

THE G & B LOW-FLOATER - A FLY FOR ALL SEASONS

by Dean Riphagen

When I first fished the streams of the Western Cape several years ago, it was invariably with nymphs and high-floating dry flies.

Nymphs duped the majority of the largest fish I caught, and in many cases they outfished the dry flies in terms of the numbers of fish caught and released. Despite the fact that high-floating dries took many fish, I was somewhat disappointed with their fish-deceiving qualities.

The clear waters of the western Cape, such as the Jan du Toit's and Witte, offer South African anglers a unique opportunity of often seeing trout rise to the surface to take both natural and artificial flies. This to me was not only exciting, but it also gave me the opportunity of observing trout at close quarters. What was most interesting when fishing to visible fish with high-floating dry flies was the number of rejections I experienced, particularly in flat, slow water. In fast water, it is unusual to experience refusals to dry flies, because the trout has only a limited time in which to accept or reject the artificial. In slow water, on the other hand, a trout can inspect a pattern at its leisure, and it is on such water that anglers experience the majority of refusals.

Several years ago, I spent a memorable day alone on the Witte during a mid-week break in my university exams. It was not memorable as a result of the numbers of fish I caught, but rather due to the capture of a large brown which I had tangled with on two previous occasions. It was an experience which gave me further insights into the value of keeping a wide range of low-floating dry flies in my arsenal of trout patterns.

I had worked my way upstream from the old hotel site, and had reached a position where the Forestry hut first becomes visible. The glide in question almost always holds a good fish, and I had landed several respectable specimens from it on previous occasions.

When I first caught sight of the glide, a small dimple in midstream caught my attention and I immediately froze. A cockfish of about 15 inches was feeding hard in the upper water layers, and a tag in its adipose fin signified a previous capture. He was easily visible in the clear currents, and I watched fascinated as he held his position, eating every edible morsel that drifted over his lie. He looked an easy target and indeed was, taking my artificial on the first drift. I bungled the strike, however, and pricked him, causing him to bolt for cover.

I wrote the episode off to experience and continued on upstream. This meant having to wade through the glide, and as I reached the far bank, a sixth sense caused me to stop and look upstream.

The upper section of the glide was guarded by two large sun-bleached rocks which funnelled the water into a deep, powerful riffle. In the broken water at the base of the right hand rock, a dull shape hugged the bottom, and the shade thrown onto the river by the rock made it difficult to make out the object clearly. I watched the area for several minutes, and eventually the outline of a large trout began to take shape. The fish was lying in a holding, rather than a feeding lie, and the currents were so slow at the base of the rock that it barely had to move to retain its position.

Unhitching the heavily hackled, fast-water dry, I pitched it out ahead of the fish's lie, ensuring that the leader and tippet fell away from the main current tongue, thereby avoiding any unforeseen drag. The fly drifted with the current towards the trout and I waited expectantly for the fish to move off the bottom to intercept the pattern.

Slowly the shape detached itself from the bottom and angled up towards the surface. The fly had floated into a flat, slick section of water on the downstream side of the rock, and was in fact no longer moving downstream at all. The brown, a magnificent specimen in pre-spawning colours, eased slowly up to the fly and began a lengthy inspection. After it was satisfied that the fly was a fraud, it turned and slowly cruised back to its lie. I tried several further drifts over the area, but it was obvious that the pattern was failing to interest the trout.

I removed the fly from the tippet and clinched on another high-riding dry fly. The fly was in fact a Royal Wulff, and I hoped it would achieve better results than the small yellow-bodied Humpy now drying on the fleece patch on my vest.

The Royal Wulff met with a similar refusal, and it was now evident to me that a change in tactics or fly was in order. I was convinced that all aspects of my angling strategy were correct, so the fault, I thought, had to lie with the artificial. I attached the Wulff to the fleece patch along with the Humpy, and once again opened my fly box. Lying in an untidy mass in the corner compartment of the box were several patterns which were later to become known to anglers who used them as G and B's. This fly, named after its originators, Gavin Grapes and Jimmy Baroutsos, is a pattern that, to all intents and purposes, resembles the American Devil Bug or Cooper Bug. These artificials have a wide following amongst anglers around the world and, although the G & B in many ways looked very similar to the American pattern, it has, over the years, been modified to deal with the faster freestone waters of South Africa.

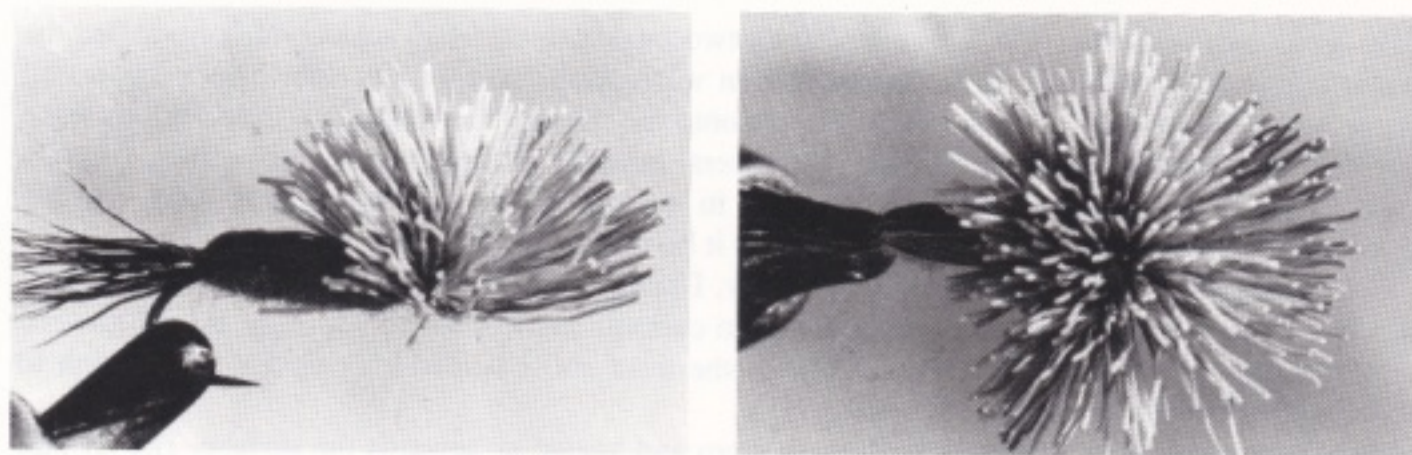
I removed an orange-bodied G & B from the box and tied it on. The brown was still visible on the bottom of the stream, but after several refusals to other patterns, I was not particularly confident of the artificial's chances of fooling it.

