



CHAPTER 16

Part 4

New Era



A painting of a Balbyter ant by John Philip showing its distinctive hairy abdomen to which air bubbles will cling

Closed cell Evazote foam – a new era dawns

'The first fish to spy the fly almost left a cloud of scales behind in its haste to suck it down. From there it was a one hundred per cent win and the Gevaarlike Balbyter (dangerous ball-biter) was born.'

Fly tying instructor Gordon van der Spuy weighs in with his sketched step-by-step for the Balbyter.

Gordon says, "This thing has as many triggers as Pamela Anderson jogging down the beach in a

thong. Fish can't help themselves, it just screams 'ant!' I tend to find that #16 balbyters are most useful. I've caught plenty of fish on them."

Edward Truter *The Mission Magazine* 15 November 2023

The advent of closed cell foam rubber terrestrial imitations on the fabled LeTort River in Pennsylvania was not an auspicious occasion.

It was Charlie Fox, as I recall, who wrote that when one of the regulars proudly showed the 'Dean of the Letort', Vincent Marinaro, his latest creation, a foam rubber beetle, the curmudgeonly Marinaro exploded in wrath. He stormed off, muttering words like 'sacrilege' at the very thought of synthetic materials invading the hallowed world enhanced by his imitationist predecessors, people like Charles Cotton and Frederick Halford.

He was on a hiding to nothing.

Half a century later, Rick Takahashi and Jerry Hubka approached fly anglers around the world and asked them to post their favourite terrestrials. They were photographed and in 2014 Stackpole published their encyclopaedic volume 'Modern Terrestrials'.

Of its 245 full-colour pages, 27 are devoted to ants and about 150 photographs provide the details. The majority are made of foam rubber.

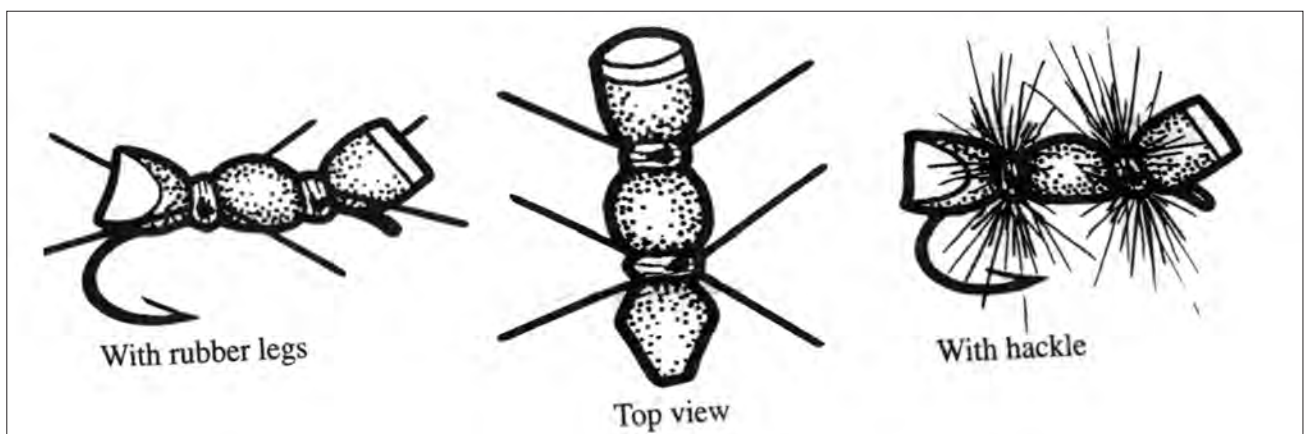
Given the pace of technological change, what is puzzling is that it took decades from the time foam rubber was invented until its usage became commonplace in fly tying.

July the third, 1912 was the important date when a chemist employed by Dunlop, Edward Murphy, took some liquid latex, a white liquid derived from the rubber tree and, using a kitchen mixer and whipped the latex into a froth. That was the first page in the foam rubber story.

As a literary chronological clue, Loring D Wilson's 1978 book, '*Tying and Fishing the Terrestrials*' (A S Barnes) devotes an entire chapter to ants of which he says: '***Were we actually limited to a single pattern, I would have to choose the ant in its various simple modifications. With the various ant patterns, I have taken almost every species of fish likely to be encountered in fresh or brackish water.***' However not one of the patterns he discusses in the book is made with foam rubber.

What cannot be discounted in the evolution of the foam rubber ant is the American entrepreneurial spirit, as exemplified by Rainy Riding, the first woman to mass produce flies in extruded foam rubber beginning in 1988

Her promotional videos, appearance at trade shows and the fact that she included an instructional leaflet in each plastic envelope of foam rubber sheets and cylinders all played a role in encouraging fly-tyers to produce foam rubber patterns with their own tweaks.

