

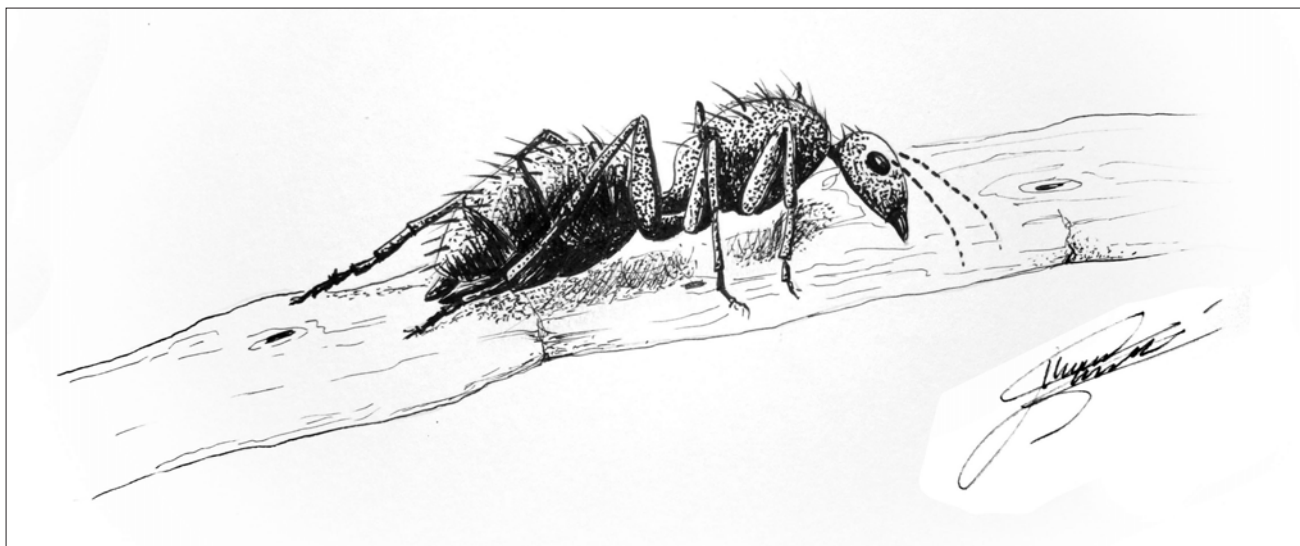


CHAPTER 12

Terrestrials – A Seasonal Rationale

“Small stream trout will almost always rise to an ant if they are willing to come up at all.”

William C Black *Creek Craft – The Art of Flyfishing smaller streams* (Truchas Publishing Company, 1988)



Scientific research in both the USA and Britain indicates that once the spring hatches of aquatic insects are over, terrestrial insects form the bulk of trout food and that, over the course of a season, more terrestrials are taken by trout because they are available for more hours of the day than the sporadically hatched aquatic flies.

In England, Dr J.Y. Woolland studied the stomach contents of 105 brown trout over a twelve-month period on the river Dee in Wales and found that from late spring onwards aerial insects were not only the single major food source but that they were the majority food, being greater than the total of all other food sources.

What is even more interesting is Dr Woolland's finding that as trout grew older they took more surface food and that from early spring to late autumn, terrestrial insects were taken in much greater numbers than aquatic insects in all but one month.

In their book, *Terrestrials -A Modern Approach to Fishing and Tying with Synthetic and Natural Materials* by Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch (Stackpole Books, 1994) the authors estimate that terrestrial insects are more available to trout than aquatic insects by a ratio of 7-1.

This is borne out by a study cited by the late Charles Brooks in his book, *The Trout and the Stream* (Crown Publishers, New York 1974). Using drift nets to trap floating insects, scientists found that, in early spring, 80 per cent of floating food taken by trout consisted of aquatic insects. By midsummer the balance had shifted and now 60 per cent of trout food consisted of terrestrial insects. Taking the year as a whole, the trout derived 70 per cent of their food from non-aquatic, land-based insects.

“Match the hatch if there is one on but, if there is not, look to terrestrial insects”, said Brooks.

In the hotter climate of South Africa this tendency is probably even more pronounced but, of three major terrestrial insects in trout diet, the grasshopper, the ant and the beetle, which is the most likely to find favour with your quarry?

The short answer is that the choice is seasonal because the seasons define when each of the three is most prolific at a given time.

For the trout streams near Cape Town that means beetles in spring, hoppers in autumn and ants for much of the year.

The longer answer is subjective and, for me, everything pivoted on what I found was the most enjoyable way to fish.

If there was gentle upstream breeze, I enjoyed fishing the RAB, aiming not at the target but above it and watching the slow descent.

Over and above that, I'll leave it to G E M Skues to explain - because nobody has defined it better:

“The indications which tell your dry fly angler when to strike are clear and unmistakable, but those which bid a wet fly man raise his rod point and draw in the steel are frequently so subtle, so evanescent and impalpable to the senses, that, when the bending rod assures him that he has divined aright, he feels an ecstasy as though he had performed a miracle each time.”

