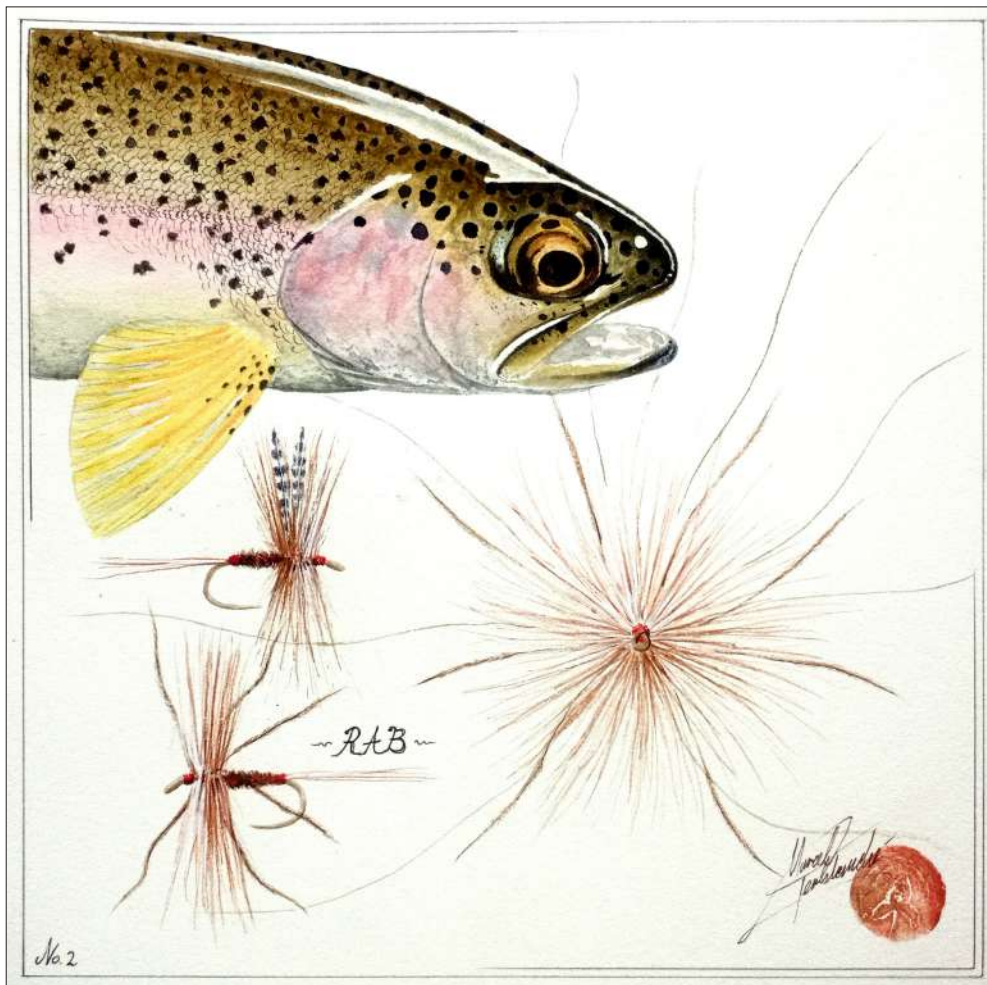




CHAPTER 9

Something Struggling

A fly design rationale



Kick: There is a quality which every hackled wet fly, for use in rough water, should invariably have. Without it, it is a dead thing; with it, it is alive and struggling; and the fly which is alive and struggling has a fascination for trout which no dead thing has. How is this quality to be attained? It is a very simple matter. Finish behind the hackle.

From 'The Way of a Trout with a Fly' by G E M Skues (1921)

After long years of trial and error I have come to the conclusion that shape or profile is important, sometimes exaggerated size, sometimes colour, but most of all movement.

Arthur Cove, ***My Way with Trout*** The Crowood Press 1986

It was a hot and humid day on a trout stream near Cape Town.

These streams hold both trout and smallmouth bass and the latter only make themselves obvious during the heat of summer, usually from December through to February when the trout, in turn are most discernible in the early morning and as twilight closes in.

Suddenly, at midday, a nuptial flight of ants carpeted the water - but there was no response from the trout.

In a side eddy I spotted a small bass.

Ants, clustered together, drifting inertly, floated overhead and were ignored.

Then a single ant, still alive and struggling, would arrive in its field of vision and the rise was instant.

It offered far less food value than the clump of ants, but it was alive and struggling and the vulnerability factor triggered the take.

For me, that incident provided an important lesson in the critical role that movement, either created by soft and mobile materials used in the tying process or induced by rod movement or retrieve, plays in fly fishing success or failure. It was also the first in a series of dots which slowly and serendipitously connected to show the linkages for trout between energy conservation and vulnerability and movement, conclusions reached by Kelly Galloup in his book 'Cripples and Spinners' and by Dave Hughes and by Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker in their two recent books.

What is significant in the context of Skues' observation is that in two countries distant from one another, Japan and Italy, country folk who depended in some measure on stream fish for sustenance or income, came to the same conclusion that he did. In Japan the Sakasa Kebari patterns and the Valasesiana patterns from the Sesia valley in the Piedmont region of northern Italy were both characterised by forward-jutting hackles.

A caveat I must stress about this article and the type of fishing I preferred is that it is focused entirely on small, shallow, boisterous forest streams where the vegetation encroaches the water providing a steady supply of terrestrials. In such streams, the trout's window of vision is small forcing it to make quick decisions on whether to rise or not and facilitating a close approach by the angler.

The pivotal role of energy conservation under such conditions was brought home to me when I was fishing the Eerste Stream which runs through the university town of Stellenbosch.

I sat down in the shade of a tree to enjoy a sandwich when I spotted a trout a few feet away. It was lying next to a rock and its right eye exactly aligned with a spot on the rock.

It took my fly on the first cast and, out of curiosity, I filled my hat with water and carried the fish about 50 meters upstream to the next pool where I released it.

I returned to my half-eaten sandwich and few minutes later the trout slid back into its home pool and resumed its previous position, its eye exactly aligned with the spot on the rock where I had previously noticed it.

Clearly, at that exact spot, it had found a position where it had protection from current pressure, least risk of predation and the best opportunity to spot food being carried towards it by the current.

Inspired by the articles in *Flyfisherman* magazine in the early 1980s about the development by Ernest Schweibert and Ed Koch of hopper patterns on the Letort, I decided to create my own and it provided yet another lesson in the importance of movement in the design of trout flies.



‘My Moby Dick’, William Humphrey’s wonderful 1979 book about his pursuit of a giant trout, resonates with me whenever I look at this photograph of my first attempt at tying a hopper imitation about 40 years ago.

It combined the features of many other successful hopper patterns, a body of furred yellow wool and a wing of golden pheasant tippet feather because all the Australian hopper patterns have this feature and if it worked there it would work for me. The pièce de résistance, the rubber legs, projected backwards from the spun and clipped deer hair head and were mottled with a permanent marker.

First cast. When I twitched the hopper towards me, the legs closed against the body and then popped open again when the forward motion ceased. Entranced and enchanted, I admired my fly-tying genius. At that moment a big head appeared and my 5x tippet snapped in an instant. I often went back to that spot, but My Moby Dick was never seen again and the memory still haunts me.

When hoppers land in the water they drift for a few seconds and then start kicking towards the shore and that kicking movement has its own attraction.

Gordon van der Spuy, author of two books on fly tying and the inspiration for this book, had a similar experience. He was on top of rock face looking down at a friend who was fishing a hopper.

The water was clear and the rises obvious. When the fly drifted inertly it was ignored, when it was twitched, activating the rubber legs, the response was instantaneous – yet another example of the importance of movement as a trigger.

