



CHAPTER 10

Small Stream Attractor Dries



A RAB tied by Storms River artist, rod builder and fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche

The truth is, on mountain waters, you rarely come across an instance where you must match the natural insect. In my experience, mountain fish feed selectively on a single insect only 5 to 10 percent of the time.

Craig Martin 'Mountain Water – The Way of the High-country Angler' (Pruett Publishing, 1999)

Dry flies are made for small streams: the fish are aggressive, the drifts are short, currents are swift, the pockets are small and the strikes are quick.

Jeff Morgan 'Small-Stream Fly Fishing' (Frank Amato, 2005)

In order to perform during repeated casts in a short period of time and to sail serenely through rough water, small stream attractor dry flies must be buoyant, waterproof, easily visible and low maintenance.

In short, it must float like a cork, incorporate a sighter which combines both a highly-visible colour and a light-reflecting material so that it glints during the drift.

With specific reference to the streams near Cape Town, cognizance must be taken of the fact that blizzard daytime mayfly and caddis hatches happen very rarely.

A C Harrison, the effective founder of the CPS did a study of our mayfly species which can be found in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder on the CPS website. In the introductory article he notes that '... many of our Cape May-flies "hatch" (i.e. transform from the nymph) by night and mass emergences and flights of the larger species are far from common.' He kept the nymphs of the various species in aquaria in his garage and noted that most hatched at close to midnight on humid nights – presumably so that their wings would not dry out.

So while winged mayfly imitations like the Wickham's Fancy and the Greenwell's Glory were known to CPS members, they had been designed to emulate an insect found but rarely here in daytime and were not designed to remain afloat on our more boisterous streams.

What evolved over time, then, were flies designed more pragmatically to suit local conditions.

In his 2001 book, *Running Waters*, one of my favourite authors on fly design, Datus Proper, seeks to answer the question of the small stream attractor dry:

Reinventing the Royal Coachman is a bit like reinventing the wheel, but the fancy old fly does run into trouble, sometimes, with educated trout. The Dark-Water Fly fools more of them and is not so fussy to tie. I meant it for little freestone streams, but spring-creek trout that would not move 6 inches for a mayfly have startled me by coming across a pool for the winged beetle. They know that it is a soft target: Beetles falling in the water cannot escape and are not camouflaged like aquatic insects.

One of nature's pranks was to hang on the beetle a sign that says EAT ME when he falls into the water. I have tried changing hackle colors and adding red to the Dark-Water Fly, just to see if the fish were impressed. They were not. If there is magic in floss of red, eye of newt, or wool of bat, it is magic that impresses humans more than fish. Peacock herl, now, does seem to conjure up the trout. It has a metallic lustre, and real beetles come with metallic paint jobs.

Real beetles have neither tail nor visible wings: Those were for me. I needed to watch the little white V bobbing victoriously toward the maw of the trout down there. He didn't have the size of a shark, but he had the temperament and I thought of his tail beating faster as he watched my Dark-Water Fly sliding down shady currents. So much for the magic.

The science of it is that a fly can be designed for both humans and trout because we see different parts of it. You and I think of water as transparent, but its surface is, in fact, a visual barrier. A fisherman sees the part of a fly that sticks above the surface, and a trout sees best what is in or below the surface. For the fisherman, looking down, the water is typically dark, so white wings provide maximum contrast.

Trout, on the contrary, look toward the light when feeding on floating insects, and seen from below, most of the surface is a silvery mirror. Maximum contrast comes from a dark, low-floating body – like peacock. Everything above the surface is indistinct or invisible, especially if pale.

The Coch-y-Bondhu was nothing but a sparse hackle, a round beetle shape of herl, and a stout Partridge hook – wide of gape to keep the point clear of the extra-plump body. This was a dry fly except when it was wet. Other beetle flies worked on the surface but not when they sank a little – as real beetles often do. On the slow meadow streams, I could usually see the trout come to my fly, even under the surface. On fast water I couldn't.

So, of course, I put on calf-tail V-wings, short and sparse. A wisp of hair was enough to hold the Coachman suspended in the current, hovering, and perhaps tiny air bubbles caught in the crinkles reminded the fish of emerging caddisfly pupae or other insects. Marinaro's V-tail then had to be added to balance the wings and keep the fly from sinking at the rear.

This resonates with me in different ways, particularly if you take the narrow, heavily vegetated brook trout streams in the Shenandoah National Park as demonstrated in the many videos by Harry Murray as a case study.

It links to Gary LaFontaine in two ways. LaFontaine regarded the beetle as the most effective searching dry fly and, in his theory of attraction hypothesis in his book *The Dry Fly New Angles* he writes:

"The 'color' of the surrounding light affects the intensity of a fly's colour.

Even if there was no hatch to match, the trout on tree-lined streams responded much better to green flies."

He cites the Royal Trude, a down-wing version of the Royall Wulff, as his most successful dry fly under a variety of light conditions and the green peacock herl is a prominent feature of these flies.

What is interesting is that the Royal Trude has the same colour scheme and configuration as the Western Coachman, a wet fly version of the Royal Trude which was the only fly used by Georges Odier, the first person to act upon the fact that many if not most caddis species swim strongly underwater as adults when egg-laying.

His techniques predated today's Euro-nymphers, the only difference being that he used lead twist-ons rather than the brass and then tungsten beads now in vogue. Odier set this out in his 1984 book *Swimming Flies* and Chuck Fothergill later named the technique 'high-sticking'.

This reminds me of the fact that, in his 2005 book *The Loch Fisher's Bible*, Stan Headley says that flies with white wings have proved particularly effective in bright sunshine – the norm in southern hemisphere countries like South Africa and Australia.

So, between Datus Proper, Gary LaFontaine and Stan Headley we've come up with a strong recommendation for the Royal Wulff.

Furthermore, the attraction of peacock herl is resoundingly affirmed in the Red Tag, a cult fly for trout in Australia and Tasmania and for grayling in the UK.

Charles Meck in his 1991 book 'Fishing Small Streams with a Fly Rod' describes how he improved this fly by replacing the red thread centre section with blue Krystalflash to create the Royal Patriot

Although all these flies have six or seven turns of hackle they do not float like a cork.

To me, the rods that Chris Barclay uses and the streams he fishes in the Southern Appalachian Mountains define 'Lilliput Water' and Ernest Schweibert's 'Song of the Little Stream' and I asked him what dry fly he favours.

He cited the hackled version of the Mr Rapidan – yellow calf tail wing for visibility, light brown dubbing for the body, moose mane for the tail and the proven Adams recipe – brown and grizzly combined – for the hackle. (if that dubbing was Semperfli Kapok, it would probably improve buoyancy.)

He said parachute flies were not buoyant enough for the continuous casts and short drifts that his small stream fishing demands.



A small stream stalking rod built by Marcel Terblanche – an Orvis six and a half foot two weight equipped with a Hardy Flyweight reel

For me the important small stream fly fishing books have been *Trout from Small Streams* by Dave Hughes in the USA and *The Pursuit of Wild Trout* by Mike Weaver in the UK and their choice of flies is informative.

Weaver had the greatest influence on me because his articles appeared in the British monthly magazine *Trout & Salmon*.

