

FOSAF Fly of the Month November 2023 – published with permission

The Sugar Ant Dry Fly

Marcel Terblanche



Ants are ever present along the banks of South African streams for a number of reasons. There is an ample supply of food for them with many flowering plants and grasses that grow on the banks which attract ants in numbers. Flotsam in the form of dry vegetation which collects on the shoreline of eddies and pools is also an important source of forage for the wood collecting ant species. And of course, water, being the source of life for most creatures is a major attractant to most ant species, especially in the dry seasons of the year.

In the South-western Cape, the Smalblaar Myrtle, *Metrosideros angustifolia* grows right on the waterline on most of the Cape streams, with its limbs stretching out over the water.

These small trees are prone to aphid attacks which in turn, attract certain ant species which feed off the honeydew excreted by the aphids and also the aphids themselves.

These trees also offer the perfect habitat for Cocktail ants to build their fascinating nests high above the flood line. Naturally in the Cape Kloofs there are strong winds and breezes, with gusts often knocking ants off the trees onto the water surface.

In all habitats around South Africa ants will be a prevalent terrestrial insect family that occur around our trout streams, and it makes absolute sense to have a selection of ant patterns in your fly box.

A few years ago, Ed Herbst asked me to test his Sunk Ant pattern on the pristine Witelts. It proved to be a killer pattern as my fishing partner out fished me on the first day with Ed's fly while I tried hopelessly with various dry flies. He was even picking up fish in runs and glides that I drifted dries over already. Needless to say, I quickly switched over to Ed's ant and instantly started picking fish up. Ed's Sunk Ant was tied on a #22 hook, and this proved to me that trout are ultimately tuned into feeding on small ants caught in the drift and tumble of fast mountain streams.

After our success with the Sunk Ant pattern, I adapted it by using a parachute hackle to make a dry ant pattern that could be tied in small sizes. The concept is not new and draws from the Japanese poodle dry flies which are tied on Klink or caddis hooks with an abdomen that sits under the surface film, suspended by the para hackle. With ant patterns its important to observe a clear separation between the thorax and abdomen to suggest a natural ant shape.

This Sugar ant dry has proven its worth on the small streams in the Cape and also in the densely forested streams I have fished more recently.

Materials:

- Light caddis or klinkhammer hook in size 18 or smaller. For this demo I used a Kona universal caddis hook.
- Thread- Semperfli Nano silk 30 D coloured with a brown or black marker.
- Wapsi polypropylene floating yarn in white.
- Grizzly or light dun hackle.
- Black Ice-dub for the thorax.



Step 1: Clamp the hook in the vice at a downward pointing angle. To create the subsurface abdomen, lay down a short base of thread along the upper half of the hook bend and build this up to a oval shape and

tie off. Mark this 'bulb' of thread with your brown or black marker. Now apply a drop of UV resin or varnish to coat the abdomen. I find building up the resin with two or more thin layers works best.



Step 2: re-position the hook into the vice to work on the front of the fly. Tie in a small bunch of the floating yarn on top of the hook shank. Separate the rear facing half of the bunch and crisscross the thread to form a wing on either side of the fly. The wing can be thinned down to only 4-5 fibres on each

wing, Now use the front facing bunch to create a hackle post, at the same time tie in your hackle along the post.



Step 3: Dub a small amount of the Black Ice-dub around the hook shank on either side of the hackle post. Now wrap your hackle down the post and secure with a wrap or two of thread around the base of the post, bring the thread forward and tie off the thread behind the hook eye.



Step 4: Finally, tease out some of the Ice-dub fibres with a dental or dubbing pick to suggest legs hanging below the thorax. Also trim the hackle post to length and pull both wings back together and trim them to be slightly longer than the abdomen.

The hackle and floating yarn wings form a good raft to float this pattern while allowing the resin abdomen to sit below the surface film. Good fishing!