Dave Lambroughton of British Columbia uses a foam rubber spider with rubber legs because of its ability to lure steelhead from the bottom and this is echoed by New Zealand guide Dean Bell in the anthology ‘New Zealand’s Best Trout Flies’ (Pheasant Tail Publishing, 2006). He says the spider’s ability to lift trout off the bottom is astonishing:

“I’ve seen it account for over 20 large browns on a single day on the upper reaches of the Ahuriri.”



My interpretation of Dave Lambroughton's #16 spider

The inherent movement of large hackle Variants is another case in point and the oversize hackle which creates it can be seen the example held by Tom Sutcliffe (below left) and two examples tied by Tony (below right).



Al McClane, fishing editor of *Field and Stream* for three decades, had a huge influence on the evolution of dry fly fishing on the mountain streams near Cape Town. His articles and books undoubtedly played a role in the development of Tony Biggs' RAB – and you can read that story in the RABS and Variants' folder in the articles section of the [Cape Piscatorial Society website](#) -

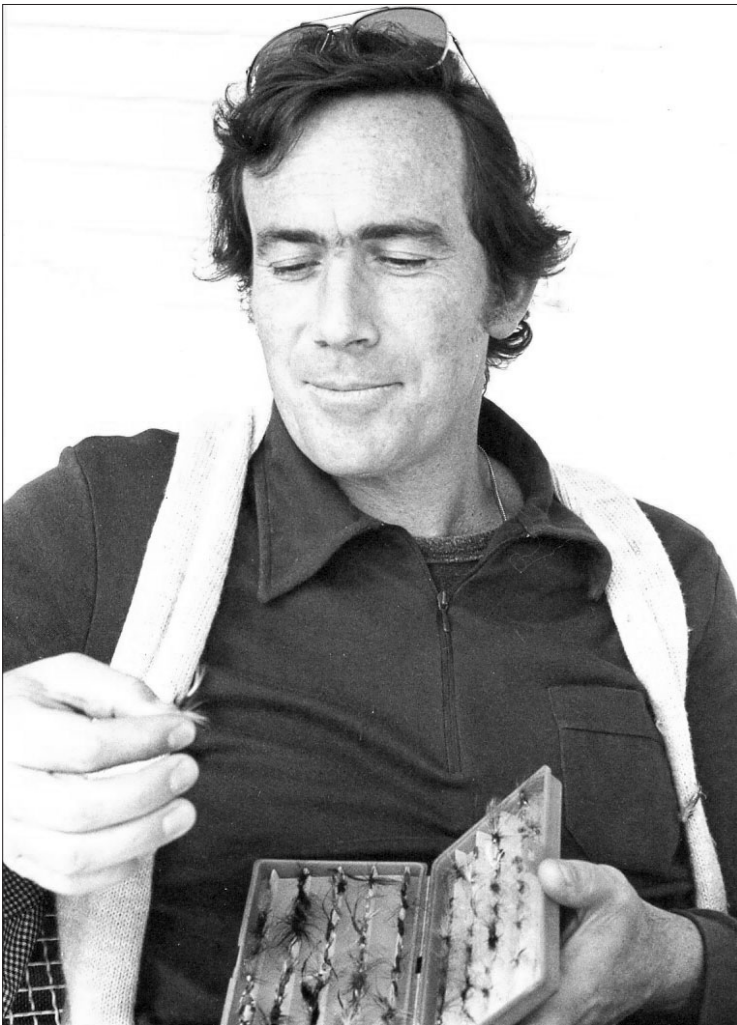
In his 1975 book *The Practical Fly Fisherman* McClane writes about Variants and Spiders, dry flies tied with oversize hackles on small hooks which ensure a soft, slow descent:

If you were to fish every day during that period of the

year when trout rise to floating flies—using a spider or variant—you would catch your daily share of trout and probably hook some of the largest ones that will ever come to any dry fly. I won't even make exceptions about where you do this fishing. Provided it is water with a normal fly-eating trout population, you are going to get a chance at every fish who wants to be caught and even a few who usually know better.

The great attraction of this fly is its ethereal, almost lifelike ability to dance across the surface. It will even turn around on the water, and the slightest change in current or puff of wind will send it skating for a few inches before floating again. The secret of course, is in the hackle, which may be two inches or more in diameter, depending on the hook size. Hook and hackle are out of proportion to each other, the hackle being roughly three or more times greater than the hook would regularly require in an ordinary dry fly. The reactions of trout to a spider-type fly are different from their responses toward ordinary flies. Logical behaviour among trout is nothing more than a pleasant myth at best; the spider, for instance, commonly causes the fish to rise above the surface and take the fly going down. Now whether this is because the fly actually excites them, or because the sensitive movement of a spider simulates an active insect about to take off, I am not sure. I have caught many trout this way, and over a long period of time the only impression left me is that the fish were anxious that the fly should not escape.

I have had the same experience of South African trout shooting out of the water and descending on a RAB, taking it as they re-entered the water.



Tony Biggs (left) examines one of his RABs with a critical eye. Photo Tom Sutcliffe.

Dragonflies and damselflies are ever-present and one of the most conspicuous insects on the trout streams near Cape Town in the heat of summer. There is no doubt that they are tracked in the air and become particularly vulnerable when mating or egg-laying. Sometimes they will dip down to capture an insect floating in the current and be taken in the process.

In South Africa they are particularly active in June, July and August and are especially vulnerable when mating an egg laying.

The advent of mirrorless cameras with shutter speeds of 1/32 000th of a second has enabled photographers like Steven Ooi to fill his @finripplemedaia Instagram pages with high-definition photographs of trout seizing dragon and mayflies in midair.

I believe that trout assume the RAB in its slow descent to be a dragonfly. In the conventional Variant dressing, the body material is tied in by the tip at the hook bend and wound forward to the hackle, creating a tapered body.

Tony Biggs turned this process around because he wanted the tips of the herl to be splayed open where the body meets the hackle so as to create what he called 'legs'.



Egg-laying damselflies - Photo by Warwick Tarboton

To achieve this, he tied about four herls in by the butts behind the hackle tie-in point, twisted them together and wrapped the fused combination back to the hook bend. He then reversed direction, winding the herl forward and splayed them in an arc behind the hackle. They are lengthy and easily catch the wind.

RABS tied by Tony Biggs

You can see some SBS sketches in Tom Sutcliffe's article 'Tying the RAB' in the ['RABS and Variants'](#) folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society'. Other articles in the folder testify to its outstanding qualities as a small stream attractor dry.

One of the greatest small stream pleasures is to fish a RAB if you have an upstream breeze – you can roll cast it all day.

To avoid tippet twist, I tied mine on a size 14 Orvis Big Eye Hook using a Surgeon's Swivel knot which allowed the fly to spin freely around the 4x tippet. In Japan, regarded by many as having the best small stream fly anglers in the world, the dry fly is often attached to the tippet with a loop knot – again seeking to maximise movement.

The RAB, like all flies of this type, seems to have a life of its own, shivering with every fluctuation of the breeze and tug of the current and it is that movement which ensures its enduring success.

In an article published in his [Paracaddis blog](#), Tim Rolston, now back in Britain, but for many years Cape Town's top guide, asked 'What Makes the RAB work'?

Tom Sutcliffe provided the obvious answer – movement:

"The fly 'floats' very nicely just prior to hitting the water's surface. I think that last 10cm just prior to hitting the surface is an area which fish survey, and few flies spend as much time in that zone as the RAB.

