



CHAPTER 16

Part 3

The evolution of the small stream ant



Changing a fly on the Coldbrook – a tributary of the Sterkspruit in Barkly East.
Photo by Tom Sutcliffe

'Ant patterns are the nearest things to universally productive flies anglers have. Over the time of day and flow of seasons, in diverse regions of the country, there is rarely a situation where the right ant fly will not afford good to excellent dry fly fishing' - Tying and Fishing Terrestrials – Gerald Almy (Stackpole, 1978).

'Ant patterns should overflow your small stream box during the summer months' - Small-Stream Fly Fishing – Jeff Morgan (Frank Amato Publications, 2005).

In the ant ecosystem of the Western Cape trout streams, the dominant species – in terms of numbers – is the tiny Black Cocktail Ant which builds its nests high above the winter flood line in the canopy of the Smalblaar Myrtle which crowds the banks of these streams.

A combination of wind and rain makes them particularly vulnerable to ending up in the water because the Smalblaar Myrtle branches overhang and sometimes touch the water.



The Smalblaar Myrtle, home to the Black Cocktail Ant, crowds the banks of the trout streams near Cape Town

A Wikipedia search for *Crematogaster peringueyi* provides useful information as does Peter Slingsby's authoritative website 'antsofthecape.blogspot.com'.

The workers measure about 4 mm so we're talking size 28 – 30 hooks and 8 – 9 x tippets.

Uni-Caenis thread and the Gamakatsu C12-BM Barbless Midge, Large Eye which is available to size 30 have greatly facilitated the tying of micro-ants, particularly if you tie it in reverse using the large eye to represent the abdomen.

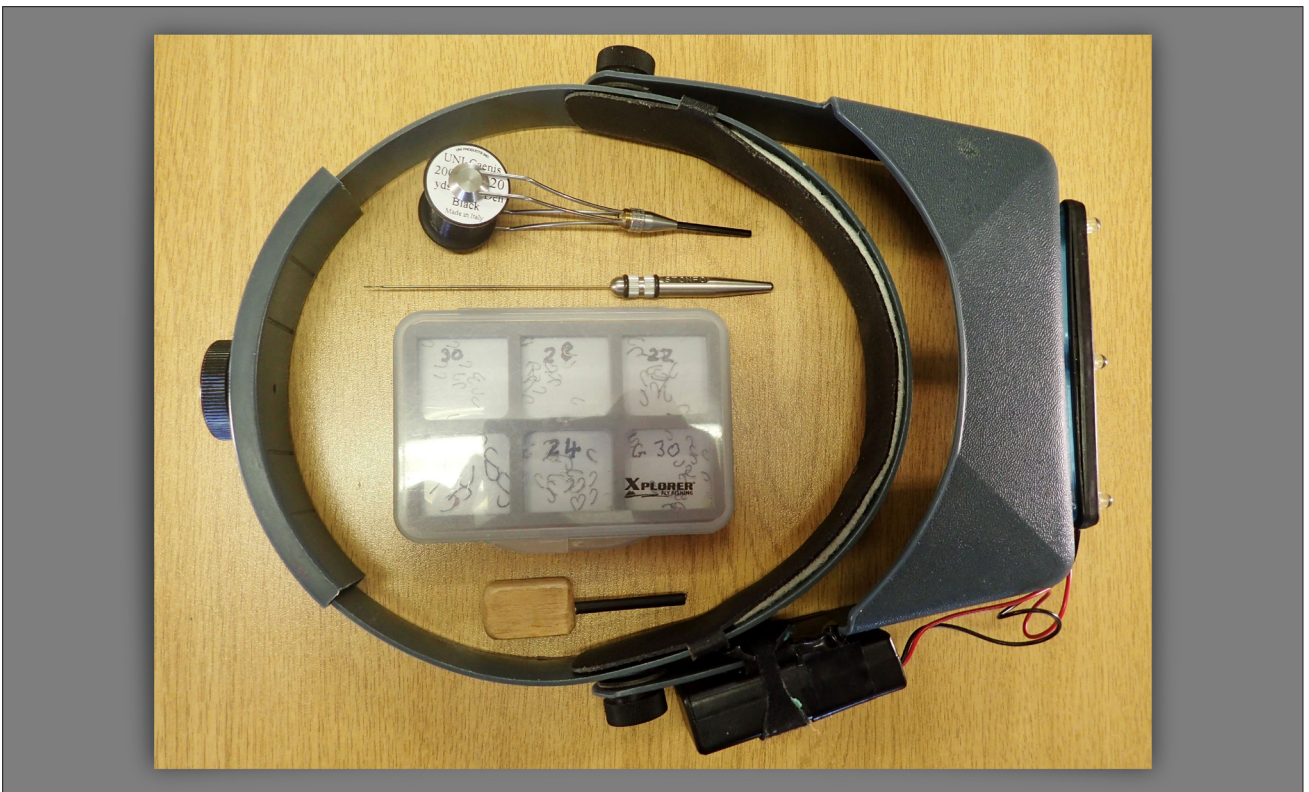
If you find this thread too fragile, try one of the GSP threads. The thinnest is Textreme Extreme

which is half the diameter of Nanosilk 20D , but both are twice as strong as Uni-Caenis.



A Gamakatsu C12-BM hook in size 30 is used to tie a back to front ant with Uni-Caenis 20/0 thread

I could not tie flies this size without my combination of prescription reading glasses and my Donegan OptiVISOR 3.5 x magnifying headband.



The author's Donegan OptiVISOR surrounds some of the tools he uses for micropatterns – from the top: TMC double arm bobbin with Uni-Caenis thread; Stonfo bobbin threader; small fly box with magnetic compartments to store hooks and magnetic hearing aid battery extracting tool fitted with wooden handle

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Fishing 8 or 9 x tippets is quite a challenge because, to be on the safe side, you change your tippet every time you hook up in the foliage on the banks.

