

## THE DRAGONFLY NYMPH

BY RON FLACK-DAVISON

(The informative articles on dragonflies by the late A. C. Harrison, in PISCATOR Nos 115 and 116 and the excellent results I have had using this nymph, prompted me to write this article).

### HABITAT

Dragonflies are common inhabitants of vleis, slow streams, dams and lakes. They may be found almost anywhere where there is adequate water depth, but are especially abundant where aquatic vegetation is luxuriant and the water comparatively warm and alkaline.

Dragonfly nymphs are heavy, well compressed insects that have, in cross section, irregular triangular bodies. They are fierce predators, continuously searching for prey such as tadpoles, small fry, beetles and even smaller dragonfly nymphs. The nymphs have a unique jet-propelled swimming action. By expanding their rectal gill chamber they take in water and then squirt it out rapidly, to propel themselves through the water in quick three to six inch bursts.

There are two basic types of nymphs. A short, wide, heavy-bodied nymph that appears to prefer hiding and crawling slowly in muddy and rocky bottoms. Secondly, a more slender streamlined nymph that seems to crawl and swim around much more, preferring weedy areas. Most species are camouflaged to blend with their surroundings, are dull and mottled and range in colour from light olive to brown to dirty black.

## IMITATION

There are several effective dragonfly nymph patterns. After a fair amount of experimentation the following is the pattern I have found to be the most effective:

**HOOK:** Mustad 79580 (4X Long Shank) sizes 6-8.

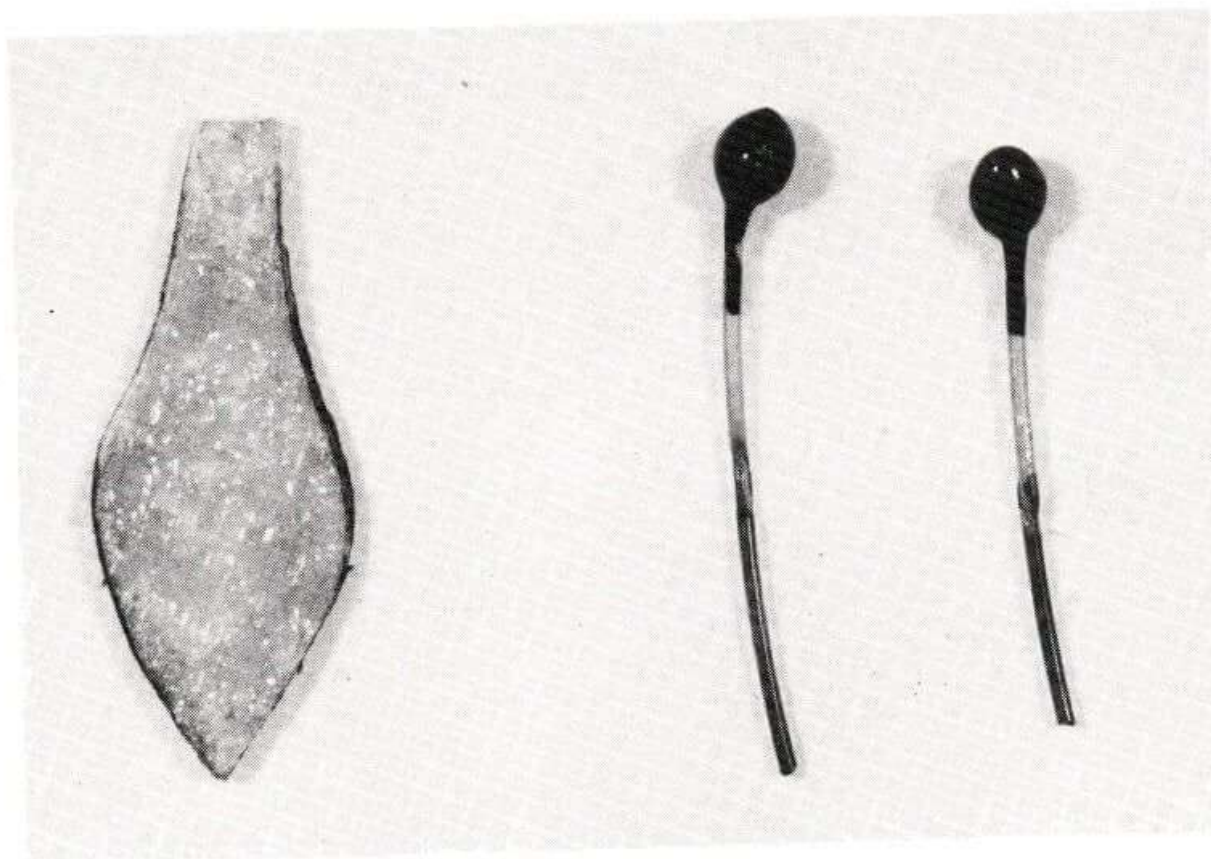
**TYING THREAD:** Prewaxed, to match body colour.