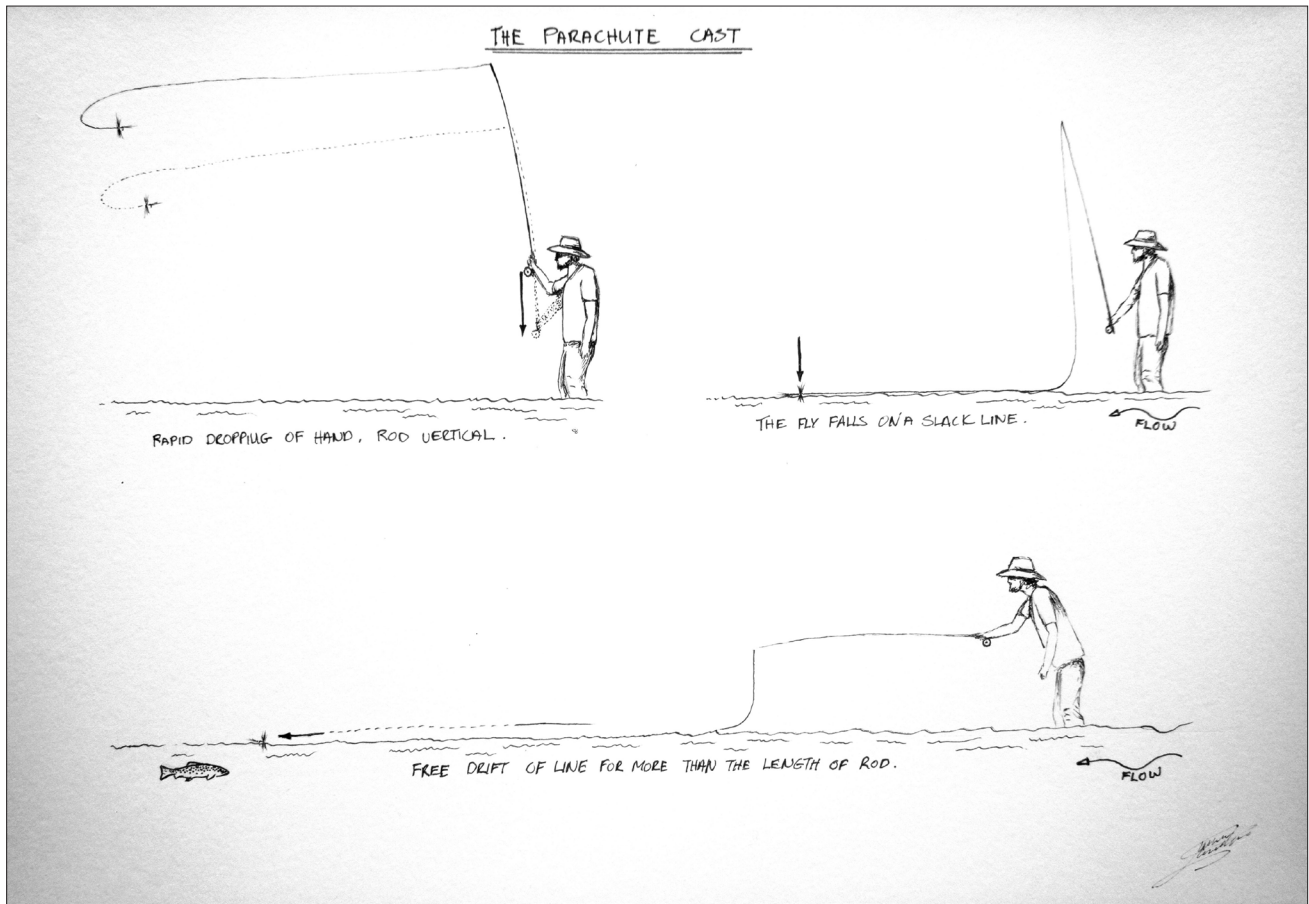
One other key to the RAB is its 'legs' and how they make the fly dance on the water in a slight breeze, they are like a tiny sail and often you get some rather odd movement on the water from a RAB that a traditional dry will not give you.

This is one of the failings of the parachute version."

Trying to cast the RAB into a downstream wind is an exercise in futility unless you are exceptionally skilled and the answer is to cast with the wind using the Parachute Cast which I first saw illustrated in the Charles Ritz book, *'A Fly Fisher's Life: The Art and Mechanics of Fly Fishing'*.

You stop the rod high, pull the energy out of the cast by dropping the elbow and then feed the line downstream with the flow.

Firstly, there is a low-pressure area ahead of large boulders where trout often hold and your fly reaches these areas ahead of the leader and, secondly, these rocks are often backlit making them easier to locate.



Two dry flies dominated our thinking on stream in the late 1970, Tony's tip-toe RAB and [Mark Mackereth's](#) flush floating, clipped and spun [Caribou Spider](#). You can read the history of [Mark's fly](#) in the 'Terrestrials' folder of the CPS archives and the history of the RAB in the '[RABS and Variant's](#)' folder-.

The Caribou Spider gradually lost public interest, but the RAB was given a new lease of life when Tom Sutcliffe added a circle of squirrel tail hair to the hackle, a variation he called the '[High-Water RAB](#)'.

As I see it, an approximate post-war chronology of small stream searching dries would read:

- Caribou Spider – Mark Mackereth
- RAB – Tony Biggs
- Squirrel Hair High Water RAB – Tom Sutcliffe
- Halo Hackle Parachute – Tom Sutcliffe
- Para RAB – Philip Meyer
- Rubber Tail Emergers – Ed Herbst
- Wolf Spider – Leonard Flemming and later versions by Peter Brigg
- Light Bulb Terrestrials – Stephen Boshoff

South African fly tyers, most specifically Tom Sutcliffe and Philip Meyer, have added squirrel tail hair to conventional dry flies and Klinkhåmer -type emergers with advantage but it seems to be an advantage that has occurred in few other countries.

Around the time that Tom created the squirrel hair High-Water RAB, I came across the term "Halo Hackle" in the November 1984 issue of the British magazine, *Trout Fisherman*. It was in an article by

English International John Ketley called, ["Tyings to Test a Saint"](#) and I was so intrigued I sent it to all my friends.

The author had bought an expensive genetic cape and, wanting to conserve these feathers he used less expensive and softer feathers at the eye and wound the smaller, stiffer genetic hackle up behind it as reinforcement. This proved exceptionally successful on the Test and he called these 'Halo Hackle' patterns.

I showed the article to Tom and also shared with him some Coq du Leon feathers I had acquired. He combined the two feathers in a conventional vertical hackle fly and wrote an article on this hackle-stacking method for the first issue of *The Complete Flyfisherman* magazine.



Fred Steynberg's Wolf Spider imitation combines a rooster and partridge feather in parachute configuration on a Wapsi foam bug body

I was later to realise that he had combined both game and rooster feathers in a parachute pattern when I spotted it on a Wolf Spider imitation being used by Fred Steynberg in Rhodes. He told me that Tom had introduced the concept at a clinic that Fred's guiding company, Linecasters, had held in Rhodes and he had used it with a Wapsi Bug Body.

Initially the two feathers were wound individually but the publicity afforded to the split thread technique by Marc Petitjean and the tools he developed made it possible to wind them simultaneously. Then, super strong and ultrathin GSP threads made it possible to insert the feathers into a loop before creating the multi-feather parachute hackle.

Adding rubber tails to emergers

Nothing produces movement like rubber strands and Al Troth was an early exponent with his Girdle Bug.

In *The Wisdom of the Guides* he tells of an occasion when he was fishing the Bighorn River with his son, Eric, using a rubber-leg hopper:

“We’re coming down one of the first runs just below the put-in place at the dam, and he dropped the fly out. I can still see the thing happening. A nice big brown came up and hung under the fly. I said ‘Shake the rod tip’. He shook the rod tip and the legs twitched a little bit, then POW, gone.”

Around the time that Tom Sutcliffe was developing his Halo Hackle flies I was experimenting with the Klinkhåmer and by good fortune I imported some ultra-thin rubber strands from the Montana Fly Company and felt there would be merit in adding them as two dangling tails at the bend of the Klink.



