

A man in a wide-brimmed hat and waders is kneeling in a shallow stream, holding a small fish. He is smiling and holding a fly fishing rod. The background shows a rocky stream with a small waterfall and dense green trees under a blue sky.

The Delicate Fly Fisher

Ed Herbst

The Delicate Fly Fisher

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Author's Note

"You have a story to tell"

Gordon van der Spuy, fresh from the triumph of self-publishing 'Feather Mechanic' his personal approach to fly tying which was earning significant acclaim from expert and beginner alike, was visiting me in the retirement home where I lived in Cape Town, my fly angling days a decade behind me. I hesitatingly agreed, only too aware from my own library of the plethora and fly fishing and tying books extending across centuries.

What had I to offer which was new or would be of benefit to potential readers?

"You have an audience." Gordon said.

That was true in a way.

My one-sentence Instagram bio - @ed_herbst346 - read: 'Small stream enthusiast based in Cape Town and narrowly focused on delicate tackle and tiny flies' and, in little more than a year, I had gained close on one thousand five hundred followers from all over the world.

I had previously, with Peter Brigg, co-authored a book on significant South African trout flies which could be regarded as indigenous in terms of design, materials used and the local prey species they were designed to imitate.

It had done well locally but what did I have to offer an international audience of trout anglers?

By profession I am a news reporter and all the articles I had written over the past four decades had related to my own learning curve, my own journey in my chosen fly-fishing milieu – what Ernest Schweibert called 'The Song of the Little Stream'.

I was looking for what we all look for – the fly that would, with an accompanying sense of wonder, change a dour day into one filled with sunshine; the rod and reel that would relate to the title of this book, 'The Delicate Fly Fisher' and would compensate for my mediocre casting skills and less than adequate stalking ability, the fly tying vise and tools that would enhance my enjoyment and enable me to tie smaller and more delicate flies with more speed and greater dexterity.

I discussed the possibility of writing a book on small stream fly fishing with consummate split cane rod-building craftsman, Stephen Boshoff. He has walked the 'Delicate Fly Fisher' path with me and had, in fact, suggested the title of this book.

"You were there in the best of times", he said, stressing the importance of the historic chronology which I had helped bring to life as editor for a decade of *Piscator*, the journal of the Cape Piscatorial and, later, the digitising of its content over its 63-year lifespan on the CPS website – <https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/>.

As a television news reporter, you have 70 seconds – if you are lucky – in which to summarise complex events in a way which makes them coherent to your audience.

Pulling seemingly disparate threads together and distilling them into an essence is an acquired skill and perhaps that is where I can be of assistance to those seeking greater efficiency, success and enjoyment in a multi-faceted endeavour which enthralls commoners and kings.

Can I, from the knowledge gleaned in almost half a century of intense immersion in fly fishing books and magazines and my own experience in the small stream environment, help others benefit from my mistakes and discoveries?

Often, what I most recall after reading a book, is a defining element, a sentence or a fact or an experience of the author which I find intriguing, something worthy of further exploration.

The definitive book for me is *Trout from Small Streams* by Dave Hughes and what lived with me after reading it was his chapter 'Working Wet Flies' in which he speaks of a 'revelation' and 'an epiphany'.

It relates to an experience on a hot summer day when he was fishing a crystal staircase stream in Oregon. Trout were splashing at but not taking his usually successful dries. What did work were size 10 - 12 soft hackles such as the Partridge and Yellow. Suddenly previously-reticent trout were competing for his fly and he put this down to what he called the 'umbrella posture' of the fly in the water.

My experiments, successful for me, in seeking to replicate this design feature, resulted in what I called the Slipknot Emerger.

It combines fly design features gleaned from Vincent Marinaro, Frank Sawyer and John Goddard and is used with the Surgeon's Swivel, a knot popularised by Art Lee, along with the greased leader approach recommended by Tom Rosenbauer and Peter Hayes.

It emphasises essential elements which characterise successful trout fly design - movement, contrast and vulnerability - and it contains one hotspot, although the further I move into the realms of provoking a trout to take the fly through curiosity or aggression rather than deceiving it into seeing it as a potential food item, the less comfortable I become.

'Equipment is the only thing' is a chapter in Gary Borger's stellar instructional book, *Presentation*, and I was to discover that the hard way on my first day as a fly angler in the spring of 1978.

The Western Cape is a winter rainfall region and the water was still high and cold when I stepped into the stream wearing running shoes. As a slim and wiry person, I have little resistance to the cold and, after falling several times, I realised that I needed to get proper wading shoes. I also wanted others to avoid my experience and that is what motivated my writing thereafter.

The *Delicate Fly Fisher* is also a life story, of a friendship that resulted in two life-saving medical interventions, of a political struggle against a bureaucratic ideology which sees trout as an environmental threat rather than an employment-creating asset while ignoring the impact of habitat destruction.

That, in turn, saw the emergence of the Federation of South African Fly Fishers, FOSAF, the local equivalent of similar lobby groups elsewhere in the world such as Trout Unlimited and The Grayling Society.

In 2021 FOSAF achieved a court victory with momentous political significance because it challenged the de facto approach to the promulgation of legislation in South Africa. Government, with its deep pockets, filled by the taxpayer, has appealed the ruling.

It is also the story of the Cape Piscatorial Society and how our colonial forbears overcame enormous financial and logistical challenges to establish a trout fishery in a hot and arid country.

Fly fishing in the colonies was much influenced by the Victorian heritage but, over time, evolved with local knowledge and experience to provide an indigenous body of knowledge from which fly anglers and tyers elsewhere in the world can benefit.

When I joined the CPS in 1978 and acquired previous issues of its journal, *Piscator*, I came across an article 'Lilliput Water' by Peter Turnbull-Kemp which left me entranced and defined my fly-fishing aspirations from then on. It described his fishing with the Leonard Baby Catskill – the forerunner to my mind of the current 'Whisper' rods - and it left me with a longing to replicate its lightness and delicacy.

I have, because of its influence on me, included that article in the beginning of this book.

If, at the end of it, you walk away with the thought that it has provided you with an interesting and entertaining read and ideas for further exploration, then it will have succeeded in its purpose.



Dedications

To the Cape Piscatorial Society which has enriched my life for almost half a century

To my late mother, Helena, whose memory I revere

To Tom Sutcliffe, friend and mentor

To Stephen Boshoff, superb craftsman, who accompanied me on the search for the ultimate small stream fly rod

To Peter Brigg, co-author and proofreader who cherishes the small stream ethos

To Sunet Terblanche who helped me create the Cape Piscatorial Society's literary archive

To Andrew Ingram, the creative force behind the two-DVD Vimeo series 'A South African Fly-Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends'

To Gordon van der Spuy – the 'Feather Mechanic' – for persuading me to write this book

To the Wild Trout Association in Rhodes and Barkly East whose members provided me with memorable friendship, hospitality and fly-fishing

To artist and professional fly tyer Marcel Terblanche whose illustrations add so much clarity to the text

To Hannes Thiart and his wife Barbara Mueller whose publishing skills brought this project to fruition





CHAPTER 1

Early Milestones

From Goldfish to Mountain Streams

“It’s in the fishing that does it for most of us, not just the catching or the keeping. The reading of the water, the awareness of the environment, the pleasure of the open spaces, the preparation and the anticipation. So many facets come together from tying flies, to reading and acquiring knowledge, to practising the craft and the repetition of the doing, until it becomes enshrined muscle memory that happens without thought or conscious endeavour and just happens mostly as you hoped or intended it to. Believing in a future means that we cherish what we have and believe in and steward this so that we hopefully can leave it in a better state for those coming after us to enjoy and benefit from. Many of us feel the urge to share this pursuit with others who feel likewise and with the next generations. Long may it be so. I live in hope that our legacy will inspire others.”

Ilan Lax, National Chairman of the Federation of South African Fly Fishers (FOSAF), December 2021.

One of my earliest recollection was being taken, aged about five years, by my widowed mother on a bus to the Durban harbor to where a ferry departed for the far side of the bay every few hours. She had bought me a rod and reel from her meagre earnings as a typist and I caught a rock cod. I don’t know why she did that, perhaps it was because of the interest I had displayed when she told me about fishing during her childhood in a country village, but there were no further trips because she could not afford the bus fare.

I then discovered goldfish in ponds in a park near my home, but using a rod would quickly attract the attention of the park attendant. I would visit the park with bread and chum the goldfish. Having attracted their attention, I would throw a twig into the water attached to which was a short section of nylon mono and a small hook baited with bread. I would watch with delight as the twig zig-zagged around the pond while scanning the park for the attendant. Had he approached, I would have nonchalantly strolled away, but he never did and, after retrieving the twig, the goldfish would be released.

A few years later I found an American magazine, Rod & Gun, at a local book shop and came across an article about the angling adventures of Dwight Eisenhower as a youth. I was enthralled and my mother bought the magazine for me. I could do that, I could be like them.

I started bait fishing rivers and later graduated to spinning for bass in farm dams. I continued to voraciously read American magazines such as Outdoor Life and Sports Afield and Field & Stream but it was only when I was in my mid-thirties that I was able to realise my ambition to start fly fishing.

My employer, the South African Broadcasting Corporation transferred me as a television news reporter and camera operator to Cape Town in 1978 and I joined the Cape Piscatorial Society which

traces its origins to 1906.

I became a committee member and then editor of its annual journal *Piscator* which I edited for close on two decades until 2010 when the cost of printing became prohibitive. I was able, subsequently, to get its best articles digitised and placed on the CPS website.

Equipment is the only thing

That's the title of a chapter in Gary Borger's stellar instructional book, *Presentation* (Tomorrow River Press, 1995) and it is appropriate because wading boots bookended my 30 years as an active fly angler.

My first trip to a trout stream near Cape Town was memorable only because of its misery. It was the beginning of spring and the stream was still high after the winter of 1978 when, with a second-hand fiberglass Hardy Jet and wearing lightweight trail running shoes with thin rubber soles, I cast my first shop-bought fly. It was the locally-developed Caribou Spider and, four decades later, it featured in a book written by Peter Brigg and I, *South African Fishing Flies – An Anthology of Milestone Patterns* (Struik, 2017).

I am averse to the cold and the Cape Province with its Mediterranean climate gets its rain in winter. I fell several times and, shivering with cold after these immersions, I brought an early end to my first angling trip with the realisation that I had to get proper wading boots. I felt, at the time, that if I used my ability as a reporter and photographer, I could help others avoid my calamitous start to fly fishing.

In 2010, my balance was affected by a rare neurological disease which reduced my balance and mobility, something I became aware of when attending the annual River Festival in Rhodes. I had bought some new wading boots with latest in sticky rubber soles and found myself stumbling and struggling to keep my balance.

What bewildered me was the fact that other anglers wearing wading boots in various states of disrepair, were not finding the riverbed unusually slippery. Wading boots bookended my time as an active fly angler.

An environmental role

The Cape Piscatorial Society liaises with the provincial environmental governing body, Cape Nature, in monitoring the adverse impacts on mountain streams – with varying degrees of success, as these two photographs taken decades ago show.

The Witte stream is the closest brown trout stream to Cape Town - the top photograph shows what was known as 'Breakfast Pool' to fly anglers. It is situated about an hour's walk from the car park and it was a popular place for a coffee break before starting fishing.

The bottom photograph shows what the pool looked like after being dredged by local farmers who were concerned about the impact of winter floods on a weir which diverts much of the stream's flow during summer as part of their irrigation system.

The flow from the weir is just a trickle which has a significantly adverse impact on the stream below it and the CPS has been unable to change this situation.

Farming is a justifiably powerful lobby in South Africa's Western Cape Province – it employs more people than any other commercial sector and, by a substantial margin, provides the most export earnings.

Its wine estates are justifiably world famous and have been visited by millions of tourists over the years.

I watch with concern as the vineyards move up the mountain sides as farmers try to increase the yield of their farms and, with greater concern, the impact of agricultural irrigation on the region's streams.

CHAPTER 1



Breakfast Pool on the Witte stream in its pristine original condition



Dr Kas Hamman of Cape Nature examines Breakfast Pool after it was dredged by local farmers

The Flyfisherman (Pty) Ltd

The 1981 issue of *Piscator* carried an advertisement for South Africa's first angling shop devoted exclusively to fly fishing. Up till then, local fly anglers had, in the main, only had access to British brands such as Hardy and Veniard.

Tom Sutcliffe had journeyed to Manchester, Vermont to get the Orvis agency in South Africa. Orvis, the world's oldest mail order company specialising in outdoor pursuits, brought out lavishly-produced fly fishing and tying catalogues each year which we awaited as eagerly as a child awaits presents beneath the Christmas tree. It was also a period of intense innovation in American fly fishing which was well-documented in the magazine of the same name which I, for one, awaited with a similar sense of anticipation.

These Fly Fisherman articles were to mould and drive my own preoccupation with Lilliput streams and the benefits so derived were inspirational. Suddenly I was exposed to Ernest Schweibert, Lee and Joan Wulff, Dave Whitlock, Gary Borger, Lefty Kreh, Art Lee, Gary LaFontaine, Ed Koch, Ed Schenk, Rene Harrop, Harry Murray, Fran Betters, Tom Rosenbauer, Carl Richards and Doug Swisher and others.

The Birth of FOSAF

Cape Nature Conservation's Jonkershoek hatchery in Stellenbosch, the university town an hour's drive from Cape Town, had bred trout for the fly fishing fraternity since the 1890s but, a century later, the relationship between trout anglers and Cape Nature Conservation soured.

In the mid-1980s Cape Nature took the principled and justified position that it could no longer financially afford to breed and stock trout for what it perceived to be a small group of moneyed enthusiasts. It felt this role should be taken over by private rather than state-funded hatcheries. It also felt that its limited resources should be utilised to protect and promote indigenous fish species, some of which were threatened rather than an introduced species which is not native to South Africa. Fast-breeding imported species such as bass and bluegill in particular created an environment in which indigenous fish species, the minnows in particular, were at a life-threatening disadvantage.

Where Cape Nature made a mistake was to launch a propaganda war seeking to portray trout as a threat to indigenous fish species, a propaganda war in which it was supported by a vociferous and vehement anti-trout lobby and growing anti-colonial sentiment within the country. No evidence existed to prove that trout had extirpated any indigenous fish species and the positive role of trout in the context of job creation and tourism income was ignored in this campaign by the anti-trout lobby. That anti-trout sentiment continues to this day.

In response to the policy change by Cape Nature, fly anglers from throughout the country then gathered at the Eagles Ridge Hotel in Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape in March 1986 to create the Federation of Southern African Fly Fishers, a lobby group which would endeavour to promote their interests and conserve the environs in which they fished.

Its accomplishments since then have been significant but its founding as a lobby group was inevitable. Similar organisations such as Trout Unlimited in the USA and The Grayling Society in the UK prove the point. Appropriately, its first committee meeting was held on the premises of the Cape Piscatorial Society and I was appointed secretary at that meeting.

The role of trout in South Africa has been eloquently summed up by Professor Duncan Brown, Dean of the faculty of Literature at the University of the Western Cape in his book *Are Trout South African* (Picador, Africa 2013).

As he tells it, the leading promoter of the idea that trout are an existential threat with no redeeming merits is a retired academic at the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, Dr Jim Cambray. The major threat to our freshwater fish species on the Red Data list is habitat degradation.

CHAPTER 1



Delegates at the founding meeting of FOSAF in March 1986



FOSAF's first committee held at the CPS in Cape Town in 1986 – from left, Malcolm Meintjes, Vaughn Patterson, Fred Croney, Tom Sutcliffe and Ed Herbst

The major piscine threat to endangered minnows are bass and bluegill and the translocated sharp tooth catfish – called barbel locally. Bass and bluegill are able to out-compete our indigenous fish – for example the yellowfish, a Cyprinid which resembles the European barbel and chub – because yellowfish take several years to reach breeding maturity whereas bass and bluegill do so within a year. Another major threat, particularly in the Eastern Cape, are sharptooth catfish, known as barbel locally, which have reached this province – where they were not previously found – through inter-basin water transfer via the linkage of the Orange River and the Fish River to facilitate irrigation and promote agriculture in that province.

Wikipedia refers to the 50-mile Orange-Fish River Tunnel, which was built in the 1960s, as the ‘longest continuous enclosed aqueduct in the southern hemisphere’.

I commissioned Dr Cambray to write an article on the ecological consequences of this tunnel and ‘Barbel, a catfish on the move’ appeared in the 2004 issue of *Piscator* and can be read on the CPS website in the ‘Trout Wars’ folder. As Dr Cambray points out, the barbel, which can reach 50 lbs, can survive in the harshest condition because of its ancillary air-breathing organs. When the water dries up, they simply hibernate in the moist earth until the next rainfall season.

This undermined the image of trout as the major threat to indigenous fish species which is promoted by the anti-trout lobby. What the anti-trout lobby cannot discount is the employment benefits brought about by trout ecotourism which, in a stillwater context is predicated on trout aquaculture. In a small country village like Dullstroom, a three-hour drive from Johannesburg, 80% of its inhabitants draw an income from fly angling-related tourism and the dams in the village are stocked from local hatcheries. In a country where more than a third of its citizens are unemployed and dependent on social grants, that is significant.

Dr Jeremy Shelton, whose Ph.D. thesis subject was the endangered minnow species of the Fynbos Biome, was interviewed by the editor of *The Mission* magazine, Tudor Caradoc-Davies for an article headlined ‘What Lies Beneath’. He said that the greatest threat to these minnows was habitat degradation, that a stabilised level of co-existence had been largely established between the two and that this had to weighed against the eco-tourism benefits that trout had brought to the country.

In common with other fly angling lobby groups elsewhere, FOSAF’s major areas of concern are environmental. It opposes the absence of preventative maintenance at water treatment plants in ANC municipalities which has turned some of our rivers in urban centres into open sewers and government’s approval of mining in ecologically-important wilderness areas.

A second area of contestation in which FOSAF is involved is the battle with the Department of Environmental Affairs for control of the trout value chain and its declaration that trout are invasive which they are not, confined as they are to a tiny fraction of a hot and arid country.

In 2021 FOSAF achieved a significant court victory in this regard. FOSAF’s Yellowfish Working Group’s role is imperative when one considers the danger these indigenous species face from riverine pollution and mining in ecologically fragile areas.

The Wild Trout Association

The Wild Trout Association was started on the 18th April 1991 by Dave Walker and Martin Davies as a means of creating a mutually rewarding link between farmers and fly fishers in the Eastern Cape Highlands – Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear.

The Association, which is based in Rhodes, organises day ticket fishing for visitors on more than a hundred miles of stream and river giving approximately 70% of the rod fee to the riparian owner and retaining the rest for admin fees. At the time, Walker had a vision of establishing a conservancy in the area. Davies had a vision of a sport fishery in the area. Lengthy debates ensued and finally, a start was made on a constitution for a “conservation-based sport fishery”. Needless to say, for those who know Davies, this was not a short process. Ultimately, many hours later, the final version was typed

up and presented to potential founder members Basie Vosloo and Carien Vosloo, Graham and Margy Frost, Grant & Kathy Sephton and Marius and Debbie Robertson, all farm owners in the area. The sum total of water under their control amounted to 26 miles. A flyer with text and a map was printed and proudly distributed. The flyer was 1/3 of an A4 page printed on both sides.

Dave Walker, owner of a local 'Walkerbouts Country Inn' B&B was coerced into standing as chairman, a job which he duly undertook. It emerged many years later that this move had been plotted by Graham and Margy Frost together with Martin Davies and several other founder members.

To bring the new Association to the attention of a wider audience, Walker and company duly organised the Barkly Wild Trout Association Expo in April 1992. It was an auspicious gathering attended by fly fishing enthusiasts from all parts of South Africa. This is what I wrote at the time in Piscator, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society.

"The Barkly Wild Trout Association is unusual in concept in that it enables the riparian owners in the Barkly district to develop, improve and make available for public usage their streams, rivers and dams while retaining autonomous control of their property.

It is thus the first organisation of its kind in South Africa where riparian owners have come together to help each other develop a natural resource for the benefit the Barkly East community at large and the fly fishing public in general."

The Expo was opened by the Chairman of the President's Council, Dr Willie van Niekerk. In his speech Dr van Niekerk said that the principles upon which the Association is founded are sound and to be welcomed precisely because they counter the threat of syndication which, in some areas has made fly fishing for trout a sport to which only the affluent have access. He said that contrary to normal syndication practice where the farmer cedes control of his water to the syndicate, the association's constitution leaves that control firmly vested in the farmer.

Dr van Niekerk noted that the Association's members control only one hundred kilometres of the estimated one thousand kilometres of river fly fishing available in the district and called on other farmers to join the Association.

"If we can attract fly fishers to this area in significant numbers the ripple effect will be felt throughout the local economy. Such anglers stay at local hotels, fill up their vehicles at local garages and buy a wide range of consumer goods from soft drinks to newspapers and periodicals," he said.

Fishing was provided on the Karnemelk, Kraai, Sterkspruit, Bok, Joggem and Langkloof Rivers and the picturesque, Willow Stream.

Furthermore, a study done by Dr Mario du Preez and Deborah Lee of the Department of Economics, at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth shows that fly fishing results in a R5.6 million annual contribution to a village economy where the majority of people are unemployed and dependent on social grants. Dave Walker says that, in the interim, more than 15 000 day permits have been sold for more than a million rand of which 75% has been disbursed to riparian members over the past 25 years at an average of almost R43 000 per year. Dave adds that the cumulative spend by fly anglers over the past 30 years has added an estimated R20 million in trickle-down benefit to the local economy

The publicity spin-off for members and the region as a result of media coverage has been of inestimable value.

Hunting Trout

By the time the WTA was established Tom Sutcliffe had moved from Pietermaritzburg to Cape Town to take the position of head of hospital services for the province and we started fishing together, a friendship which saw us visiting Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear every year for the next two decades.

In Barkly East We stayed with Basie and Carien Vosloo on their farm Birkhall on the Sterkspruit River and with Graham and Margy Frost on their farm Balloch on the Willow Stream. We stayed at Dave Walker's B&B, the Walkerbouts Inn, when in Rhodes and with Ron and Robin Moore who farmed on the banks of the Little Pot River in Maclear. The Naude's Nek Pass links Rhodes and Maclear and Donie and Juan-Marie Naude whose farm Vrederus lies at the summit of the Pass, also became dear friends. During these trips Tom started keeping a diary which, several years later, morphed into *Hunting Trout*, South Africa's most-loved fly fishing book which is still in demand after being reprinted three times.

One of its chapters, *The Lakes at Inhluizane*, was included by Nick Lyons in his anthology *The Best Fishing Stories Ever Told* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2010). 'Return to Barkly' a relevant chapter from *Hunting Trout* can be found on the website of the CPS.

So many memories of the Eastern Cape Highland towns and villages – Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear and of the Naude's Nek Pass which connects the latter two – and of its good people. Mostly of happy fishing memories but also memories of poignant import and of tragedy – read the chapter 'Memories and In Memorium'.

Becoming editor of *Piscator*

Piscator, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society, was first published in 1948 and its editor was A C Harrison, a founding member of the CPS and a towering figure in its history for almost half a century. When he retired in 1978, a retired executive at the University of Cape Town, C Ross-Munro took over and when he died, the baton was passed to me.

A decade ago, printing costs became prohibitive and *Piscator* ceased publication. The vast amount of online information on fly fishing and fly tying had effectively made it redundant. Anxious to preserve its history and to make its rich literary heritage available to a current and future audience, I have, in the past few years, started digitising the most interesting of the *Piscator* articles with the help of Sunet Terblanche who runs a business administration company called Virtual 24-7.

Fly anglers in the British colonies, while drawing on the mother country's rich angling heritage, developed their own often ingenious answers to universal questions which is why I felt it important to archive *Piscator*'s contents. I have also added articles from the websites of Tom Sutcliffe and FOSAF and *The Mission* magazine and it is now the repository of a significant body of fly angling information which, in the main, pertains to small stream fly fishing, the subject of this book.



Sunet Terblanche who helped the author archive articles from *Piscator* on the CPS website gets a tying lesson from Gordon van der Spuy

The guiding experience

To be a fly fishing guide requires physical stamina, immense patience and an indomitable calm and, as I discovered in 2006, I am woefully bereft of all of those attributes.

To my financial detriment, I had asked for early retirement from my employ as a television news reporter in the Cape Town office of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The office had been taken over by two African National Congress acolytes and propaganda promoting a political party which had proved itself to be corrupt and inept in every way and censorship by omission to cover up its multitudinous and never-ending scandals, had become an enforced and untenable way of my professional life.

Behind me lay a career as news reporter and cameraman that spanned almost four tumultuous decades and five political leaders - from John Vorster to Thabo Mbeki. All that changed when I walked away from that profession and Ernst and Anchen Stofberg, owners of Dwarsberg farm near the village of Rawsonville, a 90-minute drive from Cape Town, offered me the opportunity to rent a house on the farm, almost on the banks of my favourite stream.

To add to my income I started guiding on the stream and I quickly discovered that if the weather conditions were unfavourable or your client lacked expertise, you became the target of their frustration.

The most common mistakes made by newcomers to Cape streams are false casting too much and ripping the line off the water if a cast goes astray. Fish-scaring false casting is the comfort food of our sport, a pleasant, rhythmic ritual that is as difficult to abstain from as giving up tobacco or alcohol or coffee. I saw it all the time, three false casts, backwards and forwards and then shoot – swish/swish, swish/swish, swish/swish ... cast. Very often this is because the angler is using the line weight designated on the rod blank but that formula is predicated on routinely casting with ten metres of line outside the rod tip – and on the Holsloot you are often casting at half that distance. I used a double taper line, one weight heavier than recommended for the rod model and cut it in half which gave me two lines for the price of one. I rarely had reason to cast even the length of half a fly line as I wandered up the bubble line, but my rods loaded easily at 15 feet and false casting to get the rod working in its sweet spot never became necessary.

When you are fishing with a friend you are relaxed but when a guide is watching you, it can add an element of tension. What sometimes happened, I found, was that the client would become irritated when the fly didn't land where it was supposed to and, to rectify the situation, the line would be ripped off the water in the back cast prior to the fly be re-positioned.

"You've just put a flash of lighting across that trout's ceiling", I would say in a tone that I hoped would be taken as jocular.

On some occasions guiding was a memorable pleasure. At the time there was a company called Thunder City operating out of Cape Town which offered flights in British ex-combat jets such as the English Electric Lightning and the Blackburn Buccaneer. They would sweep down the Holsloot valley at what seemed to be tree height and I remember one such occasion when I guided my first client, a pharmacist.

He and his wife had arrived late the previous afternoon and booked into one of the cottages on the farm. He had only just started fly fishing and he had had a few largely unsuccessful trips to the Vaal River for yellowfish. He wanted a few casting tips and, although the wind was howling downstream, we walked the few hundred metres to the stream and I rigged his rod. It was a five weight and, attached to the dark-green leader was a large, buoyant strike indicator. It loaded and cast well enough but I was puzzled because on every cast the strike indicator would submerge. *"Is this a floating line?"* I asked. He assured me that the shop assistant who had sold him the outfit had told him that a floating line was fitted. It was, in fact, a sinker and he was somewhat relieved because he now knew why his first fly fishing trips had proved so difficult.

The next day he used my rods. Custom-built on one weight Sage and Scott blanks by my friend and master craftsman, Stephen Boshoff, they incorporated our ideas of what the ultimate 'Small Stream Special' – aka the 'One-Off One Ounce' – should be and they were over-lined with two-weight Rio Pocket Water lines, specifically designed for the sort of conditions found on Western Cape trout streams.

He quickly mastered the roll cast and progressed from dry flies to nymphing with a strike indicator and we then used the rods alternately. We would try a stretch with the dry fly and, if that did not produce any interest, we would drift a nymph through the same run.

If the dead-drift nymph was ignored, the last cast would be stripped back and the occasional result was a trout rocketing across the stream to grab the rapidly-moving nymph.

Normally, one changes flies at the end of a run but I taught him to move to the next section of stream before a selecting a hopefully more-productive pattern. I pointed out that the water upstream of where you are changing flies has yet to be disturbed and, while you are sorting through your fly box or gently tightening a knot, you might well see a fish move.

We took a lunch break in the shade looking up the long valley and, as we did so a dot appeared in the sky on the horizon. In an instant it was transformed into a jet fighter. It arrived in silence, ahead of its sound. Hugging the contours of the mountains at what seemed tree height it was overhead in a second, its visceral thunder obliterating the gentle sound of flowing water. We turned to watch in horrified fascination as it headed away from us, straight towards the towering peaks in the distance in what seemed an inevitable collision course. At the last moment it jinked upwards, tilting slightly, as it clawed its way exultantly into the heavens, its roar diminishing swiftly into a whisper until, once more, the comforting quietness of the mountain stream resumed its rightful precedence.

My companion sighed in content. *"I used to be a fanatic, now I'm an addict"*, he said emphatically.

In the late afternoon I gave him a fly tying demonstration under the oaks as he sampled a sauvignon blanc purchased from the Daschbosch cellar at the bottom of the valley and derived from grapes grown on Dwarsberg farm.

Another memorable guiding experience involved someone who, while nursing his wife through her terminal cancer promised himself a day on the stream with me.

It was cathartic for both of us.

On that day my prayers were answered, the sun shone, the birds sang, there was a gentle upstream breeze and the normally recalcitrant trout co-operated – and some of them were of respectable size.

As he left, he thanked me and his eyes glistened as he said: *"That was everything that I imagined it would be."* Don't thank me, my friend – my gratitude is equal to yours.

It wasn't always like that.

When I started guiding, I charged a thousand rand a day which was the going rate at the time.

Friends suggested that I charge R1200 as most of my clients would not object to such a fee. One of my early clients was a multi-millionaire executive of a local insurance company who was known for hiring all the cottages on the farm at weekends for his friends.

He arrived late on a Friday afternoon and, without charging him, I spent an hour working on his casting and then spent another hour giving him a fly tying demonstration. He invited me to join his friends for supper under the oaks – all delicatessen food as I recall.

During the evening one of the women declared that *"There are two sorts of people in life – those who queue and those who push in - and I belong to the latter group."* I queue, but it said a lot of the prevailing ethos among them and I held my counsel.

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The next day I worked hard and successfully to provide him with good fishing and, at no extra cost, he used my custom-built rods. As a guide, you stop when your client stops and he only stopped when it was almost dark.

I, then in my early sixties, was exhausted. I could not remember what I had said I would charge him, whether I had asked for a thousand rand or twelve hundred.

"I can't remember what I said a day's fishing would cost you", I said questioningly.

"Five hundred rand", was his expressionless reply.

Instant, insensate, red-mist rage which I struggled to control.

"No, I would never have charged so little for a ten-hour day – twelve hundred rand", I said breathing deeply.

To add insult to injury, one of the things I did for clients was to take digital photographs which I would then burn onto a DVD and mail to them. He lived, predictably, in the wealthiest suburb in the city.

In 2007, my year of my guiding days ended when I was head-hunted to join the Cape Town municipality's media division. They apologised for offering me three times what I had been earning at what had become a state broadcaster, a state broadcaster constantly mired in corruption scandals and which subsequently required not one but two multi-billion rand bailouts.

I have written extensively about this for news websites such as Politicsweb, Rational Standard, Biznews, The Media Online and others. Fly fishing and fly tying were my respite and my sanctuary.

The role of competitive angling

As a glance at the FIPS-MOUCHE website – home of the International Sport Fly Fishing Federation indicates it has, for three decades, played an extraordinary role in promoting the science of river and lake fly fishing, driving technological advance and building personal bonds across continents. It has played a similarly beneficial role in South Africa with our male, female and youth teams doing us proud in international competition.

CPS member Korrie Broos has built on those friendships to bring a series of anglers from abroad who had excelled in international competition to this country to hold clinics and impart their skills. He did this at his own expense.

At the 2002 World Championships in France he made friends the captain of the Italian team, Edoardo Ferrero who is now vice president of Fips-Mouche. Edoardo subsequently visited South Africa along with Pier-Luigi Concito who won individual gold medals twice in the world championships

Edoardo pronounced our streams as ideal soft hackle water and introduced us to the Arpo, a deadly CDC caddis pattern which is quick and easy to tie. In 2007 Korrie brought Jiri Klima and Karel Krivanec from the Czech Republic and they spent a day and a night at Dwarsberg Trout Haven on the Holsloot Stream.

It was an eye-opener.

Jiri fished an eight foot #2 weight rod with a team of nymphs and his ability to drop those nymphs into the tiniest of pockets with inch-perfect precision made one understand why he had previously been called the "River God" by English angling author Charles Jardine.

In competitive fly angling one competes against the clock and to watch Jiri build a leader with a nymph on the point and another on the dropper within two to three minutes left a lasting impression if not any desire to emulate the feat. The sections of the two-metre leader were arm length and bitten off and, when every second counts, one understands why this is necessary. The dropper nymph was about 50 cm from the point fly.



Pascal Cognard at one of the stream fishing seminars he held in South Africa in 2013

His wading barely caused a ripple and his casting was astonishingly quick and accurate. His drifts were very short and the longest time he took between casts was about seven seconds as he quickly and precisely probed all the spots that were likely to hold fish.

As dusk arrived, the mirrored surface of the stream was broken by tiny dimples as trout gently took emerging midges. Jiri persisted with his nymphs however and when I asked him why he had not adapted his tactics to suit the changed circumstance he said *"Because I like to fish this way."*

Korrie was subsequently to bring to South African Jiri Pechar who is heavily involved in organising the Fips-Mouche World Junior Fly Fishing Championships as well as Pascal Cognard, three times individual world fly fishing champion and Said Yahiaoui, a member of the French team from 1991 to 1993 and its current manager. Korrie accompanied me on my penultimate fly fishing trip in 2010. Although I did not know it at the time, my balance was beginning to be affected by a rare neurological disease. He was solicitous in assisting me and showed me techniques that I would never have considered or evolved on my own.

A South African fly tying journey

In 2010 Andrew Ingram, former Chief Photographer at the Cape Times and now an executive at the National Sea Rescue Institute, suggested that we collaborate on DVDs under the title of 'A South African Fly Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends'. We produced two which featured myself, Tom Sutcliffe, Dean Riphagen, Fred Steynberg, Mario Geldenhuys and Philip Meyer tying time-proven patterns of South African origin.

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Andrew Ingram (right) walking towards a stream with Rhodes-based guide, Fred Steynberg during the filming of our DVD series on significant South African small stream patterns

They are now available on Vimeo:

www.vimeo.com/573845780 / Ed Herbst and friends flytying 2.mp4 on Vimeo



**Andrew Ingram films me interviewing Fred Steynberg for our two-part DVD series
'A South African Fly Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends'**

The end: As I mentioned earlier, my fly fishing days were bookended by wading boots. In the late seventies I bought a pair of felt-soled wading boots after realizing that I would injure myself trying to wade in running shoes. In 2010, I attended the annual Rhodes Fly Fishing Festival which is headquartered at Dave Walker's Walkerbouts Inn. I found myself struggling to keep my footing when others were experiencing no problems.

On my return to Cape Town I was diagnosed with CIDP, a weakening neurological disease. At first the doctors did not know what was wrong with me and Tom Sutcliffe made the breakthrough with a decision to send me to the Groote Schuur Private Academic Hospital.

I made my last trip to Barkly East with Tom and we stayed, as always, at Birkhall, the home of Basie and Carien Vosloo. Tom took me to the Sterkspruit River, I leaning on a carbon fiber wading staff made for me by Stephen Boshoff, he carrying a small camping stool. I set up my Sage Triple Ought - as always with a small sunken ant on the tippet - and slipped some waterproofed poly yarn through the loop-to-loop leader connection.

I painstakingly greased the leader with Mucilin and flipped a cast upstream, and then again.

On the third drift the strike indicator dipped and Tom released the small trout. My heart wasn't in it though. I missed the ever-changing chess game, each bend in the stream revealing a new set of problems to solve. I urged him to carry on fishing and hobbled back to the truck leaning on the wading staff. At the truck I fell but hauled myself up and into the cab.

In Cape Town endless medical tests and one period in hospital after another followed. Radiation killed the cancer and bought me another decade but it was touch and go for a while.

Tom made a call to a few friends and raised the money for a painting by Doug Starling which

was based on a photograph he had taken of me while we fished a small stream together for the last time. Before I had been given the painting, I phoned a friend who has seen it and the original photograph upon which it is based which was taken in a deeply-shaded section of the stream. *“How does it compare?”* I asked. *“It’s better,”* he said. *“You can see the line”*. Artistic license has its merits.



The Paddy Starling painting which fly fishing friends bought for me – casting from a kneeling position as usual

“I console myself with the thought that I still have fly tying – and a growing Instagram family”.

Tom then started his ‘Spirit of Fly Fishing’ website and newsletter which enables me to write contributions on fly fishing and tying trends and new tools and materials.

Tim Rolston asked me to write the foreword to his fly tying book, *Guide Flies*, essential reading for a fly tyer in my opinion as it draws on his decades as Cape Town’s leading guide and the wealth of information already carried on his ‘Fishing Gene’ website, it too, is published by New Voices Publishing Services.

Milestone patterns – an indigenous fly chronology

In 2013 and now a pensioner, I was approached by Peter Brigg who suggested we co-author a book on fly patterns which could be considered indigenous to South Africa in terms of design, materials used and what they imitated. His coffee table book *Call of the Stream*, the most beautiful fly fishing book I have ever owned, had sold well and he was looking for another project. *South African Fishing Flies – An Anthology of Milestone Patterns* was published in 2017 and the publisher chose a watercolour by Peter for the cover. It consists of chapters by the people who invented the patterns and I feel it is an important contribution to the historical record. To make it accessible to a wider audience, I have had some of the chapters posted on the CPS website in the ‘Indigenous Flies’ folder.



Peter Brigg's exquisite watercolour on the book cover

CPS and the future

At the time of writing the CPS had celebrated its 90th birthday and, like all such organisations was adapting to the regimen prescribed by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is financially sound and local tourist organisations refer any overseas visitors who express an interest in fly fishing to it. Looking back over the past four decades, the biggest change is the amount of information that the internet has made available.

We now have access to YouTube instructional videos and innumerable websites which include those of the CPS and FOSAF and individual local fly anglers. Competitive fly angling, initially opposed by older CPS and FOSAF members has been of immense benefit because it has brought younger fly anglers into the fold and most of the CPS committee members compete.

FOSAF remains resolute in protecting the interests of fly anglers and conserving the environs in which they fish.





CHAPTER 2

Lilliput Water*

Piscator No 91, Spring 1974

By Peter Turnbull-Kemp

Most of us know a Lilliput Water. It may be a highland burn or a drowsy summer brook shrunk to a string of shaded pools. Lilliput can be a tiny tarn or a lochan set deep in the mist-swept heather. For others, it may be an unruly cascade, slicing through golden gorse, or a dark and secret woodland lake. It might be a miniature effervescence, framed in a massive moor, or simply dew-dear depths of utter upland silence. In contrast it can be a slender sliver of green-girt limestone riches or a bright torrent swollen by spates from midday melting snows. Lilliput can be a lonely thing among cluttered rocks, desolate and sear with only the wind for it to chatter to for company.

Whatever its nature, Lilliput in any form offers the fly fisher one constant thing. This is its store of bright and somehow cheerful little trout as wild as the midget creatures on which they prey. Sadly, few of us pay lasting tribute to the Lilliputs we know forgetting our debts to such waters for our earliest tuition or shunning the miniscule away as now beneath our notice.

Certainly, waters of this kind are not for bragging fishermen's plunder once the excitement of the novice has gone. Lilliput is no place for much killing. It may be possible to measure success, if measure it you must, by numerical means; but the real rewards are almost intangible. To be sure, the occasional prize may be won. For those fortunate enough to fish tiny waters harbouring briefly the wild wanderers back from the sea, there will sometimes be the cataclysmic eruption of inappropriate sea-trout bulk and silver. Even where the sea-trout do not come there may still be the comparative monster dark with the concealment and the years that gave it time to grow plucking the heart with excitement when it rises unexpectedly.

Yet, for the most part, the fun and the joy of Lilliput will come from its regular sprite-like inhabitants, and the wise fisher will match his tackle to what he may reasonably expect rather than to wishful thinking. Much of the food of the typical lilliputian trout is taken underwater, but surface offerings will seldom be spurned for very long. Indeed, the normal floating diet of the little fish will generally be both habitual and catholic. An angry, bee may figure now, a struggling ant provoke the next snatching rise, and a beetle then vary the fare. No doubt this will be dull for the angler who is a strict imitationist, but Lilliput can provide its own sophistication. This will be found in the use of the floating artificial, presented with the most delicate of equipment.

A hairlike leader and a wisp of rod seem all that is truly fitting for waters such as these. Thin terminal tackle for tiny barbless flies and a rod delicate enough to handle both with sympathy. Somehow the irreplaceable aesthetic appeal of a good split cane rod, with its varnish and silk, seems to fit the fairy-tale world of Lilliput better than synthetic rod materials. On practical grounds, few of the rods manufactured in synthetics can handle truly delicate terminal tackle, and one should perhaps search

among the products of the shrinking band of master rod-builders.

The childish jingle. *One, Two, Three*, can describe the finest of tackle for minor magical waters. With apologies to metric purists, the simple phrase stands for 1 oz. of rod, 2 oz. of reel, and a No. 3 line or lighter. I use a six-foot two-piece cane by Leonard of New York, rated for a No. 2 line, and weighing 1 oz. This is balanced perfectly by an Orvis reel exactly twice the rod weight. The rod was originally designed for 8X leaders and No. 28 flies and its slender responsiveness makes all but the very smallest of trout a captive well worth recollection. With a total weight of less than 4 oz. for rod, reel, line, backing leader and fly there is little to blunt the sense of contact with a game opponent of any size.

To some of us it will be logical that surface imitations for Lilliput ought to be small and have impeccable floating qualities. Furthermore, that they should be resistant to being pounced upon by numerous hungry little trout. The traditionalists will be content to use conventional fly patterns, possibly palmer-hackled or having the buoyancy of clipped deer-hair bodies. I have had success with the North American designs rejoicing in such exotic names as the Natural Irresistible and Rat Face McDougall, although the hair bodies of these cannot be tied on hooks much smaller than No. 16. Once equipped with wings, hackles and tails these have, however, excited a proportion of the splashy rises most of us associate with slight alarm. One suspects they may be a bit too bulky for the Oliver Twists of the world of trout.

Those who are a little less shackled by the orthodox may prefer tiny unhackled and cork-bodied terrestrials, ideally tied on nothing larger than a short-shanked (5-XS) No. 16 hook. On the water they are approximately the same in size as a No. 22 of traditional design, while retaining the better gape and bite of the larger hook size. To me they look in every way beguiling propositions for elfin trout. Slipped from the mouth of a captive they require only a quick rinse to be set bobbing through rough water as cheerfully as before.

Tactics, where stream conditions are involved, need not be a blind searching of the water with the upstream fly. Instead, the imitation should be placed where experience hints a trout could lie. One of the smaller excitements of this brand of angling is the unmistakable fishy confirmation that your intuition was exactly right.

If Lilliput is for you a little lake, then the correct tackle will also prove to be that elusive item—authentic gear for fishing the tiniest midges. When the evening calm is a network of overlapping sunset rings, the delicate equipment will come into another version of its own.

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to believe that man's present abuse of his surroundings may drive those who seek for only wild trout to Lilliput. If that time comes, then might it not well be that the tackle described will then become the commonplace? I, for one, will not mind. For even when the longest day is gone and the fisher looks across the tumbled miles to home, the featherweight equipment still remains the good companion it has been throughout the well-imprinted day.

*** Author's footnote:** The charming phrase 'the waters of lilliput' was first used by the British writer Arnold Scott, writing in *The Field* of 15th November 1973.

The Field of 5.9.74 said that it was now sadly in order to unmask a pseudonym. "Arnold Scott" was W. H. Lawrie, who had died recently. He had been a regular correspondent and a writer of a number of books on English, Scottish and Welsh trout flies. W. H. Lawrie's books in the C.P.S. Library include his latest work, *International Trout Flies*. 1969.

Ed Herbst writes: In an email to me, Ted Simroe, former vice-president, and bamboo rod builder for the H.L. Leonard Rod Co. from 1967-1978, described the lengths to which he went to get the Baby Catskill down to one ounce:

"The rod you asked about was initially labelled the Leonard 37L. That was changed to the 36L in the mid-seventies when the model numbering was changed for all the Leonard rods. The 6-foot, 1 oz. rod was developed in the early 1950s, and was supposed to have been developed to accommodate a special membership group of the famous Anglers Club of New York. To be a member of this group, which was called the '28-8-18 Club,' one had to land an 18-inch trout on a size 28 fly using an 8X tippet.

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I personally have never been able to confirm this requirement or its relationship to the 37L. However, it has always been a good 'story,' even if just a rumour! By the way, the rod was designed to be used with a level silk line, size 1.

There were several issues with getting the weight down to 1 oz. or less, although the idea of a 1 oz. rod was not the starting point. The ferrules on that rod were 7/64ths of an inch, which had to be specially made. The tip tops were actually # 2.5/64ths. The Perfection Company made a special # 3/64ths tip top for Leonard but did not have the tubing necessary to fashion anything smaller. Also, the 'swelled butt' section, which was a Leonard characteristic, was eliminated. If you have ever seen one of these rods, I am sure you would be amazed at the delicacy of the sections, especially of the tip sections. No one else ever came close to making a cane rod that light. We used a beveller that incorporated 3/4" diameter carbide saws, and I am still amazed when I think what I accomplished with that machine! I can remember that when I planned to cut the tip sections, I would plan on starting early on Saturday AM, when no one was around. I would start with enough cane to make 24 tip sections.

Because each of the six strips were so small, some would fracture in just being picked up. Others would break coming out of the saws. I always considered myself lucky if I could end up with 12 complete tips. We would then lose 3 or 4 more when gluing the six strips together, and another 1 or 2 in the assembly process! From all this, we felt good if we could end up with 3 complete rods.

As far as the reel seat was concerned, the Leonard Fairy Reel was developed for this rod. It was a raised pillar design, like all the Leonard reels, but the side plates were all hard rubber, with no aluminium castings around the edges. The reel foot was shorter and narrower than normal, and the wood reel seat was only 2 3/4" long, rather than the standard 3 1/2" long. The butt cap and ring were about 1/2 the size of the standard Catskill hardware, and the nickel silver winding and cork checks were also eliminated. The wood used was either white pine, butternut or basswood. Balsa was never used as far as I know. I do remember making one rod with an all-cork cut-out reel seat. I eliminated the stripping guide and used a # 1 snake guide instead. We only put one coat of varnish on that rod instead of the normal 2 or 3. The finished rod weighed in at 7/8 oz. exactly.

As I mentioned earlier, # 1 level silk line was originally used on these rods. When silk gave way to the plastic-coated lines, a 3-weight was the smallest available, and most used that line since it was all that was available. Actually, I fished one of these rods using greased 30-pound Dacron squidding line, and it worked better than anything else!"

Peter Turnbull-Kemp coupled his Leonard Baby Catskill with an appropriate reel, the Hardy Featherweight. Born in Scotland, Peter fought in the Scots Guards in World War II and, thereafter, worked for the then Southern Rhodesia's Department of National Parks. He established a trout hatchery in the Nyanga National Park and developed Africa's first pellet diet for hatchery trout. A copy of his 1994 book *The Flyfisher's Nyanga* is in the library of the Cape Piscatorial Society. I believe his Leonard Baby Catskill is now owned by a Capetonian. It would be interesting to know how it got from modern-day Zimbabwe to the southern tip of Africa where, as Turnbull-Kemp well knew, 'cheerful little trout' can be found in the Lilliput water that he so loved.

NB: This and other articles on small stream fly fishing equipment can be found in the 'Tackle' folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society - <https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/articles/>





CHAPTER 3

Memories and in Memoriam

One of the most evocative titles among the fly-fishing books in my collection is *The Bright Stream of Memory* by Geoffrey Bucknall, a collection of articles from *The Fishing Gazette*, Britain's foremost angling magazine from 1879 to 1937.

"The bright stream of memory is all we, as fly anglers, have left when we enter the twilight of our lives and no longer have the physical strength to wade slippery riverbeds and fight turbulent currents. They are the recollections that sustain us and provide some comfort as a counter to vague, poignant regrets that we started fly fishing much later than we should have and did not get to fish nearly often enough."

One of the most golden memories I have was a day spent on the Swith stream near the summit of the Naude's Nek Pass, the gravel road that connects Maclear with Rhodes in the north-eastern Cape Drakensberg.

Where it flows beneath the road it is an unprepossessing little stream that Tom Sutcliffe and I had driven across several times during our annual pilgrimages to what is the centre of our fly-fishing universe. It was a halfway stage between visits to friends Ron and Robin Moore and Ginger and Ebbie Jenkins at the foot of the pass on the Maclear side, Donie and Juan Marie Naude at that famed stillwater venue, Vrederus, near the summit, and friends on the Rhodes and Barkly East side such as David Walker and Basie and Carien Vosloo.

A probable reason for the scant interest we had shown the Swith was that there are a lot of crack willow trees at the bridge, which prevent one seeing the water and, on either side of the bridge, the stream is hidden by folds in the hills.

Something prompted us to stop, however, on what was probably the sixth time we had crossed the bridge. Scrambling down the bank and into the cool of the shade thrown by the willows we were surprised to see a good trout dart upstream. Buoyed by the discovery we walked a short distance both upstream and down of the bridge, finding a good flow of clean water and a lot of promising holding lies.

On our next trip a year later, Donie took us to meet the owner of the farm, John Jordaan and his wife Amanda. Their son, Pieter, was overseas, working in the USA to raise money for his own farming ambitions. Sitting in their lounge we pored over maps of the area, discovering that the Swith was a tributary of the Luzie, a stream much loved by Sydney Hey and mentioned in his book, *Rapture of the River*. It finally flowed into the Kraai River

Later, John drove us downstream to show us some magnificent San paintings, but the afternoon shadows were lengthening and there was no time to fish.

The next day Donie took us to a magnificent valley a few kilometres downstream of John's house. The fishing was good, the scenery spectacular and I was elated to discover an overhang next to a deep run which was full of otter droppings indicating a good supply of crabs. I recalled Sydney Hey's son, Dr Douglas Hey, later to become head of Cape Nature Conservation, telling me of how many of the trout he had cleaned for his father on boyhood trips to the region fifty years previously, had contained crabs.

I vowed to return and return I did, two years later. In the interim, Pieter had returned from the USA and now lived close to the Naudes.

I was on my own this time, the pressure of work keeping Tom in Cape Town. I invited Pieter to accompany me, telling him I would be happy to pay for his services. He was not a guide in the sense that Rhodes residents Fred Steynberg and Tony Kietzman are, more of a ghillie – but he knew every shadowed coppice, every sun-dappled verge in the most remote river valleys, having visited them on horseback in a lifetime spent in the area.

Once he grasped what made the intimacy of small, tree-cloistered streams meaningful to Tom and I, he was enthused, suddenly sensing the potential of a host of hidden kloofs where he knew the entrance and exit points.

It was a day out of heaven, made all the better by the fact that he shouldered the load I always carry, cameras, lenses, food and drink and rain gear. What is more, I had the stream to myself - no leapfrogging a companion or waiting in line. I caught fish after fish and he was there to capture the moment on my camera. When the strike indicator slowed and dipped in that thrilling cadence that you almost sense before it happens, slowed and dipped in the run next to the otter overhang, the day had provided more than I could have hoped for. I went and sat in amongst the otter droppings and insisted he take a photograph of me there in that tranquil place that they normally enjoyed alone.

But something more meaningful was to occur when, in the late afternoon, distant rumblings and an intermittently-lit sky indicated that it would be wise to leave the valley. As we walked up the steep slope to where the vehicle was parked Pieter mentioned that his father had spoken of outstanding San paintings in this valley. My thoughts, still in the day's fishing, still immersed in the joy of it all, I absent-mindedly said that the sites the San preferred for such paintings were overhangs that provided not only protection from the elements for the paintings but also a panoramic view that would enable both game and potential attackers to be spotted early and in safety.

We both stopped, suddenly struck by the same thought, and then almost rushed forward. Just such an overhang was situated where the steep path reached the plateau, the magnificent valley a vista below us, the stream a tiny, silver sliver amongst green trees and verdant meadows. We both simultaneously drew breath because looking at us – through us – was an eland, that most holy of San deities. Wherever we moved its gaze seemed to gravely follow us in a way that was almost eerie but not threatening, the long-dead artist, in capturing the serenity of the animal, creating a tribute to it – and himself – on the rock face that, to the San artists, was the gateway to the spirit world. Deeper within the recess was another vignette of San life and what once was, a hippo, its back bristling with arrows, its open-jawed agony palpable.

Moved, we drove in silence back to the welcoming kitchen hearth at Vrederus. Pieter promised to take me to similar places in a future and the potential of a whole new world of discovery held me in pleasant thrall as I slipped into sleep later that night.

It was not to be. Terse, grieving and aggrieved, Juan Marie's short, clipped sentences, echoing in the hollow void of a long-distance telephone call, told a chilling but familiar tale of a region where farmers are ever under threat. She, Donie and Pieter had driven to Maclear to watch a concert at the local school hall. At the interval, Pieter had gone to fetch something from their truck. He found someone breaking into it and, in the ensuing confrontation, was surrounded and shot in the chest. He succumbed an hour later in the Maclear hospital.

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Tom phoned. His sister and her husband, avid birdwatchers, had been guided by Pieter the week before to a valley where wattled cranes lived. They were indebted to him and held in prospect his promise of future visits to other outstanding birding places. Tom said he had spent half an hour on the phone to John. I told him I would not be phoning, lacking the courage, but promised I would write a tribute to Pieter.

To John and Amanda, to Donie and Juan Marie and to all who loved this shy and unassuming young man whose short life was full of joyous but unfulfilled prospect - this is my fulfilment of that pledge.





CHAPTER 4

“Haneda Here”

The Search for the Ultimate Small Stream Fly Rod



Casting control is the most important aspect of fishing small streams. Sequestered pools, with guarding alders overhead and shrubbery along the sides, are cruel masters of the casting art. For small streams, I still like short rods.

Dave Hughes, *An Angler's Astoria*, 1982.

It is often said that Japanese fly fishers love bamboo rods because bamboo is a part of Japanese culture. We may prefer bamboo to chemicals, but fly fishers here in Japan started loving bamboo fly rods more because we found a bamboo rod to be an ideal tool for the smaller streams and smaller trout we fish for most in Japan.

Yuki Bando *Mostly Bamboo – Eighteen Bamboo, Fibreglass and Graphite Fly Rod Makers in Japan* (Flybito Press 2020).

“Haneda here.” The voice, emanating from Tokyo and being relayed by satellite to Cape Town was surprisingly clear. It was early in the morning in late 1983 and I could not quite believe my luck. I was about to speak to the man whose rods, I believed, were going to provide a quantum leap in achieving my fly-fishing goals.

I had first read about Hisatsugo Henry Haneda’s rods in the May 1983 issue of the American magazine, *Fly Fisherman* and the account, in an article ‘Boron Update’ by Dave Engerbretson, seemed to be too good to be true - but tantalising in prospect nevertheless: *Another line of exquisite rods for the lightest lines is produced by Archistrial of Tokyo, Japan. Archistrial rods, well known for some time in Japan but only recently available in the United States are designed by Henry Haneda. An interesting feature of the Archistrials is that they are all four-piece rods – with a one-piece feel. Haneda uses a different boron/graphite ratio in each of the rod’s four sections which he says enables him to modify the overall action precisely. The rod’s actions are delicate and yet several of my testers and I found ourselves casting the entire length of a WF-4F line with incredible ease.*

I corresponded with Haneda and bought a six-foot nine inch, three-weight. The delicate, all-cork handle was the most comfortable I had ever used and a sketch in a Japanese brochure he sent me showed that he used a chisel in their construction with the handle being held in a specifically designed template. It was to provide the parameters for subsequent experiments in small stream rod design and, although I never did learn to cast a full fly line, the Archistrial remains to this day, four decades later, the rod that is closest to my heart.

When I was no longer able to fish, I gave it to Stephen Boshoff who shares my reverence for small streams and whose craftsmanship played a pivotal role in a succession of experiments aimed at producing the ideal low mass, light-line and non-reflective rod which would provide delicate and accurate presentation with a metre of line outside the top guide.

The Leonard Baby Catskill

I was fortunate, when I started fly fishing in the late 1970s to acquire Ernest Schweibert’s double-volume book, *Trout*, with its intensive and meticulously researched discussion on the history and evolution of fly rods and the one which resonated most strongly with me was the Leonard Baby Catskill. Six foot long, weighing fractionally less than one ounce and casting a two-weight line, it was the organic progenitor of today’s ultra-light line ‘Whisper Rods’.

In substantial measure this was because of a 1974 article in *Piscator*, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society, headlined *Lilliput Water*, by Peter Turnbull-Kemp. To me it defined and encapsulated my fly-fishing metier and focus and I have used that article at the beginning of this section of this book.

Turnbull-Kemp used a Leonard Baby Catskill combined with an Orvis CFO2 reel and, by coincidence and years later, I believe I actually held that rod in my hand. A local bank had organised a function, hosted by Tom Sutcliffe, to introduce its ‘Young Millionaires’ to fly fishing. One of them mentioned he had a split cane rod of uncertain provenance.

He fetched it from his car. It was a Leonard and, as I withdrew it from the bag, I knew instantly that it was the Baby Catskill, as mythical to me as a Ferrari F40 would be to the Tifosi and I have reason to believe that this rod, in fact, was the one once owned by Peter Turnbull-Kemp.

The Boron Baby Catskill

Dave Engerbretson’s article also contained a reference to the solid boron rods of retired aerospace engineer, Don Phillips. He did the pioneering stress calculations and holds patents for solid boron and boron hybrid fabrication.

The rods were built on a wire mandrel and I bought his tribute to the Baby Catskill – six-and-a-half-foot 3 weight – and its tip was needle thin.



The author's Don Phillips solid boron rod

There's a lovely description in Ernest Schweibert's double volume book, *Trout*, where the author had a few casts in an empty, chandeliered hall at a hotel during a fly-fishing convention where Phillips showed him the rod. Schweibert subsequently wrote the foreword to Phillips' book *The Technology of Fly Rods: An In-Depth Look at the Design of the Modern Fly Rod, Its History and Its Role in Fly Fishing* (Frank Amato, 2000).

At my request, Phillips wrote an article 'Boron: From Scouring Powder to Fly Rods' for the 1982 issue of *Piscator*. It can be found in the Tackle folder on the Cape Piscatorial Society website.

'Tom Thumb Work' - the Whisper Rod era

Charles Fox articulated and defined the need in his 1963 book, 'The Wonderful World of Trout':

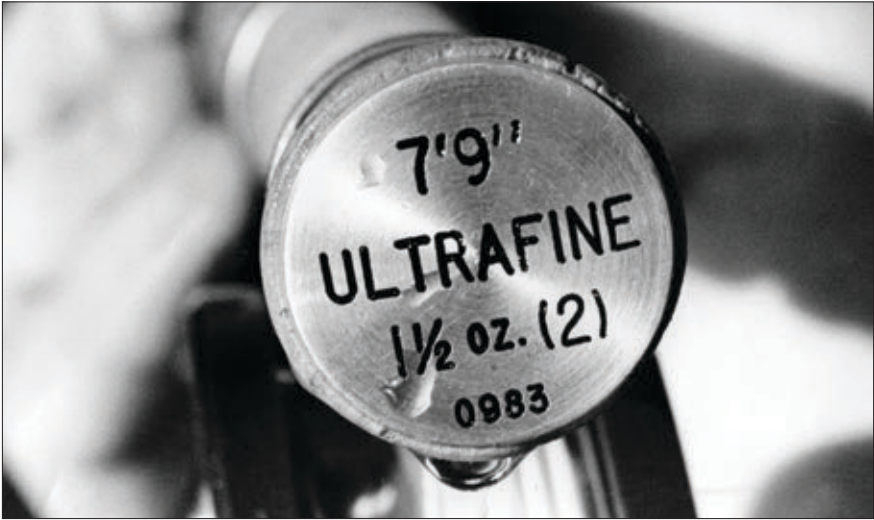
Daintiness is required to drop a fly gently nearby and to appreciate the play of a small fish, and only the little rod gives the delicate close-range delivery and feel – Tom Thumb work.

What made the Whisper Rod era possible was the collaboration between first Orvis with 3M and then Sage with 3M/Scientific Anglers to produce a series of progressively thinner and lighter fly lines:

- 1984: Orvis Ultrafine 2-weight – 80 grains
- 1987: Orvis Superfine 1-weight – 60 grains
- 1991: Orvis "One Ounce" 2-weight
- 1997: Sage SPL 65 - grain 0-weight
- 2005: Sage TXL 60 - grain 00-weight
- 2006: Sage TXL 57- grain 000-weight

The Orvis Ultrafine

In 1981 Tom Sutcliffe journeyed to Manchester Vermont to meet Leigh Perkins of Orvis who granted him the company's agency and in June that year, South Africa's first shop devoted exclusively to fly



The author's Orvis 2-weight Ultrafine – the start of the 'Whisper Rod' era

fishing opened in Pietermaritzburg. I quickly acquired the 7/11, a four-weight but, three years later, Perkins and his wife Romi visited South Africa at the invitation of Tom and he could not stop enthusing about a new model produced by company rod designer, Howard Steere. The Ultrafine was the first mass-production 2-weight fly rod and it heralded the arrival of the 'Whisper Rod' era.



The combination of an Orvis One Ounce rod and CFO2 reel provide a happy moment for the author

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This was followed in 1987 by the first production 1-weight and the ‘One Ounce’ in 1991. The One Ounce was the genesis of small stream fly rod journey which, for me, would epitomise the ‘Delicate Fly Fisher’ ethos and approach. My first opportunity to fish the One Ounce came during a trip to Durban and members of the Natal Fly Fishers Club took me to one of their favourite trout dams, looking askance at my toothpick and the size 16 PTN tied Sawyer-style to the tippet. On my first cast I saw the plop of it landing and started to let it drift with the wind when the leader suddenly shot away – first cast with the One Ounce!

The Sage ‘Ought’ series

In 1997 Sage rod designer Jerry Siem collaborated with Bruce Richards of 3M/Scientific Anglers to develop a 54-grain line - then the lightest available – and a seven-foot nine-inch rod to go with it. I was very excited and sent Sage a fax – the longest in the company history apparently.

Meeting Stephen Boshoff



Lilliput Water: Stephen Boshoff fishing one of his short, light line split cane rods on a trout stream near Cape Town

I met Stephen Boshoff in 2000 when I booked a cottage for the weekend on Ernst and Anchen Stofberg’s farm, Dwarsberg (www.trouthaven.co.za) so that I could fish the Holsloot stream.

I was told that a fellow Cape Piscatorial Society member had also booked a cottage and strolled across to suggest we share a beat as I am always wary of fishing on my own. It was the start of a valued friendship but also the beginning of a search for the ultimate small stream fly rod.

I was to discover that not only did Steve share my interest in low-flash, low-mass “Whisper Rods”, but that he was also a consummate and visionary craftsman when it came to building them. I was fishing with one of the first Sage ‘Ought’ Weights to reach the country. After a discussion about what our ultimate small stream rod would be, I gave Steve my factory-produced rod and he built me a new one on a Sage ‘O’ blank that I ordered through local agents, Frontier Fly Fishing in Johannesburg.

Stephen's bespoke Sage '0' was a revelation. The finest cork exported from Portugal and other European countries is used on champagne bottles and it was slivers of this cork which Stephen used on the first rod he made for me. It gave the handle a speckled appearance which appealed to me. In contrast to the factory rod, the handle tapered all the way down to the blank which facilitated casting with your finger on top of the grip and the shelf of cork which extended over the reel seat obviated the sharp drop on the original model. This handle design requires a lot of cork and exceptional skill because the tolerances are very fine but I don't think you will find a more comfortable or more adaptable grip design. Regardless of whether you fish thumb on top of the handle, forefinger on top or Gary Borger's 'Three point grip', this comfortable handle will suit you.

Another striking contrast was the thin, black sliding ring from an Orvis One Ounce which obviated the fish-scaring flash under the bright African sun which was an unfortunate factor on the US-manufactured rod. Stephen, at my request, was later to expose the blank at the butt by eschewing the butt cap, an idea first explored by Danish split cane master, Bjarne Fries.



Stephen Boshoff's Sage 'Ought- weight (bottom) with its 'Palm Grip' compared to the factory version

Because the average cast is short and upstream – on small, canopied streams one often has little more than the leader outside the top guide – line mending is not often called for. Furthermore, because of the often-broken nature of the water, drifts are very short and a casting tempo of two or three to the minute is not unusual. This can be tiring when you are fishing in the midday heat generated in the kloofs (gorges) of the trout streams near Cape Town.

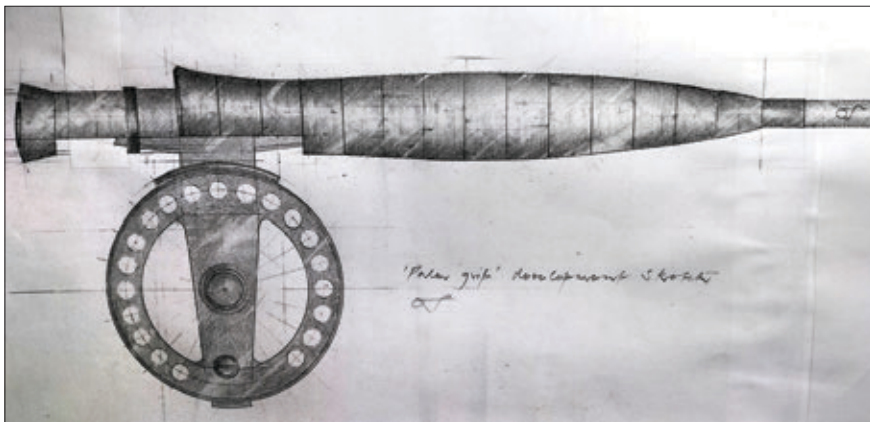
CHAPTER 4

I confined myself to pocket water because it compensated for multitude of sins. The water turbulence served to conceal one's approach and the trout in relatively shallow water have a small window of vision. Furthermore, because of the confined space of trout's holding area, floating insects quickly moved in and out of its field of vision, giving it little time to react.