I know of only one person who has been equal to this challenge, fellow CPS member Deon Stamer, whose beautiful landing nets are much admired.

Unsurprisingly, the rig he fishes is quite specialised. Sage 000 because the thin line cuts more easily into the wind. Double taper leader finishing at 8 or 9x Stroft. It's a New Zealand setup with the ant attached to the bend of a size 18 Comparadun which serves as a strike indicator.

Earlier midge hooks had eyes the same size as the wire gauge – i.e. tiny - which made attaching hooks while fishing difficult.

Deon came up with an ingenious solution.

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

He ties his tiny ants to the tippet and then attaches the tippet to the bottom of 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 point 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.



Deon Stamer's micro-ant fly box. The ants are attached to the tippet at home

Most of the takes he gets are on the ant.

When ants reach a winged state – called alates – and are ready to embark on nuptial flights to start

new colonies, trout abandon caution should the insects land en masse on the water during this migration.

This happens rarely and is solely the result of the weather, a day of soft rain which softens the ground followed by a day of high humidity which might prevent their wings from drying out.

I have only experienced this once and, on another occasion, I saw ants emerging from a nest on a lawn in large numbers and taking flight.

What is peculiar is the way trout throw their conventional caution to the winds in an ant flight and ignore larger insects when the opportunity arises to take an ant and it was Ken Miyata who articulated and defined this occurrence with his phrase ‘Anting the Hatch’.

It was Edward Ringwood Hewitt who came up with the tangy theory and attributed it to the idea that ants have a particular tartness which makes trout savour ants more than other insects – but it has never gained much traction.

*‘For some reason trout seem to find ants particularly attractive. It can’t be their size, surely; they hardly seem big enough to bother about. It was left to E. R. Hewitt to suggest that it is the tartness of their taste that appeals. He put forward the theory that the taste of their formic acid content is strongly attractive, and, being a chap to put his mouth where his money is, he ate some to prove it. This must be one of the most pointless angling experiments I can imagine. Hewitt assumed trout to have the same degree of taste that humans enjoy, and that because a taste is tart it is pleasurable to trout. Other fly fishers have followed Hewitt’s example only to find ants tasteless. I am an angler who likes to put theories into practice but I stop short at tasting flies to see if trout might like them. Mayflies, caddis, caterpillars, dragonflies are all available - why did Hewitt stop at ants? The principal reason why trout eat ants is that they are both available and abundant.’ John Roberts, **To Rise A Trout, 1988.***

(The exoskeleton of ants, the hard outer layer which protects internal organs, is chitin, a form of sugar (your guess is as good as mine).

The fact that trout will move inordinate distances, several feet, to take an ant while ignoring blanket hatches of aquatic insects is a matter of repeated record.

In England, Tom Saville wrote: “I’ve seen boats drive right through a shoal of trout rising to ants, and the fish have continued to rise in the wake, so intense was their desire to feed.” (*Reservoir Fishing with Tom Saville*, 1991).

I put this frenzy during ant nuptial flights down to a) large numbers of insects; b) that are vulnerable because they are pinioned to the water surface and cannot escape. (Tim Rolston has a series of eloquently-argued and deeply analytical articles on the vulnerability factor in his online fly angling dissertation ‘The Fishing Gene Blog’ which I highly recommend.) c) Prey familiarity. This, I believe, plays a highly-significant role in what gives ants such allure among trout. Scientists believe that there are a million ants on the planet for every human and I believe that they are such a regular occurrence in the water that the distinctive and familiar silhouette prompts a reflexive take.



Alates attracted at night to the light over a farm irrigation reservoir

In contrast, what is a matter of record is the fact that insects that are not common and do not have a prey image with which trout are familiar, are ignored.

Abundance is what habituates trout to take ants without reticence – it's why, when Dr Vern von Someron analysed the stomach contents of 489 trout taken from 16 mountain streams in Kenya for his two and a half –year, state-sponsored PhD study, *Biology of Trout in Kenya Colony*, published in 1948, he found that ants were the most common terrestrial followed by beetles.

In stark contrast was the winter scuba-diving study undertaken by Ralph Cutter and his wife Lisa for the hopper chapter in his outstanding 2005 Stackpole-published book *'Fish Food'*.

In the USA, crickets are raised commercially and can be bought from infants to adults by the thousand by people who keep pet frogs and lizards.

It was the middle of winter and no grasshoppers were to be seen on the snow-covered banks of the Green River in Colorado which is famous for the density of its trout population.

Cutter had a video deadline so he donned his wetsuit while his wife tossed handfuls of crickets into the river from the frozen banks.

'The most important factor is abundance. If hoppers are not on the water or have not been on the water in the past few days, they won't get eaten.'

The water was crystal clear, and hundreds of trout were rising to midges and blue-winged olives. For four days I sat in the water and froze my ass off.

For four days Lisa patiently tossed crickets amid the noses of surface-feeding trout, and for four days we saw not a single trout eat a single cricket.'

The trout were not habituated to the presence of the crickets (which have the same prey image as hoppers) so they ignored the unfamiliar insects.

The same situation occurs on the trout streams near Cape Town – see my article *'Why fish hoppers in autumn'* in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder in the articles archive in this website.

With the exception of winter when ants hibernate and the water in the streams in our winter rainfall region is too high to fish, ants are always available and trout are accustomed to their presence.

Another factor which prompts this sudden explosion of feeding is competition among the trout.

I witnessed the latter factor with regularity when it came to the egg-laying activity of the gravid *Choroterpes nigrescens* female mayflies at around 10 am on the streams I fished near Cape Town.

They would dip down and flying upstream would use the current to pull the eggs from their abdomens. The moment the first trout reacted, so would the others and, in seconds, the placid water surface would be a maelstrom of slashing trout.