**UNDERBODY:** Thin rigid cardboard, balsawood or plastic sheeting. Cut to characteristic body shape and then lash and glue to hook shank.

**TAILS:** Four stripped goose fibres, dyed to match body colour.

**EYES:** Black chenille or 40 lb. nylon monofilament melted at the end and then dipped in quick-drying black lacquer. Secure to hook with figure-of-eight wraps.

**BODY:** Blend of seal's fur and ultra-translucent dubbing or wool/mohair/acrylic yarn mixture. Blend to create the two most common colours — olive and brown.



The nymph shape and eyes mentioned under EYES above and in Para. 1 of the tying instructions.

*Photograph by R. Flack-Davison*

**WINGCASE (optional):** Duck quill feather or raffine, varnished and cut to deep V shape.

**LEGS (optional):** Ringneck pheasant rump or cock feathers, dyed if necessary, to match nymph body colour.

**RIBBING (optional):** Monofilament or fine gold or copper wire.

1. Cut a piece of thin, stiff cardboard, balsawood or plastic, to characteristic dragonfly nymph shape. Once you have the desired shape use this as a template to make several at a sitting (I usually tie  $\pm 20$  in a session).
2. Wrap the hook shank with tying thread. Tie in the four goose fibres, ensuring that



the tails are evenly distributed and about  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. long when tied. If desired, tie in optional ribbing, and wrap the first one-third of the shank with lead wire (or thin strip of lead foil from a wine bottle) and secure with thread.