With the constant, staccato and rapid-fire cadence of casting which Western Cape streams require, the rugged surroundings and great heat in which this occurs, fatigue is inevitable and grows with each passing hour. To avoid cramp, many fly fishers constantly shift their hand position on the grip and adopt different grips for different circumstances – thumb on top for more power when the wind comes up or for the occasional longer cast, forefinger on top for delicacy and accuracy. A handle design is required that most facilitates this constant changing of the grip.

Stephen's custom 'Ought' rod paid homage to Howard Steere in its search for lightness and the reverse half wells handle had its origins in the Henry Haneda's handle design which I had found to be the most comfortable I had ever used.

I was later to find in Ernest Schweibert's 'Trout' that the concept of a Half Wells handle tapering at the front of the grip all the way down to the rod surface was not new. His book showed a 1929 John James Hardy Special, originally owned by Ernest Hemingway, which featured this design.



A Stephen Boshoff sketch of the all-cork Palm Grip which facilitated holding the rod in different ways depending on the conditions

What made Stephen's all-cork design special was that the front reel seat made of ultra-thin aluminium was hooded within the cork grip. A shelf of cork extended along the top of the handle almost to the butt so that the transition from the handle to reel seat did not involve the abrupt gap which conventional, mass-produced fly rod handles have between the back of the cork handle and the conventional and mass-produced metal, wooden or plastic reel seat. Tom Sutcliffe was later to call this handle the 'Palm Grip.'

An all-cork reel seat is almost half the weight of a wooden one and this is important in the context of what Vincent Marinaro wrote in his book, 'In the Ring of the Rise' about the influence of reel weight on the cast: ***'Every inch that the cast is lengthened or shortened changes the alleged balance and every unnecessary ounce in an unnecessarily heavy reel dampens and degrades the cast. With the lightest reels the casts are sharply and cleanly delivered flat out with enough velocity to turn over the leaders. You also get a tighter front bow if you want it. As the reels get heavier, there is a noticeable lagging in the forward loop until finally with the heaviest reel there is a decided dropping of the loop and probably a failure to turn over the leader properly.'***

We're adding to the history of the flyrod.

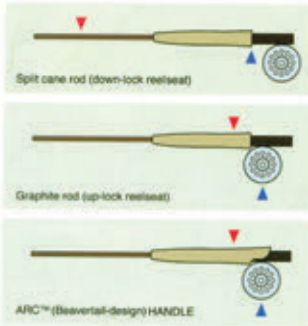


1860's - the first split cane in Maine
1900 - cork handles in common use
1912 - Hardy's "The Halford" split-cane rod developed
1930's - Chinese Tonkin cane discovered
1946 - the first fiberglass rod appeared
1968 - Jim Payne's death
1970's - end of the fiberglass era and popularity of graphite
2001 - ARC™ (Beavertail-design) handle ...U.S. Patent No. 6,629,382

How could we improve upon the modern-day flyrod?

That was the question. It had already gone through a number of important changes in its relatively short history. From bamboo to fiberglass to graphite. From long to short to long again. And from down-lock to up-lock reelseat. Every change had a reason but the bottom line was simple - to make flyfishing more enjoyable and accessible to as many people as possible.

▼ Static Balance Point ▲ Kinetic Balance Point



Split cane rod (down-lock reelseat)

Graphite rod (up-lock reelseat)

ARC™ (Beavertail-design) HANDLE

The original split-cane rods were long and weighty and needed a down-lock reelseat to counterbalance a tip-heavy rod (static balance). The up-lock reelseat was developed as far back as Hardy's "The Halford" in 1912. But it wasn't until the development of the graphite rod in the seventies that it received long-overdue recognition. You could say it was an idea born ahead of its time. Too light for first and second generation rods, it took the graphite rod to provide the perfect environment, and a union of synergy and kinetic balance was formed.

Rod handles, however, had remained largely unchanged. What if we could create a handle that would let you change grips easily as well as maintain a grip comfortably for hours? That was the challenge. The result was the ARC™ (Beavertail-design) handle. Its cork handle with its distinctive curved paddle shape lets you hold the rod way down at the reelseat for improved distance casting. It gives greater precision by eliminating reel wobble. And its ergonomic benefits let you enjoy flyfishing with a level of comfort never before experienced.

The ARC™ (Beavertail-design) handle may not make you an expert caster overnight. It will, however, give you an important tool to maximize your potential so you too can reach your casting goals ... and add your own line to the history of the flyrod.

To find out more about our special offer, just call our toll-free number 1-877-726-0440, fax us 1-514-426-9446 or e-mail us at wyoshida@sprint.ca.
Website: www.anglersroost.net
Anglers Roost 285, Boul. St-Jean, Pointe-Claire, (Qc) H9R 3J1, Canada



The Angler's Roost advertisement for the ARC™ (Beaver-tail design) rod handle

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A year after Stephen built the first Palm Grip Sage, US Patent number 6,629,382 was granted for the ARC™ (Beaver-tail design) rod handle.

In February 2005 an Anglers Roost advertisement on the back cover of *Flyfisherman* magazine coincidentally listed the advantages we had already experienced:

“What if we could create a handle that would let you change grips easily as well as maintain a grip comfortably for hours? That was the challenge. The result was the ARC™ (Beaver-tail design) rod handle. Its cork handle with its distinctive curved paddle shape lets you hold the rod way down for improved distance casting. It gives greater precision by eliminating reel wobble. And its ergonomic benefits let you enjoy fly fishing with a level of comfort never before experienced.”

In his 2005 book, *Presentation*, Gary Borger succinctly lists the benefits of an up-locking, all-cork handle:

“Your grip should be comfortable, and it should be as far back on the handle as possible. You should crowd the reel. In fact, the heel of your hand should be directly above the centre of the reel. This position removes the counterbalancing effect of the reel’s weight during the casting stroke. To me, this hand position immediately dictates reel seat design.”

“With the up-locking seat, the fixed ring can be buried under the first band of cork in the seat. In this position it’s hidden from view and from your hand. In addition, burying the band in the handle shortens the overall effective length of the seat by ½ to ¾ of an inch, allowing you to more easily position your hand over the center of the reel.”

Your hand cannot ‘crowd the reel’ with comfort if the cork ends abruptly and it slides onto a metal, wooden or plastic reel seat. To me, the Coke-bottle shape of a reverse half wells ‘Western’ handle which tapers all the way into the blank provides the best compromise between comfort and versatility.

For close range accuracy, you can slide your hand forward and cast with your forefinger on top of the handle as Tony Biggs always did. If you are casting into the wind, you slide your hand back and put your thumb on top of the thickest part of the handle for maximum power.



Above and next page: Pretoria-based rod builder Koos Eckard mastered the technique of building the labour-intensive ‘Palm Grip’. Each cork ring must be individually prepared.
The process cannot be rushed



For me, these rods and this 'Whisper Rod' period defined an absolute in the design of the small stream fly rod – it must have an all-cork handle.

This is becoming increasingly rare because the Palm Grip, in particular, requires skill and a great deal of time to construct. It is far easier, quicker and less expensive to just slide one of the multitude of readily-available wood or synthetic reel seats over the blank and then add one of the often brightly-chromed reel seat components from a manufacturer such as Lemke, Struble, REC and Bellinger.

They are all, however, heavier and more reflective than cork as well as being a lot less comfortable to hold in the transition area between cork and a metal reel seat. Initially, to try to simplify and expedite the rod handle construction, Stephen built a simple cigar rod handle with the reel secured with cable ties, but he did not persist with this approach.



Two views of Stephen Boshoff's cable tie rod handle design – the bottom photo shows the rod spray-painted khaki to reduce flash

In Japan, Katsumi Harada of Harada Takezao approached this concern by blending the front section of the cork handle with a sculpted section of wood, the smooth transition between the two facilitating a hand position which is comfortable and promotes casting accuracy.

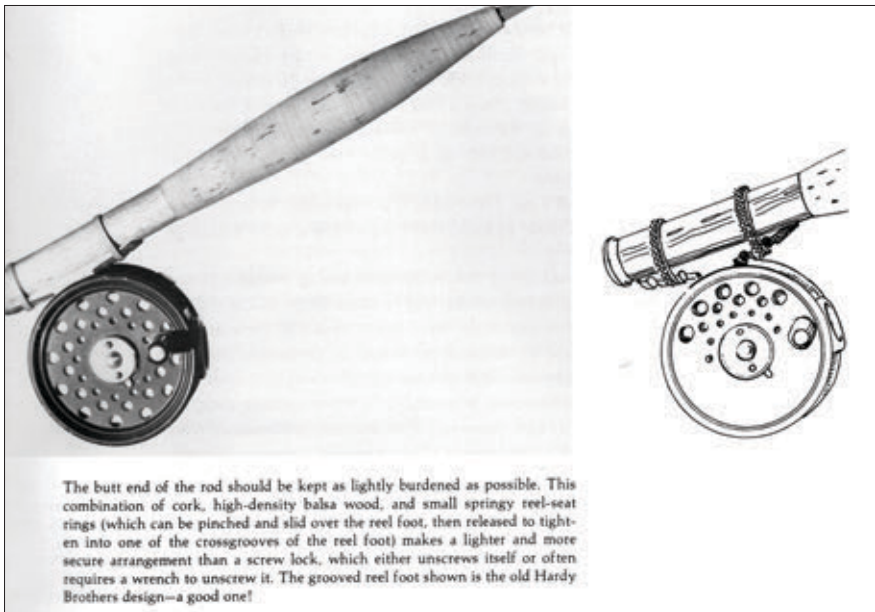
On pages 181/182 of his book 'Mostly Bamboo – Eighteen Bamboo, Fibreglass and Graphite Fly Rod Makers in Japan' published in 2020 by Yuki Bando, he writes:

Katsumi is fifty years old and one of the youngest bamboo makers in Japan. His rod has a uniquely shaped reel seat filler. He once noticed his hand was uncomfortable while casting because of the small bump between grip and reel seat filler. That gap hurts his right palm. He wanted to improve it. He stopped using a common round filler and curved it to an oval flattened shape. I like it because it looks like a miniature artwork done by Antoni Gaudy to my eyes. "It is more time-consuming work than it seems, but I am sure there are many fly fishers who feel the same way I did, uncomfortable while casting." "Yes, I often had some pressed lines in my palm after fishing."

Sliding reel seat rings

'In the Ring of the Rise', Vincent Marinaro's enormously influential 1976 book, contained useful information on fly rod building and performance. He emphasised the need for light reels and reel seat components: *"There can be no such thing as balance in a fly rod. There can never be a 'fixed fulcrum point'. Every inch that the cast is lengthened or shortened changes the alleged balance and every unnecessary ounce in an unnecessarily heavy reel dampens and degrades the cast".*

He emphasises the point again with a photograph and a caption:



"The butt end of the rod should be kept as lightly burdened as possible. This combination of cork, high-density balsa wood, and small springy reel-seat rings – which can be pinched and slid over the reel foot, then released to tighten into one of the crossgrooves of the reel foot – makes a lighter and more secure arrangement than a screw lock, which either unscrews itself or often requires a

wrench to unscrew it. The grooved reel foot shown is the old Hardy Brothers design – a good one!”

The only rod maker who, as far as I know, has seen fit to emulate the Marinaro design is Henry Haneda with my beloved Archistrial and I struggle to understand this. He uses conical and wafer-thin sliding rings made of stainless steel and they work brilliantly. The only way I would alter them is to make them matt black.



The flexible conical sliding reel seat rings on the author's Archistrial fly rod compress over the tapered reel foot of the Orvis CFO2, holding it securely in place while adding minimal weight

Rubber O-rings

The Ultralight Fly Fishing Forum website contains a wealth of information on light line fly-fishing subjects and on 17 August 2015, 'Cross Creek' of Fayetteville, North Carolina posted some interesting information on securing the reel to the rod handle – a combination of an all-cork cylindrical rod handle with the reel being secured by rubber O-rings:

"I'm an admitted grip-slider—I like to move my hand all over the grip and seat, depending on how I'm casting, and I do it without even being aware that I'm doing it. The problem is that most reel seats are uncomfortable, what with locking rings and/or skinny proportions. I gave up on factory grips years ago, their uplocking seats and flared butts not at all conducive to my habits. Ed Herbst in South Africa has come up with some designs that make it easier to grip his rods way down on the seat, but they are complex affairs requiring careful inletting and fitting."

"How do I mount the reel, you ask? It's magic—no, simply O-rings. It's important that they're the

1/8 inch thick ones to ensure the reel is held securely. The rings roll up onto the reel foot and do not try to roll off unintentionally. O-rings last a long time, but are cheaply replaced at any hardware or plumbing supply store. Carrying a few spares is easy. The other little trick that this design accomplishes is the option to move the reel practically anywhere on the grip/seat. Grips may be fatter or skinnier than this—all that's needed is larger or smaller O-rings."

Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher – picked up on this idea to build some ultralight midge rods on Mudhole six-foot 2-weight blanks.



The six foot 2-weight midge rod built by Marcel Terblanche which uses a rubber O ring to secure the rear reel foot. The front reel foot is secured within a hooded aluminium cap contained within the forward portion of the handle, a feature of the original 'Palm Grip'

The Lee Wulff Midge

Cape Town's summer is characterised by strong south-easterly winds, often downstream and I really struggled at first. My answer was to commission a custom nine foot 6-weight Orvis from Roger Baert at *The Flyfisherman* in Pietermaritzburg. In my ignorance I assumed that line weight rather than line speed was the answer.

I was fishing with Tony Biggs one windy day and I was not coping. When we stopped for lunch, I asked him if I could try his rod, a six-and-a-half-foot split cane Lee Wulff Midge made by Farlowes. It was a five weight but Tony had underlined it with a four weight line to speed up its casting stroke.

To my surprise I found that it was far easier to cast than my nine-foot Orvis because short rods cast tight loops and the rod loaded easily for close-range casts. More than 30 years later, I read Yuki Bando's book and I had a flashback to that day when casting Tony's short, split cane rod and the way in which it helped me cope with downstream wind.

It's a wonderful book and a quote from it is found at the start of this chapter. What is heartening to me is that the spirit of small stream innovation which I encountered with the rods of Henry Haneda in 1983 continues in Japan.

US aquatic scientist, Robert Bachman, has said that the average brown trout in that country will rarely get much bigger than 13 inches and, on the small streams of Dartmoor in England the trout are said to weigh 'three and four to the pound' i.e., four to five ounces.

The trout in the infertile, freestone streams near Cape Town average ten to 12 inches. In Japan's heavily-wooded mountain streams, a Yamame of that size is considered a trophy or a 'shaku' inspiring the YouTube video 'The Great Shaku Hunter' by Rolf Nylander which every lover of small stream fly fishing will find enthralling. One of the interviewees in Bando's book is Satoshi Maruyama - nickname So - who builds carbon fibre rods with a unique manufacturing process.

You can find an article on him and his rods using key words eastwind artisans.

He calls it the Solid Octagon and the tip is solid which means that it is extremely thin, a characteristic of the solid boron rods made by Don Phillips. Yuki Bando fished a Solid Octagon and was astonished. It was a #4 weight rod with a length of 8'3" in three pieces.

"As soon as I started casting, I found the smoothness to be what I had only dreamed of. Since that day, I stopped saying that bamboo is always the best. I learned the material is not everything. There are some fine bamboo rods as well as some excellent graphite rods."

Bando's interview with Satoshi Maruyama made me re-think my quest for the 'less-than-one-ounce' fly rod.

"So believes most of the major rod makers have, for years, been too enthusiastic about making fly rods lighter for years. If you use a light fly rod, it is difficult to turn over a fly with a 12-foot leader of 6X in a short distance. It is just because the rod does not have enough weight to bring the fly, tippet, and leader forward."

My perception now is that the greater weight of a fibreglass rod might make it load more easily for short-range casts than carbon fibre and that this, along with its lesser expense might explain the substantial growth in the number of rod makers who sell custom, light-line fibreglass fly rods which are ideal for small streams.

Rod length

In 1975 Doug Swisher and Carl Richards published their book *Fly Fishing Strategy* and it contains this reference which is of relevance to those fishing small streams:

"It's a mechanical fact that, for the same casting stroke, a short rod automatically throws a tighter loop than a long rod."

"The short rod will not only keep your casting plane low, resulting in less tangling and more control in the wind, but it will also help keep the angle of your casting plane in the proper perspective. 'Ideally, for most fishing situations, your casting plane should be parallel to the water. This is true for both your false casts and the final delivery. With the short rod, you can let your candy cane straighten a few feet above the surface and gently parachute to the water. Unfortunately, the long rod advocate

does one of two things, neither of which is conducive to the small-stream angler. Most will tilt the casting plane forward so they can aim their forecast more directly at the target. This causes the delivery to be drilled into the water, scaring every fish in sight, and back casting at such a high angle that every tree near the stream is snagged.

“Some slightly more sophisticated anglers cast their candy canes on a nearly level plane but, with the long rod, they are elevated so high that they splash down rather sloppily on the water. Control and accuracy are also sacrificed when a high casting plane is used.”

What I found interesting is that the late Gary Howells is revered as the pre-eminent split cane rod maker in the USA of his era -1957 -1990 – and when he was interviewed by Yuki Bando for his 2020 book, *Mostly Bamboo*, Howells said he loved small stream fly fishing and considered seven foot and three inches as the ideal split cane rod length for this purpose.

Line weight

Taking all factors into account, my sense is that a 3-weight line is the best compromise for the small streams fished by the ‘Shaku hunters’ in Japan, by Chris Barclay in the Appalachian Mountains of the USA, those who fish the Yorkshire Dales streams in England, South Africa’s mountain streams or tiny streams anywhere.

I say that in part because a seven foot, three-weight rod seems to be the sweet spot for both fibreglass and bamboo and silk lines, my favourite, are freely available in this line weight. A 2-weight line is thicker and more than double the weight of a 000. The thinner the line, the less water disturbance it will cause on the back cast. On small stream casts the length of fly line impacting on the surface is small but the consensus is that a three-weight line will have the advantage if the wind comes up.

(When faced with a downstream wind, I eventually learned to fish downstream using the parachute cast which I picked up in the 1973 Charles Ritz book, *A Fly Fisher’s Life*.) The Scientific Anglers Infinity line is half a line weight heavier than normal which will enable a carbon fibre rod to load more smoothly at short range and the lightest line in this model is a three weight.

Guide Placement

Since reels were first invented, guides have traditionally been attached to the rod in a straight line, level with and on the same plane as the reel. This tradition was, for me, challenged when I came across an intriguing alternative in an article, ‘On The Right Lines’ by Paul Canning in the August 1992 edition of *Trout & Salmon*: This is what he wrote: ***“At the casting demonstration I saw the unusual way in which Lefty Kreh had ringed his rods. I went home and tried it and was immediately convinced of the distance benefits.***

Ever since then I have used the set-up on rods from which I seek distance. Basically, one uses three single-leg oversize lined rings offset towards the free hand. These would be 25mm inside diameter at 30 degrees offset, 15mm at 20 degrees and 10mm at 10 degrees offset.”

“When you cast with this set-up, you can see the line coming down and settling as it flies up the rod. Any flapping around, which will cost distance, is kept clear of the rod.”

Admittedly, in our conditions, we are not seeking distance but, as I have said, the fish almost never take line from the reel and, if you are a right-handed caster, you are constantly feeding line from the left hand and controlling your distance from it with very short drifts before you pick up and cast to another pocket. To me it would seem logical that if you are always feeding line through the rod at an acute angle from your left hand, then Kreh’s offset guide idea would pay dividends – not necessarily for distance but for smoothing out the line flow.

Most of our trout are small and fought from the line hand rather than the reel so this approach would not seem to have any intrinsic empirical disadvantages for small streams. Black, single-foot guides are appropriate on small stream fly rods.

Avoiding rod flash

At the time of writing in mid-2022, Sage had produced a Euro Nymphing rod, the Sense, which is advertised as having a 'Stealth Grey blank colour with black primary thread wraps' and a 'Matte black reel seat'. Ideally, the rod would not be a single colour but mottled. The market would, however, not respond favourably to a splotchy rod finish.



A photograph taken by Peter Brigg on a stream in the foothills of the South Africa's Drakensberg Mountain range which emphasises the need for matte-finish rods, particularly in bright sunlight

As Peter Hayes points out in his 2013 book 'Flyfishing outside the box – Emerging Heresies':

"... the flash generated by the rod with which the angler is casting starts at the butt and travels up the rod to the tip with incredible speed as the rod's power is released. It shoots towards the fish like a missile."

Tom Sutcliffe became convinced that the light reflected from rods bounced off the water in front of trout and back into their eyes when fish that were facing upstream and feeding hard, spooked as he lifted his camera to take a photograph. This seems to be borne out by the work of Brian Clarke and John Goddard who used underwater cameras to photograph rod flash for their 1980 book, 'The Trout and Fly':

"In all our experiments concerning the reflective power of rods, the matte-varnished rod was much less easily seen. It is quite clear that the reflection of sunlight off gloss varnish must alert many trout even if the angler is not aware of it at the time."

If you doubt this, then watch the DVD 'Trout Vision and Refraction', volume 3 in the series 'The Underwater World of Trout' by Wendel (Ozzie) Ozefovich using the key word 'underwateroz'.

Hayes recommends spraying your rod with Windsor & Newton aerosol matte varnish. Manufacturers such as CTS will supply low-flash blanks if requested. Bright reel seats and chrome guides have no place on small stream fly rods.

That light-reflecting rods reduce one's chances of fishing success has been recognised for centuries and a chronology of quotes from anglers such as G E M Skues, Gary LaFontaine and John Goddard can be found in my article 'Quotes on avoiding rod flash – ideal blank colour and finish' in the 'Tackle' folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society. (It goes without saying that wearing mirrored sunglasses is disadvantageous).

Spliced joints and the Centre Axis Reel

When Sage introduced the SPL 'Ought' at the Denver Fly Tackle Dealers Show in November 1997 they also announced a collaboration with the Swedish company, Danielsson, to produce a second version of this rod in which the reel was not slung beneath the rod but was an integral part of it.

This 'Centre-axis' collaboration did not last although the concept endures in the model produced by reel manufacturer Waterworks who claim significant advantages:

"By closely aligning the center mass of our Litespeed reel with the center axis of our rods, we've de-levered the mass of the heavier object. The result will amaze you. You'll feel the pulse of your cast like never before."

To smooth the abrupt step between cork handle and most conventional fly rods which utilise a metal, wooden or synthetic reel seat which slides over the rod blank, Stephen Boshoff — @boshoffbamboo — adapted the basic design principles of the 1980s 'Centre-Axis' collaboration between Kurt Danielsson and Sage which used the Loop reel.

A subsequent email to him from what is now Danielsson Innovation AB read:

"Kurt Danielsson designed the 'centre-axis' rod/reel in the early or mid-eighties. The idea of this project was to make a kit with a rod and reel in a small box to open and use. The kit was made in a very limited series (I believe not more than five) and the box was made of a modified violin case."



Stephen Boshoff fishing a prototype centre axis reel and rod combination

The Sage reel screwed onto the back of the rod and his first prototype echoed this approach. His

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

later versions are much more elegant – and functional - to hold and fish with because they allow the rod hand to comfortably surround the reel.

He then developed a more comfortable and aesthetically more appealing method of blending rod and reel on a Scott 2-weight blank and combined it with a brightly chromed Vision reel. To counter this, he spray-painted the blank and the reel heron grey as recommended by G E M Skues.



Two views of the centre-axis format adopted by Stephen Boshoff more than a decade ago. It is comfortable, aesthetically attractive and the way the front of the handle blends into the blank allows one to cast with your forefinger on top of the blank for short-range accuracy



CHAPTER 4

It was a natural progression to start building split cane centre axis fly rods.



A split cane centre axis fly rod combined with a Hardy reel. Clotalario sparttiodes, an indigenous briar, is used to link the cork handle to the reel and is echoed on the centre of the reel

In 2010 Stephen gave me a centre axis, scarf joint rod and set out the rationale in a *Piscator* article headlined 'Favoured tools for small streams: an interim hypothesis' which can be found in the Tackle folder on the CPS website.



In 2010, Stephen Boshoff (right) presented the author with a centre axis, spliced-joint 3-weight split cane rod coupled with Sage Click reel and one of the nets he makes

The spliced joint is an old and well-proven concept having originally been used over a century ago on long salmon rods where the stresses were much greater.



The advantage of the splice joint (above and below) compared to the conventional metal ferrule is that it is lighter. It is rarely seen nowadays as bamboo ferrules, originally developed by Bjarne Fries are the contemporary convention

In 2020 Stephen's work was featured in issue 21 of the Italian Bamboo Rod Makers Association's journal and a year later he was invited to the Association's annual conclave but Covid-19 travel restrictions prevented him from attending.

The future

I tried a Scott fibreglass rod about 20 years ago and simply found it too slow for my liking. In the interim, fibreglass technology has changed significantly. Perhaps incorrectly, I attribute this to New Zealand's first win in the America's Cup in 1995.

With composites playing such a huge role in yachting, it was inevitable that their research and development would accelerate exponentially from then on and the fourth victory for Team New Zealand in 2021 emphasised the point. Composite Tube Systems was set up in 1999 by Stephen Pratt, a graduate in technology from New Zealand's Massey University and CTS is now recognised as a world leader in fly rod technology. What distinguished CTS was its willingness to produce one-off blanks to customer specifications.

In 2010, intrigued by the growing use of ten and eleven foot rods in competitive angling, I commissioned an eleven foot 2-weight which I only got to use once because a neurological illness which affected my balance intervened.

In the past decade an improvement in fibreglass technology coupled with a cost benefit compared to carbon fibre has seen an exponential growth in the number of custom rod builders whose products display exceptional craftsmanship. Playing a huge role in this surge in popularity is *The Fibreglass Manifesto*, the blog run by a policeman from South Carolina, Cameron Mortenson.

Now we have short, light-line fibreglass fly rods in the seven to seven and a half foot, 2- 3-weight range, that excel in the small stream environment because they are rugged, load easily for short-range

casts and can easily be produced in muted colours and matte finishes.



**Stephen Pratt (left) of CTS – supplying rod builders with the blanks that meet their specific needs.
A CTS employee (right) – testing a rod blank at the company's factory in New Zealand**

The impact that this new generation of freely available and relatively inexpensive fibreglass blanks has had was brought home to me when I read that Edward Barder who, in my opinion, has inherited the mantle of the late Tom Moran, is now applying his exquisite craftsmanship to the CTS blanks.

Now the Lilliput Water fly angler can commission a custom rod which, in the broader context of cost, performance and durability, provides the best compromise for someone seeking a rugged, matt-finish, light-line fly rod which will excel in delicate, short-range casting.

What was intriguing to me in this resurgence in fibreglass popularity was the increasing use of ventilated rod handles. They were introduced by the South Bend rod company in the 1940s, subsequently popularised by Paul Young and are now often used by custom rod builders such as Chris Barclay, Graywolf and others. Such handles with a space between cork rings are fractionally lighter and enable one to feel the blank flexing.

The Single-Piece fly rod

If you are looking for a rod which saves fractions of a gram and if you normally walk from your vehicle to a small headwater stream, then a single-piece rod becomes the preferred option, not least because ferrules tend to dampen casting feel.

In his 2006 book *The Loch Fisher's Bible*, Stan Headley bemoaned the way in which the multi-ferruled travel rod had come to dominate the fly rod market to the detriment of casting accuracy and enjoyment.

Ed Shenk, one of the Letort regulars during the era of Vincent Marinaro, Charles Fox and Ernest Schiwebert who loved fishing headwater streams with tiny flies - 'the Itsy-Bitsies' - wrote a chapter on

the benefits and joys of short, one-piece rods in his 1989 book, *Fly Rod Trouting*.

A year earlier, Ed Koch expressed similar sentiments in his book, *Fishing the Midge*.

The Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town has benefitted each year from a charity auction organised by Tom Sutcliffe through his monthly newsletter and Stephen Boshoff has contributed split cane rods to this auction in the past.

In 2021, funds were sought for a new emergency room at the hospital and I thought it an appropriate opportunity to explore the possibility of a single-piece seven foot six inch 3-weight – this time in fibreglass.

CTS provided the blank - designated 376-1 and Derek Smith, the country's leading synthetic rod builder, agreed to build the rod at no cost and the auction was conducted by *The Mission* magazine.



Derek Smith in front of the Emergency centre at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town. The auction of this rod raised R26 500 for the hospital bringing the total, raised for it by fly anglers to more than half a million rand

The rod was fitted with black Pacbay light wire snake guides offset towards the line hand of a right-handed caster in the configuration favoured by Lefty Kreh. We needed photographs to promote the auction and Tudor Caradoc-Davies, editor of *The Mission* magazine fished it for a day to get the necessary photographs.



Tudor Caradoc-Davies fishing the one-piece CTS fibreglass three-weight on a trout stream near Cape Town

He said it lived up to expectations. Tudor brought the rod to the retirement home where I live to show it to me and, seated on a bench in the garden, I had a fly rod in my hand again - a poignant moment last experienced a decade earlier.



The author holding the single-piece 3-weight CTS fly rod and in the garden of the retirement home where he lives in Cape Town

It was light and crisp and sweet, loading easily with a yard of line outside the top guide and it delivered the fly with authority. I suddenly realised what the fibreglass renaissance was all about.

Fibreglass is not dead to paraphrase a popular website, it is flourishing and one of the reasons is the extraordinary range of colours available – CTS offers its blanks in all the colours of the rainbow – well, more than seven dozen to be correct.

Gary LaFontaine recommended matte battleship grey for a camo rod and Megan Dinwiddie, who handles customer liaison at the company, says ‘Satin Space Gray’ is the CTS designation for the colour that most closely approximates that shade and finish.

So, if you want to replicate this rod, the blank is designated CTS Quartz 376-1 in ‘Satin Space Gray’.

Here is Tudor’s assessment:

The Taylor Swift Test

When Ed told me about this one-piece CTS glass rod he had made by Derek Smith, it sounded like my kind of rod. On our skinny streams down in the Western Cape of South Africa, I usually fish a 7’6” 4-weight Epic glass rod (coincidentally also built by Derek Smith) from The Swift Fly Fishing Company, another New Zealand rod brand. For these streams most people fish a 2 or 3-weight and I used to too until I won the Epic on auction and gave it a bash. For dry fly fishing (Cape Doctor or no Cape Doctor), it handles all conditions and kicks ass, plus even small fish put a satisfying bend in the rod while it can handle much bigger fish too. I call it my Taylor Swift outfit as it’s paired with a Taylor reel.

I tested the CTS for Ed and absolutely loved the rod, but probably for slightly different reasons to the ones that motivated Ed’s decades-long quest. Here’s what I found:

It’s Not Super Light

I get the appeal of light rods, but I’ve never really understood the obsession with rods so light they feel like little more than a piece of grass in hand. It always felt like it was one of those pointless arms races humans engage in, like that period in the early 90s when tiny phones were all the rage, or the

ongoing fixation with uber-expensive watches that can handle being 300m underwater (when most people never dive deeper than the deep end of a swimming pool). This rod has a comforting weight to it that gave me confidence from the get-go.

It Can Handle The Doctor – Our Summer South-Easterly Gale

The day I tested this rod, the morning started off relatively still but by 11-12am the wind was gusting downstream and getting our dries down where wanted them to be became a lot harder. I adjusted my cast to make a faster, punchier forward cast and the CTS one-piece did the rest, laying down RABs and hoppers exactly where I wanted them in the bubble line.

It's a Shock-Absorber

I have a tendency, especially in the early season when I'm a little too eager and rusty, to strike too hard. On carbon fibre rods I've found that can result in small fish flying through the air or the 6x tippet breaking. Glass small stream rods like the CTS and Taylor Swift are forgiving, protect the tippet by acting as a shock absorber between the lightning fast strike of our small stream rainbows and the over-enthusiastic/clumsy movements of the angler.

It's Tough

Another reason I like glass rods, especially where the wading is challenging, is because they are incredibly hardy. Having had a few knee reconstructions over the years, I tend to wipe out a lot and as such Taylor Swift has come in for the kind of abuse the mere thought of which would have snapped a 000-weight carbon-fibre rod. The CTS is equally tough and will do duty for you for years to come.

It's Practical

Even though I live 45 minutes away from the streams, I love the idea of a one-piece, a rod designed so specifically for regular fishing on hyper-local waters that you need never break it down. When not fishing, hang it from the wall so that it speaks to you every day, asking you to take it out for another session.

Thanks Tudor.

In his 1989 book *Fly Fishing Small Streams*, John Gierach says: ***"... a good medium-action bamboo could just be the ultimate small-stream fly rod."***

Tom Sutcliffe agrees, citing the following benefits over synthetic rod materials:

- they load more easily than graphite, so you can fish closer in,
- they roll-cast better,
- you can actually feel the rod loading and unloading, which makes timing your cast easier and its far easier for beginners to learn casting with a bamboo rod,
- they protect light tippets really well and then finally and importantly,
- bamboo rods dampen out your casting mistakes and are far better instruments for beginners to learn to cast on.

If you have fished one of Stephen Boshoff's splice joint, centre-axis fly rods you would very probably agree, but split cane fly rod can be expensive and there is often a long waiting period.

The fact that you can get a rugged, matte-finish seven foot three-weight fibreglass fly rod built to your specifications with a much shorter delivery period will tip the scales for most small stream fly anglers.

Thanks to Leigh Perkins and Howard Steere of Orvis and, subsequently Jerry Siem at Sage, small stream fly anglers now have a plethora of light-line fly rods that load easily at short distances and

deliver pinpoint accuracy.

The original split cane Whisper Rod was the Leonard Baby Catskill. Chris Bogart of Shenandoah Rods has provided the taper for his seven foot 2-weight, the Yellow Rose

In fibreglass there are the beautiful ventilated grip rods that Chris Barclay constantly field tests in the small streams of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina accompanied by his dog Stella, and JP Ross spent years developing his Beaver Meadow series of rods which were specifically designed for the small streams of the Adirondack Mountains in north-eastern New York

Barclay's Synthesis rod range features an all cork, down-locking ventilated handle which has an almost seamless transition to the reel seat.

In an email to me he wrote:

"Most people that try a ventilated grip on a lighter rod (usually 4wt and under but I've made a few strong 5wts with a ventilated grip) end up buying one. Sometimes people send their rods back in the off-season so I can add a second butt section with a ventilated grip."

"I feel that on full flexing rods (not progressive stiff butt rods) a ventilated grip will give the caster a better sense of timing and feel for what the rod is doing. Sometimes people mention that they feel it gives them a better grip on the rod when their hand is wet. Or that they find that their hand doesn't want to hold the rod with a tight grip and that relaxes their casting enough to make a difference. It's very interesting to me that people like them for so many different reasons. I really enjoy making them and usually have at least one personal rod with a ventilated grip."

The Swith - Rethinking the Palm Grip

The Palm grip was never going to gain market traction because it is expensive, requires exceptional skill and is very time consuming to create. In 2022, two decades after the first Palm Grip Sage Ought Weight was built, Stephen found a new way and named it the Swith. It is a seven foot, three-piece, two weight. This had emotional resonance with me because the Swith stream holds happy memories for me which I recorded in an article 'Small Stream Paradise' which can be found in the 'Eastern Cape' folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society.

The Swith: "A search for minimalism, and a celebration of the streams, landscapes and people occupying my mind." That's how Stephen describes his latest rod, an alternative design to the rod handle he built on the Sage 0 Weight in 2002



"A small innovation is the larger than normal diameter reel seat (+/- 21mm). It enables a smooth transition between the palm of the hand and reel and also provides a wider and more stable flat for the reel foot. In essence, it is a simpler development of the original Palm Grip."

The Small Stream Fly Rod – Stephen Boshoff

I asked Stephen to articulate his rod building approach:

I have been tinkering with fishing rods – trying to make them perform and look better – for as long as I remember. In my youth, this involved all kinds of rods, mostly in glass and graphite. Later, I focused more and more on fly rods, and particularly light line rods suitable for Cape Kloof streams.



Stephen Boshoff who has collaborated with the author for the past three decades on developing and building the ultimate small stream fly rod – Photo by Jan Ras

through taper, but also hollowing and the nature and number of ferrules. The focus on bamboo also resulted in a turn from chasing one or two weight rods to settling around three and four weights, more suited to windy stream conditions (with lightness achieved in leader construction). Rod lengths of between 7' and 7'6" appears to enable rods of a gentle yet authoritative action.

While I still offer the centre-axis, the palm grip has evolved. This came about through a combination of seeking a simpler (albeit still time-consuming) design, and cheaper reel fittings which do not scratch the feet of prized reels. The new rods in the 'Swish' range offer simple cigar 'superfine' grips with a wider than normal reel seat section (in cork). The wider reel seat is the function of using simple brass

I met a kindred spirit in Ed on the Holsloot stream, and was exposed to his collection of rods, not only those by big name manufacturers but also some from makers seldomly seen locally, including Don Philips and Henry Haneda. For more than 20 years, he has been the champion, partner, and client assisting work in pursuit of a rod functionally suited to – and worthy of – hunting small stream trout in Cape Kloofs and the North-eastern highlands.

Early work focused on development of the 'palm-grip', looking for a comfortable hand position close to the reel, countering the weight of the reel and assisting accurate casting. It was only later that we discovered the Italians following the same 'wrap-around' rod grip position, assisting casting in overgrown streams.

We also explored using lighter guides, changing rod action through varnishing sections of graphite, painting blanks to counter rod-flash, and so on. Later, my 'centre-axis' followed, overcoming the uncomfortable metal transition between grip and reel of the first Sage centre-axis rod and reel.

In some ways, I found working in 'plastic' materials limiting. Bamboo offers more possibilities to manipulate rod action, not only

plumbing tube for reel seat rings. These rings have the added advantage of making for a wider reel seat flat (giving more stability) and not scratching reel feet (as brass is soft). Covering the rings with cork (following the style of Bjarne Fries) avoids rod flash and adds to a minimalist aesthetic. Rods are three piece (assisting travel) using sleeve bamboo ferrules which are lighter than nickel silver and more durable than integrated bamboo ferrules. The lightly toned colour of the rods reflects the colour of the Kloofs and stream beds that we frequent.

After more than 20 years working in bamboo, I offer the following 'credo' of work (equally applicable to other fly-fishing pursuits, including fly tying).

1. The work draws from and builds on that of others who came before, as well as those working today. Be proud of and respect the tradition and acknowledge the people and work that inspire you.
2. Explore the methods of others, to know and release ways of expanding the craft. Take pleasure in the achievements of all makers, whether newcomers or established rod makers.
3. Understand that advancements in the craft are often in the form of small, private, and not easily discernible approaches and ways of work.
4. Make rods the way you like them, as opposed to what the market or "experts" suggest.
5. Recognise the craft as of equal status to all other work and approach all facets of work with the same commitment and care, whether functional or aesthetic, hidden or exposed.
6. Find comfort in and be honest about your own ways of work, whether by hand or machine tools. Each has its place and is a matter of choice.
7. Make every rod as if for yourself and destined for a last cast. Know that the best bamboo rod has not yet been made and may not come at the highest price nor from an established centre of the craft.
8. Explore local and everyday materials, and guard against waste or environmental harm.
9. Assist new entrants to the craft, enabling them to find their own ways.
10. Make time to use your own work on the water.

The Bjarne Fries legacy

If you were to single out a person who, more than any other, has beneficially improved the design and aesthetics of split cane fly rods, it would have to be, in my opinion, the Dane, Bjarne Fries.

The bamboo ferrule, which he pioneered, while initially proving somewhat fragile, is increasingly taking precedence over nickel silver ferrules.

What appealed to me most was the way in which he left the split cane exposed at the butt of the rod and when I teamed up with Stephen Boshoff to come up with the ultimate small stream fly rod, I asked him to leave the carbon fibre blank exposed at the butt of the grip.

He took this further, with the butt finishing at a downward slant which was not only for aesthetic reasons, but because it allows any fly line which ends up behind the reel, to slide away from the rod. This instantly became an intrinsic element of the Palm Grip 'brand'.

His current rod, the Swith (named after an idyllic little stream midway between Rhodes and Maclear near the summit of the Naude's Nek Pass in the Northeastern Cape Highlands) uses the cork-covered sliding reel seat rings which were also a practical and attractive feature of the Fries rods. It is equipped with sleeve bamboo ferrules which are a further development of the original Bjarne Fries concept.



The bamboo ferrules and exposed bamboo at the rod butt – two Bjarne Fries inspired features on Stephen Boshoff's Swith small stream rod, a seven foot, 3-piece, two-weight



The Bjarne Fries inspired, cork-covered sliding ring on the handle of Stephen Boshoff's Swith

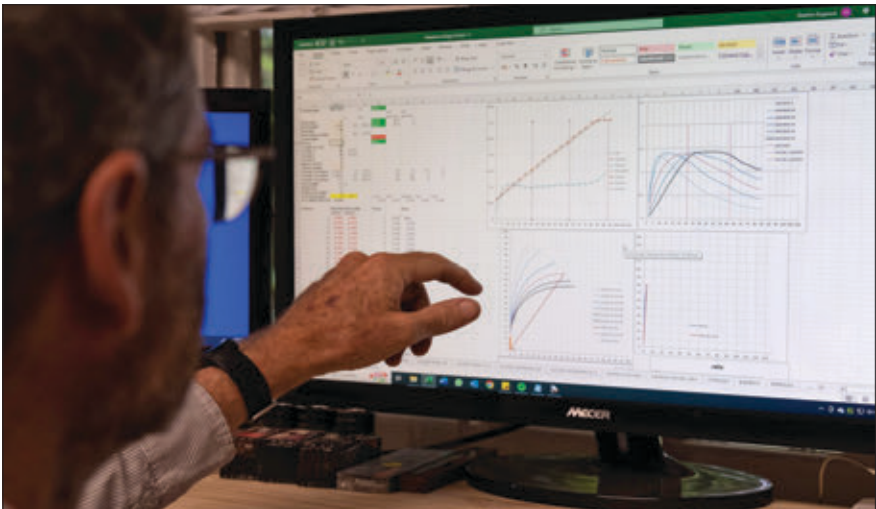
Re-thinking the Baby Catskill

I started this chapter with reference to the Leonard Baby Catskill which was used by Peter Turnbull-Kemp for fishing his beloved moorland becks. Well, how does a single piece six-foot version that can comfortably cast the Sage 'Ought Weight' fly lines sound to you?

CHAPTER 4



Stephen Dugmore planing some cane (above) and looking at a spread sheet of rod tapers (below)
Photos by Matt Kennedy – The Mission magazine



In 2006, while chatting to a fellow member of the Cape Piscatorial Society, Stephen Dugmore, he told me that he had started to build split cane rods. He is an architect by profession so I knew he would have a good understanding of the tensile strength of materials and I asked him to write an article for the CPS journal, *Piscator*, of which I was editor.

You can find that article 'The allure of the of the split cane rod' in the Tackle folder of the CPS archives. His understanding of the craft and his skill at building these rods has progressed considerably since those days.



The author fishing his Stephen Dugmore Wisp on a trout stream near Cape Town

He feels that seven foot and three-weight is the sweet spot for split cane small stream fly rods and he built me one which he called 'The Wisp' in 2010. It was superb, but I only got to fish it once before a neurological illness that affected my balance intervened.

His website, 'Freestone Rods' provides a great deal of useful information on split cane rods as well as on the models he offers and it is definitely worth a visit.

Let me close with two quotes that justifiably illustrate the reverence in which split cane rods are held:

"Bamboo, being a natural product, like flesh and blood, can establish a greater affinity with its owner than any other material. There can be a powerful bond between them, an identification, that lets the caster feel that the rod is an extension of his own personality."

'In the Ring of the Rise' - Vincent Marinaro

"There will always be bamboo rod makers, because bamboo possesses characteristics beyond any other rod material. Bamboo has heart, muscle and sinew. A rod of bamboo is a living thing and

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you will never go to the river alone because the maker who fashioned it is always with you. All the engineering skill in the world cannot put heart into glass, metals or high technology synthetics."

"Pick up a sleeping bamboo rod and feel it come to life in your hand. Break the tip of a graphite rod and there's no harm done or felt except perhaps to one's wallet. There may even be a no-fault lifetime guarantee to mitigate such a loss. But snap the tip of a bamboo rod and one's heart breaks with it."

'Jordan the Rodmaker, A biography of Wesley D. Jordan at Cross - South Bend - Orvis'

William H. Jordan





CHAPTER 5

The Delicate Fly Fisher's Reel

“Using the lightest reel possible makes some sense, since you’re constantly moving the reel while casting. An ounce of weight carried through the casting motion all day makes pounds of difference.”

Scott Roederer, *The Compleat Angler’s Catalogue*, 1985.

“Reels for trout and other fish of that size should be lightweight yet strong, have a capacity for the line plus 50 to 100 yards of backing, employ a rim-control spool and have a simple, adjustable, tooth-and-pawl drag system. I also demand a reel foot that is securely attached and a low-flash finish.

Gary Borger, *Presentation*, Tomorrow River Press, 1995.

The design parameters of the ideal small stream fly reel are defined by small stream trout and the circumstances in which you fish for them. In the trout streams near Cape Town a ten-inch trout is about average and a 16-inch trout a once-in-a-season triumph – if you are lucky.

This is typical of small stream trout everywhere. In the streams of the Smoky Mountain National Park, rainbow and brook trout average between five to eight inches, browns can grow bigger than that.

In his seminal study, ‘Foraging behaviour of free-ranging brown trout in a stream’, fisheries biologist Robert Bachman states that the average size of a brown trout in the USA is 13 inches. In the rocky, freestone streams of Britain, they speak of trout being ‘four to the pound’.

In his wonderful film ‘The Great Shaku Hunter’, Rolf Nylander documents the fly anglers who spend a lifetime on small mountain streams in Japan pursuing Iwana and Yamame measuring bigger than 11 inches – an elusive goal.

Occasionally, in early spring when the streams near Cape Town were still high after our winter rainfall season, a hooked trout would get downstream of me and, using the current, take line off the reel. A click and pawl drag system was more than adequate to cope with this situation.

I focused on pocket water and, in those confines, trout did not have the room to make long runs. My only experience of a small stream trout taking line from the reel on local streams in summer when the water levels are low occurred under unusual circumstances.

I was fishing from the tail of a long pool. On the right bank there was a high rock face and the pool was densely bushed on the left. There had to be a fish lying where the current tongue at the head of the pool flattened out, but it was beyond the reach of my best double haul even if I had had the wind

behind me. Furthermore, the head of pool was as tightly-bushed as it was lower down.

I spent about twenty minutes hacking my way through dense bankside undergrowth with my trusty Gerber folding blade saw to get to the top of the run. I was fortunate that, where I exited the brush, the water was just starting to run into the pool.

Even when I got to the water I could only crouch and I flicked an Elk Hair Caddis downstream. It was probably the first fly that that particular trout had ever seen. It weighed about a kilogram and, because it had the length of the pool to run, it surged downstream while my little Orvis CFO2 reel let out an unfamiliar yelp. I'll swear that trout looked bewildered when I released it.

In short, the small stream fly angler does not need a large-arbor reel with a counterbalanced spool and a complex cork or carbon fibre drag system. The average double taper floating fly line is about 80 – 90 feet long, but you will be using less than half that length in your average small stream cast.

It therefore made sense to me to cut a double taper line in half and fill up the rest of the spool with Dacron backing. The way I fished the trout streams near Cape Town was with probing casts and short drifts i.e., multiple casts in an hour. The heat, particularly around midday, can become enervating leading to a lapse in concentration.

One of fly fishing's most innovative thinkers, Vincent Marinaro, eloquently articulated the benefits of lightweight reels in his second and last book, *In the Ring of the Rise*:

'In 1889 R.C. Leonard, a tournament caster, stepped to the platform without a reel on his rod and simply coiled the line at his feet. With that abbreviated rig he proceeded to smash all distance records, including his own by a wide margin. It was a shocking thing to competitors and spectators alike. It was a momentous discovery from which not only tournament casters but fishermen as well should have profited.

That early-day pioneer discovered an extremely important principle in rod dynamics. It amounts to this: That the caster has to move the useless weight below his hand as well as the useful weight above the hand and that the removal of dead weight below the hand helped to overcome inertia more quickly, increasing tip speed, thus imparting greater velocity to the fly line. I should have been a valuable lesson to everyone, but it wasn't. It remained only among tournament casters for many years.

With the lightest reels the casts are sharply and cleanly delivered flat out and with enough velocity to turn over the leaders. As the reels get heavier there is a noticeable lagging in the forward loop until, finally, with the heaviest reel there is a decided dropping of the loop and probably a failure to turn the leader over properly.'

"You can suit yourself about these matters but for me there is only one sound system and that is: Use the lightest possible reel of good quality and adequate capacity no matter how long or heavy the rod may be."

Today's delicate small stream models had their genesis in the reel patented by Charles Orvis in 1873.

It was mounted upright rather than sideways on the rod, was narrow and perforated, all design elements which are echoed in the fly reels we use today.

In the early 1960's aluminium alloys were developed which allowed the manufacture of substantially lighter reels, the smallest of which was the Hardy Fly Weight which came in at just under three ounces.

Hardy then improved on the design of this series in 1971 by incorporating, at the behest of Orvis, an idea of famed US custom reel maker, Stanley Bogdan.

Bogdan simply eliminated the outer rim of the reel frame, producing a lighter, cageless design. This

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one-sided 'half- frame' enabled spool changes to be quickly made and its two-and-a-half-inch diameter held half a double taper three weight line and a few yards of Dacron backing.

To further remove weight, the reel foot was ported.



A beloved combination for 40 years. The author's Orvis CFO2 reel combined with Henry Haneda's Archistrial fly rod

The CFO2 weighs two and a half ounces and my only criticism is that it is not a uniform matte black, but has a reflective silver reel foot and similarly reflective components on both the front and back of the reel.

With the advent of computer aided design programmes and computer controlled multi-axis lathes and drills, we have seen a plethora of new reel companies enter the market with models carved from solid ingots of high-grade aluminium alloys.

In 1996 Mark Farris - an industrial designer who holds sixteen patents and who is best known for his role in designing the Waterworks reels - improved on the CFO2's click and pawl overrun mechanism when he introduced a small polymer wishbone that impinges on indentations machined into the inner rim of the spool.

Sage used this design when it introduced its Click series of reels in 2011, the lightest of which weighs two ounces, thus shaving half an ounce from the CFO2.



A Sage Click on a Stephen Boshoff centre-axis split cane fly rod

It is a three-inch reel, though, and incorporates a counterweight opposite the reel handle and an adjustable drag which, in my opinion are unnecessary features when you are fishing for 'four-to-the-pound' trout.

In 2013 British manufacturer, Wychwood, used the polymer wishbone to produce another three-inch model, the RS 2/3. It weighs 1.7 ounces, making it 20 grams lighter than the CFO2 which had been introduced 42 years earlier. One of its advantages was that the only chrome fitting was the screw that connected the handle to the reel and I coloured it with a black permanent marker. Its handle though, is overlarge and, in my opinion, lacks aesthetic appeal.

The much smaller handle on the Orvis CFO2 sufficed for thousands of fly anglers over decades and a handle of this configuration would be just as utilitarian on the Wychwood and look far more elegant. Fortunately, the Japanese company Retro Rod & Reel makes an exquisite replacement in marble ebonite.



The Wychwood RS 2/3 on a Palm Grip Sage Circa 3-weight built by Koos Eckard

Around 2005 I bought a Danielsson Midge which I think was then sold under the Loop name. I did not keep it for long as there was a lot of friction from the three rollers and, to me, it was not as attractive as the CFO2.

The cited advantages of the ‘large arbor’ Danielsson – ‘low start up inertia’ and less coiling of the fly line were irrelevant to me because the trout I caught were controlled not from the reel but from the line hand. I accordingly did not need a high-efficiency braking system and the silk lines that I used had no memory anyhow.

These incremental gains in lightness by small fly reels over decades make it obvious that only a change to composites such as carbon fibre will see my dream of a matte-finish, two-and-a-half-inch small stream reel weighing just one ounce realised.

Certainly, the expertise exists within the motor racing industry to create such a reel.

(Hardy introduced its two-ounce Ultraclick UCL reel in 2020 but it is a caged reel designed for competitive angling with ultra-thin lines and not specifically for small stream fishing.)



Two small stream reels chosen by customers who have bought split cane centre-axis rods from Stephen Boshoff – the Ross Colorado (top) and the Wychwood RS2/3

Stephen Boshoff chooses the elegant click and pawl Ross Colorado LT 3-4 for his beautiful centre axis split cane rods. Although it weighs an ounce more than the Sage Click and Wychwood RS2/3, he feels the Ross is a stronger and thus more durable reel and that the trade-off of an extra ounce in weight is a worthwhile compromise.

These three reels and the Hardy Ultraclick UCL superbly complement today’s small stream fly rods.





CHAPTER 6

Lines and leaders

Small Stream Fly Lines...

A Terenzio Zandri silk line and furled leaders form the backdrop to a Palm Grip Sage 000 and my beloved Orvis CFO2, still going strong after 30 years. Appropriately, a real fly hitches a ride.



"Call me old-fashioned, but I find brightly-coloured fly lines distracting. Splitting a jewel-like mountain pool in half with a fluorescent orange fly line seems profane."

Craig Martin *Mountain Water – The Way of the High-country Angler* (Pruett Publishing, 1999).

In 1984 when Orvis brought out the Ultrafine 2-weight, I approached the Phoenix silk line company in France and asked if they could supply one of their lines in 'Mere Green' for my new rod. They were happy to oblige, saying that they had already made such a line for an Italian customer.

It was everything I had hoped it would be.

Silk lines have a smaller diameter than equivalent synthetic lines which means they facilitate casting into the wind and lift off the water on the back cast with less water disturbance. They have no memory and are less shiny and light reflecting than plastic lines.

My subjective sense was that, because they have no stretch, I got more hookups when using silk lines.

I was forced to use synthetic lines during the Sage 'Ought' era but then started using Terenzio Zandri silk lines and furred leaders from around 2006. Silk lines require more maintenance than synthetic lines but, to me, that was part of the ritual and the trade-off was a more pleasant and successful fishing experience.

Small stream trout probably average about ten inches and eight ounces and, once hooked tend to stay within the tight confines of their home range. That means that you are never going to be taken into your backing and your reel does not need a counterweight or a complex braking system.

The only time, in my experience, that a local trout got the reel to turn was in the beginning of spring when the water was still high and a hooked trout managed to get downstream of me and use the current to its advantage. I accordingly cut my double taper lines in half and filled the reel with Dacron backing. The backing ended with a Perfection Loop. I attached a short piece of Dacron with a Perfection loop to the back of the fly line.

I then connected the two, loop-to-loop.

Line winders upon which silk lines are dried have long existed, but my approach was simpler.

I hooked the Dacron loop on the fly line over the thumb of my left hand, bent my arm and wound the line over my elbow and between the thumb and forefinger creating loops of about a foot which I secured with overhand knots in small pieces of string. This looped line assembly was hung on a cup hook to dry.

Once dry, I would grease the two halves with red tin Mucilin and lay them out in a sunny place for an hour or two. The excess grease would then be wiped off and the half fly lines would go back onto the cup hooks.

Before going fishing I would put one half of the line on the reel and the other loop in a Ziplock bag which would go into my backpack. At lunchtime, I would exchange one for the other and be fishing a high-floating silk line for the rest of the day.

By 2006 I was fishing the silk lines and furred leaders of Terenzio Zandri and, if I was still fishing, I would like to try the line made by Koji Yano.

What I enjoyed about the Terenzio Zandri line was the loop-to-loop connection to his furred leaders.

... and leaders

"A good small stream rule of thumb is that the leader should roughly match the rod's length minus six inches to a foot or so. Practically, this means having more line out and working than the leader."

William C. Black Creek Craft – The Art of Flyfishing Smaller Streams 1988

"I tied on my standard length of fresh 5x tippet, in other words as long as my arm, which I can tell from years of holding the end of the spool under my chin and extending my arm full stretch

with the spool under my chin with the spool unwinding in my other hand. That's how I measure my standard tippets. That works out at about thirty inches. Ed uses a ruler marked in millimetres. There's a fundamental difference in our approach here - I go by feel, he goes by formula – but, so far, the trout don't seem to have noticed the difference."

Tom Sutcliffe *Hunting Trout* 2002

Mono leaders

For me, small stream fly fishing was about enjoyment, enjoyment without frustration, enjoyment in comfort, the total experience not measured or determined by the number of trout caught, but how they were caught.

I gave up hunting in my teens after wounding an animal, but I never forgot the tension and excitement of air rifle hunting, the need to get close, the need for stealth in stalking, the need for accuracy. I wanted to replicate and recall those memories in my fly fishing while making it as gentle and delicate as possible – the .410 approach rather than the 12 bore.

For me that meant short leaders that I could control.

Bob Miller lives for the Trico hatch and fishes size 22 – 24 flies on 7 x tippets on light line rods.

In his 1997 book on Trico fishing, he discusses leader length and I feel his views on leaders are just as applicable to someone fishing a size 14 Royal Wulff on a stream near Cape Town or in the rhododendron-closeted brook trout streams that Chris Barclay fishes with his short fibreglass rods in the Blue Ridge Mountains:

"In my early days of fishing dries, everything I read or heard about dry fly leaders claimed that they had to be long; up to fourteen feet or more in length. Thank God I didn't believe that. It didn't take me long to realize that to cast a long leader well requires holding a lot of fly line in the air along with the leader.

While over the years my involvement in small fly fishing has increased, the length of my leaders has decreased to the point that I don't fish any leader over nine and one half feet in length, regardless of the circumstances.

My reason is that I just don't cast a longer leader very well. Since Trico fishing is primarily made up of short casts, a long leader can be a hindrance.

The long and the short of leaders is that they be kept fine. The length should be whatever you cast best."

It was Charles Ritz, famous hotelier and fanatical fly fisher who created the baseline which determined current thinking on the design of conventional tapered leaders – sixty percent butt, twenty percent transition section and twenty percent tippet.

The sixty percent of the longer butt section should have a gradual taper involving three sections of nylon in declining diameter, the short, fast-tapering transition section would be three pieces of six-inch nylon leading to the tippet.

When Czech-nymphing master Jiri Klima visited our streams in Cape Town I watched him build a leader with three sections of mono of declining diameter, each the length between his outstretched hands.

I didn't time the construction process, but I'd say that two minutes was about right – to save time he bit off the lengths of nylon.

A small stream leader tied to the formula suggested by Art Lee in his book *'Fishing Dry Flies for Trout on Rivers and Streams'* (Atheneum, 1982) would take much longer and require more finger dexterity than I possess. Here's one of the 15 leader formulae – ranging from six feet to 4 x to 20 feet to 7 x – which are listed in the book.

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

6 feet – 4x

Diameter – inches	Length – inches
.020"	13"
.017"	10"
.015"	8"
.013"	7"
.011"	5"
.010"	4"
.009"	3"
.008"	2"
.007"	20"

For me, knotting two and three inches of mono together would be both difficult and boring.

I also have a problem with the butt diameter of this formula.

When I started fly fishing 40 years ago, I read a chapter '*The fallacy of the stiff leader*' in Richard Walker's 1982 book '*Dick Walker's Trout Fishing*'.

Walker averred, correctly, that the difference in flexibility between the fly line and a stiff mono leader resulted in an open loop presentation to the detriment of accuracy – here's the critical sentence in which he compares mono to its more flexible predecessor, silkworm gut:

"The reason stiff nylon or other plastic don't cast well is that they won't bend into so tight a loop."

That being the case, a heavy-butt, or should I say, large-diameter butt leader, becomes a liability when you try to cast tight loops because it is simply much stiffer than the more flexible fly line and does not smoothly continue the energy transfer as the loop unfolds when it reaches the junction between fly line and leader.

This is particularly important when roll casting which, in my small stream approach, forms the bedrock of what I call 'the small stream ethos'.

George Harvey in the USA was the first to move away from the heavy butt principle, going from the .022 of an inch butts that were conventional thirty years ago to .013 of an inch. Both Harvey and his contemporary, Joe Humphreys, provided valuable insights into what they called 'brush fishing' – the approach to tiny streams completely hemmed in by trees and shrubs.

Here's Humphreys' 1989 brush fishing leader formula keeping in mind that this was for a 6-weight rod and it therefore starts at .017":

11 inches of .017

9 inches of .015

9 inches of .013

10 inches of .011 (0X)

9 inches of .009 (2X)

9 inches of .008 (3x)

14 inches of .007 (4x)

That's a six-foot leader tapering to 4x to fish a size 12 Humpy.

Charles Meck, in his 1991 book, *'Fishing Small Streams with a Fly Rod'*, concurs:

"There's no way you can control and accurately cast a leader twelve feet long under most small stream situations."

He provides several formulae for short leaders up to a maximum of seven and a half feet, all starting with a butt diameter of .015 inches although, if you were fishing fly lines from 0 – three weight, you would probably achieve a tighter loop with a butt diameter of .013 inches.

Gary Borger then radically simplified leader design by pointing out that the progressive tapering of the leader using shorter and shorter lengths of mono of decreasing diameter as illustrated by the Art Lee example quoted above, was not necessary:

"Many fly fishers believe that to build a tapered leader each new segment that's added must be no more than 0.002 smaller than the last segment or the leader will 'hinge,' i.e. collapse back on itself and not turn over. This is absolutely NOT true. In fact, the cross-sectional area of the leader can be reduced by 60 percent and the leader will not hinge."

Here's Borger's nine-foot leader tapering to 4x:

4 feet of .013

1 foot of .010

4 feet of 4x

Borger cautions that when connecting sections of mono of widely differing diameter, one should use his '5/7 blood knot', five turns of the thicker mono and seven of the thinner.

In 2013 Pascal Cognard visited South Africa. He is one of only three people to have won three individual gold medals in the annual FIPS-Mouche world fly fishing championship.

An article on the leaders used by the French team can be found in the Tackle folder on the website of the CPS. This is the formula for the 'short regressive' taper which found particular favour with competitive fly anglers who fish the trout streams near Cape Town – a 12-foot leader tapering to 6x.

24 inches of .016

20 inches of .014

15 inches of .012

12 inches of .011

10 inches of .010

8 inches of 3x

6 inches of 5x

Five feet of 6x

Just a caveat on that five-foot 6x tippet – Ed Shenk was a Letort regular along with people like Vincent Marinaro, Charles Fox and Ernest Schweibert, but he loved short, single-piece rods and fishing headwater streams. Two of the chapters in his 1989 book *Fly Rod Trouting* are headed 'Short Fly Rods' and 'Jewel of the Headwaters'.

His take on leaders and, in particular, tippets for small streams is succinct:

"I usually fish with 10-to-12-foot leaders on more open water, such as the Letort or Falling Spring. My mountain leaders are scaled down versions designed to turn over properly at close range. These

are seldom longer than 9 feet. Butt sections are seldom more than .017 inches and I top out at 4x or 5x, usually the latter. These shorter leaders seem to turn over better if the tippet is no longer than 20 inches, even though tippets of 24 inches are used more often."

Extruded leaders

In *Trout from Small Streams* – the best book on the subject – Dave Hughes gives leader design short thrift:

"Now I buy 7½-foot leaders as the base for all my small stream fishing..."

Tom Sutcliffe agrees in principle. In his wonderful 2002 book, *Hunting Trout* he has this to say in a chapter headed *Dry Fly Leaders for Freestone Streams*:

"I use a 9-foot, 4x continuous taper nylon leader with twelve inches cut off the butt to reduce the diameter slightly from the average of say 0.021 inches, down to around 0.017 inches. This gives a butt of around sixty percent of the line-tip diameter. Attach a tippet of 3 to 6 feet of 4,5, or 6x nylon, depending on conditions."

Tim Rolston, for many years Cape Town's leading guide, advocates a similar approach in an article headlined ***"Take me to your leader"*** on his *'Fishing Gene Blog'*:

"My simplified approach is to use as a base a purchased tapered knotless leader. I use a nine-foot leader with a tippet diameter of approximately 2x more than I want to finish up with. Equally I normally put the leader into boiling water for a few minutes and stretch it, this seems to add a level of springiness which better protects the light tippet when fishing, yet another French innovation."

To that is added a compound tippet of two three-foot sections of copolymer tippet material, these days most often Stroft which I like very much."

So the base leader is then a 4x tapered leader, 3ft of 5X and 3ft of 6X. On calm days and flat water, I may add an additional 3ft of 7 or even 8X to that. That means that most of the time the leader is between 15 and 18 feet long."

Tim can fish an 18-foot leader because he is a casting instructor who has written a book on the subject – I would struggle to control one half that length, particularly if it was windy. My approach is to get as close as possible, fishing from a kneeling position if that is feasible.

If I was still able to fish, I'd buy a nine-foot leader tapering to 3x. I'd cut two feet off the butt, tie a Perfection Loop in that section and loop that through the loop at the end of my silk fly line.