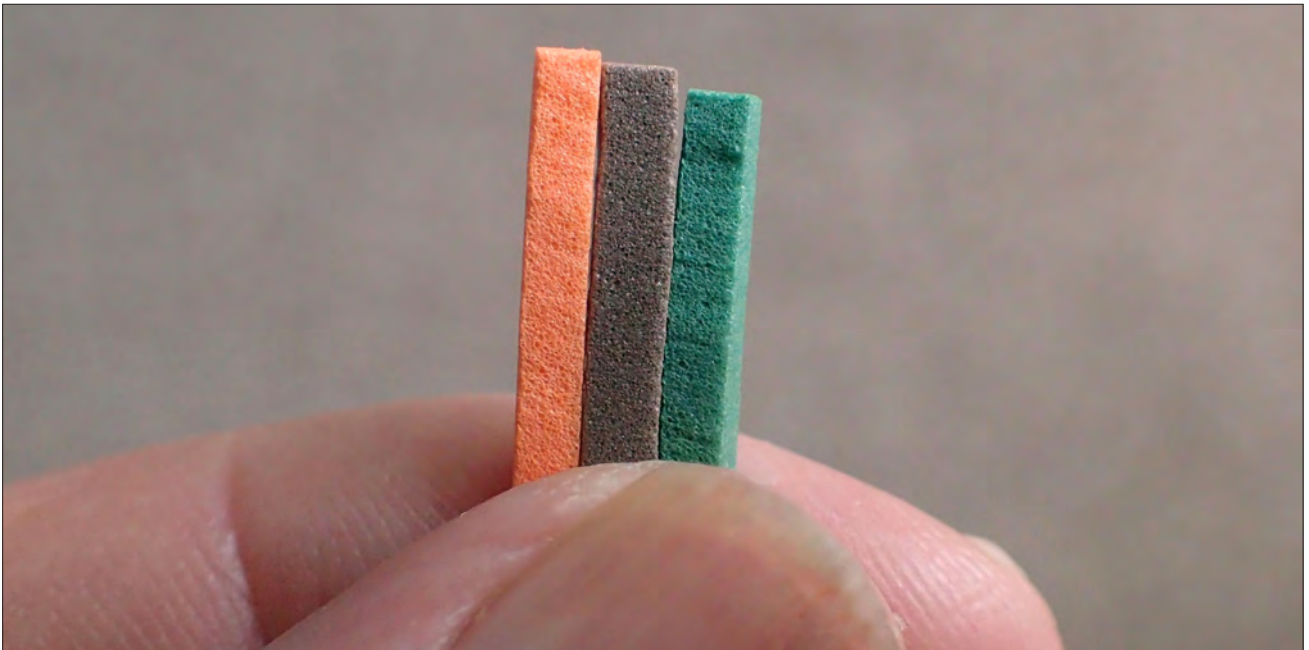


A leaflet sold with Rainy's tubular extruded foam rubber material

Her website – rainsflies dot com - states: *'The product that started the foam revolution in fly-tying is a tubular extruded foam with a nice outside finish. Easy-to-follow instructions in each package illustrate tying methods for many different Rainy's signature patterns.'*

Soon the demand became too great and she opened a factory in Thailand. After 50 years in the business, she is now retired but her products, from ants to tarpon flies, all including foam rubber, are sold all over the world and all the other major companies such as Hareline and Wapsi sell flies made with this material.

Two other forms of foam rubber which have fly tying applications are Razor Foam, thin slices from .5 to 2 mm (I use the Wapsi version) which is ideal for tying tiny ants and, a more recent product, Drew Chicone's, Fettuccine Foam – 4 mm square strips which he developed for a tarpon fly, the Tuscan Bunny. You can, however make it thinner by stretching it and it then has applications for ant and beetle patterns



Drew Chicone's Fettuccine Foam can be used to tie small ant imitations

My favourite foam rubber for tying small terrestrial patterns, though, is Wapsi's made-in Taiwan Evazote – thin and pliable it has a lovely sheen



Wapsi's version of Evazote foam rubber in 'Salmon Fly Orange' favoured by the author – its code is WPF 8275

The first books featuring flies tied with foam rubber started appearing in the early 1990s.

C Boyd Pheiffer published *Bug Making-A Thorough Guide to Making and Tying Floating Bugs for all Gamefish—Bluegill to Billfish* in 1993; a year later Frank Amato Publishing released *Tying Foam Flies* by Skip Morris and, in 2003, Harrison Steeves wrote *Tying Flies with Foam, Fur and Feathers*.

In 2016, Bill Skilton of Orvis produced his Quick Sight Ant, a foam rubber cylinder with a white section glued to one end as a sighter. I quickly acquired some though the local Orvis

agent, *The Flyfisherman* and decided to pre-waterproof the lot by dropping them in Loon Hydrostop which, in those days, came in a big bottle. The Hydrostop dissolved the glue, separating the two sections.

I had an old rubber camping mattress so I bought a leather punch to produce the tubes - but that ended up as a hopper, a story for another chapter.

However British company Gunville Upavon now produces hollow drill bits and blocks of high quality, closed cell foam rubber which allows you to produce your own cylinders in different colours. It is available locally.



The Gunville drill bits and blocks of high-density foam rubber from which suitable cylinders can be extracted

An excellent YouTube video clip by Fly Fish Food is headlined 'Gunville Foam Cutters from Upavon' and there are others. For very small foam tubes your pharmacist can supply biopsy punches.

The Quick Sight Ant was, nevertheless, a significant innovation and I particularly like the YouTube version tied by Tim Flagler headlined 'Tying a foam-bodied ant' on the Midcurrent website.

A similar You Tube version tied by Lance Egan entitled 'Bionic Ant 2.0' can be found on the Fly Fish Food website. From all accounts these are successful patterns, but my concern is that real ants, more often than not, drift in a foetal position and their heads and abdomens do not project upwards and skywards.

A given absolute in all drifting ants is that the slim petiole which connects head and abdomen (gaster) contains six things and six things only – legs.