Once I had discovered strike indicator nymphing in the 1980s through the articles of Dave Whitlock in *Fly Fisherman* magazine, I had found my niche.

The greased Hi-Viz leader incorporating coloured mono and a small yarn strike indicator meant that my less-than-optimum eye sight was not a great handicap.

The yarn strike indicator changed the aerodynamics of the leader causing a slightly-weighted fly to abruptly swing downwards creating an automatic tuck cast.

At the same time, I had been reading the articles in the UK magazine *Trout & Salmon* by small stream specialist Mike Weaver who fished boulder-strewn streams like the West Dart, and the Cherry Brook, streams very similar to the ones I fish. These articles were to culminate in a wonderful 1991 book *The Pursuit of Wild Trout*.

As always, I was looking for the fly which would change my fortunes for the better and Weaver gave me direction with sunken beetle pattern which he called the ‘Black Bug’.

Hook: Size 16 or 18, sometimes 20

Body: A short length of lead wire whipped to the shank, with bronze peacock herl wound over.

Back: Crow or other black herl secured at front and rear

Describing the pattern, Weaver writes: ***“For some unknown reason, even the most supercilious trout in smooth, shallow water is vulnerable to this fly when presented on a long leader with a very fine point.”***

There were other clues.

The summer 1975 issue of the Cape Piscatorial Society's journal, *Piscator*, carried an article, ‘Comic

Yorkshire Fly' by British angler, Eric Horsfall Turner. This referred to his Eric's Beetle which had a peacock herl body, a yellow wool tail and a small, starling or black hen hackle. He fished it upstream on a greased leader and it proved so effective that he stopped fishing it unless he came across selective trout that refused all dry flies. They would then quickly succumb to the Eric's Beetle and a marrow spoon would indicate what they were feeding upon.

Then the 'Comic Yorkshire Fly' would be removed and replaced by a suitable imitation of what the trout had been rising to.

You will find this article in the 'Terrestrials' folder, in the 'Articles' section of the Cape Piscatorial Society's archive, home to this online book.

In 1952, Tom Ivens published his ground breaking book, *Still Water Fly Fishing* which popularised the Black and Peacock Spider, a wet fly version of the immortal Coch-y-Bonddu. It had a peacock herl body and a black hen hackle and was probably taken as a snail or beetle.

But it was just as deadly on streams and, in his 1986 book, *50 Favourite Wet Flies*, T Donald Overfield quotes another British angling author, Conrad Voss Bark as saying it was deadly when fished upstream on chalk streams and spate rivers alike:

"Sometimes the fish comes to it with such a splash you practically drop your rod. At other times they just suck it down as though they know the beetles cannot escape."

Noel Jetson, the legendary guide and fly shop owner from Cressy in Tasmania, chose as one of his favourites what he called the "Riffle Beetle". He first came across it in the late fifties being used by Dick Wigram, a protégé of G E M. Skues and he described it as 'deadly.'

"The Riffle Beetle is the easiest of all flies to tie. It is best in small sizes and used on a very fine tippet. River or lake, it is a very good fly."

Here's his dressing:

Hook: Kamasan B160 size 16

Thread: Black

Body: Peacock herl

Overlay: Black crow wing or Raffene

Further research led me to believe that fishing a beetle like a nymph with an upstream dead drift very probably had its origins in Australia.

In 1939 Wigram authored the book *Nymph Fishing in the Southern Hemisphere*.

"The use of an artificial beetle in various types common to the Southern Hemisphere is closely allied to nymph fishing."

Many of the beetles eaten by trout (at times these constitute 90 per cent of their food) (my emphasis) are not water insects but are purely adventitious and purely seasonal in their occurrence.

The ti-tree beetle, which hatches out in December, supplies food for the trout for quite an appreciable period and when at its height is found to constitute almost the entire stomach content of nine fish out of ten.

The wet patterns are fished in much the same way as the nymph. If necessary, the cast may be greased to the last link and the gut carefully watched for the sudden draw that indicates fish.

The beetle is tied thus: Bind silk from eye to bend. Tie in a small strip (1/4" wide) taken from a crow feather. Next tie in a short length of black wool and, having taken the silk back to the eye, bind the wool up the shank to within a short distance of the eye. Wind the wool back three parts of the way

and then forward again to form a fat body. Tie in the wool and cut off the waste. Wind on at the eye two turns of a small reddish-brown hackle (Rhode Island Red) leaving a little space at the eye. Bring the piece of crow feather over the body and, separating the hackle, tie this in at the space left behind the eye. Tie down with several tight turns of silk. Whip-finish and varnish. The ti-tree beetle may be made in exactly the same way, excepting that the wings and hackle will be a different colour."

When I started fishing a sunken beetle upstream and dead drift using a greased leader with a small yarn strike indicator in 1993, I assumed that I was fishing a drowned terrestrial beetle. What I did not realise is that the wholly aquatic Riffle Beetle - *Elmidae* - lives in pocket water, feeding on algae, plant material and dead insects.

This is what Dick Wigram was imitating and New Zealand's Stu Tripney keeps Wigram's legacy alive with his size 16 'Bionic Riffle Beetle'.