To the 3x tip, I'd attach a foot of 4 x Rio Two-Tone Indicator Tippet – which has alternate sections of fluo pink and yellow - and finish that with a Perfection Loop Knot.

That would give me the option of a loop-to-loop connection to another section of 4x tippet material or 5/6x if I was fishing a small fly.

When fishing a small sunken terrestrial, I would slip the loops apart, insert a small tuft of glo-bug yarn which had been pre-treated with a floatant like Loon Fly Dip to function as a strike indicator. If I changed back to a dry fly, I would simply remove the yarn.

Leader length for small streams depends entirely on the stream circumstances - Joe Humphreys used a six-foot leader for brush fishing and Chris Barclay, who fishes his beautiful fibreglass rods in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, usually fishes a rod-length leader of around seven feet.

Google Earth Maps and the advent of outstanding short, light-line fibreglass blanks which are relatively inexpensive combined to produce 'Blue lining' – opening new fields of exploration for those who love small stream fly fishing.

Scientific Anglers and Rio were quick to realise the commercial potential of blue lining and to market

products catering for the increased interest in small stream fly fishing.

Scientific Anglers produced the Amplitude Smooth Creek Trout fly line with a taper designed to roll cast well at short range. To go with it, they produced a six-foot extruded leader, the Amplitude Smooth Creek Trout with tippet diameters from 3x to 6x.

Rio's small stream line is the 'Creek'.

Furled leaders

Darrel Martin did us all a favour in 1999 with his chapter on furled leaders in *'Micropatterns: Tying and Fishing the Small Fly'*.

In 2001, with the assistance of FOSAF, he visited South Africa with Taff Price and demonstrated how to make furled leaders. Three-foot furled leaders in dark colours for light-line fly rods are now freely available on the market. Their benefit for small stream anglers is significant, most particularly in the context of their turnover at short range and their soft descent.

Here's a quote from *Micropatterns*:

"I took the first furled leader I made into the backyard for a dry cast. I hoped it would extend with a slow, soft cast. My cast pushed the leader out thirty feet. The line landed, but the leader, paralyzed in midcast, hung four feet off the ground. I did not understand. I laid the rod down and walked to the leader. The leader, tippetless, was held in mid-cast by a single strand of spider's web strung across the yard. Evidently, a tender web caught and held the delicate, drifting leader. Surely this was a soft descent. The furled leader makes a difference. A supple thread leader can pitch the pattern softly into the trout's strike zone."

If the small stream angler combines the soft descent of a furled leader with a big, wind-resistant Variant as recommended by Al McClane - or the South African equivalent, the Tony Biggs RAB - the results can be surprising.

The great benefit of such flies is that their soft descent ensures gentle presentation and, if you see them land, they are easy to follow in the drift thereafter.

Stephen Boshoff remembers using a one weight rod and a RAB on a furled leader when he and Peter Brigg fished the tiny Didima stream in the Drakensberg Mountain range in Natal.

He said three 8–10-inch browns simultaneously leapt out of the water and tried to intercept it in mid-air.

The French leader

Jean-Pierre Guillemaud (Piam) became legendary in the 1970s and 80s for his ability to catch big trout in wide, clear and slow-flowing rivers like the Loue and the Ain in the Jura Mountains of eastern France.

He did this with a 25-foot leader tapering to 8x which consisted of eight lengths of mono which became progressively longer as the diameter decreased.

This states the obvious – the longer the leader, the less chance of the trout detecting you visually or being alerted to the alighting fly.

I would struggle to fish a leader of that length with the short rods which I enjoy fishing.

My approach is to wade thigh-deep pocket water concentrating on the bubble line and focusing on a soft descent which means aiming not at the water but above where I think the trout will be holding. The soft descent is achieved either with big-hackled Variants or through the aerodynamic effect of the yarn strike indicator about the size of a match head. When used in conjunction with a small and lightly-weighted (1 mm countersunk brass bead) sunken beetle or ant, the indicator enables an automatic

tuck cast.

Convex leaders

Quite who came up with the idea of a double taper leader, I don't know. They were already being used in the early fifties by legendary fly fishers such as Charles Ritz and Al McClane. In *'Creep and Crawl'* a 1956 article on small stream fly fishing in *Sports Afield*, Al McClane gave this formula:

"You can turn a balanced double taper leader over with your hand. I designed one that is a comfortable 7 ½ feet long and it is ideal for short casts. Here are the specifications: 18 inches of .014, 6 inches of .015, six inches of .017, 15 inches of .019, 9 inches of .013, 12 inches of .011 and 15 inches of .009. This will roll with very little line extended."

McClane ends his double taper leader at a diameter of .009"/.23mm which is 2x. This would be considered excessive in terms of today's much stronger monos, but his favourite flies for fishing the little creeks were large RAB-type variants. They usually require quite large diameter nylons to turn them over effectively unless one uses a knot like the Surgeon's Swivel which eliminates the twisting which occurs when large flies are tied to fine tippets. McClane's formula could easily be adapted to a leader butt of .013 to make it more effective for 0-3 weight lines.

In the September 1981 issue of the British magazine, *'Trout & Salmon'*, George Beall gave his version of a seven-foot, five inch, double taper leader devised by Pierre Creusevaut of Belgium who for several years was the world's champion distance caster: 22 inches of 0.015 diameter nylon, 30 inches of 0.17, 12 inches of 0.013 mm, 10 inches in 0.009 and a 15 inch tippet of 3x.

The idea of convex leaders was given momentum by an article that appeared in volume 14, no 6 of the US magazine, *'Fly Fisherman'* (September, 1983) by an engineer, Bernard B. Beegle. Here's a quote:

"You don't have to attach them to a fly line and cast them with a fly rod to see and feel the blessings of the new design over the old. Just grasp the butt section of each leader in your casting hand and give each a try, alternating between the old and the new design. I have done this many times to demonstrate to fly fishermen the blessings of the convex taper. Each angler could tell just by observation which leader was the convex taper. During both the backward and the forward cast, this design turned over better and with less effort-especially during the forward cast. The leader comes through in a tighter loop and straightens out much better. Furthermore, the convex taper exhibited an extra kick at the end of the toss, the tippet landing in a serpentine pattern as expected, the caster not having to mend the toss to achieve this."

In his 2001 book, *'Drag Free Drift - Leader Design and Presentation Techniques for Fly Fishing'*, Joseph A. Kissane said of the convex design:

"The convex or weight-forward configuration of these leaders makes them a particularly logical choice for windy conditions. Regardless of whether the convex geometry helps energy transfer, their ability to turn over well makes them useful for longer casts and larger flies."

Kissane later reverted to conventional straight taper leader designs and Cape Piscatorial Society members who experimented with the concept, myself included, found they offered no advantage for small stream fly fishing, even when shortened appropriately.

Greased leaders and tippets

"The floating leader was far less affected by currents because it was riding half above the water instead of fully immersed in it. Would you fish a dry fly with a sinking line?"

Tom Rosenbauer *The Orvis Guide to Prospecting for Trout* (Lyons Press, 2008)

The vocal opposition to the greased tippet bemuses me – the greatest inhibitor of dry fly success is drag and the moment any section of the tippet sinks below the surface it is pulled by the current causing the dry fly to drag.

Among the members of the Cape Piscatorial Society, I am probably alone in advocating greasing the entire leader including the tippet, an approach favoured by Tom Rosenbauer of Orvis and Peter Hayes, author of *'Fly Fishing Outside the Box – Emerging Heresies'*.

M C Coetzer, the country's most experienced competitive fly angler, is adamant that the rear section of the leader must be greased to enhance lift-off into the back cast, but that the tippet must sink.

Siding with him is the city's most experienced guide, Tim Rolston, and he wrote a cogent article on the subject – *'Should Tippets Float'* for his Paracaddis website.

I focused on specific sections of stream – thigh-deep pocket water – and to me the most compelling segment of this debate relates to the first rule of fly fishing – do not let the fish become aware of your presence. That, in part, means not drowning your dry fly on lift-off into the back cast via your sunken tippet and then having that dry fly expel the water so accumulated in a fine, incandescent mist as the back cast ends. A mist which, backlit under our bright African sun, creates a kaleidoscope of colours.

Drone footage of the extent to which the stream surface is disturbed during lift-off into the back cast has reinforced my view.

Furthermore, a floating fly moving at odds with the current during a dead drift guarantees failure and, in the braided currents found in the knee-deep pocket water which I chose to fish, any part of the tippet which is below the surface instantly causes drag.

I was therefore cheered when Peter Hayes published his fascinating book, *'Fly Fishing Outside the Box – Emerging Heresies'* in 2013.

He said that the waterproof autofocus cameras which had just become available enabled him to see the leader and the tippet as trout see them

The idea of doing this was not new and he cites the experience of G E M Skues who used an underwater observation chamber constructed by the naturalist Dr Francis Ward. (A photograph can be seen in Paul Schullery's, *'The Rise: Streamside Observations on Trout, Flies, and Fly Fishing'*).

In a footnote, Peter Hayes says:

"This business of sinking the tippet with which I so disagree has been handed down for decades, but actually only for a few of them. Skues, writing in The Way of a Trout with a Fly in 1921 (p 41) referring to what he had learned from looking up through the sunken window of Dr Francis Ward's experimental pond, said that when thrown on the surface dry, the gut was not noticeable from underneath except in the window, and not very noticeable then. Sunken gut he says 'became obvious', and goes on to say that 'the insistence of the dry fly angler on ... absolute dryness of gut and fly seems ... to be thoroughly justified.'

So not only did Skues see the same as my camera, but he is clear that keeping your tippet floating was de rigueur up to the 1920s at least. Who was it that led us astray?"

What is interesting in the historical chronology on the floating tippet, is that two prominent writers, first Al McClane and then Tom Rosenbauer agree with Hayes.

Al McClane: *The Practical Fly Fisherman*, (Prentice Hall, 1975) Pages 80 – 81:

"Whether a leader sinks or floats can be a worrisome question to the neophyte. While it is extremely important that the leader be rubbed perfectly straight, I doubt if it matters whether it sinks unless you are fishing a wet fly or nymph which requires that it go under. Traditionalists will raise a bloodshot eye at the idea that a floating leader is just as effective as one sunk below the surface, but I am convinced that trout see it one way or the other, and any attempt to hide it underwater is wasted effort.

Trout will even hit the knots in a leader when they're busy gorging on midges. To convince myself,

I spent time in a wet suit with scuba gear studying the subject from the trout's point of view; I only came to the conclusion that a sunken leader is more visible with its double image reflecting against the surface when it's an inch or so under the water than a floating leader, which frankly I had more difficulty finding.

Leader shadow on the bottom is of no consequence because from the trout's position, facing the current, his view of the river is horizontal and upward. To a fisherman standing in the water and looking down on the full length of it, the shadow may be alarming, but a trout has no such advantage. The important thing is that the leader makes it possible for an artificial fly to arrive on the stream like a natural insect. And to achieve that depends on how smoothly you present your casts."

Tom Rosenbauer: *The Orvis Guide to Prospecting for Trout* (Lyons Press, 2008) Pages 159 -160:

"I originally started greasing my leader with silicone dry-fly paste because I had trouble following my fly in a pocket water stream that never seemed to see the sun. I found I could trace the fly better by looking for the shine of the leader on the water, and it didn't bother the trout at all. Using a greasy leader in other streams because I was too lazy to change leaders or rub mud onto the fly to remove the silicone, I started noticing that drag wasn't as much of a problem - I was getting longer floats.

Switching back to a non-treated leader, I could see what was happening: The floating leader was far less affected by currents because it was riding half above the water instead of fully immersed in it. Would you fish a dry fly with a sinking line?

I still like to keep my leader sinking in smooth water, and often use fluorocarbon tippet, especially for the last five feet, because a leader's shadow can disturb a nervous trout. But in riffled water, and in the smooth windows in pocket water where the trout don't see much of your leader, it pays to keep the whole thing floating."

My decision to follow the dictum of Skues, McClane, Rosenbauer and Hayes was primarily and fundamentally based on the water I chose to fish, the water I enjoyed fishing. Knee-deep pocket water where the braided currents would tug at the sunken portions of tippet causing drag.

I didn't de-grease the tippet when fishing my little sunken beetles and ants because trout in water that deep are always on the watch for surface food and the 1.5 mm countersunk brass bead on the beetle or the weight of the copper wire in the ant would take them just below the meniscus anyway. I couldn't see them in the water, but I could see the small yarn indicator the size of a match head and, forward of that, the brightly coloured mono held at the surface by the ever-reliable Mucilin paste.

Hi-vis leaders

In the late 1970s an article on nymphing by Dave Whitlock in *Fly Fisherman* significantly improved my fly-fishing success and enjoyment. He advocated sliding a small piece of brightly coloured fly line onto the leader as a strike indicator. At the time Stren had yellow mono on the market and I combined the two ideas. Since then, competitive angling has given us leader material in a combination of bright colours by companies such as Rio, Scientific Anglers and Hanak which, when greased with Mucilin, help guide the eye of the small stream angler towards the fly.

Hi-vis leader material can be combined with Loon Bio Strike mouldable putty on a tippet knot. It's quick and easy to apply and I keep a blob of it stuck to the reel seat behind my hand so that it is quickly available. Another option would be to use black Skafars Neon Wax where the yellow and pink sections of Rio Two Tone tippet material merge or to colour that section with a black permanent marker.

This brings me back to the objections to the greased tippet for dry fly fishing which we know decreases drag. Is the objection, then, that the greased tippet is more visible to the trout? The objectors seem to be unaware or to have forgotten that, in the early-1970s, Doug Swisher and Carl Richards experimented with tippets dyed fluorescent pink and yellow and found that they made no difference as they explained in their 1975 book *'Fly Fishing Strategy'*:

“The strict traditionalist will no doubt be turned off by this revolting idea, fearing that every trout within sight within sight would swim for cover. This has not been the case. In fact, not once have we found a situation where the high visibility leader has caused a drop-off in success but there has been an advantage. Even with size #28 midge adults and pupas in clear, slow-moving water, the bright yellow or pink leaders and tippets do not put fish down. We think that the trout is only concerned with the fly which, of course, represents its main diet and ignores all the other objects, of which there are many, that come drifting in and on the currents.”

This makes sense because, for the same reason, trout and other fish ignore the plainly-visible hook which is part of the fly. Brian Clarke and John Goddard devised upside down patterns which made the hook less visible when they were working on their 1980 book, ***‘The Trout and the Fly – A New Approach’***. They never caught on because they were unnecessary.

Boiled leaders

Boiling leaders made of Maxima mono is universal practice among competition fly anglers for a very good reason – it increases the elasticity of the leader giving it a greater shock-absorbing capability on the strike which, in turn, facilitates the use of finer tippets. A decade ago, MC Coetzer and other members of the South African national team used Google Translate to parse online French articles where they found references to this.

MC asked a friend to experiment.

“When he phoned me back, he said he was literally shaking with excitement”, MC recalls.

To create this stretch, MC advises boiling the Maxima leader in wide coils for two minutes.

Stephen Boshoff advises boiling Maxima leaders in tea which gives them a beautiful brownish tinge, a possible advantage in the peat-stained streams near Cape Town which are a pale amber in colour. Al McClane experimented with leaders of different colours and came to the conclusion that it was a debate of no significance – but Stephen’s ritual appeals to me.

The tippet is not boiled.

Here are the relevant measurements of Maxima Ultra-green mono:

2lbs .005” 6x

3lbs .006” 5x

4lbs .007” 4x

5lbs .008” 3x

6lbs .009” 2x

8lbs .010 1X

10lbs .012”

12lbs .013”

Elasticity

Darrel Martin says a furled leader may stretch 15% of its total length. If you combine this with the elasticity of boiled Maxima mono, you build in significant shock absorption.

For short casts with short rods on small streams you could start with a three-foot furled leader and loop that to three foot of 4 x boiled Maxima for a basic length of six foot. Add a tippet ring to the 4x and add your sections of 5 and 6 x after that.

Tippet rings

One of the significant advantages that competitive fly angling has brought us is the tippet ring which floats as part of a greased leader. It allows one to change tippets when they become too short with constant fly changes, without affecting the basic leader length. A 2 mm tippet ring, particularly on a greased leader, will not adversely affect dry fly presentation.

Line to leader join

When Pascal Cognard visited South Africa in 2013, local fly anglers gained useful insights and an article by Tom Sutcliffe on his website illustrated Cognard's leader construction methods and the extent to which he streamlines the line-to-leader join.

Leader and Tippet Knots

Blood knots are streamlined, easy-to-tie and strong. I wipe Loon Knot Sense onto my mono before tying the knot so that it is infused within the knot. This serves two purposes, reducing friction and bonding the knot internally.

Reduce friction by tightening the knot slowly and keeping your hands about 10-12 centimetres apart, thereby distributing the heat stress across a greater length of nylon. When the knot is completely tight, Borger recommends that the relevant section of leader be held in that stretched position for about ten seconds – presumably to allow the heat generated during the tightening process to dissipate.

He recommends five turns with the thinner mono and seven with the thicker for his 5/7 blood knot, particularly if mono of widely differing diameters is used. The Improved Blood Knot is used for the same reason and doubles the thinner strand.

Conclusion

The approach of South African small stream anglers is eclectic.

Tom Sutcliffe, like Dave Hughes and Tim Rolston modifies a commercial, knotless leader.

Peter Brigg and I like short, furred leaders designed for light-line rods but use the Sutcliffe/ Hughes/ Rolston approach if they are not available.

South Africa's most experienced competitive fly angler, MC Coetzer uses a boiled Maxima leader based on the Pascal Cognard short regressive taper and greases the rear section of the leader.

In the end, small stream leader choice comes down to whatever works for you in maximising enjoyment and minimising frustration, but a maxim which cannot be challenged is that for small stream stalking, a six-foot leader offers more control and ensures more dry fly accuracy for the average caster than a 16-foot one.





CHAPTER 7

In Search of a Virtuous Vise



With a little help from my friends. A 2005 photograph taken while I was trying a prototype of the midge jaw for the Jvice made by Jay Smit of Durban

I started fly-tying in the early 1980s with a Sunrise vise. The jaw chipped and this started my search for the ultimate fly-tying vise. Like all tackle junkies I have been attracted to each top-of-the-range vise that appears on the market and, in the ensuing years, I have bought most of them.

The Sunrise was based on the iconic Thompson, the first collet-and-sleeve vise, but I wanted something better.

In choosing my next vise I was guided by Dave Whitlock in *The Second Fly-Tyer's Almanac* (J B Lippincot, 1975) which he co-authored with Robert Boyle. He wrote: ***"To me, Bill Hunter's new HMM vises are the ultimate today in traditional cam-operated fly-tying tools. During the development of the HMM standard and premium models, nothing was spared in time, engineering and field testing to make a product that leaves nothing to be desired."***

"I personally feel they are the finest vises I've ever used."

There was both truth and irony in this passage. Truth because the HMH endures as a superbly engineered example of the traditional cam-operated vises, irony because Dave, like me, subsequently started tying on the Renzetti Presentation 3000, the first commercially available, true rotary fly-tying vise. So, too, does Darrel Martin, author of *Micropatterns*, the definitive book on tying tiny flies.

It was a revelation as far as I was concerned and my quest, since then, has been to find a vise that would surpass the Renzetti in tying small flies with fine threads such as Semperfli Nanosilk 24/0, Textreme Extreme 10 denier and the even-finer UTC Uni-Caenis

I quickly disposed of the HMH and bought not just one Renzetti but two. For some reason I had an idea that it was produced by an elderly genius, working in a garret and that his potential demise might curtail supply. This resulted in me living in some austerity for a while because they were not inexpensive by my standard of income.

Comparing it to other vises available at the time, however, was like comparing a Porsche to a VW Beetle or a Ferrari to a Fiat. It was far ahead of its time, though and, as other manufacturers subsequently brought out their own interpretations of the theme, Andy Renzetti belatedly patented his idea.

Subsequently, other vises, based on the Renzetti's rotary principle appeared on the market and I bought most of them. As each one appeared, I'd give my Renzetti to a fly-tying friend and I would then buy the new contender on the market. First there was the Tiemco, then the C&F Ultimate Reference Vise and then the Petitjean. Each sought to enhance the original but only succeeded, in my opinion, in detracting from its simplicity and finesse. I went back to the Renzetti 3000 a few years ago – albeit with one addition. Forty years ago, it was sold with two jaws, one for small flies and another for bigger patterns.



Between the jaws of the Renzetti 4000 (top) and the original 3000 jaws, both of which screw onto the Renzetti stem, a wide range of hook sizes can be accommodated

When Mop flies made their appearance, I started tying them on size 8 hooks and the standard jaws on the Renzetti 3000 did not easily accommodate them. My enquiry to Frontier Fly Fishing in

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Johannesburg resulted in an email from Lily Renzetti. She pointed out that Renzetti stopped producing two jaws for the 3000 model several years ago. The problem was easily solved however because the head of the Presentation 3000 screwed off and could quickly be replaced with Presentation 4000 head.

What I like about the Presentation 3000 is its lightness and that a tap with the back of my hand aligns the head of the vise where I want it. The top of the vise arm is uncluttered, my hand is comfortable resting on it and the material clip is ideally positioned for whip finishing. I don't use the rotary function often, but it is there if I need it.



The author has equipped his 'indoor vise', the Renzetti Presentation 3000, with a Jvice articulated bobbin rest and wooden tool holder. Extra illumination is provided by the Pro Lite FTL230 Dual Head LED Fly Tying Lamp



'Call of the Stream' website owner, Peter Brigg - @grizzlyhackle – using the Renzetti Traveller which is very popular with South African fly tyers

Later vises by other manufacturers proved more complex without offering, for my needs, any significant advantage.

I have tied with the Waldron, regarded by many as the ultimate, but I found the big spur wheel with which the jaw is loosened and tightened to be obtrusive and I feel it could, with advantage, be replaced by a small sliding T-bar which would drop out of the way when not in use.

The best-selling vise in America is the Regal and it is easy to understand why. One can change flies in an instant, it is rugged and beautifully engineered, but it held no appeal for me.

Could the Renzetti Presentation be improved?

I liked the magnetic jaw on the C&F which helped to locate small hooks within the jaw and, it might be my imagination, but I felt that the rotary mechanism on some of the other top of the range vises was slightly smoother.

If that is the result of using some sort of ball race, I would appreciate that modification to the Renzetti 3000. On the pedestal base Tiemco, the stem is incorporated within a sleeve which makes it easy to raise or lower the vise head but this is unnecessary on a C-clamp vise.



As the photos left and right indicate, the vise stem on the Tiemco pedestal vise is adjustable for height

And, in between, there was the Jvice.



**Jay Smit of Durban cuts out the middleman and builds his vise to your specifications.
More than 2000 have been sold all over the world**

Who would have thought that a retired South African engineer, working from his garage could produce a product that could challenge established names like Renzetti, Tiemco, Petitjean, Dynaking, C&F and others for innovation and engineering finish and quality?

I call it my 'Garden Vise' because the way the wooden base is configured, its ease of assembly and disassembly and the design of its carry case, make it perfect for someone who likes to move outdoors when the sun is shining and the breeze drops, or someone who travels a lot.



An annual ritual of mine is to greet the beginning of spring with a fly-tying session in the garden of the retirement home where I live in Cape Town.

If I had the sort of budgetary restrictions which most fly tyers with families have and was confined to only one vise, the Jvice would be my undoubted choice because of its relatively low price and its versatility. To cite just a single example, the Jvice is the only one that I am aware of which has a tool which allows you to attach your camera to the vise for taking pictures of your flies. If you can afford it, you can order a Damascus steel jaw. Its optional battery-powered light, which is instantly attached and removed, has proved useful during the routine electricity outages – euphemistically called 'load

shedding' - which South Africans now regularly endure.



The battery-powered Jvice light fits into one of the holes in its wooden base and is instantly removable

As far as price goes, imported vises have freight charges and the mark-up of local agents incorporated into the price. In South Africa, neither factor applies to the Jvice which, in some cases, can make it significantly less expensive than imported vises of similar quality.

Jay's interest in engineering started as a child because his father, a farmer near Howick in Natal, did all the maintenance and repair on farm vehicles. ***"From an early age, I started dismantling and repairing things mechanical, from water pumps to tractors and was taught by my father to use the machinery in the farm workshop,"*** Jay says.

Later he studied electronics and then worked for Eskom for many years. He then became Technical Director for a door manufacturing company in Durban and headed a division that designed and built specialised production machines.

"All the skills gleaned during this time stood me in good stead when I started building my own vise," Jay says.

Jay had started fishing at an early age when his father took him shad fishing during their annual holidays to the Natal South Coast, but in 2001 he accompanied friends on a trip to the trout streams and dams of the Drakensberg Mountains in Natal.

Not only did the trip get him started on fly fishing and fly-tying, but it also led him to make his own vise because he felt that he could improve on the imported vise he had bought. The first one he made was quickly improved in two subsequent versions.

"In September 2003 Gerard Barnardt of Cape Town kindly put me in touch with Hans Weilenmann, one of the world's leading authorities on fly-tying. Hans was impressed and agreed to do a revue of the Jvice in the American magazine, 'Fly Fisherman'."

The Weilenmann revue was published and the first export order went to Peter Frailey from Carlisle, MA in the USA. He did a revue on the Jvice and placed it on his site. Since then, export orders have been regular with three or four vises being sold abroad each month.

“In February 2002, I sold a vise to Capetonian, Ed Herbst, editor of the oldest fly-fishing journal in the country, Piscator, and probably the country’s leading authority on ultra-light line fly fishing and micro-patterns. This is where my troubles started because Ed wanted midge jaws and provided me with a lot of research on the features that would enhance the tying of small flies.”



The Jvice midge jaws which resulted from a request by the author

“In March 2005, Loren Williams, a professional fly tyer and fly-fishing guide based in New York State, contacted me for a vise. He had a set of specific design requirements that I agreed to produce for him, and he described the finished product as his ‘perfect vise’. I incorporated all these changes in my production versions. Later that year Loren was chosen as the official fly tyer for the US fly fishing team and accompanied them to the 2005 World Championships in Sweden. He did a great revue on his Jvice for his website which brought me further international publicity.

Because of the rising cost of components, I decided to purchase a CNC lathe to enable in-house production of parts and to improve quality. The new machine arrived in early 2007 and, since installation in my garage, all parts are produced in-house. The new machine has enabled me to test new ideas and expedite research and development where, previously, such work took months and I had to do big minimum runs. The only problem is that the family cars now have to sleep outside!” Jay said.

The Jvice is receiving rave reviews from fly tyers all over the world. Each one is numbered and logged on Jay’s computer data base and he prefers to deal with customers individually rather than through dealers. This enables you to tailor the vise to your own needs and if you have any queries, Jay is just a mouse click or a telephone call away. Before ordering your vise, you can discuss with him exactly what you want the final configuration of your vise to be. No other vise offers this degree of customisation to suit your individual needs.

At the time of writing in late 2022, Jay completed his 2000th Jvice and it was auctioned, raising R40 000 for the Red Cross Children’s Hospital in Cape Town.

Jay is constantly adding new features to his product and all of them will fit every model he has made.

“Freight charges drive up the costs of an imported vise”, says Jay. “But, besides that, there is no other vise on the market which offers as many accessories or the versatility of the J Vise. My customers in Cape Town, for example, will fish for trout in tiny mountain streams on Saturday and on Sunday they will be fishing for tunny, mako shark and snoek thirty kilometres from shore. The Jvice offers midge jaws suitable for tying flies half the size of your little finger nail, the standard jaws

which will tie deep-sea flies as long as your fore-arm and the Pro Jaw which holds hooks from 6/0 to # 22 and smaller," Jay said.

The Jvice is constantly evolving as he gets new ideas or input from fly tyers – many of them professionals – from all over the world and each new accessory will fit the vise you have bought. Except for the Norlander, I have owned or tied on most of the top-of-the-range vises including the Law. None of them is as versatile or offers the range of accessories that the Jvice does. Other benefits include the base which Jay can configure to suit your needs. Another thoughtfully engineered and superbly crafted Jay Smit device is his long-fibre brush maker. Most purchasers will use it to make saltwater streamers with craft fur and other synthetics, but I use it to make wonderfully mobile brushes with zonker strip fur and marabou for dragon fly nymphs and mop flies.



Jay with his long-fibre brush maker which facilitates the tying of streamers with natural and synthetic materials

I have poor eyesight and I could not tie without the assistance of prescription reading glasses and the OptiVISOR, a headband magnifier made by the Donegan Optical Company in the USA. Its use by doctors and jewellers is universal and I use the maximum eyepiece magnification – 3.5x.



I could manage without the feline company but not my prescription reading glasses and my Donegan OptiVISOR magnifying headband

I have tried most bobbin holders including Petitjean and SMHAEN and Renzetti, the automatic bobbin holders made by Eikich and Norvise and the magnetic bobbin holder made by Tiemco.

The Tiemco Double Arm version is my favourite, however, because it fits my hand and is exceptional in design and finish. One of its advantages is that the ceramic thread tube is adjustable for length. What this means is that you can make it just longer than your forefinger which improves thread control.

When tying with ultra-fine wire I use the Stonfo Bobtec Bobbin with the standard tube because it gives me greater control. It is slightly wider than the Tiemco which means that it facilitates the use of the wider spools used for wire and threads like Veevus.

Ten years ago, I used Gudebrod 10/0 and or 14/0 Griffiths Sheer when tying small flies. Today we have more choices. My favourite conventional thread is UTC 70 denier which I use for flies around # 16.

For # 18 flies up to around #22 I use Semperfli Nanosilk 24/0.

For size 24-26 I use Textreme Extreme 10 denier and for sizes 28 and 30 I use UTC Uni-Caenis.

Nanosilk and Textreme are gel spun threads consisting of minute fibres and are difficult to break but Uni-Caenis has a breaking strain of eight oz. If you use it, you will break it sooner or later so I keep a Stonfo bobbin threader at hand. Uni-Caenis does not unravel off the hook shank when it breaks, so it is easy to re-start the tying process.

The Nanosilk and Textreme threads opened up a new vista for dubbing loop bodies and dual 'halo hackles' which combine rooster and game bird feathers. Splitting the thread and inserting dubbing was said to have been used by George Selwyn Marryat, Frederick Halford's muse, more than a century ago.

This technique was brought back into mainstream fly-tying by CDC exponent, Marc Petitjean and the tools he has developed to facilitate the process.

Darryl Lampert, creator of the Hi-Vis CDC Midge, recommends Griffiths 14/0 Sheer thread for splitting and Hemingways 8/0 consists of two easily separated strands. If, however, your hands shake – as mine do – then a dubbing loop using a thin yet strong GSP thread, is far easier to create.

Marc Petitjean introduced plastic versions of a bulldog clip for inserting CDC into a split thread or dubbing loops and similar products were then brought out by Stonfo and Swiss CDC.

I use the metal Swiss CDC clip for most of my CDC work, the Stonfo clip when tying tiny flies and the extra-large Petitjean clip for inserting zonker strip fur or marabou into a dubbing loop when tying dragon fly nymphs on #8-10 hooks. For spinning these materials into a chenille, I use the SMHAEN Master Dubbing Twister and Marc Petitjean's MP Dubbing Twister.

My favourite scissor for fine work is the three- and three-quarter inch, Italian-made Koptor scissor which has a serrated blade and I also like the Dr Slick Bent Shaft model because both are slightly curved which makes it easier to pick them up.

For heavy-duty work I like the Dr Slick Razor model - very similar to equivalent designs by Loon and Tiemco - and I use the Renomed Supercut for marabou -again because one blade is serrated. It could, with advantage, have blades which are a centimetre longer.

To cut the thread after whip finishing, I stroke a scissor blade across it. For some reason, manufacturers put the serrated blade away from the tyer, whereas it would be more useful if the serrated blade was closest to the tyer.

I've adapted items for fly-tying, one of the most useful being a double-headed dental pick – Stonfo makes a tool like this which it calls the 'U Shape Bodkin Fiber Puller' but it is not as versatile as the tool which your dentist can order for you.

I have also found the magnet used for picking up hearing aid batteries to be useful. With the addition of a wooden handle, it has excelled at removing micropattern hooks from the C&F fly boxes with their magnetised compartments which I use for hook storage.

Another pharmacy-supplied item which has proved useful is the biopsy punch – available in sizes from 1 mm - for extracting small foam tubes from pieces of foam rubber when creating small ant and hopper patterns. The idea comes from Mike Backhouse of the Natal Fly Dressers Society who ties what I call a 'Phospho Buzzer'. He has created a luminous version of John Goddard's Suspender buzzer using the phosphorescent 'Float-A-Bait' foam rubber which rock and surf anglers use when using soft baits such as shrimps and which he fishes from a float tube with an intermediate line.

Another item from my local chemist is a haemostat – also called artery forceps – which, with the application of heat, creates a waffle pattern on foam rubber.

I got the idea from the Floating Foam Caddis Pupa by Kenneth Einers which was described on the Global Fly Fisher website.

I use a small brush which comes with Braun electric shavers for roughing up dubbed fur bodies.

Fly tyers have never had it so good – I marvel at the vast range of tools, materials and information that are available now compared to what was on offer when I tied my first fly 40 years ago.





CHAPTER 8

A Personal Small Stream Approach

“Fly fishing reflects the values of its practitioner and this remains the essential issue. Essentially, how do you want to catch a fish. Do you prize artistry or results? You learn about yourself over time and you become more patient or less, more discerning, or less.”

David Coggins *‘The Optimist – A Case for the Fly Fishing Life’* (Scribner, 2021).

What I wanted from the trout streams near Cape Town was to maximize my contentment and minimise the risk.

Tom Sutcliffe, the doyen of South African fly angling authors points out that these streams favour a specific approach:

“You search the runs and holding spots with short casts, concentrating on the water right ahead and to the sides of you, avoiding long casts wherever possible. In fact, the thing that most astounds visitors is how ‘short’ we fish on Cape streams.

It’s a technique that relies on covering holding water with quick, well-placed drifts, avoiding drag and watching for any sign of a take like a hawk.

In a sense it’s almost a form of ‘abbreviated’ fly-fishing, in that it’s close in, the drifts are short and quick and you’re doing a lot more casting than usual.”

Although I no longer hunted, I wanted to re-create my school-day memories of stalking pigeons with an air-rifle, inching forward, senses on hyper-alert.

To do that I had, as a fly angler, to create a system which allowed me to fish successfully in comfort using tackle and techniques that would compensate for middle-age physical inadequacies such as poor balance, eyesight and casting co-ordination.

Like many fly anglers, I imagine, I did not seek to redress those shortcomings by half an hour of casting practise every day.

I sought, instead, to create the fly which would, to quote the work of Nobel laureate Nikolaas Tinbergen, incorporate a ‘super normal releaser’ which would prompt a trout to move out of its normal feeding lane to intercept it.

I also sought to develop a presentation system that would make it easier for me to see the fly land and to follow its drift thereafter and to ascertain which knots would be easiest for my trembling hands to tie and least likely to break.

Casting

Long casts ruin dry fly presentation by creating more opportunities for drag. Gary LaFontaine – The Dry Fly – New Angles (Greycliff Publishing Company, 1990)

I divide fly casting into two schools, the Joan Wulff approach which, very broadly speaking and in my subjective perception, emphasises minimum effort and the Lefty Kreh approach which enables one to cast long distances into the wind.

To my mind the best casting approach for small streams means loading the rod and letting it do its work with the minimum of upper torso movement.

In the energy-sapping heat of South Africa's steep-sided stream valleys, energy-saving pays big dividends.

As Tom Sutcliffe points out, small stream fly fishing involves short casts and short casts require abbreviated casting arcs.

To encourage this, as Art Flick explains in his interview for that informative book *Wisdom of the Guides: Rocky Mountain Trout Guides Talk Fly Fishing* (Frank Amato, 2005), he teaches people to cast by making them stand on a cement block – too much arm and upper body movement and you fall off the block. "They have to use the wrist", he said.

I've heard that ghillies boat fishing the Scottish lochs adopt a similar approach, telling the angler who is not letting the rod do the work, to cast with their fly box held against their bodies by their casting arm – too much arm waving and torso moving and they are short of their flies.

To illustrate this, I would demonstrate to beginners that I could cast 20 feet of line and leader with my casting arm pressed tightly against my rib-cage – just by flexing my wrist.

This was achievable provided the meter or so of line beyond the top guide was heavy enough to load the rod tip – which usually meant one line weight heavier than the rod is factory-rated for.

Also in *The Wisdom of the Guides*, Jennifer Olsen who guides in Montana and Sweden says when newcomers struggle with casting it is because they can't feel the rod bending:

"So the first thing I do is overline the rod. Immediately. At least by one line weight."

Restricting upper torso movement and enhancing casting accuracy can best be achieved by emulating the stance of the participants in a sport where nothing else counts – Olympic pistol shooters. A right-handed shottist stands with the right foot forward. So too, do darts players.

Art Lee devotes a chapter to this in his book *Lore of Trout Fishing* (Human Kinetics, 1999). The chapter is entitled 'The "Right" Foot Forward'.

The casting stroke is short, stopping the rod at 12 o'clock on the back cast and ten o'clock on the forward cast.

Casting with your forefinger on top of the grip makes it difficult to take the rod beyond 12 o'clock on the back cast.

And, as Tom Sutcliffe always intones, "Left hand down!"

This creates a tight loop with a minimum of effort.

If you want to see some other-worldly fly casting when tightly hemmed in by vegetation then buy the DVD or do a YouTube search for the three-part series 'A Casting Approach to Dry Fly Fishing in Tight Brush by Joe Humphreys' which is also available in YouTube Clips. A Joe Loughran article, unfortunately no longer traceable by an internet search, gave useful information on the hand positions and pressures required to generate tight loops and accurate casts.



Forefinger on top of the grip, left hand down. Tom Sutcliffe fishing the Coldbrook Stream in Barkly East

Here is a summary of his approach using short rods and I seek to bring it to the attention of the widest-possible audience here:

“A key to accurate casting with these short rods (5’ to 7’) is to execute both your back cast and forecast with a very short casting stroke, the shorter the better. Smooth acceleration to an immediate stop, almost like punching a wall, then hold the rod stopped until the cast is almost completely laid out.”

“Another tip... to increase speed and accuracy very quickly... AS YOU ARE EXECUTING YOUR BACK CAST... OPEN YOUR 3 LOWER FINGERS... control the rod with your thumb and fore finger – keep the back of the rod handle up against the fleshy part of your hand. HOLD THE ROD WITH THESE TWO FINGERS THROUGH THE BACK CAST... Then, just as you are finishing your fore-cast... SHARPLY SQUEEZE... THE 3 FINGERS TOGETHER AGAINST THE LOWER PART OF THE ROD HANDLE and your thumb against the top of the rod handle... THIS GIVES A FINAL, RAPID ACCELERATION TO THE STOPPING of the rod... SPEEDING UP THE LINE AND IMPROVING ACCURACY... TAKES A LITTLE PRACTICE BUT REALLY IMPROVES A CAST IN A TIGHT SITUATION.”

“If there is a disadvantage with the short rod, I think it is more likely to be with the fisherman than the rods. I am not talking about line speed, or well executed hauling, I am referring to applying power at the wrong time during the casting stroke (most likely at the beginning of the forecast). A shorter rod (with a fast or even medium fast action) will not be very forgiving of overpowered casts.”

Enhancing short casts with short rods is a rod which loads easily and split cane is the material which best meets this criterion. A new generation of fiberglass rods is edging closer to that ideal.

The nature of delicately fishing the trout streams near Cape Town with a dry fly often involves fishing in hot weather and making many casts every hour.

Because I am slightly built, and was middle-aged when I started fly fishing, my assumption was that the one-ounce rod was a desirable goal, which meant carbon fibre.

If you want to build the ultimate low-mass seven-and-a-half-foot fly rod for fishing small mountain streams, you start with a single-piece 0-weight Sage Dart.

At the time of writing in late 2022 I started reading *Mostly Bamboo – Eighteen Bamboo, Fiberglass and Graphite Fly Rod Makers in Japan* by Yuki Bando and I started re-thinking the role of the one-ounce small stream fly rod.

Lightness as a goal is important but, what is more important I now realise, is the easy-loading capability of a rod material in achieving the twin goals of casting with minimum effort and maximum accuracy and this is outlined in the ‘Haneda here’ chapter 4.

Advances in fiberglass technology have resulted in increased interest among small stream fly anglers in seven foot or shorter light-line fly rods.

I recently saw some drone footage of a fly angler on a Cape stream. What was startling was the level of water disturbance on a conventional back cast.

The line literally sliced into the water, dispersing water on the back cast, something emphasised by the bright sunshine which is the norm on southern hemisphere trout streams.

I sought to counter this in two ways – first by greasing the line and the leader with Mucilin, the least-expensive heavy paste on the market, to glide it off the water on the back cast and secondly by starting the cast using an abbreviated roll-cast, what Lefty Kreh calls the ‘roll pickup’.

It assumes that you are using a rod which loads with a meter of line outside the top guide – split cane, fiberglass or an over-lined carbon fiber rod specifically designed for short-range, delicate-presentation fishing such as the current Sage Dart.

You execute the first part of a roll cast, sliding the line off the water as delicately as you can. Then, as

the line unfolds over the water on the forward stage of the cast, you do not complete it but go straight into a conventional back cast. This disturbs the water less than a conventional back cast.

I did that all the time, on every possible cast until it became second nature and this approach is based on another important premise, that repeated false casting on a small stream increases the possibility of failure.

The steep-sided mountain valleys on the trout streams near Cape Town are hot in the middle of summer and energy conservation to facilitate concentration was important to me as a slightly built and middle-aged person. I was, for this reason, grateful for the fact that, as a graduate from spin-fishing, I had become accustomed as a right-handed caster to reeling with my left hand.

It is an easy skill to master with a little persistence and it brings significant benefits if you consider how often in a fishing day you switch the rod from hand to hand if you both cast and reel with your right hand. Most people are right-handed and, while small stream trout rarely take line from the reel, controlling a fish from your more-adept hand and reeling with your left gives you more control and saves time.

False casting is also used to remove water from a sodden dry fly which is a constant problem if you don't grease your fly line down to the hook eye and this creates a significant fish-scaring problem if you are fishing a large-hackled fly like the Tony Biggs RAB

If any part of your leader sinks, this large-hackled pattern is dragged beneath the water surface and audibly leaves it on the back cast. Then as the forward cast begins, the water is dispelled in a fine mist which is incandescent on a bright day. I started greasing my entire leader up to the fly after this was recommended by Tom Rosenbauer in his book, 'The Orvis Guide to Prospecting for Trout'.

I never had reason to regret this in a small stream environment. This brings me to – drum roll and peal of trumpets ...

Ed's immutable first rule of small stream fly fishing which reads:

If you hook streamside vegetation on the back cast and you manage to free the fly ...

... and you do not change the position of your feet or make your next cast over the opposite shoulder ..

... on your next cast the fly will end up in the same place except...

... this time you will not be able to free it.

(South African trout stream guides who supply their clients with flies prefer to use 5x tippets because retrieving flies from streamside vegetation becomes a more viable option than if the client is using a 6 or 7x tippet.)

You will be doing yourself a big favour as a small stream fly angler by watching the original DVD version of the Joe Humphreys video '*A casting approach to dry fly tactics in tight brush*'.

Keeping dry flies dry

I used a three-step approach to drying flies after catching a trout:

Wash the fly in the stream to remove fish slime.

Insert the hook bend into thin rubber band on the front of your fly vest. Stretch the rubber band by pulling the tippet and then twang the rubber band like a guitar string. The resultant vibration expels most of the water on the fly.

Squeeze the fly in tissue paper. Blow on it to fluff it up.

Apply desiccant powder.

Knots

I used three – the Blood Knot for leaders, the Perfection Loop to create my loop-to-loop strike indicator system and the Duncan Loop for attaching fly to tippet.

Gary Borger uses what he calls the 5/7 Blood Knot, particularly when joining mono with a big diameter difference – five turns of the heavier nylon and seven turns with the lighter.

He also has a caution about tying the Perfection Loop:

Do not pull the short end of this knot when making the final tightening. If you do, the knot flips over and becomes a slip knot.

My Perfection Loop-to-Perfection Loop method of strike detection when using tiny flies on shaded mountain streams involves the use of bright mono such as Rio Two Tone Indicator mono for the 3x loop which is then joined to a 4x section which also includes a Perfection Loop.

Grease the leader with Mucilin and then, between the loops, slip some orange egg yarn which has been treated with Watershed or a similar floatant and left to dry.

Skafars leader grease or the new Hareline Sighting Leader Wax increases leader visibility or you can use Loon Biostrike putty on the leader knots.

If you switch from a small nymph or sunken terrestrial pattern to an easily-visible dry fly, simply slip the 3 and 4x loops apart and remove the egg yarn.

The Duncan Loop in its normal configuration slips closed when under tension which provides a little shock absorption when using fine tippets.

I used it with a different goal – to allow the fly movement on the tippet.

There seems to be consensus that the most accomplished small stream fly anglers in the world are to be found in Japan and you'll notice that, for this reason, their dry flies are attached with loop knots and are not attached rigidly to the tippet.

When Tom Sutcliffe and I visited Maclear in the Eastern Cape, we stayed with Ron Moore and his wife Robin who farmed on the banks of the Little Pot River.

Robin routinely beat the men in regional dam fishing competitions. She said she was no better than them and used the same flies that they did. She said her secret was using a Rapala knot – a loop knot which, like Lefty Kreh's non-slip loop knot, allowed the fly more freedom of movement on the tippet.

I approached it somewhat differently because with a hand tremor and poor eyesight I struggled with Lefty's Knot.

I wanted an easy-to-tie loop knot which did not slip under tension.

To achieve this, I used Loon Knot Sense and a 'third hand' when attaching my fly to the tippet with a Duncan Loop.

The heat generated in tightening a knot weakens it which is why we lubricate them with saliva before tightening. Loon Knot Sense is a better lubricant.

When you tie a knot, you need three hands – one holds the hook, another the tippet which leaves you short of a hand to hold onto the tag end of the knot.

When changing flies, I would sit in the shade with the rod across my thighs.

When the knot was constructed and ready for tightening, I would apply the resin, and tuck the hook into the stripper guide on my rod. This would leave my hands free to hold the tippet and the tag end of the knot.

I would then cure the tightened knot with the little Loon UV light - which has since been replaced with the Nano Light - or simply turn my body towards the sun.

On the rare occasions when I wanted to change flies midstream, I would use the snap swivel which I had attached to the front of my fly-fishing vest, tucking the rod butt in the pocket on the thigh of my wading pants which I had a seamstress make for me out of quick-drying synthetic material.

An automatic tuck cast

When I joined the Cape Piscatorial Society in 1978, I fished with the recommended, commercially-available dry fly, the Caribou Spider, a clipped deer pattern with a small parachute hackle around a red chenille post. It was justifiably popular being almost unsinkable and easy to follow during the drift.

There were days, however, when the trout were unresponsive and no rises were to be seen.

The answer, I was told, was to fish a nymph.

How did you know, I asked, when a trout had taken the nymph?

You'll see your line tip move, I was told – but I never detected any such movement.

Then Dave Whitlock came into my life through a series of articles in *Fly Fisherman* magazine.

He advocated sliding a short section of bright orange floating fly line onto your leader, but I took it a step further. I threaded it onto a section of fluorescent yellow Stren nylon and marked the nylon on either side of the fly line with a black permanent marker.

Shortly afterwards, I caught my first trout on the nymph and it vividly brought home to me the words of G E M Skues in *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*:

'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 home 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'.

There was nothing subtle in my first experience of catching a trout using a strike indicator.

The orange, yellow and black section of my greased leader slowed to a halt and then dipped below the water surface.

It dawned on me that perhaps my nymph had not hooked the stream bed and, as if in a dream, everything seemed to happen in slow motion as I eventually raised my rod tip and realised that I had caught a trout on a nymph.

I subsequently settled on a loop-to-loop section in my leader into which I slid a small piece of glob yarn previously waterproofed with Loon Hydro Stop and allowed to dry.

This, I found, altered the aerodynamics of the leader and, when used with a small sunken beetle in spring and my copper wire ants in summer and autumn, the leader would stop in mid-air at the end of the cast and the #16 beetle (weighted with a 1mm countersunk brass bead) or the copper wire ant would hinge downwards in an automatic tuck cast.

Joe Humphreys called this the 'Tuck Cast' but it was a technique which was arguably articulated first by Frank Sawyer in his 1970 book, *Nymphs and the Trout*:

'To make a nymph pitch and sink quickly, the best method I have found is to stop the rod on the downward stroke in casting and check the running line passing through the left hand just when it is extended horizontally over the water. This check tends to make the nymph curl downwards with the cast and then penetrate the water before the line falls'.

I found the orange strike indicator easy to follow on the water and the use of sunken terrestrials

worked well for me.

If there was a favourable upstream breeze, the RAB was a joy to use as it descended softly, was easy to follow for that reason and, affected by the slightest breeze, it seemed to almost quiver during the drift.

Al McClane prescribed them for what he called 'creep and crawl' fishing but they do not seem to feature in the small stream annals of the USA and the UK.

There is a 'RABs and Variants' folder on the CPS website which provides useful information on a type of fly which has become justifiably iconic on the trout streams near Cape Town.

All of these factors enhanced my small stream approach which involved, as Tom Sutcliffe explained at the start of this chapter, exploratory casts with short drifts, fishing the pockets and runs where the broken water surface served to mask my approach.

I avoided the smooth and flat sections of the stream because pocket water compensates for a multitude of sins. Firstly, the window of a trout lying in shallow water is small, so you have less chance of being seen.

Furthermore, it only sees a dry fly when it is relatively close meaning that it must react quickly leaving it little time for scrutiny of the rapidly approaching fly.

One thing I have never regretted is following the advice of Tom Rosenbauer and greasing the entire leader from fly line to tippet when fishing boisterous pocket water.

My small stream approach is not, as recent experience proves, a more productive method than Euro-nymphing with a French leader, it was simply a less-fatiguing method which I found, through trial and error, to be the one that I enjoyed most.





CHAPTER 9

Something Struggling

A Fly Design Rationale



Kick: *There is a quality which every hackled wet fly, for use in rough water, should invariably have. Without it, it is a dead thing; with it, it is alive and struggling; and the fly which is alive and struggling has a fascination for trout which no dead thing has. How is this quality to be attained? It is a very simple matter. Finish behind the hackle.*

From *'The Way of a Trout with a Fly'* by G E M Skues (1921).

'After long years of trial and error I have come to the conclusion that shape or profile is important, sometimes exaggerated size, sometimes colour, but most of all movement'.

Arthur Cove, ***My Way with Trout*** The Crowood Press 1986.

It was a hot and humid day on a trout stream near Cape Town.

These streams hold both trout and smallmouth bass and the latter only make themselves obvious during the heat of summer, usually from December through to February when the trout, in turn are most discernible in the early morning and as twilight closes in.

Suddenly, at midday, a nuptial flight of ants carpeted the water - but there was no response from the trout.

In a side eddy I spotted a small bass.

Ants, clustered together, drifting inertly, floated overhead and were ignored.

Then a single ant, still alive and struggling, would arrive in its field of vision and the rise was instant.

It offered far less food value than the clump of ants, but it was alive and struggling and the vulnerability factor triggered the take.

For me, that incident provided an important lesson in the critical role that movement, either created by soft and mobile materials used in the tying process or induced by rod movement or retrieve, plays in fly fishing success or failure. It was also the first in a series of dots which slowly and serendipitously connected to show the linkages for trout between energy conservation and vulnerability and movement, conclusions reached by Kelly Galloup in his book 'Cripples and Spinners' and by Dave Hughes and by Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker in their two recent books.

What is significant in the context of Skues' observation is that in two countries distant from one another, Japan and Italy, country folk who depended in some measure on stream fish for sustenance or income, came to the same conclusion that he did. In Japan the Sakasa Kebari patterns and the Valasesiana patterns from the Sesia valley in the Piedmont region of northern Italy were both characterised by forward-jutting hackles.

A caveat I must stress about this article and the type of fishing I preferred is that it is focused entirely on small, shallow, boisterous forest streams where the vegetation encroaches the water providing a steady supply of terrestrials. In such streams, the trout's window of vision is small forcing it to make quick decisions on whether to rise or not and facilitating a close approach by the angler.

The pivotal role of energy conservation under such conditions was brought home to me when I was fishing the Eerste Stream which runs through the university town of Stellenbosch.

I sat down in the shade of a tree to enjoy a sandwich when I spotted a trout a few feet away. It was lying next to a rock and its right eye exactly aligned with a spot on the rock.

It took my fly on the first cast and, out of curiosity, I filled my hat with water and carried the fish about 50 meters upstream to the next pool where I released it.

I returned to my half-eaten sandwich and few minutes later the trout slid back into its home pool and resumed its previous position, its eye exactly aligned with the spot on the rock where I had previously noticed it.

Clearly, at that exact spot, it had found a position where it had protection from current pressure, least risk of predation and the best opportunity to spot food being carried towards it by the current.

Inspired by the articles in *Fly Fisherman* magazine in the early 1980s about the development by Ernest Schweibert and Ed Koch of hopper patterns on the Letort, I decided to create my own and it provided yet another lesson in the importance of movement in the design of trout flies.



'My Moby Dick', William Humphrey's wonderful 1979 book about his pursuit of a giant trout, resonates with me whenever I look at this photograph of my first attempt at tying a hopper imitation about 40 years ago.

It combined the features of many other successful hopper patterns, a body of furred yellow wool and a wing of golden pheasant tippet feather because all the Australian hopper patterns have this feature and if it worked there it would work for me. The pièce de résistance, the rubber legs, projected backwards from the spun and clipped deer hair head and were mottled with a permanent marker.

First cast. When I twitched the hopper towards me, the legs closed against the body and then popped open again when the forward motion ceased. Entranced and enchanted, I admired my fly-tying genius. At that moment a big head appeared and my 5x tippet snapped in an instant. I often went back to that spot, but My Moby Dick was never seen again and the memory still haunts me.

When hoppers land in the water they drift for a few seconds and then start kicking towards the shore and that kicking movement has its own attraction.

Gordon van der Spuy, author of two books on fly tying and the inspiration for this book, had a similar experience. He was on top of rock face looking down at a friend who was fishing a hopper.

The water was clear and the rises obvious. When the fly drifted inertly it was ignored, when it was twitched, activating the rubber legs, the response was instantaneous – yet another example of the importance of movement as a trigger.

Dave Lambroughton of British Columbia uses a foam rubber spider with rubber legs because of its ability to lure steelhead from the bottom and this is echoed by New Zealand guide Dean Bell in the anthology 'New Zealand's Best Trout Flies' (Pheasant Tail Publishing, 2006). He says the spider's 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."



My interpretation of Dave Lambroughton's #16 spider

The inherent movement of large hackle Variants is another case in point and the oversize hackle which creates it can be seen in the example held by Tom Sutcliffe (below left) and two examples tied by Tony Biggs (below right).



Al McClane, fishing editor of *Field and Stream* for three decades, had a huge influence on the evolution of dry fly fishing on the mountain streams near Cape Town. His articles and books undoubtedly played a role in the development of Tony Biggs' RAB – and you can read that story in the RABs and Variants' folder in the articles section of the Cape Piscatorial Society website.

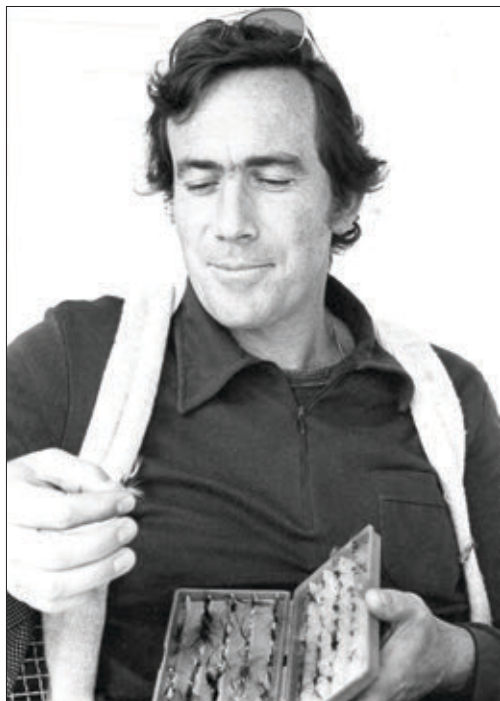
In his 1975 book *The Practical Fly Fisherman* McClane writes about Variants and Spiders, dry flies tied with oversize hackles on small hooks which ensure a soft, slow descent:

'If you were to fish every day during that period of the

year when trout rise to floating flies—using a spider or variant—you would catch your daily share of trout and probably hook some of the largest ones that will ever come to any dry fly. I won't even make exceptions about where you do this fishing. Provided it is water with a normal fly-eating trout population, you are going to get a chance at every fish who wants to be caught and even a few who usually know better.

The great attraction of this fly is its ethereal, almost lifelike ability to dance across the surface. It will even turn around on the water, and the slightest change in current or puff of wind will send it skating for a few inches before floating again. The secret of course, is in the hackle, which may be two inches or more in diameter, depending on the hook size. Hook and hackle are out of proportion to each other, the hackle being roughly three or more times greater than the hook would regularly require in an ordinary dry fly. The reactions of trout to a spider-type fly are different from their responses toward ordinary flies. Logical behaviour among trout is nothing more than a pleasant myth at best; the spider, for instance, commonly causes the fish to rise above the surface and take the fly going down. Now whether this is because the fly actually excites them, or because the sensitive movement of a spider simulates an active insect about to take off, I am not sure. I have caught many trout this way, and over a long period of time the only impression left me is that the fish were anxious that the fly should not escape'.

I have had the same experience of South African trout shooting out of the water and descending on a RAB, taking it as they re-entered the water.



(L) Tony Biggs examines one of his RABs with a critical eye. Photo by Tom Sutcliffe

Dragonflies and damselflies are ever-present and one of the most conspicuous insects on the trout streams near Cape Town in the heat of summer. There is no doubt that they are tracked in the air and become particularly vulnerable when mating or egg-laying. Sometimes they will dip down to capture an insect floating in the current and be taken in the process.

In South Africa they are particularly active in June, July and August and are especially vulnerable when mating and egg laying.

The advent of mirrorless cameras with shutter speeds of 1/32 000th of a second has enabled photographers like Steven Ooi to fill his @finripplemediaia Instagram pages with high-definition photographs of trout seizing dragon and mayflies in midair.

I believe that trout assume the RAB in its slow descent to be a dragonfly. In the conventional Variant dressing, the body material is tied in by the tip at the hook bend and wound forward to the hackle, creating a tapered body.

Tony Biggs turned this process around because he wanted the tips of the herl to be splayed open where the body meets the hackle so as to create what he called 'legs'.



Egg-laying damselflies - Photo by Warwick Tarboton

To achieve this, he tied about four herls in by the butts behind the hackle tie-in point, twisted them together and wrapped the fused combination back to the hook bend. He then reversed direction, winding the herl forward and splayed them in an arc behind the hackle. They are lengthy and easily catch the wind.

RABS tied by Tony Biggs

You can see some SBS sketches in Tom Sutcliffe's article 'Tying the RAB' in the 'RABs and Variants' folder on the website of the Cape Piscatorial Society. Other articles in the folder testify to its outstanding qualities as a small stream attractor dry.

One of the greatest small stream pleasures is to fish a RAB if you have an upstream breeze – you can roll cast it all day.

To avoid tippet twist, I tied mine on a size 14 Orvis Big Eye Hook using a Surgeon's Swivel knot which allowed the fly to spin freely around the 4x tippet. In Japan, regarded by many as having the best small stream fly anglers in the world, the dry fly is often attached to the tippet with a loop knot – again seeking to maximise movement.

The RAB, like all flies of this type, seems to have a life of its own, shivering with every fluctuation of the breeze and tug of the current and it is that movement which ensures its enduring success.

In an article published in his Paracaddis blog, Tim Rolston, now back in Britain, but for many years Cape Town's top guide, asked 'What Makes the RAB work'?

Tom Sutcliffe provided the obvious answer – movement:

'The fly 'floats' very nicely just prior to hitting the water's surface. I think that last 10cm just prior to hitting the surface is an area which fish survey, and few flies spend as much time in that zone as the RAB.

One other key to the RAB is its 'legs' and how they make the fly dance on the water in a slight breeze, they are like a tiny sail and often you get some rather odd movement on the water from a RAB that a traditional dry will not give you.

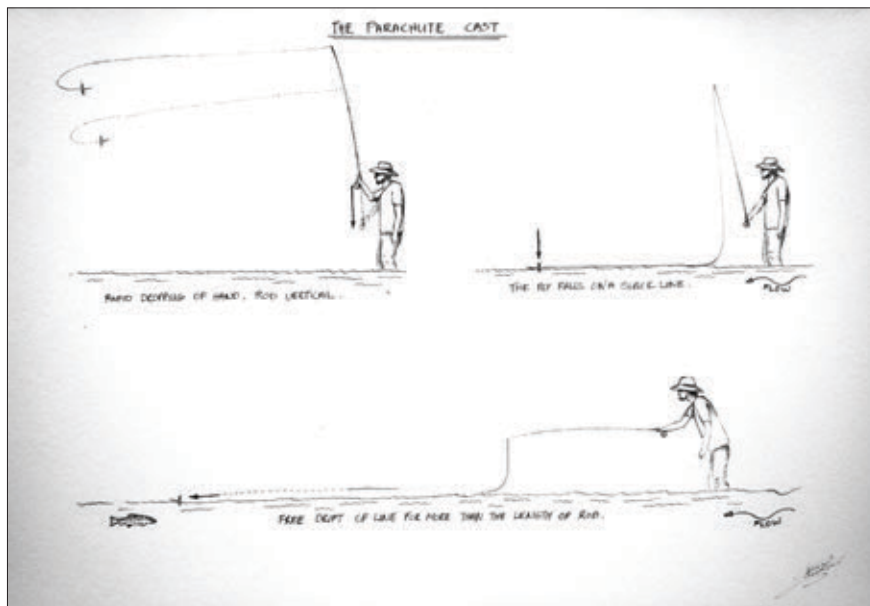
This is one of the failings of the parachute version.'

Trying to cast the RAB into a downstream wind is an exercise in futility unless you are exceptionally skilled and the answer is to cast with the wind using the Parachute Cast which I first saw illustrated in the Charles Ritz book, *'A Fly Fisher's Life: The Art and Mechanics of Fly Fishing'*.

You stop the rod high, pull the energy out of the cast by dropping the elbow and then feed the line downstream with the flow.

Firstly, there is a low-pressure area ahead of large boulders where trout often hold and your fly reaches these areas ahead of the leader and, secondly, these rocks are often backlit making them easier to locate.

CHAPTER 9



Two dry flies dominated our thinking on stream in the late 1970, Tony's tip-toe RAB and Mark Mackereth's flush floating, clipped and spun Caribou Spider. You can read the history of Mark's fly in the 'Terrestrials' folder of the CPS archives and the history of the RAB in the 'RABs and Variant's' folder.

The Caribou Spider gradually lost public interest, but the RAB was given a new lease of life when Tom Sutcliffe added a circle of squirrel tail hair to the hackle, a variation he called the 'High-Water RAB'.

As I see it, an approximate post-war chronology of small stream searching dries would read:

- Caribou Spider – Mark Mackereth
- RAB – Tony Biggs
- Squirrel Hair High Water RAB – Tom Sutcliffe
- Halo Hackle Parachute – Tom Sutcliffe
- Para RAB – Philip Meyer
- Rubber Tail Emergers – Ed Herbst
- Wolf Spider – Leonard Flemming and later versions by Peter Brigg
- Light Bulb Terrestrials – Stephen Boshoff

South African fly tyers, most specifically Tom Sutcliffe and Philip Meyer, have added squirrel tail hair to conventional dry flies and Klinkhåmer -type emergers with advantage but it seems to be an advantage that has occurred in few other countries.

Around the time that Tom created the squirrel hair High-Water RAB, I came across the term "Halo Hackle" in the November 1984 issue of the British magazine, *Trout Fisherman*. It was in an article by

English International John Ketley called, 'Tying to Test a Saint' and I was so intrigued I sent it to all my friends.

The author had bought an expensive genetic cape and, wanting to conserve these feathers he used less expensive and softer feathers at the eye and wound the smaller, stiffer genetic hackle up behind it as reinforcement. This proved exceptionally successful on the Test and he called these 'Halo Hackle' patterns.

I showed the article to Tom and also shared with him some Coq du Leon feathers I had acquired. He combined the two feathers in a conventional vertical hackle fly and wrote an article on this hackle-stacking method for the first issue of *The Complete Flyfisherman* magazine.



Fred Steynberg's Wolf Spider imitation combines a rooster and partridge feather in parachute configuration on a Wapsi foam bug body

I was later to realise that he had combined both game and rooster feathers in a parachute pattern when I spotted it on a Wolf Spider imitation being used by Fred Steynberg in Rhodes. He told me that Tom had introduced the concept at a clinic that Fred's guiding company, Linecasters, had held in Rhodes and he had used it with a Wapsi Bug Body.

Initially the two feathers were wound individually but the publicity afforded to the split thread technique by Marc Petitjean and the tools he developed made it possible to wind them simultaneously. Then, super strong and ultrathin GSP threads made it possible to insert the feathers into a loop before creating the multi-feather parachute hackle.

Adding rubber tails to emergers

Nothing produces movement like rubber strands and Al Troth was an early exponent with his Girdle Bug.

In *The Wisdom of the Guides* he tells of an occasion when he was fishing the Bighorn River with his son, Eric, using a rubber-leg hopper:

“We’re coming down one of the first runs just below the put-in place at the dam, and he dropped the fly out. I can still see the thing happening. A nice big brown came up and hung under the fly. I said ‘Shake the rod tip’. He shook the rod tip and the legs twitched a little bit, then POW, gone.”

