



CHAPTER 11

Hi-Vis Parachute Posts – a local consensus



An illustration of Tony Kietzman's Edhåmer by Marcel Terblanche

Body and hackle color are essential in imitating natural insects. However, I am convinced that wing color does not make any difference to the trout.

From: *Fluorescent Flies (Techniques of Trout Fishing and Fly Tying by George Harvey (Nick Lyons Books, 1990)*

The 1983 article by George Harvey in *Fly Fisherman* magazine in which he stated that wing colour on flies played no role in the acceptance or rejection by trout was seismic and significantly enhanced the angling experience of fly anglers around the world from then on.

He reproduced the article in the above-mentioned book seven years later and here is the background story of how he reached that conclusion:

"In May 1983 I was given some Metz hen saddle patches dyed fluorescent orange, hot pink, yellow and green. Since I had been using coloured hen saddle patches for divided wings on some dry-fly patterns I most frequently use, I decided to see if the fluorescent wings would help me to see the flies and find out how the trout would react to the brilliant colours.

The first fly I experimented with was a deer hair ant. I wanted to see how the burnt wing compared with the fluorescent red lacquer I had been using on the back to make the fly more visible.

The first wing I tied was hot pink. I could see the fly as far as I could the lacquered version and the wing was still visible when the deer hair was practically torn apart.

It was a phenomenal experience to see trout rise and take fluorescent flies without hesitation. The best part was that I could see the flies in quiet or riffly water and missed very few rises. It turned the frustration I had been experiencing into delightful days astream again.

On many small mountain streams overgrown with rhododendron and other trees and shrubs, the light is so dim it is difficult to see beneath the foliage.

Joe Humphreys and I gave the fluorescent deer ants a real test on such a stream and the results were even better than I had hoped for. When certain light conditions exist, especially dense shaded areas, we were able to see the green fluorescent wings a little better."

(Harvey's conclusion that he could see a fly with feather-tip wings dyed green on streams shaded by vegetation is interesting because, in terms of LaFontaine's 'Theory of Attraction' and belief that the predominant colour of ambient light makes flies of that colour more attractive to trout, then a fly with a green wing should enhance its ability to evoke strikes. LaFontaine's most successful fly was the Lime Trude. Should he have tied it with a green synthetic wing such as Fishient's Frizz Fibre?).

I certainly concur with Harvey. If you lose track of your dry fly or emerger, the visual element that makes dry fly fishing so appealing is lost – for me at least. The alternative is to use a tiny bright yarn or float putty strike indicator – but these often seem to get more strikes than the fly you are using.

Trout thus seem to be attracted to, rather than repelled by these bright colours as millions of nymphs tied with red and orange 'hot spots' prove.

There is compelling historic evidence in this regard. To my knowledge the first parachute pattern to be available over the counter in Cape Town was the commercial version of Mark Mackereth's Caribou Spider which was sold by Lemkus Sports at the bottom of Adderley Street and for decades it was the only parachute pattern available.

It was the first dry fly I fished when I started fly angling in 1978 and for years it deceived thousands of trout despite the fact that the anchoring post for its grizzly hackle is a piece of red chenille.



The commercial version of Mark Mackereth's Caribou Spider symbolises his immense contribution to fly angling in South Africa

The consensus is that fluorescent pink parachute posts are the most visible and the easiest to track during the drift.

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

In Rhodes, guide Tony Kietzman uses fluorescent pink Antron yarn as the parachute post on his Edhåmer emerger. "It screams at you", he says.

In Pietermaritzburg, guide Jan Korrubel concurs using this material on his ParaRAB emerger.