What is significant is that the dressing of Wigram's beetle, subsequently adopted by Jetson, is basically the same as Mike Weaver's Black Bug'.

Today you have a wide range of hooks and materials to improve on the patterns I used in my early and successful attempts to fish the sunken beetle upstream and dead-drift in the same way that G E M Skues and Frank Sawyer fished their nymphs. Beetles in spring play a singular role in trout diet all over the world but the season is usually a short one

In Britain it is *Phylloperth hotiticola*, the Coch y Bonddu, in New Zealand it is *Pyronota Festiva*, the Manuka beetle, in Australia it is *Paropsis pictipennis*, the Tea Tree Beetle found on myrtle shrubs and the smaller Gum Beetle, *Pyrgoides orphana*, which feeds on the leaves of wattle trees. In America the arrival of the invasive and rose-devastating *Popillia japonica* - a Scarab beetle - played a singular role in the evolution of terrestrial tactics in Pennsylvania in the 1950s and the deer hair Crowe Beetle was the predecessor of today's foam rubber designs.

In South Africa it is the Christmas Beetle - *Hypopholis sommeri* which attacks wattle and eucalyptus and is so prolific that it inspired Tom Sutcliffe's DDD and, on that legendary yellowfish venue, Sterkfontein Dam near Harrismith, it inspired Dr Hans van Zyl's 'The Good Doctor's Beetle'. His innovative use of decoupage material was a significant step forward for South African fly tying and you can read his article 'A Beetle Story' on this technique in the Terrestrials folder on this website.



Dr Hans van Zyl's legendary beetle which has deceived thousands of yellowfish over the years at Sterkfontein Dam near Harrismith

CHAPTER 12

In the Fynbos Biome and the trout streams near Cape Town it is the pollen eating Brown Monkey Beetle – *Pachynema marginella*.



Three beetle species on a yellow daisy which are prolific on the banks of mountain streams near Cape town in spring

Their focus is daisies but they are also partial to the blue, sweetly-scented flowers of *Psoralea pinnata*, a bush which blooms between October and December and is often found growing at the water's edge



Brown Monkey Beetle and a Bloukeur flower

The September 2018 issue of the South African magazine *Veld & Flora* contained a fascinating article 'Beetles in Blooms!' by Racquel de Castro Maia. She found 157 beetles and bugs, comprising eight species in a single Protea flower.

In Barkly East and Rhodes what I call the Willow Beetle - *Plagiosterna discolor* (Stål) (Chrysomelidae: Chrysomelinae) – the small iridescent green beetle that feeds on the weeping and crack willow trees - is the most important component in the diet of trout in that area during spring and much of summer.

It's about the size of a match head and trout react instantly to the plop as it hits the water.

The season doesn't matter though, many fly angling luminaries consider the beetle to be the ultimate searching fly and hatch breaker:

"I'd rather fish a beetle than a nymph. As a saver of blank days, the Black Beetle is high on the list" David Scholes *Trout Days* (Kangaroo Press, 1986).

"The beetle serves me better than a grasshopper or an ant pattern as a general terrestrial fly simply because the ubiquitous beetle is much more prevalent in the trout's diet than most fly fishermen realise; a trout's stomach isn't always jammed with them, but there are always a few in any stomach sampling" Gary LaFontaine, *The Dry Fly: New Angles*

"If I had to pick one fly to use on spring-creek waters, without hesitation I would choose a black beetle. Even though I have seldom encountered situations where I knew trout were actually feeding on beetles, I have probably caught more fish on beetle imitations than any other fly" American fly-fishing writer, guide and fly shop owner, Mike Lawson, writing in the Autumn 1990 edition of *American Angler and Fly Tyer*

"Only a few flies have the power to break the feeding concentration of selective fish, and the beetle is one of them." Randall Kaufmann, *Tying Dry Flies*, 2001

"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*, 1986

"... it's a rare summer day when fish cannot be enticed to accept some form of artificial beetle." Steeves and Koch, *'Terrestrials'*, 1994.

"Although never absolutely assured, more than one trout has submitted to a black beetle fished solely as an act of utter desperation." René Harrop *'Learning from the Water'*, 2010.

What was common to the drowned beetle designs of Wigram and Weaver was the use of an iridescent feather, often crow, for the shellback. Today we have translucent and elastic materials such as Hareline Scud Back which, being stretchable, is much easier to tie with than feather slips and brass and tungsten beads down to 1.5 mm to provide sufficient weight to sink the fly.

If you prefer to fish floating beetles, my Splitback version seeks to obviate the problem noted more than 70 years ago by John Crowe of Johnstown, Pennsylvania whose deer hair pattern was the precursor of modern foam rubber imitations – it is difficult to follow in the drift.

If your eyesight is marginal, don't attempt to follow small floating flies in the water. You are far better off using a Hi-Vis leader which has been well-greased with Mucilin paste and which incorporates a yarn strike indicator or, even more convenient, a tiny blob of Loon Bio Strike putty on one of the leader knots. I used to keep a small piece stuck to my rod handle in case I found the need for it.