His advocacy of the beetle fished up stream and dead drift was a turning point for me, bolstered by Gary LaFontaine's contention that the beetle was the best searching dry. Further support for the beetle came from Australian authors such as David Scholes and Noel Jetson.

As a teenager, Hughes used a size 12 Wulff-style fly he called the Beetle Bug, which had a body of dubbed red material.

He now favours a size 16 Elk Hair Caddis and says that going to small flies significantly improved his catch rate. I set out what I believe is an improved version of the Elk Hair Caddis – the Composite Caddis in a later chapter.

The Royal Wulff never gained much traction in South Africa, in part I believe because we developed a series of innovative patterns on the trout streams near Cape Town which proved to be exceptionally effective.

One was a big-hackled Variant, the others were flush floating and unusual in their innovative use of squirrel hair and the fact that several were imitations of the Lycosid Wolf Spider which does not spin a web but hunts its prey in riverine environments.

https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/South-Africas-Squirrel-Hair-Dry-Flies-Ed-Herbst_1.pdf

<https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Development-of-the-Wolf-Spider-Peter-Brigg-South-African-Fishing-Flies.pdf>

In the early sixties a fly was developed which symbolised a radical change in fly fishing technique as

it was then practised in South Africa. The Caribou Spider was tied by a British expat double bass player in the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, Mark Mackereth. It was probably the first local fly made of spun and clipped fur and the first tied specifically to imitate the *Lycosidae* Wolf Spider.



Mark Mackereth – master angler and developer of the Caribou Spider. Photo Tom Burgers

Prior to Mark's arrival in South Africa, it was customary to concentrate on the deep pools and to fish big wet flies like the Mrs Simpson downstream, often on a sinking line. Mark fished the dry fly upstream on a floating line, concentrating rather on the runs, riffles and pocket water.

I bought my first Caribou Spider from Lemkus Sports in Cape Town in 1979 and I saw it as a wingless parachute version of American dry fly patterns – such as the Irresistible – and meant to imitate mayflies.

It had a conventional dry fly tail and the parachute was constructed by tying the stripped quill into a loop which was held upright by a gallows tool. The hackle was wound laterally around this quill loop, the feather tip was then threaded through the loop and the quill was pulled to tighten the loop around the feather, leaving the tip of the feather pointing forward.



Later versions saw the hackle feather wound around a post of red chenille to create a parachute which made it easier to follow on the water.

The commercial version of the Caribou Spider – an extremely effective small stream searching dry fly (L)

If I were to recommend just one fly to a beginner on Cape streams, it would be the modern version of the Caribou Spider. It floats like a cork, is easy to follow in the most boisterous of currents and has proved successful for half a century.

A few years ago, a newcomer to Cape Town, Liesel Hattingh, asked my advice on fly selection and my recommendation, the Caribou Spider, quickly became her favourite. She says that offering it to a trout "... is like offering a child chewing gum."

I called it her 'laughter fly' because I would fish a few hundred yards behind her and her laughter as her Caribou Spider seduced yet another trout was a constant tonic.

Initially, her casting was somewhat erratic and I ended up with a Caribou Spider in my hat. She quickly improved, however.

Now the working mother of a teenage son who is turning into a formidable golfer (with all that that entails in a 'mom's taxi' context), she no longer has time for fly angling, but she still retains for sentimental reasons, a battered store-bought Caribou Spider which deceived dozens of trout. It is interesting in that the hackle is wound around a yellow chenille post, rather than the conventional red one.

Liesel Venter (nee Hattingh) with her battered Caribou Spider with which she caught dozens of trout



A closeup of the same fly – still ready to do battle

I am indebted to master split cane rod builder and CPS historian, Stephen Boshoff, for much of the following information on the life and times of Mark Mackereth.

Mark was born on Christmas day 1907 in Stillington, Yorkshire but grew up on a farm in nearby Pickering where he fished for trout and salmon. His parents reluctantly conceded to his decision to choose music rather than farming as a career. The outbreak of WWII interrupted his musical studies and he saw action at Dunkirk and in the subsequent Normandy campaign.

After the war, while doing guard duty at the Tower of London, he met a South African woman, Eileen Watkins, who was a friend of the family of the Officer Commanding of the Tower and who introduced them.

For South African fly-anglers it was a fortuitous romance. The couple left for South Africa in 1951 after Mark was offered a position as a double bass player with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra. Ten years later he took a transfer to the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, joined the Cape Piscatorial Society, and discovered the Smalblaar which, in issue number 53 of the CPS magazine, *Piscator*, he described as a 'delightful little river.'

Perhaps his most significant role was as mentor to a new generation of CPS Young Turks who were chafing against a decades-old regimen of tactics prescribed by the luminaries of the day such as Sydney Hey and Fred Bowker (Kingfisher), the manipulated wet fly, often based on gaudy salmon patterns and fished under tension across or downstream.

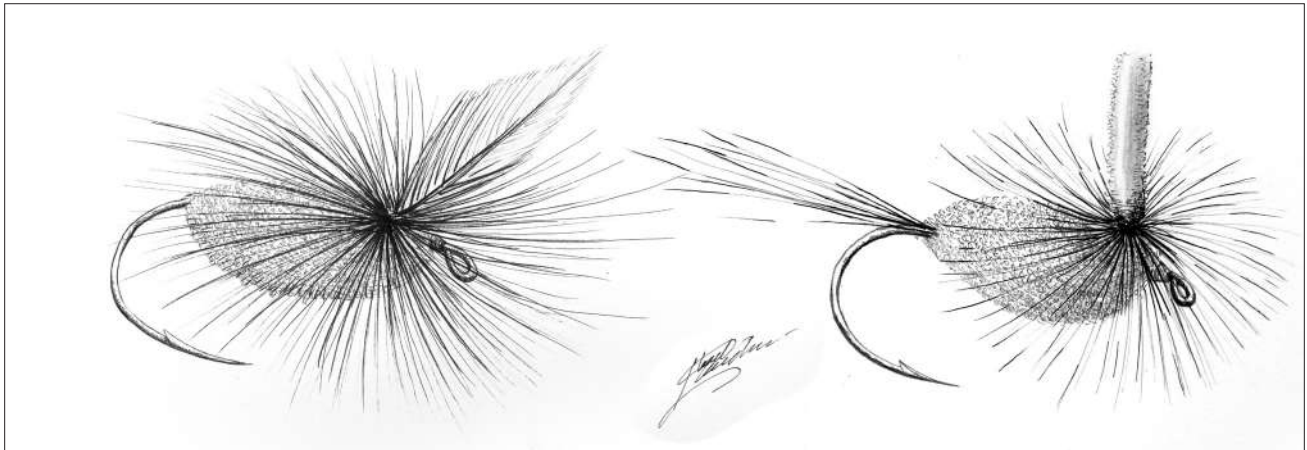
One of them was Tom Sutcliffe. It was only when I interviewed him for the DVD, *A South African fly-tying journey with Ed Herbst and friends*, that I learned how Mark developed the fly to imitate the Wolf Spider which was common on the banks of the Holsloot and Smalblaar streams near Worcester and that it therefore did not have a tail. On the DVD, Tom ties the modern version with a parachute post.