I think this awareness of what other trout are doing also accounts for the calm surface of a dam becoming a frenzy of slashing trout the moment the last rim of the setting sun dips below the horizon and countless chironomids utilise the darkness and the safety in numbers to emerge – the most famous example being the 'Blagdon Boil'.

Another possible factor, and a surprising factor is that, in comparison to many of the insects upon which trout feed, ants have a high nutritional value.

In their book, **Lake Fishing With A Fly**, (Frank Amato Publications, 1984), Ron Cordes and Randall Kaufmann provide the following table based on a study at Castle Lake in northern California.

Food Organism	Number per 1000 calories
Dragonfly nymphs	15
Beetles	26
Ants	70
Damselfly nymphs	85
Snails	229
Midge larvae/pupae	759
Caddis larvae	1000

In *The Complete Book of Flyfishing* by Göran Cederberg (Queen Anne Press, 1990) the author says ants play a vital role in the diet of trout in Scandinavian lakes:

Ants play an extensive role in still-water fishing, particularly in the thousands of small lakes in forest regions. Several years ago, a Scandinavian scientist made a study of the food habits of rainbow, brown and brook trout. It was found that no other food dominated their menu so heavily as did ants in the month of August. This applied to all of the lakes investigated, and the proportion of ants in the fish's food reached 80%!

The explanation is that flying ants swarm intensively at close intervals in late summer. They 'rain' down on lakes by the billions – up to several hundred per square metre of water surface – and attract all the fish to the surface.

Ant falls during nuptial flights are one of the prime examples of having to match the hatch but, in my experience, they happen rarely on the trout streams near Cape Town and when they do it is usually on hot and humid days when the trout are dormant. Furthermore, the ant falls never last long.

However, if you happen to strike it lucky and have an imitation that matches the alates, fortune has smiled on you.

In his book *'Terrestrial Fishing'* (Stackpole, 1990), Ed Koch describes just such an occasion:

'The ants were on the water for 45 minutes or more. In that length of time, I hooked and released seventeen trout. I snapped of more flies than I care to remember and missed many risers.'

British author, David Collyer had a similar experience when fishing Blagdon Reservoir with a fly that matched the falling ants – eight fish in half an hour.

One of the most famous fly angling books is Arthur Ransome's *Rod and Line* published 95 years ago which is beyond the copyright statute so I included the chapter on ants in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS archive. It not only demonstrates the veracity of the match the hatch theory, but postulates that fishing ant patterns on bright rather than cloudy days might have some merit. He had tied copies of ants which had flown into his home using orange silk which, when oiled, resulted in flies that accurately imitated the colour of the invaders.

'With half a dozen of these impressionist ants duly oiled in a matchbox, on a hot August day, with fair water in the river, it was, of course, impossible not to hurry off to show them to the trout. On the eddy below the stone bridge was an ant. On the bridge there were more. On a flat pool in the wood just above the trout were steadily rising at something I could not see. Was it ants? It presently was. My impressionist ant had hardly floated six inches before a trout had him. Twelve fat little trout (a whole jury) mistakenly declared themselves satisfied of the innocence of my impressionist ant, besides one or two that I missed or lost. Their verdict is enough to satisfy me in offering this extremely simple dressing to those who one day or other are likely to need an ant or two in a hurry. With it should be a warning that on a dull day shortly afterwards, the fish would not look at the

ants, but came well to other flies. The Winged Ant is not a general utility fly, but when it is good it is very good. That is when and only when the ants are on the river. That may happen any day at this time of year (August), but is likeliest to happen on a hot bright day. It has been suggested that they are attracted by the glitter of the water.'

In English literature the chronological history of ant pattern development goes back to the time of Charles Cotton but more recently most of the development took place in the USA.

Ransome, when designing his ant imitation, was an adherent of the theory of translucence advocated by J W Dunne in his 1924 book *'Sunshine and the Dry Fly'* which saw him painting his hooks white, an idea that never caught on and neither did Vincent Marinaro's idea of incorporating translucent horse hair in his ant patterns but, with the advent of translucent materials such as Gliss 'n Glow Clear Ice and the transparent UV resins, the idea might be worth re-thinking.

In the USA, the understanding of efficacy of ant imitations probably started in the 1930s and is described in Gerald Almy's 1978 Stackpole book *'Tying and Fishing Terrestrials'*.

'The basic design of the fur-bodied ant, like so many terrestrials, evolved in Pennsylvania.'

The ant they were using was a shallow-drifting pattern of lacquered black thread in two lumps, one slightly bigger than the other to represent the abdomen and with a smidgen of black hackle in the middle which was trimmed flat at the base.

'One of our favourite flies was the old Hard-Back Ant, fished wet. Back then we considered a size 14 small. Most of our patterns were tied on 10s and 12s. Over the years we tied the ant on smaller and smaller hooks and the smaller we made them the better they worked. Eventually we carried nothing but 18s, 20s 22s and 24s. We still kept a few 12s on hand but I don't think we ever went make to the larger sizes. Using the small ants, we sometimes caught and released thirty to forty trout before sunset brought in the evening rise.'

For many years, had anyone asked me to pick one fly to use all season long, I'd have promptly chosen the Wet Black Ant. A supply of tiny wet ants always fills a compartment of my fly box.'

Bob McCafferty is given credit for developing in the 1930s the two-hump dubbed fur ant and a sinking version tied with lacquered thread, the latter being invented first

Here's a quote by Ed Koch from his 1990 Stackpole-published book, *'Terrestrial Fishing'* which confirms what I feel is a basic tenet of small stream fly angling: ***'The advent of the floating ant produced trout for us better than any previous pattens. We originally tied them in in sizes #16, #18 and #20. Later we went down to #22 and #24 and eventually to #26 and #28 as the hooks became available. Size 18 was the most popular. If you started fishing any stretch of the stream with the size #18 black ant you could count on taking at least a few trout. If you happened to run into a particular or selective feeder, it could normally be fooled by a smaller size. A lighter tippet than was normally used for the #18 was necessary. 7x or 8x worked well with a #22 or #24 ant.'***

Koch was articulating one of the basic tenets of fly design that Datus Proper emphasised in his outstanding book on fly design *'What the trout said'* – that trout take flies size 16 or smaller with less suspicion than larger patterns.