Ants

About 20 years ago, on a hot midsummer's day, a morning with my sunken beetle had not proved productive and I stopped for something to eat and drink, sitting in the shade of the bankside trees – the evergreen Smalblaar Myrtle (*Metrosideros angustifolia*). In the branches above me I could see the carton nests of the tiny (4mm) Black Cocktail Ant, *Cremogaster peringueyi* which are made of chewed plant material and resemble brown *papier maché*.

Ants were on the branches around me and at my feet.

In his wonderful 2017 self-published book *Ants of Southern Africa* – now sadly out of print – Peter Slingsby writes: ***“If you find a carton nest of cocktail ants on the west or south coast of South Africa, the chances are that this very common species is the responsible resident. The colonies often number tens of thousands of individuals.”***

When I read that, I had a flashback to the late 1970s when Tony Biggs took me fishing. In those days, the Cape Piscatorial Society had yet to implement a catch and release policy and a neighbour of Tony’s, renowned for his trout pâté, had asked him to bring some home.

The first trout I caught had a tiny black ant at the front of its mouth and another further back and I realised that the trout had the ability to detect and capture these ants individually in fast pocket water.

Years later, on that hot summer day, I also remembered Vincent Marinaro’s quote about red ants in that wonderful pioneering book *A Modern Dry Code* referring to these minute insects *“... glimmering and glowing as if lighted by some inner fire”*.

That led to the development of small copper wire ants tied on up-eye sedge hooks with their wide gape.

Copper wire is malleable which means it can be flattened with fine-nose pliers to keep the hook gape open and this is facilitated by the use of up-eye sedge hooks such as the Tiemco 206 BL and the Hanak H360 BL which are available in small sizes.

Back then, I covered these ants with nail polish, today I would use a UV light-cured resin such as Solarez Copper Shimmer which contains minute specks of light-reflecting glimmer dust. You can achieve much the same effect by adding glitter dust to clear UV resin.



Solarez Copper Shimmer used in the first stages of this sunken ant pattern which is tied back-to-front so as not to occlude the hook gape

The position of the copper wire turned the hook upside down and hook point facing upwards which made it less like to snag the stream bed.

Cape Piscatorial Society member Deon Stamer pioneered the use of micro ants on my streams – tied down to size 32 – just two blobs of black thread

He fishes these tiny flies on 8x tippets tied New Zealand-style to the bend of a small indicator dry fly such as a Comparadun.

More often than not, the trout take the trailing fly.

He has developed an ingenious method of attaching these flies to the hook bend of the suspender dry.

He cuts the tip from hypodermic needles leaving the hollow section exposed.

He ties his tiny ants to the 8 x tippet at home and then attaches the tippet to the needle with a Perfection Loop knot.

To link the ant with the Comparadun, he inserts the hook point of the indicator dry into the exposed hollow section of the hypodermic needle, slightly loosens the Perfection Loop Knot and slides the loop over the Comparadun hook point.

Tighten the Perfection Loop Knot and the two flies are joined.

In significant measure, Gamakatsu has facilitated the tying of micro-ant patterns with its Big Eye C12-BM Barbless Midge hook

The oversize eye mimics the head of the ant so all you need to do is create a thread abdomen and attach a strand of nylon organza material in a spent wing style behind the eye and you have an excellent GISS-style micro ant.

Now Hanak has picked up the gauntlet with its medium wire, short shank # 26 H150 BL, effectively a size 28 which will not easily straighten even on bigger trout.

Hoppers



A Barkly East hopper showing why imitations tied with orange rubber legs are successful

It took me more than 30 years to reach an understanding of the role that grasshoppers play in the diet of trout in my home streams and it required a bit of sleuthing.

In the 1970s, prior to the advent of the now pervasive catch-and-release ethos, members of the Cape Piscatorial Society would examine the stomach contents of the trout they kept, note these on the catch return forms which the CPS provided and return them to the club room.

CPS secretary A C Harrison would then pin them to the noticeboard where they were a constant source of interest, providing members with information on who caught what, where and on what pattern.

What is fortunate in retrospect is that AC, as editor of the Society's journal, *Piscator*, would publish this stomach content information under the headline *Notes from the Club Room Board*. This guide, which was published in *Piscator* for 14 years from the autumn of 1965 until the autumn of 1979, was

dropped for space reasons and it was loss which was keenly felt.

What was needed, I realised, was an analysis of that information to see if any useful conclusions could be gleaned.

And so it proved.



**The Cape Alder Fly larva becomes an autumn staple for trout in the streams near Cape Town.
Photo courtesy of Mike Picker**

What was clear was that in April and May, the numbers of what we call 'Toebiters' – but what are called hellgrammites in the USA or Alderfly in the UK - were found in increasing numbers in trout stomachs, replacing the Baetis nymphs which are the staple earlier in the year.

At this time the larvae move to the shore, climb out of the water and dig a hole in moist soil where they pupate. During this migration they become very vulnerable to predators like trout and a small Woolly Buzzer or Pat's Rubber Legs is all you need.

Toebiters are semivoltine, having an egg-to-adult lifecycle that lasts for several years, so they are always available to trout in different sizes, but the availability of the largest sizes peaks in Cape trout streams in April and May.