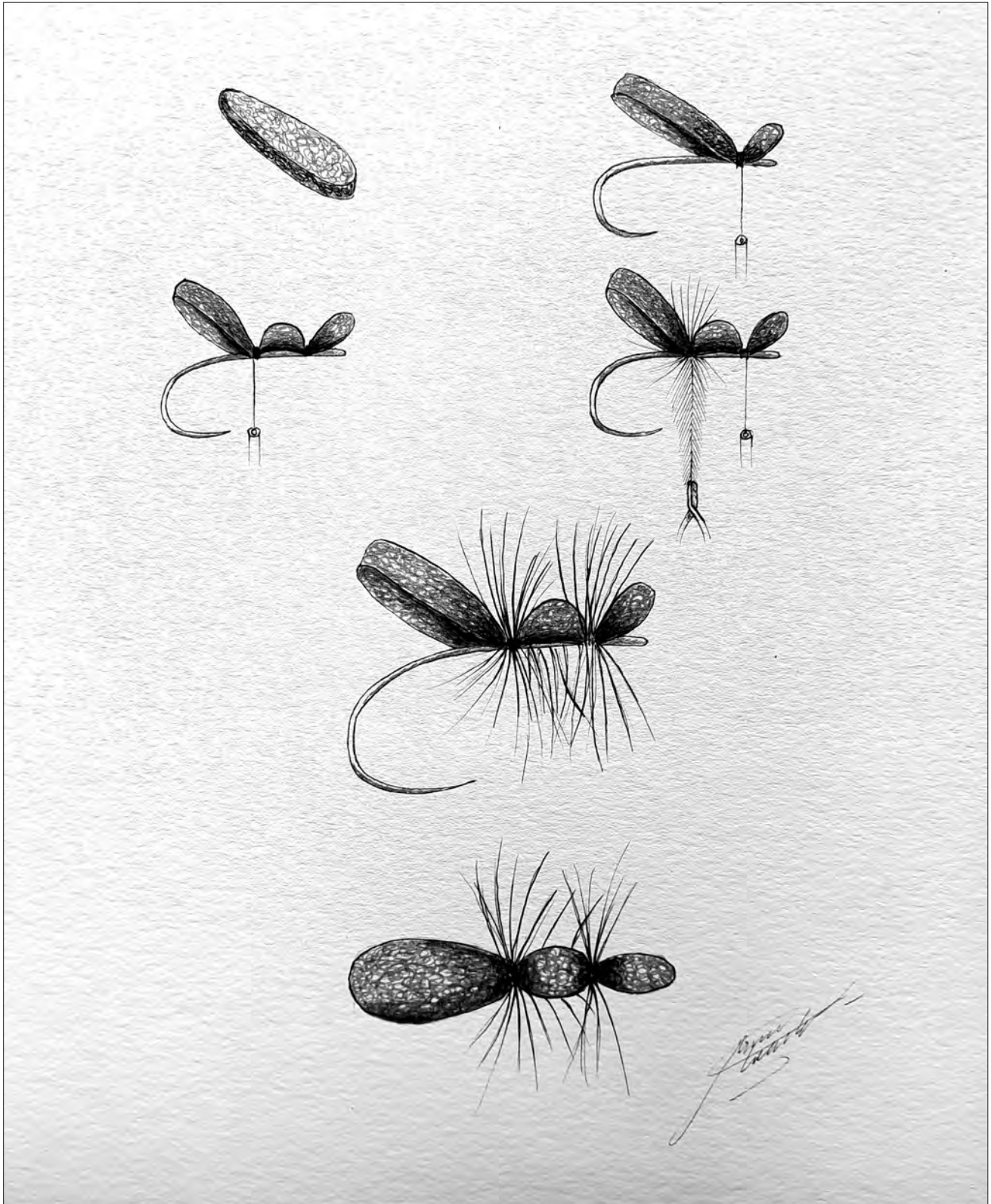
An early Fettuccine ant tied by the author – note the unnatural way in which the two body segments point skyward, which contrasts with the flatter floating posture of the natural

The internet has introduced a landslide of instructional YouTube videos on ants– an excellent example being Martin Joergensen' Global Flyfisher website which features a dozen ant patterns.

I also like Davy McPhail's video on tying a foam rubber, hackle

point winged ant which can be found on the Fulling Mill website, as well as the afore-mentioned example by Tim Flagler. Kelly Galloup's 'TheSlideinn' website includes several ant patterns and he is fervent devotee of the sinking ant.

The first foam rubber floating ant that I saw which really appealed to me was in a book, 'Ken Iwamasa's Flies (Preutt Publishing, 1989). He used a simple triangular piece of foam rubber, and a lift-and-bind technique to create the body segments and a palmered hackle feather, stripped on one side, to create the movement.



Storms River artist, Marcel Terblanche sketched the steps for me

Stripping the hackle feather on one side reduces the possibility of the barbs matting together and enhances movement. Rhodes-based guide, Fred Steynberg, ties a similar pattern for his clients, but uses a very sparse turn of hackle just behind the first segment to represent the legs.

You can see a photograph in an article on his Linecasters website headlined 'Days that Ants Fly'.

Fred Steynberg's foam rubber ant concentrates the sparse hackle fibre legs at the front of the fly

The iconic non-ferocious Balbyter

Quite why the non-threatening *Campanotus* Sugar Ants have been given such an unseemly suggestive common name (*Balbyter* translates from Afrikaans as *Ballbiter*) is a mystery. You might get a few warning nips if you stand on a nest but you will have departed before any danger to your wedding tackle looms.

This is in strong contrast to Australia's venomous Jack Jumper (*Myrmecia pilosula*) which can leap up to three inches, and whose bite and sting are both poisonous and have caused fatalities.

Only one indigenous foam rubber ant design has earned iconic local status - Edward Truter's Balbyter.

He is one of our most accomplished and widely travelled fly anglers and he gave me permission to publish his article on the fly which appears in the Terrestrials folder on this website.

Gordon van der Spuy included it in the first of his two superb *Feather Mechanic* books on fly tying which have sold well all over the world to a growing and appreciative audience.

An Illustration of the Balbyter from Gordon van Spuy's first book – used with permission

In his article for The Mission, kindly reproduced on this website, Edward stresses the importance of the CDC wing:

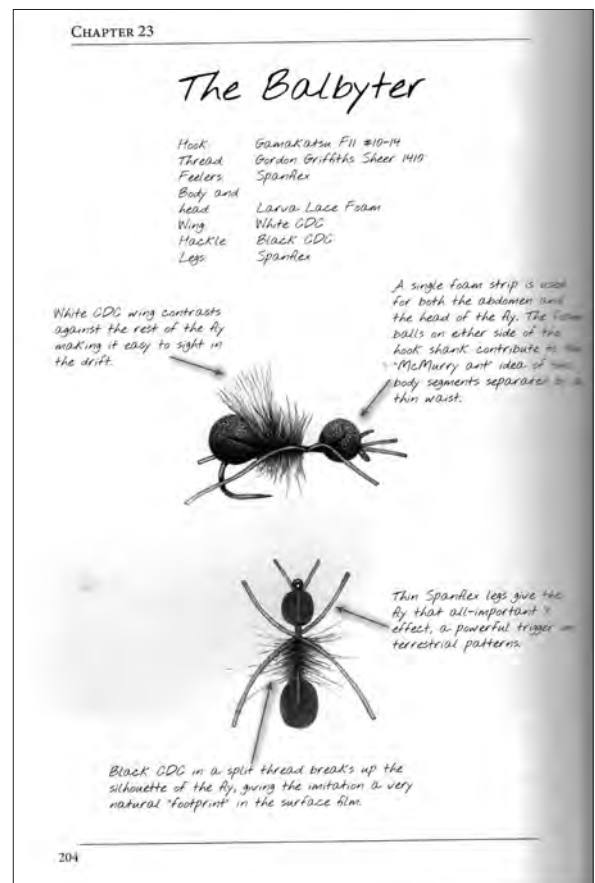
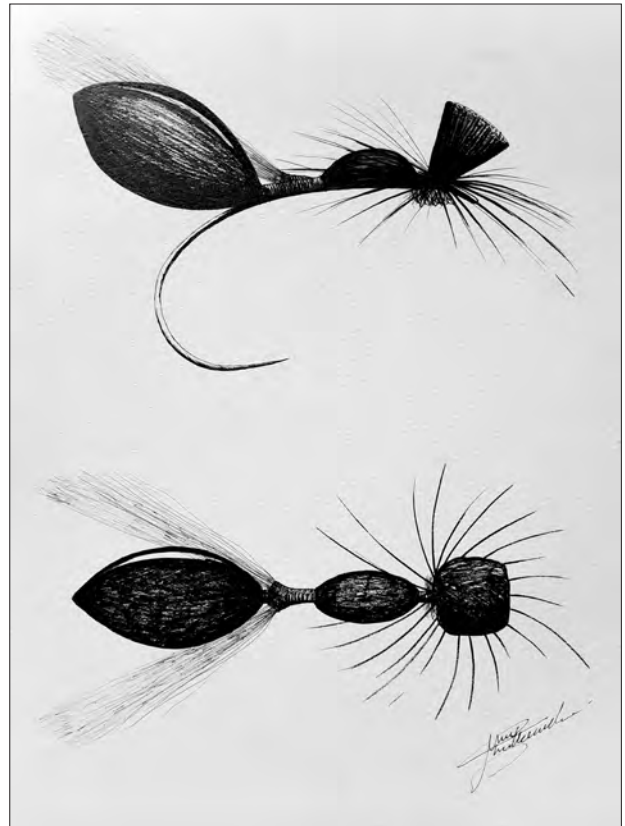
'One of the things about the dynamic of CDC fibres interacting with the water's surface and in the film, is the way that there's a play of light with the mix of fibres. Tiny hairs and air bubbles create an optical, visual footprint that looks nearly identical to that which forms around real insects trapped in the film.'

However, given the boisterous nature of the streams near Cape Town and the flick-flick cadence of one's rapid pocket probing progress, CDC can quickly become sodden

The leaves you with various poly yarn synthetics, but the earlier versions lacked the subtle colour transitions which characterise insect wings.

If I remember correctly, it was Enrico Puglisi that, in 2005, first marketed EP® Trigger Point® Fibers which were lighter than water, water proof and blended strands of different colours to match the wing colours of insects. Other companies followed suit.

What I'm looking for in ant and other winged patterns

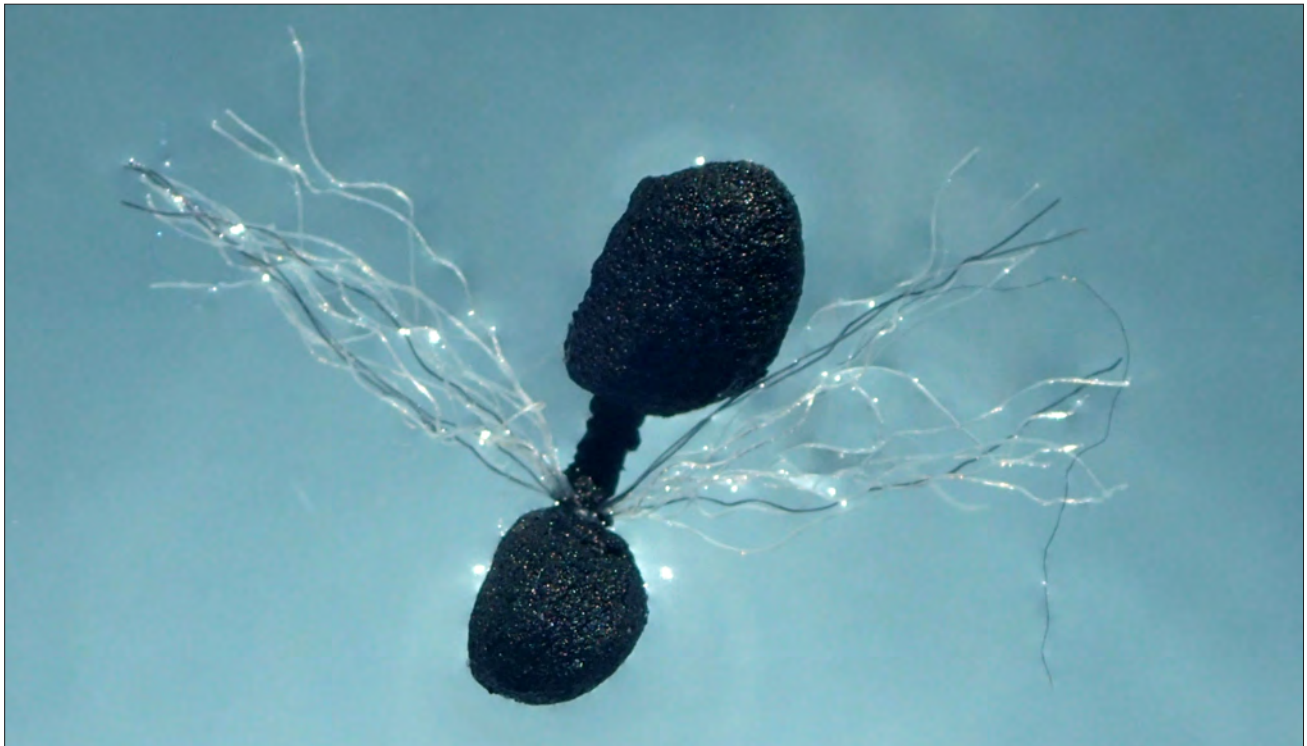


- beside colour variations - is greater visibility and buoyancy. There are several possibilities. Tiemco Aero Wing is lighter than water and has hollow tubes within each fibre. Combining black and white would work well, but it is expensive. Just comb them together using a small deer hair comb like the C&F Design Stainless Tying Comb. A cheaper alternative would be combining black and white McFlylon – which is also lighter than water - with a few strands of white satin wedding organza for flash. McFlylon is an interesting material in that it is lighter than water and stretches