Here are the Vimeo links to the videos containing this and other interviews with South African fly tyers:

<https://vimeo.com/567798545>

<https://vimeo.com/573845780>

He described how Mackereth's sister, who lived in Canada and was due to visit Mark and his wife in Cape Town, was asked to bring out any fly-tying materials she could find. She brought with her a piece of caribou (reindeer) skin. It spins beautifully and Mark combined a spun and clipped body of caribou with a parachute hackle wound around the feather's looped quill. This process was facilitated by the use of what became known as a Gallows Tool which was developed by an Australian engineer, Bob Barlow and marketed by Veniards. Mark apparently said at the time that the inspiration for the fly was American – possibly the original Rat Faced McDougal with grizzly hackle tip wings or the Muddler.



A depiction by artist Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher – of the original tying of Mark, sans tail Mackereth's Caribou Spider (L). The commercial version of the Caribou Spider added a tail and used red Tuf Chenille as the parachute post, making it much more visible in the drift (R)

Tom recalls: "Mark's quest for the ultimate, wide, glossy and cleanly barbed free-range cock hackle was insatiable."

"During his time in Johannesburg he befriended Leo Rosettenstein, then owner of the iconic hunting and fishing shop, 'Arms and Ammunition' located in Bree Street in the city centre. One night after dinner at Leo's house, Leo mentioned to Mark that he had a small collection of game cocks that he used for hackle. Mark insisted on seeing them there and then. Armed with a torch, Leo showed him a few birds roosting in a peach tree. In a flash Mark grabbed the best-looking fowl by its feet and marched it inside where he divested it of a heap of its prime neck hackles. This story was related to me by Leo himself."

"Mark and I frequently fished the Holsloot River and along the road we passed close by a number of farms. We often stopped at Gevonden just before Rawsonville for, as Mark put it, 'A little inspection.' Folk would be going about their business around their cottages, but when Mark stepped out of the car he was instantly recognised as 'the feather man.' The farmyard would erupt into a cacophony of

screeching roosters as men folk, women and kids chased the better birds Mark pointed out, the red, ginger and white game cocks, but only the ones with the longer spurs. He'd take envelopes and a pair of scissors from his shirt pocket and in five minutes he'd snipped off the best of the neck feathers and handed over a rand or two."

"The same would happen as we passed through farms on the road up the Dwarsberg Valley on the way to fish the upper sections of the Holsloot and on frequent occasions, if there was time left in the day after fishing, I was instructed to take a back road home where Mark scoured new farmyards for suitable birds. If he spotted any he would bark, 'Stop!' quickly get out, establish his purpose with the somewhat bemused locals and then have them hunt down a targeted fowl or two. His parting shot was often, 'I will be back.' I'd see them in the rear-view mirror as we left, staring incredulously at the money they had just earned for a couple of feathers – and no doubt hoping he would be back!"

At my request two other people who had fished with him, a former President of the CPS, the late Geoff Godley and Pieter Cronje, former communication director of the Cape Town municipality, wrote articles for *Piscator* about him. They said he never learned to drive a car, was a great cook and could cast with amazing accuracy – even into the wind – with his split cane Pezon et Michel Ritz Fario Club

Geoff Godley wrote: "There was an aura about him which had to be observed to be appreciated. Cows and horses in a meadow would walk quietly up to Mark and nuzzle him and small animals such as dogs and cats were tremendously attracted to him. Barry and Helga Steyn who for some years managed the Du Toitskloof Hotel, had a bull terrier by the name of Jane who was always nearly beside herself when Mark arrived there to fish."

Pieter wrote: "I have never watched a neurosurgeon at work but observing Mark Mackereth present a wispy dry fly to a wily trout gets pretty close."

"His artistry included playing the double bass, tying delicate fly patterns, getting a trout when no one else could and preparing a connoisseur meal after a day on the river."

"The refinement started way back in Yorkshire. His grandfather who died on the trout stream at age 93 trained him to drop a fly into a glass some twenty paces away. He retained the skill and the accent. "

"His gentle dexterity and control with his split cane rod, his irresistible presentation of the fly, how he could adjust his cast for any situation, how he gently coiled the fly line in the palm of his hand and how he could play and land the fish will stay with me forever. Here was a consummate expert steeped in the tradition of gentlemanly conduct on the water coupled with a deep respect and appreciation of nature and living things. He was only too willing to share his vast, intuitive knowledge and techniques."



Tom recalls that Mark always insisted on roughing up his flies by putting them through the washing machine first and this sometimes delayed their departure.

Fifty years later two expert fly fishers, Fred Steynberg in Rhodes in the North Eastern Cape and Leonard Flemming in Stellenbosch independently developed their own patterns after realising that Wolf Spiders are taken avidly by trout and Peter Brigg is constantly refining his own version.

Fred Steynberg's spider imitation – dual feather halo hackle and Wapsi Bug Body

But Mark Mackereth was the first. His role in closing a chapter on the past, popularising the upstream

dry fly and in inspiring a new generation of fly fishers who were, in their own right, to impact massively on the evolution of South African fly fishing and fly tying, deserves recognition.

As Pieter Cronje put it: “Such a mentor comes but once in a lifetime.”

One can understand why spiders are irresistible to small stream trout where the proximity of wooded banks ensures a steady supply of drop-in terrestrial insects. It is a wide fly, a strong triggering characteristic according to LaFontaine and its eight rapidly moving legs are the key factor in its attraction.

One can find a series of articles on the evolution of South African Wolf Spider imitations by Leonard Fleming, Peter Brigg and Keith Wallington in the ‘Terrestrials’ folder in the CPS archives.

<https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/articles/terrestrials/>

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 way it to lifts 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.”

Leonard Flemming tied an imitation of the Wolf Spider using pheasant tail for the legs which was much wider than the Caribou Spider and Peter Brigg then tied a similar version which simplified the tying process. It is his favourite and most successful searching dry fly but neither version is sold commercially. (Peter’s website - *Call of the Stream* – is the most beautiful coffee table book on small stream fly fishing I have ever come across)

Almost as popular as the RAB, is Philip Meyer’s ParaRAB which I described in the previous chapter. As far as I can ascertain is unique in that its forward-facing, vertical fan of squirrel hair at the hook eye was specifically designed to take advantage of water level air currents which induce movement. It is now being tied in increasingly different ways and with different combination of materials.



Where the small stream stalking dry excels – the Willow Stream in Barkly East

Gerrit Redpath, veteran fly angler who has played an extremely positive role in local competitive

angling, favours a ParaRAB, altering the density of the parachute section to suit the water conditions - sparse in the thin water of autumn, heavier when the streams are still in spate after the winter rains.

The most popular commercially available searching dry fly in South Africa is the big-hackled Variant invented by Tony Biggs and this provides yet another example of just how influential Mark MacKereth was in shaping a dry fly approach to South Africa's rocky and rapid mountain streams.

It was under his mentorship that Tony Biggs started fly tying and his RAB Variant is the best-selling fast-water attractor dry fly in the country.