A further interesting factor then became obvious. What was also increasingly found in trout stomach contents in autumn was grasshoppers.

For example, on 28 April 1969 one of South Africa's legendary fly fishing pioneers, the late John Beams, wrote that the trout he had caught on the Smalblaar stream near Cape Town were ***"Stuffed with toebiters and grasshoppers."***

Quite why this should be so for grasshoppers, though, I was not sure.

Looking for evidence on hopper seasons in the southern hemisphere, I found some useful information in *Dry Fly Fishing for Trout* (Kangaroo Press, 1994). The author, Tasmanian angler Tony Ritchie, says:

"Adult insects begin to appear in late December and my records suggest that the fishing they spark usually starts in the middle of January and sometimes extends to the rest of the season late in April. The action seems to peak during the last three weeks of February and the first three weeks of March, perhaps because the grasshoppers are more mature then. With the heat beginning to liven

them up, their jumps and flights grow longer and so they find themselves more often on the water.”

Perhaps, I reasoned, they are simply coming to the end of their lifespan in autumn and thus weakening?

I eventually found the answer I was looking for in another Tasmania-related article about the Nobby Hopper, a grasshopper imitation created by the legendary guide, Noel Jetson. It is on the flyanglersonline website and here is the relevant passage: ***“Grasshoppers mate in late summer and autumn, after which the females deposit their eggs in soil. Gradually, as the height of summer looms, less aquatic food is available in lowland rivers and trout start relying more and more on terrestrial foods, particularly grasshoppers.”***

Looking at the hoppers which I have come across on the streams near Cape Town and cross-referencing the information and the colour photographs in the *Field Guide to Insects of South Africa* (Struik, 2002) I would say that the most common are Rock Grasshoppers (*Conistica saucia*), Burrowing Grasshoppers (*Acrotylus*) and Yellow Wings (*Oedaleus*). If one takes the early instars into account, I would say that two centimetres was an average length for the adult insect - about a size 12 hook and tan the average colour.

Remember, though, that for much of their lives they are smaller than that and the smaller the fly, the easier it is to cast and, according to one of my fly design idols, the late Datus Proper, the more likely the trout are to take it without suspicion.

Hopper season

In South Africa, the eggs are laid in autumn – let us say April.

They are dormant (called a diapause) for 9-10 months – through our winter - and would hatch around December. The newly-hatched grasshoppers, called nymphs, are replicas of the adults but are smaller and cannot fly. They go through progressive moults (instars) for about five weeks, growing progressively larger, until they reach the adult stage which would take us to mid-January. It takes another month for the wings to fully develop. Thereafter the hopper lives for about another two months and it is in this period, April and May, that they start mating fights and flights and become more available to trout. This was reflected in the *Piscator* catch returns.

In the meadow streams in the north eastern Cape which flow through open grass land, a rubber legged foam hopper is hard to beat, particularly when the storks are in evidence. They are not known in Afrikaans as Springkaanvoel (Grasshopper Bird) for nothing!



Hopper time! When the storks are seen feeding assiduously in Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear, it's time to reach for the hopper box. Photo courtesy of Warwick Tarboton

As Peter Brigg has noted, when a hopper lands in the water it momentarily lifts its wings in an

attempt to fly to safety. It then spins around to face the nearest bank and starts to kick its way to safety.

Peter says that dead hoppers are ignored and this was also the experience during the cricket experiments of Ralph and Lisa Cutter.

Tony Ritchie's book provides a further snippet of useful information. He writes that crops planted on farm land close to the river bank, attract hoppers and the clue for me was storks feeding in such areas in Barkly East and Rhodes as they built up their strength for the annual migration to Europe.



**Lucerne fields close to the willow-lined Sterkspruit in Barkly East.
Beetle and hopper patterns excel here. Photo Stephen Boshoff**

I believe what made my hopper pattern so successful on South African streams was the configuration of its downward-pointing, knotted legs and the movement of the legs when twitched.

Crops that are found in the rich alluvial soils on the banks of the rivers in Barkly East and Rhodes in summer and autumn include rye, lucerne and wheat but my hopper also worked on the boulder-strewn streams near Cape Town throughout the year and I put that down to the 'splat factor'.

Here's Jeff Morgan in his outstanding 2005 book, *Small Stream Fly-Fishing*: ***"I have also found that the rise to hoppers seems instinctual rather than by choice. Have you ever noticed how most fish rise to a hopper right after it plops in the water? After catching 60 fish on hopper patterns on small streams in Yellowstone, I found that over 70% of rises occurred within two seconds of the fly hitting the surface. This is not the picky rise of a selective fish, this is instinct. When a big piece of food hits the water, the trout doesn't even think, it eats. This instinctual reaction probably accounts for most fish we catch on hopper imitations. Compare this rise speed to trout that came up for ant and beetle patterns. With another group of 60 fish hooked on ant and beetle patterns, less than 40% of rises came within two seconds of the fly hitting the surface. There is still an instinctual reaction, but it is much less pronounced than with the hopper patterns."***

When it comes to the difference between the splatted hopper and the splatted beetle, I believe the dangling, double-jointed rubber legs on my hopper designs tipped the pocket water odds in favour of the hopper plus - on my rocky streams - its more distinctive silhouette.