A slant tank photo of a rubber-tailed Klink-type emerger provides a trout’s eye view of the fly

Trout seemed to start slowly rising to it when it was further away than normal because they could see its approach from further away and I was getting more strikes than I was on conventional Klinks.

The reason for its success is not difficult to discern.

The strands double the length of the fly without adding weight or adversely affecting its aerodynamics.

They add exponentially to the fly’s movement with the currents twitching the strands this way and that.

Rhodes-based guide Tony Kietzman was also using the Klink as his general searching fly and I gave

him some of the rubber strands promising him that adding them would double his catch rate.

He did and he did.



Tony Kietzman's Edhåmer – thin rubber tails, stripped peacock quill body, six turns of dun hackle and a pink Antron post because it is the easiest to spot on the water

With a few tweaks of his own, he came up with a fly illustrated above which he calls the Edhåmer...



Success on the Edhåmer. Tony Kietzman fishing the Coldbrook stream in Barkly East (left).

Such rubber tails would work just as well on Bob Wyatt's Deer Hair Emerger, Hans Weilenmann's CDC and Elk and similar patterns. As it is, Weilenmann added to the attraction of his fly by replacing rooster hackle with CDC which has far more movement.

Then Hareline brought out a thin translucent strand which it called Daddy Long Legs. Mottling these strands with a permanent marker added to the illusion of movement.

Then there are the materials which give the *illusion of movement*.

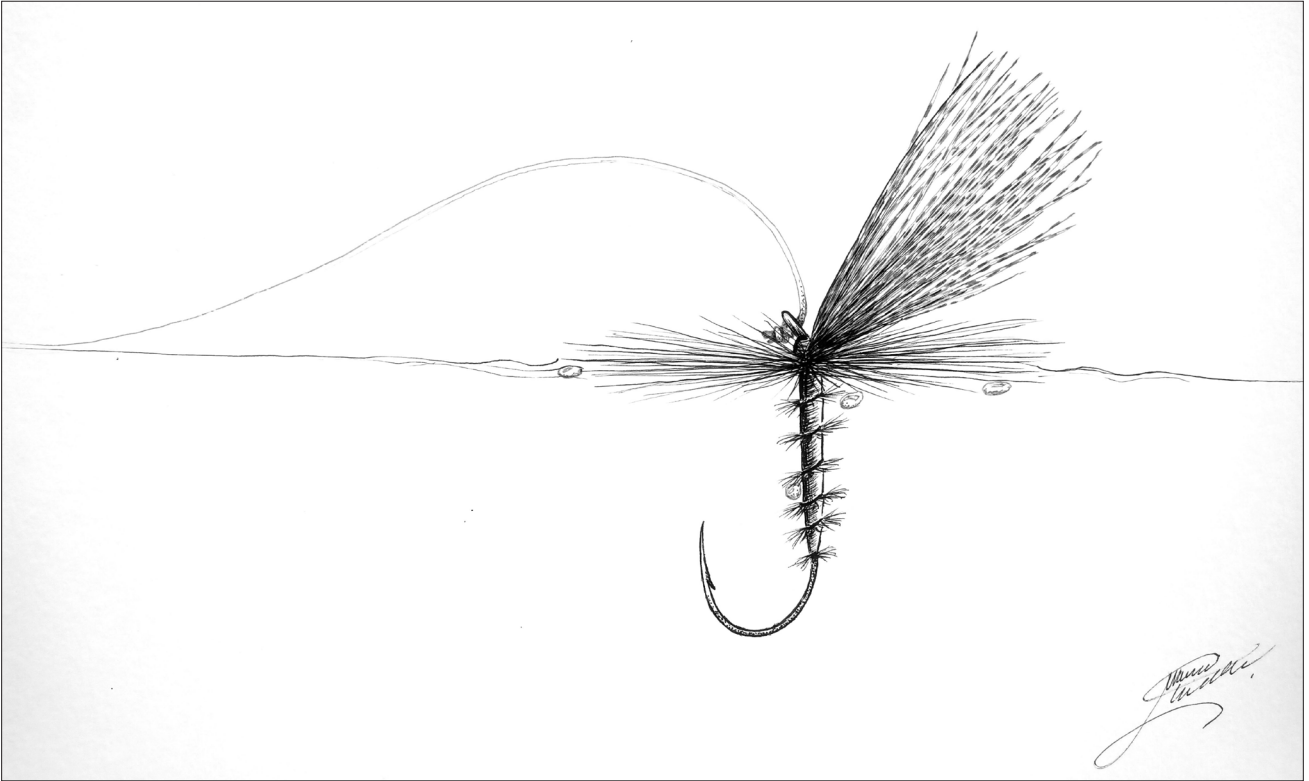
Years ago, when Fritz/Cactus Chenille came on the market it was used by stillwater anglers for Blobs but then the late Steve Parton, float tubing pioneer in

the UK, wrote an article extolling its virtues for dry flies. I tied some foam rubber-backed beetles with Cactus Chenille bodies and did very well with them fished static on dams. They seemed to be moving as they rocked in the ripple and the light flickered back and forth over the mylar strands. Patrolling trout were often drawn to the fly which was static but gave the impression of a struggling insect.

CHAPTER 9

Since then, Semperfli and other companies have introduced Straggle Legs, Micro Fritz and similar materials in differing colours.

If these are combined with the half-in, half-out illusion of the emerger which dates from the time of the [British Mole Fly and the French Pont Audemer](#), you have a fly with built-in vulnerability.



**The Pont Audemer. Gary LaFontaine called this type of pattern 'hanging flies'.
His version, 'the Occasion', had two hackle tip wings**

Add a double parachute hackle using two types of feathers, the foam rubber thorax devised by Morten Oland and dangling rubber tails and you have a fly which combines a vulnerable posture with a kaleidoscopic impression of movement.



A halo-hackled Klink tied Morten Oland style by Caleb Willmot using snowshoe hare for the wing

Alternatively, a spinner wing of floating yarn split by foam rubber would add to the illusion of vulnerability and increase lateral support.

The origins of the fly I was working towards which emphasised movement and vulnerability can be found in an article 'The Zakhåmer – Re-thinking the Klinkhåmer Special' which I wrote for Tom Sutcliffe's 'Sprit of Flyfishing' website.

I incorporated all these ideas in the Zakhåmer Special at the request of expat South African publisher, Paul Curtis, now living in Wales. His request was a Klinkhåmer made with the materials that Tom used for his Zak Nymph an impressionistic 'tied in the round' nymph.

To create as much buoyancy behind the hook eye I used a piece of orange Fettuccine Foam as the parachute-support post and cupped that from below with a 'U' shaped piece of soft Larva Lace foam. The created a resilient base for the dual CDL and CDC split-thread parachute hackle to bite into. I got this idea, the invention of Danish guide, Morten Oland, after reading about it in an article by Oliver Edwards

What Paul returned to me some months later was unrecognizable – he said it had been torn to pieces in record time by the trout and grayling in Wales.

In a later development I provided the fly with even more movement by allowing it to pivot freely around the hook eye – as described in a later chapter.

But, in examining its evolution to its current form which is a parachute fly using squirrel tail hair as the supporting medium you must go back to the early 1980s when Tom Sutcliffe added squirrel tail hair and two grizzly hackle tips to the RAB, a fly he called the '[High Water RAB](#)'.

Squirrel tail hair began appearing on more and more RABs until in some instances the circumference of the [squirrel hair circle](#) was wider than that of the feather.

A High-Water RAB tied by Peter Brigg



Then came another dramatic change and the first of its kind of which I am aware and shown here in one of the FOSAF books on South African fly tyers:

To facilitate movement on the water of the fly while preparing for the World Championships, Philip

**PHILIP MEYER –
FLY-TYING NOTES**



Parachute RAB:

HOOK:

Dry fly #12 - 16.

THREAD:

Red 8/0 or 10/0.

TAIL:

White hackle fibres.

