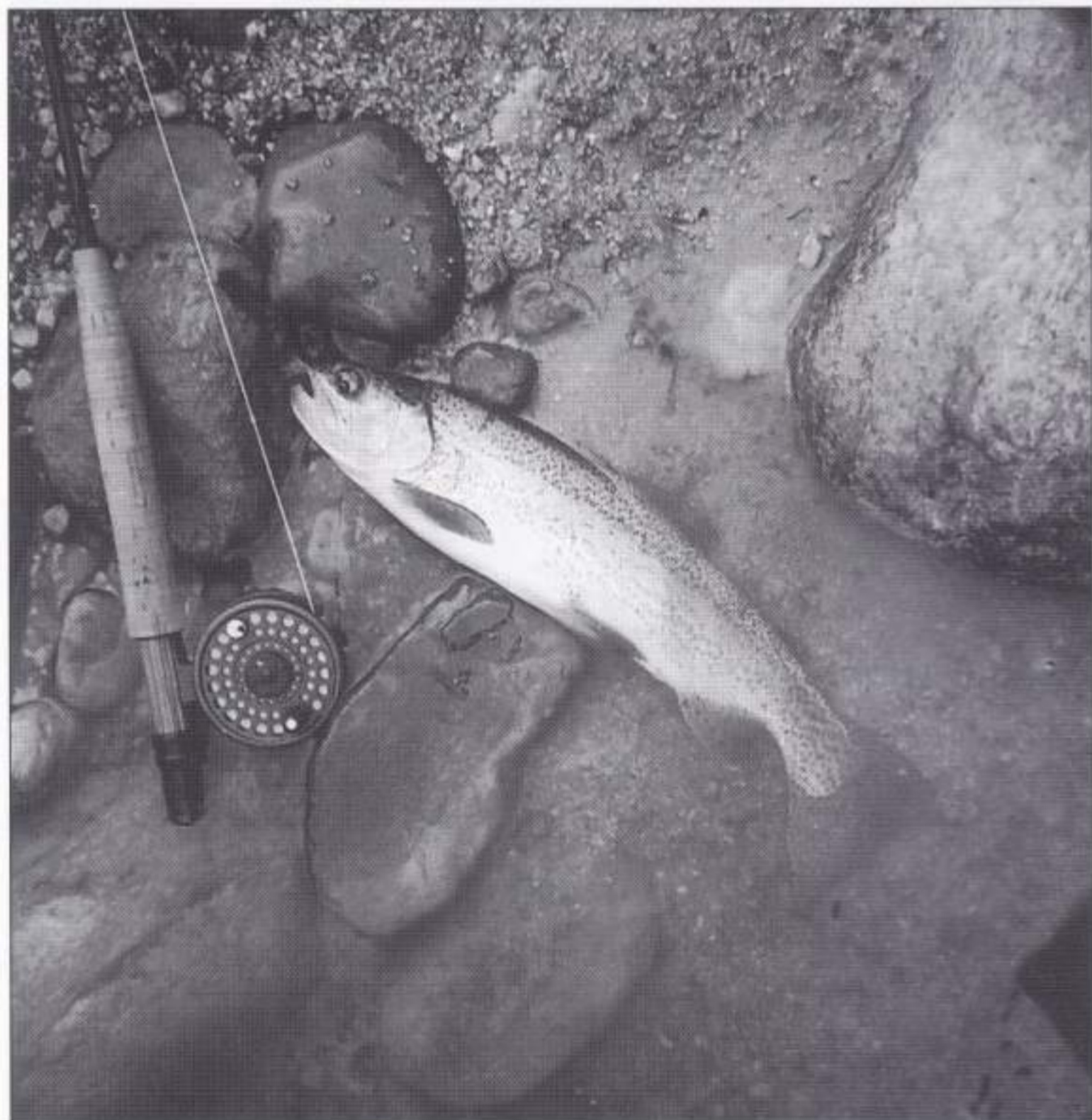
Eddie Gerber's tying of Art Scheck's Spundun showing the "life vest" beneath the hook shank that improves buoyancy and replicates the mayfly thorax.



The Comparadun from which the Spundun is derived. The microfibbet tails are separated by fluorescent orange floss which imitates the mayfly egg sac and provides an additional trigger point.

presentation were good, the Spundun was taken, while some more popular patterns were refused. Normally, I would use #18-22 flies in such conditions, but the fact that the Spunduns, even in #12 were taken readily, shows what a good pattern this is.

I have since used this pattern to great effect on the Smalblaar and have found that it will seduce reluctant "big" fish in deep, slow water as well as being deadly on the fast runs or riffles. I am also looking forward to using the Spundun on the rivers in Mpumalanga during a forthcoming trip to the Vaal river for yellowfish, where I'm sure they will prove just as effective.



A Holsloot rainbow that succumbed to Art Scheck's mayfly design.

Tying the Spundun:

The parts:

As on most dry flies, stiff, shiny hackle fibres make good tails for Spunduns.

Suitable fibres can come from large neck hackles (including those from cheap imported rooster capes) and strung saddle feathers that don't have too much web. Other materials such as calf tail, moose mane, and on smaller patterns, microfibrets can be used.

For body material, dubbing, peacock herl, stripped quills and pheasant tail fibres can be used. Any dubbing suitable for other dry flies can be used for the Spundun's body. Soft fine deer hair, normally called "coastal deer" or "comparadun hair" is normally used for the wing and thorax. On our streams I've used elk and klipspringer with equal success.

The easiest way to tie up Spundun patterns is to copy the tails and bodies of established patterns and combine them with appropriate shades of deer hair (match your local hatches). The spundun is also a very versatile searching pattern. I find tying the pattern down to #18 practical and in natural brown, olive and tan, they work for me. Be a thinking angler and try your own variations. Tie them as scruffy as Tom Sutcliffe likes his DDD, as tiny as Ed Herbst's or as neat as Dean Riphagen's flies. Fish love them and so will you. If you want to tie an emerger, replace the hackle-fibre tails with a trailing shuck of grey polypropylene or antron yarn. The wings of an emerger pattern should be slightly shorter and sparser than the wing of the dun pattern. A reasonably waterproofed Spundun will fool fish and float all day, as well as stop you drooling over dry fly capes that you can't afford anyway.

Tying tips.

Leave the front quarter of the hook shank bare until it's time to add the deer hair as this makes spinning the hair a lot easier. Build up a good head of tying thread, as this is what props up the Spundun's deer hair wing.



Ode to the Sedge

"My last words on the Grannom cannot be other than a eulogy. For how can I fail to feel an affection for this gentle insect in whose delectable company I have passed so many hours? From its very birth I watched it, clumsily and awkwardly, engage in tumbling games with its brothers and sisters; then, through its infancy and maturity, nestling in its case, harming no other living creature, but waiting patiently and trustingly for the victuals upon which its life depends to be brought to its threshold; to its breath-taking metamorphosis from an aquatic animal to a fairy-like creature of the air and, finally, to its lonely death in obscurity. All these things I have seen, and to me, if to none other, the Grannom will take its place alongside its more renowned contemporaries as one of the great flies of the fly fisher's world, calling me each year from my winter wearied rest to taste once more the joys of the golden days of the fly fisher's season." David Jacques, *Fisherman's Fly*,

A&C Black, London, 1965.