This factor has been enhanced since Stephen Boshoff came up with what I call his 'pendulum-leg' design in which the cranked, downward-pointing leg, is counterweighted with tiny drops of UV-resin to create more movement in the leg.

On small streams with a gentler flow, the beetle is probably more effective.

A hopper is the one dry fly which can be twitched with confidence and, used as a miniature popper, it can be a successful antidote to dead-drift tedium.

Spiders

"The spider is honestly something special, watching it float down the stream and into an eddy, watching a big bow come up and have a look, deciding carefully whether or not to take the fly and then absolutely engulfing it. Seriously fun skinny stream fishing today. I fished a simulid with a spider dry dropper. For every 2 fish I hooked on the simulid, I hooked one on the spider. After this I couldn't help myself and fished only a spider or hopper the rest of the day, all on a little 6ft 1weight and had such fun."

Matthew Sephton email while fishing the Three Drifts Stream, Barkly East in December 2023



Spiders are outliers in the context of insects upon which trout prey but they are readily accepted when trout detect them as this painting by Storms River artist, Marcel Terblanche, makes clear

Fred Steynberg and Tom Sutcliffe are the only fly anglers I know of who have used a stomach pump on larger trout caught in Barkly East and Rhodes.

Tom says he has never found a spider in his samplings and Fred mentions one occasion.

That is because they are very agile and adept at staying out of the water.

However, when they do land on the water, they become extremely vulnerable because they are so detectable.

Firstly, unlike insects, they have eight instead of six legs and the tips of these legs leave what John Goddard called 'foot indentations' which reflect sunlight and create literal sparks of light.

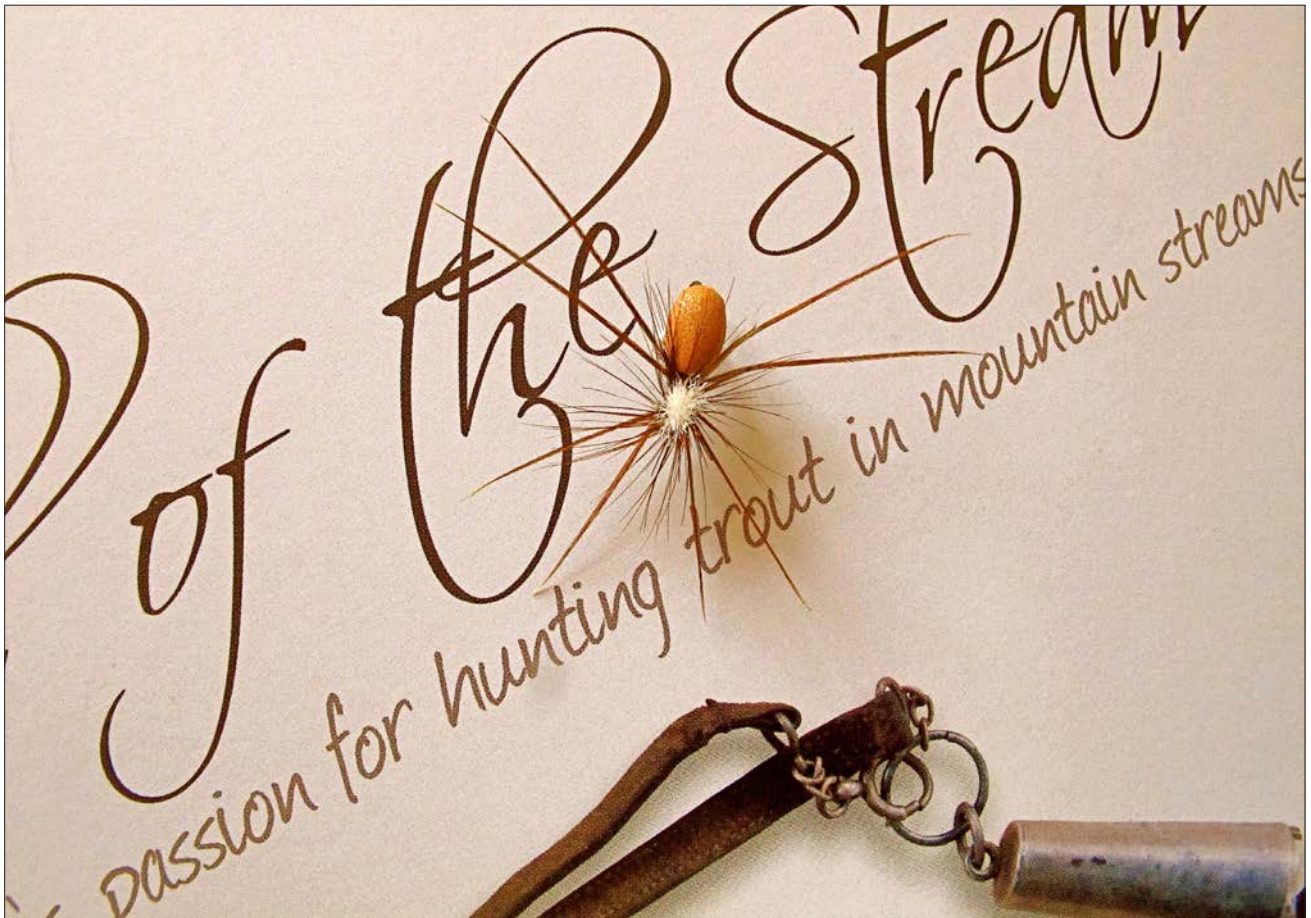
Goddard and his co-author Brian Clark wrote in their 2005 book *'The Trout and the Fly'* that these sparkles play a significant role in enabling trout to detect insects coming towards them in the current.