ABDOMEN:

Pheasant tailfibres.

RIB:

Fine copper wire.

THORAX:

Peacock herl.

POST:

Poly yarn or frizz fibre.

LEGS:

Squirrel tail, Water mongoose, or jackal.

Meyer added a vertical spike of squirrel tail hair jutting upwards from the hook eye. This was an attempt to utilise the air currents at water level to induce movement in the fly, something that I had never seen before.

I interviewed Philip for the second DVD, 'A South African Fly-Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and Friends' which I produced with Andrew Ingram and here are the links for the video series which includes him

tying his signature fly.

<https://vimeo.com/567798545>

<https://vimeo.com/573845780>

Gordon van der Spuy, for his sterling book '[The Feather Mechanic](#)' then flattened the squirrel hair into a semi-circle and that is the most popular form right now, see below.



At around the same time Jan Korrubel and Peter Brigg both projected a spike of squirrel hair forward of the hook eye in an attempt to achieve the same objective



Jan Korrubel's version of the PARA Rab dropped the vertical tuft of squirrel tail hair at the eye of the hook to the horizontal so that water-level air currents could facilitate fly movement



Peter Brigg's PARA Rab with forward-projecting squirrel tail hair

Another pattern which emphasises the role of movement is the Squirmy Wormy, now a staple in every competitive fly angler's box - and there can be no accolade greater than that.

Lesotho provides another example of the importance of movement in fly design.

In areas where the riverbed is flat stone with little shelter for trout or yellowfish, they would tuck themselves into fissures in the rock and would ignore Perdigon-type bead head nymphs.

It was only when a turn or two of CDC in a dubbing loop was added behind the bead that they could be persuaded to strike.

The response to the movement of the manipulated dry fly is well documented in two books, Leonard M Wright's *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect* (1972) which focused on caddis and Harry Murray's 1989 book *'Fly Fishing for Smallmouth Bass.'*

Instead of an upstream dead drift during caddis hatches, Wright advocated an across and down presentation with a twitch – the 'sudden inch' when the fly reached the trout.

Trout will often move five – even ten – feet to one side for an insect that's making a surface disturbance while they'll seldom swing more than a foot outside their feeding lane for a quiet one.

Murray also writes about the explosive response when Edward Hewitt's Neversink Skater is skimmed across the water surface. Hewitt's fly, which was specifically developed for this tactic, comprised two large spade hackles tied dull side to dull side on a small, short shank hook so that the tips converged.

Thus manipulated, the skater produced ***'wonderful fishing on hundreds of occasions.'***

Much the same principle motivated Frank Sawyer's Induced Take and the Leisenring Lift.

My sense is that the large-hackled variants such as the RAB are successful for the same reason.

Building movement into a fly is an evolving facet of fly design and examples of cross-genre creation where ideas are borrowed from other types of angling are Marc Petitjean's Magic Head which uses a plastic cone at the hook eye to emulate the side-to-side wiggle of a bass plug, and Blane Cocklett's

Game Changer which achieves a similar effect.

Rubber tails

"Trout eat living things. Motion is a sign of life" (Lee Wulff on Flies Stackpole Books, 1980)

Trout research indicates that movement and contrast enable them to locate prey but, of late, the concept of vulnerability is attracting increasing interest.

This was first brought to my attention in an article 'Anting the Hatch' by Ken Miyata in the October 1982 issue of the American magazine *Flyfisherman*. Miyata found that even when trout were selectively feeding on a mayfly or caddis hatch, they would not refuse an ant. And in his 2008 book *Spring Creeks* Mike Lawson says: *'Most of the time I use beetles when I can't catch by matching the hatch.'*

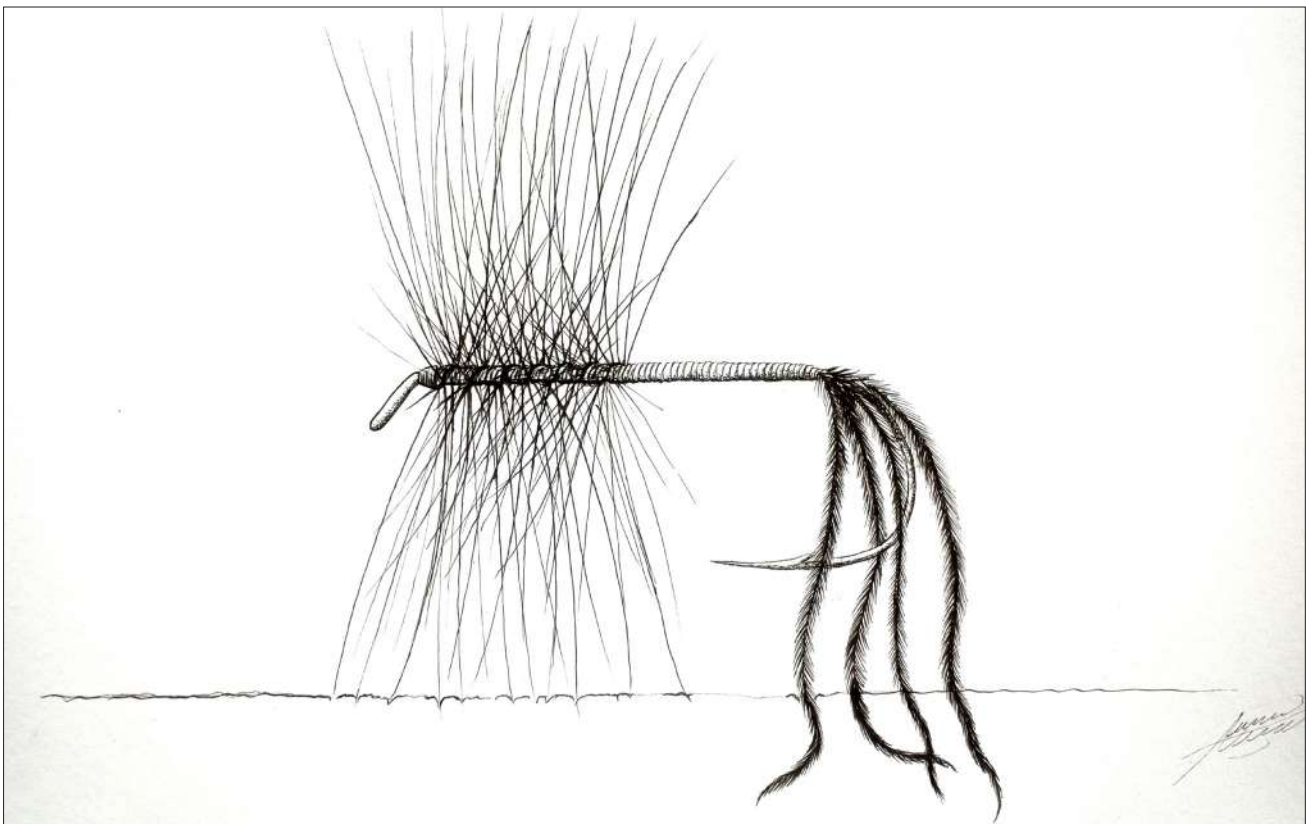
I would argue that vulnerability is the defining factor here. Mayflies and caddis, unless they get stuck in the shuck, emerge rapidly resulting in splashy rises. The ant and the beetle are a sure thing - they are going nowhere other than downstream.

Bob Wyatt has written at length about this factor in articles punting his Deer Hair Emerger but I believe that by adding rubber tails to this fly he would be adding movement to its impression of vulnerability.

Part of my thinking in this regard came from Gary LaFontaine's fly, the Shroud, except that he used marabou at the bend of the hook rather than rubber tails to create a dry fly with exceptional tail movement.

Here's the sentence from *The Dry Fly – New Angles* that resonated with me:

"In our observations of attractors, the dangling tail was a tremendous trait for pulling trout from a long distance."