My favourite however, is Deadly Dazzle by local company Fishient and to quote the company: *Deadly Dazzle is an infusion of the Mirror Image fibre, blended with super UV Flash. This deadly combination creates a flashy cotton candy fibre that gives bulk and shape to a fly while retaining its natural translucency.*

It's the inclusion of micro thin strands of UV Flashabou in Deadly Dazzle that appeals to me because I believe the UV mylar strands are triggers and their intermittent flash as they catch the light makes the low-floating ant easier to follow in the drift.

Another of my convictions is that poly yarn wings tied at right angles to the body have two advantages – the spent wing position. Firstly, they are outriggers adding support to the body and aiding buoyancy and, secondly, they signal vulnerability.



A Veniard Ant tied spent-wing style has several advantages

There are two tweaks which might add to efficacy of the original Balbyter.

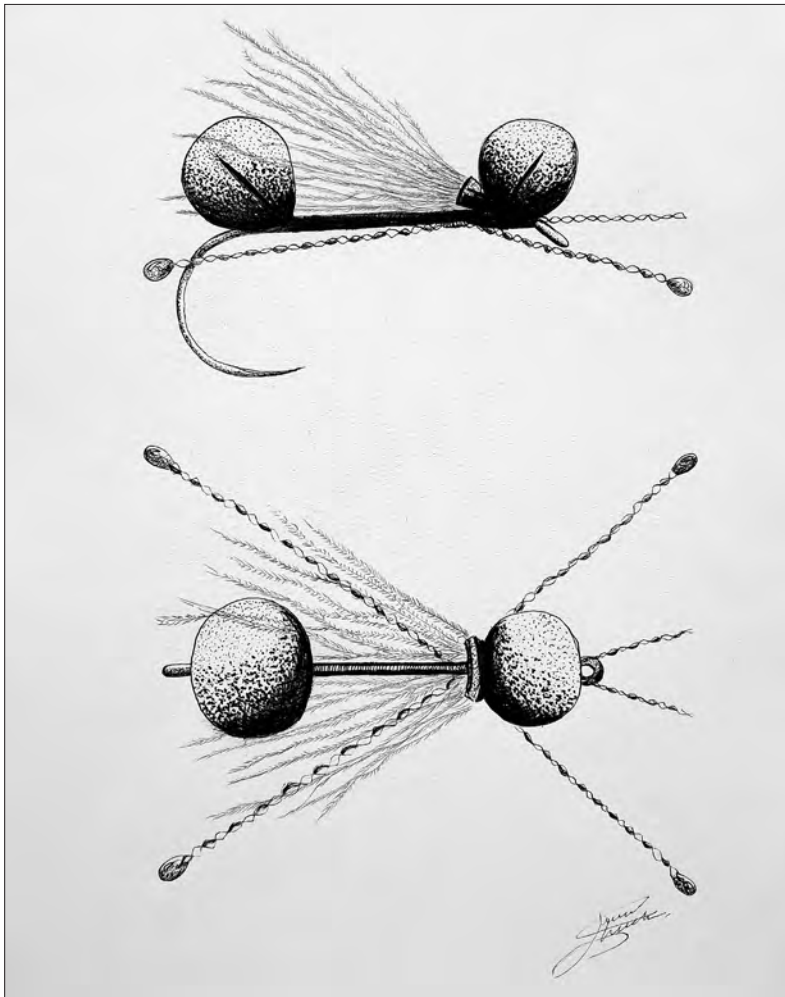
Marcel Terblanche was asked to tie some Balbyters for a client whose departure for the Bokong River in Lesotho was imminent.

Not having the time to acquire the requisite rubber legs he used Krystalflash instead and, upon his client's return, Marcel was informed that the results with the twisted mylar legs had been much better than when, on previous trips, rubber-leg Balbyters had been used.

The second possible tweak is to counter-weight the legs, rubber or Krystalflash, using split cane rod maker Stephen Boshoff' idea of adding tiny drops of Loon Knot Sense to the tips of the legs. This adds underwater flash and causes the legs to wobble in response to the push and pull of the current – see my Instagram post

Here's how Marcel Terblanche envisages the modified Balbyter:

Would counterweighted Krystalflash legs prove more effective than rubber legs on the Balbyter?



Tying the Veniard Ant

"He cast the small ant pattern onto fast water in the neck above the deep Willow Pool and found himself fast to a good fish of about a kilogram which took the little fly ravenously. The trout was duly landed and when cleaned was found to contain a fully grown field mouse – and yet it could not resist that tiny ant." Tony Ritchie, **Dry Fly-Fishing for Trout**. Kangaroo Press, 1994.

I see the Veniard Ant as the high-tech successor to the McMurray Ant.

It's a two-blob, one big and one small connected by a thin waist, moulded foam rubber ant which has lots of creative potential and is a quick and easy tie.

Assisting this process, if you so choose, is a recent discovery from Instagram – that Brush-on Loctite superglue does not erode foam rubber.

I apply a thin layer of Loctite superglue to the hook shank and then tie it down at the waist using Hends Ultrafine Thread or UCT 70 denier in

orange. I then cover this section in a thin layer of Loctite Brush on superglue mixed with purple glitter dust available from craft shops.



The Veniard Ant body which reflects the general impression of the ant's size and shape

The idea of using coloured thread on ant patterns is not new. Fran Betters used orange on the ants he fished and sold on the West Branch of the Ausable River in New York State. Edward Truter uses red thread on his Balbyter as does Gordon van der Spuy on his drifting parachute ant.

And I am mindful of the fact that Charles Cotton used red thread on his Ant Fly when he was fishing with Izak Walton in the mid 1670's.