Around the time that Tom Sutcliffe was developing his Halo Hackle flies I was experimenting with the Klinkhåmer and by good fortune I imported some ultra-thin rubber strands from the Montana Fly Company and felt there would be merit in adding them as two dangling tails at the bend of the Klink.



A slant tank photo of a rubber-tailed Klink-type emerger provides a trout's eye view of the fly

Trout seemed to start slowly rising to it when it was further away than normal because they could see its approach from further away and I was getting more strikes than I was on conventional Klinks.

The reason for its success is not difficult to discern.

The strands double the length of the fly without adding weight or adversely affecting its aerodynamics.

They add exponentially to the fly's movement with the currents twitching the strands this way and that.

Rhodes-based guide Tony Kietzman was also using the Klink as his general searching fly and I gave

him some of the rubber strands promising him that adding them would double his catch rate.

He did and he did.



Tony Kietzman's Edhåmer – thin rubber tails, stripped peacock quill body, six turns of dun hackle and a pink Antron post because it is the easiest to spot on the water

With a few tweaks of his own, he came up with a fly illustrated above which he calls the Edhåmer...



(L) Success on the Edhåmer. Tony Kietzman fishing the Coldbrook stream in Barkly East

Such rubber tails would work just as well on Bob Wyatt's Deer Hair Emerger, Hans Weilenmann's CDC and Elk and similar patterns. As it is, Weilenmann added to the attraction of his fly by replacing rooster hackle with CDC which has far more movement.

Then Hareline brought out a thin translucent strand which it called Daddy Long Legs. Mottling these strands with a permanent marker added to the illusion of movement.

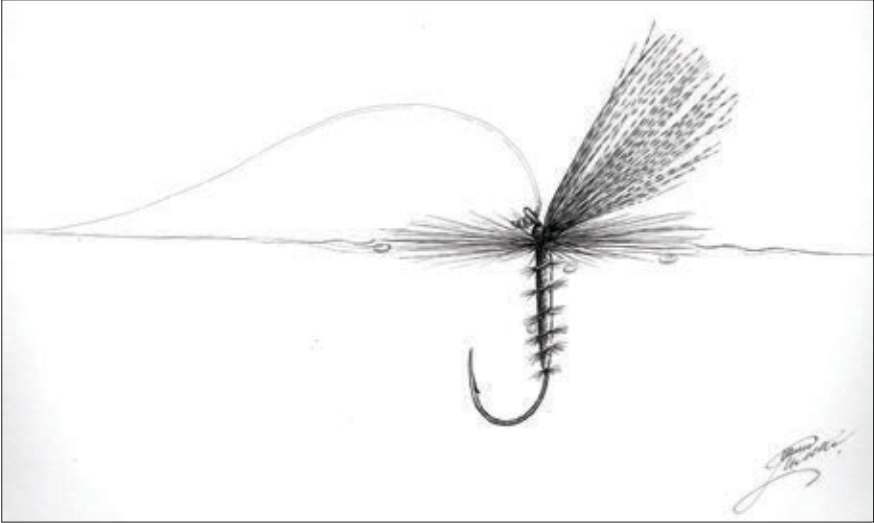
Then there are the materials which give the *illusion of movement*.

Years ago, when Fritz/Cactus Chenille came on the market it was used by stillwater anglers for Blobs but then the late Steve Parton, float tubing pioneer in the UK, wrote an article extolling its virtues for dry flies. I tied some foam rubber-backed beetles with Cactus Chenille bodies and did very well with them fished static on dams. They seemed to be moving as they rocked in the ripple and the light flickered back and forth over the mylar strands. Patrolling trout were often drawn to the fly which was static but gave the impression of a struggling insect.

CHAPTER 9

Since then, Semperfli and other companies have introduced Straggle Legs, Micro Fritz and similar materials in differing colours.

If these are combined with the half-in, half-out illusion of the emerger which dates from the time of the British Mole Fly and the French Pont Audemer, you have a fly with built-in vulnerability.



**The Pont Audemer. Gary LaFontaine called this type of pattern 'hanging flies'.
His version, 'the Occasion', had two hackle tip wings**

Add a double parachute hackle using two types of feathers, the foam rubber thorax devised by Morten Oland and dangling rubber tails and you have a fly which combines a vulnerable posture with a kaleidoscopic impression of movement.



A halo-hackled Klink tied Morten Oland style by Caleb Willmot using snowshoe hare for the wing

Alternatively, a spinner wing of floating yarn split by foam rubber would add to the illusion of vulnerability and increase lateral support.

The origins of the fly I was working towards which emphasised movement and vulnerability can be found in an article 'The Zakhâmer – Re-thinking the Klinkhâmer Special' which I wrote for Tom Sutcliffe's 'Sprit of Flyfishing' website.

I incorporated all these ideas in the Zakhâmer Special at the request of expat South African publisher, Paul Curtis, now living in Wales. His request was a Klinkhâmer made with the materials that Tom used for his Zak Nymph an impressionistic 'tied in the round' nymph.

To create as much buoyancy behind the hook eye I used a piece of orange Fettuccine Foam as the parachute-support post and cupped that from below with a 'U' shaped piece of soft Larva Lace foam. The created a resilient base for the dual CDL and CDC split-thread parachute hackle to bite into. I got this idea, the invention of Danish guide, Morten Oland, after reading about it in an article by Oliver Edwards

What Paul returned to me some months later was unrecognizable – he said it had been torn to pieces in record time by the trout and grayling in Wales.

In a later development I provided the fly with even more movement by allowing it to pivot freely around the hook eye – as described in a later chapter.

But, in examining its evolution to its current form which is a parachute fly using squirrel tail hair as the supporting medium you must go back to the early 1980s when Tom Sutcliffe added squirrel tail hair and two grizzly hackle tips to the RAB, a fly he called the 'High Water RAB'.

Squirrel tail hair began appearing on more and more RABs until in some instances the circumference of the squirrel hair circle was wider than that of the feather.



A High-Water RAB tied by Peter Brigg

Then came another dramatic change and the first of its kind of which I am aware and shown here in one of the FOSAF books on South African fly tyers:

To facilitate movement on the water of the fly while preparing for the World Championships, Philip



Meyer added a vertical spike of squirrel tail hair jutting upwards from the hook eye. This was an attempt to utilise the air currents at water level to induce movement in the fly, something that I had never seen before.

I interviewed Philip for the second DVD, 'A South African Fly-Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and Friends' which I produced with Andrew Ingram and here are the links for the video series which includes him

tying his signature fly.

<https://vimeo.com/567798545>

<https://vimeo.com/573845780>

Gordon van der Spuy, for his sterling book 'The Feather Mechanic' then flattened the squirrel hair into a semi-circle and that is the most popular form right now, see below.



At around the same time Jan Korrubel and Peter Brigg both projected a spike of squirrel hair forward of the hook eye in an attempt to achieve the same objective



Jan Korrubel's version of the PARA Rab dropped the vertical tuft of squirrel tail hair at the eye of the hook to the horizontal so that water-level air currents could facilitate fly movement



Peter Brigg's PARA Rab with forward-projecting squirrel tail hair

Another pattern which emphasises the role of movement is the Squirmy Wormy, now a staple in every competitive fly angler's box - and there can be no accolade greater than that.

Lesotho provides another example of the importance of movement in fly design.

In areas where the riverbed is flat stone with little shelter for trout or yellowfish, they would tuck themselves into fissures in the rock and would ignore Perdigon-type bead head nymphs.

It was only when a turn or two of CDC in a dubbing loop was added behind the bead that they could be persuaded to strike.

The response to the movement of the manipulated dry fly is well documented in two books, Leonard M Wright's *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect* (1972) which focused on caddis and Harry Murray's 1989 book *Fly Fishing for Smallmouth Bass*.

Instead of an upstream dead drift during caddis hatches, Wright advocated an across and down presentation with a twitch – the 'sudden inch' when the fly reached the trout.

'Trout will 'often' move five – even ten – feet to one side for an insect that's making a surface disturbance while they'll seldom swing more than a foot outside their feeding lane for a quiet one.'

Murray also writes about the explosive response when Edward Hewitt's Neversink Skater is skimmed across the water surface. Hewitt's fly, which was specifically developed for this tactic, comprised two large spade hackles tied dull side to dull side on a small, short shank hook so that the tips converged.

Thus manipulated, the skater produced ***'wonderful fishing on hundreds of occasions.'***

Much the same principle motivated Frank Sawyer's Induced Take and the Leisenring Lift.

My sense is that the large-hackled variants such as the RAB are successful for the same reason.

Building movement into a fly is an evolving facet of fly design and examples of cross-genre creation where ideas are borrowed from other types of angling are Marc Petitjean's Magic Head which uses a plastic cone at the hook eye to emulate the side-to-side wiggle of a bass plug, and Blane Cocklett's

Game Changer which achieves a similar effect.

Rubber tails

'Trout eat living things. Motion is a sign of life' (Lee Wulff on Flies Stackpole Books, 1980)

Trout research indicates that movement and contrast enable them to locate prey but, of late, the concept of vulnerability is attracting increasing interest.

This was first brought to my attention in an article 'Anting the Hatch' by Ken Miyata in the October 1982 issue of the American magazine *Fly Fisherman*. Miyata found that even when trout were selectively feeding on a mayfly or caddis hatch, they would not refuse an ant. And in his 2008 book *Spring Creeks* Mike Lawson says: *'Most of the time I use beetles when I can't catch by matching the hatch.'*

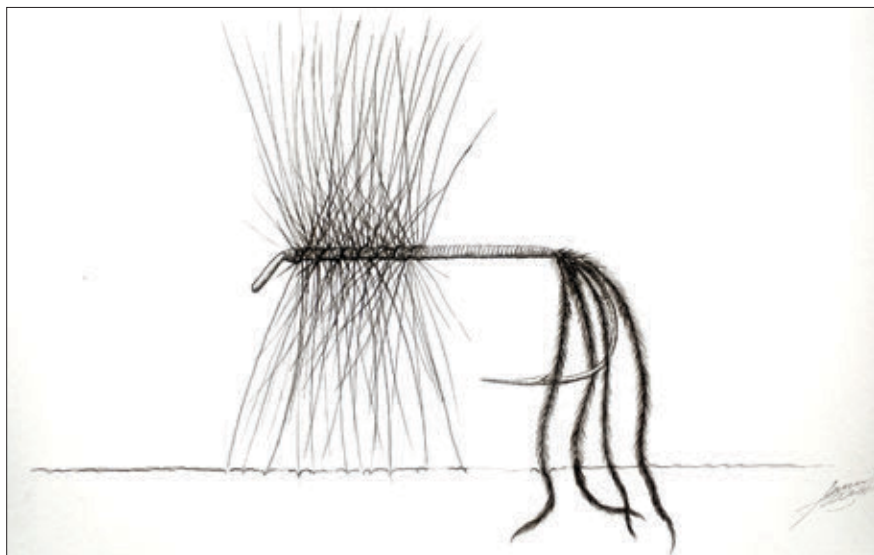
I would argue that vulnerability is the defining factor here. Mayflies and caddis, unless they get stuck in the shuck, emerge rapidly resulting in splashy rises. The ant and the beetle are a sure thing - they are going nowhere other than downstream.

Bob Wyatt has written at length about this factor in articles punting his Deer Hair Emerger but I believe that by adding rubber tails to this fly he would be adding movement to its impression of vulnerability.

Part of my thinking in this regard came from Gary LaFontaine's fly, the Shroud, except that he used marabou at the bend of the hook rather than rubber tails to create a dry fly with exceptional tail movement.

Here's the sentence from *The Dry Fly – New Angles* that resonated with me:

'In our observations of attractors, the dangling tail was a tremendous trait for pulling trout from a long distance.'



Gary LaFontaine's Shroud – part palmered rooster hackle, part dangling marabou tail

I believe however that two mottled fine rubber tails widely separated will produce more movement than a clump of marabou meshed together and they would enhance, I believe, several contemporary

patterns – the Plume Tip for one.

(By the same token, with more and more tyers adding beads to soft hackles, I see no ethical rationale for not adding light bulb rubber tails to traditional soft hackles.)

Besides my own success with my rubber tailed Slipknot Emerger which I detail in a later chapter, I have two anecdotal accounts to support this hypothesis. At my suggestion, Rhodes-based guide Tony Kietzman added rubber tails to his Klinks and, he says, the success rate increased substantially – so much so that he now calls this ‘improved’ version, the Edhâmer.

When a member of the Italian national fly-fishing team, Edoardo Ferrero visited Cape Town a decade ago he declared local streams to be ideal for soft hackles and Sean Mills became an instant convert.

Sean told me that trout usually spooked when a nymph or dry fly approached the tail of a pool and the drift rate increased suddenly as the current speeded up. However, this animated the fibres of the soft hackle and the sudden movement often prompted a reflexive strike.

His flies were pretty prosaic, as soft hackles are – thread bodies and a turn of hen or gamebird hackle. When I suggested adding rubber tails he said: “Ed, when my flies stop catching fish, I’ll consider changing them”. Later, he confessed that he had tried rubber tails and they had definitely increased his strike rate.

The thinnest rubber strand available is bait cotton used by rock and surf anglers for securing soft baits likes shrimps to hooks. It is an inexpensive, translucent material and can easily be mottled with a permanent marker. Loon UV Knot Sense is easy to work with and the drops adhere to the tip of the leg. Mottle the leg by holding it against the tip of an earbud while applying the ink.



Bead head soft hackles are increasingly being used and I see no ethical reason for their efficacy not to be increased by tying them with light bulb rubber tails.

Fly size

In the book by Datus Proper he writes that stream trout generally take flies #16 or smaller with less suspicion than bigger flies and this is because the average size of the insects they eat is around #20. Here are three links to articles that explain that:

<http://www.fosaf.co.za/tippetArchive-22.php>

<http://www.tomsutcliffe.co.za/fly-fishing/my-fly-fishing/item/905-surveys-on-insects-available-as-trout-food-and-how-to-sample-the-stomach-contents-of-trout.html>

<http://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/index.php/trout-diet-in-the-fynbos-biome>

The Mystery of the Orange Quill

"My suspicion is that color in trout flies is most art. It is important but mainly for building confidence in humans" Datus Proper 'What the Trout Said about the design of Trout flies and other Mysteries' (Knopf,1982)

McFylon is an interesting material – it stretches and is lighter than water – and is most often used in fish egg imitations. I sent some to Heather Ralph - @fishnwine – in Rhodes with the suggestion that it might make a useful strike indicator material.

She greased this poly yarn indicator with Loon Aqueal floatant and, fishing the Bell River where it runs past the village, she had a rainbow trout rise to it in three successive drifts. Whether it is rainbow trout on the streams near Cape Town or browns in the Bushmans River in Kwa Zulu Natal, the attraction of orange poly yarn strike indicators is universal and frustrating. But why does this happen?

G E M Skues, in his 1932 book, *Side-Lines, Side-Lights & Reflection* wrote that he had no idea why the Orange Quill was the most successful dry fly during the evening rise to the Blue Winged Olive, a *Baetis* species: *"It may be asked why the Orange Quill is taken at night for the BWO. I answer frankly, I don't know."*

(See: *G.E.M. Skues and the hatching BWO puzzle* on the Rackelhanen website.)

LaFontaine believes that the colour of the ambient light plays a significant role in the success of dry flies and, if trout are used to seeing floating prey bathed in orange light in the late afternoon, would they not, then, associate an orange yarn indicator with food?

The empirical discovery by G E M Skues and other fly anglers of that era that the Orange Quill was the most successful pattern during the late afternoon hatch of *Baetis* mayflies left these 'match the hatch' practitioners mystified. Seven decades were to pass before Gary LaFontaine and his team of scuba divers provided the answer while diving on the Abutment Pool on the Big Hole River in Montana where the sun is reflected from a cliff in late afternoon.

You will find the proof on page 206 of his 1990 book *The Dry Fly – New Angles: 'When the sun was hitting the cliff, after 4:30 PM., various orange patterns caught almost three times as many fish as they did during the morning.'* LaFontaine believes that the colour of the ambient light plays a significant role in the success of dry flies and, if trout are used to seeing floating prey bathed in orange light at dawn and in the late afternoon, would they not, then, associate an orange yarn indicator with food?

There is a great deal of empirical evidence to support that theory and we were provided with photographic evidence of LaFontaine's theory 12 years earlier with underwater photographs taken by Brian Clarke and John Goddard on page 89 of their book, *The Trout and the Fly*. *'The thin, outer edge of the outstretched wings glow orange in the dying light and where their feet touch the water surface there are silver starbursts of light'.*

I recall a survey being done a few years ago in an online yellowfish website and the majority of the respondents said a nymph with an orange bead was their most successful fly. I remember watching

hatchery trout at what was then the J L B Smith Institute of Ichthyology in Grahamstown attacking a trout with a missing gill cover and Martin Davies telling me he fed the trout their pellets from a red plastic bucket, ensuring all the while that his Walker's Killers and Mrs. Simpsons had a strong element of red in their tying. The role of orange as a trigger is everywhere in evidence – the Partridge and Orange soft hackle being the first that comes to mind. In Australia, hopper imitations almost invariably utilize golden pheasant tippets as wings, the Ausable Wulff by Fran Betters is another notable example, egg flies obviously, the Blob and many salmon flies.

In his 1960 book *A Man May Fish*, T C Kingsmill Moore who fished the Irish loughs wrote: *'There are at least three mystery colours, claret, gentian blue and bright orange which seem to have an attraction for fish not accountable by the occurrence of these colours in their natural food.'* MC Coetzer, one of our most experienced anglers in all aspects of the sport, including competitively, is adamant that orange rubber legs are an essential trigger on hopper patterns. His article on small stream fly patterns which is featured on Tom Sutcliffe's website is a valuable read.

Blue is a puzzling colour that plays a major role as a wire rib in New Zealand guide Ken Orr's 007 nymph and I notice that Dave Lambroughton uses a blue wire rib on some of his dry mayfly imitations. And what of yellow? According to Gary LaFontaine yellow signifies danger to trout and yet the Yallerhammer is a proven classic for brook trout in the Appalachian Mountain streams.

This makes me uncomfortable – in terms of my own very subjective small stream ethos, I wish to deceive the trout into believing my fly is edible rather than provoking curiosity or aggression.

The Pendulum Leg and a Light Bulb Moment



Stephen Boshoff's Light Bulb concept on a foam rubber spider

As I was writing this chapter, split cane rod master Stephen Boshoff sent me a small photograph of what he called his 'Light Bulb Ant'.

He said he wanted the ends of the CDC fibres, weighted with UV light-cured resin to create a pendulum movement and reflect light. This is my version of the idea, but I quickly realized that weighting the end of a fine rubber strand had much more potential, most specifically with the antennae of adult caddis which are very obvious but usually ignored by fly tyers.



Stephen Boshoff's CDC-hackled 'Light Bulb Ant' which should appeal to grayling

One could also weight the ends of rubber legs on small flies like ants and beetles if you use Loon Knot Sense on Bait Cotton – for some reason conventional UV resin does not stick to Hareline micro silicone rubber legs. The idea is in its infancy but, as understanding grows, I believe its application will become more widespread as this spider and hopper indicate.

Vulnerability

'Stillborns', 'cripples' 'stuck- in -the-shuck' 'single wing' 'sunk spinners' have been part of fly fishing's vernacular at least since Kelly Galloup revealed in his 2001 book, *Cripples and Spinners*, that 50 % of mayflies are injured during the transition from nymph- to egg-laying adult, that trout selectively prey



on these damaged insects and that this had been captured on film.

The footage shows in extreme closeup three mayflies riding the surface of the river. One is a completely emerged dun, one is an emerging dun and the third is a cripple caught in the nymphal shuck. As the mayflies drift along, a nice trout turns and come to them. It takes the cripple first, then changes the direction, circles, and takes the emerger. The healthy dun which was riding in the middle between the other two, is ignored altogether. The trout had to actually go out of its way to avoid taking the dun. That was enough proof for me.



When Galloup started studying trout feeding habits he discovered that 50 of the spinners had fallen on their sides and had one wing glued to the water surface.

Exactly the same situation in the context of vulnerability was observed in England on three chalk streams, the Wye, Lathkill and Derwent by Philip White chief riverkeeper for the Duke of Rutland. He was weed cutting and noticed that the trout were selectively taking the exhausted post egg-laying mayflies:

These flies were at the stage where, having been egg-laying for a period, they were exhausted and crash landing on the water.

Here they struggled for some time before final collapse and death. During these struggles it is common for the fly to have one wing trapped in the surface film whilst the other is still waving free. These were the flies the trout hit with the greatest relish.

This is exactly the focus of the latest book by Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker, 'The Flies that Trout Prefer' - that trout seek out the insects with the least chance of escape.

An extract from the book can be found on that wonderful website 'The Floating Fly'

I've left to last the fly which has become synonymous with the vulnerability concept which has driven the work of people like Kelly Galloup, Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker – the Quigley Cripple. If I was still able to fish, I would add two elements, trailing light bulb tails and the light-flickering body of Semperfli Straggle legs twisted together with Semperfli Micro Metal.

There is a plethora of YouTube clips available showing how to tie the Quigley Cripple and my suggested changes are reflected below.

In the examples below I have left out the hackle because I felt its absence did not detract from the fly but added extra complication.

For the 'light bulbs' I used Solarez Buoyant Armor to Hareline Daddy Long Legs rubber strands which should add intriguing movement.

In his book, 'The Never-Ending Stream – A Tribute to Fly-Tying Form and Function' (Pruett 2010) Scott Sanchez profiles 20 tyers whose patterns changed the thinking of fly anglers all over the world.

The story about the inspiration and evolution of Bob Quigley's Quigley Cripple echoes the experience of Kelly Galloup, Phil White, Bob Wyatt, Hans van Klinken, Peter Hayes and Don Stazicker:



During a PMD hatch in the summer of 1978, Bob was fishing a Hair Spider. The pattern, which was a sparsely-tied Horner Deer Hair adaptation similar to the Humpy, was popular with old-timers on the Fall River. A number of these variations were tied with or without hackle. On this day, the fish were rising around Bob's fly, eating the natural and leaving his artificial alone. He did manage to catch some fish and, through doing so, the fly became ragged and waterlogged. The back of the fly was sinking while the front hung in the film. All of a sudden, the fly really started to work and the fish were moving to eat it. When he wore out the first fly, Bob roughed up the other hair spiders prior to fishing them, and the half-below-the-water and half-above-the-water concept worked on the new flies.

In one of the final chapters of this book, I build on the work of Vincent Marinaro, John Goddard and Frank Sawyer to create a fly which combines both movement and vulnerability – the Slip-Knot Emerger.

Before I contracted a rare neurological illness which affected my balance and ended my fishing, I was working on a fly which incorporated as many fine rubber strands as possible.

‘Something Struggling’



It was designed to emphasise movement and the vulnerability factor in successful trout prey images but I only got the chance to fish this pattern once before illness intervened.

In short, a big adult insect - dragonfly, damselfly, cicada or stonefly - mired in the surface film.

It sought to replicate what the Tony Biggs RAB Variant imitated as a high-floating dry fly, but, on this occasion, as a tangled and helpless mess of body, wings and legs having been tumbled through several rapids. Remembering the ant taken by the bass so many years before I called it ‘Something Struggling’.

It reflected in its thinking the scuba observations described by Gary LaFontaine in his 1990 book, ‘The Dry Fly – New Angles’ – that a trout holding deep in fast water needs a ‘wide’ fly and ‘big chunk’ before it will rise.

Central to its design theory - besides the mobility of the micro rubber legs - was the foam rubber head of Roman Moser’s Balloon Caddis (also featured in LaFontaine’s Airhead). Caddis mainly emerge at twilight or after dark and, as Oliver Edwards explains: ‘Roman Moser’s Balloon Caddis was designed to copy a caddis right on the point of emergence.

The yellow Polycel foam balloon represents the bulging thoracic cuticle of the emerger. Clearly a pattern best fished in the evening, during a caddis emergence.’

The take was savage and the tippet seemed to snap in a heartbeat.



Something Struggling – broken on the Holsloot. Photo by Sean Mills

It was a size 14 and I am told that it proved successful on the trout streams of Lesotho, albeit as a #12. It did have a legacy though. It persuaded Jan Korrubel to incorporate some rubber strands as a tail on his version of the PARA-Rab.

Spent wing vulnerability

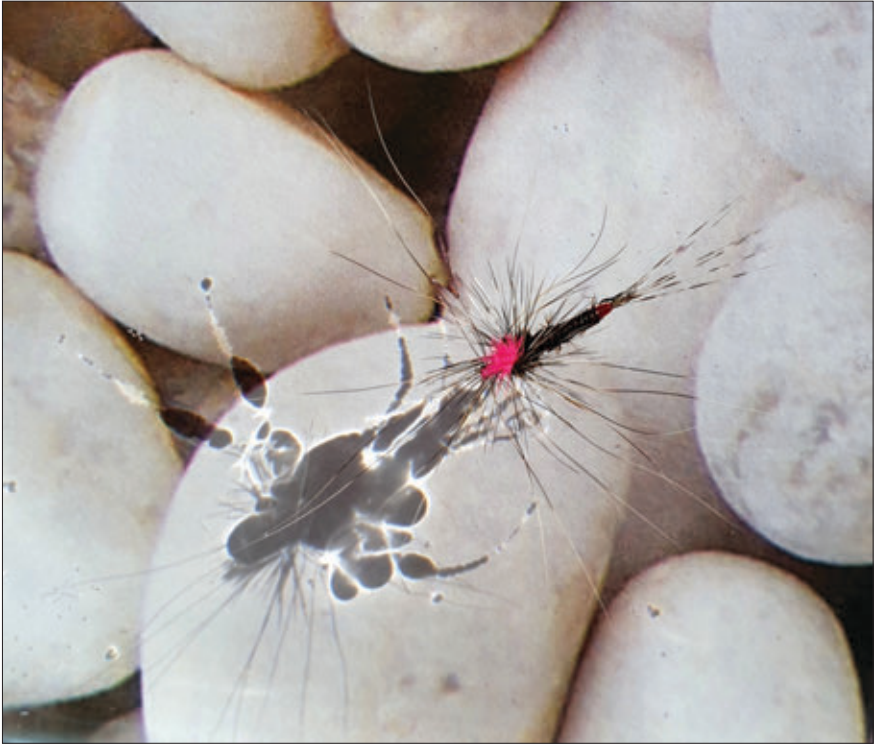


Rubber-tailed spent spinner tied Klinkhåmer-style

Style

Nothing signals vulnerability more than a spent wing spinner. Its dead and its going in the direction that the current takes it.

This is an attempt to meld a number of ideas, the stance of the Klink, the movement of Stephen Boshoff's pliable and unbalanced pendulum tails, the kaleidoscope light-rippling Straggle Leg body (called 'sex on a string' by Paul Procter) ribbed with Semperflī Micro Glint, the poly wings at right angles to the body giving outrigger support and the orange Larva Lace thorax cover providing buoyancy and extra visibility. See above.



The shadow cast by a PARA Rab tied by Alan Hobson emulates the shadow cast by a mayfly struggling to extricate itself from the pupal shuck





CHAPTER 10

Small Stream Attractor Dries



A RAB tied by Storms River artist, rod builder and fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche

The truth is, on mountain waters, you rarely come across an instance where you must match the natural insect. In my experience, mountain fish feed selectively on a single insect only 5 to 10 percent of the time.

Craig Martin 'Mountain Water – The Way of the High-country Angler' (Pruett Publishing, 1999).

Dry flies are made for small streams: the fish are aggressive, the drifts are short, currents are swift, the pockets are small and the strikes are quick.

Jeff Morgan 'Small-Stream Fly Fishing' (Frank Amato, 2005).

In order to perform during repeated casts in a short period of time and to sail serenely through rough water, small stream attractor dry flies must be buoyant, waterproof, easily visible and low maintenance.

In short, it must float like a cork, incorporate a sighter which combines both a highly-visible colour and a light-reflecting material so that it glints during the drift.

With specific reference to the streams near Cape Town, cognizance must be taken of the fact that blizzard daytime mayfly and caddis hatches happen very rarely.

A C Harrison, the effective founder of the CPS did a study of our mayfly species which can be found in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder on the CPS website. In the introductory article he notes that '... many of our Cape May-flies "hatch" (i.e. transform from the nymph) by night and mass emergences and flights of the larger species are far from common.' He kept the nymphs of the various species in aquaria in his garage and noted that most hatched at close to midnight on humid nights – presumably so that their wings would not dry out.

So while winged mayfly imitations like the Wickham's Fancy and the Greenwell's Glory were known to CPS members, they had been designed to emulate an insect found but rarely here in daytime and were not designed to remain afloat on our more boisterous streams.

What evolved over time, then, were flies designed more pragmatically to suit local conditions.

In his 2001 book, *Running Waters*, one of my favourite authors on fly design, Datus Proper, seeks to answer the question of the small stream attractor dry:

Reinventing the Royal Coachman is a bit like reinventing the wheel, but the fancy old fly does run into trouble, sometimes, with educated trout. The Dark-Water Fly fools more of them and is not so fussy to tie. I meant it for little freestone streams, but spring-creek trout that would not move 6 inches for a mayfly have startled me by coming across a pool for the winged beetle. They know that it is a soft target: Beetles falling in the water cannot escape and are not camouflaged like aquatic insects.

One of nature's pranks was to hang on the beetle a sign that says EAT ME when he falls into the water. I have tried changing hackle colors and adding red to the Dark-Water Fly, just to see if the fish were impressed. They were not. If there is magic in floss of red, eye of newt, or wool of bat, it is magic that impresses humans more than fish. Peacock herl, now, does seem to conjure up the trout. It has a metallic lustre, and real beetles come with metallic paint jobs.

Real beetles have neither tail nor visible wings: Those were for me. I needed to watch the little white V bobbing victoriously toward the maw of the trout down there. He didn't have the size of a shark, but he had the temperament and I thought of his tail beating faster as he watched my Dark-Water Fly sliding down shady currents. So much for the magic.

The science of it is that a fly can be designed for both humans and trout because we see different parts of it. You and I think of water as transparent, but its surface is, in fact, a visual barrier. A fisherman sees the part of a fly that sticks above the surface, and a trout sees best what is in or below the surface. For the fisherman, looking down, the water is typically dark, so white wings provide maximum contrast.

Trout, on the contrary, look toward the light when feeding on floating insects, and seen from below, most of the surface is a silvery mirror. Maximum contrast comes from a dark, low-floating body – like peacock. Everything above the surface is indistinct or invisible, especially if pale.

The Coch-y-Bondhu was nothing but a sparse hackle, a round beetle shape of herl, and a stout Partridge hook – wide of gape to keep the point clear of the extra-plump body. This was a dry fly except when it was wet. Other beetle flies worked on the surface but not when they sank a little – as real beetles often do. On the slow meadow streams, I could usually see the trout come to my fly, even under the surface. On fast water I couldn't.

So, of course, I put on calf-tail V-wings, short and sparse. A wisp of hair was enough to hold the Coachman suspended in the current, hovering, and perhaps tiny air bubbles caught in the crinkles reminded the fish of emerging caddisfly pupae or other insects. Marinaro's V-tail then had to be added to balance the wings and keep the fly from sinking at the rear.

This resonates with me in different ways, particularly if you take the narrow, heavily vegetated brook trout streams in the Shenandoah National Park as demonstrated in the many videos by Harry Murray as a case study.

It links to Gary LaFontaine in two ways. LaFontaine regarded the beetle as the most effective searching dry fly and, in his theory of attraction hypothesis in his book *The Dry Fly New Angles* he writes:

"The 'color' of the surrounding light affects the intensity of a fly's colour.

Even if there was no hatch to match, the trout on tree-lined streams responded much better to green flies."

He cites the Royal Trude, a down-wing version of the Royal Wulff, as his most successful dry fly under a variety of light conditions and the green peacock herl is a prominent feature of these flies.

What is interesting is that the Royal Trude has the same colour scheme and configuration as the Western Coachman, a wet fly version of the Royal Trude which was the only fly used by Georges Odier, the first person to act upon the fact that many if not most caddis species swim strongly underwater as adults when egg-laying.

His techniques predated today's Euro-nymphers, the only difference being that he used lead twist-ons rather than the brass and then tungsten beads now in vogue. Odier set this out in his 1984 book *Swimming Flies* and Chuck Fothergill later named the technique 'high-sticking'.

This reminds me of the fact that, in his 2005 book *The Loch Fisher's Bible*, Stan Headley says that flies with white wings have proved particularly effective in bright sunshine – the norm in southern hemisphere countries like South Africa and Australia.

So, between Datus Proper, Gary LaFontaine and Stan Headley we've come up with a strong recommendation for the Royal Wulff.

Furthermore, the attraction of peacock herl is resoundingly affirmed in the Red Tag, a cult fly for trout in Australia and Tasmania and for grayling in the UK.

Charles Meck in his 1991 book 'Fishing Small Streams with a Fly Rod' describes how he improved this fly by replacing the red thread centre section with blue Krystalflash to create the Royal Patriot

Although all these flies have six or seven turns of hackle they do not float like a cork.

To me, the rods that Chris Barclay uses and the streams he fishes in the Southern Appalachian Mountains define 'Lilliput Water' and Ernest Schweibert's 'Song of the Little Stream' and I asked him what dry fly he favours.

He cited the hackled version of the Mr Rapidan – yellow calf tail wing for visibility, light brown dubbing for the body, moose mane for the tail and the proven Adams recipe – brown and grizzly combined – for the hackle. (if that dubbing was *Semperfli* Kapok, it would probably improve buoyancy.)

He said parachute flies were not buoyant enough for the continuous casts and short drifts that his small stream fishing demands.



A small stream stalking rod built by Marcel Terblanche – an Orvis six and a half foot two weight equipped with a Hardy Flyweight reel

For me the important small stream fly fishing books have been *Trout from Small Streams* by Dave Hughes in the USA and *The Pursuit of Wild Trout* by Mike Weaver in the UK and their choice of flies is informative.

Weaver had the greatest influence on me because his articles appeared in the British monthly magazine *Trout & Salmon*.

His advocacy of the beetle fished up stream and dead drift was a turning point for me, bolstered by Gary LaFontaine's contention that the beetle was the best searching dry. Further support for the beetle came from Australian authors such as David Scholes and Noel Jetson.

As a teenager, Hughes used a size 12 Wulff-style fly he called the Beetle Bug, which had a body of dubbed red material.

He now favours a size 16 Elk Hair Caddis and says that going to small flies significantly improved his catch rate. I set out what I believe is an improved version of the Elk Hair Caddis – the Composite Caddis in a later chapter.

The Royal Wulff never gained much traction in South Africa, in part I believe because we developed a series of innovative patterns on the trout streams near Cape Town which proved to be exceptionally effective.

One was a big-hackled Variant, the others were flush floating and unusual in their innovative use of squirrel hair and the fact that several were imitations of the Lycosid Wolf Spider which does not spin a web but hunts its prey in riverine environments.

In the early sixties a fly was developed which symbolised a radical change in fly fishing technique as it was then practised in South Africa. The Caribou Spider was tied by a British expat double bass player in the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, Mark Mackereth.

It was probably the first local fly made of spun and clipped fur and the first tied specifically to imitate the *Lycosidae* Wolf Spider.



Mark Mackereth – master angler and developer of the Caribou Spider. Photo by Tom Burgers

Prior to Mark's arrival in South Africa, it was customary to concentrate on the deep pools and to fish big wet flies like the Mrs Simpson downstream, often on a sinking line. Mark fished the dry fly upstream on a floating line, concentrating rather on the runs, riffles and pocket water.

I bought my first Caribou Spider from Lemkus Sports in Cape Town in 1979 and I saw it as a wingless parachute version of American dry fly patterns – such as the Irresistible – and meant to imitate mayflies.

It had a conventional dry fly tail and the parachute was constructed by tying the stripped quill into a loop which was held upright by a gallows tool. The hackle was wound laterally around this quill loop, the feather tip was then threaded through the loop and the quill was pulled to tighten the loop around the feather, leaving the tip of the feather pointing forward.

Later versions saw the hackle feather wound around a post of red chenille to create a parachute which made it easier to follow on the water.



(L) The commercial version of the Caribou Spider – an extremely effective small stream searching dry fly

If I were to recommend just one fly to a beginner on Cape streams, it would be the modern version of the Caribou Spider. It floats like a cork, is easy to follow in the most boisterous of currents and has proved successful for half a century.

A few years ago, a newcomer to Cape Town, Liesel Hattingh, asked my advice on fly selection and my recommendation, the Caribou Spider, quickly became her favourite. She says that offering it to a trout “... is like offering a child chewing gum.”

I called it her 'laughter fly' because I would fish a few hundred yards behind her and her laughter as her Caribou Spider seduced yet another trout was a constant tonic.

Initially, her casting was somewhat erratic and I ended up with a Caribou Spider in my hat. She quickly improved, however.

Now the working mother of a teenage son who is turning into a formidable golfer (with all that entails in a 'mom's taxi' context'), she no longer has time for fly angling, but she still retains for sentimental reasons, a battered store-bought Caribou Spider which deceived dozens of trout. It is interesting in that the hackle is wound around a yellow chenille post, rather than the conventional red one.



(L) Liesel Venter (nee Hattingh) with her battered Caribou Spider with which she caught dozens of trout. A closeup of the same fly – still ready to do battle

I am indebted to master split cane rod builder and CPS historian, Stephen Boshoff, for much of the following information on the life and times of Mark Mackereth.

Mark was born on Christmas day 1907 in Stillington, Yorkshire but grew up on a farm in nearby Pickering where he fished for trout and salmon. His parents reluctantly conceded to his decision to choose music rather than farming as a career. The outbreak of WWII interrupted his musical studies and he saw action at Dunkirk and in the subsequent Normandy campaign.

After the war, while doing guard duty at the Tower of London, he met a South African woman, Eileen Watkins, who was a friend of the family of the Officer Commanding of the Tower and who introduced them.

For South African fly-anglers it was a fortuitous romance. The couple left for South Africa in 1951 after Mark was offered a position as a double bass player with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra. Ten years later he took a transfer to the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, joined the Cape Piscatorial Society, and discovered the Smalblaar which, in issue number 53 of the CPS magazine, *Piscator*, he described as a 'delightful little river.'

Perhaps his most significant role was as mentor to a new generation of CPS Young Turks who were chafing against a decades-old regimen of tactics prescribed by the luminaries of the day such as Sydney Hey and Fred Bowker (Kingfisher), the manipulated wet fly, often based on gaudy salmon patterns and

fished under tension across or downstream.

One of them was Tom Sutcliffe. It was only when I interviewed him for the DVD, *A South African fly-tying journey with Ed Herbst and friends*, that I learned how Mark developed the fly to imitate the Wolf Spider which was common on the banks of the Holsloot and Smalblaar streams near Worcester and that it therefore did not have a tail. On the DVD, Tom ties the modern version with a parachute post.

Here are the Vimeo links to the videos containing this and other interviews with South African fly tyers:

<https://vimeo.com/567798545>

<https://vimeo.com/573845780>

He described how Mackereth's sister, who lived in Canada and was due to visit Mark and his wife in Cape Town, was asked to bring out any fly-tying materials she could find. She brought with her a piece of caribou (reindeer) skin. It spins beautifully and Mark combined a spun and clipped body of caribou with a parachute hackle wound around the feather's looped quill. This process was facilitated by the use of what became known as a Gallows Tool which was developed by an Australian engineer, Bob Barlow and marketed by Veniards. Mark apparently said at the time that the inspiration for the fly was American – possibly the original Rat Faced McDougal with grizzly hackle tip wings or the Muddler.



A depiction by artist Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher – of the original tying of Mark, sans tail Mackereth's Caribou Spider (L). The commercial version of the Caribou Spider added a tail and used red Tuf Chenille as the parachute post, making it much more visible in the drift (R)

Tom recalls: "Mark's quest for the ultimate, wide, glossy and cleanly barbed free-range cock hackle was insatiable."

"During his time in Johannesburg he befriended Leo Rosettenstein, then owner of the iconic hunting and fishing shop, 'Arms and Ammunition' located in Bree Street in the city centre. One night after dinner at Leo's house, Leo mentioned to Mark that he had a small collection of game cocks that he used for hackle. Mark insisted on seeing them there and then. Armed with a torch, Leo showed him a few birds roosting in a peach tree. In a flash Mark grabbed the best-looking fowl by its feet and marched it inside where he divested it of a heap of its prime neck hackles. This story was related to me by Leo himself."

"Mark and I frequently fished the Holsloot River and along the road we passed close by a number of farms. We often stopped at Gevonden just before Rawsonville for, as Mark put it, 'A little inspection.' Folk would be going about their business around their cottages, but when Mark stepped out of the car he was instantly recognised as 'the feather man.' The farmyard would erupt into a cacophony of screeching roosters as men folk, women and kids chased the better birds Mark pointed out, the red, ginger and white game cocks, but only the ones with the longer spurs. He'd take envelopes and a pair of scissors from his shirt pocket and in five minutes he'd snipped off the best of the neck feathers and

handed over a rand or two.”

“The same would happen as we passed through farms on the road up the Dwarsberg Valley on the way to fish the upper sections of the Holsloot and on frequent occasions, if there was time left in the day after fishing, I was instructed to take a back road home where Mark scoured new farmyards for suitable birds. If he spotted any he would bark, ‘Stop!’ quickly get out, establish his purpose with the somewhat bemused locals and then have them hunt down a targeted fowl or two. His parting shot was often, ‘I will be back.’ I’d see them in the rear-view mirror as we left, staring incredulously at the money they had just earned for a couple of feathers – and no doubt hoping he would be back!”

At my request two other people who had fished with him, a former President of the CPS, the late Geoff Godley and Pieter Cronje, former communication director of the Cape Town municipality, wrote articles for *Piscator* about him. They said he never learned to drive a car, was a great cook and could cast with amazing accuracy – even into the wind – with his split cane Pezon et Michel Ritz Fario Club

Geoff Godley wrote: “There was an aura about him which had to be observed to be appreciated. Cows and horses in a meadow would walk quietly up to Mark and nuzzle him and small animals such as dogs and cats were tremendously attracted to him. Barry and Helga Steyn who for some years managed the Du Toitskloof Hotel, had a bull terrier by the name of Jane who was always nearly beside herself when Mark arrived there to fish.”

Pieter wrote: “I have never watched a neurosurgeon at work but observing Mark Mackereth present a wispy dry fly to a wily trout gets pretty close.”

“His artistry included playing the double bass, tying delicate fly patterns, getting a trout when no one else could and preparing a connoisseur meal after a day on the river.”

“The refinement started way back in Yorkshire. His grandfather who died on the trout stream at age 93 trained him to drop a fly into a glass some twenty paces away. He retained the skill and the accent.”

“His gentle dexterity and control with his split cane rod, his irresistible presentation of the fly, how he could adjust his cast for any situation, how he gently coiled the fly line in the palm of his hand and how he could play and land the fish will stay with me forever. Here was a consummate expert steeped in the tradition of gentlemanly conduct on the water coupled with a deep respect and appreciation of nature and living things. He was only too willing to share his vast, intuitive knowledge and techniques.”

Tom recalls that Mark always insisted on roughing up his flies by putting them through the washing machine first and this sometimes delayed their departure.



Fifty years later two expert fly fishers, Fred Steynberg in Rhodes in the North Eastern Cape and Leonard Flemming in Stellenbosch independently developed their own patterns after realising that Wolf Spiders are taken avidly by trout and Peter Brigg is constantly refining his own version.

(L) Fred Steynberg’s spider imitation – dual feather halo hackle and Wapsi Bug Body

But Mark Mackereth was the first. His role in closing a chapter on the past, popularising the upstream dry fly and in inspiring a new generation of fly fishers who were, in their own right, to impact massively on the evolution of South African fly fishing and fly tying, deserves recognition.

CHAPTER 10

As Pieter Cronje put it: “Such a mentor comes but once in a lifetime.”

One can understand why spiders are irresistible to small stream trout where the proximity of wooded banks ensures a steady supply of drop-in terrestrial insects. It is a wide fly, a strong triggering characteristic according to LaFontaine and its eight rapidly moving legs are the key factor in its attraction.

One can find a series of articles on the evolution of South African Wolf Spider imitations by Leonard Flemming, Peter Brigg and Keith Wallington in the ‘Terrestrials’ folder in the CPS archives.

Dave Lambroughton of British Columbia uses a foam rubber spider with rubber legs because of its ability to lure steelhead from the bottom and this is echoed by New Zealand guide Dean Bell in the anthology *New Zealand’s Best Trout Flies* (Pheasant Tail Publishing, 2006).

He says the way it to lifts 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.”

Leonard Flemming tied an imitation of the Wolf Spider using pheasant tail for the legs which was much wider than the Caribou Spider and Peter Brigg then tied a similar version which simplified the tying process. It is his favourite and most successful searching dry fly but neither version is sold commercially. (Peter’s website - *Call of the Stream* – is the most beautiful on small stream fly fishing I have ever come across)

Almost as popular as the RAB, is Philip Meyer’s ParaRAB which I described in the previous chapter. As far as I can ascertain is unique in that its forward-facing, vertical fan of squirrel hair at the hook eye was specifically designed to take advantage of water level air currents which induce movement. It is now being tied in increasingly different ways and with different combinations of materials.



Where the small stream stalking dry excels – the Willow Stream in Barkly East

Gerrit Redpath, veteran fly angler who has played an extremely positive role in local competitive angling, favours a ParaRAB, altering the density of the parachute section to suit the water conditions - sparse in the thin water of autumn, heavier when the streams are still in spate after the winter rains.

The most popular commercially available searching dry fly in South Africa is the big-hackled Variant

invented by Tony Biggs and this provides yet another example of just how influential Mark MacKereth was in shaping a dry fly approach to South Africa's rocky and rapid mountain streams.

It was under his mentorship that Tony Biggs started fly tying and his RAB Variant is the best-selling fast-water attractor dry fly in the country.

In a 1974 article in *Fly Fisherman* magazine 'High Profile Imitations', Gary LaFontaine described a small stream encounter with brook trout when his fly of choice was a Edward Hewitt's Bivisible:

"The Bivisible seemed to be a cure for the lazy rise of the wary trout. It fell gently with an air-resistant drop onto the water. It skipped on the conflicting currents. It imitated no specific insect, but as it shivered and wobbled high on the hackle points it captured an illusion of living entity and triggered the brook trout into decisive strikes."

And that's why, provided you are not casting into the wind, Tony Biggs' RAB Variant with its big hackle on a small hook, appeals to me so much.

It does not drift inertly as though lifeless – it has character! It dances and triples in sync with the push and pull of the current, it has a life of its own and the cheeky drift is preceded by a thistledown descent which, in itself, is a pleasure to watch.

Tom Sutcliffe has a step-by-step article on tying this pattern in the 'RABs and Variants' folder of the CPS archives.

Depending on the situation, trout approach their prey differently. If there is a termite fall in a dam, they will first splash it to subdue it then circle back to swallow it, but they will sip a chironomid adult trapped in the surface film. The response to a RAB is electric – they shoot out of the water like a submarine-fired missile and plummet down on it like a drone-dropped grenade.

Small-stream trout – say eight to ten inches – have small mouths and Cape Town's leading professional guide for decades, Tim Rolston, raises a practical concern about Variants in his book *Guide Flies – Simple, Durable Flies that Catch Fish*.

His clients want to land trout and Tim correctly points out that the combination of a size 16 hook and a large, stiff hackle inhibits successful hook sets.

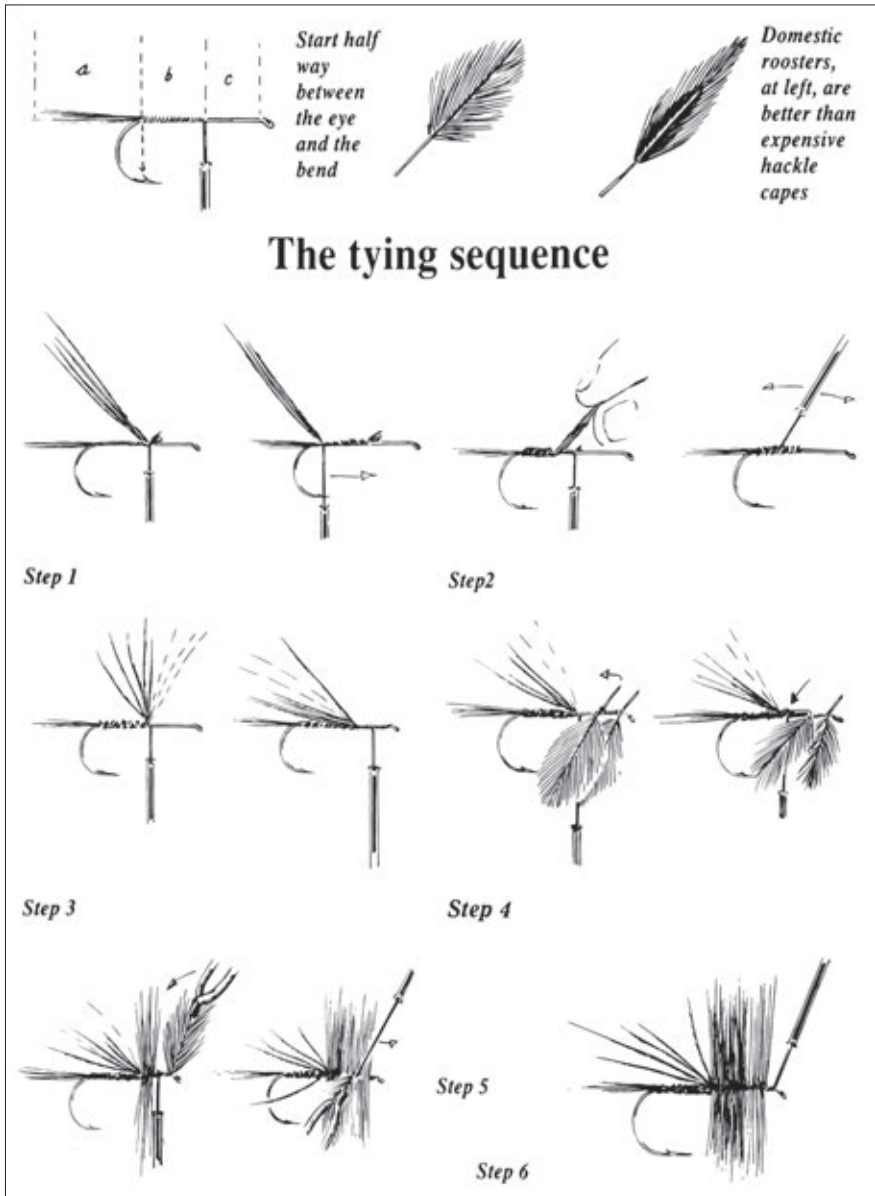
I don't care.

For me, the small stream ethos is predicated on enjoyment of the total experience and not notches on an angling bedpost and roll-casting a RAB with the breeze coming over the right shoulder, being able to easily follow it in the drift because it lands so softly and to see it taken by a trout in full-attack mode, makes my day.

Arno Crous, an enthusiastic South African small stream fly angler, emigrated to Australia where he fishes the little streams in Victoria. His @smallstream_flyfishn Instagram page is a pictorial Lilliput stream delight and I asked him what the favourite searching attractor dries in Australia are. He said the Stimulator was very successful, probably because it resembles the local grasshoppers, but he favours a small Goddard Caddis.

So, in the USA, Dave Hughes chooses a size 16 Elk Hair Caddis and Chris Barclay the hackled Mr Rapidan. In Australia Arno Crous, who has fished small streams in South African and is familiar with our patterns, nevertheless chooses a small Goddard Caddis.

Craig Thom, owner of the Stream-X fly fishing shop in Cape Town says the RAB is his best-selling searching dry fly, but he advises beginners to start the day with a small Elk Hair Caddis because caddis mate, lay their eggs and emerge at night so they are always present at one stage or another of their life cycle early in the morning.



A Tom Sutcliffe step-by-step sketch of tying the RAB from his article 'Tying the RAB' in *Piscator*



There is a lot of merit in this call by Craig and Dave Hughes.

(L) Datus Proper – an outstanding analyst of trout fly design

Datus Proper, in his stellar book on fly design – *What the Trout Said* - says that if he were restricted to just two floating patterns, he would choose a conventional hackled dry to imitate mayfly – which don't feature prominently on South African streams – and a dubbed-body hair-wing sedge.

He makes the point that Al Troth used a palmered grizzly hackle of his Elk Hair Caddis not to increase buoyancy but to create the impression of movement. Hans Weilenmann takes this concept further with his CDC and Elk.

Bob Wyatt, a singular voice of reason agrees with Proper about the efficacy of the dubbed-body, no-

hackle Deer Hair Sedge: *"I rate the no-hackle version higher than Al Troth's palmered design."* Adding that, for brown trout on lochs, it reigns supreme as a bob fly.

In Rhodes, the Puterbaugh Caddis is gaining increasing favour as an effective, quick to tie and buoyant searching dry.

Dean Riphagen of Frontier Fly Fishing agrees with Gary LaFontaine that the foam rubber beetle is the best rough water searching dry fly and I made it more visible by splitting the Larva Lace foam rubber shellback so that it cradled a visible sighter.

(R) An early version of the author's Split Back Beetle using a CDC sighter

The record of beetles on small streams either in the initial deer hair Crowe Beetle form or the subsequent foam rubber patterns or in the previous Coch-y-Bondhu era is beyond dispute.

Here are two confirming quotes:

"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* (A& C Black, 1965)

"In my opinion the Coch-y-Bondhu is



one of the best all-round patterns ever devised. I have used it for more than forty years and, during no-hatch periods, it has rarely let me down."

Norman Marsh, *Trout Stream Insects of New Zealand – How to Imitate and Use them* (Halcyon Press, 2004).

Here are some of the accounts by top anglers about the efficacy of the floating deer hair or foam rubber beetle and its ability to tempt trout into striking which have ignored several other patterns:

The Hair Beetle *Tying Flies with Jack Dennis and Friends* (Snake River Books, 1993)

It was an early September morning on the Henry's Fork.

The dissipating mist revealed three trumpeter swans lazily swimming across the river. Tucked in a little indentation on the far bank, a slow rise caught my attention. Once again, a slow rise appeared at the same spot. This looked like a good size fish.

My friend, Mike Lawson, better known as 'the Dean of the Henry's Fork,' leaned over and philosophically said, "I know this fish. I've tried to get him before but failed."

"Mike," I said, "it's a new day. Let's give him a go."

We were on the Henry's Fork that day to film a segment of our video, Tying and Fishing Caddisflies. Mike reached into his vest and pulled out a fly box. "If I am lucky enough to hook this fish, it will be great for the cameras. He's a big boy. He feeds in this little back water and it's tough to get a drag free float to him. One mistake and he's history."

The first fly out of his fly box was a Black Caddis, next a Partridge Caddis, then a Pale Morning Dun... Mike even tried a size 24 Griffith's Gnat. An hour had passed and we had plenty of video footage of flies floating on the water while that fish went on rising. Mike looked at me in disgust, then looked at the camera and said, "Shut that thing off for a second. Jack, if you want to have a good picture of a fish running and jumping on film, you better let me pull out my secret fly box."

At this point, having a fish on camera, regardless of what it was caught on would be great. Out came the secret fly box and Mike pulled out a dark black fly with a little red tuft. "This fly works every time," Mike said. I peered at it and said, "That's a beetle!" "That's right, Jack," Mike replied. "Everybody thinks that the Henry's Fork is a match the hatch stream. Well, every time I can't match the hatch, I put this beetle on and it does the job for me. In fact, it might be my favorite fly on this stream."

Mike had a good drift on his first cast and as the beetle floated over that big rainbow, there was a gentle sip and the hook-up. The water exploded as the trout headed downstream. Mike leaned over and without an ounce of excitement in his voice said, "Maybe I should have brought my five weight today instead of my four weight." I never really paid much attention to a beetle until that day. Since that time, I have worked on a variety of different beetle patterns. I have found one that I feel is easy to tie and will work as well as the one Mike used on the Henry's Fork. I call it the Hair Beetle for lack of a better name.

It is basically a Crowe Beetle with a dubbed body, Krystal Flash legs and a sighter made of Glo Bug Yarn.

Here's a quote from Craig Matthews and John Juracek's *'Fly Patterns of Yellowstone'* on their foam rubber beetle pattern which they call the 'Blue Ribbon Beetle'.

During the dog days of August when fishing is demanding on the Madison, Henry's Fork or spring creeks this fly will out-fish all others in non-hatch situations. During Diptera emergences in mid-winter this fly will take fish after fish, because it imitates a mating clump of midges.

Last August 28th there was no hopper wind, no caddis hatch, and not many clouds in the sky but

we had a day off from work and were determined to have a good afternoon of fishing. Working up from Pine Butte in the catch and release section of the Madison we fished side by side and took over twenty nice browns and rainbows in the twelve-to-seventeen-inch class—all on a # 12 black Foam Beetle. We watched some fish travel over three feet and take the fly in a gentle sip.

If there is a drawback to any beetle pattern it is that they are hard flies to see. We do not know who first put a small clump of fluorescent pink yarn on the top of beetle patterns several years back, but it sure helps in tracking the fly.

Foam Rubber Beetle – ‘Fly Patterns of Yellowstone’ – Craig Matthews and John Juracek (Nick Lyons Books, 1987)

There have been similar experiences on the trout streams near Cape Town.

If memory serves me correctly it was Dave Whitlock who first put coloured nail varnish on the top of deer hair beetles and ants and I have often wondered why he did not add coloured glitter dust to reflect light and add eye-catching sparkle.

If I was restricted to three searching dries for the trout streams near Cape Town in spring or summer, I would choose a RAB if there was an upstream breeze and my Split Back Beetle and Composite Caddis if there was not. In autumn, I would choose a hopper.

I concur with LaFontaine’s conclusion that the beetle is an outstanding searching dry fly and I believe that I have solved the visibility problem to which John Crowe, the inventor referred in the context of his eponymous deer hair beetle.

The sighter post which protrudes from the top of my Split Back Beetle – described in a later chapter) combines materials which catch the eye not only because of their bright colours but also because of their sparkle – Micro Krystal Flash, Hends Holographic Hair and pink or red wedding organza or pink Antron.

I believe that my Composite Caddis which I describe in a later chapter, offers several advantages over the original Al Troth version as does LaFontaine’s Airhead.

That’s not to say that the trout streams near Cape Town don’t offer their own ‘match the hatch’ challenges just because significant Mayfly hatches are rare occurrences.

The streams near Cape Town are not known for regular or blizzard mayfly hatches.

Tom Sutcliffe asked three of our most talented young fly anglers for their stream choices and the favourites of MC Coetzer and Matt Rich and Stanton Hector provide interesting reading and valuable food for thought.

A C Harrison whose research into local mayfly species is reflected in the CPS archive in the ‘Trout Behaviour and Diet’ folder kept most of the species in aquaria in his garage and found that they hatched around midnight on humid nights, perhaps so that their wings did not dry out.

There is one notable exception on the stream that I fished the most often, the Holsloot above the farm Dwarsberg Trout Haven near the village of Rawsonville.

You could literally set your watch by it and I called it the ‘Ten ‘o clock ten minute dinner gong.’ I think its *Choroterpes nigrescens*, the Holsloot Darkening Dun, a Leptophlebiid, because such egg laying is characteristic of this species. A C Harrison, who wrote the definitive study on our mayflies, hints at this but does not specifically confirm it. Quiet stretches with no sign of movement suddenly boil as trout rose almost in a frenzy.

Ten minutes later it is over and the stream is quiet again.

If, at the height of these churning rises you look behind you, you see with the backlighting, gravid female mayflies dipping down and flying against the current to dislodge their eggs.



Quiet areas of the Holsloot explode in frenzied rises when the mayfly egg-laying starts

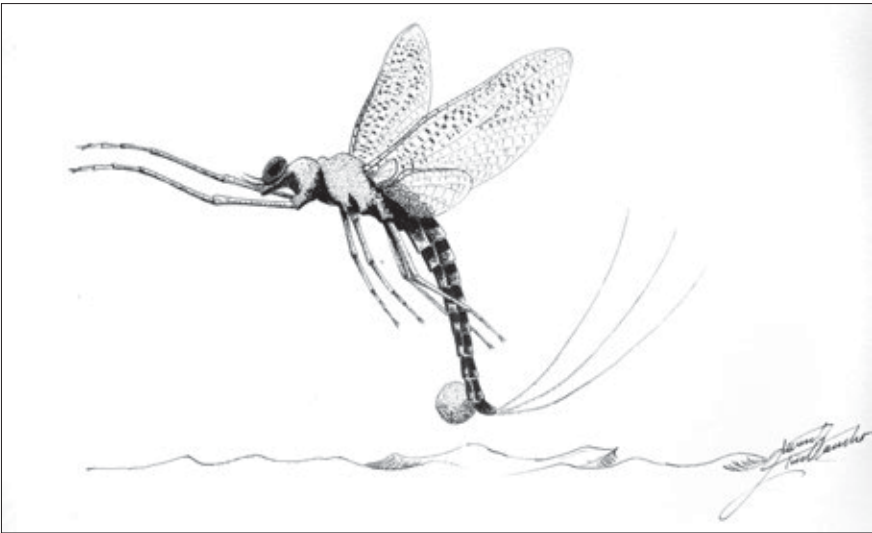


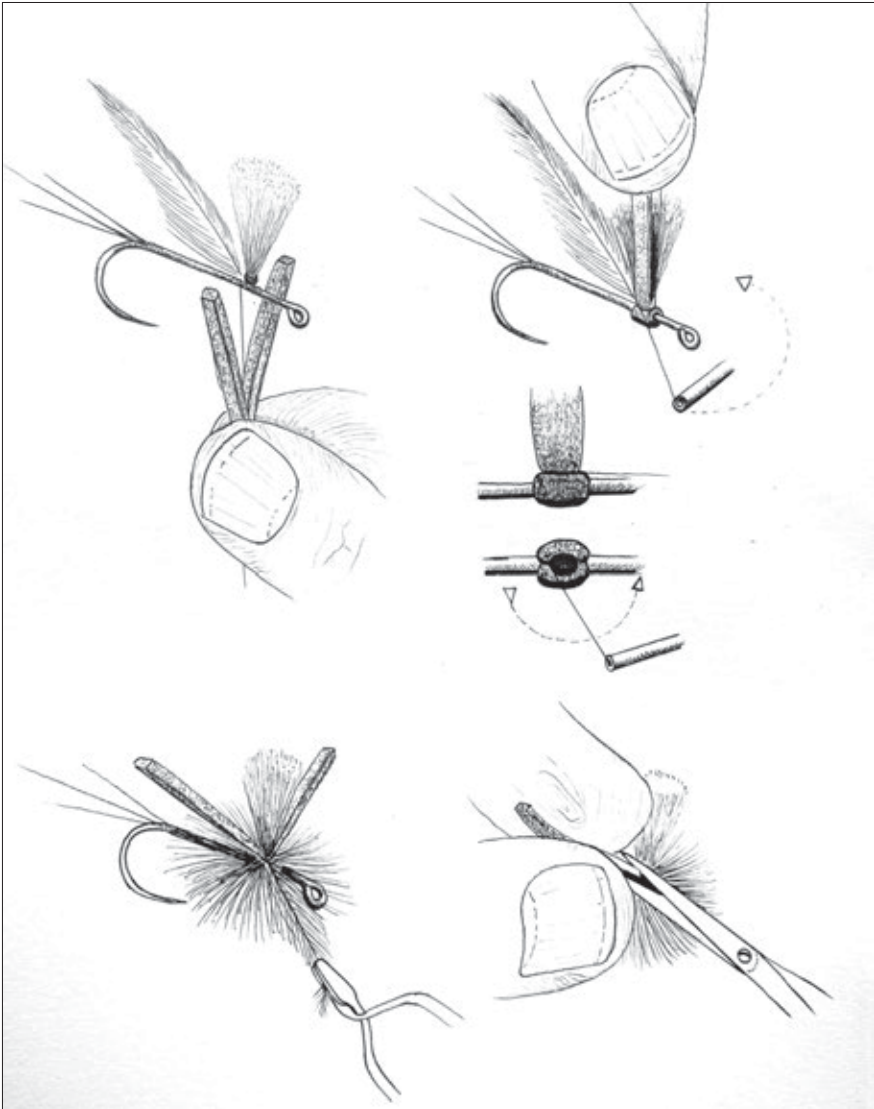
Illustration by Marcel Terblanche

The trout are reacting to the other trout and to the delicate impact on the water of the mayflies just as the trout in Barkly East and Rhodes react to the plop of the willow leaf eating beetles.

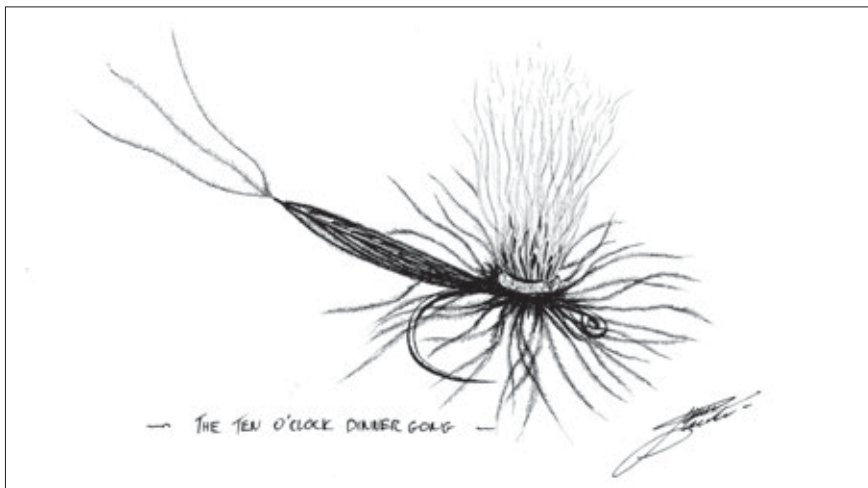
Anything small and black will suffice, a #16 black parachute or, demonstrated on YouTube, an Arpo, don't forget to add a CDL tail for extra buoyancy;

Darryl Lampert's Hi-Vis CDC Midge, Agostino Roncallo's Mirage and the the French Fore and Aft pattern called Mouche Exquisite are suitable imitations.