Gary LaFontaine's Shroud – part palmered rooster hackle, part dangling marabou tail

I believe however that two mottled fine rubber tails widely separated will produce more movement than a clump of marabou meshed together and they would enhance, I believe, several contemporary

patterns – the Plume Tip for one.

(By the same token, with more and more tyers adding beads to soft hackles, I see no ethical rationale for not adding light bulb rubber tails to traditional soft hackles.)

Besides my own success with my rubber tailed Slipknot Emerger which I detail in a later chapter, I have two anecdotal accounts to support this hypothesis. At my suggestion, Rhodes-based guide Tony Kietzman added rubber tails to his Klinks and, he says, the success rate increased substantially – so much so that he now calls this ‘improved’ version, the Edhåmer.

When a member of the Italian national fly-fishing team, Edoardo Ferrero visited Cape Town a decade ago he declared local streams to be ideal for soft hackles and [Sean Mills](#) became an instant convert.

Sean told me that trout usually spooked when a nymph or dry fly approached the tail of a pool and the drift rate increased suddenly as the current speeded up. However, this animated the fibres of the soft hackle and the sudden movement often prompted a reflexive strike.

His flies were pretty prosaic, as soft hackles are – thread bodies and a turn of hen or gamebird hackle. When I suggested adding rubber tails he said: “Ed, when my flies stop catching fish, I’ll consider changing them”. Later, he confessed that he had tried rubber tails and they had definitely increased his strike rate.

The thinnest rubber strand available is bait cotton used by rock and surf anglers for securing soft baits likes shrimps to hooks. It is an inexpensive, translucent material and can easily be mottled with a permanent marker. Loon UV Knot Sense is easy to work with and the drops adhere to the tip of the leg. Mottle the leg by holding it against the tip of an earbud while applying the ink.



Bead head soft hackles are increasingly being used and I see no ethical reason for their efficacy not to be increased by tying them with light bulb rubber tails.

Fly size

In the above-mentioned book by Datus Proper he writes that stream trout generally take flies #16 or smaller with less suspicion than bigger flies and this is because the average size of the insects they eat is around #20. Here are three links to articles that explain that:

<http://www.fosaf.co.za/tippetArchive-22.php>

<http://www.tomsutcliffe.co.za/fly-fishing/my-fly-fishing/item/905-surveys-on-insects-available-as-trout-food-and-how-to-sample-the-stomach-contents-of-trout.html>

<http://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/index.php/trout-diet-in-the-fynbos-biome>

The Mystery of the Orange Quill

“My suspicion is that color in trout flies is most art. It is important but mainly for building confidence in humans” [Datus Proper](#) ‘What the Trout Said about the design of Trout flies and other Mysteries’ (Knopf,1982)

McFlylon is an interesting material – it stretches and is lighter than water – and is most often used in fish egg imitations. I sent some to Heather Ralph - @fishnwine – in Rhodes with the suggestion that it might make a useful strike indicator material.

She greased this poly yarn indicator with Loon Aquel floatant and, fishing the Bell River where it runs past the village, she had a rainbow trout rise to it in three successive drifts. Whether it is rainbow trout on the streams near Cape Town or browns in the Bushmans River in Kwa Zulu Natal, the attraction of orange poly yarn strike indicators is universal and frustrating. But why does this happen?

G E M Skues, in his 1932 book, *Side-Lines, Side-Lights & Reflection* wrote that he had no idea why the Orange Quill was the most successful dry fly during the evening rise to the Blue Winged Olive, a *Baetis* species: *“It may be asked why the Orange Quill is taken at night for the BWO. I answer frankly, I don’t know.”*

(See: *G.E.M. Skues and the hatching BWO puzzle* on the [Rackelhanen website](#).)

I believe you will find the answer on page 206 of Gary LaFontaine’s book *The Dry Fly – New Angles: When the sun was hitting the cliff, after 4:30 PM., various orange patterns caught almost three times as many fish as they did during the morning.*

LaFontaine believes that the colour of the ambient light plays a significant role in the success of dry flies and, if trout are used to seeing floating prey bathed in orange light in the late afternoon, would they not, then, associate an orange yarn indicator with food?

The empirical discovery by G E M Skues and other fly anglers of that era that the Orange Quill was the most successful pattern during the late afternoon hatch of *Baetis* mayflies left these ‘match the hatch’ practitioners mystified. Seven decades were to pass before Gary LaFontaine and his team of scuba divers provided the answer while diving on the Abutment Pool on the Big Hole River in Montana where the sun is reflected from a cliff in late afternoon.

You will find the proof on page 206 of his 1990 book *The Dry Fly – New Angles: ‘When the sun was hitting the cliff, after 4:30 PM., various orange patterns caught almost three times as many fish as they did during the morning.’* LaFontaine believes that the colour of the ambient light plays a significant role in the success of dry flies and, if trout are used to seeing floating prey bathed in orange light at dawn and in the late afternoon, would they not, then, associate an orange yarn indicator with food?

There is a great deal of empirical evidence to support that theory and we were provided with photographic evidence of LaFontaine’s theory 12 years earlier with underwater photographs taken by Brian Clarke and John Goddard on page 89 of their book, *The Trout and the Fly*. The thin, outer edge of the outstretched wings glow orange in the dying light and where their feet touch the water surface

there are silver starbursts of light.

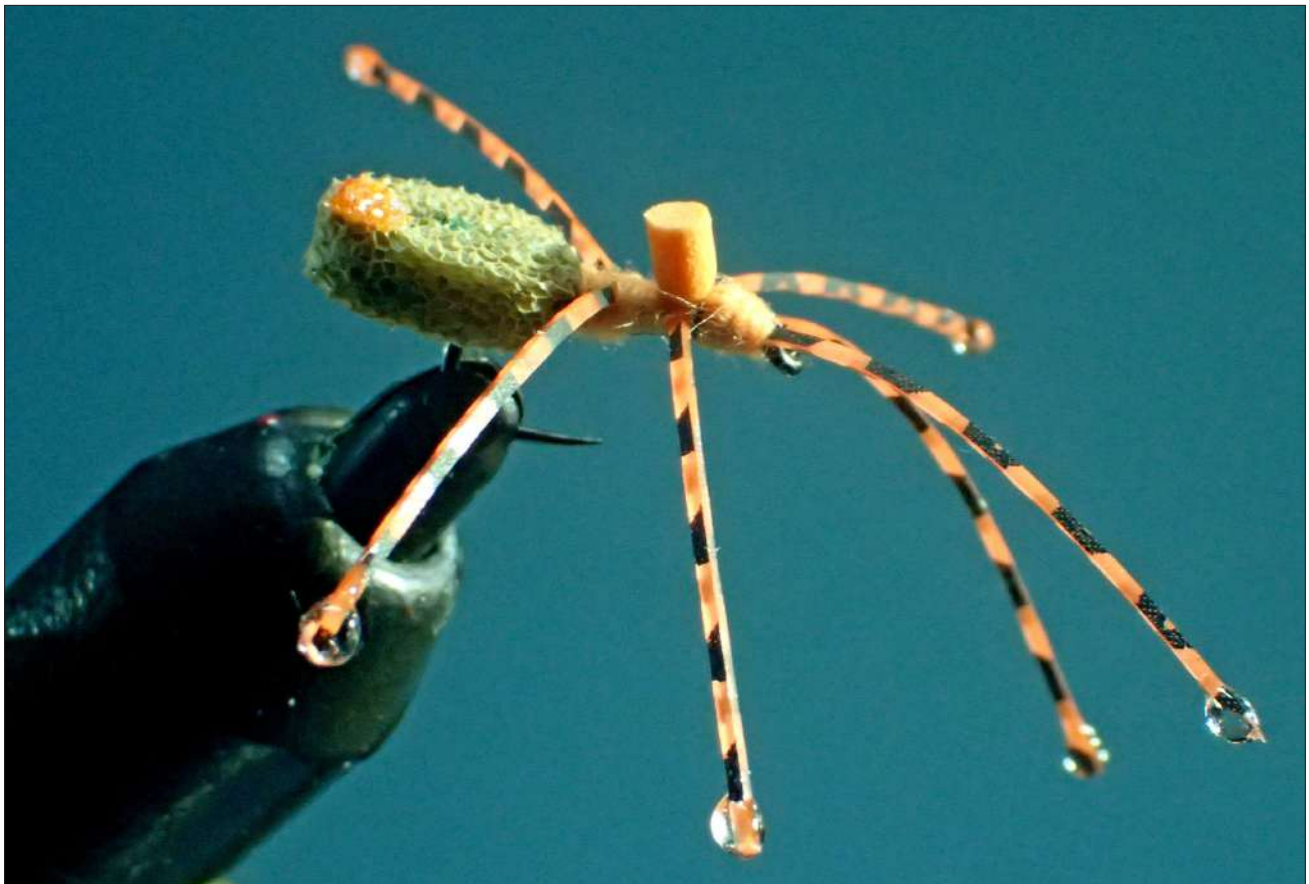
I recall a survey being done a few years ago in an online yellowfish website and the majority of the respondents said a nymph with an orange bead was their most successful fly. I remember watching hatchery trout at what was then the J L B Smith Institute of Ichthyology in Grahamstown attacking a trout with a missing gill cover and Martin Davies telling me he fed the trout their pellets from a red plastic bucket, ensuring all the while that his Walker's Killers and Mrs. Simpsons had a strong element of red in their tying. The role of orange as a trigger is everywhere in evidence – the Partridge and Orange soft hackle being the first that comes to mind. In Australia, hopper imitations almost invariably utilize golden pheasant tippets as wings, the Ausable Wulff by Fran Betters is another notable example, egg flies obviously, the Blob and many salmon flies.