Secondly, they are wide insects -small body, long legs – and as Gary LaFontaine wrote after his team of scuba divers spent hundreds of hours underwater studying the reaction of trout to various fly patterns, a trout holding deep in a fast current, will rise to a wide fly because it signals the arrival of a 'big chunk', i.e. lots of calories.

Historically, Mark Mackereth's Caribou Spider was the first local Wolf Spider imitation but, since then, we have had patterns from Fred Steynberg, Keith Wallington, Leonard Flemming and Peter Brigg. The latter three have contributed articles to *Piscator*.

In his article, Leonard Flemming says he was inspired to tie a spider imitation after seeing a trout leap out of the water to take one in mid-air *"that was dangling by its silken thread from a streamside bush"* and he goes on to say it has proved successful on streams in the Western and Southern Cape and the Drakensberg Mountain Streams in KZN: *"I've lost count of trout I have caught on this fly and believe it would work well on most streams excelling I have found, when trout are wary or selective"*.

This website also contains an article by Peter Brigg, an extract from the book we co-authored on indigenous flies, which sums up the background history on the development of Wolf Spider imitations.



A Wolf Spider imitation tied by Peter Brigg – his favourite small stream searching dry

After I joined Instagram - [@ed_herbst346](#) – in mid-2022, I started following photographer

#davidlambroughton who often posted photos of his #16 rubber leg, foam rubber spider opining that it was so deadly on New Zealand trout "that it ought to be banned".

This view was supported by a guide in New Zealand, Dean Bell who, in his chapter in the 2006 anthology 'New Zealand's Best Trout Flies' (Pheasant Tail Publishing) wrote that its 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"***.

I was aware of its potential because I had downloaded a 2015 article he had written for the issue of the American magazine *The Flyfisherman* in which he described how successful it was in deceiving steelhead. When fishing rivers like the Babine in British Columbia he ties his rubber leg spider patterns on short shank #4 – 6 hooks.

"Now the best drift of the day on a summer steelhead river is just after sunup, wading ankle to knee-deep, maybe less, and watching a River Spider struggle over two to four feet of water. And every time it looks like the bottom dropped out of the river as 10 to 20 pounds of steelhead seeks deeper water along with maybe 100 uninterrupted yards of my backing".

Ever since reading an article on Tom Sutcliffe's website by MC Coetzer in which he stressed the importance of orange rubber legs as a trigger on hopper patterns, I have tied my foam rubber spider patterns with this material - but the real spider imitation breakthrough came when Stephen Boshoff sent me a photo of his 'Light Bulb Ant'.



Stephen Boshoff's Light Bulb Ant (L). A design idea which significantly enhanced the author's rubber leg spider pattern

Initially, my thought was that by adding resin to the tip of the pliable rubber legs on hopper and spider patterns, you were creating extra movement but it was only when I saw a spider photographed on the water by expat South African, Arno Crous who fishes the small streams of Australia, that the penny dropped and the dots connected

Notice the eight points of light where the tips of the spider's legs touch the water creating a dimple in the meniscus which strongly reflects light in the bright southern hemisphere sunshine

Prior to seeing this photo, I had coloured the resin blobs on the tip of the rubber leg with a permanent marker, but now I leave the Loon Knot Sense foot tips clear.



The top view of the rubber leg spider which by December 2023 was being tested by Rudi Hiestermann and Heather Ralph in Rhodes and Matthew Sephton in Barkly East

Both recorded an enthusiastic trout response with Matt Sephton saying the trout in the Three Drifts stream on Pitlochrie *“wouldn’t leave it alone”*.



A trout which was deceived by the author’s rubber light bulb leg spider when fished by Matthew Sephton on the picturesque Three Drifts stream on Pitlochrie farm in Barkly East

What better way to say goodbye to 2023 than fishing upper reaches of the Bokspuit in Rhodes.