I tied my own #16 version of the Mirage incorporating Morten Oland's foam rubber thorax, a CDC parachute hackle and a wing of the fur from a snowshoe rabbit foot.



Artist Marcel Terblanche's depiction of the Morten Oland technique of cupping the parachute post from beneath with a U-shaped piece of Larva Lace foam rubber to add buoyance to parachute patterns



My answer to the egg-laying mayflies – a combination of Augustino Roncallo’s Mirage and Morten Oland’s technique of supporting the wing from below with a U-shaped piece of Larva Lace foam rubber to enhance buoyancy

I recall a day on this stream with an expert fly angler, Sean Mills, who pioneered fly fishing for carp and sand shark in the Western Cape

I took him to a place where a big trout had its lie next to a mid-stream boulder and hardly had we got there then it started rising. It was around 10 am and I assured Sean it was the Darkening Dun and he needed something small and black. He was confident that the small Elk Hair Caddis would suffice but after several casts and perfect drifts were ignored, he accepted my small black fly and hooked it first cast.

“That fish ignored 13 casts with the Elk Hair Caddis” he said as he released it.

Sometimes, after the rises stopped, I would get a response to a #16 sunk spinner but not always.



(L) The author’s Sunk Spinner used after the rises to the egg-laying Choroterpes ceased

The other major ‘hatches’ on our streams are the Net-Winged Midge (*Blepharoceridae*) and the egg laying Black Fly Adults

Both occur in early spring, but I have only once experienced the black fly mating and egg laying personally and only once seen it referred to in *Piscator* catch returns.

The adult black fly looks exactly like a house fly and the midstream rocks were covered with an orgy of them, once they had laid their eggs they toppled into the

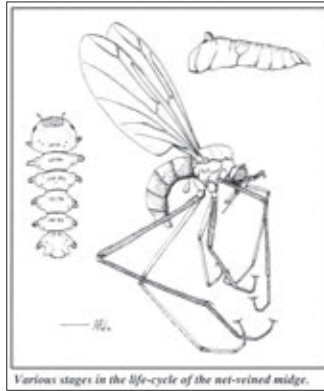
water and the fish went mad but I had no suitable fly. How I yearned for a #16 Coch-y!



(L) A black fly female after laying her eggs

The Net-Winged Midge hatches were far more predictable and Darryl Lampert's palmered CDC was created specifically for this hatch which elicits a frenzied response. It looks like smoke on the water. So too was Tom Sutcliffe's Single Feather Midge which has proved its worth both here and on the Itchen.

(Below) The Net-Winged Midge – like smoke across the water



When I was editor of *Piscator*, the CPS committee kindly agreed to pay two academics Dr Ferdie de Moor at the Albany Museum in Grahamstown and Shirley Chinn of the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg to write illustrated articles on the black fly and the Net Winged midge (*Blephariceridae*) respectively

Their respective article "Blackflies, Lords of the

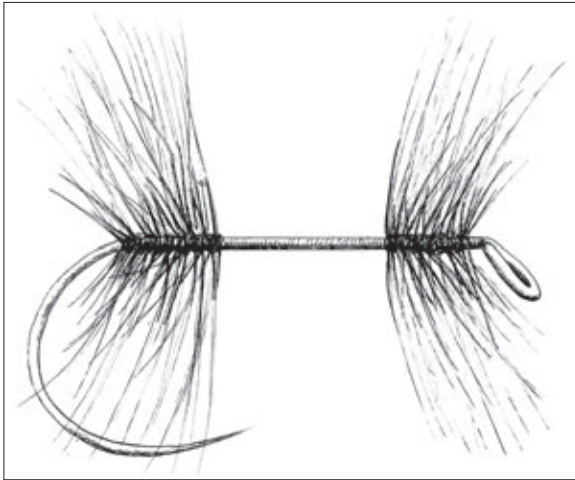
Rapids' and "Net-Winged Midges" of South Africa' can be found in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder in the CPS archives.



Tom Sutcliffe's Single Feather Midge – an effective Net-Winged Midge imitation

My initial pattern – which worked very well for the Net-Winged Midge emergence - was based on the Mouches Exquises (Exquisite Flies). The hackles are tied facing inward, shiny side to shiny side in

an X shape which provides a very stable platform. Pequenot states that for twenty years this was the only fly he used and he changed only if he found himself in a match-the-hatch situation. He said it accounted for more than half the trout and grayling that he caught.



(L) This sketch by Marcel Terblanche illustrates the principle behind the French Fore and Aft double hackle patterns which French author Jean Paul Pequegnot described as 'extraordinary flies'

My great regret is that I did not solicit an academic article on another extremely prolific insect on the streams near Cape Town, the micro caddis. Tim Rolston, a former Cape Town guide, now resident in the UK, tied an imitation with goose biots as wings which is featured in the Indigenous Flies folder on the CPS website.

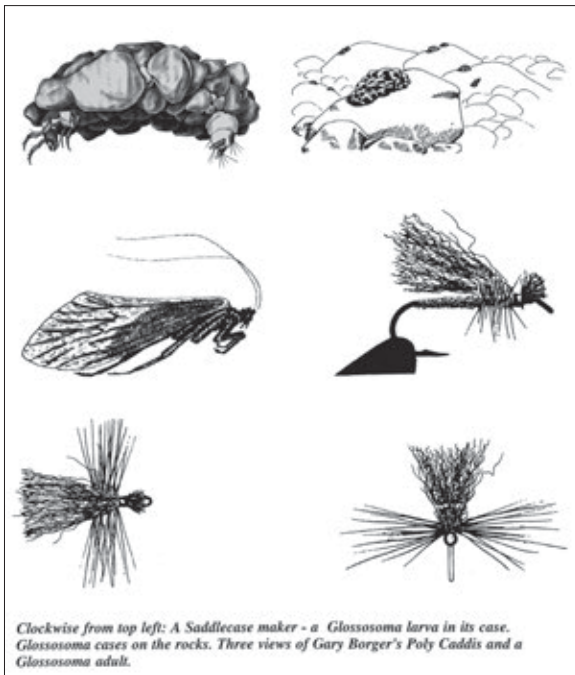
It is one of the most prolifically-visible aquatic insects on our streams. Its little white sandcastle larval cases adorn virtually every rock on the stream bed and the adults scurry across the rocks at the waterline in huge numbers.

I prefer Stanton Hector's version which uses a softer material for the wings – raffia.

Most micro-caddis egg-laying and emergence occurs after dark, but I was present once when they got the timing wrong and started around mid-morning. It provided some exciting fishing - read my article 'Caddis on the Holsloot' in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder in the CPS archive.

(L) The various life stages of the *Glossosoma microcaddis* and Gary Borger's imitation of the adult

In England, Stuart Crofts is the micro caddis expert and his patterns would be worth trying here.



*Clockwise from top left: A Saddlecase maker - a *Glossosoma* larva in its case. *Glossosoma* cases on the rocks. Three views of Gary Borger's Poly Caddis and a *Glossosoma* adult.*

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

In summary then, the RAB is an enduring favourite if the wind isn't blowing. The ParaRAB's popularity, in its various manifestations - let's just say a parachute incorporating squirrel hair - grows by the minute. Everybody's fly box contains a version of AL Troth's Elk Hair Caddis and a foam rubber hopper.

The competitive fraternity who fish the mono dry-dropper system to avoid micro-drag, greatly favour Tim Rolston's CDC midge as the top fly in their two-fly rig. It is a radically-successful method on more open water, but it is the anthesis of what I call the 'Small Stream Ethos'.



A contemporary ParaRAB - its wide squirrel hair hackle aiding its buoyancy





CHAPTER 11

Hi-Vis Parachute Posts – a Local Consensus



An illustration of Tony Kietzman's Edhåmer by Marcel Terblanche

Body and hackle color are essential in imitating natural insects. However, I am convinced that wing color does not make any difference to the trout.

From: Fluorescent Flies: Techniques of Trout Fishing and Fly Tying by George Harvey (Nick Lyons Books, 1990).

The 1983 article by George Harvey in *Fly Fisherman* magazine in which he stated that wing colour on flies played no role in the acceptance or rejection by trout was seismic and significantly enhanced the angling experience of fly anglers around the world from then on.

He reproduced the article in the above-mentioned book seven years later and here is the background story of how he reached that conclusion:

"In May 1983 I was given some Metz hen saddle patches dyed fluorescent orange, hot pink, yellow and green. Since I had been using coloured hen saddle patches for divided wings on some dry-fly patterns I most frequently use, I decided to see if the fluorescent wings would help me to see the flies and find out how the trout would react to the brilliant colours.

The first fly I experimented with was a deer hair ant. I wanted to see how the burnt wing compared with the fluorescent red lacquer I had been using on the back to make the fly more visible.

The first wing I tied was hot pink. I could see the fly as far as I could the lacquered version and the wing was still visible when the deer hair was practically torn apart.

It was a phenomenal experience to see trout rise and take fluorescent flies without hesitation. The best part was that I could see the flies in quiet or riffly water and missed very few rises. It turned the frustration I had been experiencing into delightful days astream again.

On many small mountain streams overgrown with rhododendron and other trees and shrubs, the light is so dim it is difficult to see beneath the foliage.

Joe Humphreys and I gave the fluorescent deer ants a real test on such a stream and the results were even better than I had hoped for. When certain light conditions exist, especially dense shaded areas, we were able to see the green fluorescent wings a little better."

(Harvey's conclusion that he could see a fly with feather-tip wings dyed green on streams shaded by vegetation is interesting because, in terms of LaFontaine's 'Theory of Attraction' and belief that the predominant colour of ambient light makes flies of that colour more attractive to trout, then a fly with a green wing should enhance its ability to evoke strikes.

LaFontaine's most successful fly was the Lime Trude. Should he have tied it with a green synthetic wing such as Fishient's Frizz Fibre?).

I certainly concur with Harvey. If you lose track of your dry fly or emerger, the visual element that makes dry fly fishing so appealing is lost – for me at least. The alternative is to use a tiny bright yarn or float putty strike indicator – but these often seem to get more strikes than the fly you are using.

Trout thus seem to be attracted to, rather than repelled by these bright colours as millions of nymphs tied with red and orange 'hot spots' prove.

There is compelling historic evidence in this regard. To my knowledge the first parachute pattern to be available over the counter in Cape Town was the commercial version of Mark Mackereth's Caribou Spider which was sold by Lemkus Sports at the bottom of Adderley Street and for decades it was the only parachute pattern available.

It was the first dry fly I fished when I started fly angling in 1978 and for years it deceived thousands of trout despite the fact that the anchoring post for its grizzly hackle is a piece of red chenille.



The commercial version of Mark Mackereth's Caribou Spider symbolises his immense contribution to fly angling in South Africa

The consensus is that fluorescent pink parachute posts are the most visible and the easiest to track during the drift.

Experienced Gauteng fly fisher, Gary Glen-Young, who has fished for South Africa at several World Fly Fishing Championships, swears that pink posts on parachute patterns such as Klinkhåmers do not make fish turn away.

In Rhodes, guide Tony Kietzman uses fluorescent pink Antron yarn as the parachute post on his Edhåmer emerger. "It screams at you", he says.

In Pietermaritzburg, guide Jan Korrubel concurs using this material on his ParaRAB emerger.

Philip Meyer, who invented the ParaRAB while guiding in Stellenbosch a decade ago, uses fluo pink Frizz Fibre by Fishient for the parachute post and cuts the post at an angle sloping downwards towards the hook eye. This exposes the fibre tips which reflect light, the resulting sparkle making the fly easier to follow in the drift.

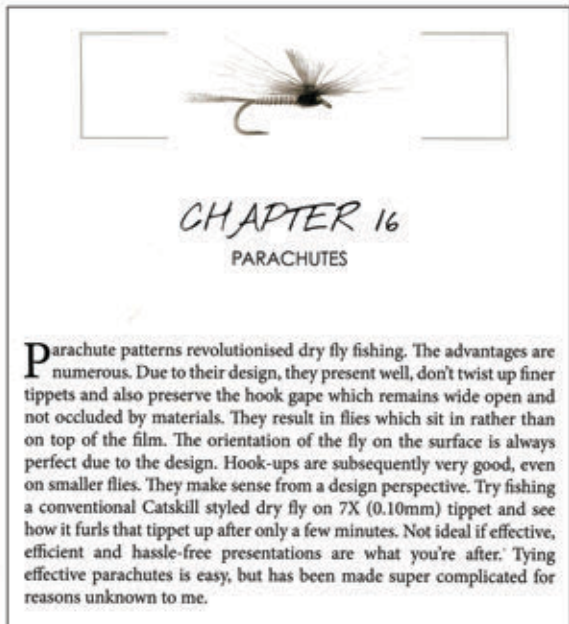
This accords with the experiments that George Harvey and Joe Humphreys did 30 years ago when failing eyesight led them to tie the Adams with pink wing tips from some dyed grizzly capes given to them by Bucky Metz.

These flies were in no way less effective than the standard Adams, but could be tracked far more easily on the water, particularly in shaded sections of the stream.

Furthermore, one of the leading guides in the USA, Pat Dorsey, recommends fluorescent pink posts on parachute dries in his outstanding book, *Tying and Fishing Tailwater Flies* (Stackpole Books, 2010).

The doyen of South African fly tyers, Gordon van der Spuy, is a devotee of parachute patterns and devotes a chapter in his first book 'The Feather Mechanic' to the correct way to tie them. It has justifiably aroused interest all over the world, is available on Amazon and Kindle and is scheduled for reprint.

Gordon van der Spuy's book 'The Feather Mechanic' clarifies this technique



Author Gordon van der Spuy, with me to his right, teaching Rena Bladen to tie a parachute pattern

In addition to a chapter on how to tie parachutes, he includes two patterns tied in this way, his Macaw Midge and Philip Meyer's ParaRAB. He favours white polypropylene for his parachute posts.

This prompts the question of whether brightly-coloured parachute posts result in less takes?

I put the question to South African fly anglers and shop owners:

Craig Thom (Stream-X): "I have a problem with the visibility thing. Always be visible - to whom? It may be my imagination, but I feel that flies without bright sighting posts are more effective. This means: straining harder to see them, hoping you know more or less where it lands and watch for the splash, using a bigger dry as well as a spotter, or getting closer to the water level where you can see it better (Still haven't found waders that let me lie on my belly).

One way around the visibility problem in the late afternoon is to fish two dries, one light, one dark."

Stephen Dugmore: "I am with Craig on this one. In my admittedly limited experience of testing one against the other, it seems to me that flies with small white posts, or no post at all, are much less spooky to fish than pink ones – particularly on more sparsely hackled flies. Looking at a fly from the underside I prefer not to see any pink.

But I also agree with Ed that if you can't see the damn things then I'll sacrifice some takes for the ability to track the fly."

Peter Brigg: "I'm with Stephen on this one - I rarely cast far enough not to be able to see a small white foam or Antron post. I also just can't think pink and even if it doesn't bother the fish, I'm not comfortable with it and probably lose confidence. It's like cutting a beautiful run in half with a fluorescent orange or yellow fly line which doesn't sit easy with me. White is so much more natural and looks like the bubbles which are ever-present along the current line - ask Rhodes guide, Fred Steynberg, why he prefers white strike indicator yarn - same reason. But I guess it can do no harm to have a few Parachutes with pink posts in your box - when all else fails, it is very visible. Japanese fly fishers strongly favour bright pink posts and they fish testing small streams with clear water and banks that have a lot of vegetation which shades the water."

Darryl Lampert: "I haven't found a problem with fish refusing fluorescent red or pink parachutes - but then I tend to trim my parachute posts fairly short. If it is a concern, you can always tie a small amount of pink or fluorescent red Antron surrounded by white/grey/black Antron. That way you get to see the fly and the fish will only see the white/grey/black when viewed from below. A couple of strands of fluorescent red surrounded by black shows up very well."

MC Coetzer: "Interesting...

I'm stuck somewhere in the middle here.

I have found that bright posts definitely scare fish, so I will not use them unless it is absolutely necessary. Bright posts become absolutely necessary only when I can't track a fly which is tied with a white post and this normally only occurs in the early morning or late afternoon when there is too much glare on the water.

Being able to see the fly is the more important consideration for me but I have definitely found bright posts to be less effective than plain white or grey.

The other side of this coin... Why are flies like G & B Low Floaters (tied with a bright orange body) or sub surface bright beaded nymphs so effective if a bright post, which is half hidden behind a hackle, scares fish? Maybe the bright post problem is all in the mind – my mind.

I first started using them in 2006 when we prepared for the nationals down here. It was probably under the influence of Gary Glen-Young. But even during the early part of that season on the Elandspad stream, fish would turn away from the fly at the last second. The moment I switched back to the exact pattern with a white post, the fish would simply eat the fly. This happened repeatedly over the course of a couple of weeks and I eventually only used them when it was the only solution to glare. On the Smalblaar stream's slower runs it was even worse.

I still carry a few but must admit that I hardly ever take them out – possibly because I don't fish that early or late in the day.

A number of years ago – maybe eight - I thought it would be a good idea to incorporate a Royal Coachman/Wulff-style body (red Holo-Flash between two segments of peacock herl) into a small all-black parachute pattern that had been working extremely well for me. No trout ever took those flies and despite numerous attempts to make it work, there are still one or two left in my boxes. This was the only change I made to the previously-successful pattern which had a slim body of black superfine dubbing. Strange...

This whole discussion is very interesting. It does however seem that being able to see the fly is the primary consideration and that this is why anglers with failing eyesight, prefer the bright posts."

Giordano (Zamps) Zamparini: "I mainly fish the Broedersroom and Helpmekaar streams in the Magoebaskloof Mountains near Polokwane but have also fished the clear streams of Slovenia and Chile. I find that visibility depends on contrast. A white post bobbing in the bubble line and surrounded by foam is difficult for me to see. I accordingly tie the post in two contrasting colours. This makes a beneficial difference."

Stanton Hector: "I am partial to tying parachutes as well as other flies using white material as a sighter. However, a few months ago I picked up some orange Spirit River poly yarn after seeing Tom Sutcliffe's CDC Single Feather Midge."

This prompted me to come up with the High Mountain Midge which is tied with a stripped peacock quill body and a peacock herl thorax beneath a CDC parachute hackle wrapped around an orange yarn post. The post/sighter is then cut short and at an angle to minimize the chances of fish spotting it. I tie these from size 16 down to 20. I christened the fly a few months ago and it is extremely effective despite the orange post. However, the orange still didn't sit that comfortably with me so I opted for the lime-coloured yarn (they call it lime, but, in reality, it's very close to being white). Fish reacted equally well to both colours fished side by side on the Smalblaar. So, the colour of post or spotters, I feel, is a personal choice, really."

Mark Krige: "1: Can trout distinguish colour above the waterline?

2: Does colour at least partly affect the response of a trout to feed on or reject a potential food item?

3: Do pressured trout 'wise up' and become wary of certain colours, especially 'unnatural' colours?

For me, the answer to all three questions is yes. In addition, I've noticed that some of the wariest trout I've come across were totally unpressured by anglers. Wariness, I believe, is not solely the result of fishing pressure.

What is interesting, too, is that sometimes the addition of an 'unnatural' colour can trigger a strike provided it is used sparingly. Think of the Europeans' use of pink CDC in mayfly and caddis wings and our own use of red triggers on dry flies.

If an angler feels that bright posts are detrimental, it is fortunately pretty simple to construct a stacked post in which the bright material is veiled by white or an otherwise neutral colour. The bright material is highly visible when viewed from above, but remains invisible from below.

My Conclusion: The choice is a subjective one depending on your eyesight and what you hope to derive from your day on the water. If, like me, you don't have 50/50 vision and you are fishing for enjoyment, then a pink parachute post makes sense because white seems to disappear when your dry fly is in the bubble line. If, however, you are a competitive fly angler, then the experience of repeated last-second refusals is difficult to ignore", Mark says.

What is also relevant here is the undeniable fact that trout are attracted to orange and grayling to pink.

Hareline McFlylon Polypro is a fluff, lighter than air and designed originally, I think, for salmon egg imitations. Why not, then, make it an integral part of your fly as Tom Sutcliffe did with his Single Feather Midge?

I sent some to Heather Ralph - @fishnwine – in Rhodes with the suggestion that it might make a useful strike indicator material.

She greased this poly yarn indicator with Loon Aquel floatant and, fishing the Bell River where it runs past the village, she had a rainbow trout rise to it in three successive drifts.

Whether it is rainbow trout on the streams near Cape Town or browns in the Bushmans River in Kwa Zulu Natal, the attraction of orange poly yarn strike indicators is universal and frustrating. But why does this happen?

G E M Skues, in his 1932 book, *Side-Lines, Side-Lights & Reflection* wrote that he had no idea why the Orange Quill was the most successful dry fly during the evening rise to the Blue Winged Olive, a *Baetis* species: *“It may be asked why the Orange Quill is taken at night for the BWO. I answer frankly, I don’t know.”*

(See: ‘G.E.M. Skues and the hatching BWO puzzle’ on the Rackelhanen website’)

I believe you will find the answer on page 206 of Gary LaFontaine’s book *The Dry Fly – New Angles: “When the sun was hitting the cliff, after 4:30 PM., various orange patterns caught almost three times as many fish as they did during the morning.”*

LaFontaine believes that the colour of the ambient light plays a significant role in the success of dry flies and, if trout are used to seeing floating prey bathed in orange light in the late afternoon, would they not, then, associate an orange yarn indicator with food?

The empirical discovery by G E M Skues and other fly anglers of that era that the Orange Quill was the most successful pattern during the late afternoon hatch of *Baetis* mayflies left these ‘match the hatch’ practitioners mystified. Seven decades were to pass before Gary LaFontaine and his team of scuba divers provided the answer while diving on the Abutment Pool on the Big Hole River in Montana where the sun is reflected from a cliff in late afternoon.



Fishient, the Scottish-based company of Cliff and Tarryn Rochester has come up with an interesting compromise in the ‘Flash’ version of a material called Sculpture Fibre. It is an Antron-type material which incorporates ultra-thin Mylar threads. This provides subtle glints in the drift and it works well for size 14 to 16 flies. There is a finer version called Deadly Dazzle.

Yaqoob Tarmohammed (L), a professional fly tyer, who posts on Instagram as @jozify, ties hundreds of parachute flies annually from the Parachute Adams to the Klink and the ParaRAB and he says his clients routinely stipulate either white or pink posts.

#jozifly says his clients invariably choose white or pink for the wing on parachute fly orders

Another professional fly tyer, Alan Hobson, who is also a guide, has had the same experience and his inventory can be found on his 'wildflyfishinginthekaroo' website.

As a final arbiter I put the question to AI and the answer startled me because I came across an article where the author had done comprehensive tests using materials of all colours but purely within the context of what was most visible – and the answer is not pink.

The headline on the article by Joe Dellaria is 'Parachute Post Duel: Picking the Best Color and Material' and you will find it on the website of the J Stockard fly fishing shop – www.jsflyfishing.com.

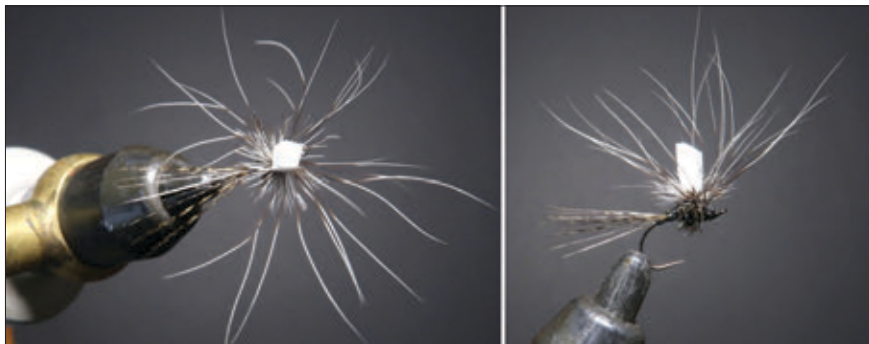
Of course, you don't have to use fibre as the anchor for the parachute, foam rubber works just as well. Although it is heavier and less aerodynamic it does provide more buoyancy.



(L) An orange Fettuccine foam rubber post is cupped, Morten Oland-style, by Larva Lace foam rubber in this emerger – the body is olive Semperflī Straggles Legs

(R) A Wapsi foam rubber parachute post anchors the CDC hackle and Razor Foam is used for the body on this mayfly imitation

The commercially-available foam rubber parachute posts are expensive, but it is easy to make your own using either a leather punch or a biopsy punch, the latter available through your local pharmacist.



Two views of a size 20 squirrel hair parachute tied on a size 20 Tiemco 206BL hook by Peter Brigg using conventional craft foam as the parachute post

CHAPTER 11

Fred Steynberg of Linecasters fame who guides all over the world but lives in Rhodes, uses the most accessible and inexpensive foam rubber material of all.



**Fred Steynberg's Wolf Spider imitation which uses Ethaflex as the anchor
for its 'halo hackle' parachute**

Gary LaFontaine believed that Ethaflex packaging material has exceptional light dispersal and trout attracting properties.





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, startling 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.

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 the CPS 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 tippetts 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 Buggler 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 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 by 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.

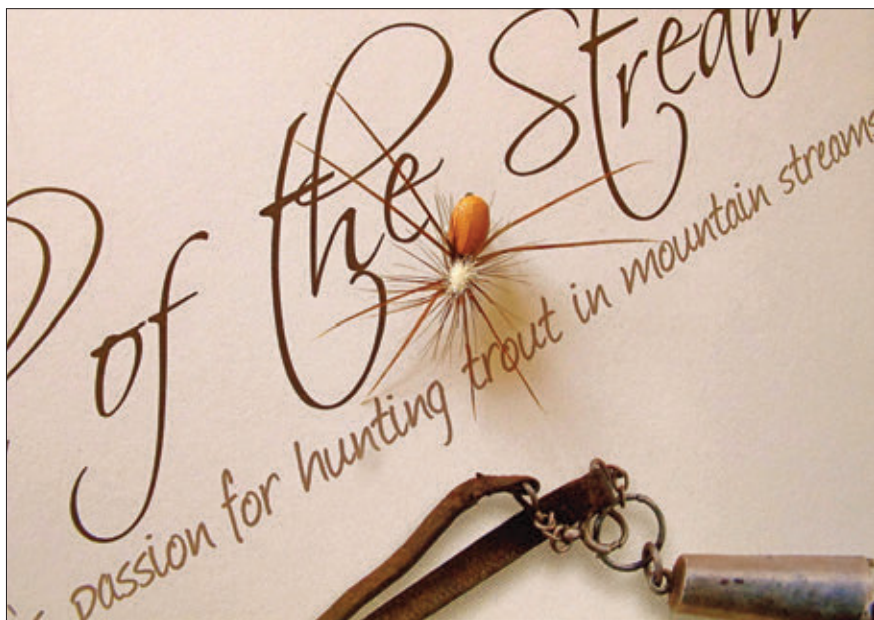
Goddard and his co-author Brian Clark wrote in their 2005 book *‘The Trout and the Fly’* that these sparkles play a significant role in enabling trout to detect insects coming towards them in the current.

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*”.

The CPS 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 *Fly Fisherman* 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'.



(L) Stephen Boshoff's Light Bulb Ant. 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

In the photograph by Arno Crous of the Wolf Spider on page 282 in Chapter 17, you can see the eight points of light where the tips of the spider's legs touch the water.

They create a dimple in the meniscus which strongly reflects light in our bright southern hemisphere sunshine. To make the tips of the mobile rubber legs even more visible from a distance, glitter dust is added to the resin.



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 Bokspruit in Rhodes.

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

Rudi Hiestermaann 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 Nesbitt – 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 Hiestermaann'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.





CHAPTER 13

Floating Beetles



At this point, having a fish on camera, regardless of what it was caught on would be great. Out came the secret fly box and Mike pulled out a dark black fly with a little red tuft. "This fly works every time," Mike said.

I peered at it and said, "That's a beetle!" "That's right, Jack," Mike replied. "Everybody thinks that

the Henry's Fork is a match the hatch stream. Well, every time I can't match the hatch, I put this beetle on and it does the job for me. In fact, it might be my favorite fly on this stream."

Mike had a good drift on his first cast and as the beetle floated over that big rainbow, there was a gentle sip and the hook-up. The water exploded as the trout headed downstream.'

Tying Flies with Jack Dennis and Friends Snake River Books 1993

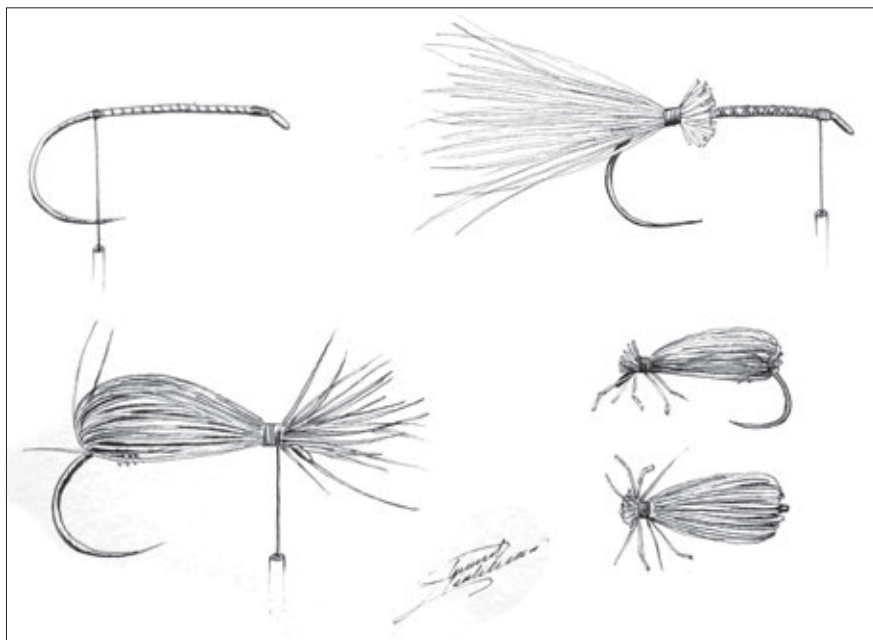
Floating Beetles: Spring in the Fynbos biome of the Western Cape sees the wild flowers almost writhing with a multitude of beetle species with the brown monkey beetle, illustrated by Marcel Terblanche at the head of this chapter, being particularly prevalent on the banks of our trout streams.

There's a telling anecdote about beetles by Jack Dennis in the book mentioned here. He was making a video with Mike Lawson on the Henry's Fork.

They had located a big rising trout but, after an hour, and many casts it continued rising having refused a Black Caddis, Partridge Caddis, Pale Morning Dun and a size 24 Griffith's Gnat.

Lawson then attached a deer hair beetle with Krystal Flash legs and the trout took on the first drift.

Beetles Floating: Split Back Beetle



An illustration by Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher - replicating the sketch in John Crowe's 1947 book

Today's foam rubber beetles simply replicate in a synthetic material what John Crowe created with deer hair half a century ago. It is definitely a blue-collar fly, both in origin - the former steel-producing city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania - and in its construction. A single tuft of black-dyed deer hair is tied in by the butts at the bend of the hook, folded forward and tied off at the eye. The stub of hair at the eye replicated the head of the beetle and a few strands, protruding sideways, the legs.

Here's an extract – pages 120 – 123 – from his *The Book of Trout Lore* (A S Barnes & Co 1947):

Having made a few turns of thread about the shank of the hook, tie on a small bunch of deer hair near the bend. Fold the hair forward, and tie it again near the eye.

In trimming away excess, three or four strands of hair should be allowed to remain at the head, to suggest antennae; also a number of individual hairs should extend out to either side, as legs.

To make the modern, commercially-available foam rubber beetles easier to track during the drift, another piece of brightly coloured foam rubber is tied in just behind the eye at the completion of the tying procedure.

On South African dams, Tom Sutcliffe's hair-hackled DDD made of spun and clipped klipspringer or deer hair has deceived thousands of trout since it was first fished in 1985 and the foam rubber 'Good Doctor's Beetle' has deceived thousands of yellowfish on Sterkfontein Dam in the Orange Free State ever since it was first tied by Dr Hans van Zyl in 2005. I've read that beetles are very sensitive to humidity and heat for their ability to fly. As they traverse the crop-covered landscape around this dam, they encounter a sudden change as they cross the water and lose the ability to fly - so the yellowfish are assured of a constant supply of high-calorie food.

Articles on both these patterns can be found in the 'Dam Fishing' folder in the articles archive of the CPS website.

In this relatively calm water situation, the fish have ample time to inspect the fly, but the situation is very different in the more turbulent pocket water that I chose to concentrate on as a small stream fly angler. Firstly, the zone of vision though its 'window' is restricted and the broken surface inhibits close inspection. Secondly, it flashes through that zone of vision very quickly.

About 20 years ago I was perched on top of a rock face on the bank of the Holsloot stream near Rawsonville in the Western Cape. I was looking down on a deep pool where a trout of about 16 inches clearly visible, hovered about half a metre below the surface. Drifting downstream was a twig about the size of a cigarette butt. From my vantage point I could see that it was twig. From its vantage point the trout could not. It duly rose, took the twig and planed downwards. A few seconds later the twig popped to the surface.

That proved two things to me – when fishing dry flies on streams I, and I suspect many others, strike too quickly.

It also proved, to me at least, that what is on top of beetle imitation is irrelevant because all the fish sees from its subsurface position is the underside of the pattern outlined against a bright sky.

In his stellar 1995 book *Presentation*, Gary Borger says that trout have 14 percent less ability than humans to resolve close-range detail. That's what makes it vitally important to increase movement and contrast in fly-tying, two of the most significant factors in the way in which trout discern prey in the maelstrom of drifting particles with which they are constantly surrounded.

So, what you need to do in creating a more successful floating beetle design is to improve your ability to follow it in the drift. You also have to make it easier for the trout to spot which means increasing movement and possibly also using colour to that end and as a means of making it more appealing to the fish.

Harry Murray who fishes the small streams of the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia rates his Flying Beetle as one of his most useful flies. It is a Crowe Beetle with a peacock herl body and a deer hair wing – tied caddis style at the eye – which makes it easier to spot on the water.

Using Krystalflash for the legs and Straggle String for the body as Paul Procter does with his 'Kicking Beetle' creates the visual impression of movement as the light flickers back and forth across these gleaming materials.

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

Years ago, I came up with the Split Back Beetle idea which was an attempt to solidly anchor the sighter in the middle of the hook shank and to use both colour and light-reflecting materials in its composition.

You can see it being tied in the second Vimeo video I did with Andrew Ingram 'A Fly-Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends' a decade ago

The sighter was a mixture of bright pink Antron for colour combined with a fine shredded mylar such as Hareline's Ice Wing Fiber, Fishient's Shiner or micro Krystal Flash for their ability to reflect light.

To achieve this, I tie a slim post of this combination of materials on top of the hook shank. I then slit the foam rubber shellback of the beetle down the middle and fold the two segments around the sighter. I have recently started using Wapsi Evazote Fly Foam in Salmon Fly Orange code WPF 8275. This soft and elastic foam rubber has a subtle sheen and, what is more important in my opinion, is that it is translucent which could be important against our bright, southern hemisphere sky.



A Split-Back Beetle

In 1980, Stackpole published *Chauncey Lively's Flybox* and I subsequently realised that Lively had used this procedure in his Quill Back Japanese Beetle using deer hair, although he did not incorporate a sighter.

Now, in terms of floating beetle imitations, here's a significant insight from Chauncey Lively:

'For a while I tried to imitate the dark metallic green underside of the natural by weaving strands of peacock herl through the deer hair, but I'm convinced it wasn't worth the effort. The herl, fragile at best, not only rendered the pattern less durable but it absorbed water and hindered its floatability. The trout don't seem to mind the black underview of the pattern and they are the most severe critics a fly can have.'

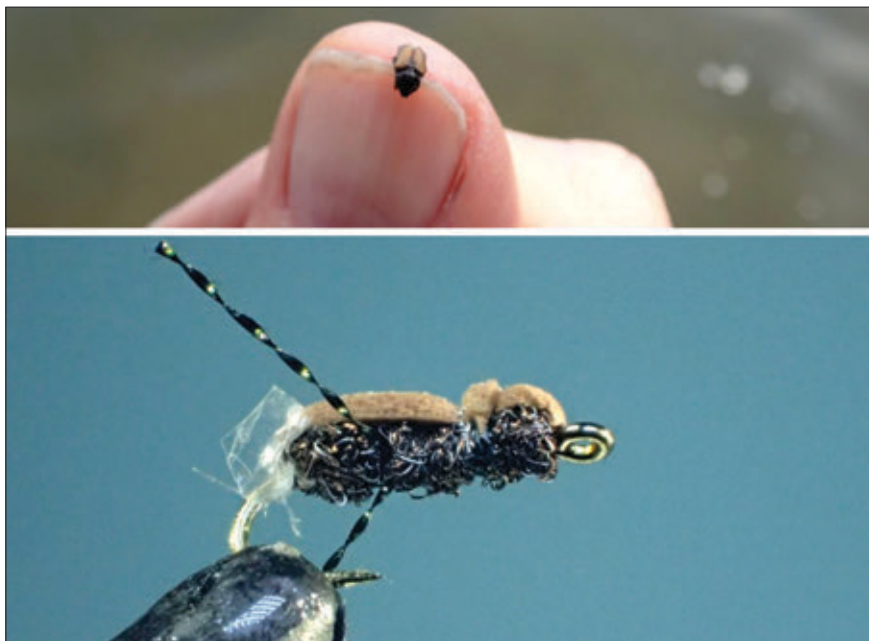
What Lively was emphasising is that with a beetle seen against the bright background of the sky, silhouette is important and it is a silhouette which is familiar to trout.

Emphasising this point is the fact that beetles are the largest order of living organisms with an estimated 350 000 species and they are multi-brooded, producing up to four generations a year.

What is even more significant in this regard is that beetles are exactly the same shape as another large order of insects, the bugs or *Hemiptera* of which there are some 60 000 species such as leafhoppers,

cicadas and aphids in this family. The major difference between beetles and bugs is that the beetles have jaws with which they bite and chew, but the bugs live exclusively on liquids and have sharply pointed snouts adapted for piercing and sucking either sap from plants or blood from other creatures. We thus have four hundred and ten thousand species of insect sharing the same general silhouette — an oval shape with three legs on either side — and which are available throughout the year compared with six hundred species of mayfly which are available as adults for a brief period each year.

In spring, on the trout streams near Cape Town, you will find brown monkey beetles in profusion wherever the sweetly-scented flowers of *Psoralea pinnata* are found next to the stream. It is a bush which blooms between October and December and is often found growing at the water's edge. Unless you have eyes like a hawk, you fish small terrestrial imitations with some form of strike indicator.



The Monkey Beetle is small and has a very distinctive silhouette

Keep in mind though that beetles are not just familiar to trout as terrestrial or land bound insects. There are several species of aquatic beetles and bugs such as Diving Beetles, Riffle Beetles, Water Scavenger Beetles, Whirligig Beetles, Backswimmers and Water Boatmen which swim about underwater and are familiar to trout. Many of these species are found in a stillwater environment but the Riffle Beetle (*Elmidae*) is an aquatic beetle found in the broken pocket water that I preferred to fish.

Tying the Split Back Beetle

The foam rubber Split Back Beetle came about because I wanted to make the sighter an integral part of the fly and not tacked on at the completion of the tying process.

Most beetle patterns today place the foam rubber strike indicator behind the head and where the rubber legs are tied in. In the Split Back Beetle, I moved my sighter post to the midpoint of the hook shank and thus the highest point of the pattern. This also makes the area where the legs are tied in

less cluttered. I also wanted to situate it at the highest point of the fly where it was most visible to me but less visible to the trout.



A Split Back Beetle showing how the two pieces of foam rubber enclose the sighter

Beetle patterns are absolutely deadly. In an article, 'Persistence Pays Off on the Smalblaar' published in the November 2005 issue of *Piscator*, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society, Philip Hills writes of a sighted rainbow trout that spurned a Parachute Adams, Klinkhåmer, Bead Head Nymph, Fore and Aft (Knotted Midge) and an ant pattern before it took his foam beetle with alacrity.

Philip's experience is echoed across the world with Mike Lawson on the Henry's Fork in the USA and David Scholes in Tasmania also singing the beetle's praises. Philip's article can be found in the Terrestrials folder on the CPS website.

There are two schools of thought on the best material to mimic the legs on beetle imitations:

Thin rubber legs which have actual movement;

Krystal Flash where the movement of light along the spiralled strand creates the visual impression of movement.

Initially I chose Hareline Grizzly Krystal Flash a combination which, I believe, enhances the visual impression of movement but then Stephen Boshoff @boshoffbamboo came up with his 'lightbulb' idea – putting tiny drops of UV resin (Loon Knot Sense works well) on the tips of thin materials, as a counterweight which creates extra movement and reflects light.

He first tried it on a CDC-hackled ant but I then realised it would perform the same function on rubber or Krystalfash – what I called 'Pendulum Legs'.

An oft-omitted but important element of beetle imitations are the membranous wings which can be seen protruding beyond the body when the insect is on the water.

If you do a Google Images search for 'beetle wing structure' you will see what I mean.

Renowned American fly tyer A K Best regarded these wings as a key trigger factor and imitated them with hackle tips, but I found them to be fragile and inclined to twist light tippetts.

The best material for this purpose, I have found is stretched bubble wrap plastic.

It is durable and has a subtle sheen.

Foam rubber flies are top-heavy and, if tied on fine wire hooks, tend to land not upright, but on their sides.

Here are the materials I prefer for the Split Back Beetle – keep in mind when tying in rubber legs that the ultra-thin GSP threads such as Textreme Extreme, cut through rubber legs like a knife:

Dressing

Hook: # 12 -14 TMC 100SP-BL or TMC 101

Thread: UCT 70 denier or Veevus 16/0 in fluo green

Wing: Stretched bubble wrap plastic

Sighter: Combined fluorescent pink Antron yarn or Fishient Fluoro Fibre, fluo pink Hareline Ice Wing or orange McFlylon.

A local equivalent for Ice Wing is Fishient Shiner. An alternative is micro-Krystal Flash which is very thin and reflects a lot of light

Underbody: Straggle String or Hareline quick Descent dubbing which is very easy to work with.

Shellback: 3 mm Orange Wapsi Fly Foam

Legs: Fine rubber legs tipped with Loon UV Knot Sense. UV resin does not adhere to latex rubber and I prefer the Wapsi round rubber legs or Veniard's thinner mottled Centipede rubber strands. An alternative as used by Mike Lawson and others is Krystal Flash.

The first step is to tie in the tiny piece of bubble wrap plastic at the hook bend to imitate the protruding hind wing.

Then tie in the Wapsi foam rubber shellback (or Razor Foam for smaller imitations) at the hook bend.

Tie in a short piece of Straggle String – I use Dark Green Olive which has a strong UV component. On the Tuft Back Beetle I twist Hareline Quick Descent Dub onto the thread which, contrary to what its name suggests, does not sink the fly.

Advance the thread to the middle of the hook and tie in a post of the combined pink Antron yarn and flash material on top of the hook shank.

Wind the Straggle String forward, around the sighter post to the hook eye and tie off.

Split the shellback down the middle and fold the two halves on either side of the sighter post, cupping it in the process and creating a domed oval shape.

Secure the two foam rubber strips at the hook eye and cut off, leaving two stubs of foam rubber on either side of the hook eye to mimic the head of the insect.

Wind the thread backwards for a few turns, creating the space to tie in the Pendulum Legs

Tie an overhand knot in the middle of each rubber leg. This creates a V shape and helps you centre the leg, providing extra purchase for the thread. This was an idea from a YouTube clip of Mak's 'Killer Autumn Beetle'

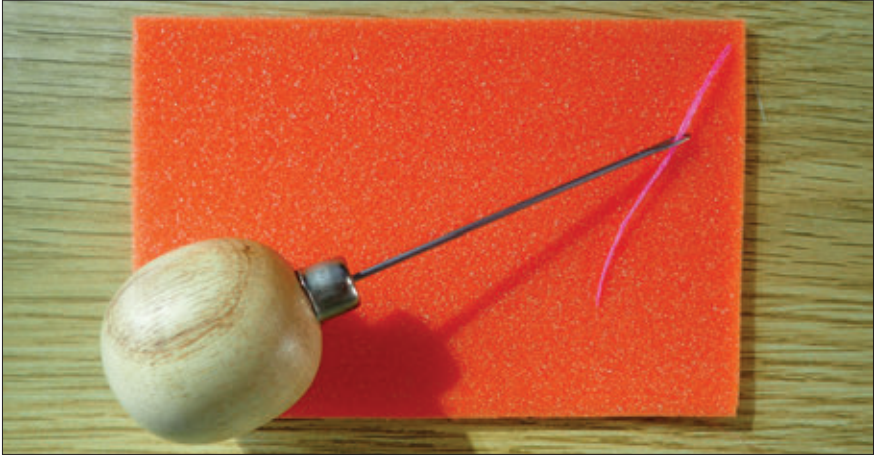
Tie these legs on either side of the hook shank at the hook eye.

Cut the sighter post at an angle sloping downwards and pointing forward to the hook eye. This exposes the tips of the Antron yarn creating little points of light which enhance your ability to track the fly during the drift.

As a final step, add the resin to the tips of the rubber or Krystal Flash legs and cure with your UV torch. You will find that you need to do this twice to give the resin sufficient heft.

There are alternatives.

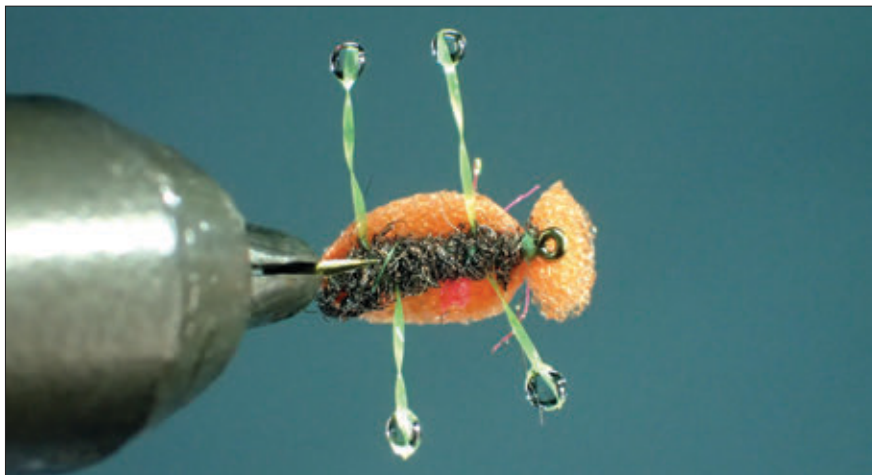
You can thread the sighter material through the foam rubber shellback using a tool such as Zuddy's Leg Puller. I call this version the Tuft Back Beetle and the fly shown here uses phosphorescent Krystalflash tipped with UV resin for the legs.



Zuddy's leg puller with threaded sighter material on Wapsi's Evazote foam rubber



A Tuft Back Beetle with 'glow-in-the dark' Krystal Flash Legs



The bottom view of the Tuft Back Beetle showing how the Quick Descent Dub keeps the phosphorescent Krystal Flash legs separated

As previously mentioned, most commercially-available foam rubber beetle patterns simply replicate the steps used by John Crowe with his milestone deer hair beetle – tie a strip of foam rubber in at the bend of the hook, pointing backwards and then bend it forward and tie it down at the hook eye.

Both Gary LaFontaine and Scott Sanchez (*A New Generation of Trout Flies*– Wild River Press, 2005) use a simpler method – dubbed underbody and the foam rubber strip tied in at the eye and pointing backwards, projecting slightly beyond the hook bend.



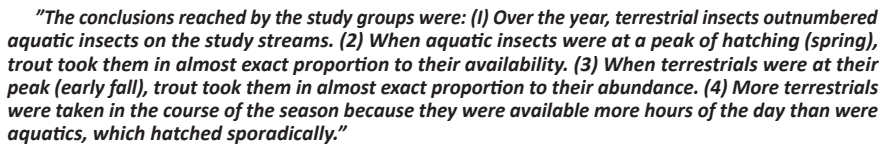
I tied the examples shown here on a #18 Ahrex 507 big eye midge hook using 1mm Razor Foam for both the top of the fly and as a body material. These examples use Glitter Dust - obtainable at craft stores - as a sighter fused to the body with UV resin.

This method is not as visible or as durable as a post threaded through the top section with a tool like Zuddy's Leg Puller.

(Above) View of a LaFontaine/Sanchez -type beetle which is more like a Jassid in construction than conventional Crowe-type beetles

Says Sanchez: ***"Beetles are my go-to flies for tough fish. Trout eat them after repeated refusals of other patterns. They are particularly effective on meadow stream and spring creeks."***





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Charles E. Brooks 'The Trout and the Stream', Crown Publishers, New York, 1974.

"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' (Greycliff Publishing, 1990).

The logic behind fishing small, weighted imitations of beetles and ants upstream and with a strike indicator on narrow, heavily-bushed headwater trout streams is irrefutable.

The closer the vegetation is to the water the greater the number of fall-in insects.

Over the course of a year, most trout food is terrestrial in origin and they have, therefore, to constantly monitor the water surface.

If they can capture these land-based insects beneath the surface they will because there is less expenditure of energy and exposure to predators involved.

As Randall Kaufman pointed out in his 1991 book, 'Tying Dry Flies', 'Only a few flies have the power to break the feeding concentration of selective fish and the beetle is one of them.'

'Anting the Hatch', the title of an article written for Fly Fisherman in 1982 by a Japanese scientist, the late Ken Miyata, has similarly become part of the fly angling's nomenclature.

The idea of fishing sunken terrestrials like a nymph was first mooted in print by Dick Wigram, a G E M Skues protégé.

In his book, 'Nymph Fishing in the Southern Hemisphere' (Grason Press, Sidney, 1939), he wrote: ***"The use of an artificial beetle in various types common to the Southern Hemisphere is closely allied to nymph fishing."***

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 a fish."

I avoided the smooth stretches in my small stream fly fishing with my sunken beetle because pocket water hides a multitude of stalking and casting sins. Furthermore, these insects move through such areas quickly and prey capture, when it is at the trout's level, requires less energy than rising for an insect at the surface.

Furthermore, they can see the fly in its entirety rather than as a silhouette against the sky.

In spring, in the Fynbos biome of the Western Cape province of South Africa, the area around mountain streams literally writhes with small pollinating beetles as the wild flowers bloom in profusion.

Veld & Flora is the quarterly journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa and its September 2018 issue contained an article 'Beetles in the Blooms' by Raquel De Castro Mia in which she describes finding 157 beetles and bugs including eight different beetle species in a single protea in this area.

Prolific among these species is the scarab monkey beetle (Hopliini).

They are attracted to yellow daisies and, as Storms River artist and fly angler Marcel Terblanche points out in the painting above, they are also attracted to the blue, sweetly-scented flower of a small (12 foot) tree, *Psoralea pinnata*.

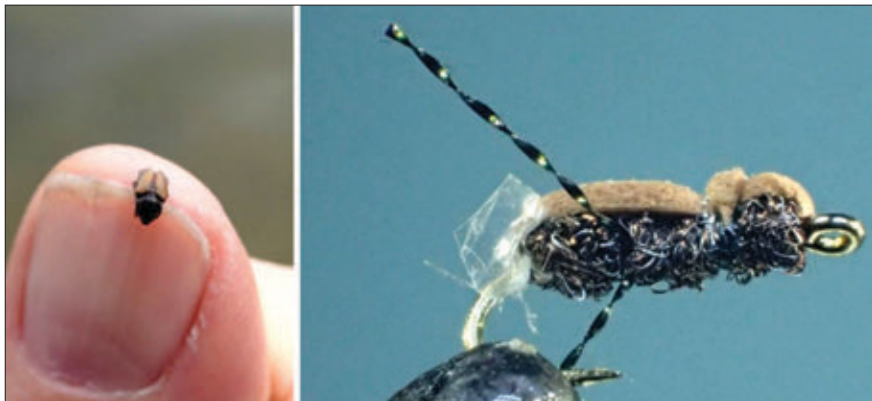
It blooms from October to December and its distinctive blue flower is a magnet for monkey beetles. As luck would have it, its favourite habitat is along stream banks and there is often a chum line of monkey beetles downstream of such trees.

Tracking such small cryptically-coloured flies, particularly in choppy pocket water is difficult, so one automatically uses some sort of strike indicator of which there are several.



Brown monkey beetles are significant pollinators of yellow daisies and other flowers

So, already, you are fishing a terrestrial imitation like a nymph and there are several advocates of such an approach – read my article ‘Sunken Terrestrials’ in the ‘Terrestrials’ folder on the CPS website.



**The author’s imitation of a brown monkey beetle tied on a #18 Orvis ‘Big Eye’ hook –
Daiichi 1110 - using 24/0 Semperfli Nanosilk thread**

I first fished a weighted beetle pattern in 1993 using a yarn strike indicator held between two Perfection Loops mid-leader and, in so doing, I had found my niche. My less than 50/50 vision was no hindrance because it was easy to follow the waterproofed yarn indicator (today I would use waterproofed orange Hareline McFlylon) which affects the aerodynamics of the cast creating an automatic tuck cast.

This chapter of *The Delicate Fly Fisher* looks at the materials that have come onto the market in recent years which enhance the tying of small sunken beetles and assesses potential design changes which would make them more able to deceive trout into thinking that they are high-calorie prey.



The author's current version of a sunken beetle - the equivalent of a # 18 – using a 2mm bead

What was common to Dick Wigram's Riffle Beetle which, from the 1940s, he fished upstream and dead drift like a nymph in Tasmania and the 1990s when Mike Weaver adopted a similar approach on the small streams of the UK, was that a slip of black crow feather was chosen for the shellback because of its sheen.

Tasmanian angler, David Scholes in his book 'Trout Days' (Kangaroo Press, 1986) describes a similar pattern, the Black Beetle, which he ties on a #14 hook. ***"The elongated oval body is of black wool over which a strip of crow quill is drawn to the head after the hackle is put on. In this way it becomes a 'throat hackle' and is of soft red cock or hen."***

Saying, ***"I'd rather fish the beetle than the nymph"***, he adds: ***"As a saver of blank days, the Black Beetle is high on the list. I have unusual faith in the hooking and holding qualities of the Black Beetle. Perhaps this is because of the bold way in which the trout usually takes it and, in consequence, the way in which the strike can be timed so exactly and the hook driven home so solidly."***

This approach was also used by Canadian fly angler, Dave Engerbretson, an editor at large for Fly Fisherman magazine and author of the 1986 book 'Tight Lines, Bright Water'.

In the book he professes his faith in a pattern he called, 'My Beetle'. It is tied on a size 16-18 hook and consists of only two materials - a shellback of duck, goose or turkey wing fibres and a dry fly quality hackle. He ties the wing quill in at the bend and then ties in and winds the hackle forward. He clips off the hackle fibres on the top and bottom of the hook leaving a few fibres sticking out at the sides to resemble legs. The wing fibres are then pulled forward to provide the back of the beetle and tied off at the eye of the hook.

Two fibres are left sticking forward over the hook eye to resemble antennae.

Engerbretson said: ***"Since I first realised just how much trout like to eat beetles, this pattern has become my ace-in-the-hole fly in many difficult angling situations in all parts of the country. If I am fishing to rising trout in still water, and they show little interest in the fly which, to me, appears to be a good imitation of the natural - I tie on a beetle. If they aren't taking what I think they are taking, I don't have a close match for the natural, or I don't know what they are taking - I try a beetle. Or,***

as so often happens after a major hatch is over and the big 'bank feeders' are sipping insects from the wind row of bugs that have collected along the edge of a stream - a beetle is usually my number one choice. And in the late summer when most of the hatches are over and the terrestrials make up a large portion of a trout's diet, you guessed it! I opt for my box of beetles. You should too."

These flies weren't weighted but they would not have been buoyant because they would have soaked up water.

All terrestrial insect imitations are most effective when fished below the surface because they require less effort to capture and less exposure to predators than those at the surface – its that simple.

Gary LaFontaine, a fervent devotee of the sunken hopper, simply added lead wire to existing floating hopper patterns and Ernest Schweibert, in his monumental double-volume book, 'Trout', wrote about Charles Wetzel fishing his sunken ant made of lacquered tying thread. More recently Kelly Galloup produced a video 'Tying the Sunken Ant Jig'.

I first fished a sunken beetle in 1993 and it utilised the materials available at the time.



The sunken beetle which I started fishing with a yarn indicator in 1993. It proved to be the most effective in spring, being supplanted by the sinking copper wire ant in summer and autumn

It was tied on a size 16 wet fly hook, had a shellback of peacock herl, a dubbed hare's ear fur body and black Krystal Flash legs, chosen because the way they glinted suggested movement.

With that combination of materials, I have little doubt that it would still be effective today.

Previously, weighting wet flies involved lead wire but, this time, I had a new option.

Roman Moser was the man who started the bead head trend on his home river, the Traun in Austria. Anglers using spinning reels in the rivers of the Tyrol mountains had for years been using little lures which featured glass beads and Moser decided that lead wire behind the glass bead would help to sink the fly. The results were astonishing, so much so that he was accused of bait fishing. Moser then produced countersunk brass beads in gold.

It would have remained a local method but in 1988 Moser produced a video *Neue Wege mit der KocherFliege* – subsequently produced with English commentary as *New Ways of Fishing the Caddis*. One of the patterns featured a caddis pupa imitation with a brass bead at the hook eye and, with leading writers such as Hans van Klinken in Europe and Malcolm Greenhalgh in the UK, becoming enthusiastic converts, the die was quite literally cast.

Theo Bakelaar helped promote these bead head nymphs when he appeared at the Dutch Fly Fair in 1990 with his face painted gold.

Then, in 1992, Orvis, with its significant marketing clout, started selling – and promoting – bead head nymphs.

“How would you like to discover a fly that will catch trout when nothing is rising – in deep water and shallow, cold and warm, in those periods when a trout stream seems as lifeless as Death Valley?” the Orvis marketing director Tom Rosenbauer, wrote in the company’s monthly newsletter, Orvis News, in February 1992.

In Britain, Greenhalgh added the bead to traditional favourites such as the Hare’s Ear and Pheasant Tail nymphs and reported unprecedented success – including 42 grayling in a day using a bead head PTN on that most testing of chalk streams, the Wiltshire Avon.

There can be little doubt, given the world-wide adoption of bead head nymphs, that they qualify to be called ‘super-normal releasers’.

The concept of ‘triggers’ which cause an instinctive reaction in various animal species has been well documented by Nikolaas Tinbergen and other scientists in the field of ethology, the study of animal behaviour.

Shortly before the start of World War II, Tinbergen, a young Dutch zoologist, noticed something strange happening in a fish tank containing sticklebacks, a small local minnow. The fish tank was on a window ledge and Tinbergen noticed that, at the same time each day, the male sticklebacks would adopt aggressive postures. He realised that they were responding to the passing of the bright red van belonging to the Dutch postal service. Male sticklebacks have a bright red stripe and the females have swollen bellies. He built models which hugely exaggerated these features and found that the males would attack the model which had the largest element of red and that when a model of a female with an exaggeratedly swollen belly was introduced into the fish tank they would become amorous. In each case the male sticklebacks concentrated on the models with exaggerated features and ignored the real fish.

Tinbergen called these exaggerated features, ‘super-normal releasers’ – in other words they triggered extremes of behaviour and, I believe, placing a metal or silver-lined glass bead – Pat Dorsey-style - at the eye of the hook on subsurface patterns falls into this category.

Storms River artist and professional fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche has pleasant memories of my first attempt at a sunken beetle when, as a schoolboy he fished the Eertse stream which runs through

Stellenbosch and, at weekends, the Smalblaar stream in the Du Toit's Kloof valley near Worcester:

"I remember your original sunken beetle very well from my high school days - it used to be one of my favourite flies to use on the Eerste stream in Stellenbosch.

It was equally deadly at the Idas Valley Dam above the town, one of the dams which supplied Stellenbosch with water. If you spotted a trout cruising close to the bank and could get the sunken beetle slightly ahead of it, it would invariably accelerate to take it.

A few years back we were fishing on the Smalblaar stream near Worcester and while we were walking upstream past a very shallow, fast riffle that didn't look like it held fish, we spotted a nice trout next us, holding right along the edge of this rapid water.

I tried the RAB I had on and it didn't even move. So I tied on your original sunken beetle and put the fly down about a metre above the trout. It instantly shot upstream to get to the fly, triggered by the glint of the bead and the metallic sheen of the peacock herl."
The smaller you can tie a sunken beetle, the easier it is to cast – here is my current tie:

Hook: Dohiku 303 'Beetle Hook' in size 14, a short shank model which is an effective size 18.

Bead: Black 1.5 or 2mm mm countersunk bead in brass or tungsten or silver-lined glass bead.

Thread: Semperfli Nano Silk 20 denier.

Protruding Wing: Bubble wrap plastic which is durable and has a nice sheen.

Shellback: Hareline Mini Flat Fly Braid - olive.

Body: Black Hareline Quick Descent Dub – when it comes to ease of use, there is no alternative to this dubbing which is made of finely-shredded aluminium shavings. Being made of metal, it is compressible with fine-nose pliers which enables you to widen the hook gape.

Legs: Krystal Flash or fine rubber.



Two examples of Quick Descent Dubbing which is made of thin strands of aluminium and is the easiest to use when tying small flies

The big breakthrough for those who wished to follow the above-mentioned fly anglers and fish the sunken beetle like a nymph was the advent of synthetic materials which rendered the crow feather shell back redundant.

There are several and their big advantage, aside from the availability in different colours and increased durability, was that they are elastic and also translucent. By stretching them, they can more precisely cover the dubbed body and enable smaller patterns to be tied than the traditional feather shellback.

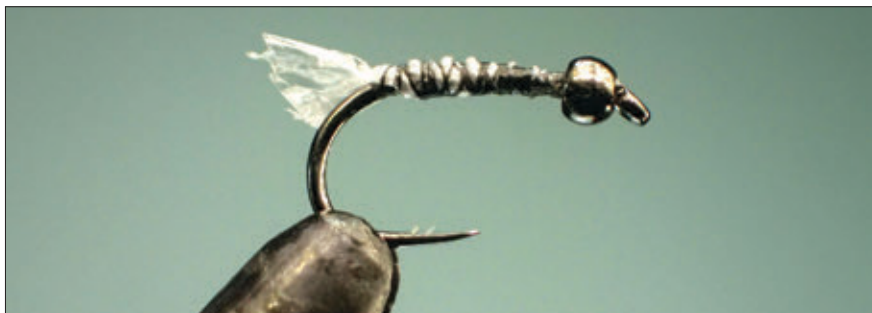
Among them are Chewee Skin, Scud Back and various braids.

My favourite is Hareline Mini Flat Fly Braid in olive.

My hook of choice is a size 14 Dohiku 303 model, aptly called the 'Beetle Hook'. It is a short shank, medium wire hook which creates a #18 fly with a wider-than-standard gape.

Tying sequence

Attach the bead to the hook and tie a tiny trailing piece of bubble wrap plastic at the bend of the hook to represent the diaphanous hind wing which is covered by the hard and protective elytra. If you do a Google Images search for 'Beetle Hind Wings' you will find many examples. When the beetle is in the water, the tip of their wings often protrudes beyond the body providing a translucent recognition point.



Fold the braid double and tie it in at the eye of the hook leaving a small space behind the bead for the whip finish



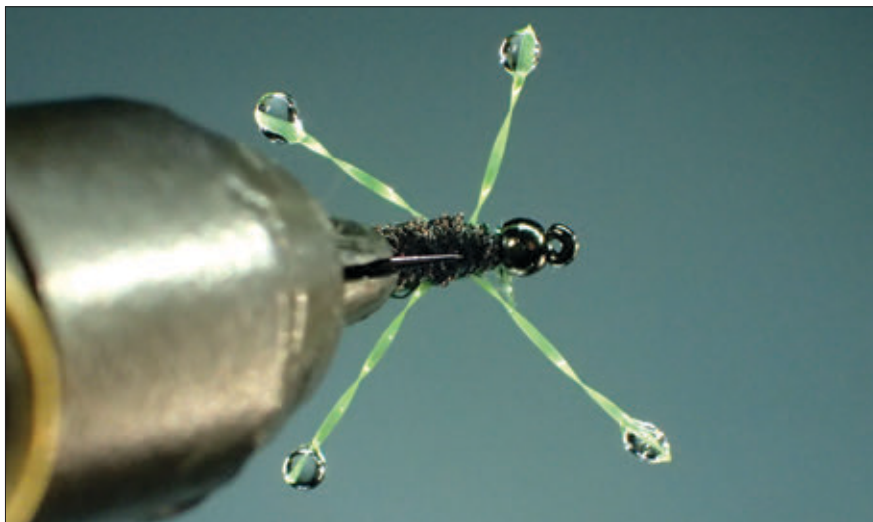
Create a dubbed body with the Quick Descent Dub. One of its advantages is that it can be compressed with small pliers to maximise the hook gape



**Place the legs in an X shape in the middle of the hook and on top of the dubbed body and hold them in place with a few x-wraps of the dubbed thread.
I am using Veniard barred rubber legs here**



Advance the thread to the eye of the hook and fold the two pieces of backward-facing braid forward to the eye of the hook and whip finish behind the bead



Once the fly is complete, counterweight the legs with tiny drops of Loon UV Knot Sense to add movement and light. This idea comes from Cape Town split cane rod maker Stephen Boshoff – the Hemiptera – with their stylet (shaped like a straw) sucking mouths than they will be seeing much bigger versions of this type of insect which would be imitated using #10 -12 hooks.

