The Goose Biot Micro Caddis

Tim Rolston

To me, fly tyers go through phases. The first is that we lack confidence in our own patterns and rely on commercial ones for the most part. The second is where we lack confidence in the commercial ties and rely on our own, although still adhering to common norms and fixed ‘recipes’.

Finally, one arrives, at least hopefully, at a point where one has the skills required and the confidence to take the road less travelled - to add and subtract from known patterns to suit one’s own requirements and even to ‘invent’ flies, if that is indeed possible.

To me it is at this point where one has the greatest freedom and will find the most pleasure. To my mind many commercial patterns are overdressed, both in the numbers of materials as well as bulk. The natural insects that the fly tyer seeks to copy are wondrously delicate, subtle and yet complex creatures of the stream.

I personally believe it is in the capturing of that delicacy that the key to success on the water lies. Nobody can create an exact copy of a natural insect on a hook. What I seek to do, is to end up with a delicate, sparse and functional caricature, with an essence of beauty and the illusion of life contained within it.

As a guide it is also important to me that they are not too complex or costly to manufacture - so if a client hooks up in a tree I am not forced to choose between a long swim and ritual seppuku. I think that good dry flies are like good lingerie, they should be slightly transparent, minimalistic, pretty, discardable and at least ‘appear’ edible.

On the nutrient-poor and crystal-clear streams of the Western Cape, the fly angler need not become overly fussy about specifically matching the hatch for much of the time. The trout tend to be eclectic in their eating habits and, barring the occasional fixation on a flying ant fall, it is presentation and fly size more than pattern that is crucial to success.

However, catch and release regulations have over the years brought about changes to the behaviour of the fish in that they have become far more wary of larger patterns and a little more selective in terms of no longer grabbing anything on the water. They seem to have learned that natural insects are delicate and sparse creations of nature, and will thus forego consumption of overdressed, large or dense imitations, particularly when there are numbers of natural insects on the water.

One of the more prolific hatches which can occur several times in a season is the emergence of large numbers of black microcaddis. There is also a similar hatch of tan varieties at different times. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this caddis hatch is that, unlike the mayflies, the caddis live in their adult form for considerably longer and are able to at least drink to sustain themselves over several days. This can result in the rocks being literally covered in these minute 5mm-long insects.

It therefore isn't the emergence itself so much as the longevity of the caddis flies that seems to be important.

The insects can be seen crawling on the rocks and, I suspect, dipping close to the water to take the occasional sip. They thus run an obvious risk of being swept away in the current. They are there for days and sometimes weeks on end and the trout know all about them. While the fish will undoubtedly consume other food during these periods, they seem to be particularly aware of the presence of the caddis and will readily take a well-constructed copy. The problem is not simply to copy such a small and delicate fly, but to do so in a manner which makes the artificial at least somewhat visible to the angler.

The Goose Biot Micro Caddis wasn't so much invented as evolved over time as a solution to this emergence and proliferation of adults on the rocks and ultimately in the food chain.

I have, for a long time, been a fan of parachute style patterns. They tend to land the right way up more consistently than standard Catskill or Halfordian ties with their vertically-wound hackles, and they also don't have the same propensity for twisting light tippets. Light tippets are a definite advantage to the angler on these catch and release waters and I rarely fish heavier than 7X, even with larger patterns.