Using purple on flies is a growing trend, particularly in areas where the water is peat stained. Grayling are known to be partial to pink flies but there seems to be a growing perception that they are even more attracted to purple patterns in infertile, acid-water streams. Marcel Terblanche -@driftflyfisher – found that, on the peat-stained brown trout streams of the Southern Cape, purple was an emphatic trigger.

I have always fished ant patterns with a greased hi-vis leader and a yarn strike indicator but using some Loctite superglue to add a few particles of red glitter dust to the top of the bigger portion of the Veniard body can make it easier to follow in churny water.



Tied as a spent wing, the Veniard Ant has extra lateral support and a greater impression of vulnerability

One of the benefits of the Veniard Ant body, aside from its silhouette, is its size – about the size of our Balbyter *Camponotus* Sugar Ant and the other ubiquitous ants in various countries – the Banded Sugar Ant (*Camponotus consobrinus*) in Australia, the Carpenter Ant in the USA (*Camponotus pennsylvanicus*) and the Wood Ant (*Formica rufa*) in the UK and Europe.

(I discount 'ants' much larger than this. I think flies like the Chernobyl Ant are taken for larger terrestrials.)

Filling the gap

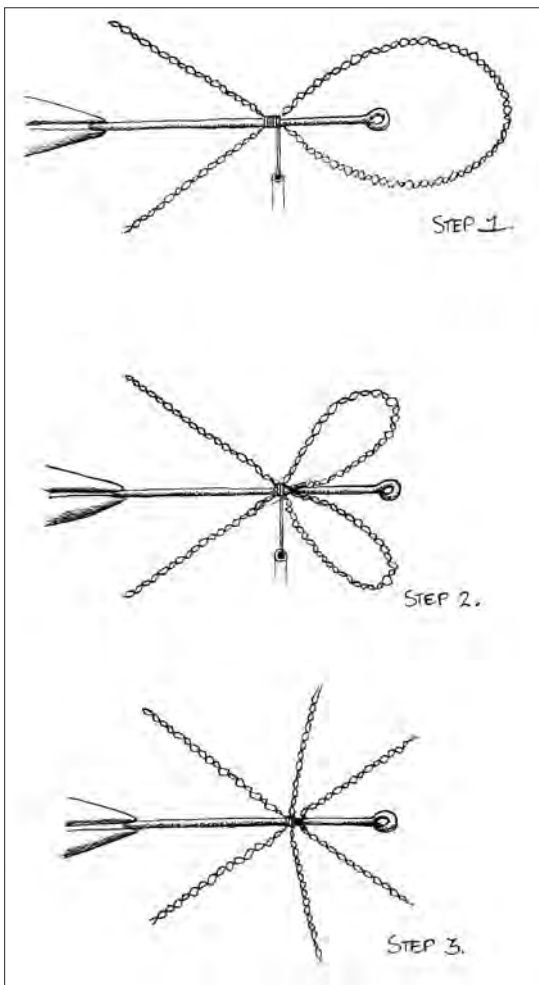
The Veniard Ant body also offers a base for one's creative instincts. One can add wings, legs and

antennae. The legs can be made of rubber, Krystalflash or other materials such as Supreme Hair a crinkly nylon originally developed for salt water streamers. For micro ants, the fine hair used by hairdressers to create braided hairstyles works well.

When I used Supreme Hair – which is available in purple as is micro Krystalflash I adopted a John Betts idea which allows the creation of six legs using a single strand of material. You can see the relevant article, written in 2004 *'Tying Ant Patterns'* in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder on this website.

A strand of synthetic material about one and a half inch long is folded between thumb and forefinger to create two loops that are then tied in at the midpoint of the hook shank. The two loops thus created are cut at their midpoint leaving one with six legs created from one strand of material.

The process is set out in the sketch below by Marcel Terblanche.



The John Betts idea of creating six legs from a single strand of materials

My favourite method of filling the gap between the two body segments is a spent- wing configuration of a yarn developed for fly tying because it adds supporting buoyancy, an illusion of vulnerability and improved ability to follow the fly in choppy water.



I use ultrathin thread in fluorescent orange to keep the middle of the Veniard body narrow. It is then covered with purple glitter dust available from craft shops and the top off the abdomen is covered in red glitter dust.

The reflections help follow it in choppy water. Dave Whitlock, as I recall, started the trend of using red nail polish in this context, but I wonder why he did not use glitter dust which is increasingly used in nail polish?

For legs I now favour micro Krystal Flash counterweighted with Loon Knot Sense (there might be more suitable alternatives.)

The Veniard body can be tied in a variety of styles using a size 18 Dohiku 302 medium wire hook

Loon's UV resin (thin) gives such patterns a blue glow in bright sunshine.

To facilitate following the ant in the drift, place a mixture of glitter dust and Loctite superglue on top of the larger section of the foam rubber body



Tying the Fettuccine Ant

I had never heard of the Tuscan Bunny or Drew Chicone when I first spotted Fettuccine Foam in the online catalogue of a local fly angling shop, but its potential for tying a small foam rubber ant was immediately obvious.

When my order was delivered, I was delighted to find that the 4mm square strips could be reduced in size by stretching it. I took an orange strip and coloured it black, leaving the front of the fly untouched to act as a sighter.



The author's first Fettuccine Foam Ant. The CDC wing is fronted by Hareline Ice Wing fibres to improve visibility