Or as Bob Wyatt, author of two outstanding books, *'Hunting Trout'* and *'What Trout Want'* described standard trout response – ***"If it's bigger than you, flee. If its smaller than you, chow down"***.

Ant size

The June 1978 issue of the American magazine *Flyfisherman* carries an article by Ernest Schweibert headlined 'Ants' in which he gives the dressings for 40 different species of ants, the smallest of which was tied on a #22 hook – probably because smaller hooks were largely unavailable back then. One admires the research but to suggest that so many flies are necessary because trout can distinguish

between them hardly seems credible.

Here's a list of common South African ants by size:

Lepisiota – Small Black Ants – 3mm

Momorium – Timid or Pharaoh Ants – small 1.5 to 4mm

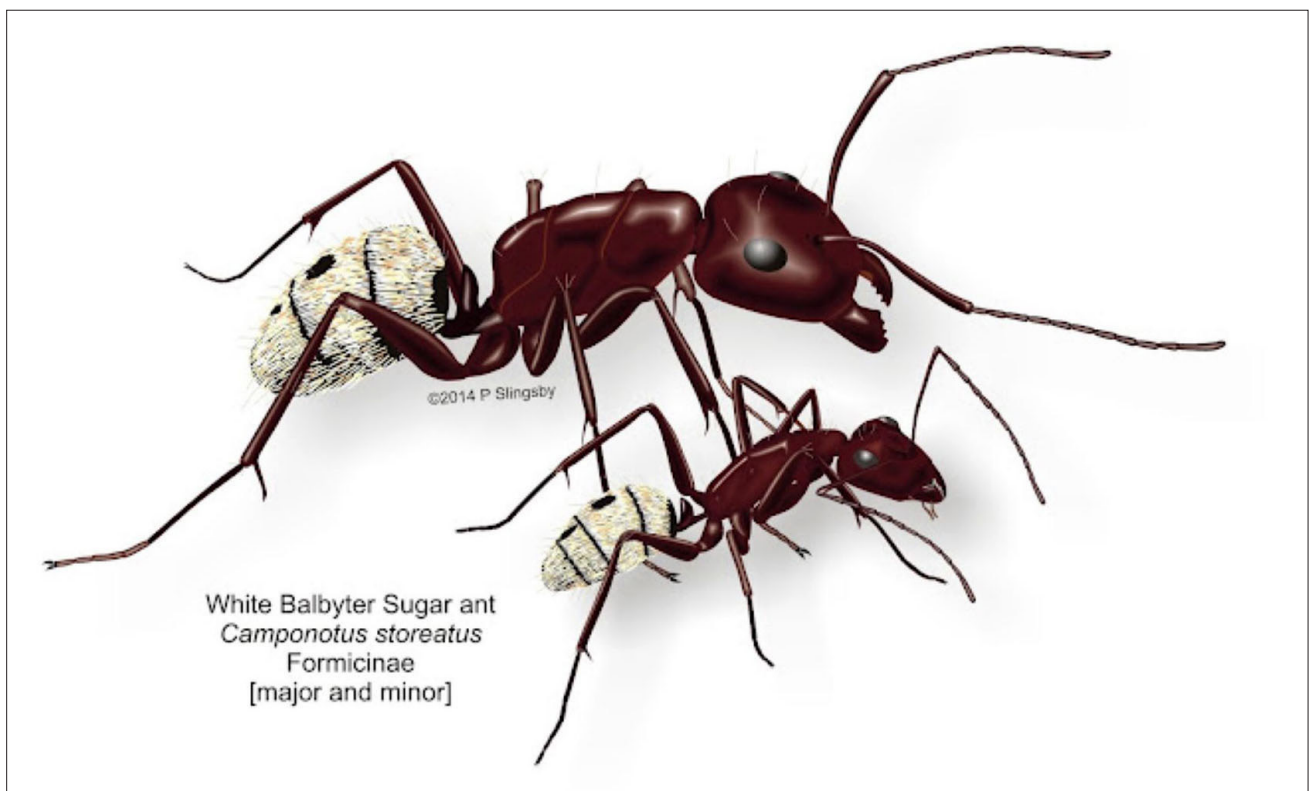
Ponerine – Ringbum Ants – 5mm

Crematogaster – Cocktail Ants – occur in fynbos areas – 5 mm

Messor – Harvester Ants – occur in arid areas such as the Karoo – 7mm

Campanotus – Sugar Ants/Balbyter – the most common ant, widespread throughout the country – 13 to 22 mm

My advice to the local small stream angler would be to focus on one most common of the larger ants – the *Camponotus* genus.



The beautiful illustrations of the Sugar Ant by Peter Slingsby. Note the hairy abdomen to which minute air bubbles adhere giving a silvery appearance to which Ralph Cutter refers

In the Cape and much of South Africa its *Camponotus maculatus* – colloquially known as the ‘Balbyter’, in the UK its *Formica rufa*, the Wood ant and in the USA it’s the Carpenter Ant.

The average *Camponotus* major worker averages about a centimetre in length.

The original ‘Big Eye’ hook was designed by Jim Lepage of Orvis in 1990 to facilitate the threading of tippets and it was also marketed by Daiichi as the 1110.

According to Orvis advertising at the time ... **Big Eye® hooks have eyes between 225% and 306% (depending on hook size) larger in the internal hook-eye area than conventional dry-fly hooks. Our size 22 Big Eye hooks have the same-size eye as a conventional size 16 hook! And a size 16 Big Eye has the eye of a normal size’.**

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The problem with the 1110 is its narrow gape in small sizes.