In a 1974 article in *Fly Fisherman* magazine 'High Profile Imitations', Gary LaFontaine described a small stream encounter with brook trout when his fly of choice was a Edward Hewitt's Bivisible:

"The Bivisible seemed to be a cure for the lazy rise of the wary trout. It fell gently with an air-resistant drop onto the water. It skipped on the conflicting currents. It imitated no specific insect, but as it shivered and wobbled high on the hackle points it captured an illusion of living entity and triggered the brook trout into decisive strikes."

And that's why, provided you are not casting into the wind, Tony Biggs' RAB Variant with its big hackle on a small hook, appeals to me so much.

It does not drift inertly as though lifeless – it has character! It dances and triples in sync with the push and pull of the current, it has a life of its own and the cheeky drift is preceded by a thistledown descent which, in itself, is a pleasure to watch.

Tom Sutcliffe has a step-by-step article on tying this pattern in the 'RABS and Variants' folder of the CPS archives.

<https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Tying-the-RAB-Tom-Sutcliffe.pdf>

<https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/articles/rabs-and-variants/>

Depending on the situation, trout approach their prey differently. If there is a termite fall in a dam, they will first splash it to subdue it then circle back to swallow it, but they will sip a chironomid adult trapped in the surface film. The response to a RAB is electric – they shoot out of the water like a submarine-fired missile and plummet down on it like a drone-dropped grenade.

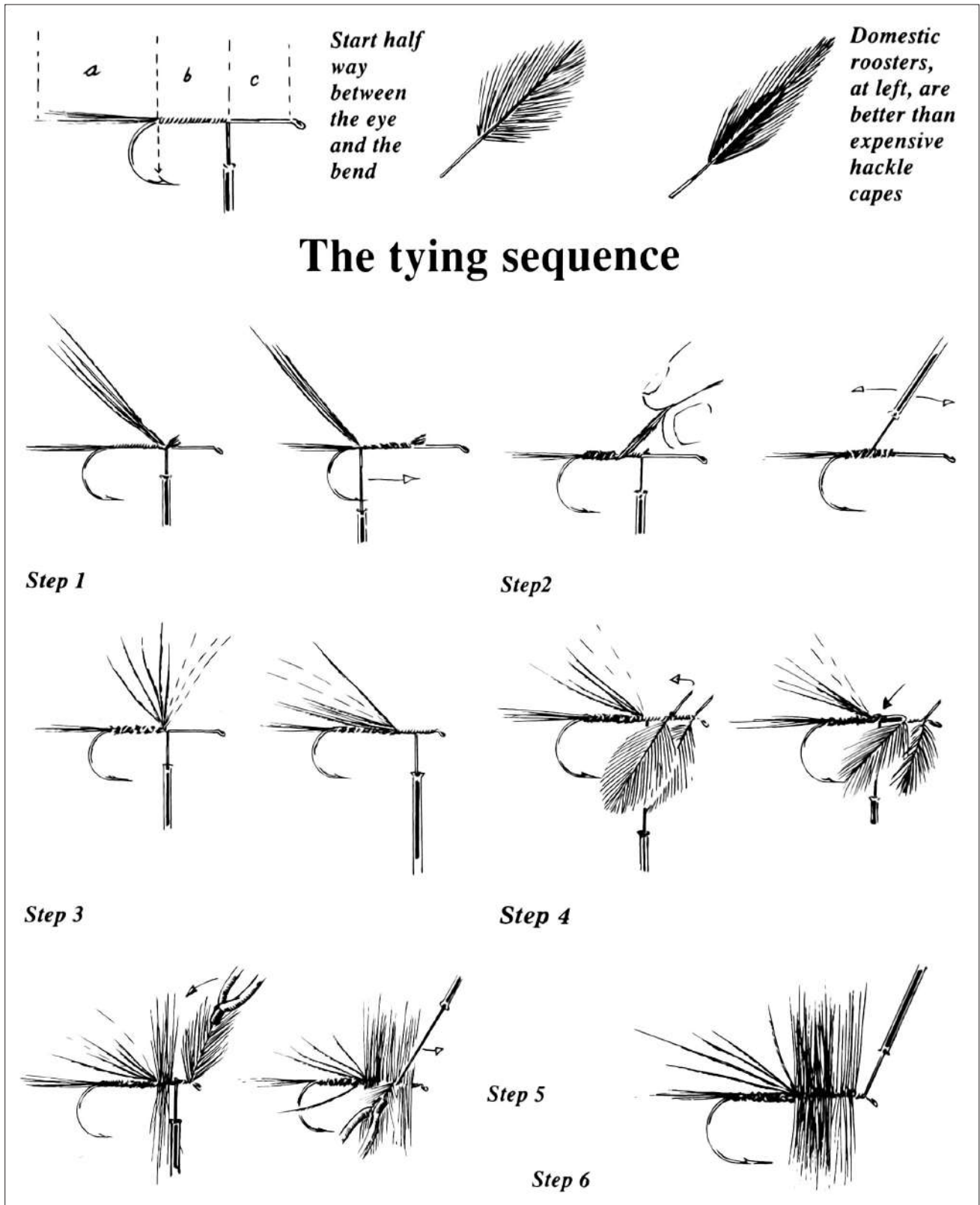
Small-stream trout – say eight to ten inches – have small mouths and Cape Town's leading professional guide for decades, Tim Rolston, raises a practical concern about Variants in his book *Guide Flies – Simple, Durable Flies that Catch Fish*.

His clients want to land trout and Tim correctly points out that the combination of a size 16 hook and a large, stiff hackle inhibits successful hook sets.

I don't care.

For me, the small stream ethos is predicated on enjoyment of the total experience and not notches on an angling bedpost and roll-casting a RAB with the breeze coming over the right shoulder, being able to easily follow it in the drift because it lands so softly and to see it taken by a trout in full-attack mode, makes my day.

Arno Crous, an enthusiastic South African small stream fly angler, emigrated to Australia where he fishes the little streams in Victoria. His @smallstream_flyfishn Instagram page is a pictorial Lilliput stream delight and I asked him what the favourite searching attractor dries in Australia are. He said the Stimulator was very successful, probably because it resembles the local grasshoppers, but he favours a small Goddard Caddis.



A Tom Sutcliffe step-by-step sketch of tying the RAB from his article 'Tying the RAB' in Piscator

So, in the USA, Dave Hughes chooses a size 16 Elk Hair Caddis and Chris Barclay the hackled Mr Rapidan. In Australia Arno Crous, who has fished small streams in South African and is familiar with our patterns, nevertheless chooses a small Goddard Caddis.

Craig Thom, owner of the Stream-X fly fishing shop in Cape Town says the RAB is his best-selling

searching dry fly, but he advises beginners to start the day with a small Elk Hair Caddis because caddis mate, lay their eggs and emerge at night so they are always present at one stage or another of their life cycle early in the morning.

There is a lot of merit in this call by Craig and Dave Hughes.



Datus Proper – an outstanding analyst of trout fly design (L)

Datus Proper, in his stellar book on fly design – *What the Trout Said* - says that if he were restricted to just two floating patterns, he would choose a conventional hackled dry to imitate mayfly – which don't feature prominently on South African streams – and a dubbed-body hair-wing sedge.