I rubbed some silicone paste into the deer hair fibres of the fly and slowly worked line out. The bushy pattern was difficult to turn over properly with the four weight rod, but I was lucky with my first cast and the pattern landed softly on the water upstream of the fish. As soon as the pattern drifted into the fish's window of vision, it moved off the bottom, raised itself to the surface and intercepted the fly as it drifted downstream.

The brown hovered inches below the fly and followed the pattern for several feet downstream. Then suddenly it quietly closed the gap between itself and the fly. It took the pattern with a clearly audible gulp, and I tightened up as the fish turned down towards its lie. When the trout felt the bite of the tiny fly, it panicked, racing across the stream in a frantic bid for freedom. Once it had reached the sanctuary of the faster water in mid-stream, it boiled on the surface and then shot downstream, taking several yards of line in its initial run.

Further wild runs followed, but it was only a matter of time before the fish was subdued, and soon I was sliding the fish into the net. She was a beautiful hen in prime condition, and I admired her beauty for several minutes before removing the hook and easing her back into the current. At 20 inches and three and a quarter pounds, she was reaching trophy proportions for the Witte watershed, and was a classic example of the quality of angling that can be expected on this stream as a result of catch-and-release management.

Gavin Grapes and Jimmy Baroutsos were the two CPS committee members responsible for the implementation of catch-and-release regulations on the Witte several years ago, and it was on this stream that Jimmy demonstrated to me the versatility and fish-catching qualities of this fly. The fly was initially fashioned after the Cooper Bug and Devil Bug, simple deer hair patterns that have proved their effectiveness on every continent. When I first met these anglers, they were using a



Side and top views of the G & B Low-Floater

pattern very similar to the Cooper and Devil Bugs, but their pattern evolved over the years to suit our fast freestone streams, and in particular, the streams of the western Cape. By flaring the single bunch of deer hair at the head, and then adding further bunches of flared deer hair, a very effective dry fly was created. Unlike many traditionally hackled dry flies, the G & B uses no hackle, and does not ride above the water's surface. Instead, the pattern floats low in the surface film, presenting the trout with the unbroken, life-like body silhouette.

Probably the most interesting feature of this and similar flies is that they float extremely well, even in very fast water. Most fly fishermen believe that because a fly floats low in the water, it will quickly become swamped in rough currents. The G & B uses hollow deer hair fibres in its construction, and the deer hair, which is clipped into an umbrella shape, provides a wide surface area to float the body and hook. These two factors combine to make the fly a useful addition to any freestone angler's assortment of dry fly patterns.

Although there are several conflicting theories concerning the use of different colours in fly patterns, I firmly believe that the colour of a fly can, and often does, make a difference to the angler's catch rate. I have often used a fly in a certain colour with mediocre results, only to change its colour with much greater success, even though the pattern's size and shape had not changed at all. My most successful colours when fishing the G & B were always orange and chartreuse, particularly where brown trout were my quarry. Although I tie the pattern in a wide variety of colours, these two colours always seem to perform better than patterns tied with body colours such as yellow, brown and black.

Like most dry flies that I fish on rivers and streams, I generally like to fish the G & B casting upstream, allowing the pattern to float naturally downstream with the current. Dead-drifts are almost always the most successful technique to take trout in our rivers and streams, and I have seldom experienced takes to this pattern when it was dragging, or when it was skating across the current. Invariably, when you do take trout on patterns that are dragging in, or on the current, the fish are usually the smaller inhabitants of the water. Anglers, particularly those who ply the fast western Cape waters, should familiarise themselves with techniques such as reach casts, aerial mends, stack mends and the like, that help one avoid drag when fishing to slower currents over faster ones.

Mike Lawson, the famous fly tier from St Anthony, Idaho, says that were he forced to choose only one dry fly for all his spring creek angling, it would be a black beetle. Were I forced to choose only one dry fly for all my dry fly fishing on South African rivers and streams, it would, without question, be a G & B Low-Floater. It has taken some of the most selective trout I have encountered, and it is an extremely easy pattern to tie.

Hook: Tiemco 100 or similar, #10 - #16.

Thread: 6/0 prewaxed, colour to match body.

Tail: Deer or elk hair.

Body: Synthetic dubbing, my favourite colours being orange, chartreuse, black, brown and yellow.

Overbody: Deer hair.

Head: Deer hair.