Fortunately, other manufacturers such as Ahrex and Allan now market midge hooks with bigger eyes and a wide gape, although none of them are as small as the Gamatcatsu #30



At the beginning of 2024, Hanak introduced the #26 short shank H150 BL – effectively a conventional size 28



The current pinnacle of midge hook design, the large eye #30 Gamakatsu C12-BM with a match head for comparison

Here's what Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch have to say about the American and British *Camponotus* species: ***'Subfamily Formicinae. This subfamily of ants is probably the most important group of ants to both trout and trout fishermen. While there are only 200 species of these ants on the North American continent, their habits put them near, and in many cases over, trout streams. The carpenter ants, members of the genus Camponotus, are on a day-to-day basis the most important of all.'***

These ants excavate their nests in wood and are extremely common in the vegetation along trout streams. These are most likely the large black or brownish ants (some reaching a size of 1/2 inch) that most anglers have encountered swarming over tree trunks along streams. They are frequently dislodged by rainstorms, Wind, predators, or even squirrels and birds simply creating a commotion in the branches.'

As such they are often found in large numbers floating (or sunken) in trout streams. Mound building ants of the genus Formica are also included in this subfamily, but unless they are swarming, their importance is probably minimal.'

The largish British Wood Ant, *Formica Rufa*, builds its large nests on the ground, often some way from the water and where they are most exposed to the sun, so they would be less important as a species to the fly angler than our Balbyter and the American Carpenter Ant (most ant species are found

in the southern hemisphere).

Ant pattern design

‘The essential ant shape is basically an hourglass, requiring nothing more than two blobs of suitable material to represent the gaster and head.’

No hourglass has a waist as characteristically long and thin as an ant’s petiole: if anything defines the pure ‘essence of ant’ shape it is not the gaster and head but the wide distance that separates them’. Rick Keam – *‘Dressed for Dinner’* (Stevens Publishing, 2021)

In terms of the GISS factor – general impression of size and shape – Tim Rolston is adamant that the mid-section of an ant imitation should be devoid of any material, hackle or anything else, because he believes that is the most important recognition factor which, for the trout, defines the ant as potential prey.

Given the number of ants in the water, their distinctive Coke bottle shape will be a familiar search image which does not arouse suspicion.

The two humps and a thin waist has stood the test of time and Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch agree with Tim Rolston that adding material between the humps is disadvantageous: ***‘This reduction in the conspicuous waist really does appear to decrease the effectiveness of the pattern.’***

At the end of the article ‘Ants on the Menu’ in the folder of that name in the CPS article archive, Tim provides a step-by-step Illustration of a size 18-20 ant which emphasises the ant’s narrow waist (petiole) and provides a white wing for greater visibility.

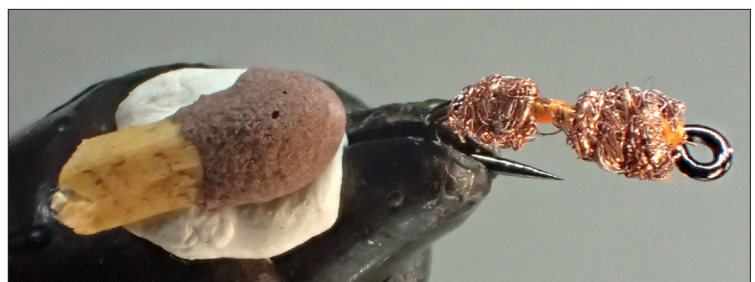
If I were tying Tim’s pattern today, I would use kapok as the body material for its innate buoyancy and the white Fishient Deadly Dazzle for the wing because it contains thin strips of light-reflecting UV Flashabou.

Gerald Almy calls this design a ‘No Hackle’ Ant:

‘The no-hackle ant. is best reserved for hooks sized #24-28. This’ fly’s supreme virtue is simplicity in tying, and even those of us who normally shudder at the prospect of tying #24s and #26s will find these imitations easy to work on small hooks. The fly is tied by simply winding an oval hump of fur for the gaster, wrapping the thread forward to leave a thin waist, and dubbing another hump for the head of the ant. This imitation provides a good, crisp silhouette of a tiny ant, which must appear to the trout as two tiny dots barely connected. The fly should be dressed heavily with flotant and squeezed dry after taking a fish. Using this procedure, I’ve taken close to a dozen trout on a single fly of this type without sinking it.’



(L) The easiest way to tie a tiny double hump ant is to use Hareline Quick Descent Dub which has a subtle gleam and I have found it the easiest material to use when dubbing small bodies