He makes the point that Al Troth used a palmered grizzly hackle of his Elk Hair Caddis not to increase buoyancy but to create the impression of movement. Hans Weilenmann takes this concept further with his CDC and Elk.

Bob Wyatt, a singular voice of reason – see [here](#) and [here](#) - agrees with Proper about the efficacy of the dubbed-body, no-hackle Deer Hair Sedge: *"I rate the no-hackle version higher than Al Troth's palmered design."* Adding that, for brown trout on lochs, it

reigns supreme as a bob fly.

In Rhodes, the Puterbaugh Caddis is gaining increasing favour as an effective, quick to tie and buoyant searching dry.

Dean Riphagen of Frontier Fly Fishing agrees with Gary LaFontaine that the foam rubber beetle is the best rough water searching dry fly and I made it more visible by splitting the Larva Lace foam rubber shellback so that it cradled a visible sighter.

An early version of the author's Split Back Beetle using a CDC sighter (R)

The record of beetles on small streams either in the initial deer hair Crowe Beetle form or the subsequent foam rubber patterns or in the previous Coch-y-Bondhu era is beyond dispute.

Here are two confirming quotes:

"For Welsh and Scottish streams and for small waters generally, there are few better all-round patterns than a Coch-y-Bondhu, and few which are so foolishly neglected. Wet or dry, and at any time of the season, it is always a good pattern to try on a strange river."

A Courtney-Williams, *A Dictionary of Trout Flies* (A&C Black, 1965)



"In my opinion the Coch-y-Bondhu is one of the best all-round patterns ever devised. I have used

it for more than forty years and, during no-hatch periods, it has it has rarely let me down."

Norman Marsh, *Trout Stream Insects of New Zealand – How to Imitate and Use them* (Halcyon Press, 2004)

Here are some of the accounts by top anglers about the efficacy of the floating deer hair or foam rubber beetle and its ability to tempt trout into striking which have ignored several other patterns:

The Hair Beetle Tying Flies with Jack Dennis and Friends (Snake River Books, 1993)

It was an early September morning on the Henry's Fork.

The dissipating mist revealed three trumpeter swans lazily swimming across the river. Tucked in a little indentation on the far bank, a slow rise caught my attention. Once again, a slow rise appeared at the same spot. This looked like a good size fish.

My friend, Mike Lawson, better known as 'the Dean of the Henry's Fork,' leaned over and philosophically said, "I know this fish. I've tried to get him before but failed."

"Mike," I said, "it's a new day. Let's give him a go."

We were on the Henry's Fork that day to film a segment of our video, Tying and Fishing Caddisflies. Mike reached into his vest and pulled out a fly box. "If I am lucky enough to hook this fish, it will be great for the cameras. He's a big boy. He feeds in this little back water and it's tough to get a drag free float to him. One mistake and he's history."

The first fly out of his fly box was a Black Caddis, next a Partridge Caddis, then a Pale Morning Dun... Mike even tried a size 24 Griffith's Gnat. An hour had passed and we had plenty of video footage of flies floating on the water while that fish went on rising. Mike looked at me in disgust, then looked at the camera and said, "Shut that thing off for a second. Jack, if you want to have a good picture of a fish running and jumping on film, you better let me pull out my secret fly box."

At this point, having a fish on camera, regardless of what it was caught on would be great. Out came the secret fly box and Mike pulled out a dark black fly with a little red tuft. "This fly works every time," Mike said. I peered at it and said, "That's a beetle!" "That's right, Jack," Mike replied. "Everybody thinks that the Henry's Fork is a match the hatch stream. Well, every time I can't match the hatch, I put this beetle on and it does the job for me. In fact, it might be my favorite fly on this stream."

Mike had a good drift on his first cast and as the beetle floated over that big rainbow, there was a gentle sip and the hook-up. The water exploded as the trout headed downstream. Mike leaned over and without an ounce of excitement in his voice said, "Maybe I should have brought my five weight today instead of my four weight." I never really paid much attention to a beetle until that day. Since that time, I have worked on a variety of different beetle patterns. I have found one that I feel is easy to tie and will work as well as the one Mike used on the Henry's Fork. I call it the Hair Beetle for lack of a better name.

It is basically a Crowe Beetle with a dubbed body, Krystal Flash legs and a sighter made of Glo Bug Yarn.

Here's a quote from Craig Matthews and John Juracek's *'Fly Patterns of Yellowstone'* on their foam rubber beetle pattern which they call the 'Blue Ribbon Beetle'.

During the dog days of August when fishing is demanding on the Madison, Henry's Fork or spring creeks this fly will out-fish all others in non-hatch situations. During Diptera emergences in mid-winter this fly will take fish after fish, because it imitates a mating clump of midges.

Last August 28th there was no hopper wind, no caddis hatch, and not many clouds in the sky but we had a day off from work and were determined to have a good afternoon of fishing. Working up

from Pine Butte in the catch and release section of the Madison we fished side by side and took over twenty nice browns and rainbows in the twelve-to-seventeen-inch class—all on a # 12 black Foam Beetle. We watched some fish travel over three feet and take the fly in a gentle sip.

If there is a drawback to any beetle pattern it is that they are hard flies to see. We do not know who first put a small clump of fluorescent pink yarn on the top of beetle patterns several years back, but it sure helps in tracking the fly.

Foam Rubber Beetle – ‘Fly Patterns of Yellowstone’ – Craig Matthews and John Juracek (Nick Lyons Books, 1987)

There have been similar experiences on the trout streams near Cape Town.

If memory serves me correctly it was Dave Whitlock who first put coloured nail varnish on the top of deer hair beetles and ants and I have often wondered why he did not add coloured glitter dust to reflect light and add eye-catching sparkle.

If I was restricted to three searching dries for the trout streams near Cape Town in spring or summer, I would choose a RAB if there was an upstream breeze and my Split Back Beetle and Composite Caddis if there was not. In autumn, I would choose a hopper.

I concur with LaFontaine’s conclusion that the beetle is an outstanding searching dry fly and I believe that I have solved the visibility problem to which John Crowe, the inventor referred in the context of his eponymous deer hair beetle.

The sighter post which protrudes from the top of my Split Back Beetle – described in a later chapter) combines materials which catch the eye not only because of their bright colours but also because of their sparkle – midge Crystal Flash, Hends Holographic Hair and pink or red wedding organza or pink Antron.

I believe that my Composite Caddis which I describe in a later chapter, offers several advantages over the original Al Troth version as does LaFontaine’s Airhead.

That’s not to say that the trout streams near Cape Town don’t offer their own ‘match the hatch’ challenges just because significant Mayfly hatches are rare occurrences.

The streams near Cape Town are not known for regular or blizzard mayfly hatches.

Tom Sutcliffe asked three of our most talented young fly anglers for their stream choices and the favourites of MC Coetzer and Matt Rich and Stanton Hector provide interesting reading and valuable food for thought.

A C Harrison whose research into local mayfly species is reflected in the CPS archive in the ‘Trout Behaviour and Diet’ folder kept most of the species in aquaria in his garage and found that they hatched around midnight on humid nights, perhaps so that their wings did not dry out.

