

Bright spot dry flies - a local consensus

Ed Herbst

In his book, *New Zealand's best trout flies*, compiled by Peter Scott, Pheasant Tail Publishing, 2006, guide Peter Carty writes: "Because parachute patterns sit low, they can be difficult to see. A white post in some situations is of no help at all. These days, I tie most of mine with a post of pink antron and have found that this is the best all round colour to see. I have a few in other colours, usually fluoro, in case I have a customer who is colour-blind. Tie a few with a black post too. In really bad light this is often the best colour to see."

In 1929 while fishing the Ausable River in the Adirondack Mountains of New York state, Lee Wulff developed a series of flies which were eventually to bear his name. His objective was a fly that rode the boisterous currents with greater buoyancy and were easier to see than the British dry flies then in vogue. His use of white bucktail in the White Wulff and later the Royal Wulff made these flies a lot more visible, particularly at twilight.

More than half a century later the next big breakthrough came when George Harvey and Joe Humphreys, plagued with failing eyesight, tied an Adams with pink wing tips from some dyed grizzly capes given to them by Bucky Metz. These flies with were in no way less effective than the standard Adams, but could be tracked far more easily on the water. Here's how George Harvey described these experiments: "In May 1983 I was given some Metz hen saddle patches dyed fluorescent orange, hot pink, yellow and green. Since I had been using coloured hen saddle patches for divided wings on some dry-fly patterns I most frequently use, I decided to see if the fluorescent wings would help me to see the flies and find out how the trout would react to the brilliant colours.

"The first fly I experimented with was a deer hair ant. I wanted to see how the burnt wing compared with the fluorescent red lacquer I had been using on the back to make the fly more visible. The first wing I tied was hot pink. I could see the fly as far as I could the lacquered version and the wing was still visible when the deer hair was practically torn apart. It was a phenomenal experience to see trout rise and take fluorescent flies without hesitation. The best part was that I could see the flies in quiet or riffly water and missed very few rises. It turned the frustration I had been experiencing into delightful days astream again.

"On many small mountain streams overgrown with rhododendron and other trees and shrubs, the light is so dim it is difficult to see beneath the foliage. Joe Humphreys and I gave the fluorescent deer ants a real test on such a stream and the results were even better than I had hoped for. When certain light conditions exist, especially dense shaded areas, we were able to see the green fluorescent wings a little better." From: *Fluorescent Flies (Techniques of Trout Fishing and Fly Tying)* by George Harvey, Nick Lyons Books, 1990.

As parachute flies became more accepted, bright pink parachute posts became a valuable alternative for those who find dry flies difficult to follow. One of the leading guides in the



A small rainbow caught on a bright spot parachute on the Jan Du Toits stream.

USA, Pat Dorsey, recommends fluorescent pink posts on parachute dries in his outstanding book, *Tying and Fishing Tailwater Flies*, Stackpole Books, 2010.

Cape Town's Phillip Meyer and Mark Krige tie Parachute RABs to order using white or pink Frizz Fibre from Fishient for the parachute posts, <http://www.tomsutcliffe.co.za/index.php/fly-tying/105-new-dry-fly-the-halo-hackle-rab-variant> and, in the past year and prompted by a post on the best attractor dry flies on the midcurrent web site, <http://midcurrent.com/experts/favorite-searching-dry-flies/> an email debate ensued on whether brightly-coloured posts on parachute flies attract or repel trout.

Ed Herbst: If you lose track of your dry fly or emerger, the visual element which makes dry fly fishing so appealing is lost for me at least. The alternative is to use a tiny bright

yarn or float putty strike indicator but these often seem to get more strikes than the fly you are using. Trout thus seem to be attracted to rather than repelled by these bright colours.

Experienced Gauteng fly fisher, Gary Glen-Young, who has fished for South Africa at several World Fly Fishing Championships, swears that pink posts on Klinks, parachutes etc do not make fish turn away.

This would seem to accord with the view that size and shape are the most important factors in dry flies, particularly given the fact that they are seen in silhouette against the sky.

Craig Thom: I have a problem with the visibility thing. Always be visible - to whom? It may be my imagination, but I feel that flies without bright sighting posts are more effective.

This means straining harder to see them, hoping you know more or less where it lands and watch for the splash, using a bigger dry as well as a spotter, or getting closer to the water level where you can see it better (Still haven't found waders that let me lie on my belly). One way around the visibility problem in the late afternoon is to fish two dries, one light, one dark.

Stephen Dugmore: I am with Craig on this one. In my admittedly limited experience of testing one against the other, it seems to me that flies with small white posts, or no post at all, are much less spooky to fish than pink ones particularly on more sparsely hackled flies. Looking at a fly from the underside I prefer not to see any pink.

But I also agree with Ed that if you can't see the damn things then I'll sacrifice some takes for the ability to track the fly

Peter Brigg: I'm with Stephen on this one - I rarely cast far enough not to be able to see a small white foam or antron post. I also just can't think pink and even if it doesn't bother the fish, I'm not comfortable with it and probably lose confidence. It's like cutting a beautiful run in half with a fluorescent orange or yellow fly line-it just doesn't sit easy with me. White is so much more natural and looks like the bubbles which are ever-present along the current line - ask Rhodes guide, Fred Steynberg, why he prefers white strike indicator yarn - same reason. But, I guess it can do no harm to have a few in your box - when all else fails, it is very visible. Japanese fly fishers strongly favour bright pink posts and they fish testing small streams with clear water and banks that have a lot of vegetation which shades the water.