In his 1960 book *A Man May Fish*, T C Kingsmill Moore who fished the Irish loughs wrote: 'There are at least three mystery colours, claret, gentian blue and bright orange which seem to have an attraction for fish not accountable by the occurrence of these colours in their natural food.' MC Coetzer, one of our most experienced anglers in all aspects of the sport, including competitively, is adamant that orange rubber legs are an essential trigger on hopper patterns. His [article](#) on small stream fly patterns which is featured on Tom Sutcliffe's website is a valuable read.

Blue is a puzzling colour that plays a [major role](#) as a wire rib in New Zealand guide Ken Orr's 007 nymph and I notice that Dave Lambroughton uses a blue wire rib on some of his dry mayfly imitations And what of yellow? According to Gary LaFontaine yellow signifies danger to trout and yet the Yallerhammer is a proven classic for brook trout in the [Appalachian Mountain streams](#).

This makes me uncomfortable – in terms of my own very subjective small stream ethos, I wish to deceive the trout into believing my fly is edible rather than provoking curiosity or aggression.

The Pendulum Leg and a Light Bulb Moment



Stephen Boshoff's Light Bulb concept on a foam rubber spider

As I was writing this chapter, split cane rod master Stephen Boshoff sent me a small photograph of what he called his 'Light Bulb Ant'.

https://www.instagram.com/p/CdVUAavUMYLB/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

He said he wanted the ends of the CDC fibres, weighted with UV light-cured resin to create a pendulum movement and reflect light. This is my version of the idea, but I quickly realized that weighting the end of a fine rubber strand had much more potential, most specifically with the antennae of adult caddis which are very obvious but usually ignored by fly tyers.



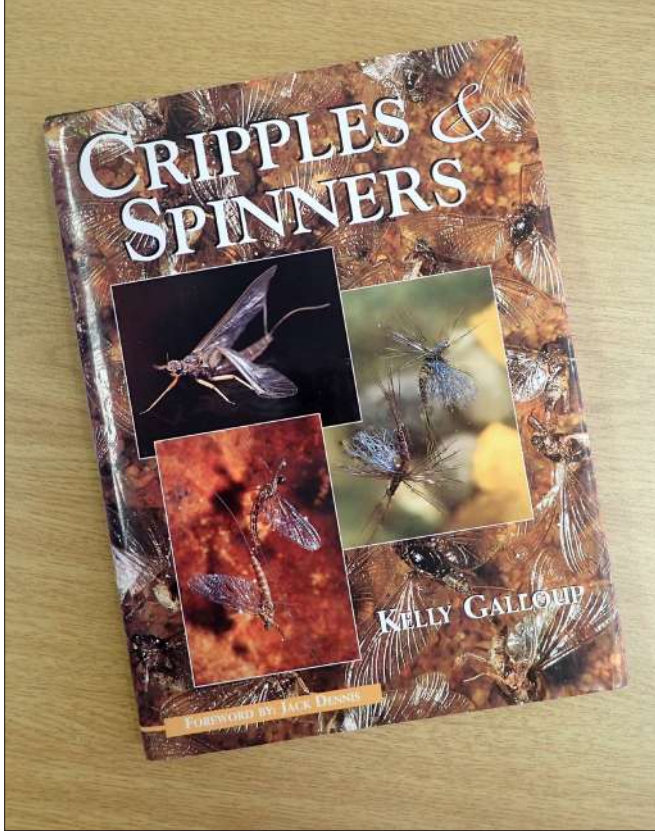
The author's version of Stephen Boshoff's 'Light Bulb Ant' which should appeal to grayling

One could also weight the ends of rubber legs on small flies like ants and beetles if you use Loon Knot Sense on Bait Cotton – for some reason conventional UV resin does not stick to Hareline microsilicone rubber legs. The idea is in its infancy but, as understanding grows, I believe its application will become more widespread as this spider and hopper indicate.



Vulnerability

'Stillborns', 'cripples' 'stuck-in-the-shuck' 'single wing' 'sunk spinners' have been part of fly fishing's vernacular at least since Kelly Galloup revealed in his 2001 book, *Cripples and Spinners*, that 50 % of mayflies are injured during the transition from nymph- to egg-laying adult, that trout selectively prey on these damaged insects and that this had been captured on film.



The footage shows in extreme closeup three mayflies riding the surface of the river. One is a completely emerged dun, one is an emerging dun and the third is a cripple caught in the nymphal shuck. As the mayflies drift along, a nice trout turns and come to them. It takes the cripple first, then changes the direction, circles, and takes the emerger. The healthy dun which was riding in the middle between the other two, is ignored altogether. The trout had to actually go out of its way to avoid taking the dun. That was enough proof for me.

When Galloup started studying trout feeding habits he discovered that 50 of the spinners had fallen on their sides and had one wing glued to the water surface.

Exactly the same situation in the context of vulnerability was observed in England on three chalk streams, the Wye, Lathkill and Derwent by [Philip White](#) chief riverkeeper for the Duke of Rutland. He was weed cutting and noticed that the trout were selectively taking the exhausted post egg-laying mayflies:

These flies were at the stage where, having been egg-laying for a period, they were exhausted and crash landing on the water.

Here they struggled for some time before final collapse and death. During these struggles it is common for the fly to have one wing trapped in the surface film whilst the other is still waving free. These were the flies the trout hit with the greatest relish.

This is exactly the focus of the latest book by Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker, 'The Flies that Trout Prefer' - that trout seek out the insects with the least chance of escape.

An [extract](#) from the book can be found on that wonderful website '[The Floating Fly](#)'

I've left to last the fly which has become synonymous with the vulnerability concept which has driven the work of people like Kelly Galloup, Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker – the Quigley Cripple. If I was still able to fish, I would add two elements, trailing light bulb tails and the light-flickering body of Semperfli Straggle legs twisted together with Semperfli Micro Metal.