There is one notable exception on the stream that I fished the most often, the Holsloot above the farm Dwarsberg Trout Haven near the village of Rawsonville.

You could literally set your watch by it and I called it the ‘Ten ‘o clock ten minute dinner gong.’ I think its *Choroterpes nigrescens*, the Holsloot Darkening Dun, a Leptophlebiid, because such egg laying is characteristic of this species. A C Harrison, who wrote the definitive study on our mayflies, hints at this but does not specifically confirm it. Quiet stretches with no sign of movement suddenly boil as trout rose almost in a frenzy.

Ten minutes later it is over and the stream is quiet again.

If, at the height of these churning rises you look behind you, you see with the backlighting, gravid female mayflies dipping down and flying against the current to dislodge their eggs.



Quiet areas of the Holsloot explode in frenzied rises when the mayfly egg-laying starts

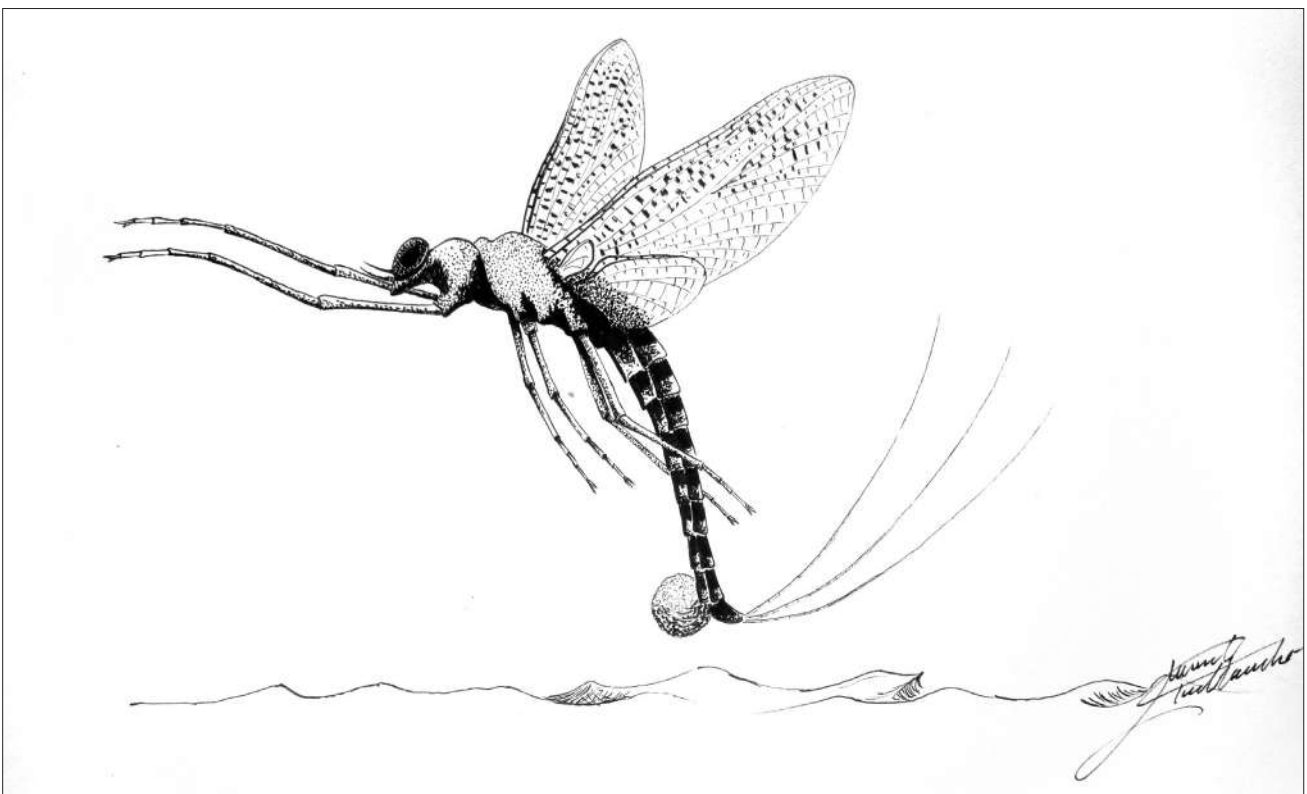


Illustration by Marcel Terblanche

The trout are reacting to the other trout and to the delicate impact on the water of the mayflies just as the trout in Barkly East and Rhodes react to the plop of the willow leaf eating beetles.

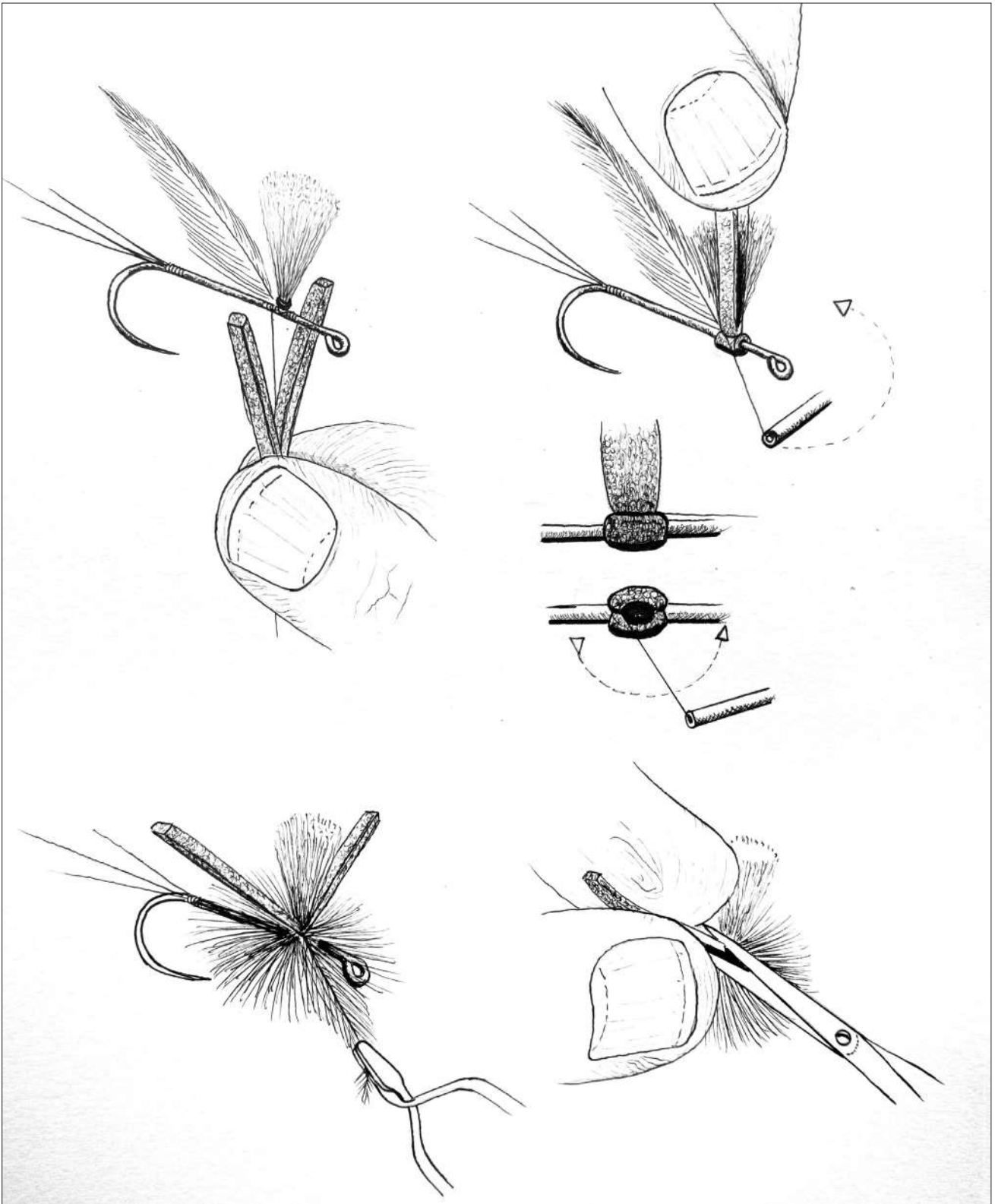
Anything small and black will suffice, a #16 black parachute or, demonstrated on YouTube ...