Darryl Lampert: I haven't found a problem with fish refusing fluorescent red or pink parachutes - but then I tend to trim my parachute posts fairly short. If it is a concern, you can always tie a small amount of pink or fluorescent red antron surrounded by white/grey/black antron. That way you get to see the fly and the fish will only see the white/grey/black when viewed from below. A couple of strands of fluorescent red surrounded by black shows up very well.

MC Coetzer: Interesting. I'm stuck somewhere in the middle here. I have found that bright posts definitely scare fish, so I will not use them unless it is absolutely necessary.



Tom Sutcliffe's One Feather CDC Midge with a bright orange yarn post which proved exceptionally successful on the Itchen in England.

Bright posts become absolutely necessary only when I can't track the fly (tied with a white post) and this normally only occurs in the early morning or late afternoon when there is too much glare on the water.

Being able to see the fly is the more important consideration for me but I have definitely found bright posts to be less effective than plain white or gray. The other side of this coin - why are flies like G & B Low Floaters (tied with a bright orange body) or sub surface bright beaded nymphs so effective if a bright post, which is half hidden behind a hackle, scares fish? Maybe the bright post problem is all in the mind-my mind.

I first started using them in 2006 when we prepared for the nationals down here. It was probably under the influence of Gary Glen-Young. But even during the early part of that season on the Elandspad, fish would turn away from the fly at the last second. The moment I switched back to the exact pattern with a white post, the fish would simply eat the fly. This happened repeatedly over the course of a couple of weeks and I eventually only used them when it was the only solution to glare. On the Smalblaar's slower runs it was even worse. I still carry a few but must admit that I hardly ever take them out-

possibly because I don't fish that early or late in the day.

A number of years ago maybe eight - I thought it would be a good idea to incorporate a Royal Coachman/Wulff-style body (red Holo-Flash between two segments of peacock herl) into a small all-black parachute pattern that had been working extremely well for me. No trout ever took those flies and despite numerous attempts to make it work, there are still one or two left in my boxes. This was the only change I made to the previously-successful pattern which had a slim body of black superfine dubbing. Strange. This whole discussion is very interesting. It does however seem that being able to see the fly is the primary consideration and that this is why anglers with failing eyesight, prefer the bright posts.

Giordano (Zamps) Zamparini: I mainly fish the Broedersroom and Helpmekaar streams in the Magoebaskloof mountains near Polokwane but have also fished the clear streams of Slovenia and Argentina. I find that visibility depends on contrast. A white post bobbing in the bubble line and surrounded by foam is difficult for me to see. I accordingly tie the post in two contrasting colours. This makes a beneficial difference.

Stanton Hector: I am partial to tying parachutes as well as other flies using white material as a sighter. However, a few months ago I picked up some orange Spirit River poly yarn after seeing Tom Sutcliffe's CDC Midge, <http://www.tomsutcliffe.co.za/index.php/fly-tying/95-tying-the-cdc-midge>.

This prompted me to come up with the High Mountain Midge which is tied with a stripped peacock quill body and a peacock herl thorax beneath a CDC parachute hackle wrapped around an orange yarn post. The post/sighter is then cut short and at an angle to minimise the chances of fish spotting it. I tie these from size 16 down to 20. I christened the fly a few months ago and it is extremely effective despite the orange post. However the orange still didn't sit that comfortably with me so I opted for the lime coloured yarn (they call it lime, but in reality it's very close to being white). Fish reacted equally well to both colours fished side by side on the Smalblaar. So, the colour of post or spotters, I feel, is a personal choice, really.

Mark Krige: Can and do trout distinguish colour above the waterline? Does colour at least partly affect the response of a trout to feed on or reject a potential food item? Do pressured trout 'wise up' and become wary of certain colours, especially 'unnatural' colours?

For me, the answer to all three questions is yes. In addition, I've noticed that some of the wariest trout I've come across were totally unpressured by anglers. Wariness, I believe, is not solely the result of fishing pressure.

What is interesting, too, is that sometimes the addition of an 'unnatural' colour can trigger a strike provided it is used sparingly. Think of the Europeans' use of pink CDC in mayfly and caddis wings and our own use of red triggers on dry flies.

If an angler feels that bright posts are detrimental, it is fortunately pretty simple to construct a stacked post in which the bright material is veiled by white or an otherwise neutral colour. The bright material is highly visible when viewed from above, but remains invisible from below.



Herman Potgieter hooks a trout on the exceptionally clear Jan du Toit's stream. Are bright spot parachutes successful under such conditions? Photo by Stephen Dugmore.

Herman Botes: Yellowfish, (which can be more selective than trout) and trout do react negatively to bright, fluorescent posts or wings on flies but this depends on the fly pattern and the way it sits in the water.

This has been evidenced in a very interesting way. When the fish in slow, flat water comes up for a Klinkhamer or parachute style emerger with a fluoro red post, it spots the red post at the last second and refuses. When I fish the vertical style emerger the fish just about never refuses the pattern with a red post even in daylight. This leads me to believe that with shallow emergers the fish focuses on the film and above-surface profile and, with vertical emergers, the focus shifts to the film and the section of the fly that is below the surface. (The fluoro red post does seem too much, but it is essential to see your pattern in the bad, low angled light of the winter sun and at dusk. Where the light is good I fish a fluoro white post).

The consensus, then, seems to be that dry flies with brightly-coloured, fluorescent wing posts should be avoided unless visibility is a problem and that, on shaded streams, fluorescent chartreuse wings are easier to spot than orange or pink.

“It would not be wise to omit tiny flies entirely, even for a small-stream selection. When you need them there will be no substitutes. When size is critical, it’s surprising how often shape and colour are not.” Dave Hughes, Trout from Small Streams, Stackpole Books, 2002.