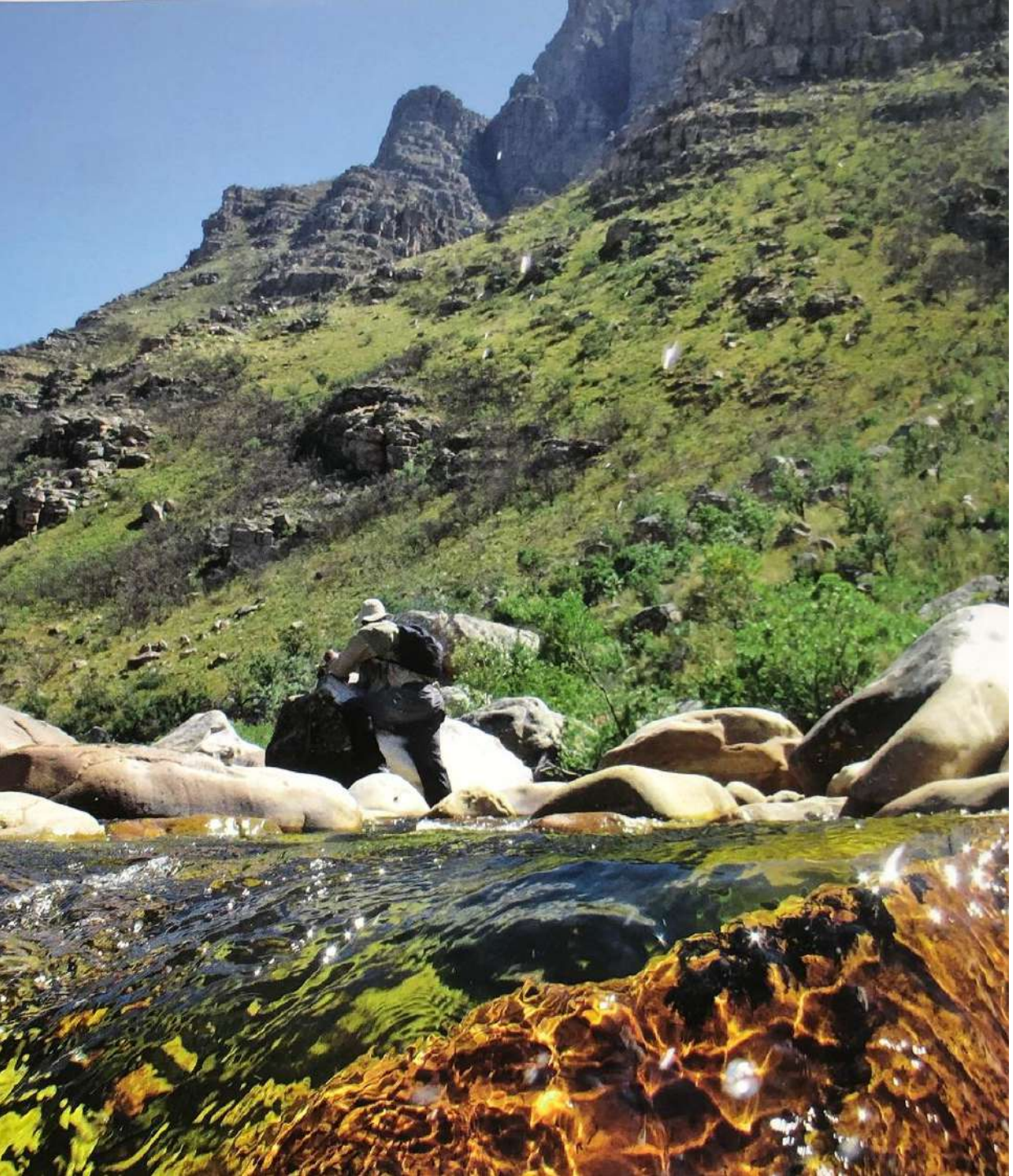
The parachute style requires less hackle to float the fly because, in my opinion, more of the fibres are in contact with the water. This provides the fly tyer with the option of creating more sparse, delicate and transparent imitations which are, in turn, more readily accepted by the fish. Finally, the wing post provides a visual clue which enables to the angler to spot the imitation when it lands and, thereafter, to track its drift. This is particularly critical when casting to fish eating small insects trapped in the surface film - if you aren't watching carefully, the rise of the trout can be missed entirely.

The initial version of the Goose Biot Micro Caddis therefore had a white wing-post of Poly Yarn or

Tim Rolston, fly-fishing guide, casting instructor and author, is well-known for designing simple and effective patterns. His Goose Biot Micro Caddis is a typical example of his innovative tying.

calf tail fibres, a dubbed body of black superfine dry fly dubbing and a tent shaped wing formed from a slip of black feather fibre, usually crow or guinea fowl. It proved tremendously effective but, as imitation of the naturals frequently required patterns down to size 20, it was troublesome to tie in really small sizes.

In fact, there appears to be more than one black caddis species prevalent on the streams near Cape Town and the sizes vary from 18 down to 22. The feather wing-slip versions are fine for the larger imitations, but problematic when going really small. A solution was found by using reversed goose biots as the wing. The pattern itself is so small and so sparse that the classically tent shaped wings of the caddis



represent, to my mind, a key trigger for the fish and the biots imitated these perfectly. The latest versions of the pattern even forego the dubbing on the body and rely solely on the tying thread to form the abdomen.

There are a few tricks to tying this caddis effectively and now all of my parachute flies are tied using a combination of techniques gleaned from a variety of sources ranging from Skip Morris and Hans Van Klinken to members of the Italian national team at the annual FIPS-Mouche World Fly Fishing Championships.

The post is tied in first, and these days I use Poly Yarn in white or grey almost exclusively. The use of the artificial fibres allows tying in the post by looping it around the hook. This creates far less bulk on the hook shank and keeps the pattern slim and sparse, like the natural. (The methods of tying in posts and parachute hackles are discussed in detail in my books “Essential Fly Tying Techniques” and “Guide Flies – Simple, Durable Flies that Catch Fish”).

The cock hackle, usually dun or black on this pattern, is tied up the post when you start tying in preparation for wrapping down the post later. The abdomen is either dubbed or simply black tying thread. Tying in the biots can be tricky but, by tying the points down with a single turn of thread in front of the post before wrapping tightly to secure them, the critical tent shape can be formed with some consistency. A few wraps of thread or dubbing in front of the post forms the head and the thread is then returned to the post in preparation for finishing off. Finally, the hackle is wound down the post and secured with a Super Glue whip finish around the post itself. By wrapping the hackle down the post in this way, the tendency of many parachute patterns to ‘unravel’ is overcome. This process, once mastered, reduces the bulk and provides a neat and very durable final result.

This fly can be fished effectively throughout the season, but when the caddis are on the rocks in numbers it will frequently out-fish all others. Of course variations in size and colour allow one to cover a variety of smaller caddis and even stonefly adults using similar techniques. Fished drag-free on a fine tippet this extremely sparse and simple pattern can prove deadly and is worthy of inclusion in any small stream fly box where microcaddis occur.

Dressing

Hook: Size 18 – 22 fine wire

Thread: Black 8/0 -16/0

Body: Black thread or ultrafine dubbing

Wings: Goose biots to match colour of natural

Post: White or grey poly yarn

Hackle: Cock hackle to match colour of natural