an Arpo – see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) – don't forget to add a CDL tail for extra buoyancy;

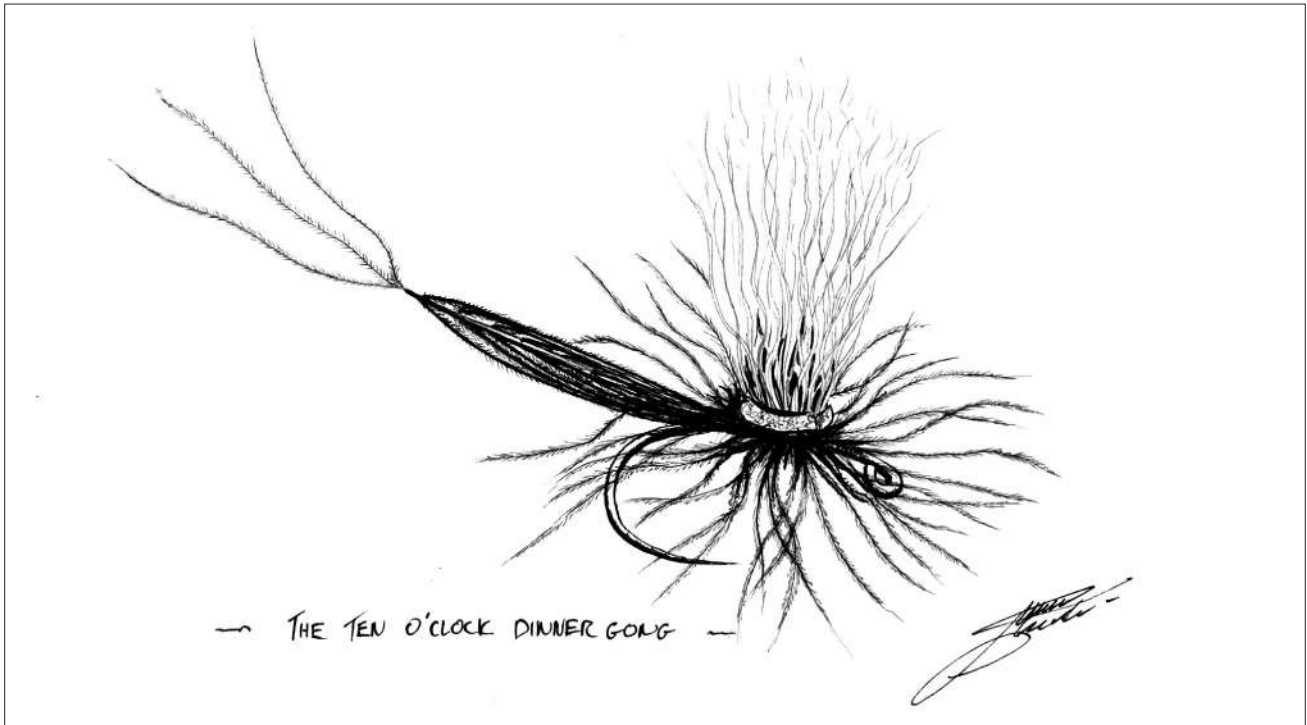
Darryl Lampert's [Hi-Vis CDC Midge](#)

Agostino Roncallo's Mirage and the the French Fore and Aft pattern called Mouche Exquisite

I tied my own #16 version of the Mirage incorporating Morten Oland's foam rubber thorax, a CDC parachute hackle and a wing of the fur from a snowshoe rabbit foot.



Artist Marcel Terblanche's depiction of the Morten Oland technique of cupping the parachute post from beneath with a U-shaped piece of Larva Lace foam rubber to add buoyance to parachute patterns



My answer to the egg-laying mayflies – a combination of Augustino Roncallo’s Mirage and Morten Oland’s technique of supporting the wing from below with a U-shaped piece of Larva Lace foam rubber to enhance buoyancy

I recall a day on this stream with an expert fly angler, Sean Mills, who pioneered fly fishing for carp and sand shark in the Western Cape

I took him to a place where a big trout had its lie next to a mid-stream boulder and hardly had we got there then it started rising. It was around 10 am and I assured Sean it was the Darkening Dun and he needed something small and black. He was confident that the small Elk Hair Caddis would suffice but after several casts and perfect drifts were ignored, he accepted my small black fly and hooked it first cast.

“That fish ignored 13 casts with the Elk Hair Caddis” he said as he released it.

Sometimes, after the rises stopped, I would get a response to a #16 sunk spinner but not always.



The author’s Sunk Spinner used after the rises to the egg-laying Choroterpes ceased (L)

The other major ‘hatches’ on our streams are the Net-Winged Midge (*Blepharceridae*) and the egg laying Black Fly Adults

Both occur in early spring, but I have only once experienced the black fly mating and egg laying personally and only once seen it referred to in *Piscator* catch returns.

The adult black fly looks exactly like a house fly and the midstream rocks were covered with an orgy of them, once they had laid their eggs they toppled into the

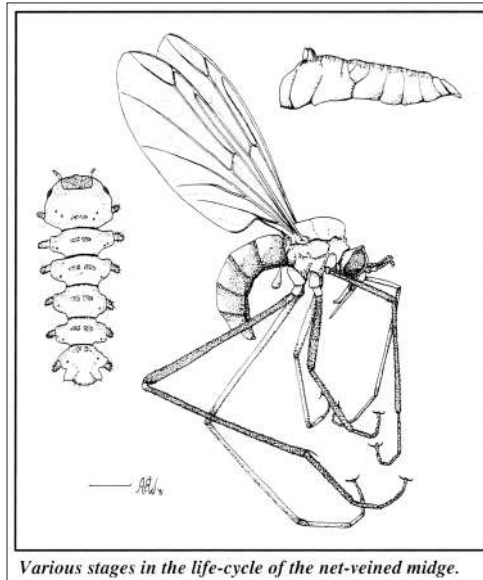
water and the fish went mad but I had no suitable fly. How I yearned for a #16 Coch-y!