There is a plethora of YouTube clips available showing how to tie the Quigley Cripple and my suggested changes are reflected below.

In the examples below I have left out the hackle because I felt its absence did not detract from the fly but added extra complication.

For the 'light bulbs' I used Solarez Buoyant Armor to Hareline Daddy Long Legs rubber strands which should add intriguing movement.



In his book, 'The Never-Ending Stream – A Tribute to Fly-Tying Form and Function (Pruett 2010) Scott Sanchez profiles 20 tyers whose patterns changed the thinking of fly anglers all over the world. The story about the inspiration and evolution of Bob Quigley's Quigley Cripple echoes the experience of Kelly Galloup, Phil White, Bob Wyatt, Hans van Klinken, Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker:

During a PMD hatch in the summer of 1978, Bob was fishing a Hair Spider. The pattern, which was a sparsely – tied Horner Deer Hair adaptation similar to the Humpy, was popular with old-timers on the Fall River. A number of these variations were tied with or without hackle. On this day, the fish were rising around Bob's fly, eating the natural and leaving his artificial alone. He did manage to catch some fish and, through doing so, the fly became ragged and waterlogged. The back of the fly was sinking while the front hung in the film. All of a sudden, the fly really started to work and the fish were moving to eat it. When he wore out the first fly, Bob roughed up the other hair spiders prior to fishing them, and the half-below-the-water and half-above-the-water concept worked on the new flies.

In one of the final chapters of this book, I build on the work of Vincent Marinaro, John Goddard and Frank Sawyer to create a fly which combines both movement and vulnerability – the Slip-Knot Emerger.

Before I contracted a rare neurological illness which affected my balance and ended my fishing, I was working on a fly which incorporated as many fine rubber strands as possible.

'Something Struggling'



It was designed to emphasise movement and the vulnerability factor in successful trout prey images but I only got the chance to fish this pattern once before illness intervened.

In short, a big adult insect - dragonfly, damselfly, cicada or stonefly - mired in the surface film.

It sought to replicate what the Tony Biggs RAB Variant imitated as a high-floating dry fly, but, on this occasion, as a tangled and helpless mess of body, wings and legs having been tumbled through several rapids. Remembering the ant taken by the bass so many years before I called it 'Something Struggling'.

It reflected in its thinking the scuba observations described by Gary LaFontaine in his 1990 book, 'The Dry Fly – New Angles' – that a trout holding deep in fast water needs a 'wide' fly and 'big chunk' before it will rise.

Central to its design theory - besides the mobility of the micro

rubber legs - was the foam rubber head of Roman Moser's Balloon Caddis (also featured in LaFontaine's Airhead). Caddis mainly emerge at twilight or after dark and, as Oliver Edwards explains: 'Roman Moser's Balloon Caddis was designed to copy a caddis right on the point of emergence.

The yellow Polycelcon foam balloon represents the bulging thoracic cuticle of the emerger. Clearly a pattern best fished in the evening, during a caddis emergence.'

The take was savage and the tippet seemed to snap in a heartbeat.



Something Struggling – broken on the Holsloot. Photo Sean Mills

It was a size 14 and I am told that it proved successful on the trout streams of Lesotho, albeit as a #12. It did have a legacy though. It persuaded Jan Korrubel to incorporate some rubber strands as a tail on his version of the PARA-Rab.

Spent wing vulnerability

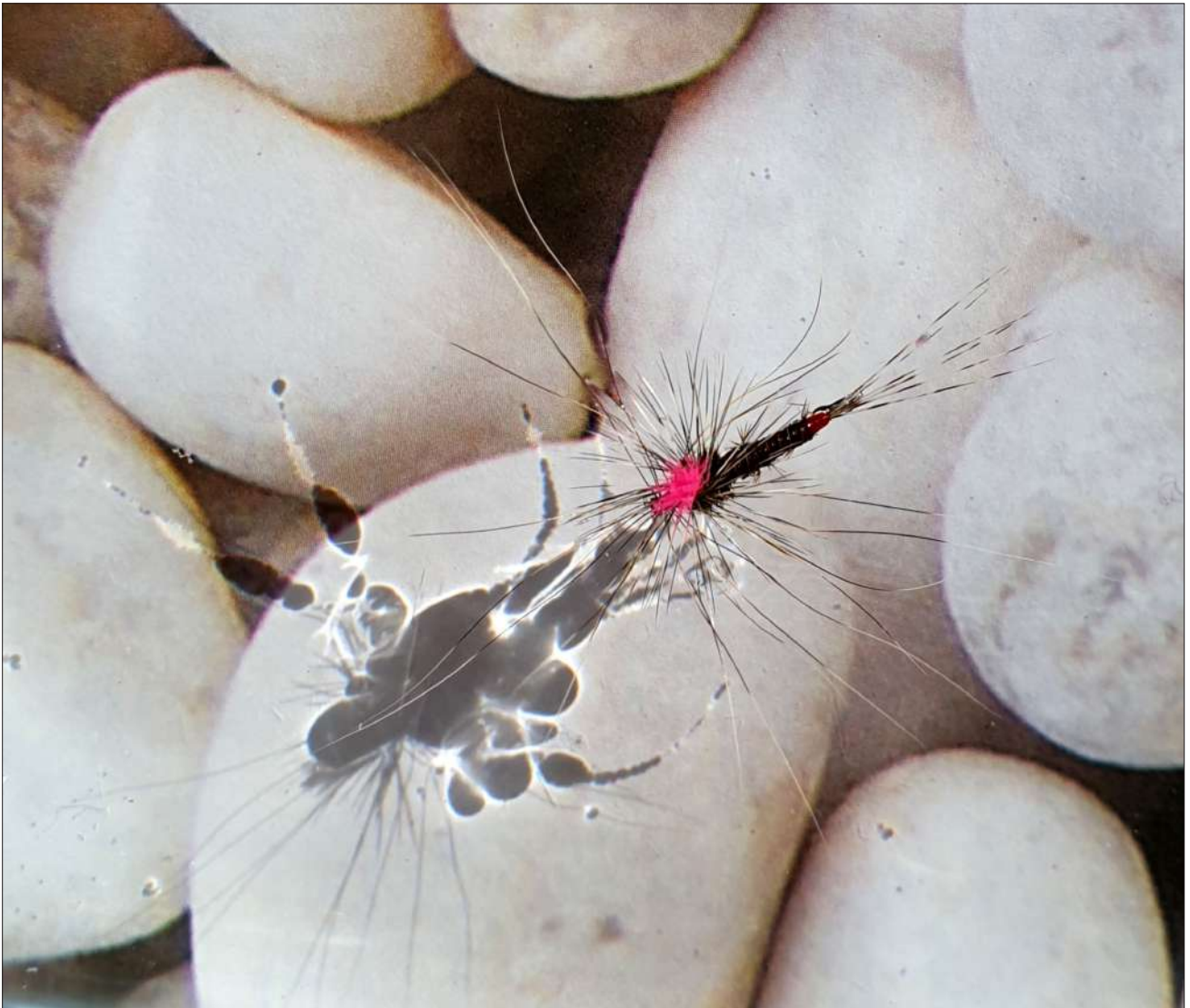


Rubber-tailed spent spinner tied Klinkhåmer-style

Style

Nothing signals vulnerability than a spent wing spinner. Its dead and its going in the direction that the current takes it.

This is an attempt to meld a number of ideas, the stance of the Klink, the movement of Stephen Boshoff's pliable and unbalanced pendulum tails, the kaleidoscope light-rippling Straggle Leg body (called 'sex on a string' by Paul Proctor) ribbed with Semperfli Micro Glint, the poly wings at right angles to the body giving outrigger support and the orange Larva Lace thorax cover providing buoyancy and extra visibility.



The shadow cast by a PARA Rab tied by Alan Hobson emulates the shadow cast by a mayfly struggling to extricate itself from the pupal shuck