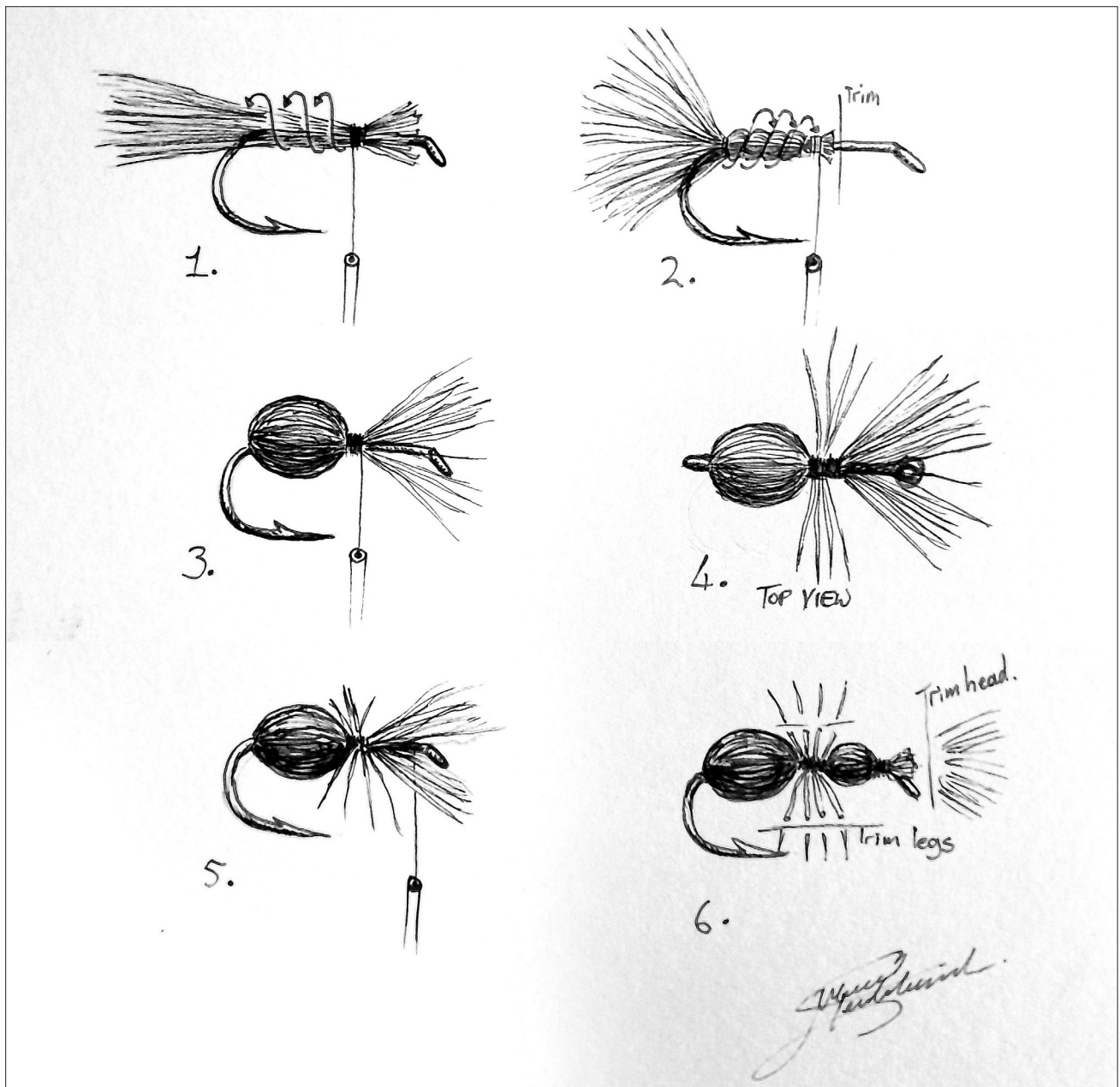
Quick Descent Dub is made of hair-thin aluminium fibres which can be flattened so as not to occlude the hook gape. Tie the ant back-to-front to maximise the space near the

hook point, grease it and then cover it with Loon Top Ride or a similar desiccant powder

The 1970s saw attempts to find alternatives to the dubbed fur ant using deer hair, already well proven in the Crowe Beetle and balsa wood, both fading into obscurity as inexpensive Evazote closed cell foam rubber became freely available.

Much of the pioneering work on terrestrial pattern development was done on the placidly-flowing Letort Spring Run in Pennsylvania in the 1960s by anglers such as Vincent Marinaro, Charlie Fox, Lefty Kreh, Ernest Schweibert, Ed Shenk and Ed Koch.

Deer hair was the more popular material for simply because it was easy to acquire, quick and easy to tie and it had an influential publicist in Chauncy Lively whose articles appeared for 40 years in the *Pennsylvania Angler*, eventually being consolidated by Stackpole in 1980 into a valuable record, *Chauncy Lively's Flybox*.



Tying the deer hair ant, Chauncy Lively-style – illustration by Marcel Terblanche

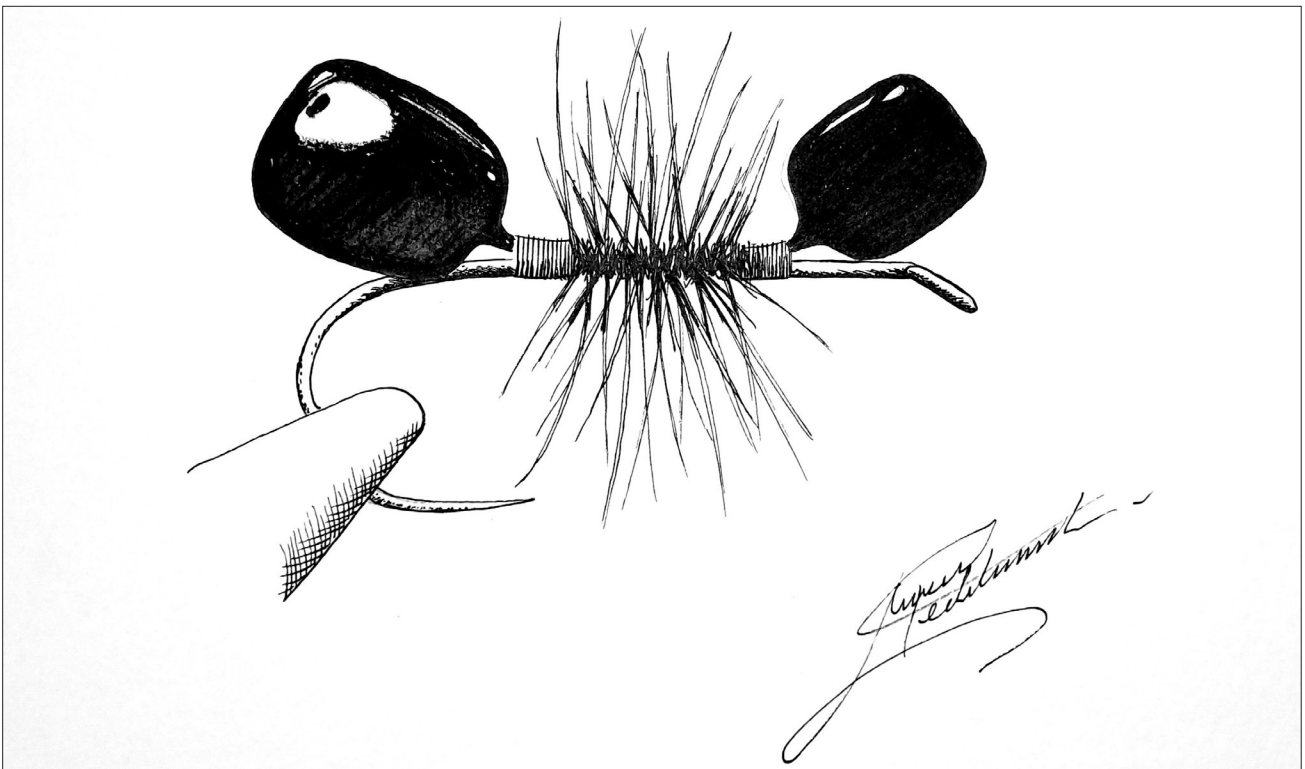
If his deer hair ant had one apparent disadvantage it was that it was not durable, but the more it frayed, the more appealing it became to trout.