Trout will see far more beetles the size of your little fingernail – particularly when it comes to bugs – the Hemiptera – with their stylet (shaped like a straw) sucking mouths than they will be seeing much bigger versions of this type of insect which would be imitated using #10 -12 hooks.

The main trigger when it came to contemporary beetle pattern design was the arrival from Japan in the USA a century ago of the alien and invasive *Popilla japonica* - about half an inch in length. Vincent Marinaro gave a full breakdown in his milestone 1950 book *A Modern Dry Fly Code*. He and Charlie Fox use to set beetle traps and anyone was free to use these beetles to chum the trout on Pennsylvania's Letort Spring Run.

The black clipped deer hair fly they settled on was tied by Ed Shenk and described by Ed Koch in his 1990 book 'Terrestrial Fishing': "It was trimmed flat on the bottom, oval on the sides and round on top."

That was it - just a beetle-shaped blob. The Crowe Beetle, described in a previous chapter, appeared at about the same time but was slightly more realistic.

Koch, however, came to an important but logical conclusion which is why I refer to him here.

After many refusals, he decided to try smaller beetle patterns and the trout response was positive. He tried a #18 version of the original pattern fished on a 7x tippet.

"They all took the little black beetle without hesitation. I was pretty sure that it was the size that had made the difference between refusal and acceptance. With the smaller size the trout were once again eager to take the imitation."

In the context of sunken beetle design, what does the future hold?

What can be done to enhance the trout-attracting abilities of an already deadly pattern?

As I see it, there are two main options - we rethink already-proven flies such as the Red Tag in the sunken beetle genre or we seek to add more movement to sinking shellback patterns such as Mike

Weaver's Black Bug.

Half a century ago Eric Horsfall Turner contributed an article 'Comic Yorkshire Fly' to Piscator - you can find it in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder in the articles section on the CPS website.

In the nineteen forties he had been sitting on the banks of the Derwent River in Yorkshire watching a large trout that had ignored all offerings. A beetle fell into the water and was instantly eaten. All Horsfall Turner had that resembled a beetle was a huge, winged peacock herl-bodied fly of Norwegian origin. Stripping off the wings, he offered it to his tormentor – to be tormented no more.

He subsequently refined the fly and his approach, producing what is now known as 'Eric's Beetle'.

It has a peacock herl body, a yellow wool tag and small, starling or black hen hackle. He fished it upstream on a greased leader. When he was stymied by a rising fish refusing his dry fly, he would use his beetle with a greased leader and success was usually assured: ***"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."***

A marrow spoon would indicate what they were feeding upon – whereupon the 'Comic Yorkshire Fly' would be removed and replaced by a dry fly which imitated what the trout had been rising to.

The general assumption is that Eric's Beetle was tied to represent one of the diving beetles which returns to the surface to replenish its air supply and the yellow tag was meant to imitate the bubble.

Why not, I asked myself, emulate that bubble with a silver-lined glass bead?

Pat Dorsey, author of that wonderful 2010 book, 'Tying & Fishing Tailwater Flies' has proved with his Mercury series of flies that such beads are super normal releasers and this offers a significant avenue of exploration when tying slightly-weighted beetle imitations designed to fish just subsurface.



Silver-lined clear glass beads imitating air bubbles provide the potential of another trigger on sunken beetle designs. The shellback is Chewee Skin

This basic design of the sunken beetle has a universal appeal for trout wherever it is fished, something very relevant in the relatively infertile mountain streams of southern Africa where mayfly hatches are not only sparse but sporadic. The seminal study on trout diet in such streams was the two - and - a - half- year, state-sponsored PhD study, Biology of Trout in Kenya Colony, published in 1948 by the late Dr Vern von Someron. He wrote that mayflies hatch in penny numbers and mostly at night. His study found that Baetid mayfly nymphs and blackfly (simulium) larvae were the main constituents of trout diet but that beetles, ants, grasshoppers, wasps, bees and other terrestrials were always present in trout stomachs and were often the preponderant constituent in such examinations. An extract from this thesis, 'Kenya trout Feeding Behaviour' can be found in the folder headlined 'Trout Behaviour

and Diet’ on the CPS website. The attraction of trout and yellowfish to beetles whether in dams in or streams is a matter of repeated record The most obvious stillwater example is the universal use of the of the Good Doctor’s Beetle at that fabled yellowfish venue, Sterkfontein dam near Harrismith in the Orange Free State. Dr Hans van Zyl tells his story in the Dam Fishing folder in the CPS articles archive and there is another on this pattern by David Weaver, a guide at the dam.

Alan Hobson’s study of the role of predaceous diving beetles in the diet of trout in Mountain Dam in Somerset East is equally telling and examples can be found on his ‘Wild Fly Fishing in the Karoo’ website and on his [@karootrout](#) Instagram page.



An example of Alan Hobson’s predaceous diving beetle imitation - a deadly pattern for stillwater trout - proving that beetle imitations have a universal appeal for trout and yellowfish

The biggest potential for future research in designing more effective beetles lies, I believe, in making the legs more mobile and Stephen Boshoff’s idea of weighting the tip of the leg with a tiny blob of UV resin, what I call ‘Pendulum Legs’, has much merit. I think the tip could be made even heavier if it is knotted before the resin is applied. Adding UV resin to the top of a synthetic material shellback is another avenue to explore, providing increased durability and translucence. Black glitter dust could be added to the resin to give a mottled effect.

Fishing the Sunken Beetle



A photo by Marcel Terblanche of one of the six foot, six inch one ounce small stream rods he builds for tiny, heavily-bushed streams in the southern Cape

The smaller the stream and the more closely the bankside vegetation encroaches on it, the more important a role that drop-in terrestrial insects like ants, beetles and spiders play in the lives of the trout that inhabit it.

Short rods cast tight loops which is why the Japanese fly anglers who were featured in Rolf Nylander's classic 2018 You Tube documentary, 'The Great Shaku Hunter' did not choose to use 12-foot Euro-nymphing rods.



A brown trout caught by Marcel Terblanche on a southern Cape stream using a self-built 2-weight carbon fibre rod which weighs 15/16th of an ounce. Note the weight- saving rubber O-ring securing the Wychwood reel to rod handle

If I were to fish my bead head sunken beetle today, I would choose a Palm Grip, 3-weight fiberglass rod of around seven foot in length. I'd use a 3-5 foot furled leader ending in a split ring. The ring would be covered with a small blob of Rio Bio Strike putty to act as a strike indicator. The leader would end at 6x.

In closing, a quote: ***"An imitation of a small black beetle floating on top or fished underneath at various depths, either motionless or twitched, is arguably Tasmania's most effective single trout lure over a full season."*** Tony Ritchie – 'Finding Feeding Trout' (Kangaroo Press, 1994).





CHAPTER 15

Plagiosterna discolor

Rethinking the Starling and Herl

"Even if there was no hatch to match, the trout on tree-lined streams responded much better to predominantly green flies."

Gary LaFontaine – *The Dry Fly. New Angles* (Greycliff Publishing Company, 1990).



Giordano (Zamps) Zamparini fishing the appropriately-named Willow Stream on the farm Balloch in Barkly East

For the best part of 25 years starting in the mid-1990s, Tom Sutcliffe and I visited Barkly East as the guests of Basie and Carien Vosloo staying on their farm Birkhall, a five-minute drive from the Sterkspruit River.

Centuries ago, the indigenous willow tree, *Salix mucronata*, provided food for an indigenous Willow Leaf Beetle.

The first settler farmers arrived in areas of the North Eastern Cape Province such as Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear around a century and a half ago, eventually importing and planting the weeping willow, *Salix babylonica*. This doubled the food source for the local Willow Leaf Beetle. Then, about a century ago, the available food source trebled with the government's policy of planting the imported crack willow, *Salix fragilis* in the hopes of starting a basket weaving industry.

Both quickly infested our river banks and, as a result the increase in Willow Leaf Beetles was exponential. In spring these beetles provided the bulk of the food intake of trout on rivers where willows lined both banks.

I knew that this tiny iridescent beetle was part of the *Chrysomelidae* family but I wanted a more precise identification. I called it the Birkhall Beetle, but a more accurate name would be the Willow Leaf Beetle.

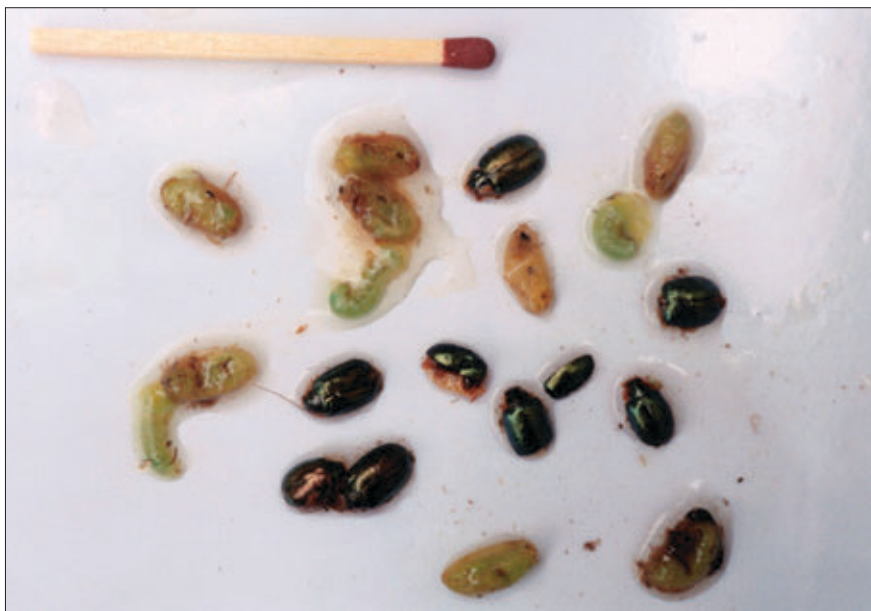
I was put in touch with Beth Grobbelaar, an entomologist and beetle specialist who works at the Agricultural Research Council's Biosystematics Division in Pretoria - @arc_south_africa. She identified the specimens I sent her as *Plagiosterna discolor* (Stål) (Chrysomelidae: Chrysomelinae)

According to her research, they are most commonly observed from September to November.



Beth Grobbelaar, who assisted the author in correctly identifying the 'Birkhall Beetle'. Three stages in the life of South Africa's indigenous Willow Leaf Beetle, *Plagiosterna discolor*

During their breeding season they form the bulk of trout food on these streams and there are swirls every time the wind blows. It is not just the beetles that are being dislodged by the wind, it is also their larvae and the occasional inchworm, the beetle indigenous and the other invasive.



The stomach contents of a trout caught in a willow-lined section of the Sterkspruit in Barkly East. Although the stream bed teemed with nymphs, it had only been able to capture drop-in terrestrial insects, Willow Leaf Beetles and sawfly larvae and pupae

Trout respond to the plop and as long as your fly has the general size, shape and colour, it will be taken.

Peacock herl is the main constituent in three famous British flies, the Coch y Bonddu, Tom Ivens' Black and Peacock Spider and the Red Tag. In his book, *50 Favourite Wet Flies* (A.C. Black, 1986) T. Donald Overfield, quotes a letter from another well-known British angling writer, Conrad Voss Bark:

"I have fished the Black and Peacock Spider almost everywhere for trout, especially in late summer and autumn on the chalk, limestone and spate rivers; practically always fished upstream and dropped down with a noticeable plop well above a fish or a place where a fish is likely to be. 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."

When I last fished the Sterkspruit, I was using the Sunken Beetle described in the previous chapter, but the *Plagiosterna* imitation shown here is a consequence of three recent fly-tying arrivals, hooks, thread and a synthetic body material and it seeks to achieve a more accurate GISS (General impression of size and shape) profile while recognising the flies which our forbears used to such effect on beetle-sipping trout.

Thread: In 2021 Semperfli introduced 20D Nanosilk which consists of 12 micro-thin fibres and has a breaking strain of 26 oz. This brought the realm of micro-patterns into the ambit of all fly-tyers

although, like all gel-spun polyethylene threads, it is slippery and requires a dab of superglue on the hook shank when you start tying.

Shortly thereafter the Italian company Textreme introduced an even thinner GSP thread, Textreme Extreme.

The advantage of these threads is that they allow multiple wraps without creating bulk.

Hooks: Two companies, Umqua with its Perdi Jig Short and Dohiku with its 302 SP have modified the Tiemco 108SP-BL 'Dolphin Shank' by shortening the shank and making the angle of the downturned eye less extreme. This widens the gape while still flipping the hook upside down when used with slotted beads. In smaller sizes these are ideal hooks for tying sunken beetle imitations.



The Tiemco 'Dolphin Shank' hook (top) and the Umqua Perdijig short – both #16

Straggle String: Some thirty years ago British stillwater expert Steve Parton wrote that dry flies with bodies of a then-new material, Cactus Chenille, were exceptionally successful, probably because light flickering across the reflective strands gave the impression of movement, the key means by which fish locate prey.

Semperfli Straggle Micro Legs reduces the size of the core and widens the gap between the strands which increases the perception of movement and enables its use with small hooks. *Trout and Salmon* columnist, Paul Procter uses it as the body material on his Kicking Beetle.

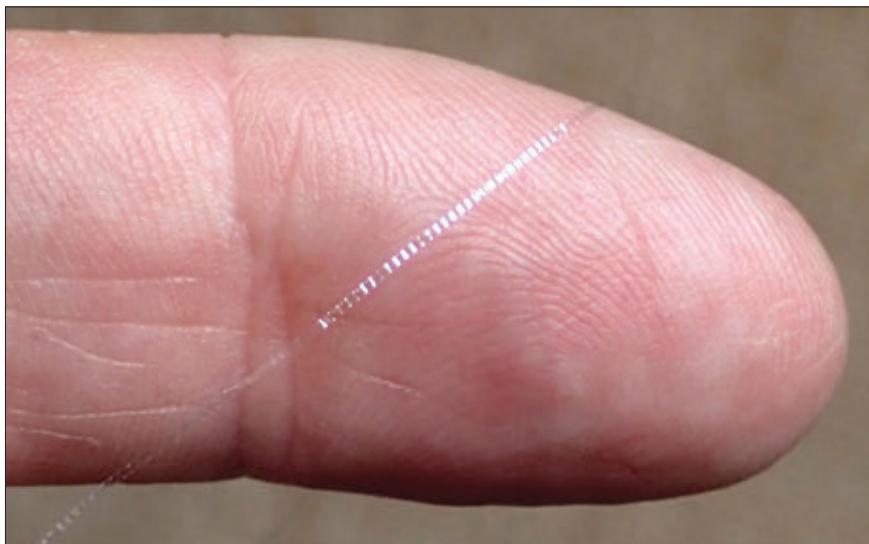
Hind wing: An oft-omitted but important element of beetle imitations is the membranous wings which can be seen protruding beyond the body when the insect is on the water.

If you Google 'Images beetle wing structure' you will see what I mean.

Renowned American fly tyer A K Best regards these wings as a key trigger factor and imitates them with hackle tips, but I found them to be fragile and inclined to twist light tippets

The best material for this purpose, I have found is stretched bubble wrap plastic. It is durable and

has a subtle sheen but an alternative is Gliss-n-Glow Clear Ice made by local company Fishient which features light-reflecting horizontal corrugations and is easier and quicker to use on size 18 and smaller patterns.



Gliss n' Glow Clear Ice mimics the protruding beetle wing on smaller imitations

Body material: Peacock eye feathers provide the material for the Red Tag, the Cochy and the Black and Peacock Spider but the sword feather is more lush and more reflective. I twist the Straggle Legs and the peacock together in an anti-clockwise direction and then spiral the thread around both before winding this rope forward and stopping shortly before the eye.

What this does is provide a halo of reflective and mobile strands surrounding a core of peacock herl which is covered in minute light reflecting scales.

Hackle: I tie a European starling feather in by the butt and then wind it around the thread W C Stewart-style. Wind on with two turns. Trim away the tip and then x-wind the thread through the barbles to strengthen and separate them.

Adding more weight and sparkle

Watch Tim Flagler's video 'Jig Hooks and Slotted Beads Part 2 of 2' on the Orvis website.

In addition to 1.5 and 2mm brass or tungsten beads, one can add a little more weight and ensure that your 'tied in the round' Willow Leaf Beetle drifts hook point up. Simply tie a piece of Hends 0.2mm lead wire to the top of the hook shank.

To add more sparkle, cover the bare hook shank when you start tying with some superglue and then brush some black UV Ice Dub against this area. You can also touch dub this sparkly synthetic dubbing against waxed thread when you start tying. Later in the process, when you palmer your peacock herl forward, the Ice Dub will protrude through the feather creating little sparkles of light.

Tying sequence

Slip the bead onto the hook and tie in a tiny slip of plastic at the bend of the hook to represent a

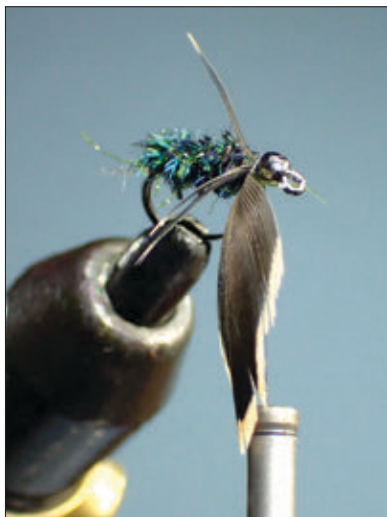
protruding wing.

Tie in 4-6 strands of peacock sword feather and a strand of Straggle Legs;

Plait the herl and the Straggle String together and then spiral the thread around both. Wrap forward to just behind the bead

Tie in a starling or equivalent feather by the butt. I use a tiny drop of superglue at this point.

Twist the thread around the feather W C Stewart-style and take about two turns of feather around the hook to create the hackle. Take the thread between the individual barbles to separate and reinforce them before whip finishing.



Wrapping the starling feather around the thread W C Stewart-style. On a down-stream drift, this is how the fly will appear to the trout

Fishing the Sunken Beetle

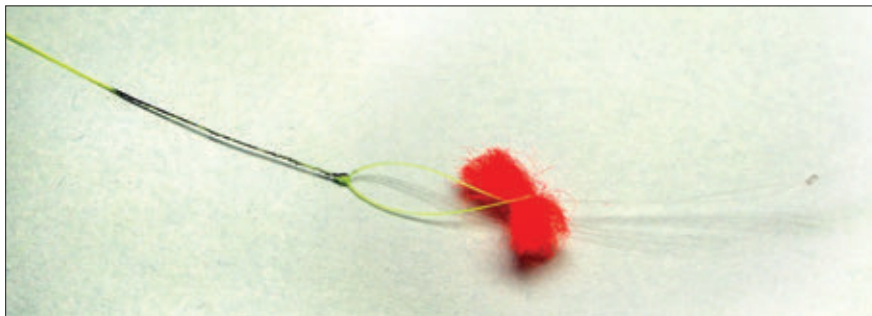
Following small beetle and ant patterns in the drift must have been very difficult until the advent of what I call the 'greased hi-vis leader'. Some 40 years ago Dave Whitlock, writing in the American magazine *Fly Fisherman*, advised sliding a piece of red or orange floating fly line onto the leader as a strike indicator. I slid it onto a piece of yellow Stren mono which I then marked on both sides of the fly line with a black permanent marker.



(L) The components used by the author for his Mucilin-greased 'Hi-vis' leaders when fishing small dry or sunken flies

Today, thanks to competitive fly fishing, we have several manufacturers such as Hends, Sci-Anglers, Rio, Soldarini, Vision and others who produce brightly-coloured nylon mono as visual aids for nymphing. Then there is Skafars which is a wipe-on/wipe-off coloured wax and Loon-Bio Strike, a yellow or pink plasticine which one can apply to leader knots or tippet rings. Grease the leader with Mucilin paste and it will lift off the water with less

disturbance and this will make it easier to follow the coloured sections of mono during the drift.



The author's Perfection Loop to Perfection Loop greased strike indicator leader. By sliding the loops apart, the waterproofed tuft of yarn can easily be removed

Combining olive Straggle String with the sumptuous opulence of the peacock sword feather will, I feel, enhance proven patterns such as the Red Tag, the Coch y Bonddu and the Black and Peacock Spider but, there is very little that is new in fly tying and, in the end, I realised that I had just tied an improved version of a century-old pattern, the Starling and Herl.

The Willow Leaf Beetle as a floater



The Bell River below Rhodes showing the separation of the willow trees on the bank, each of which is host to both *Plagiosterna* beetles and *Nematus* inchworm larvae. Photo by Peter Brigg

Decades ago, when the Steynberg family owned the Rhodes Hotel, I was sitting on the veranda with their son Fred (today a renowned guide) discussing the Willow Leaf Beetle and he asked me to

accompany him to a weeping willow a few yards away. Using his thumb, he prised away a piece of bark to expose a Willow Beetle. The tree was full of them. Willow trees in Rhodes are found in the middle sections of the streams where the flow is slower.

I have always seen flies tied to imitate this insect as slightly weighted with a 1.5 mm black brass bead to create a plop and get it down to the level where trout were holding.

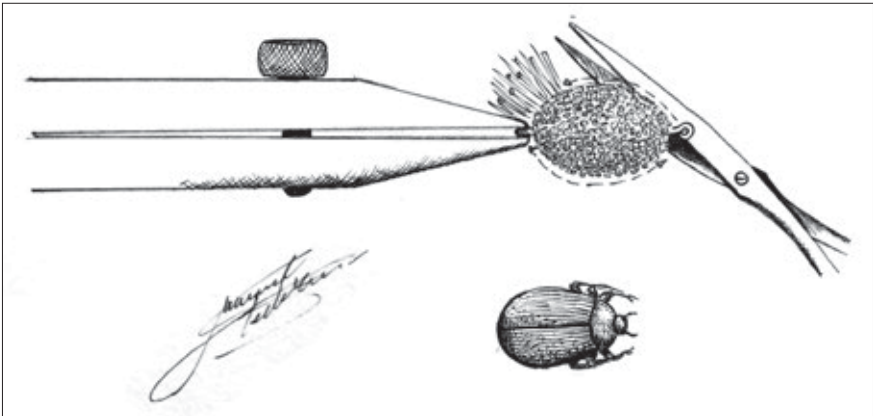
My reasoning was that the bead was a trigger and the plop attracted attention.

I trace this back to my early days of fly fishing and a section of one of the local trout streams which was completely bushed in. The trees on both banks met in the middle of the stream creating a canopy which left that section in deep shadow.

I quickly discovered that a slightly-weighted fly landing a yard or so downstream of the shadow line, invariably resulted in a trout swimming into the sunshine to investigate what had fallen in.

Two alien beetle species drove the experiments on the Letort Spring Run which saw Vincent Marinaro, Charlie Fox, Ernest Schweibert, Ed Koch, Ed Shenk and others seeking appropriate imitations in the 1960s - *Popillia japonica* which aroused the ire of gardeners by attacking roses and the smaller *Plagioder a versicolora* which attacked willow trees.

The latter, the Willow Leaf Beetle, like our indigenous species, is little bigger than a match head, about a quarter of an inch long and its legs are tiny.



An illustration by Storms River artist and professional fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher – based on the sketch of a Willow Leaf Beetle imitation in Ed Koch's 1990 book 'Terrestrial Fishing'

The imitation that the Letort regulars finally settled on to imitate their Willow Leaf Beetle was a #18 spun and clipped deer hair fly – a floater – and I now wonder if my earlier 'plop' experience on the streams near Cape Town did not send me down a somewhat incorrect path because I think the Willow Leaf Beetles on the middle reaches of the North Eastern Cape streams where the currents are smoother than those higher up the valleys, could well float.

I base that conjecture on an experience I had about 25 years ago on the Sterkspruit with the late Basie Vosloo.

The background is that in 1993 some plants were brought into Lesotho which were parasitised by the invasive sawfly, *Oligospilus nematus*, which has a green inchworm in its larval stage.

By 1995 it had made its way into Rhodes and found a century of crack willow infestation of local

streams to feed on and the sawfly population exploded.

I arrived at Dave Walker's B&B, unpacked my luggage and strolled down to the Bell stream to check on water conditions.

I was astonished to see the stream bed littered with dozens of dead green caterpillars and the tree canopy massively reduced by the green inchworms. Equally present were their pupae. I took some back with me by which time most had hatched into adults. The entomologists at the Cape Town Museum identified them as the invasive sawfly and referred me to a paper published two years earlier – ***'A recently introduced sawfly, *Nematus oligospilus* Förster (Hymenoptera: Tenthredinidae), that defoliates willows in southern Africa'*** by A. J. Urban and C. D. Eardley of the Plant Protection Research Institute in Pretoria (a copy can be found in the Terrestrials folder in the CPS articles archive).

A recently introduced sawfly, *Nematus oligospilus* Förster (Hymenoptera: Tenthredinidae), that defoliates willows in southern Africa

A.J. Urban & C.D. Eardley

Plant Protection Research Institute, Private Bag X134, Pretoria, 0001 South Africa

Exotic willow trees, *Salix babylonica* L. and *S. fragilis* Benth., were severely defoliated in the Highveld Region of South Africa and in Lesotho during the summer of 1993/94 by larvae of the Holarctic tenthredinid sawfly *Nematus oligospilus* Förster. This is the first record of *Nematinae* from southern Africa. A diagnosis is provided and distribution, biology and economic relevance are discussed. Natural enemies of the sawfly include the parasitoids *Dibrachys* sp. and *Pteromalus* sp. (Pteromalidae) and *Pediobius* sp. (Eulophidae) (Hymenoptera), and the predator *Macrorhaphis* sp. (Hemiptera: Pentatomidae). Field surveys indicated that the indigenous willow, *S. mucronata* Thunb., is not attacked. A greenhouse trial demonstrated that the sawfly cannot breed on the economically important salicaceous tree *Populus deltoides* Bart. ex Marsh.

Key words: sawfly *Nematus oligospilus*, *Nematus desantisi*, *Dibrachys*, *Pteromalus*, *Pediobius*, *Macrorhaphis*, *Salix*, *Populus*, southern Africa.

The 1993 paper which set out the background to the 1993 sawfly invasion and which can be found in the 'Terrestrials' folder in the CPS article archive

I duly wrote an article on this new source of trout food for a local magazine, *Flyfishing*.

In the July 1990 issue of the authoritative American magazine, *Fly Fisherman*, Barry Beck had written an article *The Sinking Inchworm – A guide's 'Ace-in-Hole' Pattern* in which he recommended weighting inchworm imitation - so I tied mine that way.

The dénouement came when I was being picked up at Birkhall by Basie's neighbours around noon. They were taking their children to school in Bloemfontein and would drop me at the airport to catch



An article by the author which first alerted the fly angling public to the sawfly invasion

the surface, snapping up the larvae the instant they touch the water surface.

a flight back to Cape Town.

There were a few hours to spare and, as I was packed, I borrowed a rod from him, grabbed a fly box and we drove down to the Sterkspruit to be met by an astonishing sight.

The river was literally boiling with yellowfish rising to inchworms every time a gusty breeze made its presence felt. Looking downstream, against the light, there was a fine mist in the air - such was their feeding frenzy.

I was elated – for once, I was in the right place at the right time with the right fly – Barry Beck's sinking inchworm with a 1.5 mm black brass bead supplying the weight.

Fifteen minutes later I had caught one small yellowfish and they continued their metronomic rising, despite my standing in full sight on the bank only metres from them.

The river was shallow here, so I propped my rod against a tree and waded across to where the nearest yellowfish was rising and put my nose down close to the water surface.

The inchworms were floating!

Inchworms float on hitting the water, but sink eventually.

This sawfly has also invaded the Andean region of Argentina and Chile, Australia and New Zealand and the experience there is exactly the same – the trout hover just below



Plagiosterna discolor is probably fractionally lighter than an inchworm.

Those lone willow trees dispersed along the banks of streams in Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear, co-host both the Willow Leaf Beetle and the sawfly larva.



(L) An illustration of the Nematus inchworm by Storms River artist Marcel Terblanche

The beetle has tiny legs and is easily dislodged by the wind, the inchworm not.

According to the Beth Grobbelaar, *Plagiosterna discolor* has a breeding cycle of three-months - from September to November.

However, in the above-mentioned study by Urban and Eardley, they cite the sawfly as breeding four times a year right through summer from October to March.

They found that the caterpillar stage rarely pupates on the tree, more often than not dropping to the ground to complete its transition to the adult

stage in the leaf litter at the base of the willow tree.

In Australia, where *Nematus* is also invasive and defoliating both *Babylonica* and *Fragilis* willows, the breeding season also starts in October, once the temperature reaches 23 degrees centigrade (73.4 °F).

If the portion of the willow in which the inchworm stage is feeding overhangs the water, they become fish food.

The government's Working for Water alien vegetation clearing program has seen the eradication of much of the crack willow infestation in this region and nature has achieved its own balance, so those heady days of frenzied feeding on more inchworms than could be consumed are just a memory. The crack willows have, however, re-grown in the interim.

The angler who can fish a dry/dropper rig is thus at an advantage when approaching such willow trees with my version of the Starling and Herl on the point and a foam rubber beetle on the dropper – both size 18 - will be at an advantage.

If inchworms are present, try one on the dropper.

I'm told that to imitate the inchworm, you need nothing more than a 17 mm (slightly more than half an inch) piece of green chenille singed at both ends and treated with floatant, tied on a #16 light wire hook. In Australia's Goulbourn Valley, they tie a strip of looped green foam rubber to the side of a light wire, up-eyed sedge hook.

Mario Geldenhuys, custom rod and net maker from Aliwal North, contributed a chapter on his ingenious foam rubber inchworm for the book Peter Brigg and I wrote on indigenous South African flies and it can be found in the 'Terrestrials' folder in the CPS articles archive.

For the floating version of the Willow Leaf Beetle, it can be as complicated as you want to make it.

In 1998, Stephen Boshoff who was studying in the USA at the time, attended the Somerset Fly

Fishing Show in New Jersey and bought a beetle from Ed Koch – not spun and clipped deer hair – just a piece of foam rubber lashed to a #18 hook. Silhouette again.



The Micro-beetle which Stephen Boshoff bought from Ed Koch

My thoughts in the context of imitating the floating Willow Leaf beetle is get the size right first - #18 – 20 and then make the trout aware of its approach as early as possible.

I feel that the material for achieving this is micro cactus chenille.

In 1994 Gary Borger wrote an article for *Fly Fisherman* magazine headlined 'The New Synthetics' and strongly recommended a new material called 'Cactus Chenille' which worked well for me on dry fly bodies. At around the same time, a float tube pioneer in the UK, the late Steve Parton, wrote an article on this for the magazine *Stillwater Trout Angler*: ***'The secret is out! Cactus chenille dry flies are deadly'***.



A prototype attractor beetle designed to float beneath willow trees and tied on a #18 light wire hook using micro cactus chenille for the body

CHAPTER 15

My experiments with this material as a dry fly did well for me, but was probably instantly relegated to obscurity by its name, the Xmas Caddis. You can find the account in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder in the CPS articles archive.

You can now get Micro Cactus Chenille which enables you to incorporate this deadly attention-attracting sparkle in #18 patterns and smaller.

The great sawfly invasion some 20 years ago did not endure at that level, but the inchworms are still around, albeit in smaller numbers.

If you are a traditional 'match-the-hatch' recreational fly angler then it would pay to approach the willow trees in this area with suitably imitative flies.

A final thought – would a suitably-coloured and greased squirmy wormy be an effective inchworm imitation in such circumstances?



Micro Cactus Chenille enables trout to detect small beetle imitations at a distance. They can be followed in the drift by using a greased hi-vis leader





CHAPTER 16

Part 1

The Ant Ecosystem



*"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."

Marcel Terblanche Fosaf Fly of the Month November 2023 - 'The Sugar Ant Dry Fly'.

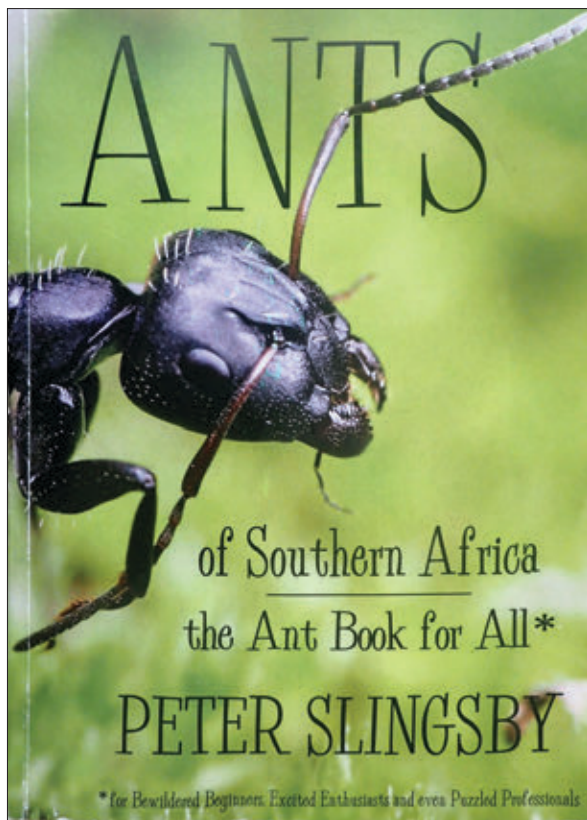
As the painting by artist and professional fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher – headlining the first part of this chapter indicates - the Smalblaar Myrtle plays a vitally important role in the lives of trout in the streams near Cape Town.

At the beginning of spring in the Western Cape, when the mountain air is sweet with the smell of flowers in bud, those flowers literally writhe with movement as the beetles, speckled with pollen, enjoy

the feast. By late autumn that is a thing of the past. Two points are salient here – while more species of beetles exist than any other form of animal life on earth, in sheer numbers they are considerably exceeded by ants and secondly because ants, unlike beetles, live in colonies rather than as individuals, there are concentrations of them numbering from hundreds to thousands. If those colonies are close to water, then the chances of fish in that area becoming familiar with their silhouette and light pattern on the water - rather than that of a beetle - is considerably enhanced.

This is the story of a journey spanning almost half a century as I slowly accumulated knowledge of the role played by three specific ant species which are common in the diet of trout in the streams near Cape Town - *Crematogaster peringueyi*, the Black Cocktail Ant, the *Camponotus* or sugar ant species, known locally as *Balbyters* (ballbiters) and the Yellow Fire Ant – *Solenopsis punctaticeps*.

A prized possession in this regard is Peter Slingsby's monumental 2017 book, 'Ants of Southern Africa' – now sadly out of print. His illustrations of ants are magnificent and you can find them on his website, [antsofthecape.blogspot dot com](http://antsofthecape.blogspot.com).



(L) Peter Slingsby's magnificent book on South African ants, rich in research, beautifully illustrated

The most prolific of these three species on local streams is the Cocktail Ant (called Swartwipgatmier in Afrikaans because of its defence mechanism which involves arching its abdomen over its head when threatened and projecting a repellent spray.) For the specific chapter relating to the Black Cocktail Ant on Peter's website and its symbiotic relationship with the Smalblaar Myrtle, use this link:

- Ants of Southern Africa -:
Crematogaster sp: Cocktail ants
(antsofthecape.blogspot.com)

The article has a photograph of the 'carton nests' built by these ants. They are made of chewed vegetable matter which resembles papier mâché. The nests are easy to spot but I never realised their significance in their context as a source of trout food. They also use this material to build protective shelters over their aphid farms.

To get a further idea of what these three ants look like, just do a Google Images search using the Latin names. Peter recommends that you join the Open University's website [iSpot dot org](http://iSpot.org).

[Antwiki dot org](http://Antwiki.org) also has a wealth of information.



Ants on the Smalblaar Myrtle – illustration by Marcel Terblanche



The Smalblaar Myrtle provides trout in the streams near Cape Town with shade and – a regular supply of tiny ants

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

They all look much the same however, hook size 18 or smaller and mainly dark.

If you do an internet search for *Metrosideros angustifolia* you will be taken to an article by the SA National Botanic Institute (SANBI) on a tree which is known colloquially as the 'Smalblaar Myrtle' – Smalblaar being Afrikaans for 'narrow leaf'.

Our most significant local trout stream is named after it.

This river-dwelling evergreen is the only indigenous myrtle we have and it is endemic to the winter rainfall heathland – known as the Fynbos Biome - of the Western Cape.

What makes the Smalblaar Myrtle important in the context of local fly angling is that not only is it home to prodigious numbers of ants but, in many places, its branches along which the ants search for food, touch the water.

Furthermore, *Metrosideros angustifolia* blooms from October to February, our summer and our windy months when the ants are at a greater risk of being dislodged. The small, clustered, fluffy yellowish flowers are sweetly scented and attract a variety of insects.



The sweet-scented flower of the Smalblaar Myrtle – photo supplied by Alice Notten, Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, SANBI

I was told by Storms River artist, Marcel Terblanche, whose paintings illustrate this article, that the cocktail ants exploit the insects visiting these flowers.

What these circumstances make clear is that local stream trout are habituated to the presence of ants in the water to the extent that they respond to them reflexively.

This, when it comes to trout is a matter of record everywhere – trout are ant epicures wherever they are found.

The seminal study on trout diet in African small streams was the two and a half –year, state-sponsored PhD study, Biology of Trout in Kenya Colony, published in 1948 by the late Dr Vern von

Someron. You can find an extract from it in the CPS articles archive in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder. He analysed the stomach contents of 489 trout taken from 16 mountain streams and found that the most commonly consumed terrestrial insect was the ant followed by beetles.

I was, however, slow to grasp the salience of this initial understanding of the importance of ants to trout and still slower to act on it.

The first lesson came within a year of my starting to fly-fish.

I had been befriended by Tony Biggs, inventor of the RAB Variant and he had been asked by a neighbour to bring some trout home for the smoker.

One of the trout I caught had a tiny ant in the front of its mouth and one almost in its gullet and I realised that each of them had been individually captured in that fast and boisterous water.

Back then, tiny hooks were not available and I thought no more of it.

Then I read Ken Miyata's article 'Anting the Hatch'.

The definitive article on trout's proclivity for ants was written by him and published in *Fly Fisherman* Volume 13, number six (July/October, 1982.) A year later Miyata was dead. He drowned while fishing the Big Horn River in Montana on October 14, 1983. He had a PhD in zoology and was a fellow of the Smithsonian Institute. He co-authored a book 'Tropical Nature' on the natural history of the Central American rain forest that was published posthumously the following year by Charles Scribner. John Randolph, then editor of *Fly Fisherman* magazine, headed his obituary 'The Best and the Brightest'. Miyata's peers were some of America's most revered fly-fishing authorities, Art Lee, Mike Lawson, Mike Kimball and others. Had he lived he would have undoubtedly become one of the sport's luminaries. Randolph concluded his obituary by writing: 'Ken Miyata will be missed; his affirmations will endure.' Perhaps it is a fitting epitaph that 'Anting the Hatch' has become part of fly fishing's nomenclature and one of its most effective techniques. Both ants and beetles have been found to shift the focus of trout that seem to be exclusively locked onto a substantial hatch of mayflies or caddis.

The fly photograph which accompanied Miyata's article showed nothing out of the ordinary – just two blobs of dubbed tan-coloured fur with a turn of hackle between them which was clipped away at the bottom of the fly.

With my growing knowledge of the efficacy of ant patterns gleaned from reading books and international magazines, I felt it would be beneficial as editor of *Piscator* to emphasise this. So, for the 2004 issue, I collated quotes from fly angling authorities in an article called 'What the experts say about ants'. It can be found in the 'Ants on the menu' folder in the CPS articles archive.

Setting aside seasonal differences and in a 'match the hatch' context, trout and yellowfish are habituated to ants because there are more of them and, once they land in the water, they cannot escape – more to follow.

References:

Ants on the Menu – CPS articles archive.

Marcel Terblanche – 'Sunken Ants on the Witels' and 'Valuable findings and developments in tying and fishing floating ant patterns' on Tom Sutcliffe's 'Spirit of Fly-Fishing' website.

Fred Steynberg – 'Days that Ants Fly' on his Linecasters website.





CHAPTER 16

Part 2

Further thoughts on the small stream ant



"Trout go crazy over ants but seldom seem greatly impressed with ant patterns. Ant patterns that look cool in the fly box rarely work as well as they seem like they should. The answer is in front of your eyes... if you go underwater."

Real ants are covered with minute bristles that have a tendency to trap numerous small bobbles of air. An ant that looks black from our vantage point, very often is sparkly silver from a trout's view. Typical ant patterns simply look dead in the water."

Ralph Cutter Fish Food: A Fly Fisher's Guide to Bugs and Bait (Stackpole, 2005).

The photograph of a Camponotus Sugar Ant (Balbyter) by Philip Herbst at the top of this article

illustrates the point made by Ralph Cutter and is a scan used with permission from Peter Slingsby's wonderful book *Ants of Southern Africa*.

In the first part of this chapter, I described the revelation of the role played by the Smalblaar Myrtle in habituating the trout in the streams near Cape Town to the presence of ants and how I failed to grasp the significance, some 40 years ago, of catching one with a Black Cocktail Ant at the front of its mouth and one almost disappearing into its gullet.

In the context of ant pattern design, there have been, I feel, four other revelations, two recent and yet unproven.

According to scientists there are 2.5 million ants for every human on earth and, if nature followed fly tying, they would all drift downstream head-first and with heads and abdomens pointing skywards.

They don't - as the following photographs prove...



Ants, pinioned by water tension, whether in a farm irrigation tank (above) or a glass of water (below) do not assume a single position



My friend, Peter Brigg, whose 'Call of the Stream' website is a photographic celebration of small stream fly angling beauty, tells me that the ants that drown in his garden birdbath are invariably found

on their sides and in a foetal position.

A useful illustration of this can be found on Fred Steynberg's Linecasters website under the title 'Ants that Fly' and a Vimeo video interview showing him tying his imitation can be found in the two-part series 'A Fly Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and Friends'.

The four ant pattern design factors that I found significant, in addition to the role played by the Smalblaar Myrtle were:

- Ralph Cutter's scuba-diving discovery that bubbles clinging to the hairy bodies of ants when seen from below, give them a silvery glitter and that the way to emulate this is by coating fur-bodied ants with water-proofing desiccant powder;
- The experience of a client of professional fly tyer Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher - who made a last-minute order of Edward Truter's legendary 'Balbyter' pattern before a trip to Lesotho's legendary Bokong River for yellowfish. As he did not have fine rubber leg material, Marcel substituted Krystal Flash and his client reported a significant increase in catch rate. The light rippling up and down the twisted mylar material creates a greater visual impression of movement than the rubber legs can provide. You can find an article by Edward on this fly in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS articles archive;
- The idea by Cape Town split cane master Stephen Boshoff - @boshoffbamboo - to add a tiny dot of clear UV resin to the tip of leg material on ant patterns to increase light dispersal and movement in the counter-weighted leg;
- The significant increase in response by trout in the peat-stained streams of the southern Cape when Marcel used a fly with a purple wire rib and the equivalent trout response to purple flies in rivers and streams with a high humic acid content in the USA.

The Dubbed Fur Ant

This pattern probably dates from the experiments by Bob McCafferty and Vince Marinaro on Pennsylvania's Letort Spring Run more than half a century ago. It gets new relevance with Ralph Cutter's observations that sunk fur patterns dusted with powdered silica gel attract air bubbles just as hairy insects such as Balbyter ants do.

This bears out the experience of stillwater fly anglers, as the following quotes confirm. They all found that when a fur fly was first attached to the tippet, they got an immediate response because of the air bubbles clinging to the fur. However, as the fly becomes water-logged after repeated retrieves and the bubbles disappeared, the number of strikes diminished.

Marvin Taylor: *Float tubes, fly rods and other essays: Idaho 1979*

"For several years I've experienced a fishing phenomenon, which, for a time I had dismissed as a coincidence. I noticed that when fishing wet flies or nymphs, particularly in lakes and reservoirs, I had more strikes on a fly I had just tied on than on one which had been fished for a time. In talking with other fishermen, I confirmed my observations of the phenomenon.

Coincidence you say. I've no reason for such a thing to happen. I'm not so sure. It has happened too many times to be purely coincidental. I spent considerable time on one trip recently, experimenting with different patterns to see if the 'phenomenon' held up. On five different occasions, after unsuccessfully fishing a brown leech pattern through some high percentage water, I changed to a fresh copy, and each time I got a strike on the first cast.

The possibility is that the new fly traps air bubbles and moves naturally through the water, thus appearing more palatable to the fish. Angling author Pete Hidy, who along with Jim Leisenring wrote 'The Art of Tying the Wet Fly and Fishing the Flymph' has given credence to the theory of nymphs hatching in a bubble of compressed gas, which is generated in hatching. The flies Pete dresses have

dubbed fur bodies and soft, hen hackle legs that trap air bubbles mimicking the natural hatching nymph. I see a relationship between the 'flymph' theory and my 'first-cast' theory and have arrived at several conclusions.

First, I find the theory works more often with mohair or fur-bodied patterns than it does with chenille or hard bodies. The fur or mohair traps air more easily and gives the illusion of the natural nymph.

Second, I find the theory works better when I'm fishing a floating or slow-sinking line. I believe fish are looking for hatching insects, with the accompanying gaseous bubbles, and when the freshly tied-on pattern floats into view they pounce on it.

Third, the flymph theory might explain why mohair patterns are so important to float-tube fishermen. Mohair, particularly the long-strand variety, holds more air and thus would appear more 'natural' to the fish. Most of us who have fished mohair patterns so religiously thought the translucence of the material attracted fish. It is probably the combination of translucence and trapped air which makes mohair so attractive."

Fly Fish the Trout Lakes with Jack Shaw: Canada 1976

"Aquatic insects that are air breathers carry air in the form of bubbles which reflect silvery light somewhere about their body. Notable among these are the water boatmen and backswimmers.

There is also another cause of air bubbles on aquatics that is often overlooked by even the most experienced fly angler. This is the process whereby aquatic plants convert light to oxygen in the form of very tiny bubbles that rise in little strings like the tiniest of pearls to the surface. Dragon and damselfly nymphs that move through and about the weeds will on occasion gather these bubbles about their bodies. This usually occurs on bright sunny days when the process is at a peak.

Often it will happen when using a fly with a furry body, a fish will be caught on the first cast or two, thereafter it may no longer produce. The reason for this is that the natural insects are carrying these tiny bubbles. The furry body of the imitation, having at least some natural oil in the hair, will retain hair on the first few casts. While these bubbles are trapped in the imitation the fly is a success, but after the fish has mouthed the fly the air bubbles are gone and the offering no longer has the appearance of a natural and thereafter will fail to produce."

Lake flies and their imitation – A practical entomology for the stillwater flyfisher by C.F.Walker 1960

While discussing the effect that silver ribbing has on making lake flies more effective, Walker writes: "While on the subject of air bubbles, it may come as a surprise to those fishermen who have never seen their flies beneath the surface at close quarters to hear that, on entering the water, a previously un-wetted artificial carries down with it a small reservoir or air in exactly the same manner as a Corixid and with the same visual effect of silver. This does not usually last very long however, for as the fly is drawn through the water, the air gradually detaches itself and rises to the top in a series of bubbles which may possibly afford an explanation of the frequent success of a fly fresh from the box soon after alighting on the surface."

Later he writes: "This may come as a surprise to those who have never looked below the surface, but the fact is that an air bubble under water looks exactly like a drop of quick-silver. There is a green algal growth at the bottom of my aquarium at this moment which is covered with small air bubbles, the effect being as if someone had broken a thermometer over a billiards table."

Mercury Midge – Pat Dorsey – Tying and Fishing the Tailwater Flies (Stackpole Books, 2010)

"Back in the mid-1990s, Bill Black, president of Spirit River, sent me a plastic bag filled with an

assortment of small glass beads. There were several colours and sizes – all applicable for tying tiny mayfly and midge imitations. Nobody has these yet, said Black. Experiment with them and let me know what you think.

One glass bead in particular – the clear, silver-lined one, caught my attention. Wheels began to turn and I immediately headed to my fly-tying room. I put an extra-small one on a #20 scud hook and proceeded to tie a midge larva pattern.

When I looked at the completed fly, the thorax resembled a tiny thermometer tube filled with mercury and I quickly named my new little midge the Mercury Midge.

The following week, I took the Mercury Midge to the South Platte River in Cheesman Canyon and tested it rigorously. I was pleasantly surprised to see discriminating rainbows move 8 to 10 inches to intercept it. I knew there was something special about the bead that persuaded trout to eat this fly but I could not put my finger on it. Later it occurred to me that the silver-lined glass bead imitated the gas bubble that gets trapped in the midge's thorax when it emerges."

According to J R Harris, in *An Angler's Entomology* (1956) "The end of the hatching nymph ... assumes a much-increased lustre, and in fact strongly resembles a section of glass tube which has been filled with mercury."

Dorsey continues: ***"Ralph Cutter's DVD, 'Bugs of the Underworld', demonstrates this phenomenon well. His footage shows an emerging midge becoming fidgety and restless, moving up and down in the water column, and the noticeable gas bubble that forms before the pupa emerges into an adult. The mercury beads on the Mercury Midge and Mercury Black Beauty imitate this gas bubble perfectly.***

After discovering the success of the Mercury Midge, I put the clean, silver-lined glass beads on other patterns like RS2s, Pheasant tails, Brassies, Buckskins, cased caddisflies, blood midges, Baetis nymphs and Pale Morning Dun nymphs. Umpqua Feather Merchants picked up the entire line and called it the Mercury Series. These patterns, like the Mercury Midge have also proven to catch a lot of trout."

In fact, Cutter devotes an entire chapter ***'All that glitters'*** to the fact that these bubbles are an absolutely significant trigger:

"Bubble-encased bugs are extremely visible underwater and trout often swim right past other food items to snare a glittering insect. Many times, trout will key in on and feed only on sparkling insects."



What is not irrelevant in this context, is the way Rhodes-based guide, Fred Steynberg adds epoxy to the bodies of his foam rubber floating ants. You can find a photo of his well-proven ant pattern in an informative article 'Days that Ants Fly' on his Linecasters website.

A decade ago, Andrew Ingram and I produced two DVDs which featured interviews with the country's top freshwater fly anglers as they tied their flies which had become local staples. Entitled ***'A South African Fly Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and Friends'***, they are available on Vimeo.

(L) Andrew Ingram filming Fred Steynberg in Rhodes for our dual Vimeo DVD

During the interview Fred told me that ants glisten when in the water – no doubt caused by water adhering to their hairy bodies - and that re-creating this visual impression had brought increased success. Epoxies that were in use back then have been replaced by UV light-cured resins derived from dentistry.

While writing this chapter I had a flashback to a day spent fishing dry flies with fellow CPS member Darryl Lampert. He is one of the most skilled and cerebral fly anglers and tyers I know and his Hi-Vis CDC Midge is a staple on our streams. I dried my sodden fly, coated it with Loon Top Ride and was about to blow off the excess when he stopped me saying that, in his experience, a dry fly encrusted with the glittering white powder, prompted more rises than one without.

This is now easy to achieve with Loon Fly Dip, a liquid product which clearly has a strong silica gel powder component. I pop my dry flies into the bottle and, after they have dried on a sunny window sill, they have a distinct white powder coating.

There are, I feel, two dubbed fur fly patterns that have the most potential when it comes to imitating size 18 – 20 ants, Tim Rolston's Compara Ant and Gary Borger's Parachute Ant.

Both have become easier to tie thanks to the advent of thin, strong GSP threads such as Semperfli's Nanosilk 20 D and Textreme's even thinner Extreme thread.

In my experience there are two standout dubbing materials for ant patterns – one is Semperfli Kapok which has quickly become renowned for its buoyancy. The second is Hareline's Quick Descent dubbing which is unique in that it is made from metal – hair-thin strands of aluminium. The name Quick Descent is a misnomer as Ed Engle described in his authoritative micropattern book, *'Tying Small Flies'* (Stackpole, 2004). Used in small quantities, it does not sink flies. Its advantage is that it clings so tightly to thin threads that you can build bodies that are very small.



Quick Descent Dub, the author's favourite, which is made from ultra-tin aluminium strands

Quick Descent has a few silvery strands in the mix which is another reason I favour it because I feel this helps mimic the air bubble effect to which Ralph Cutter refers.

Tim Rolston's Compara Ant

Tim Rolston, for decades Cape Town's leading guide but now living in Wales, says his biggest trout

caught on local streams have all been deceived by ant patterns and he eschews legs altogether on his dubbed body, floating ant patterns which are tied in sizes 18 – 20. I watched him tie them in about three minutes and the pattern is included in his fascinating and informative book, *Guide Flies – Simple Durable Flies that Catch Fish*, to which I wrote the foreword.

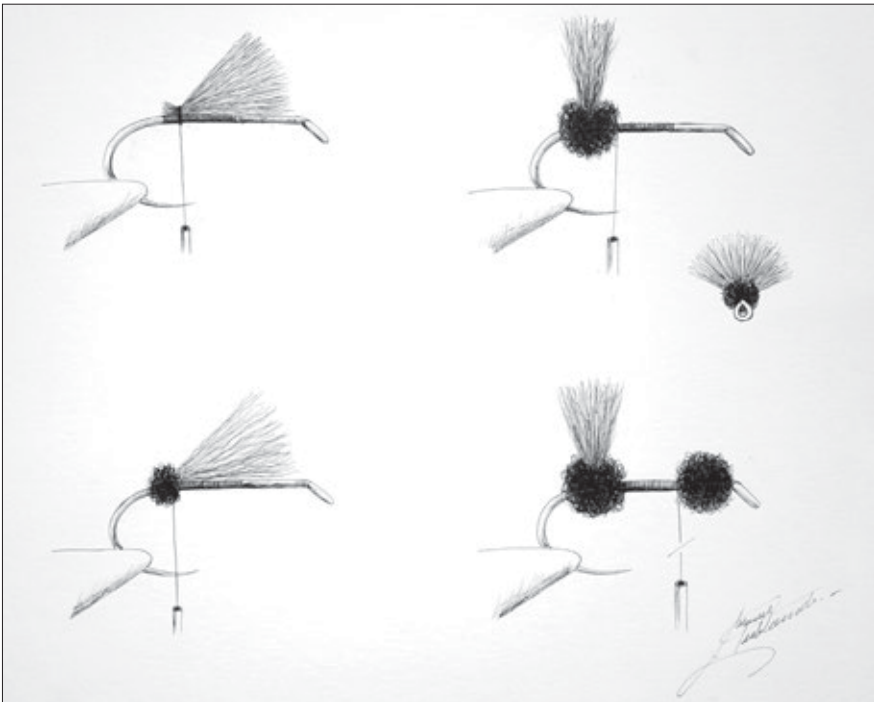


(L) Tim Rolston, now living in Wales but for many years Cape Town's leading guide, considered size 18 – 20 floating ants to be the most effective fly on the trout streams near Cape Town

At my request, he wrote a fascinating article 'Ants on the Menu' and it heads the folder of the same name in the articles archive of the Cape Piscatorial Society.

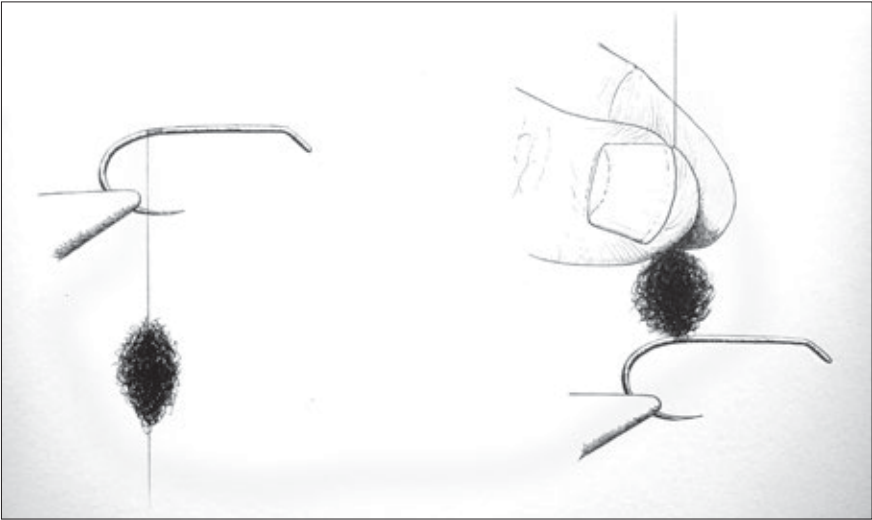
The best wing material for this pattern, in my opinion is Deadly Dazzle by Fishient because not only does it include varied colours of poly yarn but also ultra-thin strands of UV mylar.

Their sparkle in the drift makes the fly easier to follow on the water.

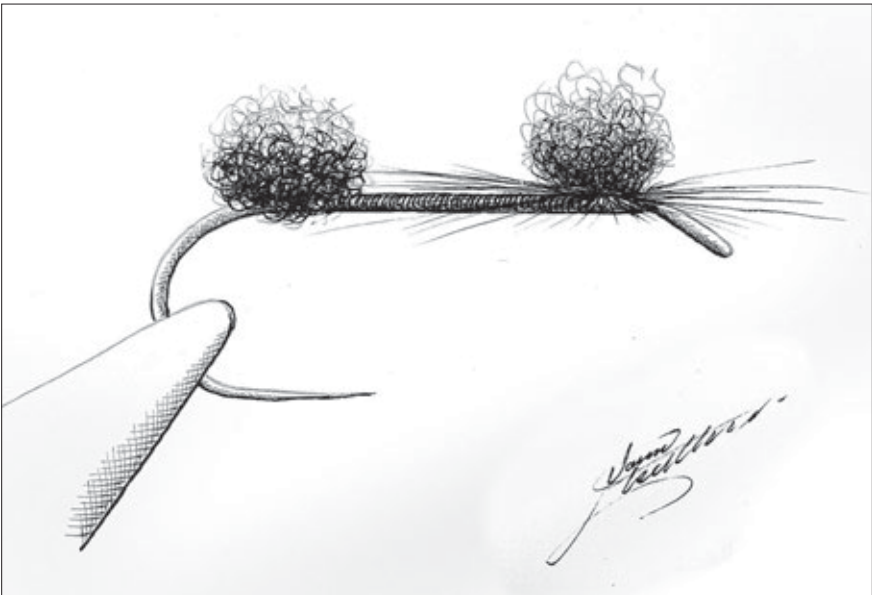


Tim's Compara Ant – illustration by Marcel Terblanche

The other definitive floating ant design is found in Gary Borger's stellar 1991 book, *Designing Trout Flies* and it draws on the work of Rene Harrop.



The first step in tying Gary Borger's Para-Ant, a Rene Harrop concept



Gary Borger's Para-Ant design which floats flush with the water surface

Between these two designs, I believe you have covered the bases when it comes to dubbed fur floating ant imitations. The Borger ant has no material beneath the hook shank which enables the use

CHAPTER 16 - Part 2

of the relatively narrow gape Daiichi 1110, designed by Jim Lepage and the Orvis Co. and patented as the 'Big Eye' hook, in 1990.

It's available down to #26, but its advantageous big eye means that you can use a more practical 6x tippet on these smaller hooks if you are fishing small streams where you are hemmed in by vegetation on the bank and casting room is minimal.

More to follow: The ubiquitous Camponotus sugar ant and its foam rubber imitations.





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.

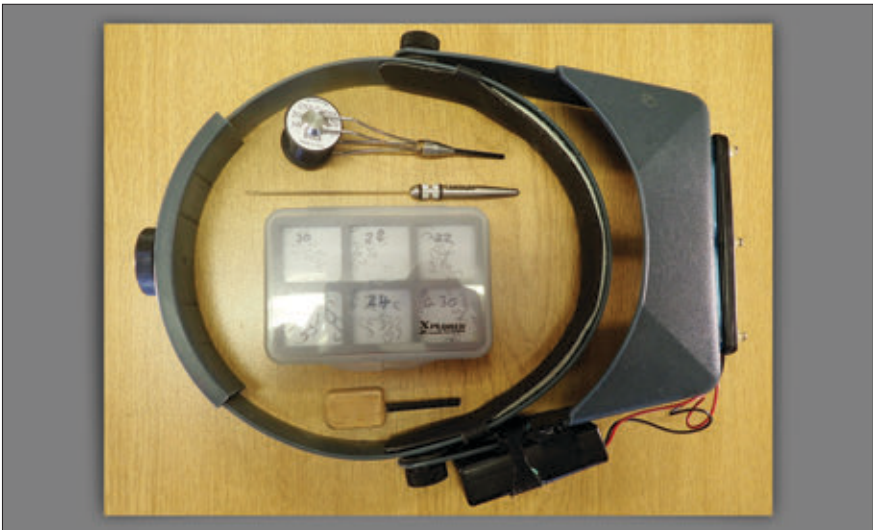
If you find this thread too fragile, try one of the GSP threads. The thinnest is Textreme Extreme

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

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

Fishing 8 or 9 x tippetts 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 the CPS 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 patterns. 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 it's smaller than you, chow down"***.

Ant size

The June 1978 issue of the American magazine *Fly Fisherman* 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

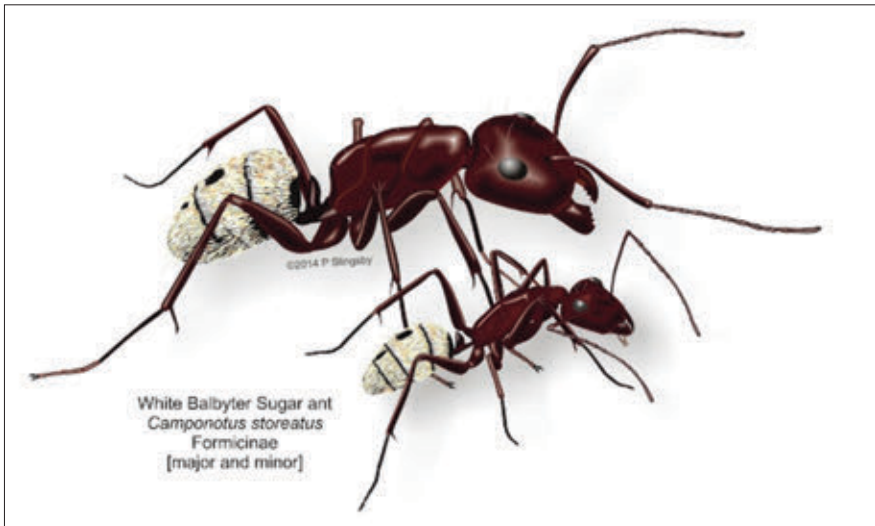
Ponerine – Ringbum Ants – 5mm

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!** 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 Gamatkatsu #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



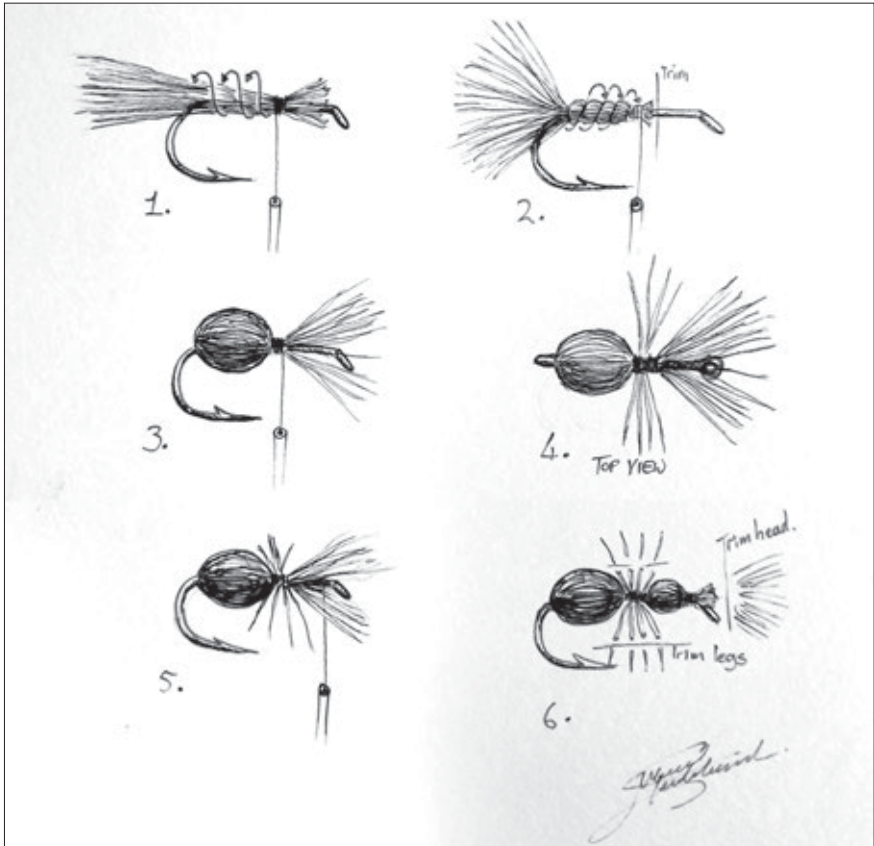
gape. Tie the ant back-to-front to maximise the space near the hook point, grease it and then cover it with Loon Top Ride or a similar desiccant powder

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 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

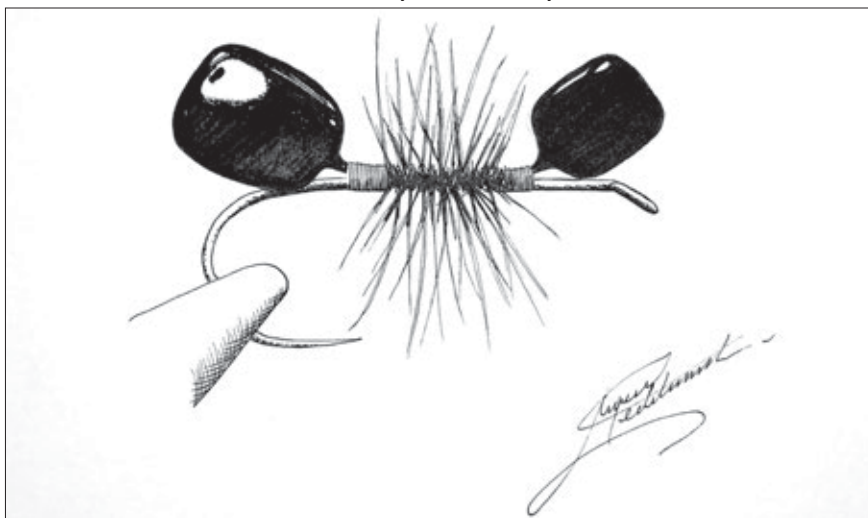
smaller examples to be tied.