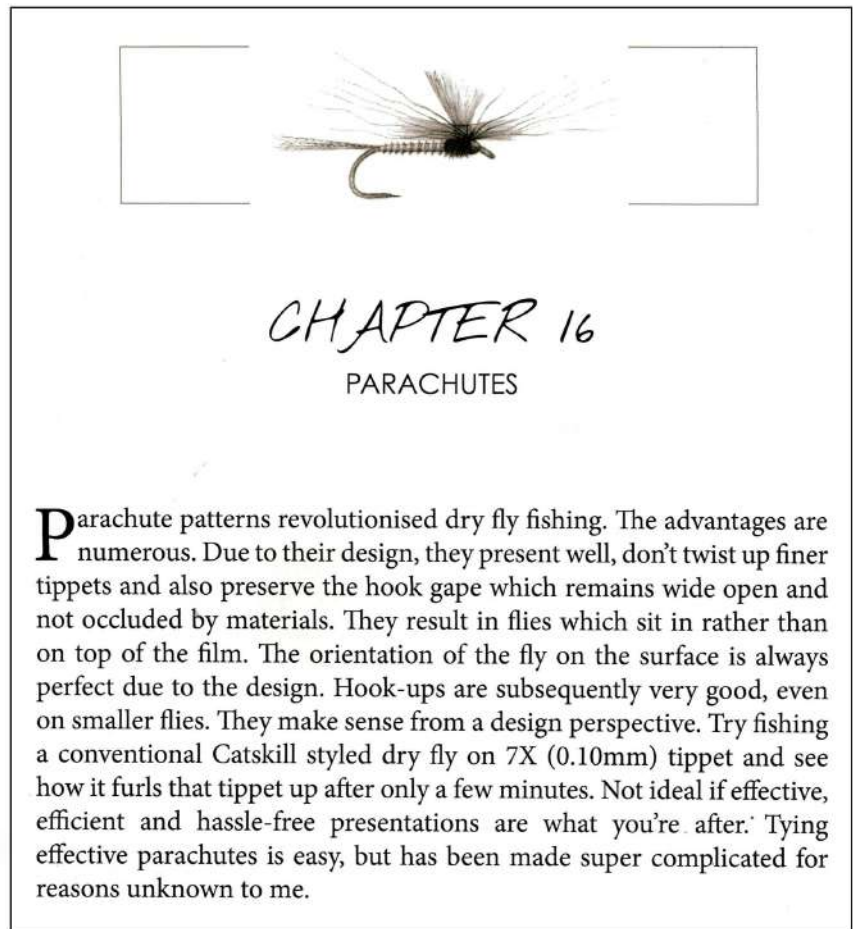
Philip Meyer, who invented the ParaRAB while guiding in Stellenbosch a decade ago, uses fluo pink Frizz Fibre by Fishient for the parachute post and cuts the post at an angle sloping downwards towards the hook eye. This exposes the fibre tips which reflect light, the resulting sparkle making the fly easier to follow in the drift.

This accords with the experiments that George Harvey and Joe Humphreys did 30 years ago when failing eyesight led them to tie the Adams with pink wing tips from some dyed grizzly capes given to them by Bucky Metz.

These flies were in no way less effective than the standard Adams, but could be tracked far more easily on the water, particularly in shaded sections of the stream.

Furthermore, one of the leading guides in the USA, Pat Dorsey, recommends fluorescent pink posts on parachute dries in his outstanding book, *Tying and Fishing Tailwater Flies* (Stackpole Books, 2010).

The doyen of South African fly tyers, Gordon van der Spuy, is a devotee of parachute patterns and devotes a chapter in his first book 'The Feather Mechanic' to the correct way to tie them. It has justifiably aroused interest all over the world, is available on Amazon and Kindle and is scheduled for reprint.



Gordon van der Spuy, with me to his right, teaching Rena Bladen to tie a parachute pattern

In addition to a chapter on how to tie parachutes, he includes two patterns tied in this way, his Macaw Midge and Philip Meyer's ParaRAB. He favours white polypropylene for his parachute posts. (His follow-up book 'The Feather Mechanic II seems destined for similar success.)

This prompts the question of whether brightly-coloured parachute posts result in less takes?

I put the question to South African fly anglers and shop owners:

Craig Thom (Stream-X): "I have a problem with the visibility thing. Always be visible - to whom? It may be my imagination, but I feel that flies without bright sighting posts are more effective. This means: straining harder to see them, hoping you know more or less where it lands and watch for the splash, using a bigger dry as well as a spotter, or getting closer to the water level where you can see it better (Still haven't found waders that let me lie on my belly).

One way around the visibility problem in the late afternoon is to fish two dries, one light, one dark."

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

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

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

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

MC Coetzer: "Interesting...

I'm stuck somewhere in the middle here.

I have found that bright posts definitely scare fish, so I will not use them unless it is absolutely necessary. Bright posts become absolutely necessary only when I can't track a fly which is tied with a white post and this normally only occurs in the early morning or late afternoon when there is too much glare on the water.

Being able to see the fly is the more important consideration for me but I have definitely found bright posts to be less effective than plain white or grey.