Today we have access to more delicate deer hair from Europe such as Roe Deer which enables smaller examples to be tied.

In his book on terrestrials, Almy said virtually identical deer hair ants were developed at the same time in the USA by two fly anglers:

'The Deer Hair Ant One of the greatest virtues a fly pattern can have is simplicity in construction and design. The deer hair ant draws kudos in this respect; it is easy to assemble and the materials list consists of one small bunch of deer hair. Like many patterns whose time has come, this fly was apparently developed separately by two anglers several thousand miles apart. In the February/March, 1973 issue of Fly Fisherman magazine William N. Reinholdt described this fly pattern as the Calcaterra ant. Ozark angler- tier Paul Calcaterra was given credit for the design of the fly. Unknown to Mr. Calcaterra or Mr. Reinholdt, the renowned Pennsylvania tier, Chauncy K. Lively, had described a similar pattern—almost identical, really—in the December, 1962 issue of Pennsylvania Angler that he called the carpenter ant. Lively said, "I did (another) piece about it in the 1964 Fisherman's Digest and have since had correspondence with anglers from Maine to Oregon who swear by it." The only difference in the pattern Lively presented in the 1962 piece and the fly described as the Calcaterra ant is that the legs of the Pennsylvania-born ant emanated from the head of the fly, the Ozark's from the thorax.'

The other short-lived pattern to hit the headlines around this time was the McMurray Ant.



The balsa-bodied McMurray Ant sketched by Marcel Terblanche

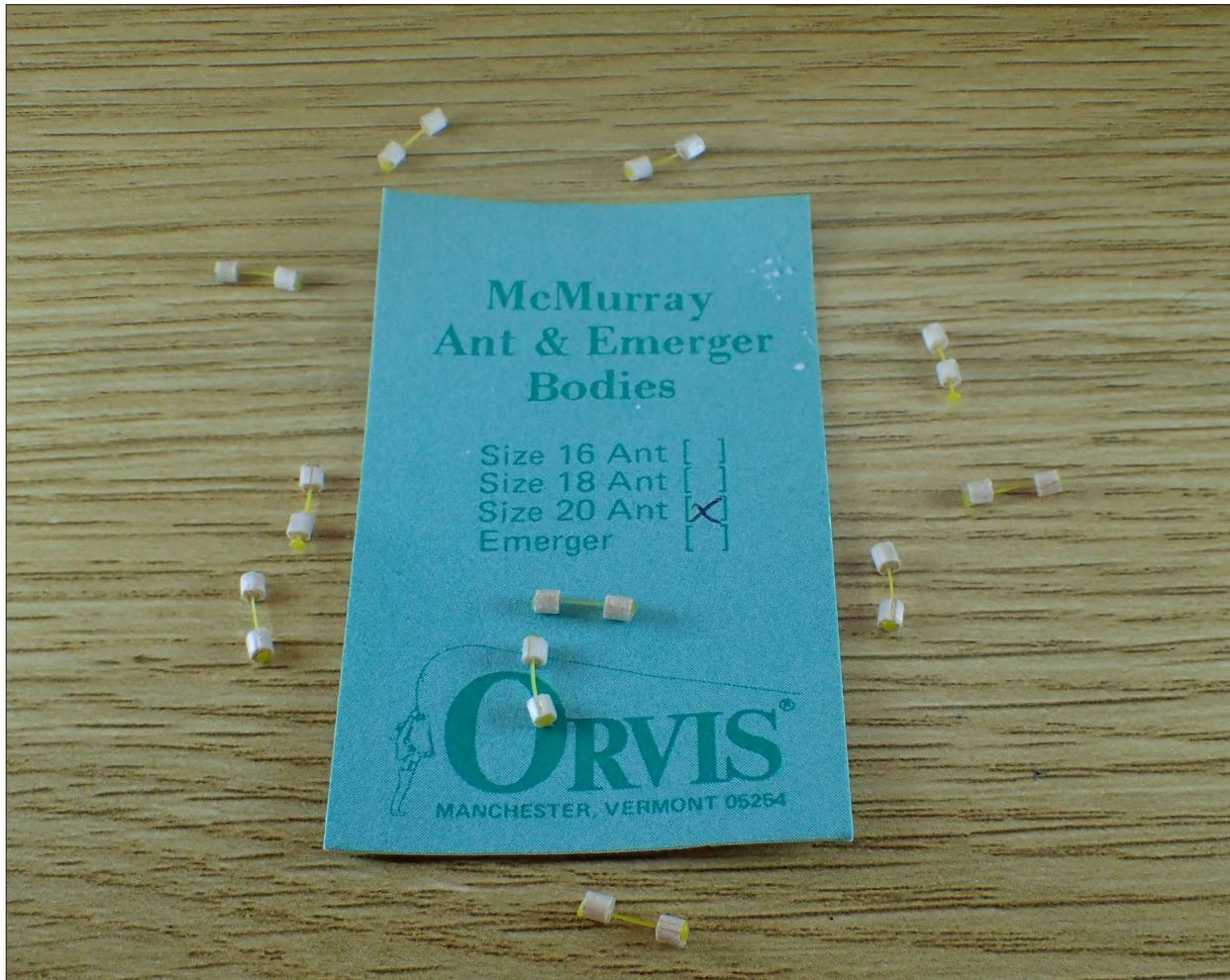
I see it as the most over-hyped fly pattern in history.