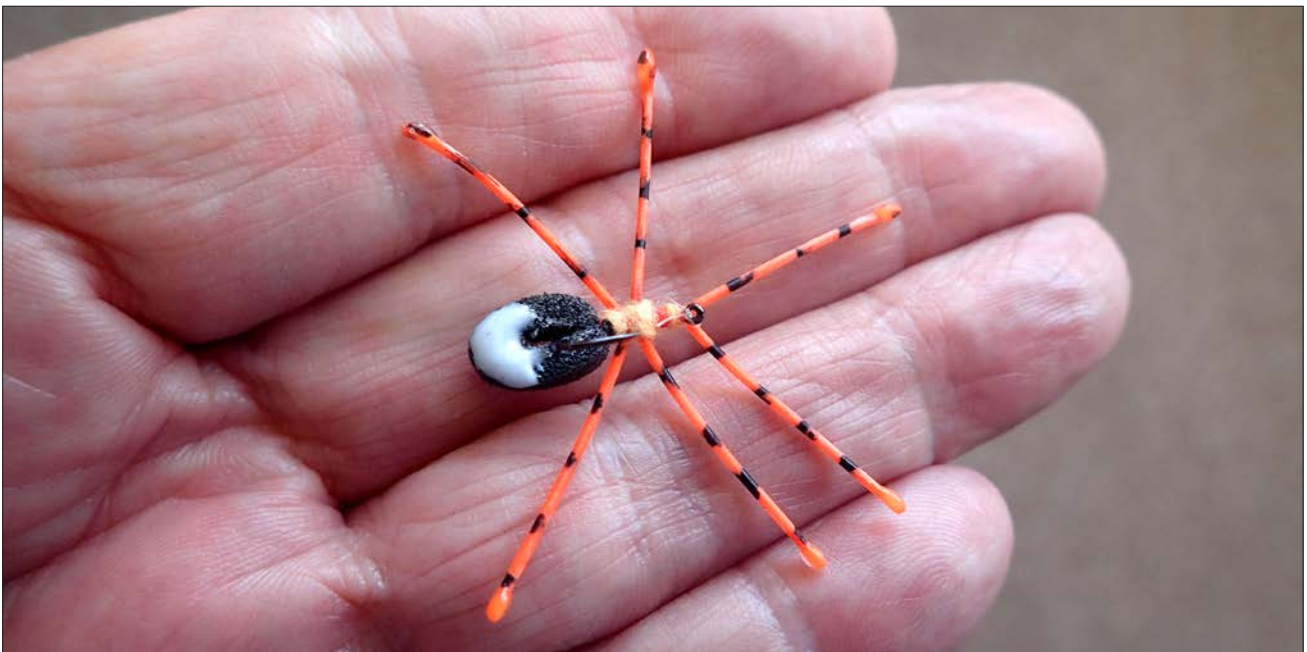
Rudi Hiestermann and Heather Ralph - @fishnwine on Instagram - did just that proving that my foam rubber spider with its mottled orange 'Pendulum/Light Bulb' legs has the potential to become a small stream searching dry fly of note.

Steady rain in Rhodes saw the Bokspruit running strongly so they opted to fish its upper reaches – on the farm Glen Nesbit – part of the Wild Trout Association's portfolio. Its trout responded very positively to both the spider and my Simulid Nymph – although the latter (tied with brass beads by Yaqoob Tarmohammed - @jozify) needed the help of a "good dollop of Loon Soft Weight. (Keep in mind that the Simulid can be tied with tungsten beads if a faster sink rate is needed).



Rudi Hiestermann's trout caught on old year's eve with orange-legged 'Light Bulb Spider' on the upper reaches of the WTA-controlled Bokspruit in Rhodes

In 2023 Solarez introduced an innovative UV-light cured resin – 'Buoyant Armour', innovative in that it adds buoyancy. I've used this white resin on the bottom of the foam rubber body to imitate the egg sac which the female Wolf Spider carries beneath her abdomen



Solarez Buoyant Armour used on the bottom of the author's Light Bulb Spider to imitate the egg sac which the female Wolf Spider carries beneath the abdomen

Dressing

Hook: #12 Dohiku 303 or Hanak H230 BL

Thread: UCT 70 in fluo orange or similar

Body: Soft foam rubber such as Larva Lace in black

Legs: Orange – spotted rubber (must be rubber – UV resin ‘light bulb’ won’t adhere to silicone rubber legs). Wapsi round rubber leg material is ideal

Dubbing: Fluo Orange Semperfli Kapok

Light Bulb: Loon Knot Sense – less expensive than other UV resins and does the job

Sighter: Red glitter dust mixed with UV resin and cured

Egg sac: Solarez Buoyant Armour which is white and contrasts with the black foam rubber body

If one accepts Gary LaFontaine’s ‘Theory of Attraction’ – that ambient light affects how trout see potential prey and if one accepts that orange is a colour that trout find attractive, regardless;

If one accepts Gary LaFontaine’s theory that trout holding deep in strong currents need a ‘wide fly’ to induce a rise;

If one accepts that ‘general impression of shape and size’ and, even more importantly, movement are essential elements of imitative fly design;

If one accepts the photographic evidence produced by Brian Clarke and John Goddard in their milestone 2005 book *The Trout and the Fly* - that trout detect insect prey coming toward them in the current by light reflected from the dimples their feet make as they indent the meniscus;

If one accepts the scientific research which indicates that trout detect prey not only through movement but through contrast...

... then the fly depicted here with its orange, UV resin-tipped legs and ‘white egg sac’ on a black body...

... might just be the most effective small stream searching dry fly extant.