A black fly female after laying her eggs (L)

The Net-Winged Midge hatches were far more predictable and Darryl Lampert's palmered CDC was created specifically for this hatch which elicits a frenzied response. It looks like smoke on the water. So too was Tom Sutcliffe's Single Feather Midge which has proved its worth both here and on the Itchen.

The Net-Winged Midge – like smoke across the water (B)



Various stages in the life-cycle of the net-veined midge.

When I was editor of *Piscator*, the CPS committee kindly agreed to pay two academics Dr Ferdie de Moor at the Albany Museum in Grahamstown and Shirley Chinn of the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg to write illustrated articles on the black fly and the Net Winged midge (*Blephariceridae*) respectively

Their respective article "Blackflies, Lords of the

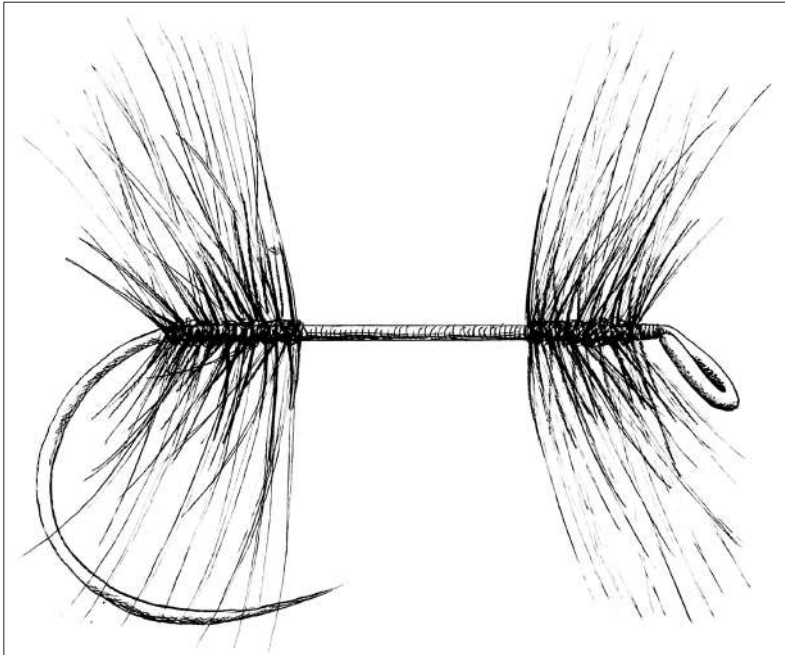
Rapids' and "Net-Winged Midges" of South Africa' can be found in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder in the CPS archives.



Tom Sutcliffe's Single Feather Midge – an effective Net-Winged Midge imitation

My initial pattern – which worked very well for the Net-Winged Midge emergence - was based on the Mouches Exquises (Exquisite Flies). The hackles are tied facing inward, shiny side to shiny side in

an X shape which provides a very stable platform. Pequenot states that for twenty years this was the only fly he used and he changed only if he found himself in a match-the-hatch situation. He said it accounted for more than half the trout and grayling that he caught.



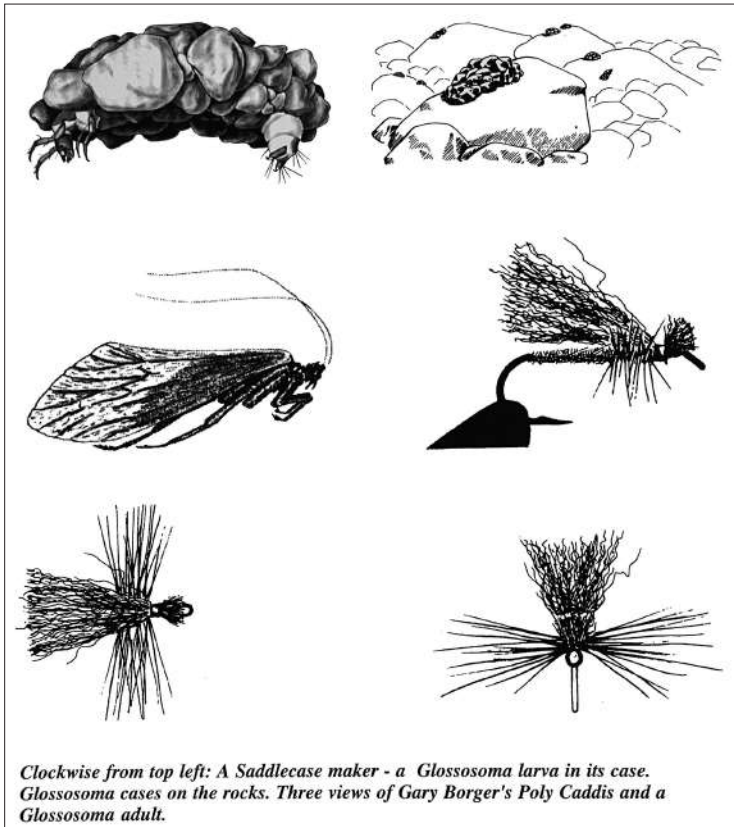
This sketch by Marcel Terblanche illustrates the principle behind the French Fore and Aft double hackle patterns which French author Jean Paul Pequegnot described as 'extraordinary flies' (L)

My great regret is that I did not solicit an academic article on another extremely prolific insect on the streams near Cape Town, the micro caddis. Tim Rolston, a former Cape Town guide, now resident in the UK, tied an imitation with goose biots as wings which is featured in the Indigenous Flies folder on the CPS website. It is one of the most prolifically-visible aquatic insects on our streams. Its little white sandcastle larval cases adorn virtually every rock on the stream bed and the

adults scurry across the rocks at the waterline in huge numbers.

I prefer Stanton Hector's version which uses a softer material for the wings – raffia.

Most micro-caddis egg-laying and emergence occurs after dark, but I was present once when they got the timing wrong and started around mid-morning. It provided some exciting fishing - read my article 'Caddis on the Holsloot' in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder in the CPS archive.



Clockwise from top left: A Saddlecase maker - a Glossosoma larva in its case. Glossosoma cases on the rocks. Three views of Gary Borger's Poly Caddis and a Glossosoma adult.

The various life stages of the Glossosoma microcaddis and Gary Borger's imitation of the adult (L)

In England, Stuart Crofts is the micro caddis expert and his patterns would be worth trying here.

In summary then, the RAB is an enduring favourite if the wind isn't blowing. The ParaRAB's popularity, in its various manifestations - let's just say a parachute incorporating squirrel hair – grows by the minute. Everybody's fly box contains a version of AL Troth's Elk Hair Caddis and a foam rubber hopper.

The competitive fraternity who fish the mono dry-dropper system to avoid micro-drag, greatly favour Tim Rolston's CDC midge as the top fly in their two-fly rig. It is a radically-successful method on more open water, but it is the anthesis of what I call the 'Small Stream Ethos'.



A contemporary ParaRAB - its wide squirrel hair hackle aiding its buoyancy