When Art Lee, one of the best-known angling writers of his day, declared that the balsa creation named by its creator Ed Sutryn after his home town of McMurray in Pennsylvania was **'the deadliest pattern ever to shake hands with a leader'** he created the fly angling equivalent of the Philosopher's Stone.

'I'm frankly at a loss to find a time or place when or where the McMurray Ant won't catch trout. Although difficult to sink, if it does it seems to make no difference. Trout hit it anyway. They hit it

dead drift or when it's dragging. I've now taken browns, brookies and rainbows on both the black and cinnamon patterns from March through October along rivers and streams in the eastern U.S., Great Britain and France. A 51/2-pound brown slammed a size 18 on a northern Icelandic river as if the trout hadn't eaten for weeks. While I've had no chance to test the fly on New Zealand or South American waters yet, I'd be willing to bet my last buck they'll work there, too. My only caution is that the smaller sizes (18-22) work best.' Art Lee: 'Fishing Dry Flies for Trout on Rivers and Streams' (Macmillan, 1984)

Orvis even sold kits, two pieces of tubular balsa connected by a short piece of mono. It is not in their catalogue today.



The McMurray kits briefly sold by Orvis

To add to the hype, Sutryn even patented the fly. Its origin, though, testifies to the seductive power of that silhouette and Sutryn is quoted in Gerald Almy's excellent book *'Tying and Fishing Terrestrials'* about the origin of the design:

'The ant in question came about as the result of a frustrating afternoon on Fishing Creek, near Lamar, Pennsylvania. This creek has a large native population of brook trout and this particular day I stood at the head of a riffle which was just boiling with rising trout. After throwing everything in my box at them I retired in defeat without having even one fish rise to my flies. On the long drive back to Pittsburgh I discussed the day with my fishing partner-, but neither of us could come up with an idea of what the trout were feeding on. After I got home, I remembered something. I was standing under a large oak tree by this riffle and had to keep brushing large black ants off myself. This brought to mind a trout that I had observed some years back feeding on something invisible in a clear, spring-fed pond. When I caught this fish (on a live grasshopper) and examined the stomach

contents, they consisted of about two tablespoons of large black ants. This pond was surrounded by large overhanging trees, and I just put two and two together. When it came to building the fly, I was ready for something different. I never cared for any of the conventional methods of tying ants, so I decided to use a cork body. I whittled two pieces of cork . . . tied them to the back of a hook and came up with a real good-looking ant. However, as I looked at it, I knew it would never hold up under heavy use. Then I got the idea of stringing the cork on a piece of monofilament and tying the monofilament to the hook. When I tried the fly out on several streams I knew I had a winner. On limestone streams, where I had been habitually skunked, the trout took the ant so deliberately and innocently that my conscience even bothered me.

When Sutryn retired, he started selling the fly commercially but changed the body material to balsa.

When inexpensive closed-cell Evazote foam became freely available, the deer hair and balsa ant imitations quickly lost their appeal.

Ant colour

In Gerald Almy's 1978 Stackpole book *'Tying and Fishing Terrestrials'*, he makes an interesting point about the colour of ant imitations.

'Since ants float semi-awash in the surface film, often breaking partially through the meniscus, their colours become distinctly visible to trout. Ants tied in various shades from pale yellowish tan to jet black will take trout on the right occasion. Ants dressed with the so-called hot orange dyed fur are extremely potent. There is something about this colour that seems to excite trout and urge them to strike.'

Given the numerous occasions that trout have risen to my greased orange yarn strike indicator while ignoring the small copper wire ant or sunken beetle which arrived in their field of vision first, I berate myself in not following the lead of Fran Betters on the Ausable River in New York State who used orange thread on his ants. Today we have the advantage of fine threads in ultraviolet orange such as UCT 140 denier and Hends Ultrafine and my favourite dubbing, Hareline's Quick Descent, comes in Rust and Copper which, if blended, is close to orange and has an inherent glitter.

What is also highly relevant here is the underwater observations of Ralph Cutter and his discovery of the glitter created by air bubbles adhering to the hairs on the bodies of ants. The local *Camponotus* ants have particularly hairy abdomens and imitations will benefit by the application of products like Loon Top Ride.

The discovery by Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher - that brown trout in the peat-coloured streams of the Southern Cape are attracted to flies containing a purple material, something already being explored in the USA, has yet to be tried here but could well be of significant relevance in the trout streams near Cape Town.



A brown trout caught in a Southern Cape stream – where they seem to be triggered by flies with purple materials – by Marcel Terblanche

CHAPTER 16

In closing, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the contribution of those who are making it possible for English-speaking, small stream fly anglers anywhere in the world with internet access, to read this online book at no cost:

Hannes Thiart of t-ART photo+design and his wife Barbara Mueller of New Voices Publishing Services who specialise in assisting people like me. Their portfolio encompasses all literary genres and they are familiar with fly angling because my rather atypical 'book' is the third they have published on the subject;

Storms River artist and professional fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche, an amateur naturalist of note, whose illustrations have significantly enhanced *The Delicate Fly Fisher*;

Sunet Terblanche of Virtual 24-7 who specialises in office administration. Without her assistance, the CPS articles archive would not exist.

To follow: Closed cell Evazote foam – a new era dawns.