The other side of this coin... Why are flies like G & B Low Floaters (tied with a bright orange body) or sub surface bright beaded nymphs so effective if a bright post, which is half hidden behind a hackle, scares fish? Maybe the bright post problem is all in the mind – my mind.

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

I still carry a few but must admit that I hardly ever take them out – possibly because I don't fish

that early or late in the day.

A number of years ago – maybe eight - I thought it would be a good idea to incorporate a Royal Coachman/Wulff-style body (red Holo-Flash between two segments of peacock herl) into a small all-black parachute pattern that had been working extremely well for me. No trout ever took those flies and despite numerous attempts to make it work, there are still one or two left in my boxes. This was the only change I made to the previously-successful pattern which had a slim body of black superfine dubbing. Strange...

This whole discussion is very interesting. It does however seem that being able to see the fly is the primary consideration and that this is why anglers with failing eyesight, prefer the bright posts."

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

Stanton Hector: "I am partial to tying parachutes as well as other flies using white material as a sighter. However, a few months ago I picked up some orange Spirit River poly yarn after seeing Tom Sutcliffe's CDC Single Feather Midge.

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

Mark Krige: "1: Can trout distinguish colour above the waterline?

2: Does colour at least partly affect the response of a trout to feed on or reject a potential food item?

3: Do pressured trout 'wise up' and become wary of certain colours, especially 'unnatural' colours?

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

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

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

My Conclusion: The choice is a subjective one depending on your eyesight and what you hope to derive from your day on the water. If, like me, you don't have 50/50 vision and you are fishing for enjoyment, then a pink parachute post makes sense because white seems to disappear when your dry fly is in the bubble line. If, however, you are a competitive fly angler, then the experience of repeated last-second refusals is difficult to ignore", Mark says.

What is also relevant here is the undeniable fact that trout are attracted to orange and grayling to pink.

Hareline McFlylon Polypro is a fluff, lighter than air and designed originally, I think, for salmon

egg imitations. Why not, then, make it an integral part of your fly as Tom Sutcliffe did with his Single Feather Midge?

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.



Fishient, the Scottburgh-based company of Cliff and Tarryn Rochester has come up with an interesting compromise in the 'Flash' version of a material called Sculpture Fibre. It is an Antron-type material which incorporates ultra-thin Mylar threads. This provides subtle glints in the drift and it works well for size 14 to 16 flies. There is a finer version called Deadly Dazzle.

Yaqoob Tarmohammed (L), a professional fly tyer, who posts on Instagram as @jozify, ties hundreds of parachute flies annually from the Parachute Adams to the Klink and the ParaRAB and he says his clients routinely

stipulate either white or pink posts.

#jozifly says his clients invariably choose white or pink for the wing on parachute fly orders

Another professional fly tyer, Alan Hobson, who is also a guide, has had the same experience and his inventory can be found on his 'wildflyfishinginthekaroo' website.

As a final arbiter I put the question to AI and the answer startled me because I came across an article where the author had done comprehensive tests using materials of all colours but purely within the context of what was most visible – and the answer is not pink.

The headline on the article by Joe Dellaria is 'Parachute Post Duel: Picking the Best Color and Material' and you will find it on the website of the J Stockard fly fishing shop – www.jsflyfishing.com.

Of course, you don't have to use fibre as the anchor for the parachute, foam rubber works just as well. Although it is heavier and less aerodynamic it does provide more buoyancy.



(L) An orange Fettuccine foam rubber post is cupped, Morten Oland-style, by Larva Lace foam rubber in this emerger – the body is olive Semperfli Straggle Legs

(R) A Wapsi foam rubber parachute post anchors the CDC hackle and Razor Foam is used for the body on this mayfly imitation

The commercially-available foam rubber parachute posts are expensive, but it is easy to make your own using either a leather punch or a biopsy punch, the latter available through your local pharmacist.



Two views of a size 20 squirrel hair parachute tied on a size 20 Tiemco 206BL hook by Peter Brigg using conventional craft foam as the parachute post

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Fred Steynberg of Linecasters fame who guides all over the world but lives in Rhodes, uses the most accessible and inexpensive foam rubber material of all.



Fred Steynberg's Wolf Spider imitation which uses Ethafoam as the anchor for its 'halo hackle' parachute

Gary LaFontaine believed that Ethafoam packaging material has exceptional light dispersal and trout attracting properties.