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.

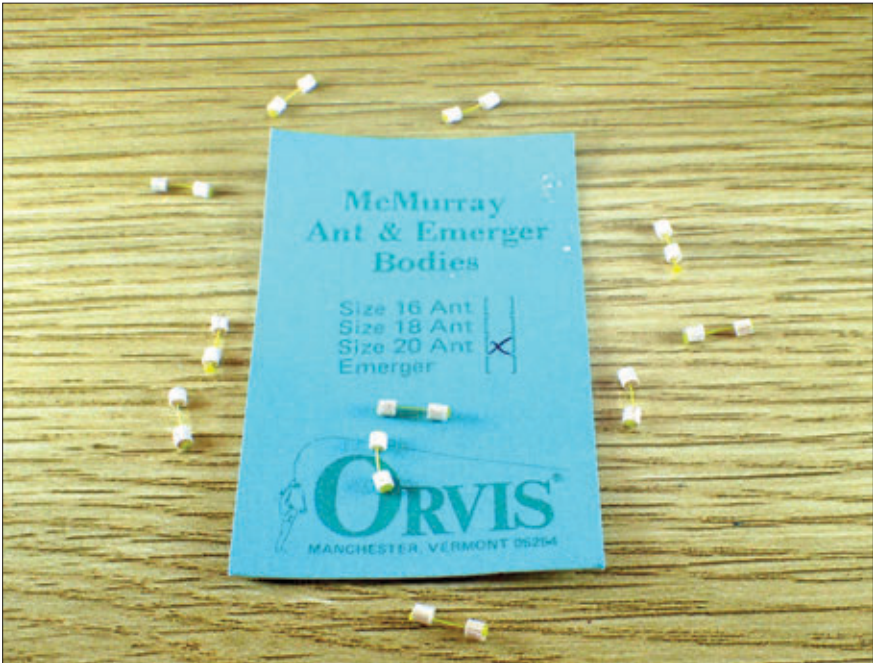
When Art Lee, one of the best-known angling writers of his day, declared that the balsa creation named by its creator Ed Sutryn after his home town of McMurray in Pennsylvania was **'the deadliest pattern ever to shake hands with a leader'** he created the fly angling equivalent of the Philosopher's 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 5½-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 have 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. Photo by Marcel Terblanche



In closing, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the contribution of those who are making

CHAPTER 16 - Part 3

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.





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 Gevaarlake 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 stream 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.

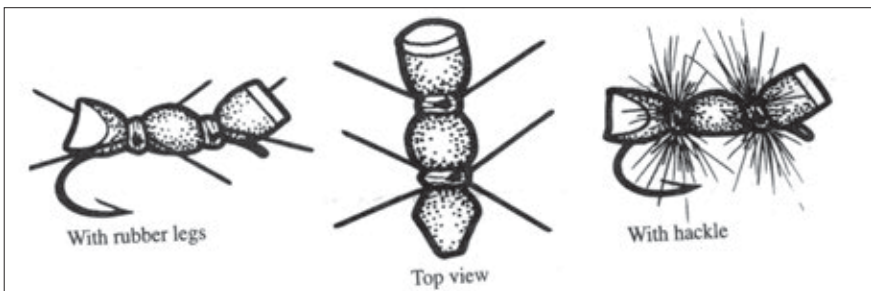
Given the pace of technological change, what is puzzling is that it took decades from the time foam rubber was invented until its usage became commonplace in fly tying.

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, 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.

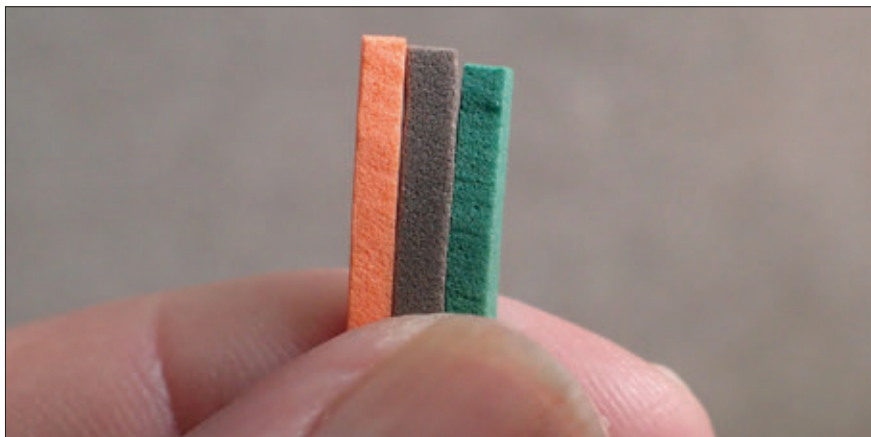


A leaflet sold with Rainy's tubular extruded foam rubber material

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



(L) 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.



(L) 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



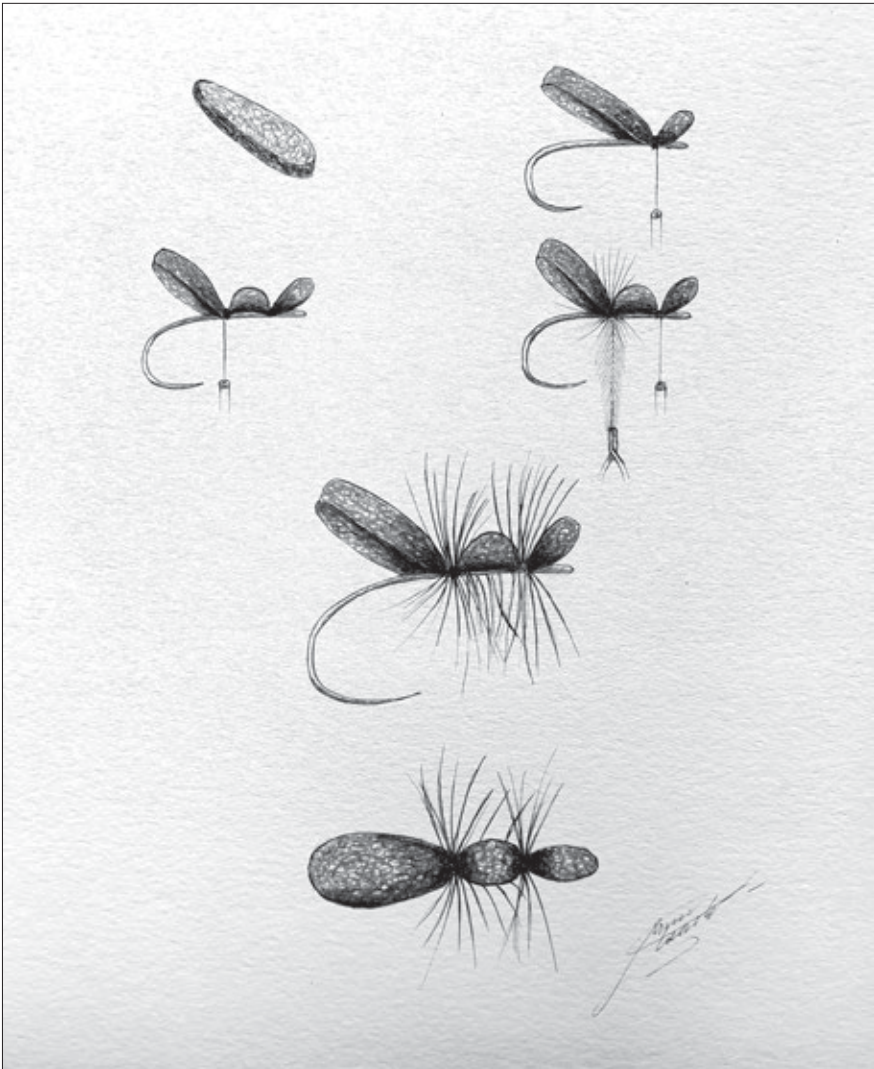
(gaster) contains six things and six things only – legs.

(L) 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's '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 'Slide Inn' 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' (Pruett 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'.

(R) 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 in the CPS articles archive.

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.

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

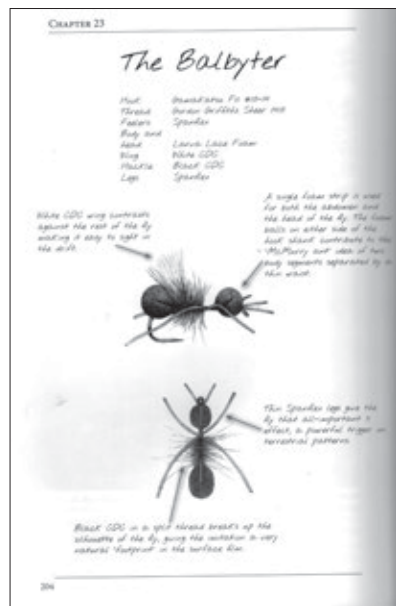
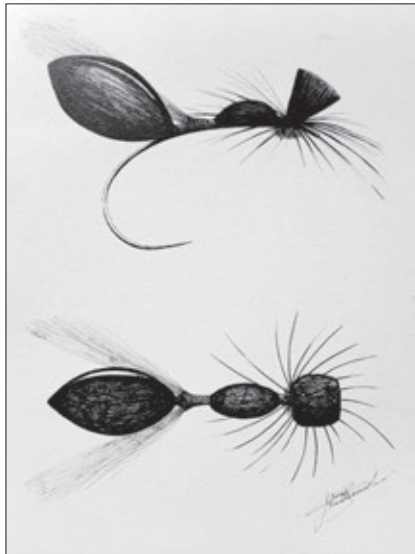
In his article for The Mission, kindly reproduced on this website, Edward stresses the importance of the CDC wing:

'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.

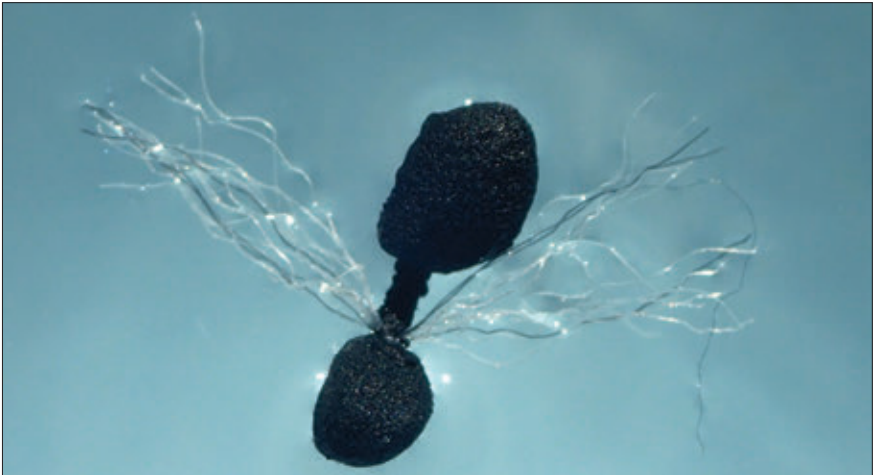


What I'm looking for in ant and other winged patterns - beside colour variations - is greater visibility and buoyancy. There are several possibilities. Tiemco Aero Wing is lighter than water and has hollow tubes within each fibre. Combining black and white would work well, but it is expensive. Just comb 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.

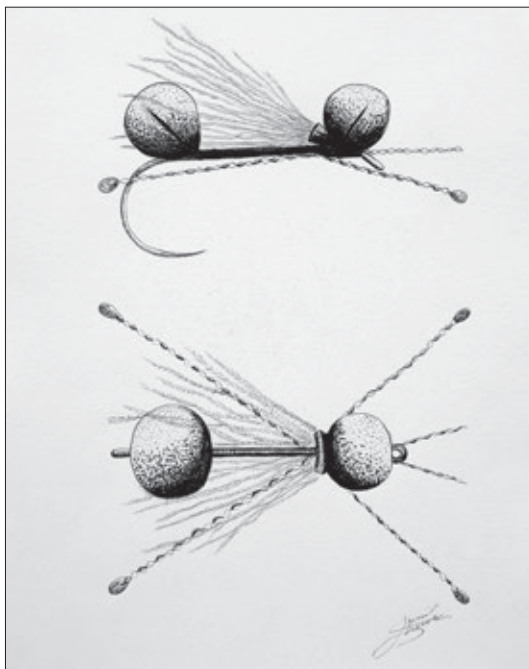
Marcel Terblanche was asked to tie some Balbyters for a client whose departure for the Bokong River in Lesotho was imminent.

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's 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 .

Here's how Marcel Terblanche envisages the modified Balbyter:

Would counterweighted Krystalfash 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 Izaak 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.

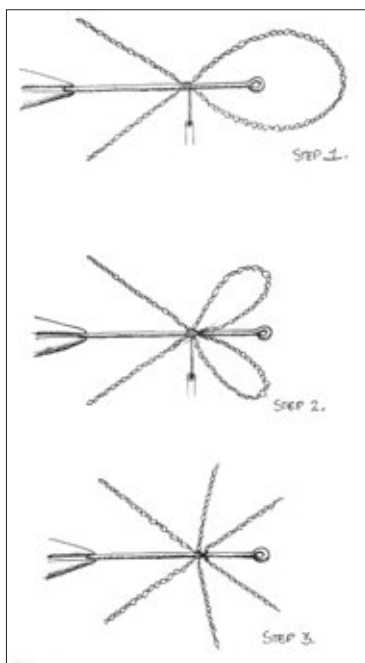
When I used Supreme Hair – which is available in purple as is micro Krystalflash I adopted a John Betts idea which allows the creation of six legs using a single strand of material. You can see the relevant article, written in 2004 '*Tying Ant Patterns*' in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS articles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

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.

(L) The John Betts idea of creating six legs from a single strand of material

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.

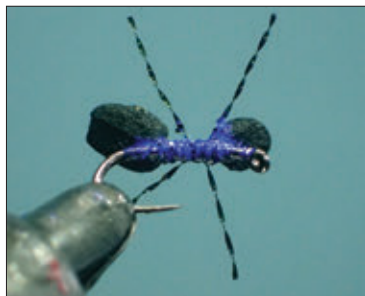
The reflections help follow it in choppy water. Dave Whitlock, as I recall, started the trend of using red nail polish in this context, but I wonder why he did not use glitter dust which is increasingly used in nail polish?

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

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

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

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.

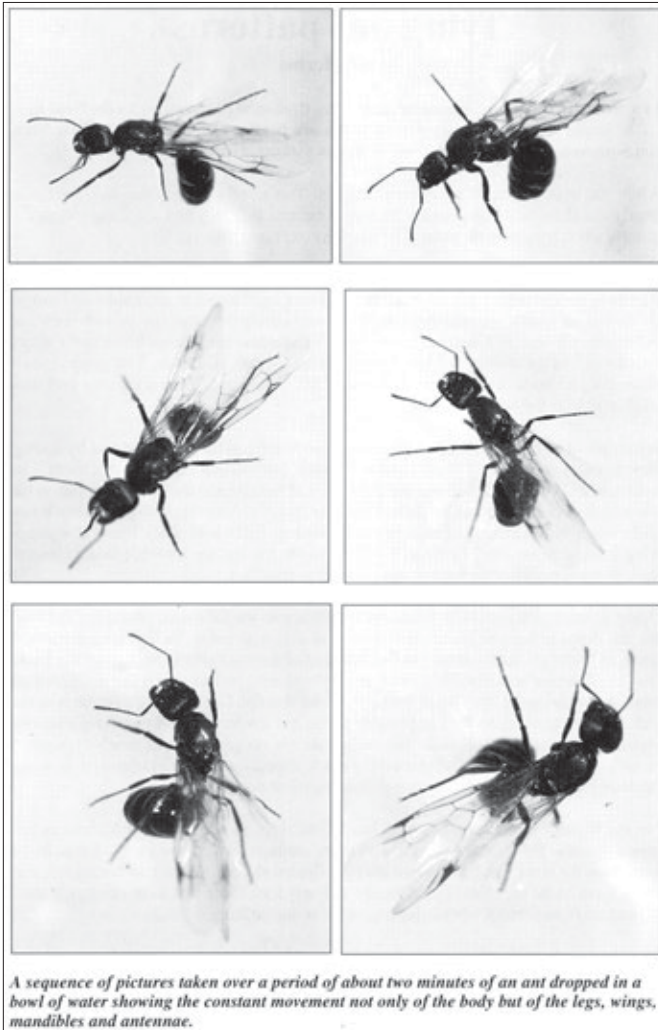
When ants end up in the water, they do so on the side which touches the water first because the wings on that side pinion them to the water surface. So, they end up on their sides, more often than not in a curled-up position while they struggle frantically.



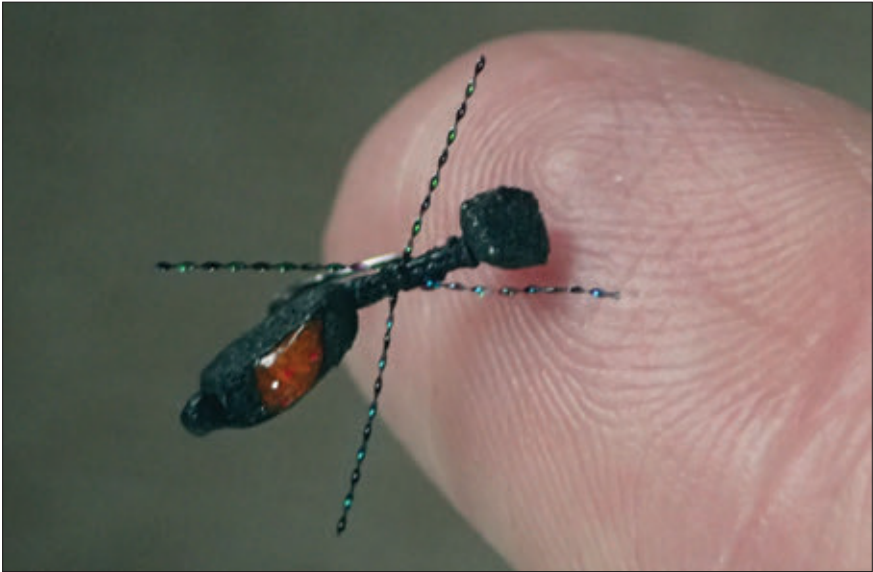
The banded abdomen on a Sugar Ant - photo by Philip Herbst and used with permission

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

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.

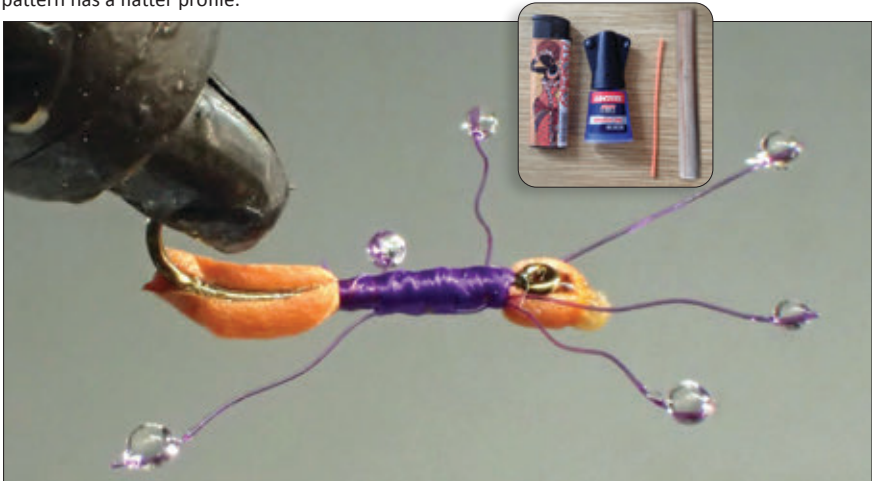


What the abdomen certainly does not do is point skyward, but that is what happens when you tie in the strip of stretched Fettuccine foam. Ideally you want to foam rubber to lie on the same plane as the hook shank and, as so often happens, I picked up answers from Instagram.



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.

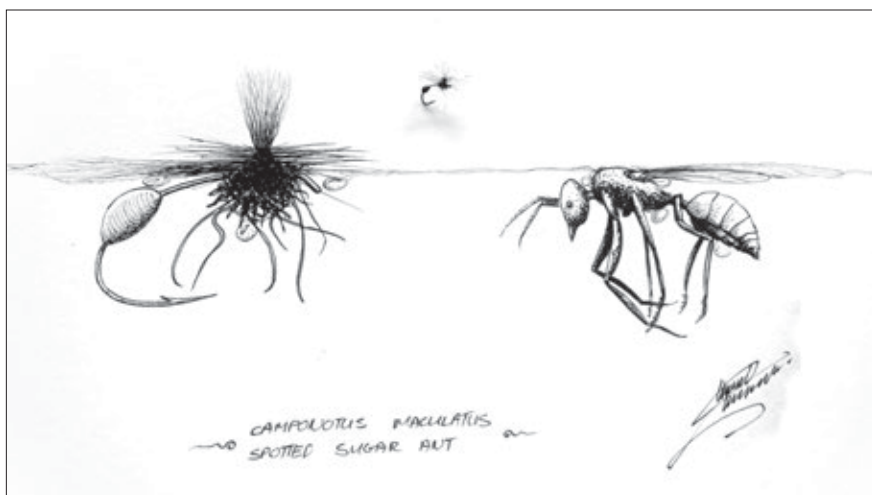




CHAPTER 16

Part 5

Drifting and Sinking Ants



A sketch by Storms River artist, Marcel Terblanche, of his drifting Sugar Ant

"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 it's 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."

Marcel Terblanche— FOSAF Fly of the Month – November 2023.

When it comes to drowned terrestrial insects drifting downstream, gravity determines that the heaviest part of the body will be lowest in the water column. With both the ant and the hopper, that body part is the abdomen.

I have long admired the elegance of the Japanese 'Poodle' flies in which the middle of the hook shank is left bare between two segments of dubbing or peacock herl. I don't know if the ant was the inspiration behind this design, but I would not be surprised.

Marcel has always recognised the importance of ants to trout in the Western and Southern Cape and it was he who brought home to me the beneficial role that the most prolific bankside tree on the trout streams near Cape Town – the Smalblaar Myrtle (*Metrosideros angustifolia*) plays in housing the nests of the Black Cocktail Ant.

His Sugar Ant Dry fly article is available on the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS articles archive and it is an intriguing design in that the poly wing is divided into three segments, two in a spent wing configuration and utilising the third as a parachute post.



The basic wing structure of the Sugar Ant imitation by Marcel Terblanche

Parachute flies with half the body beneath the surface have a strong vulnerability factor and provide the best of both worlds in that they are visible to the fish and the angler – the Klinkhåmer being an obvious example. Marcel's design is ingenious in that the laterally-splayed wing acts as a supportive outrigger while also suggesting vulnerability and the vertical centre piece provides a means of locating the fly in the drift and an anchor point for the parachute hackle.

The Drifting Ant – part two

'Life changing ants' is the title of chapter 5 in the second of Gordon van der Spuy's two 'Feather Mechanic' books which are so refreshing a change in format from the run-of-the-mill fly-tying books of the past few decades which rely on step-by-step photographs for illustration.

They combine his common-sense writing on fly construction with his attractive step-by-step colour drawings and the result has seen them distributed by Amazon and earning him a burgeoning world-wide audience.



My thanks to him for allowing me to use his illustrations for this chapter on a pragmatic and effective drifting ant pattern which combines the submerged body of the Poodle/Klink approach with a dual parachute design which provides the lateral support of a rooster-feather parachute and the subtle movement of a CDC feather, also tied in a parachute format.

(L) The final stage of Marcel's Drifting Sugar Ant pattern

Between these two local designs you have different approaches that proffer a combination of general-impression-of-size-and-shape plus the vulnerability factor which so distinguishes the Klink-type flies.

There's more. You will find an alternative wing approach which could be incorporated in a drifting ant design – 'Pieter's Maury Split Wing' – a brilliant design by Pieter Snyders in the tutorial section of the Stream and Sea website. They key words for an internet search are 'streamandsea.com + tutorials + Pieters-maury-splitwing'.

The Spent Wing Drifting Ant

I have a conceptual idea of the small drifting ant and again I draw inspiration from tiers of the past. In this case it is Neil Patterson, who introduced the Suspender Nymph, The Funnel Dun and the Sunk Spinner among other patterns in his 1995 Merlin Unwin book *'Chalkstream Chronicle'*. For the Sunk Spinner, Patterson lists a copper wire body ribbed with mono and a cream badger wing tied spent. I substituted poly yarn for the wing.

I had a lot of success fishing my Sunk Spinner equipped with a 1.5 mm black brass bead. I fished it using my usual greased hi-vis leader and yarn strike indicator.

The idea of fishing a spent wing fly beneath the surface makes just as much sense with a drifting ant pattern.

To me, therefore, a logical design path was to combine the spent-wing approach of Patterson's Sunk Spinner with a Poodle-type body in which the middle of the hook shank is left bare.

The spent wing drifting ant, tied poodle-style, is slightly weighted only at the bend, using Hends ultrafine lead wire. My idea is that with its spent wing configuration, which is the very essence of vulnerability, it will drift just below the surface where it is more visible to the fish. Hends wire is fragile, so I wind it on in open turns on top of the hook shank, and slide them together. Place some superglue on the hook bend and slide the wire into position at the bend of the hook. This will turn the hook, point upwards, and ensure that it drifts vertically with the wing uppermost.



The body material, Hareline EZ Magic Dub, is chosen with specific intent and the inspiration came from the underwater observations of Ralph Cutter in his milestone 2005 Stackpole book, *'Fish Food: A Fly Fisher's Guide to Bugs and Bait'*. Cutter found that ants have hairy bodies to which minute air bubbles adhere making them glisten underwater. EZ Magic Dub is an ultrathin chenille with tiny hairs protruding from it, so it meets Cutter's requirements in that regard. First coat it in a thin paste floatant and then dip it in some desiccant powder. If you examine this material under magnification after you have first applied a thin floatant paste and then dipped it in the desiccant powder, you will see that a tiny grain of the powder adheres to most of these fibres.

(L) The dual-feather parachute hackle used by Gordon van der Spuy on his drifting ant pattern

At the hook eye, we separate the poly wing with a foam rubber shellback – stretched orange Hareline Fettuccine foam rubber in this case, and dubbing – I have used Hareline's Quick Descent Dub because of its ease of use, but kapok would probably be better.

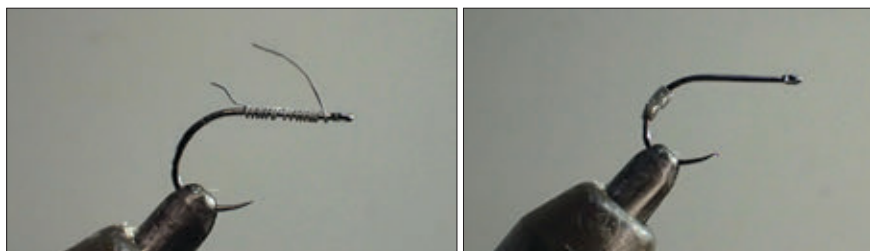
I chose the thread – white Textreme Extreme – because it is the thinnest GSP thread on the market and effectively transparent so, instead of whip finishing when you have completed the abdomen, you can wind the thread forward to the eye and it is unobtrusive, thus maintaining the essential bare midriff profile. Semperfli 20D is slightly thicker. Don't, however, make the mistake I made when photographing the tying steps of this pattern. The most effective method to keep the midsection uncluttered is to whip finish after completing the abdomen and then start again at the hook eye. If, to save time, you simply wind the virtually transparent thread forward, remember that it will turn white when you dip it in the desiccant powder. You, should after completing the fly, use a black permanent marker on the midsection to disguise the thread.



The materials used by the author on his spent-wing drifting ant concept

So, here's the dressing followed by a photographic sequence of its construction:

- **Hook:** Hanak H550BL Allround or up eye sedge hook such as the TMC 206 BL
- **Thread:** Textreme Extreme or Semperfli 20D
- **Hook bend weighting:** Hends fine lead wire of Veniard flat lead
- **Body:** Hareline EZ Magic Dub covered by paste floatant to which the subsequent application of desiccant powder will adhere.
- **Wing:** Poly yarn or wedding organza tied at right angles to the hook shank
- **Shellback separating wing:** Foam rubber
- **Thorax dubbing:** Kapok preferably or Hareline Quick Descent Dub



Apply the Hends wire in open turns and then push them together



Place a drop of super-glue at the bend and slide the lead wire onto it



The finished fly – penultimate step



(L) The completed fly after the application of paste floatant and then the bubble-creating desiccant powder

I must say that I am bewildered that fly tyers in general have not acknowledged or taken cognizance of Ralph Cutter's scuba-diving discovery that ants glitter underwater because of the tiny air bubbles adhering to their bodies. There are numerous segments on YouTube taken from their video, *'Bugs of the Underworld'* and their book *Fish Food: A Fly Fisher's*

Guide to Bugs and Bait is available through Amazon in the Kindle version.

The weighted ant fished with a strike indicator

'A miracle'

"As a matter of fact, the first fly I ever tied, around 1940, was Hard-bodied Black Ant.

While I may have tied some silly flies when I first started tying, the Hard-Bodied Ant was my first effective one. I have found that the larger black ants, #10 to #16 are the most effective, while the Hard-bodied Cinnamon Ant is best in #18 and #20. The late Bob McCafferty is credited with the hard-bodied ties and, according to Charlie Fox, also originated the fur-bodied floaters as well."

'Ed Shenk's Fly Rod Troutng' (Stackpole Books, 1989)

'Confidently, I tied on one of Ed Herbst's ant patterns onto my 6x tippet below a tiny, black yarn indicator and made the first cast. I spent two hours taking fish at will from underneath the bank, ranging in size from 12-18 inches. Yip. I have to gloat a bit, an 18-inch rainbow is a trophy from any stream, but, on the Eerste, it is a miracle.' Pieter 'Seun' Taljaard **The Pitter-Patter of Ants** Piscator 138, November 2006.

The concept of fishing sunken terrestrials first resonated with me when reading Mike Weaver's *Trout & Salmon* articles about fishing the streams of the Yorkshire Dales, articles which culminated in his 1988 book *'The Pursuit of Wild Trout'*. He heaped praise on a sinking beetle, the Black Bug – a size 16 to 20 weighted peacock herl pattern: ***'When the rivers are at their lowest and clearest ... I turn to a small and sinking beetle, the Black Bug. For some unknown reason, even the most supercilious trout in smooth and shallow water is vulnerable to this fly when presented on a long leader with a very fine point.'***

Equally persuasive was a 1975 article in *Piscator* by Eric Horsfall Turner – *'Comic Yorkshire Fly'* which can be found in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder in the CPS articles archive. It was essentially a weighted Coch-y-Bonddu with a yellow tag, fished on a greased leader, and the combination proved the nemesis of many selective trout.

However, as I pointed out in chapter 12, I came to realise that the beetle season – spring in the Fynbos biome of the Western Cape, was of brief duration but that the Smalblaar Myrtle which lined the banks of our streams hosted the nests of the Black Cocktail Ant which provided a never-ending supply of food to the trout in these streams throughout the year.

My response was the Copper Wire Ant, inspired in part by Vincent Marinaro's description in his classic, milestone book, *'A Modern Dry Fly Code'*, of the inner glow of the red ant:

'Consider for example, the startling fact that in two different species of the same family, the black and the red ant, there is tremendous variance, the former being absolutely opaque in the body and the latter glimmering and glowing as though lighted by some inner fire.'

The great benefit of copper wire in this role is that it is malleable, so you create two ovals, one big and one small, flatten them with a pair of fine-nose-pliers and cover them with nail polish (back then) or UV resin today. If you add glitter dust available at craft stores to the UV resin, you create a mottled effect.

I used to fill the gap with legs created with a fine, crinkly nylon material such as Unique Hair which is most often used in salt water streamers.

There is a reason for this approach. If you are fishing a floating ant on a South African mountain stream in bright sunshine, the chances are that the trout will see it in silhouette in which case Tim Rolston's 'bare midriff' approach will provide a convincing 'general impression of size and shape' perceived image. If, however, the fly is below the surface, the trout can see it in more detail and from further away, so building in legs and antennae can pay dividends.

I described this more complicated approach to tying the sinking ant in an article, 'Tying Ant patterns' which appeared in the November 2004 issue of *Piscator*.

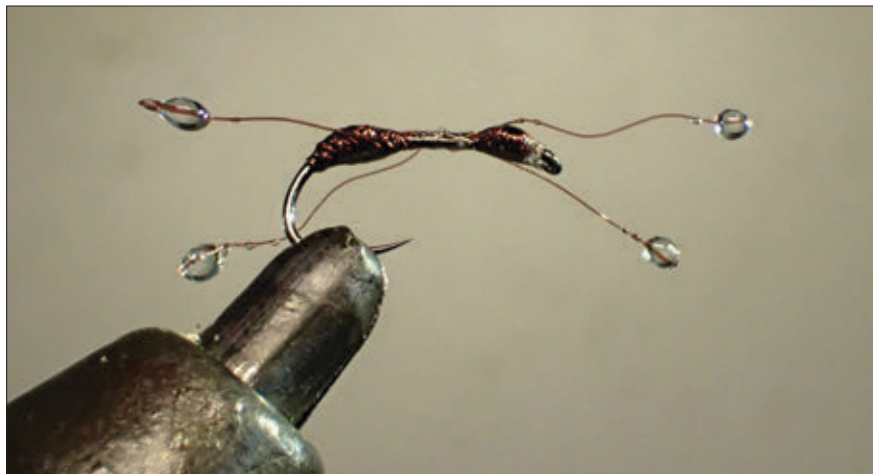
That was the sort of sinking ant used two years later by Pieter Taljaard, as quoted at the beginning of this section, when he had a day of unprecedented success as a student studying at the University of Stellenbosch and fishing the Eerste stream where it flows through the town.

His 2006 article 'The 'Pitter Patter of Ants' in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS articles archive, describes a day of success with the copper wire ant on sections of the Eerste stream which he had not previously experienced.

The 'Miracle Ant' he used was drew inspiration in part from an article I had written for *Piscator* two years earlier but, when I tried to replicate that ant for this article, I found that age had taken its toll, failing eyesight and trembling hands made the task more difficult than I expected.

But technological advance had in some measure ameliorated my difficulties. I'm talking about white Textreme Extreme, the thinnest GSP thread on the market which is almost transparent. It eased the difficulty of tying in the Unique Hair legs and I added some Solarez Medium Viscosity globules to the tips of the legs to add some shine and wobble – the idea of split cane rod builder, Stephen Boshoff.

Silvery bubbles are common to so many aquatic insects that they might prove to be a trigger.



A size 16 Copper Wire Ant with its Unique Hair legs tipped with globules of UV light-cured resin – an idea I gleaned from Stephen Boshoff's, 'Light Bulb Legs' approach

Using a bobbin holder to hold the spool of ultrafine wire, allows one to build the body of the Copper Wire ant with greater ease and precision and I use the wide tube Stonfo Bobtec Bobbin Holder (See the video clip 'Stonfo Bobtec bobbins Presented by flytier: Per Ivar Ekeberg').

Marcel Terblanche experienced a similar copper wire ant epiphany when he hiked into one of our most intimidating kloof (canyon) streams near Cape Town and you can read his account on Tom Sutcliffe's 'Spirit of Fly Fishing' website.

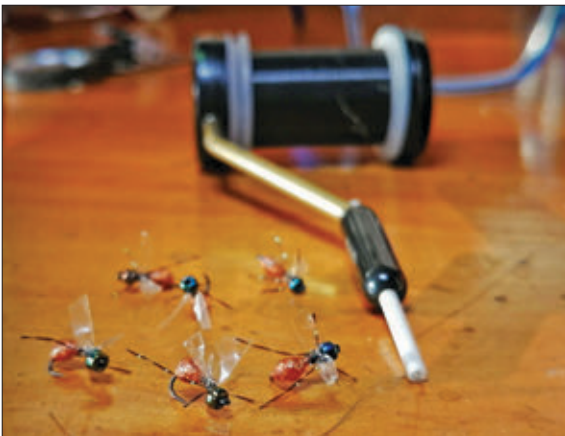
The article is headlined 'Sunken Ants on the Witels' and three of the four brown trout caught were deceived by the sunken copper wire ant using wedding organza to imitate the wings of ants in the alate stage.



A Witels brown trout deceived by the sunken ant. Photo by Marcel Terblanche



A Witels sugar ant and its weighted imitation. Notice the distinct banding on the abdomen which some fly tyers incorporate in their patterns. Photo by Marcel Terblanche



In Durban, Peter Brigg – whose ‘Call of the Stream’ website beautifully illustrates the beauty of the Drakensberg small streams – had similar success with his own version of the sinking copper wire ant which used plastic wings and Krystalflash for the legs.

(L) This version of the Copper Wire Ant has proved very effective for Peter Brigg in the mountain streams of KZN

In the past two decades or so, technological advances have made the sinking ant far more efficient and very different from Bob McCafferty’s varnished

thread ants which he introduced some 80 years ago.

These advances mainly pertained to weighting and more advantageous hook design which availed creative fly designers more latitude in expanding the sinking ant repertoire.

A quantum leap in sinking ant design occurred when Roman Moser brought into being the most important design factor in modern fly tying - the bead head - in the late 1970s.

You can read his story – ‘The history of the gold bead’ on the Global Fly Fisher website.

Tom Sutcliffe used to ask prominent local fly anglers to name their favourite stream flies and MC Coetzer whose opinions I value, listed a sinking ant consisting of two metal beads, one slightly larger than the other with an organza wing.

The key words for an internet search are: ‘MC Coetzer’s favourite stream patterns.’ It’s an article worth reading, not least for his advocacy of orange in the rubber legs used on hopper patterns – logical given that many of our hoppers have red upper legs and a flash of red in the wings.

MC later switched to a very sparse hen hackle between the black metal beads.

Ideally complementing the use of metal beads in sinking ant patterns was the later introduction of tiny up-eye sedge hooks such as the Tiemco 206 BL which is available down to #24 and the Hanak H360 BL which is available to #20 and the Hanak 550 BL Allround which is available down to #14

As mentioned, drowned ants drift vertically with the heaviest part of their bodies, the abdomen, drifting closest to the stream bed and the head close to the surface. The curved shape of these two hooks, enables one to replicate this body position without reducing hooking ability.

Competitive fly anglers tell me that jig hooks are at a disadvantage when it comes to hooking ability and when you weight a curved hook, it automatically flips into a hook point up position, so I discount jig hooks for sunken ant patterns. If, however, jig hooks are your preference, there are lots of solutions:



A combination of copper wire and a slotted bead provide the weight on this sinking ant tied on a jig hook



Keep in mind that the wings on alates extend slightly beyond the abdomen as reflected in the photo

In the quest for slightly-weighted drifting ants, Hends 0.2mm lead wire plays a useful role when used at the bend of these hooks. It does not occlude the hook gape but pulls these hooks into a position where it is drifting hook point up and with the hook eye closest to the water surface.

Fly anglers have known for decades about the trout's almost obsessional predilection for ants.

For the trout, there is an energy-conserving benefit if the ant imitation arrives at the depth where it is holding.

I witnessed a startling commitment of trout to holding lies which offer them respite from the buffeting, energy-sapping current, which brings them food and hides them from predators. They will defend such favourable lies against perceived intruders such as a rainbow-hued perdigon nymph.

I witnessed this myself.

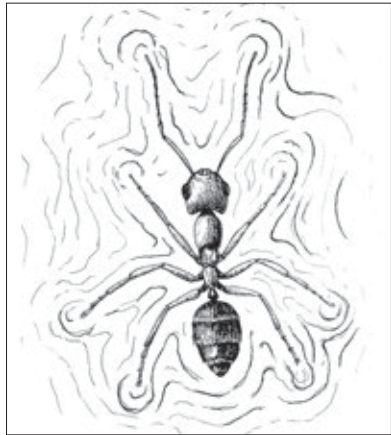
I was sitting on the banks of the Eerste stream which flows through the university town, taking a break and enjoying a sandwich. I spotted a trout a few metres ahead of me, holding tight against a boulder, its head precisely aligned with a spot of the rock. It took my flipped dry fly and I removed the

hook, filled my wide-brimmed hat with water and carried the trout for several hundred yards before releasing it several pools higher upstream. I returned to my half-eaten sandwich and several minutes later, the trout swam past me holding tight to the opposite bank. It circled back and resumed its original position with its head exactly aligned with the spot on the boulder where I had first spotted it.

I witnessed similar example of such behaviour on the Witte stream, one of the few brown trout streams near Cape Town. I was perched on a high rock when I spotted a brown which spooked at my cast and shot upstream. I noted the time on my watch and waited. Exactly 13 minutes later it resumed its place where I had first spotted it and I caught it on next cast. What that told me is that trout have short memories.

What is interesting in the context of the sunken ant, is that Lefty Kreh was invited by Jason Randall when he was writing his 2017 Stackpole-published book *'Nymph Masters – Fly-Fishing Secrets from Expert Anglers'* and one of his seven choices was the decades-old varnished thread ant with a sparse hen hackle representing the legs.

The sunken ant is the deadliest form of ant imitation and YouTube has a number of examples, for example on Kelly Galloup's website, but none utilise the 'glittering ant' discovery of Ralph Cutter or Stephen Boshoff's 'Light Bulb' idea of tipping the hackle or synthetic leg with tiny drops of resin to add flash and movement and none mottle the fly by adding glitter dust to the clear UV resin.



Stephen Boshoff's CDC 'Light Bulb' sinking ant – a principle that can also be utilised with hen hackle or synthetic legs. The constant movement of a drowning ant. Sketch by Marcel Terblanche

Ant movement

About 30 years ago I was fishing a stream near Cape Town and the auguries were not auspicious.

It had rained the previous day leaving the soil moist and porous.

Today it was hot and humid, your shirt sticking to your back and, in the stultifying heat, nothing moved – except the ants.

The stream was carpeted with ants but, of the gluttonous feeding that normally characterise the response of trout to the nuptial flights of ants, there was no sign.

Then, I spotted a smallmouth bass, in a side eddy. The water was shallow and clear and its behaviour fascinated me.

Clumps of dead ants – a lot of protein – drifted past the small bass and were ignored. Then a single ant, struggling mightily, would drift towards the bass and the rise was instant.

That moment lives with me still.

Later there was to be another epiphany.

Having read the articles by *Trout and Salmon* columnist, Mike Weaver, about the efficacy of his sunken beetle the 'Black Bug' and other similar accounts, I became a fervent convert to fishing a slightly weighted beetle imitation on a greased high-vis leader in combination with a small yarn strike indicator.

Then came the day, a hot summer day, when the beetle was not delivering. I sat down in the shade of the streamside trees, realising that the flowers of spring had long since disappeared and so too had the hordes of pollinating beetles such as the Brown Monkey Beetle.

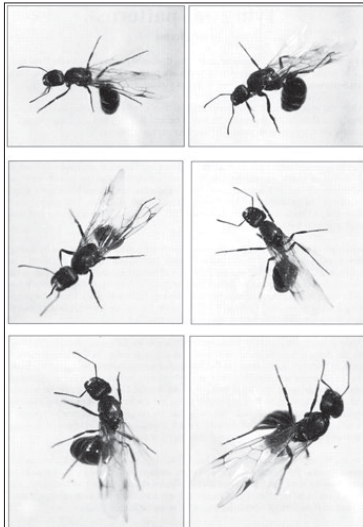
Glancing up I spotted the Papier Mache nests of the Black Cocktail Ant nests and realised they were everywhere.

At that stage I was not aware of the symbiotic relationship between this ant and the Smalblaar Myrtle - *Metrosideros angustifolia* – which grew so prolifically on the banks of our streams and fed a constant flow of ants into the water.

That, for me, was the start of fishing a copper wire ant in the same way that I had fished the sunken beetle.

My reasoning was that while Tim Rolston's 'Bare Midriff' floating ant would suffice as a dry fly because it would be seen in silhouette against a usually bright South African sky, an ant imitation seen at eye level had to be more realistic and that this could be achieved by adding legs, antennae and wings to the weighted body.

In 2004 I dropped an ant into a bowl of water and photographed its writhing with a macro lens.



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.

It was in constant motion. Whether that movement would be discernible to a trout as the ant was swept past its holding lie in fast, turbulent water is moot, but I wrote an article 'Tying Ant Patterns' – available in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS articles archive which analysed ways in which thin materials like Fluro Fibre and Unique Hair could be used to imitate legs and antennae of small ant patterns.

Adding antennae is easy – a tiny dab of superglue just behind the hook eye. Then, tie an overhand knot in the chosen material, slip it over the hook eye to rest on the superglue and tighten. A bead or dubbing imitating the head of the ant then forces it into the required V shape projecting forward, separated by the hook eye.

The thread I use when tying these small sinking ants is Textreme Extreme in white because it is the thinnest of the GSP threads and can be coloured with a permanent marker.

Since then, there have been what I consider as two significant advances in ant tying, Stephen Boshoff's counterweighted 'Light Bulb' leg – which I call the 'Pendulum Leg' and Ralph Cutter's idea of creating glitter on a furry ant body by adding desiccant dust. Tying the

ant back to front with the smallest bulb at the bend of the hook so that the hook bend is less occluded is also an advance, I feel.

Ant colour

The concept of ‘triggers’ which cause an instinctive reaction in various animal species has been well researched by Nobel laureate Nikolaas Tinbergen and others.

Shortly before the start of World War II, Tinbergen, a young Dutch zoologist, noticed something strange happening in a fish tank containing sticklebacks, a small local minnow. The fish tank was on a window ledge and Tinbergen noticed that at the same time each day the male sticklebacks would become excited. He realised that they were responding to the passing of the bright red vehicle belonging to the Dutch postal service. Male sticklebacks have a bright red stripe, the females swollen bellies. He built models which hugely exaggerated these features and found that the males would attack the model which had the largest element of red and that when a model of a female with an exaggeratedly swollen belly was introduced into the fish tank, they would become amorous – in each case ignoring the male and female fish present.

Tinbergen called these exaggerated features, “super-normal releasers” – in other words they triggered extremes of behaviour.

Tinbergen and other scholars of animal behaviour postulate that predators seek positives rather than negatives, looking not at the object as a whole but for special features they recognise. This explains why trout ignore the hook bend and point.

So, what the fly tyer seeks is to exaggerate the positives and minimise the negatives while at the same time incorporating the triggers which will prompt the fish to move further than usual from its holding lie or to choose their pattern in preference to a plenitude of the real prey.

The most obvious trigger is movement and we have all witnessed a cat’s reaction to an object on a string either pulled or swaying backwards and forward in front of it.

In fly fishing this reaction has been well documented. In the USA, Leonard Wright wrote a book, *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect* based on his observation of trout reaction to egg-laying caddis which land on the water and then scoot upstream in a brief spurt which he called, “the sudden inch”.

Manipulating the fly during the drift to simulate movement has long been practised, Sawyer’s ‘induced take, and the Leisenring Lift being the most obvious examples.

Tenkara rods, long and limber with their delicate tips have excelled at inducing movement, facilitated by the forward-facing, soft hackled sekasa kebari flies.

In Barkly East and Maclear where the rivers carry a heavy load of seeds, leaves and twigs, the dead drift is not nearly as effective, in many instances, as a fly cast downstream and twitched back against the current.

The goal for the fly tyer is to incorporate features or materials that will provoke a greater than usual response from fish.

One such material, for example, is “twinkle organza” a thin fluorescent white thread, crimped at regular intervals to produce a Krystallflash effect.

It is used in white wedding dresses and can be bought by the metre. In an article, in the issue of the American magazine, *Fly Fishing*, Gary Borger described how trout feeding selectively on tiny *Trico* mayfly spinners, chose his artificial with twinkle organza wings in preference to the real insect.

Materials which make flies attractive to trout have been used by anglers for centuries before the advent of such synthetics however – peacock herl and the fur from the ear of a hare are obvious examples.

Colour

And then there is the question of colour...

I have been fascinated by the experiments of two fly fishers, T.C. Kingswill Moore in Britain and Charles Meck in the USA, both involving blue materials.

Kingswill Moore was a judge in the Irish Supreme Court, and kept meticulous records of his experience of seventy years of fly fishing on 32 Irish lakes and 36 rivers. He came to the conclusion that there are three magic materials and three colours which do not regularly occur in nature but nevertheless provoke an unusually positive response – hare's ear, black ostrich herl and the shoulder feathers from a blue jay.

There are indications that trout can see colours in the infra-red and ultra violet spectrum that are not visible to humans and Kingswill Moore believed that three colours, not all that prevalent in nature, are particularly attractive to trout: bright orange, claret and gentian blue. His faith in black ostrich herl was the result of his belief that true black would reflect infra-red-light rays making them more discernible to fish. He photographed various material on infra-red film and under infra-red light. Black ostrich herl and black silk showed up as true black, other materials as grey.

And then there is orange and the mystery of the Orange Quill.

McFlylon is an interesting material—it stretches, has a subtle sheen and a wavy texture. Furthermore, it is lighter than water – and is most often used in fish egg imitations.

I sent some to Heather Ralph - @fishnwine – in Rhodes with the suggestion that it might make a useful strike indicator material.

She greased this poly yarn indicator with Loon Aquel floatant and, fishing the Bell River where it runs past the village, she had a rainbow trout rise to it in three successive drifts.

Whether it is rainbow trout on the streams near Cape Town or browns in the Bushmans River in Kwa Zulu Natal, the attraction of orange poly yarn strike indicators is universal and frustrating. But why does this happen? Why do they ignore the nymph or sunken beetle drifting towards them ahead of the orange strike indicator, waiting until the little bit of floating orange yarn reaches their holding lie before rising in an attempt to capture it?

G E M Skues, in his 1932 book, *Side-Lines, Side-Lights & Reflection* wrote that he had no idea why the Orange Quill was the most successful dry fly during the evening rise to the Blue Winged Olive, a Baetis species: ***'It may be asked why the Orange Quill is taken at night for the BWO. I answer frankly, I don't know.'***

(See: *G.E.M. Skues and the hatching BWO puzzle* on the Rackelhanen website.)

I believe you will find the answer on page 206 of Gary LaFontaine's book *The Dry Fly – New Angles: 'When the sun was hitting the cliff, after 4:30 PM., various orange patterns caught almost three times as many fish as they did during the morning.'*

LaFontaine believes that the colour of the ambient light plays a significant role in the success of dry flies and, if trout are used to seeing floating prey bathed in orange light in the late afternoon, would they not, then, associate an orange yarn indicator with food?

But the realization that orange is attractive to trout predates Skues – most particularly in that most attractive of flies – the Partridge and Orange.

And then we come to blue.

I am ambivalent about blue materials in flies because most of the insects upon which trout in mountain streams prey, are characterised by cryptic browns and olives.

Blue, nevertheless, appeals to trout. T C Kingswell Moore, in his 1960 book 'A Man May Fish' wrote that there were three mystery colours, gentian blue, claret and orange – rarely found in nature – which had a special appeal for trout. In their 1973 study, Ginetz and Larkin fed fish eggs in different colours to rainbow trout and their preference was, in order, blue, red, black, orange, brown, yellow, and green. In 1985, Charles Meck used blue flashabou instead of peacock on his Royal Patriot and substantially increased his catch rate. In 1988, Australian guide Ken Orr fished an effective black seal's fur nymph with a hot orange tag but its success rate increased so radically when he added a rib of blue wire, that he called it the 007 Nymph.

And now, purple.



Marcel Terblanche fishing a tannin-stained brown trout stream in the southern Cape where a soft hackle ribbed with maroon wire, elicited a remarkable response

‘The dark, peat-stained and acid waters which extend around the southern tip of the continent for about 300 miles, from the Elgin district above Sir Lowrey Pass along the Garden Route to the Humansdorp district, have been tried with trout since the beginning of the century with but little success.’

That’s a quote from an article in the Autumn 1966 issue of *Piscator* by its then editor, A.C. Harrison.

Tannins in stream water are the result of rotting vegetation and in the heavily-forested areas surrounding the Tsitsikamma Mountain range with its high annual rainfall, the high concentration of humic acid results in trout eggs being smothered by what has been termed a ‘colloidal coating’.

Brown trout survive in a few tiny streams fished by Marcel which are so heavily vegetated that moving upstream along a chain of tiny pools requires using the paths created by bush pigs – (*P.larvatus*) a wild boar which weighs between 60 to 80 kg (130 to 180 lb.). The most easily observable insect here is spiders.

Early in 2024, he was fishing one of these tiny streams using a small soft hackle – black thread body ribbed with black wire and a sparse partridge hackle - which he hoped would imitate the spiders. After an hour or so without success he changed to the same pattern but ribbed with ultra-fine, wine-coloured UTC wire.

The change was dramatic, with trout moving from the opposite bank to take the fly.

Could this indicate that trout in such streams – like those close to Cape Town where the levels of tannin are lower – are triggered by purple?

I found the answer in a 2013 book by Geoff Mueller – ‘*What a Trout Sees*’ - reproduced here.

“Colors that have intrigued me most in recent times, and seem to have the same effect on trout, are those that fall into the purple and blue end of the spectrum.

It’s been contemporary Rocky Mountain guides singing the virtues of purple Prince nymphs, Poison Tungs, Purple Hazes, Purple Renegades, and purple and blue worms that have sparked a new revolution on the water.

On a recent spring trip to the Missouri with the crew at Headhunters Fly Shop out of Craig, Montana, we experimented with purple Cripples in addition to standard hatch-matching colors during a Baetis storm that brought the river to a froth with rising trout. When the weather turned overcast in the late afternoon, our little purple pills proved far more intoxicating to trout than their more exacting-colored counterparts.

Colorado fly- tying wizard Charlie Craven confirms that he also does best with his killer purple Jujubaetis nymphs under a grey sky that draws unseen characteristics out of patterns that trout find irresistible.

North Platte Lodge/Reef Fly Shop guide Stu Birdsong tells us of the phenomenal success he’s had experimenting with purple and blue patterns—in particular the worm.

His clients hook hundreds of sizeable browns and rainbows on the Grey section of the North Platte River and on other prime Wyoming tailwaters with them annually. In the river and under the water, he’s tested it against chartreuse, pinks, and reds, and his findings are striking:

Purple continues to produce over and above other color options. Birdsong attributes the phenomenon to underwater characteristics, rather than low—light scenarios which seem to drive the success of purple and blue dries.

The Reef runs with a high sediment load through most of the season. Water clarity, although good, is highly different than the streak-free glass view you see on other tailwaters such as the Missouri and Green. He says when purple is viewed against brownish or tannin-colored water, it takes on a more natural light, in addition to having more ‘pop’ or ‘stage presence’ than the traditional colors of the past.

His results from the high-water seasons of 2010 and 2011 are telling. Birdsong says, “We would throw a purple and a red simultaneously and most of the time, no matter what the color combinations, you were best off fishing two purple worms. The first couple of weeks of spring,” he adds, “it was a pretty good split- trout seemed to eat the purple more, but they would eat other colors. As the season progressed and those fish saw more and more worm patterns, purple continued to produce over and above red, pink, or chartreuse. In fact, purple fished so well for his clients that Birdsong and fellow Reef guide Seth Kapust stopped fishing the alternatives altogether. “When purple is viewed against brown or tannin water, I think it takes on a more natural color, but one that sticks out better than other colors.”

Might this explain the success of Tom Sutcliffe’s Zak Nymph which uses purple DMC embroidery thread as a rib?

(Read the article *'Tying Zaks – Critical factors'* on his 'Spirit of Fly Fishing' website.)

Purple has not been a ubiquitous colour in the annals of fly tying - I can think only of the Snipe and Purple and Oliver Kite's Imperial.

More recently, we have seen Craig McDonald's Duracell jig nymph become a staple in competitive fly fishing. It uses Hareline UV Brown Ice Dub for the body but, to me, it looks more purple than brown.

Fishing purple and orange ants might well be a game changer.

Pictured here is an ant which combines a black bead at the hook eye and a purple wire abdomen tied by Marcel Terblanche. He says that, by using a dentist pick or dubbing needle, one can actually bend kinks into Krystflash legs to suggest the natural leg joints.



An ant with purple wire abdomen by Marcel Terblanche. The crinkled Krystflash legs could be tipped with a tiny blob of UV resin to add flash and movement

The only disadvantage of fishing ant patterns is that they are difficult to follow in the drift, but the advent of the greased hi-vis leader coupled with a waterproofed yarn strike indicator, solved that problem for me.

Translucence

If you do an internet search for 'ant flies Archives + The Mission Fly Fishing Magazine' you will be taken to three useful articles, the most intriguing of which, for me, is 'Solar Ants – Fly Tying SBS' by one of my favourite fly angling writers, Leonard Flemming. His invention of the Sand Flea imitation and the Wolf Spider, both of which feature in the CPS articles archive, are singular milestones in South Africa's trout fly evolution.

The most memorable quote on translucence in some ant species (most are opaque) came from Vincent Marinaro in his ground-breaking book *'A Modern Dy Fly Code'* – originally written in 1950 and subsequently reprinted: ***'Consider for example, the startling fact that in two different species of the same family, the black and the red ant, there is tremendous variance, the former being absolutely***

opaque in the body and the latter glimmering and glowing as though lighted by some inner fire.'

That inspired my Copper Wire Ant originally covered in nail polish and later by UV resin that inspired 'Pieter 'Seun' Taljaard's *Piscator* article, '***The Pitter-Patter of Ants***' which can be found in the Terrestrials folder in the CPS articles archive.

I had vaguely considered tying glass bead sinking ants but the trout streams near Cape Town are strewn with boulders and the chances of breaking a glass bead ant were, I reasoned quite high. This was disappointing because seed beads are tiny and some are lined in a different base colour offering exquisite translucency. Fire Mountain Gems is a website giving useful information on these beads. The three major manufacturers that I value are Toho and Miyuki which are Japanese and the Czech-made Preciosa-Ornela which makes the smallest beads I have been able to source – 16/0. That means that sixteen of these beads laid side by side will cover one inch. Toho and Miyuki make 15/0 seed beads and the generic name for such small beads is rocailles.

What made me re-think the possibility of glass bead ants after reading Leonard's article was that since I wrote my articles – 'Tying Ant Patterns' and 'Tying the Copper Wire Ant' years ago – you can find them in the 'Ants on the Menu' folder in the CPS articles archive - we have seen the advent of protective coatings most specifically the UV light cured resins.

- Leonard recommends Solarez UV-Cure F-I-e-x Formula
- Alan Hobson recommends 'Liquid Fusion' which is available locally through a company called Doodles-Café dot co.za
- Platon Trakoshis, a member of the Mission team, recommends PATTEX Extreme Repair All Purpose Glue – Read his article 'Pattex 100' in the Mission magazine website.
- I'm intrigued by Gorilla Glue because it foams if placed on a wet surface forming minute bubbles which is precisely what Ralph Cutter mentioned about ants glittering under the water surface as tiny air bubbles adhere to their hairy bodies.

Why?

'The principal reason why trout eat ants is that they are both available and abundant'

'To Rise a Trout' John Roberts (The Crowood Press, 1988)

The question that has yet to be answered is why trout on occasion become frenzied in their reaction to an ant fall, throwing caution to the wind and why they will abandon selective feeding on a specific insect hatching in profusion and divert their attention to an ant – Ken Miyata's 'Anting the Hatch'. Miyata wrote of catching trout on his dubbed fur ant pattern at midnight and when the river banks were covered in snow and ants had been hibernating for months. He wrote of catching sea run browns in estuaries where their exposure to ants had been minimal. Furthermore, Leigh Perkins, the man who made Orvis a household name in America, used nothing but a #14 red fur ant during a hatch of the diminutive Trico mayflies because he had proven on many, many occasions that it works.

In 2004 I collated a selection of ant quotes when I was editing *Piscator* under the headline 'Experts on Ants'. The majority of people quoted were from America where the *leitmotif* of fly angling is the mayfly - as it has been in the fly angling lexicon of England and France.

There is an anomaly here because the majority of ants are found in countries below the equator where mayflies are scarce and yet the majority of dry flies used here are mayfly imitations from the Adams to the Royal Wulff, in both shoulder hackle and parachute iterations.

Why, then, are trout so attracted to ants? One of the reasons put forward was the fact that they communicate through pheromones – chemical signals produced outside the bodies of insects.

'In fact, ants are little chemical factories, continuously producing an array of substances, called

pheromones, that serve as the ants' language. Through these pheromones the ants can convey messages ranging from the location of food to the presence of danger. They use pheromones as well to orchestrate social behaviours as diverse as tending the young, grooming the queen, marking their territory, and mating. Bert Holldobler, *Ways of The Ant*, National Geographic, June, 1984

References to ants in fly fishing literature date from Walton's time with Charles Cotton giving dressings for an imitation in the 1676 edition of *The Compleat Angler*.

Subsequently, other British fly-fishing authors, including Alfred Ronalds (1836), G.P.R. Pulman (1841), Michael Theakston (1853) and Frederick Halford (1913) all listed ant patterns in their books. What is relevant here, for our purposes, is that ants are far more prolific in sub equatorial Africa than they are in the cold climes of Britain.

In Britain, the nests of Wood Ants, (*Formica Rufa*) have the pungent, acidic odour traditionally associated with urinals and this has been recognised in literature for centuries, leading to the medieval name for ants – “pismires”.

He is as crabbed as an old pismire,

Though he has everything he can desire.

-Chaucer (c.1342-1400), *Canterbury Tales*, 1386-1400, *The Summoner's Tale*

Why, look you, I am whipp'd and scourged with rods, Nettled and stung with pismires, when I hear of this vile politician, Bolingbroke.

-Hotspur, in Shakespeare (1564-1616), *Henry IV*, 1598, part 1, Act 1, Scene 3

But it is only in the last seventy odd years that anglers have sought to attribute to formic acid the trout's attraction to ants, an attraction which they have empirically proven through countless successes with flies representing this insect.

It was Edward Ringwood Hewitt, one America's most significant fly-fishing innovators, who first publicised the fact in his book, *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-five Years* (Charles Scribner, 1948)

'One evening, on the Neversink, we noticed a great rise of trout in the large pool at the Big Bend. They were located where the current runs along the ledge. My son and I fished for about two hours without hooking a single one. We tried all patterns of flies with no results. There were large numbers of small black flies in the air, sometimes even clouds of them, as well as other insects, and even larger flies.

'Finally, one of these clouds of black flies came around my head, and as I opened my mouth to speak one or two of them got in it, and to my surprise they tasted quite bitter. These were small flying ants, and were bitter with formic acid. The fish were evidently taking these small flies on account of this taste, and would not touch anything larger until these insects had all disappeared.

'I took some No. 18 flies and cut down the wings to make them about the size of the flying ants, and at once began to get fish. We took a dozen good-sized ones in a little while.'

Not everyone has bought into this theory...

'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.

Research in the past few decades has shown however that ants, unlike caterpillars, dragonflies et al, communicate through a complex mix of extremely potent chemicals.

Lacking both voice or hearing, they use these chemicals in a variety of ways; to create trails for others to follow, to recruit others when there is a need to attack and subdue prey, to raise the alarm when an attack from another colony is imminent and to threaten the attackers etc.

No less than five glands produce these pheromones. Beginning at the head there is a mandibular gland that exudes alarm odours as does the Dufour's gland in the abdomen.

Also in the abdomen are a poison gland that produces formic acid and other venoms, a sternal gland that summons workers from nearby and a rectal gland that secretes trail-marking odours.

These chemicals are extremely potent as research at Cornell University has found – so potent that the possibility of using them as a cure for Alzheimer's disease is now being researched:

'Gas chromatographic and mass spectrometric analyses in the Cornell laboratory identified four components in the multipurpose fluid from the ants' poison glands. They are N-isopentyl-2-phenylethylamine, a key compound never before identified from nature; anabaseine (3,4,5,6-tetrahydro-2,3'-bipyridine); anabasine [3-(2-piperidinyl)pyridine]; and a fourth chemical never before found in ants, 2,3'-bipyridyl.'

