



CHAPTER 19

The Composite Caddis – an Evolving Pattern



The Composite Caddis proved exceptionally effective for Korrie Broos when he fished the streams on the farm Vrederus on the Naude's Nek Pass which links Rhodes and Maclear

It took a while for the penny to drop but, when it did, it turned out to be a fly-tying Kruger Rand.



(L) Stephen Boshoff, developer of the 'light bulb' concept

In May 2022, split cane master builder and dear friend, Stephen Boshoff of Cape Town, sent me a photo of what he called the 'Light Bulb Ant', a palmered CDC-hackled fly flecked with tiny drops of UV resin.

He explained that these drops would both catch and reflect light and also cause the CDC barbules to move up and down with the impetus created by the weighted tips responding to the current movement.



Stephen Boshoff's 'Light Bulb Ant' – a concept that has several fly tying applications

I saw it immediately as a means of also creating a pendulum movement in the rubber legs of hopper and arachnid imitations

I have, however, for the past three years been working on a way to make Al Troth's Elk Hair Caddis more buoyant and easier to follow in the drift. This was because, in his definitive book 'Trout from Small, Streams', (Stackpole, 2014) the author, Dave Hughes, found that a #16 Elk Hair Caddis was his most successful searching dry fly on the mountain streams of Oregon.

I called the result the Composite Caddis because it combines features and materials from a number of contemporary adult caddis imitations and I have used a photograph of the current iteration to head this chapter.

The required process was easy to define.

- Keep the GISS (General Impression of Size and Shape) factor which had made Troth's patterns a successful imitation all over the world;
- Give it greater buoyancy ensuring that it would float through the most boisterous small stream pocket water;
- Make it more visible so that it was easier to track during the drift – this is important because a lot of caddis activity takes place at twilight;

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- Enhance the trigger factors such as the bright green egg sac on gravid females.

The front of the fly is based on the foam rubber head principle of Roman Moser's Balloon Caddis. Moser used yellow foam rubber, presumably to make it more visible at dusk when caddis emerge and then return to the water to lay their eggs.

I, however, chose a Wapsi Evazote orange foam rubber made in Taiwan because it was softer than any I had previously experienced and trout and yellowfish seem to be very susceptible to flies using orange materials.



Wapsi's Evazote Foam rubber floating in water shows an attractive sheen

Initially I used Semperfli Kapok dubbing - which had proved itself to be an exceptionally buoyant material - for the body of the Composite Caddis.



The first version of the Composite Caddis used kapok dubbing for the body and lacked antennae

I then realised that the 2mm Wapsi foam rubber could be cut into a thin strip and wrapped around the hook shank to form the body.



The foam-bodied Composite Caddis before the antennae (first rubber and then Micro Krystal Flash) were added - Photo Ryan Weaver

The caddis adults that I had seen on the Sterkspruit River in Barkly East at twilight had bright green egg sacs and so I used a section of a small chartreuse Wapsi foam rubber parachute post to mimic this feature. It adds a little floatation at the heaviest part of the part of the hook and fluoresces strongly under UV light.

The entire body, head, hook covering, and the egg sac at the bend of the hook, were thus made of foam rubber, guaranteeing buoyancy if pre-soaked in Loon Fly Dip and allowed to dry on a sunny windowsill.

Using a CDC feather below a deer hair wing has become a norm on contemporary caddis dries and I reasoned that the greater opacity from below, thus created, would enable the use of highly reflective materials such as orange Micro Krystal Flash and red Hends Holographic Hair on top of the deer hair wing to improve visibility.

I sent the Composite Caddis, along with other patterns, to Rhodes residents, Rudi Hiestermaann and Heather Ralph - @fishnwine – both highly-experienced fly anglers, and they found the Composite Caddis to be the most successful of the group of experimental patterns I had posted to them.

I then ordered 50 Composite Caddis from then Stellenbosch University Student, Caleb Wilmott, who ties professionally under the Instagram hashtag @wild_mut_flies. Along with his business card, these flies were included in the goody bags of the participants in the 2023 Dirt Road Outfitters/Wild Trout Association Festival held during March in Rhodes.

Within two days, the first emailed orders were received:

Dick Plaistowe: ***“Hi Caleb, a report back on the performance of your Caddis that was given to us at the WTA Festival for which many thanks - 21 fish in just over an hour until I lost it. First fish first cast, the next on the third cast - very nice fly with plenty of triggers. A big improvement on my Elk Hair Caddis that I tie and often fish with. I tie it with a fluorescent orange post so I can see it, but I will build in your extras. Your fly is visible, but I’d prefer a slightly larger orange head when fishing***

longer casts - the red flash is amazingly visible.”

Ritchie Morris: ***“Used your fly today at the Rhodes Dirt Road Festival on the Tenahead beat. I must have caught at least twelve fish on the fly.”***

One of the guides at the festival, professional fly tyer @jankorrubel_anglerfish, provided similar feedback, but felt it would be more effective as a size 14 rather than a size 16 fly.

The Composite Caddis proved equally successful during the festival for Rudi and Heather when they fished the Loch Ness dam near the Tiffendell ski resort on Ben Macdhui Mountain. At 3000 metres this is the highest trout dam in the country and it is self-stocking as trout breed in the inlet streams,

They, like Jan Korrubel, also felt that it would be more successful if tied as a size 14, probably because it would be more visible and less attractive to very small trout.

It also occurred to me that ‘the Light Bulb’ technique could be used to imitate the one element that is missing in traditional caddis imitations such as the Elk Hair Caddis and Hans Weilenmann’s CDC and Elk – the antennae.

In most caddis species they are as long as the body but, despite this, they are routinely ignored by fly dressers.



As this photo by Marcel Terblanche indicates, the antennae on caddis adults are as long as the body

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

At my request, professional fly tyer Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher on Instagram – added antennae made of fine rubber strands tipped with Loon UV Knot Sense to the kapok-bodied Composite Caddis.



The first attempt (above and below) of adding rubber, resin-tipped pendulum antennae to the Composite Caddis with the kapok body – Photos by Marcel Terblanche



As the photo by Korrie Broos which heads this chapter indicates, we changed to Micro Krystal Flash rather than rubber for the antennae on the Composite Caddis. This change provided a combination of actual movement and the visual impression of movement as light rippled along the material's length and the movement of the glitter dust-infused UV resin 'light bulb' leg tip created a pendulum effect.



(L) Adding glitter dust to the Loon UV Resin before applying the mixture to the antennae tips provides an additional trigger – purple is chosen because it has proved effective in tannin-stained water, a characteristic of the trout streams near Cape Town

I regard the 'light bulb leg' idea as a significant addition to our fly-tying repertoire which will add movement to legs on spider, hopper and beetle imitation as well as emergers.



A rainbow trout, one of many, deceived by the Composite Caddis during the 2025 WTA festival in Rhodes

The foam rubber body and egg sac and the 'Light Bulb' antennae could be, with advantage, added to a caddis imitation of similar basic design, Gary LaFontaine's Air Head Caddis, which has proved to particularly attractive to yellowfish.

To find two useful YouTube videos on tying the Air Head, do an internet search for Herman Botes + Air Head Caddis + Mission and Air Head Caddis Fly + The Fly Project.