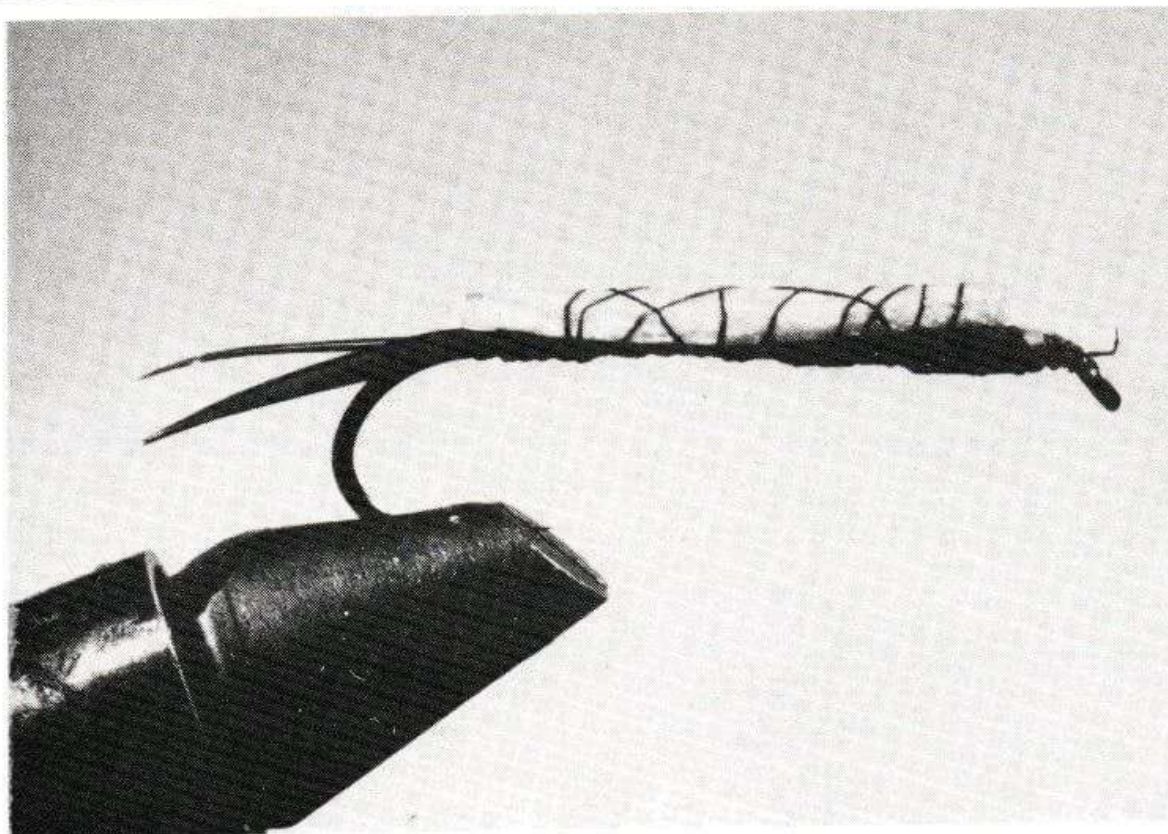


See Para. 2 of instructions.

*Photograph by R. Flack-Davison*

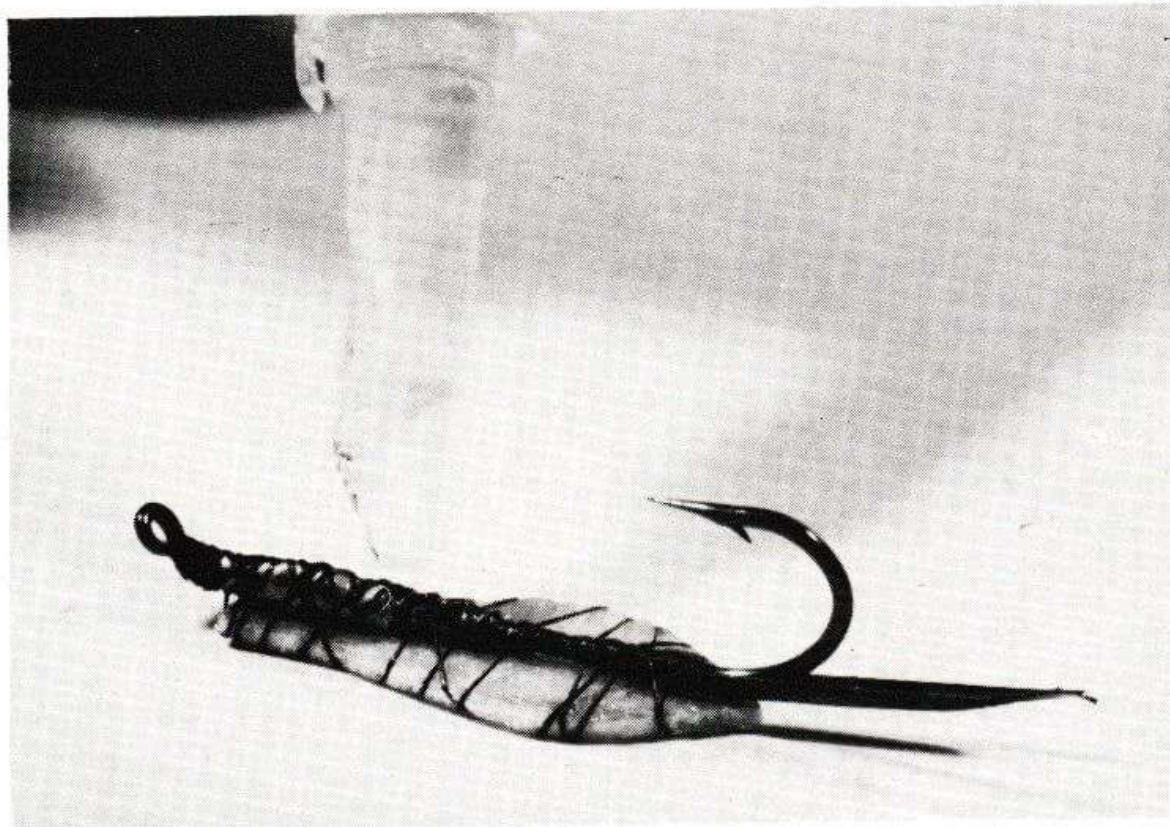
3. Lash the cardboard body flat on top of the hook shank and tie off the thread. Remove from the vice and coat bottom with a drop of superglue. Leave to dry for 20 minutes. I make a number at one sitting and by the time the last body has been secured, the first body is dry and ready to be dubbed.
4. Blend seal's fur and ultra-translucent dubbing to desired colour. As these nymphs are large they require a fair amount of dubbing. As this dubbing is expensive I regularly visit knitting shops and purchase very suitable wool/mohair/acrylic mixtures which are much cheaper and just as effective. These yarns can then be cut into  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.— $\frac{1}{2}$  in. lengths and blended to the desired colour (I use two colours — olive and brown), ensuring that the final colour is slightly mottled. Glue a small square of velcro (the toothed side) to a piece of wood. Place a few lengths of yarn between two such pieces of wood and comb to blend and tease the wool mixture, prior to dubbing.
5. Secure the eyes to the hook with figure-of-eight wraps. Commence at the rear and dub a fuzzy body stopping at the front third of the fly. Now, if desired, rib with six or seven turns of monofilament and tie on wingcase and several hackle fibres on either side, to represent legs. (I have found ribbing, wingcase and legs to be superfluous, but the choice is yours whether you incorporate them or not). Now wind some dubbing behind and around the eye stalks to create the nymph's characteristic broad flat head. Carefully whip-finish in front of eyes and tie off.