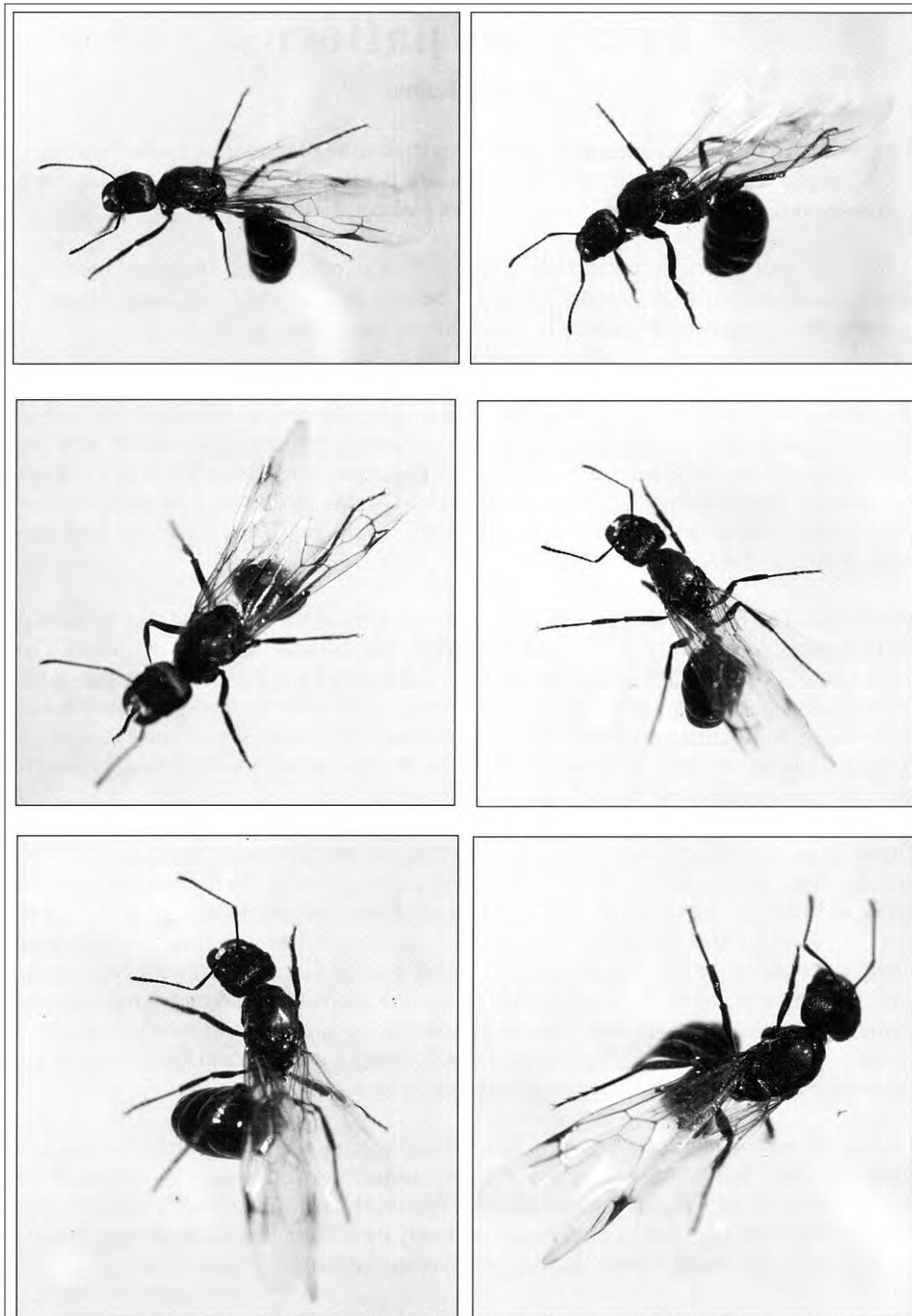
If I was to tie it now, I would counterweight the legs giving them extra wobble by covering the tips with little blobs of Loon Knot Sense or perhaps superglue gel. Perhaps using a cauteriser could achieve the same objective. What troubles me, but would not concern the trout is the fly's posture.

When ants end up in the water, they do so on the side which touches the water first because the wings on that side pinion them to the water surface. So, they end up on their sides, more often than not in a curled-up position while they struggle frantically.



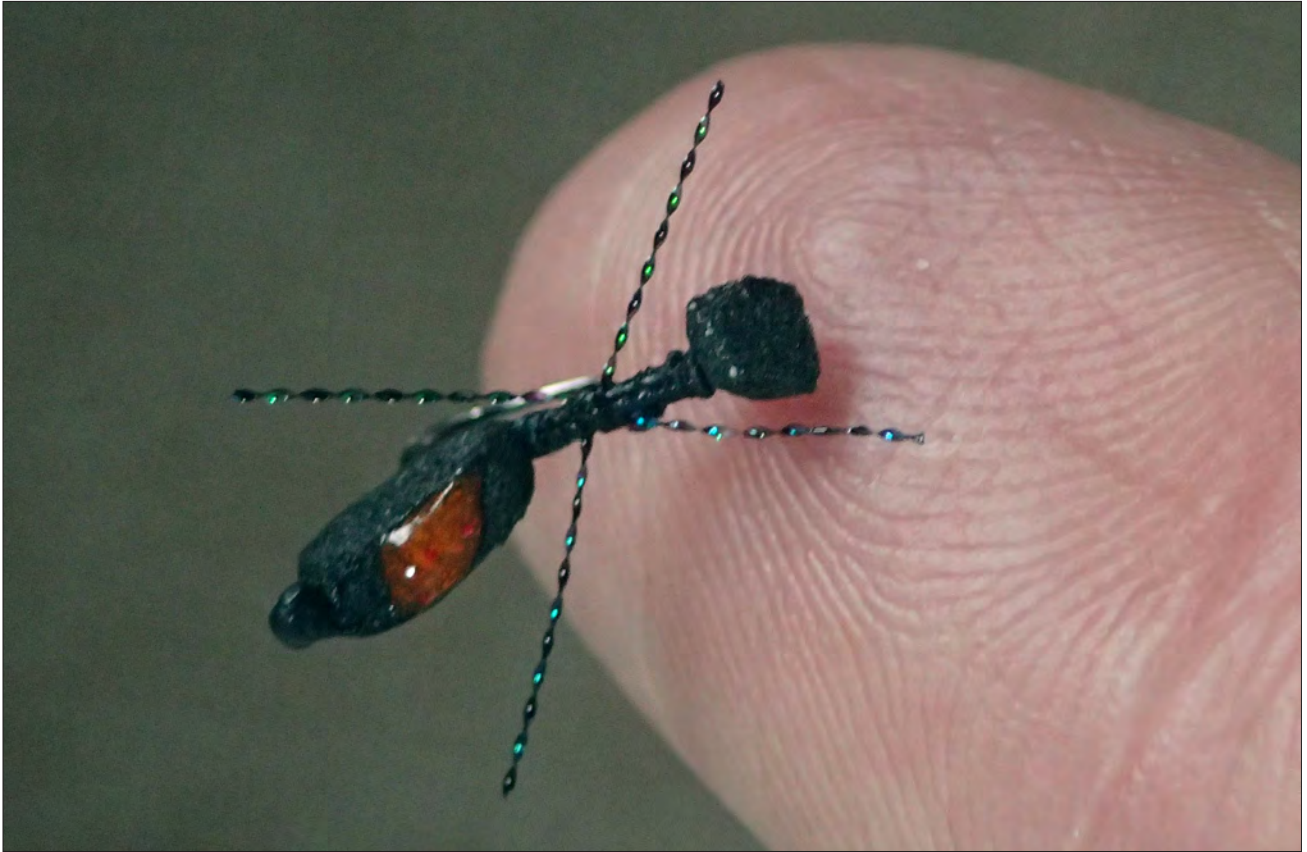
The banded abdomen on a Sugar Ant -photo by Philip Herbst and used with permission