**Para. 3 of instructions explain this process.**

*Photograph by R. Flack-Davison*



**This stage is also discussed in Para. 3.**

*Photograph by R. Flack-Davison*



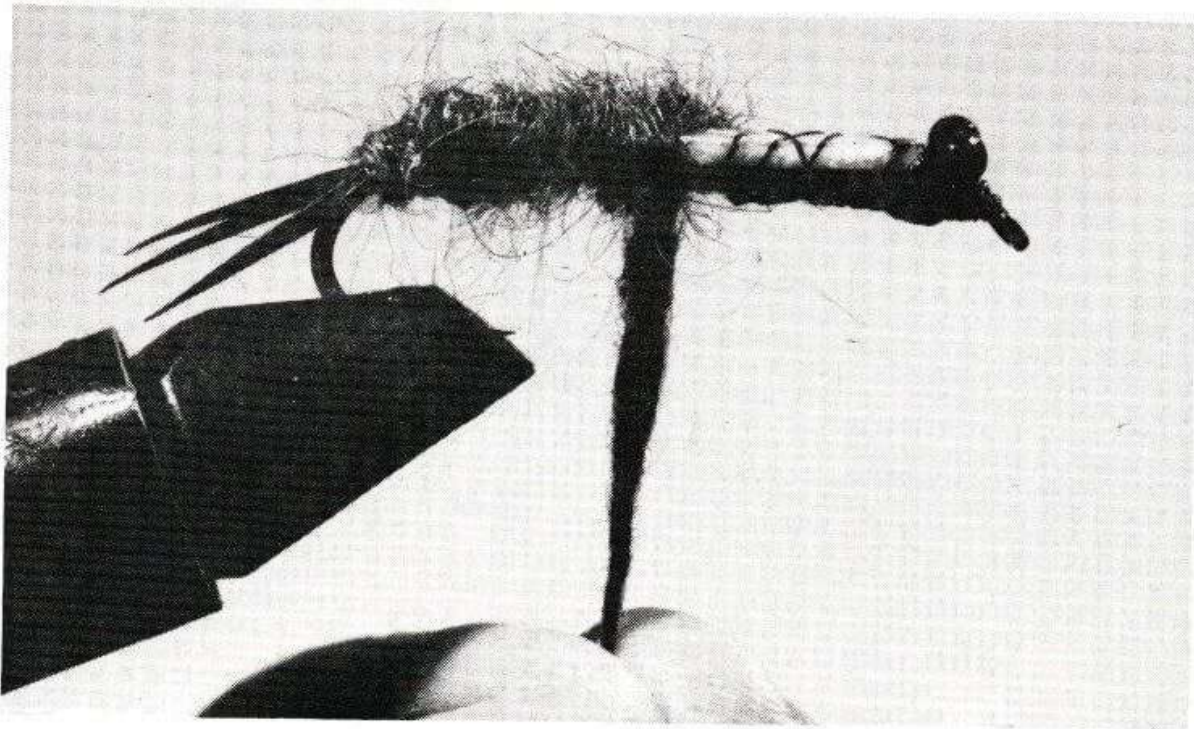
### FISHING STRATEGY

Two options are available for fishing the nymph. Firstly it can be unweighted, and the underbody constructed from buoyant material so that it floats, or sinks very slowly. It can be fished with a floating or intermediate line in shallow water or over weedbeds, or fished with a fast sinking line in deeper water. Secondly, the nymph can be weighted, to sink rapidly, and fished again with either floating/intermediate or fast sinking line, depending on preference and water depth. Nine to twelve foot knotless leaders tapering to 4 lb. to 6 lb. tippets should be used, due to the size of the nymphs and the fact that they often entice large fish. The rod should be held so that the tip remains at or slightly below water level, to ensure that a taut line is maintained at all times as the nymph is sometimes taken on the drop. After the nymph has sunk to the bottom the rod tip can be twitched lightly as this will often kick up a slight puff of sand or impart movement to the nymph, attracting a nearby fish. The nymph should be retrieved in short, quick, three to six-inch jerky strips, with slight pauses in between to simulate the natural nymph's swimming behaviour.

Takes can be abrupt and violent or it may just appear that the nymph has become snagged on an underwater obstruction and it is therefore important not to strike hard but to retain a taut line, gently lift the rod tip and then carefully set the hook, if it is in fact a fish, otherwise you will be broken fairly regularly. The one disadvantage of this nymph is that it can at times be difficult to cast, due to its size and weight. Fortunately dragonfly nymphs usually inhabit weedbeds and rocky and sandy areas close to shore, so that long casts are not essential for success.

Is this the ultimate fly pattern? No, I doubt it, but it is certainly a very effective nymph. So effective in fact that I have relegated my previous favourites, the legendary Walker's Killer and Woolly Worm to second and third places respectively in my fly-box. To date the nymph has accounted for numerous rainbow and brown trout, large and smallmouth bass, bluegill and a large carp at Voëlvelei.

When Jonathan Rodgers and I were discussing the tying of the prototype he was



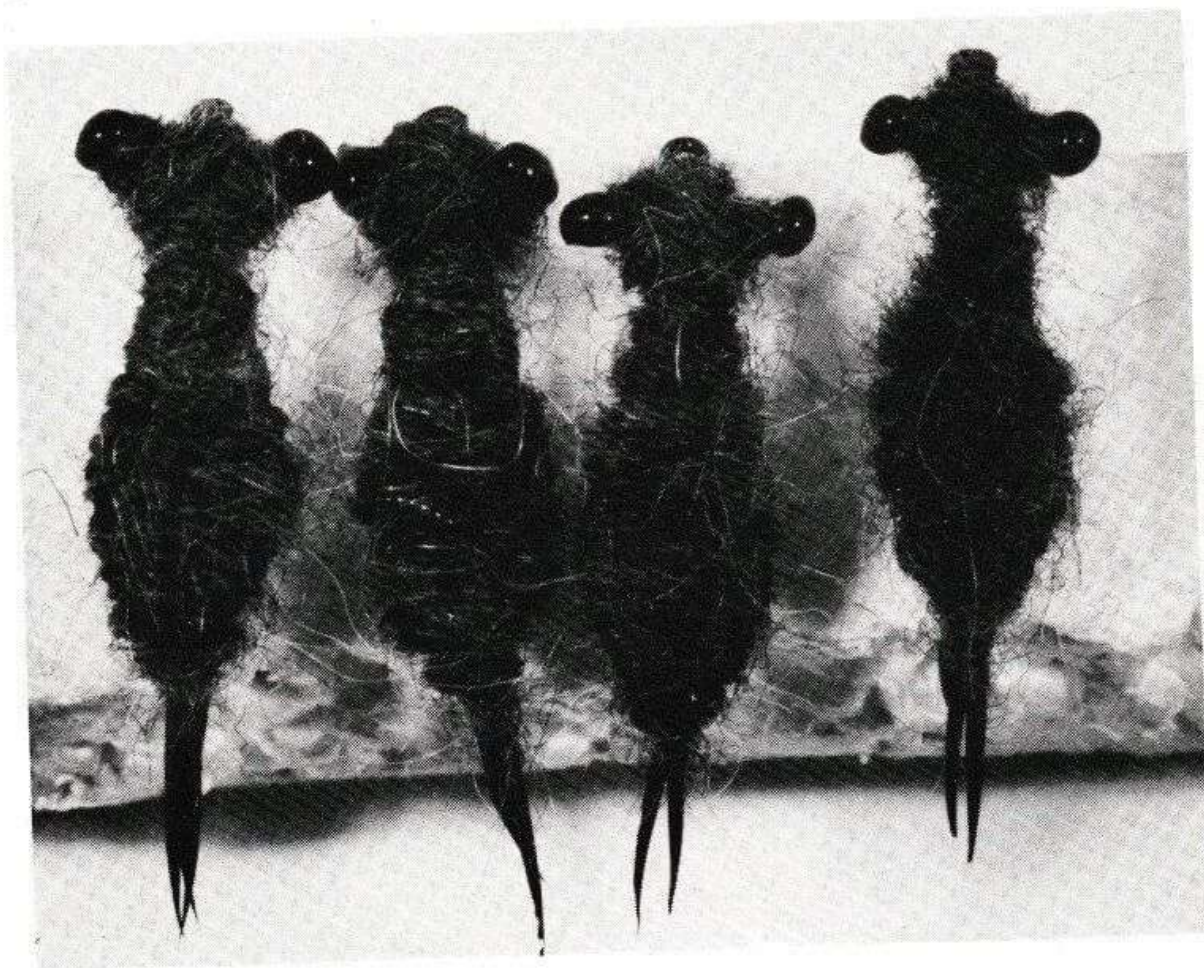
This process is discussed in Para. 4 of the instructions for tying.

*Photograph by R. Flack-Davison*



very sceptical and looked at me with a jaundiced eye when I enthusiastically extolled its virtues and the fact that I was positive it would catch fish. Jonathan, being the diplomat he is, humoured me and said nothing. I am certain he was horrified that I could even consider using such a weird creation to catch fish. (As members probably know Jonathan is a dedicated Mrs. Simpson man, even to the point that he will only use his own self-tied pattern).

The prototype nymph was duly baptised at Voëlvlei one hot, humid afternoon. It was one of the rare occasions when for me everything went right and I virtually hooked fish from the first cast onwards. After I had hooked about the sixth fish I glanced out the corner of my eye and noticed Jonathan surreptitiously tying a nymph to his tippet. From then onwards his success rate increased dramatically and for the next thirty minutes the silence was punctuated by shouts of "Gee", "Got one", and "Got another one". I waited patiently and after he had landed a few fish, asked casually what he had caught them on. "Your damn nymph" came the reply. However, Jonathan's association with the nymph was a short-lived affair. Although he found the nymph effective, he soon discarded it for his beloved Mrs. Simpson, as he felt the nymph was "too easy, and should be banned". After trying this nymph, I am certain you will be as enthusiastic about it as I am. Tight lines!!



The completed nymphs tied on Long Shank No. 6 hooks, x  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 times.

*Photograph by R. Flack-Davison*