The abdomen, being heavier, eventually hangs lower and on the Balbyter species it is prominently banded, a feature which some European fly tyers incorporate in their patterns. The photo sequence below is taken from a 2004 article, 'Tying Ant Patterns' which can be found in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the Cape Piscatorial Society's articles archive.



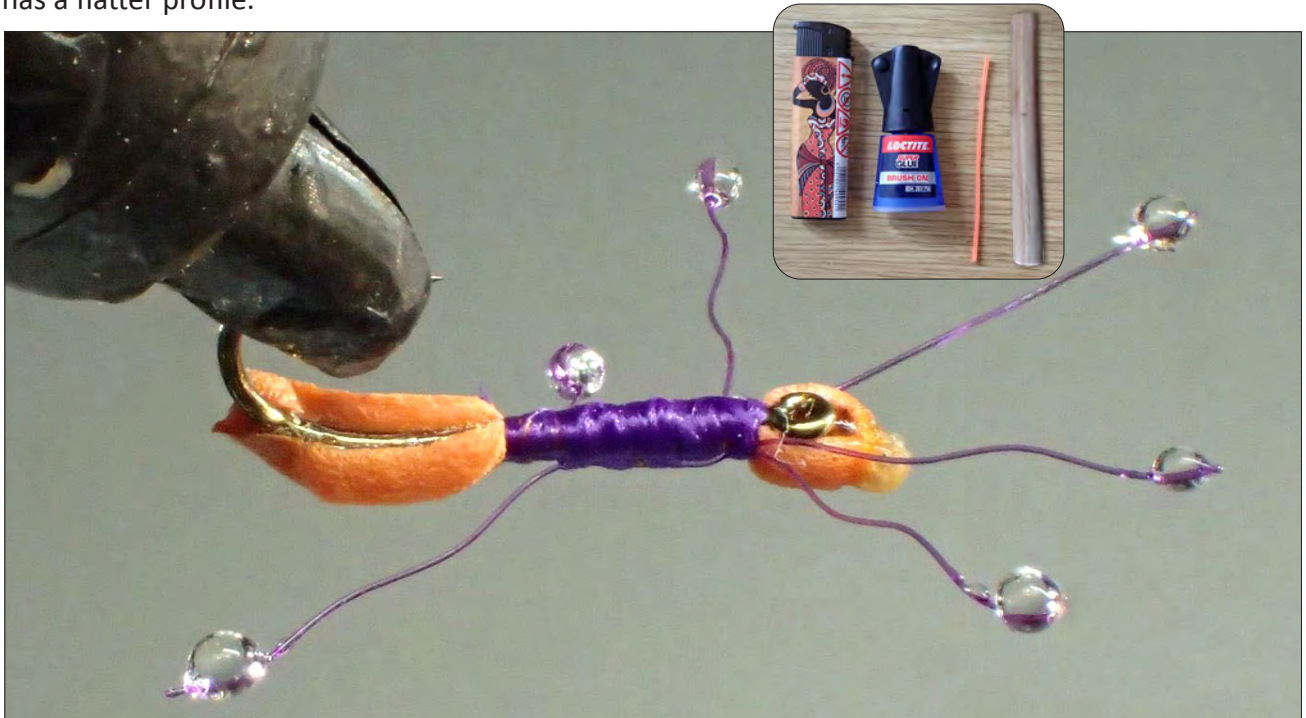
A sequence of pictures taken over a period of about two minutes of an ant dropped in a bowl of water showing the constant movement not only of the body but of the legs, wings, mandibles and antennae.

What the abdomen certainly does not do is point skyward, but that is what happens when you tie in the strip of stretched Fettuccine foam. Ideally you want to foam rubber to lie on the same plane as the hook shank and, as so often happens, I picked up answers from Instagram.



Note the slit in the body of this ant caused by the heated needle method. When combined with Loctite super glue, it permits a flatter floating posture – just like the real ant

Heat a needle with a lighter and use it to create a small groove in the rubber and then use Loctite superglue which, in the past, I mistakenly believed would erode the foam rubber - and your ant pattern has a flatter profile.



A heated needle and Loctite superglue which enables the Fettuccine foam body to lie parallel to the surface

Tying the Razor Foam Ant



A back to front Razor Foam Ant does not occlude the hook gape to the extent that a conventional tying approach would

When it comes to tying tiny foam rubber ants, Razor Foam is ideal.

It comes in packets with two sheets .5 mm thick and two 1 mm pieces.

Most of the material companies supply it, Wapsi, Rainys and Hareline among them. The Razor Foam Ant is essentially a miniature version of Edward Truter's Balbyter, but made entirely of Razor Foam which can be wound on as a dubbing replacement.

To create fly supporting antennae and add an extra touch of reality to micro ant patterns, you can use wedding organza or the fibre used by hairdressers to create braids.

However, I prefer a spent wing tie using Deadly Dazzle or a similar material.

The obvious potential of the Gary LaFontaine favourite, semi-transparent packing foam, Ethafoam and its thinner version, Aerothene, has yet to be fully explored.