Ants can detect just a few parts of their pheromone in a billion parts of air but such sensitivity is not unique in nature. Salmon and trout can detect similarly minute levels of chemicals in the water and this is shown by the ability of salmon and sea run trout to return to their natal rivers.

My sense, however, is that the most prosaic reason why trout fixate on ants, as John Roberts, suggests, it is the insect that they see and eat most often.

Habituation

Scientists estimate that there are an estimated 2.5 million times more ants on this planet than people which works out at 20 quadrillion – the majority being found in the southern hemisphere. What that means for trout, I assume, is that they would be accustomed to seeing more ants than other insects and thus take them with less suspicion.

Furthermore, they don't have much response time because the ant with its distinctive silhouette sweeps in an out of its window quickly and they have competition from other trout to worry about.

Fly anglers in the USA have learnt to trust the ant as a fly that has universal attraction for trout no matter what the circumstances and I believe it is equally deserving of trust here, given that they exist in greater numbers locally than in the colder northern hemisphere.

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'.

(Reservoir Fishing with Tom Saville – Trafalgar Square 1991)

But it was a reference in a Tasmanian book that, for me, best captured the extraordinary power that ant patterns have to tempt, the most fastidious and, in this case, the most sated trout and it is this passage that I leave you to contemplate along with the advice contained in Proverbs, Chapter Six verse Six:

'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.'

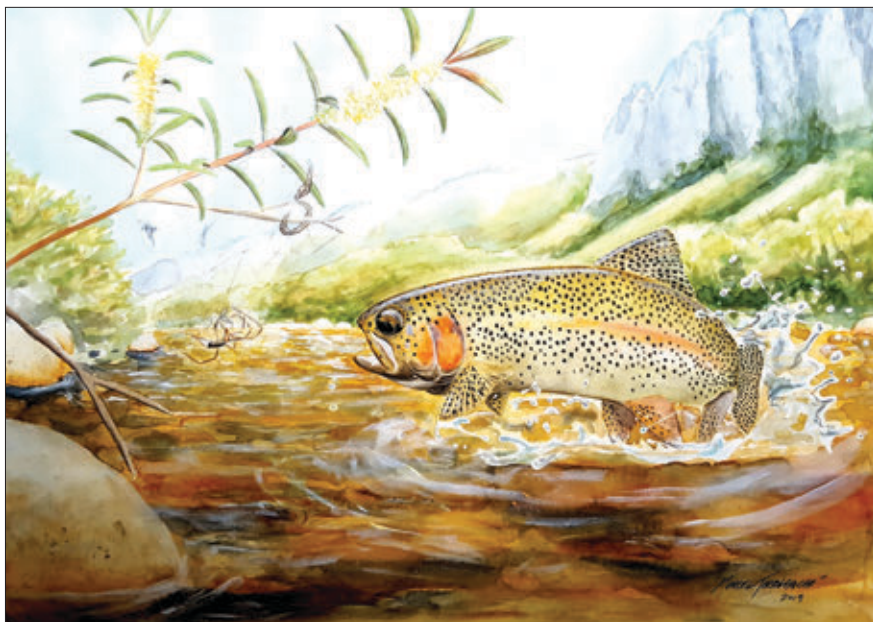
Tony Ritchie, *Dry Fly-Fishing for Trout*. (Kangaroo Press, 1994)





CHAPTER 17

The Evolution of the Light Bulb Spider



**A rainbow trout attacks a Long Jawed Orb Weaver spider (Tetragnathidae).
Painting by Marcel Terblanche**

The most common spiders preyed upon by trout in the mountain streams near Cape Town are the web-spinning Tetragnathidae species shown in the painting above and the ‘Huntsman’ spiders (Sparassidae) which do not build webs but track their prey on the bank or instream rocks or are semi-aquatic and capture their prey beneath the water surface.

This painting mirrors an account in a 2009 article ‘The Wolf Spider’ by Leonard Flemming which can be found in the ‘Terrestrials’ folder in the articles archive of the Cape Piscatorial Society.

His Wolf Spider is a more exact imitation of the spiders which frequent the trout streams near Cape Town than Mark MacKereth's more impressionistic Caribou Spider which had preceded it. I felt, however, that its legs, made from pheasant tail barbs, were fragile and that the rubber legs used by Canadian photographer, David Lambroughton, on his spider imitation would be more robust and provide more movement.

Lambroughton, a Canadian spends half the year in New Zealand, taking photographs for his 'Fly Fishing Dreams' calendar which is sold all over the world.

He described this fly on his Instagram page as being 'so deadly it ought to be banned'. This sentiment was echoed by a New Zealand guide, Dean Bell, who wrote '***I've seen it account for over 20 large browns on a single day on the upper reaches of the Ahuriri***' in the book 'New Zealand's Best Trout Flies' (Pheasant Tail Publishing, 2006). It has also deceived trout on the River Test and salmon on the Dean River in British Columbia.

Leonard also tied an imitation of a more commonly seen riverine spider, the semi- aquatic Wolf Spider, Nilus massajee, which does not spin a web but runs down its prey. It is easy to recognise because of the parallel white stripes on top of its body



**Nilus massajee. The semi-aquatic huntsman spider found on Western Cape Streams.
Photo by P. Webb**



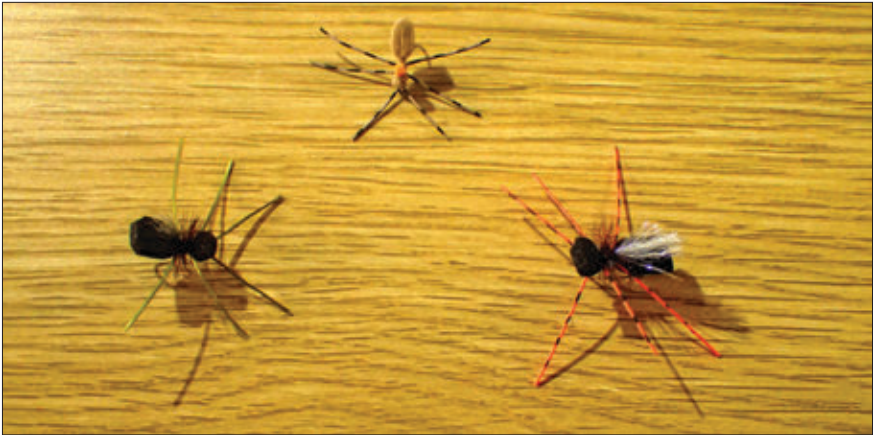
(L) A photo by Peter Brigg of his imitation of the semi-aquatic Nilus massajee fish-eating spider

Peter Brigg -@grizzlyhackle – whose 'Call of the Stream' website is a glorious celebration of small stream fly angling, developed a simpler version of Leonard's Wolf Spider and you can read his chronology of such imitations, 'The Development of the Wolf Spider' in the 'Terrestrials' folder on the CPS website.



My version of Dave Lambroughton's fly with added Ethafoam to mimic the egg sac, a prominent feature of the Huntsman spiders

Lambroughton's fly proved to be a fairly complex tie, adding a poly wing and hackle to the foam rubber body and rubber legs.



Our attempts (bottom left and right) to tie Dave Lambroughton's rubber leg spider with the looped Fettuccine foam rubber version which succeeded it

To emulate the Wolf Spider's prominent white egg sac, I added some white Ethafoam to which Gary LaFontaine attributed magical light-dispersing ability. I was later to experiment with Solarez Buoyant Armour a white, UV light-cured resin

Our version of the Lambroughton Spider proved to be effective on local streams when my friend Campbell Lyons spent a day on a local stream with a visitor from the UK who had never cast a fly rod before. He quickly mastered the rudiments of fly casting but struggled to synchronise his retrieve

with the speed of the fly's downstream drift. This resulted in loose line and missed strikes. He liked our version of David Lambroughton's size 16 spider because its glistening wing of Fishient's Deadly Dazzle made it easy to follow in the drift. A feeding trout was spotted and, in total, Campbell's client managed to get nine casts over its holding position. On each occasion the trout rose to it, but he failed to connect on the strike. Nine rises by the same trout to the same fly in a matter of minutes!



A Wolf Spider in its natural habitat – photo by Campbell Lyons

I wanted to simplify Lambroughton's spider. What succeeded these attempts used stretched and doubled Hareline Fettuccine foam rubber strips for the abdomen. These strips were originally designed by Drew Chicone for his Tuscan Bunny, a salt water surface pattern for targeting ambush feeders.

The front of the new version of the Light Bulb Spider has a Roman Moser Balloon Caddis-style head which is folded backwards using the tip as a sighter. The barred rubber legs are separated by Semperfli Kapok Dubbing. It was tied on a #14 short shank, medium wire Dohiku 303 hook.

A radical transition in the design of this Huntsman spider imitation came when I received a photo in May 2022 from split cane rod artist, Stephen Boshoff.



(L) Stephen Boshoff in his Cape Town workshop—his 'Light Bulb Ant' concept applied to other terrestrial insects was a singular fly-tying innovation

His ant, an old design, has a lacquered thread body. Instead of the traditional rooster hackle in the middle of the fly, he used a palmered CDC feather. What changed it from the conventional was that he flickered the longer tips of the CDC feather with tiny drops of UV- light cured resin. This clearly caught and reflected the ever-changing kaleidoscope of light created between the sun and the braiding water currents. In my Instagram post

at the time, I wrote: 'Kaleidoscope Ant' might be a more appropriate name because it takes the decades-old, lacquered thread ant an innovative step forward.'



(L) Stephen Boshoff's 'Light Bulb' Ant, a concept that could significantly enhance the efficacy of several conventional fly designs

Steve explained the rationale behind this step: 'What led to the 'light-bulb' (thought) in my tying - at first on floating ants - was influenced by several design factors: First, adherence to Tony Biggs's 'free' tying style, the impressionistic rather than exact imitation (further supported by Tom Sutcliffe's quest for the 'working' fly).

Second, images from books that stayed in my mind since my youth, specifically the dimpled image of the natural's legs on the water (I think both Marinaro and Goddard & Clarke's key texts carried such images). Third, my sense that most fly-tying texts over-emphasized wings, at the expense of other insect body 'parts'. Hackle - representing legs - is almost considered a secondary trigger.

Within a broader belief that most of the drifting flies I encounter onstream are not perfect and lean towards partly 'wasted' - with body parts splayed in different ways (each somewhat unique) - who knows which body part triggers fish interest? Fourth, I think that many 'floating' fly imitations - and especially terrestrial and partly-crippled imitations - drift too high above the water. They should sit in as well as above the water surface (probably the reason why Tony used a heavier hook for RABS).

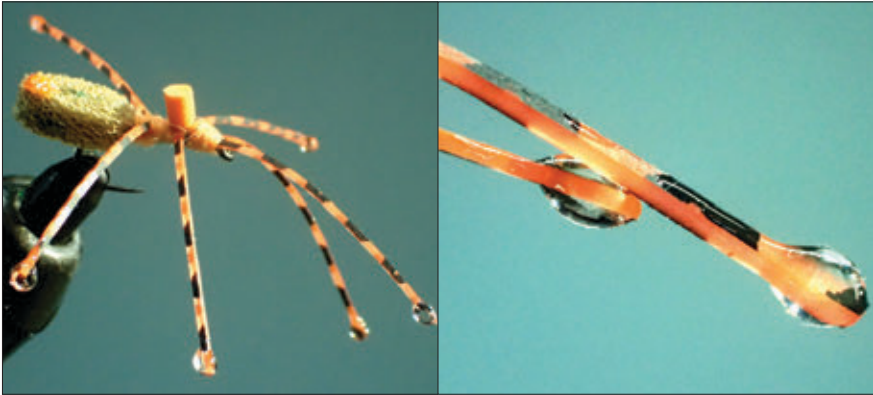
I just dislike stiff legs on flies, and the tiny blobs of epoxy creates what Ed Herbst calls a 'pendulum' effect, making the legs swing free. Finally, I do not know much about what colours the trout see. So, in one fly, I like to play with subtle variations and, probably influenced by Gary LaFontaine, believe that the light-bulb may reflect and create nuances of colour that may interest a fish, even if not seen by me.'

It was the pendulum factor that intrigued me.

Movement creates the impression of life and the counterweighted but flexible feather fibre, cantilever-anchored at the body, constantly reacted to the pressures exerted by changing current flow. A not-entirely accurate analogy in a fly design context would be Russell Blessing's Woolly Bugger with the weight at the eye of the hook creating a concomitant movement in the flexible marabou tail.

My initial sense was that these sparkling little spheres, to the consternation of traditionalists, might add an additional form of attraction to the tips of the hackle on a North Country soft hackle like a Partridge and Orange.

That thought was quickly replaced by reflection about how the added weight could animate the tips of rubber legs on foam rubber spider or hopper imitations, creating a pendulum effect.



Left & Right - The Light Bulb Spider prototype with silicone rubber legs tipped with UV resin

An initial hurdle was that the UV resin (we were later to add glitter dust) would not stick to silicone so we switched to natural rubber legs

When Solarez brought out its white UV light-cured Buoyant Armour resin, my immediate thought was that it would be ideal for representing the egg sac which the stream-frequenting Wolf Spider female carries beneath her abdomen.



Solarez Buoyant Armour white resin used to imitate the egg sac the Huntsman spiders carry beneath their abdomens

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The first Light Bulb version was first tried by Matthew Sephton who fished the Three Drifts Stream on the beautiful family farm, Pitlochrie, in Barkly East.



**Matt Sephton fishing the Three Drifts Stream on the family farm, Pitlochrie, in Barkly East.
Photo by Wiebke Langner**



It proved to be extremely successful - this from an email he sent me on 12 January 2024:

‘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 1-weight and had such fun.’

(L) Matthew Sephton stalking rainbow trout on the Barkly East family farm, Pitlochrie. Photo by Wiebke Langner



(L) A Three Drifts stream rainbow trout deceived by the Light Bulb Spider. Photo by Matt Sephton

Around this time, I received a serendipitous insight into why the Light Bulb Spider was proving so successful – aside from its wide but realistic profile and the increased leg movement facilitated by its counterweighted legs.

On Instagram, I spotted a photo taken by an expatriate South African, Arno Crous (@smallstream_flyfishn) a local small stream fly angler before he moved to Australia.



(L) The Arno Crous photo which made me realise that Stephen Boshoff's 'light bulb' approach had greater ramifications than I had initially realised

It showed a Wolf Spider and what the photo accentuated was the star bursts of light caused by the sun's rays bouncing off the dimples which the spider's feet imprint in the water surface.

Have a look at the article 'Spider locomotion on the water surface' by Robert Suter on the Researchgate website and do an images search using the same key words. Note the star-like light reflections from the dimples created by their eight waterproof feet.

The feet of spiders like Nilus massajee have features which enable it to use the surface tension of the water advantageously for locomotion.

It was John Goddard and Brian Clarke who, through their use of underwater cameras, brought us the information that those dimples created by the feet of floating insects serve as an early warning to trout of approaching prey being carried towards them by the current. It came in their milestone book 2005 book *The Trout and the Fly*.



A scan from 'The Trout and the Fly' showing how insect feet in the film reflect sunlight, alerting downstream trout to their approach



The Light Bulb Spider proved as effective on dams with Ryan Weaver - @pisscatauryan - and his son, Christopher, doing well on stillwater rainbow and brown trout with the pattern



Christopher Weaver, above, with a dam-caught brown trout, which was hooked on the Light Bulb Spider

The need for further revision became obvious when Ian Cox tested the #14 spider during the 2024 Wild Trout Association annual festival in Rhodes.

Small trout, aggressive and agile, swarmed the spider but could not get it into their mouths and the resulting disturbance frightened the bigger fish.

Dropping from a #14 to an #18 hook, would bring the resulting fly closer to the actual size of riverine Huntsman spiders.



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Top-heavy foam rubber dry flies have very specific hook requirements – heavy enough to ensure that they always land upright, balanced with the conflicting need to be as light as possible to promote buoyancy.

We settled on a short shank #18 Grip 12723BL which just barely kept the Light Bulb Spider afloat. Despite this, it was highly visible in the drift.

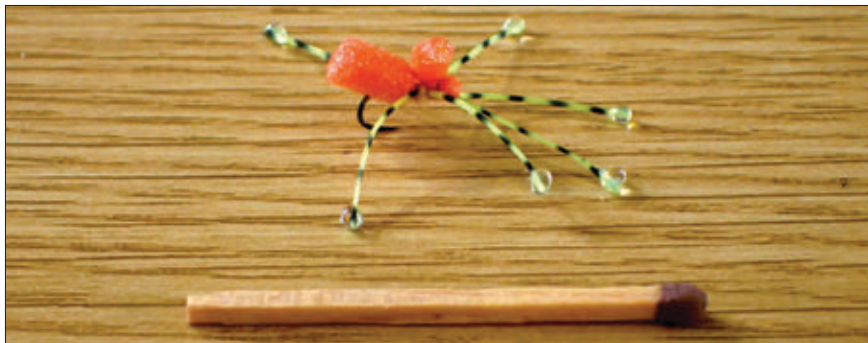
Adding more movement was a new Hareline product, Micro-Flex rubber legs, described by one USA fly fishing shop as oval in shape and ‘wiggles like crazy’.

Wanting to test its buoyancy, Campbell Lyons started in some calm water on the Smalblaar stream near Cape Town with the help of Chris Bateman. It floated (just) but drew slashing strikes when twitched and, if a dead drift does not work, try animating the legs with a subtle line movement.



Chris Bateman testing the LBS in almost still water on the Smalblaar. Photo by Campbell Lyons

It was late in May when I managed to post the new smaller version of the LBS to Darryl Lampert - @cape streams - who would use it on the Smalblaar and to Jan Korrubel who fishes one of the closest trout streams to KZN cities like Pietermaritzburg and Durban, the Bushmans. A Wiki search for ‘Giants Castle’ will illustrate the area of the Drakensberg Mountain range through which the Bushmans flows.



The latest and smaller iteration of the LBS using Hareline Micro-Flex legs before adding purple glitter dust to the second coat of UV resin

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

Both streams are among the most pressured in the country and thus ideal for testing the latest version of the Light Bulb Spider. Furthermore, with winter approaching and water temperatures dropping, trout in both streams were starting to spawn, making them less focused on prey capture.



Darryl Lampert fishing the Smalblaar stream, an ideal testing venue for the Light Bulb Spider

Darryl fished the first weekend in May and his response was overwhelmingly positive. He phoned to say 'I think you have a winner here'.

On his Facebook page he wrote: 'Ed's Light Bulb Spider was a revelation. Fish ate it slowly and confidently all day and I was sad to finally lose it under a rock - ordered some more'.



A Smalblaar stream rainbow trout deceived by Light Bulb Spider fished by Darryl Lampert

To make it more visible, we had coated the top of the sighter post with a mixture of orange glitter dust and Loon Water-Based Head Cement which we had found was the best combination for this approach, but Darryl felt that the orange fly was visible enough without this mixture.

He said that, after the first cast, the leg tips dipped under water, which I feel is advantageous because fish can spot the spider before it enters their window - which is small on shallow streams.

Jan Korrubel - @jankorrubel_anglerfish – professional guide and fly tyer, who runs the Kingfisher shop in Pietermaritzburg, only managed to get away during the last weekend in May, by which time the brown trout in the Bushmans stream had already spawned. The rigours of spawning had left them lethargic, but Jan brought several to hand and one drifted below the spider for the full length of a run, then followed over the lip into the next run before taking it decisively!



(L) Jan Korrubel's photo of the Bushmans, the most iconic brown trout stream in South Africa

Jan provided some useful feedback saying that, after only fishing in the morning, to rest the post-spawning fish, all the UV resin 'lightbulbs' had come off the Microflex legs.

They would be easy to replace, but I now use a double layer method. The first is Loon UV Clear Fly Finish which adds a subtle blue glow in bright sunlight and the second is a mixture of Solarez Flex or Glowman mixed with purple glitter dust.



(L) A Bushmans stream brown trout which followed Jan's Light Bulb Spider for some distance before taking

(L bottom) We have tried two other adhesives to create the bulbs – Aquaseal which is used to repair neoprene wetsuits and Pattex Repair Extreme

These adhesives are slow to cure and lack the convenience of UV light-cured resins which are well proven in fly tying application.

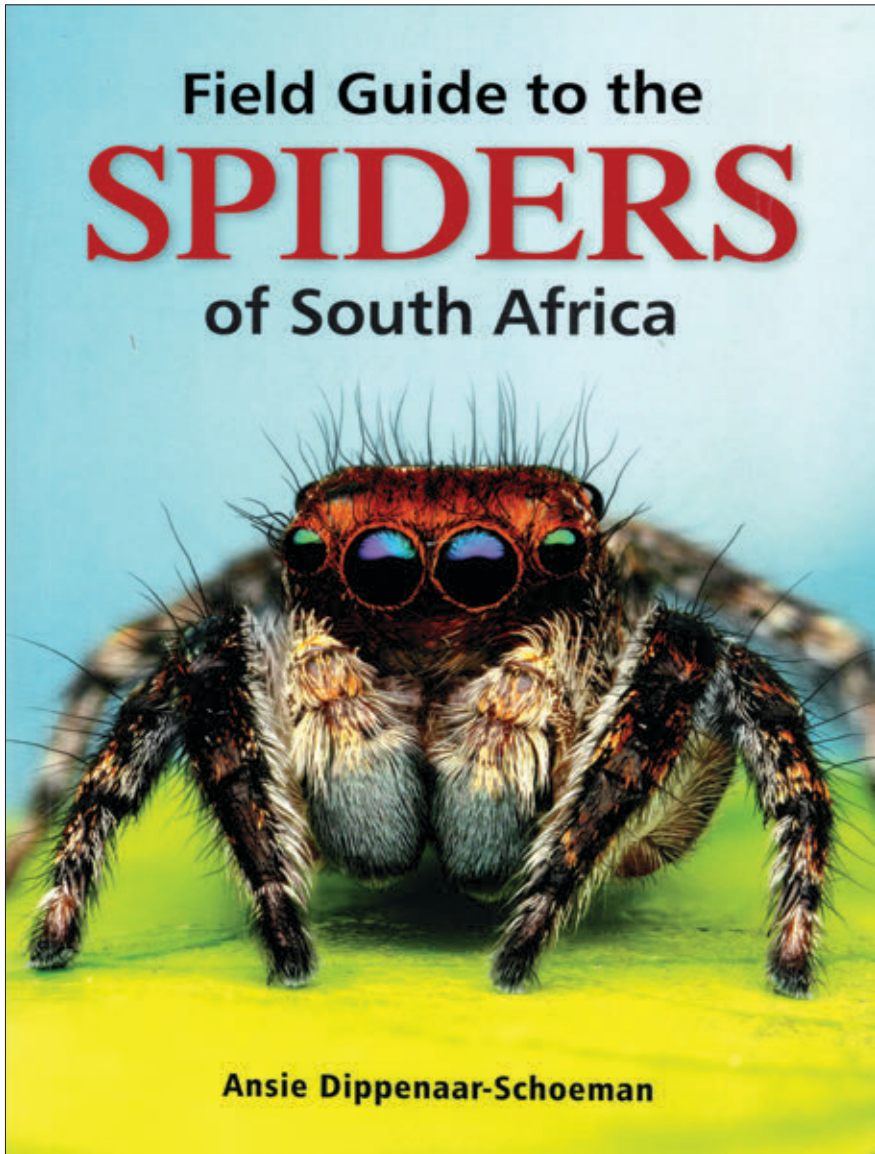


In February this year while doing an internet search for 'Spiders running on water,' I had the good fortune to come across a definitive work, the product of a lifetime of passionate research.

Professor Ansie Dippenaar-Schoeman's 'Field Guide to the Spiders of South Africa' contained several photos of the light dimples that the waterproof feet of Huntsman spiders leave on the water surface, dimples that reflect light.

She happily agreed to let me use the

photos and was intrigued when I told her that South African fly anglers had been tying flies to imitate these fascinating creatures for more than half a century.



A definitive guide to South African spiders

She asked me to write a brief, illustrated article for the newsletter of SANSA – South African National Survey of Arachnida.

The Evolution of the Light Bulb Spider

Ed Herbst (edherbst346@gmail.com)



Drawing by Marcel Terblanche 2019 of a trout leaping clear of the water trying to grab a long-jawed water spider

Historians agree that fly fishing for trout originated in the northern hemisphere where mayflies and caddis play a large role in trout diet. In the southern hemisphere, terrestrial insects such as ants and beetles play a far more important role for trout in our streams. Trout are ambush predators detecting prey by its movement and, in this regard, there is no more obvious prey than a spider with its eight legs and waterproof feet leaving little dimples in the water surface which reflect light.



Hunting spiders like the Wolf Spiders (Lycosidae) (Fig. 1) and Fish-eating spiders (Nilus mosquito) (Fig. 2) are ubiquitous on the trout streams near Cape Town. The first person to tie a fly in attempt to imitate one was an expatriate Englishman, Mark Mackereth, some 60 years ago (Fig. 3).

Mark, a bass player by profession, had met his South African wife in London and decided to pursue his career here. He joined the Cape Town Symphony orchestra and the Cape Piscatorial Society (CPS) in 1961 and his Caribou Spider – made from caribou fur – was an instant success.



Mark Mackereth's and the parachute-style Caribou Spiders.

Mark was the originator of the first South African fly to imitate the Wolf Spider (Fig. 4). Unlike conventional floating flies which have the supporting feather at the eye of the hook tied vertically, Mark used what is called a 'parachute hackle' which is tied in horizontally. It was tied in a style which we call impressionistic because it could be taken by trout for several insects, such as a beetle.

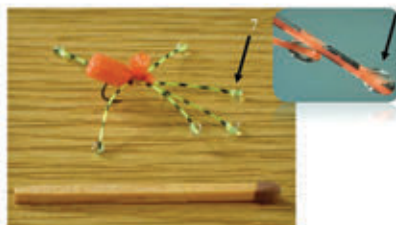
The next step in the quest for a more realistic imitation of the Wolf spider came decades later when a young University of Stellenbosch student, Leonard Flemming wrote in *Piscator*, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society (I recall an incident while fishing a small Cape stream during the late season. I watched the pale figure of the trout glide to and fro in the current while I was tying a fly to my tippet. A movement to the right of the inlet caught my eye and almost instantly the trout leapt clear of the water and grabbed a long-jawed water spider – that was dangling by its silken thread from a streamside bush – in midair!

Leonard's Wolf Spider was quite a complex tie and Peter Brigg tied a simpler version which was a huge success.



Peter Brigg, webmaster of the 'Call of the Stream' blog, tied a simpler version of Leonard Flemming's Wolf Spider imitation (Figs 5 & 6)

I had been experimenting, with some success, with a spider which used a body made of foam rubber and rubber legs. I then spotted a photo of Nilus mosquito (Fig. 2) taken by the late Peter Webb in the outstanding book 'Field Guide to South African Spiders' by Professor Ansie Dippenaar Schoeman and realised I could replicate the light dimples by adding a tiny drop of UV light-cured resin to the tips of the rubber legs. (Fig. 7).



This is work in progress as, at the time of writing the 'Light Bulb Spider' has yet to be tested. Orange is a colour that has proved particularly attractive to trout and I'm hoping the light reflected from the resin will also trigger a reaction from them.

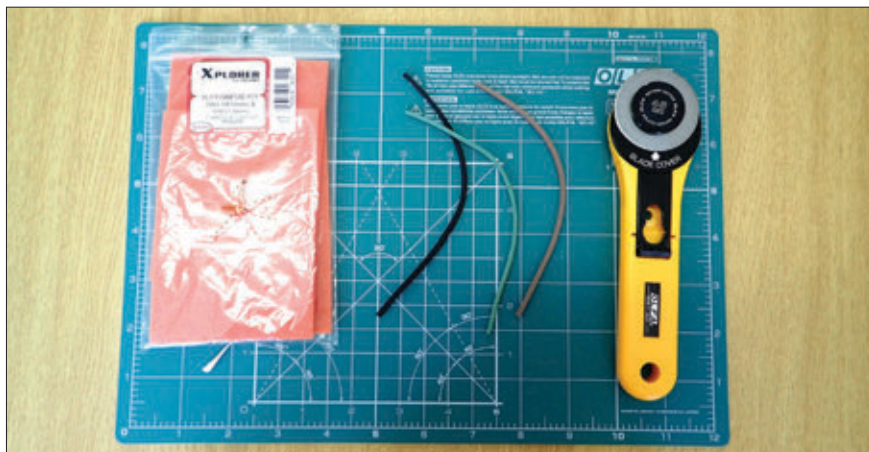
For more see the Instagram of Ed Herbst

https://www.instagram.com/p/Df5xmiM7Kd/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

What I gleaned from her book was that the spiders that I see most often on our streams are the semi-aquatic Nilus massajee, identifiable by the two parallel white stripes on its abdomen and the more cryptic Lycosidae Wolf Spider. Also vulnerable are the orb weaver spiders (Tetragnathidae) which spin their webs in close proximity to the water

Tying the Light Bulb Spider

I have found the Olfa rotary cutter and mat useful for cutting foam rubber strips for fly patterns and they have facilitated the development of the Light Bulb Spider.



Here is the material list and a step by step tying sequence of the Light Bulb Spider:



Hends ultrafine orange thread, a preferred option for the Light Bulb Spider

Hook: Grip 12723 BL size 18

Thread: Orange Hends Ultrafine or UTC 70 denier orange or white Textreme Extreme coloured orange with a permanent marker

Abdomen: Stretched and doubled foam rubber strip – Hareline Fettuccine foam rubber preferred

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Head: Wapsi Evazote foam rubber or similar

Legs: Ultrafine rubber – Hareline Micro-Flex preferred

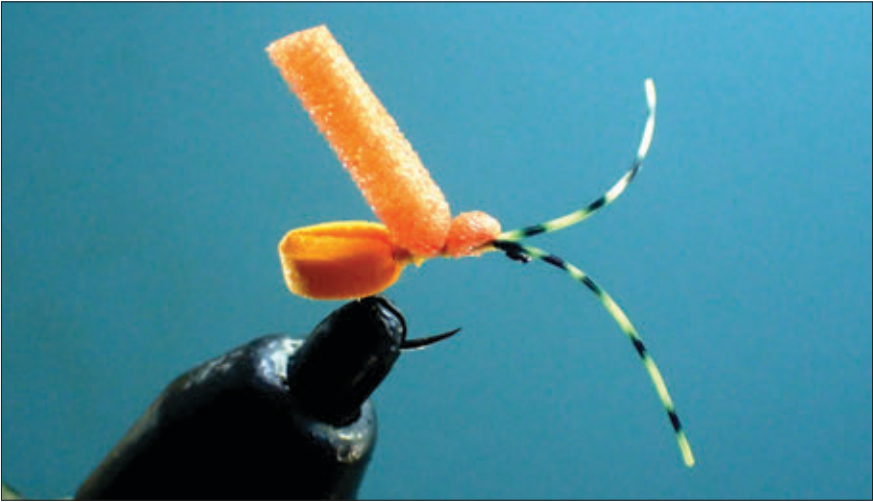
Dubbing: Semperfli Kapok



Step 1: Tie in the pre-barred Micro-Flex front legs



Step 2: Tie in the Evazote strip which will form the head and sighter post



Step 3: Fold the Evazote foam rubber backwards and tie down to form the head and sighter post



Step 4: Tie in the looped Fettuccine foam rubber strip to represent the abdomen of the spider



Step 5: Tie in a rubber leg on either side of the hook shank, dub the thread with kapok and use it to separate and secure the legs



Step 6: Tip the rubber legs with two layers of UV resin, the second layer being mixed with glitter dust

There is room for further experimentation, particularly when it comes to the leg tips. For example, combine Loon Fluorescing Clear Fly Finish as a base layer and cover it with Solarez phosphorescent Glow Man mixed with purple glitter dust as a second layer.

Why purple glitter dust?



Marcel Terblanche found that trout on his home streams charged purple flies having previously ignored patterns using different colours such as black

Marcel Terblanche, an artist whose paintings enhance this article also ties flies, furls Tenkara leaders and builds delicate small stream rods professionally, lives in the densely forested, high rainfall area of the Southern Cape.

As a consequence of the high level of rotting vegetation in the water, many streams in the area are heavily peat stained and the tannins coat trout eggs and smother them.

A 1996 article in the history folder of the Cape Piscatorial Society archive which is headlined 'Trout in the peat-stained waters of the Southern Cape' opens thus: 'The dark, peat-stained and acid waters which extend around the southern tip of the continent for about 300 miles from the Elgin District above Sir Lowry Pass along the "Garden Route" to the Humansdorp district, have been tried with trout on many occasions with but slight success.'

Brown trout survive in a handful of tiny streams here and Marcel found that simply changing from a black to a wine-coloured wire rib on a black soft hackle saw previously dormant trout charge from

the opposite bank to attack the purple-hued fly.

In the USA, trout in streams with a high humic acid content invariably take a purple San Juan worm rather than the traditional red.

The trout streams near Cape Town are also peat-stained but not to the same extent and there might be some benefit in using purple glitter dust in the two-layer UV resin mix.

Initial tests shows that the Light Bulb Spider is a promising pattern. Used by Arno Crous, it is proving itself on Australian small streams. It ticks a lot of boxes. Gary LaFontaine said that trout lying deep in strong currents need a 'wide' fly and a 'big chunk' to tempt them into expending energy on a rise to the surface. The LBS has the right silhouette, a lot of movement and its leg tips mimic the real-world starburst of light created when spiders run on the water surface.

There is room for further experiments. I'd like to tie one in dark brown and have it fished with a split shot or soft lead because I believe it would imitate our indigenous Potamonautes freshwater crabs which are eaten in numbers by our freshwater fish when available, particularly in spring when the newly-born crabs are small and more vulnerable.



Where it all began: A painting by Marcel Terblanche of Stephen Boshoff's 'Light Bulb Ant' which inspired the 'Light Bulb Spider'





CHAPTER 18

The Evolution of the Halo-Hackle/ Light Bulb Klink



Egg-laying damselfly. Photo by Warwick Tarboton

Klinkhåmers are different from many other parachute dry flies in that the thorax of the fly is designed to hang down 'through' the surface of the water to imitate an emerging insect.

The abdomen serves as a trigger point which penetrates the surface film, which gets noticed by trout from great distances, even before any resulting surface footprint features.

In all variations of this fly, the abdomen of the fly is underneath the surface of the water to attract the fish and improve hookups, while the parachute hackle and foam or wing is on or above the surface of the water for visibility and flotation.

Klinkhåmer – Wikipedia

Hans van Klinken's fly, which dates from the early 1980s, has been successful wherever trout are caught and South Africa has been no exception.

Its half-in and half-out of the water posture emphasises the 'something struggling'/vulnerability feature which characterised earlier patterns such as the British Mole Fly and the French Pont Audemer.

In the December 2006 issue of the American magazine *Fly Fisherman*, van Klinken wrote: ***"Because the heavy curved hook of my fly sits well below the surface film, the Klinkhåmer Special imitates all types of emerging mayflies and caddis."***

On the trout streams near Cape Town, the adult mayfly and caddis are not particularly prevalent and most emergence takes place after sunset.

Dragon and damselflies are, however, ubiquitous, patrolling from specific perches, sometimes dipping down to capture a terrestrial insect from the water surface, or dipping their abdomens into the water to lay eggs.

They are tracked in the air by trout and, as portrayed on the @finriplemedia Instagram page, sometimes being captured in flight by those trout.

In the Karoo, local guide Alan Hobson has seen bass in dams capturing dragon and damselflies in mid-air.

The goal of this article is to describe the evolution of my attempts to make the Klinkhåmer resemble these insects in the vulnerable egg-laying stage and, in that process, to impart more movement and improve buoyancy.

The Halo Hackle Parachute

I will sketch what I believe was the chronology of a truly outstanding contribution to fly tying – the double-feather, Halo Hackle parachute technique - which I believe can be wholly attributed to Tom Sutcliffe. The dual feather parachute enhances, I believe, the Klinkhåmer as a searching fly by breaking up the light spectrum of the hackles, thereby intensifying the impression of movement.

The first time I came across the term 'Halo Hackle' was in the November 1984 issue of the British magazine, *Trout Fisherman*. It was in an article by John Ketley called, 'Tying to Test a Saint' and I was so intrigued I sent it to Tom and other fly angler friends.

Ketley had scraped up the money to buy a very expensive Metz cape but, as he could only afford one, he chose a grizzly.

His other capes were more pliant Indian imports and to support the longer hackles of the Indian capes in his vertically-hackled dry flies, he tied a small Metz grizzly feather behind the larger feather and wound it through the bigger feather to support it.

"I found that I could add significantly to the robustness of the fly and its ability to float high by using a very small grizzle hackle as a base to the main hackle."

**England international
John Ketley looked
at the problems
presented by the
chalk-stream dry fly,
and came up with the
Halo Tying.**

River&stream

FIRST I must say that as there is virtually nothing new in our wonderful sport, I don't claim this method of tying dry flies has not been tried before, but I haven't seen it.

Having now answered anyone who has been fishing these flies for years in Outer Mongolia, I can explain how I came to develop them myself.

Many traditional dry flies are either tied nice and bushy and float wonderfully, or rather sparse and sink on the second cast despite being soaked in floatant. What I found I needed was a format that enabled me to tie flies that had a profile that was near to the natural but still floated tall on the surface. The more I cast to trout rising in chalk streams, the more I became conscious that the actual takes came when the fly was sitting relatively high on the water, as long as the fly was

not too bushy in the hackle.

Firstly I treated myself to a second grade Metz cape, but as I couldn't afford a series of such capes to meet the various colours I wanted I went for a grizzle. Then I set about experimenting with combinations of the grizzle hackles and cheaper Indian cock capes tied in together.

Slowly I found that I could add significantly to the robustness of the fly and its ability to float high by using a very small grizzle hackle as a base to the main hackle.

This way I could use only one or two turns of ordinary cock hackle and still have a dry fly that kept its hackles stiff. It appears the grizzle hackle supports the lower half of the other hackle, especially during casting and the not so odd occasion when I have to drag the fly out of some vegetation. The bonus came when I

compared the artificial's profile with various naturals and discovered with joy that to my eyes it looked a little more like the real thing. The larger hackle gave a halo effect to the smaller grizzle hackle, and I have named this method The Halo Tying.

Next I tied up three patterns for the Kennet, a Pale Watery, a Blue Winged Olive and an Imperial (well, my version of these patterns) and duly set off to try them out on the trout.

I must have been in favour with the Gods of the river that day as the Pale Wateries were hatching off perfectly as I arrived, and later the larger Olives had their turn. The evening produced a mini blizzard of B.W.O., and so I had three opportunities to test my new patterns on some very experienced Kennet trout. Needless to say I had some fish that would not take my latest confections, but the vast

Tyings to test

The river Wylfe at Haytesbury Mill — classic chalk-stream water.



TROUT FISHERMAN

John Ketley's 'Halo Hackle' article which inspired similar designs in South Africa

majority of fish that I covered accurately sipped down the Halo Fly as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

A week later I had an even better opportunity to test these patterns as conditions on the river were rather more difficult.

The weather was warm and windless, with just enough cloud cover to give the trout time to examine each morsel that floated down to them with an extra critical eye. I was fishing that day with an excellent angler and I carefully followed him as he worked his way up river. Virtually every fish he cast to would drop back with the current, balancing the artificial on his nose and quite a number of refused after taking a close-up look. In fact two or three fish went through this frustrating exercise more than once and my friend moved on to the next rising fish convinced it would not be worth further

effort. This would be a real test of my Halo patterns so I put on a delicate Pale Watery that was very similar to my friend's, but was tied in the Halo format. You can imagine my delight when each of those fish took my fly without a second's hesitation. Here was proof indeed that I could be on to a real winner.

Later on I was invited to a very different stretch of river where the fish see rather more anglers and quickly become very choosy as to what they will rise for.

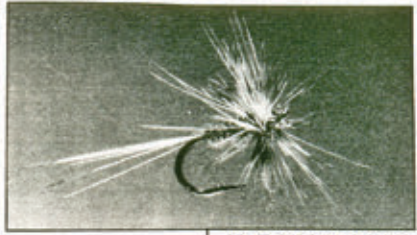
There were a few Blue Winged Olives hatching by 5pm and fish were taking them only if the natural floated right over their nose. During the day these same fish had been bombarded with all sorts of nymphs and shrimp patterns as they lay torpid near the bottom, so they were inclined to be hyper-critical of any concoction of fur and feather.

I found one heavy looking old chap on the fin in an eddy right under an alder bush. He was nicely shaded from the sinking sun by the alder leaves as they brushed the water and was intercepting each B.W.O. as it stretched its wings in preparation for its maiden flight.

First I tried him with a classic pattern B.W.O. given to me by my friend John Goddard, and despite John's well deserved reputation for tying beautiful artificials, the trout totally ignored it.

Next I put on my old wingless pattern B.W.O. that has served me very well in the past; that too was ignored. Then I knotted on my Halo B.W.O. and carefully presented it to this choosy finned tormentor — and bless me if he didn't take it as good as gold. I was so convinced he would ignore it that I struck far too late, and despite that still hooked him way back down at the base of his tongue.

The fish must have been hooked before, as he tried every trick in the trout's handbook of how to escape. First he leapt up into the alder bush and nearly wrapped my cast around a branch, but it just slipped through the leaves. Then he dived head first into a weed bed and all I could see was his big square tail as he drove his head further and further into the weeds. With steady pressure I finally persuaded him to back out and off he went downstream like a train. Now I had occasion to bless the reel I have been trying last season as it slowed him just enough for me to stop him before he went over a waterfall.



John Katley's halo tying of the Blue Winged Olive.

When I finally grassed him and retrieved my fly I was interested to see how such rough handling had affected my new pattern. I dried it off in some powder and cast it onto the water to see if it would float tall and damn me if a half pound grayling didn't take it.

After such an evening I felt I could honestly tell you chaps about this method of tying flies and hope you have similar success.

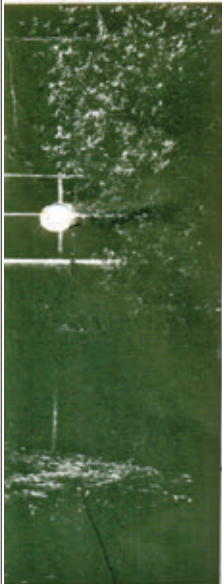
If you look at the profile of the Halo Patterns I have tied, despite my limited talents with hackles and hooks, you will notice how the small grizzle hackle seems to represent those minute feathery bits around the insect's head, while the longer hackles look like the legs and wings. It is often said that commercial flies tend to be overdressed and maybe this is true, but finding dry flies that sit well on the water and don't collapse over a few hours fishing has, I find, always been a problem.

This Halo format seems to answer both problems rather well. □

This view of the same fly clearly shows how the smaller grizzle hackle and the larger hackle create a halo effect.



saint



TROUT FISHERMAN

"This way I could use only one or two turns of cock hackle and still have a dry fly that kept its hackles stiff. It appears the grizzle hackle supports the lower half of the other hackle, especially during casting and the net so odd occasion when I have to drag the fly out of some vegetation.

‘If you look at the profile of the Halo Patterns I have tied, despite my limited talents with hackles and hooks, you will notice how the small grizzle hackle seems to represent those minute feathery bits around the insect’s head, while the longer hackles look like the legs and wings.’

To his delight, the Halo Hackle pattern proved exceptionally successful on some demanding beats of the River Test – hence the title of the article.

As always in fly tying, there were earlier, similar concepts. The idea of combining a small and a large feather in dry flies is attributed to Dr William Baigent of Northallerton in England who died in 1935 aged 71.

Ernest Schweibert in his book *Trout* (Andre Deutsch, 1979) writes:

“Variant-type flies originated on the rivers of Yorkshire in 1875, where sparse wet flies had always been tied, and it is logical that dry flies with exaggeratedly long hackle fibers should evolve there. Doctor William Baigent originated the variant-style dry fly and evolved a series of twelve patterns that became known commercially as Refracta flies. Baigent believed that the shiny fibers of his long gamecock hackles created the illusion of fluttering life, as well as floating his flies easily on relatively swift currents.”

Here’s a quote about Baigent’s flies from the 1950 book *Professional Fly Tying and Tackle Making Manual and Manufacturer’s Guide* by George Leonard Herter:

“He always tied the long hackle in grey, cream, or misty grey neutral shades and the small hackles, representing the legs of the fly, in a darker shade. The large neutral hackles, long in fibre, disturb the surface of the water on which the fly is floating and produce an alternating refraction which, he claimed, gives the appearance of wings fluttering on the water and also provides a semi-transparent look to the shorter hackles representing the legs. They produce well and are fish getters everywhere.”

In an article, ‘Dr Baigent and the Long-Hackled Fly’ carried in the February 2008 issue of the Ozark Flyfisher’s Newsletter, Terry Finger wrote:

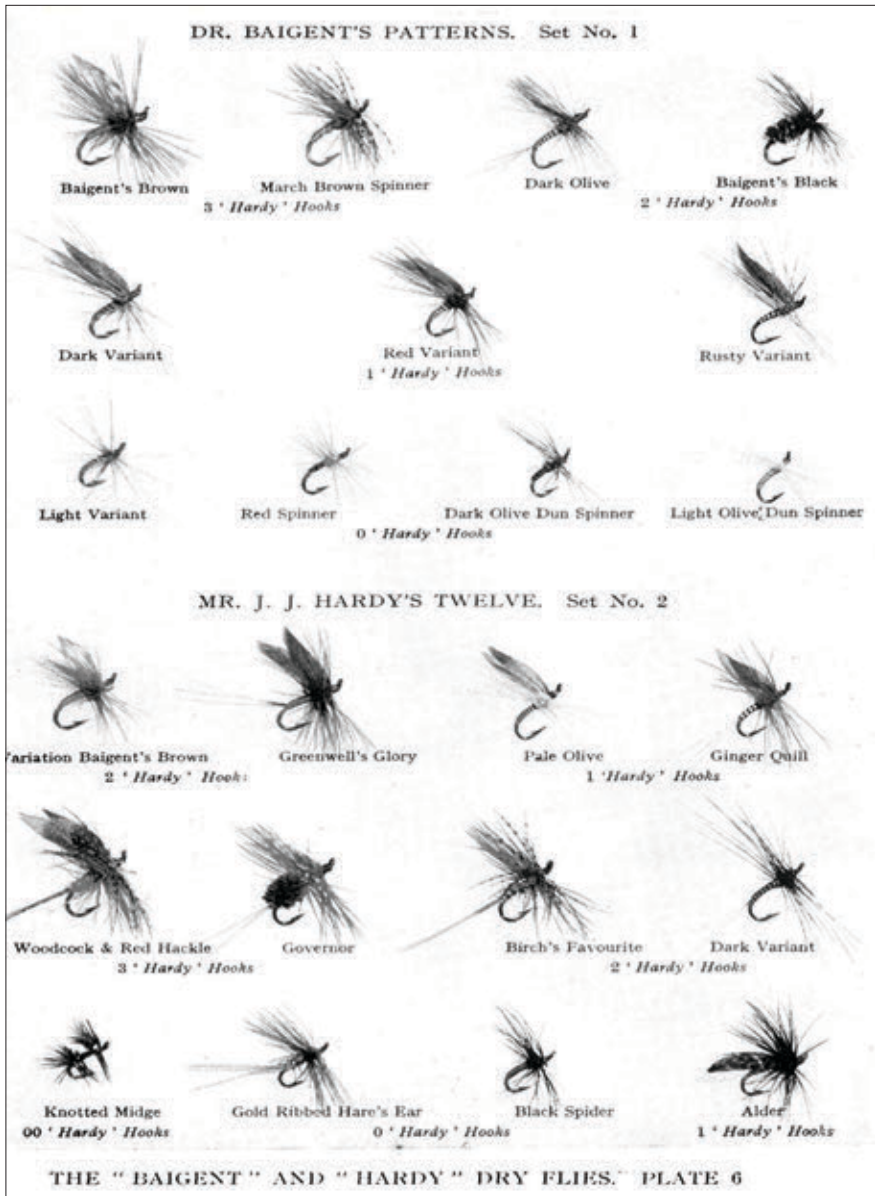
“Dr. William Baigent ... studied theories of light refraction and believed that optical patterns created by long-hackled dry flies provide a better imitation of fluttering wings than conventional flies. The long-hackled flies also floated well on swift currents and were less likely to spook trout in quiet water because they settled gently on the surface. He developed about a dozen fly patterns intended to imitate common local insects.

The flies came to be known as “variants” to indicate that their proportions deviated from conventional standards. He later produced a series of flies that were marketed commercially by Hardy’s as Refracta flies. These variants used dark-centered badger or furnace hackle or employed hackles of mixed length a short hackle to represent legs and a longer hackle to provide optical and floating qualities.”

But, from what I have been able to glean from contemporary Hardy catalogues, Baigent tied the small feather behind the big one and did not wind it through the larger hackle as Ketley described in his 1984 article.

The first South African reference to the idea came in an article – ‘The Halo Hackle – The Incredible Lightness of Being’ - that Tom Sutcliffe wrote for the first issue of the South African magazine, *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, (TCFF) in November 1993.

“Wind the first (small) hackle up to the second and then suspend it temporarily at this point trapped in your hackle pliers. Pick up the second (spade) hackle and wind a single, full turn around the hook shank. Never be persuaded to make more than one turn, otherwise you destroy the very essence of the pattern and detract from its delicacy and movement. Tie off the spade hackle and wind the first hackle through and pass it to the eye where you can tie it off.”



A page from a contemporary Hardy catalogue showing Baigent's patterns

He gave two dressings – one with two dun rooster hackles and one with a grizzly base feather and the other, bigger feather, a guinea fowl neck feather. The latter pattern, I submit, is the most significant because it was the first local fly which, to my knowledge, combined stiff rooster hackle and soft game-bird hackle in the dual-feather Halo Hackle format – but more of this anon.

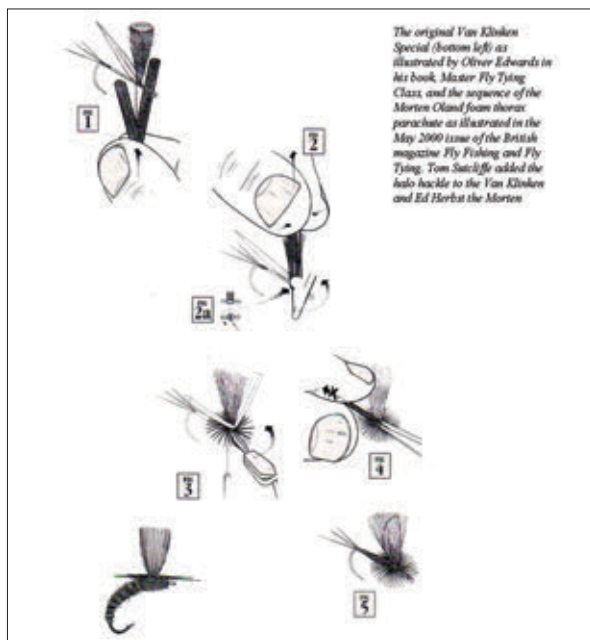
In 2000 Tom became interested in Coq de Leon feathers after reading about them in Darrel Martin's book, *Fly Tying Methods*. I gave him some that I had ordered through Orvis and he also bought some at my suggestion from Phil and Mary White who were then running Lathkill Tackle in England.

The obvious use for such feathers was in Variants – what the Americans call Spiders or Skaters – such as Tony Biggs' RAB. Tom told me, however, that he had also tied some halo hackle parachute dries and Klinkhamers with them and that they had proved very successful on our streams. Two of the dries were featured in an article – 'Spanish Feathers – Making the better dry flies better still' – he wrote for the June 2000 issue of the South African magazine *Flyfishing*: ***"So I tied a few RABs and, depending on your level of addiction to this lovely pattern, I'd say they look mouth-watering. Some people***

might think that the hackle is too broad, but I'll live with that – you could make them narrower if you used just the tip of the feather.

"And since I've developed this growing conviction that parachute flies actually get more takes, and that halo-hackle parachutes get the most, I tied a few of them as well. Same result."

In May 2000 Oliver Edwards wrote an article in the British magazine, *Flyfishing and Fly Tying* about an ingenious method of tying parachute patterns which had been developed by the Danish guide, Morten Oland. Oland folds a piece of foam into a u-shape and uses it to cup the hook shank from below, thereby surrounding the wing post on both sides. This adds buoyancy and gives the parachute hackle something to dig into.



The Morten Oland technique (above) compared to the conventional tie below. Sketches by Oliver Edwards

In the November 2000 issue of the Cape Piscatorial Society's journal, *'Piscator'*, having become aware of Oliver Edward's reference to the Morten Oland foam rubber thorax modification of the Klink, I published an article 'Halo Hackle Klinkhamer' which can be found in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder in the CPS articles archive.

To quote the article: ***"The Halo-Hackled, Morten Oland version of the Klinkhamer Special provides the best of all worlds. It floats where the most-deadly dry flies float, pinioned in the surface film and thus looking vulnerable. With its body beneath the surface, it can be seen by fish long before***

a normal dry fly would appear in their ‘window’. Above all it is buoyant, easy-to-see and presents delicately. What more could you ask for?”

In 2010 Tom posted an article on his ‘Spirit of Fly Fishing’ website: ‘Tying the Halo Hackle Klinkhamer Emerger’ in which the parachute, which was wrapped around a looped Aerothene wing, combined rooster and CDL feathers. As always, it is a worthwhile read, combining his sketches with his photographs to illustrate the tying process and the rationale behind it.

But Tom had taken the Halo Hackle parachute concept a step further and I only became aware of this a few years later when I saw a pattern tied by Fred Steynberg, one of South Africa’s most experienced guides who lives in Rhodes surrounded by a host of beautiful trout streams. He uses a combination of a rooster and a partridge hackle as a parachute on two of his patterns, an imitation of a spider and a Klinkhåmer-type emerger with a body of stripped peacock quill.

The smaller rooster hackle is tied below the broader partridge hackle, providing support.



(Top) Fred Steynberg discussing his Halo Hackle patterns with the author on the veranda of his home in Rhodes

For the wing post he uses translucent Aerothene foam rubber packaging material which Gary LaFontaine praised for its light-dispersal qualities and which is used in his deadly Air Head Caddis.

About 15 years ago Andrew Ingram and I produced two DVDs called ‘A South African Fly -Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and Friends’ which can be found on the Vimeo website and Fred can be seen tying his Halo Hackle Wolf Spider imitation in which the dual hackle is tied on top of the smallest foam rubber Bug Body by Wapsi which imitates the abdomen of spider.

(L) DVD - South African fly-tying history – note the shelf of cork over the reel seat – Stephen Boshoff’s ‘Palm Grip’ on an ‘Ought Weight’ Sage SPL



As a guide and professional fly tyer, Fred has to tie effective flies quickly and, for the Klink-type emerger, he uses a single quill for both the submerged body and the area below the hackle – in the latter case, he leaves the herl on the quill.

At this juncture it must be said that combining a rooster hackle and a game bird feather on a conventional, vertically-hackled dry fly has been around for more than a century.

One of the earliest such patterns had its origins, apparently, in Slovenia and was attributed to a local fly fisher, Josip Bravničar, who used it with great success on the Tolminka River. It was brought to the attention of a wider audience by a visiting German angler, Alexander Behm, who wrote an article about it in *Die Angelsport* in 1928.

The famous French fly-tying company, Devaux, invented a dry fly style in which the hackle is cupped forward, Tenkara-style, and combines rooster and partridge hackles.

In Britain, patterns such as the Gingler (also called the Jangler) and the Welsh Partridge have been around for a long time but these are all, however, conventional, vertical-hackle dry fly designs or what Hans van Klinken calls 'shoulder hackle' flies – not parachutes.

Fred's two patterns which he and his clients have used with great success for years are a Klink with a striped peacock herl body ...



... and right, an imitation of the local Wolf Spider (Lycosidae) which is common in South African riverine habitats

I asked Fred about this hackle configuration and he said he got the idea from a fly Tom tied during a clinic which Fred had held in Rhodes.

Fred ties his Wolf Spider imitation on a size 12 sedge hook using the smallest foam rubber Bug Body by Wapsi for the abdomen.

Fred recommends that the rooster hackle have a width approximately equivalent to the hook gape and that the partridge hackle be about twice that. I cut the barbules from one side of the rooster feather – say the right – and the barbules from the opposite side of the soft hackle.

I then wind the rooster hackle one turn clockwise around the foam thorax and the soft hackle on turn in the opposite direction. My rationale for this, and I have no proof of its validity, is that this makes for a more aerodynamically-balanced fly.

Dangling Tails

In 2013, while on a visit to Rhodes, I was told by local guide Tony Kietzman that his most successful searching pattern was the Klink and I suggested that if he wanted to double his catch rate on it, all he had to do was add rubber tails. I had proved this to my own satisfaction on my home streams near Cape Town.



Tony Kietzman – from Klinkhåmer to Edhåmer – just add dangling rubber tails

He did and he did. He uses a size 15 TMC 212 Y hook and makes the point that the tiny bit of weight which the rubber tails add to the bend of the hook and extra water inertia created by the current on them, help cock the fly in the upright position. He uses a goose biot for the body, five turns of blue

dun hackle (Van Klinken's recommendation) and a post of pink TMC Aero Wing which is lighter than water. It proved so successful that he called it the Edhåmer. I feel that barring the tails with a black permanent marker, could improve the illusion of movement.



An Edhåmer, as tied by Tony Kietzman, which has proved highly successful for the clients he guides in Rhodes

Read the account '*The Right Fly*' by Dawid Rossouw in the Cape Piscatorial Society's articles archive which I curate. You'll find it towards the bottom of the list in the 'Patterns from Piscator' folder.

To me, adding extra-fine latex rubber tails to the Klink was logical.

At a stroke, you are doubling the effective size of the fly with no significant addition of weight or adverse aerodynamic impact when casting. Keep in mind that when a surface-emerging mayfly clambers out of its nymphal shuck, it effectively doubles its length and the process of extracting itself from the shuck involves intense movement.

Furthermore, you are exponentially increasing two paramount factors that prompt trout to rise; movement and the vulnerability factor.

Such tails would, I believe, also enhance similar designs such as Bob Wyatt's Deer Hair Emerger and the Jeremy Lucas Plume Tip.

The use of rubber legs and tails, as I recall, goes back almost a century when such material used by fly tyers was derived from the corsetry industry – an example being the aptly-named Girdle Bug.

Rubber legs became a ubiquitous design feature on hopper imitations with the Madam X, a stonefly imitation by Doug Swisher and Carl Richards, providing the basic design parameters for many of today's hopper patterns.

The first rubber legs I was able to purchase decades ago came from Orvis and quickly perished.

Latex rubber legs provided the breakthrough and the mottled legs from the Montana Fly Company were a revelation being translucent and tough.

Hareline then brought out their Daddy Long Legs version. They have since brought out an improvement on Daddy Long Legs – Micro Flex. It's thinner and more flexible than competing products, fluoresces in strong sunlight and is easily barred.

The Zakhåmer – an intermediate step

About a decade ago, publisher Paul Curtis who had moved to Wales, asked me during a visit to Rhodes to tie an emerger that incorporated aspects of Tom Sutcliffe's, ZAK nymph – a revered local design.

I have forgotten the details, but the battered remnants of the 'Zakhåmer' he brought back on a subsequent visit - asking for more - indicated that the combination of orange Morten Oland foam rubber cupping a snowshoe hare wing and dangling rubber tails had proved well-nigh irresistible to the Welsh trout and grayling.



The first Zåkhåmer after its return from Wales. (R) The Zakhåmer Mark Two - an evolving design

Parachute post

Hans van Klinken uses a white polypropylene wing as the foundation for his parachute hackle but the consensus in South Africa is that fluorescent pink Antron yarn is the easiest to follow in the drift in all light conditions. Jan Korrubel uses it on his rubber-tailed ParaRAB emerger with great success when he guides on the Bushman's Stream in KwaZulu-Natal and it has proved equally effective in Rhodes. Rhodes guide Tony Kietzman uses pink TMC Aero Wing - which is lighter than water - on his rubber-tailed Edhåmer.



The 'Light Bulb' Moment

On 9 May 2022, I posted this Stephen Boshoff photograph and my text on my Instagram account - @ed_herbst346

"But I must admit that, when this photograph of his 'Light Bulb Ant' landed in my inbox, my jaw dropped because I have never seen anything like this before. CDC tips brushed with tiny drops of glittering UV-light cured resin."

"Kaleidoscope Ant' might be a more appropriate name

because it takes the decades-old hard shell sinking ant an innovative step forward."

I also realised that this principle could be applied to flies with rubber legs, creating a cantilever effect – what I called the ‘Pendulum Leg’.

Purple flies in tannin-stained streams

A further refinement came with the discovery in May 2024 by artist and professional fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche, that brown trout in the heavily peat-stained streams in the Tsitsikamma National Park area of the Southern Cape responded strongly to flies with a purple element in the dressing.



A palm grip rod, weighing less than one ounce and built by Marcel Terblanche for the tannin-stained brown trout streams of the Southern Cape

Here's what I wrote in my Instagram post on 25 May of that year:

"As a consequence of the high level of rotting vegetation in the water, many streams in the area are heavily peat stained and the tannins coat trout eggs and smothers them

"A 1996 article in the history folder of the Cape Piscatorial Society archive which is headlined 'Trout in the peat-stained waters of the Southern Cape' opens thus: 'The dark, peat-stained and acid waters which extend around the southern tip of the continent for about 300 miles from the Elgin District above Sir Lowry Pass along the "Garden Route" to the Humansdorp district, have been tried with trout on many occasions with but slight success.'

"Brown trout survive in a handful of tiny streams here and Marcel found that simply changing from a black to a wine-coloured wire rib on a black soft hackle saw previously dormant trout charge from the opposite bank to attack the purple-hued fly.

"In the USA, trout in streams with a high humic acid content invariably take a purple San Juan worm rather than the traditional red.

“The trout streams near Cape Town are also peat-stained but not to the same extent.”



The whisky-coloured trout streams near Cape Town where flies containing purple might be a trigger for trout. Photo by Brett Leslie

Tannins are contained in the bark of several tree species, including willows, oaks, hemlock and conifers and leach into streams that flow through areas where such trees grow. The high humus content in these areas often results in tea-coloured water and experience has shown that it is worth experimenting in such areas with flies tied with purple materials – the Snipe and Purple and Oliver

Kite's Imperial immediately come to mind. A more modern pattern, an Adams spinoff, the Purple Haze, is gaining increasing popularity as a searching dry fly pattern.

In the USA, guides have found that is they fish a red and a purple San Juan Worm together in streams with a high humic acid content, the trout invariably take the purple one – so much so that, in such circumstances, they use two purple San Juan Worms in tandem.

I gleaned this information from Geoff Mueller's 2013 book, *'What a Trout Sees: A Fly-Fishing Guide to Life Underwater'*.

Weighting the tips of the rubber tails on the Edhåmer with Loon Knot Sense, which can be infused with purple glitter dust, will create more movement and make it possible for trout to pick up its approach from a greater distance.

(L) The Edhåmer with 'Light Bulb' counterweighted rubber tails as visualised by Marcel Terblanche



We have found that two applications of Loon Knot Sense work best when creating the ‘Light Bulbs’ with the glitter dust being mixed with the first application of the resin so that it can shine through the second.

Body material

Van Klinken used tan dubbing for the body of the original fly and partially-stripped peacock quill is much favoured by professional South African fly tyers including Fred Steynberg and Jan Korrubel who runs the Kingfisher shop in Pietermaritzburg.



Tony Kietzman uses a goose biot on his rubber-tailed Edhåmer and Caleb Wilmott’s interpretation of a biot-bodied Edhåmer is shown left. I am now experimenting with what *Trout and Salmon* contributor Paul Procter calls ‘sex on a string’ – olive Semperfli Straggle String, because the flickering of light across its short, projecting Mylar strands gives a visual impression of movement.



(L) The ‘Light Bulb Edhåmer’ – above and below. Semperfli Straggle String is used for the body in the author’s attempt to imitate the egg-laying damselfly shown in the photograph at the start of this chapter

I tie this pattern on a # 8 Hanak H530BL ‘Pupa and Allround’ hook. The body is counter-ribbed with 0.1 mm purple wire.

The Morten Oland foam thorax method surrounding the wing provides the extra floatation which enables a very sparse halo hackle parachute to be used. This creates the broken light spectrum and alternating refraction that Baigent and then Tom Sutcliffe specifically sought.

I’ve combined partridge and CDL in the hackle.



Van Klinken uses peacock herl below the parachute but, for ease of tying and to represent the different hues of these insects I have used a blend of olive, black and copper Hareline Quick Descent Dub in the example shown left. Using Semperfli Nano Silk 20D thread enables one to use multiple turns without creating bulk. In tying this pattern I used a lot of half hitches and tiny drops of superglue.

Fred uses thin, translucent Aerothene for the wing. Gary LaFontaine believed that Aerothene packaging material had special light-dispersal qualities and used it on his Halo Midge Emerger and Air Head Caddis, so I have emulated their examples in this pattern.

Hook: Hanak H530BL #8

Thread: Semperfli Nanosilk 20D

Wing: White Aerothene on top of the hook shank

Parachute Hackle: Combined Coq du Leon and partridge

Morten Oland 'collar': Orange Wapsi Evazote foam rubber cupped from beneath the hook shank

Body: Olive Semperfli Straggle String Micro Chenille

Rib: Purple Semperfli or UTC 0.1 mm wire

Light Bulb Tails: The double application of Loon Knot Sense Infused with purple glitter dust was first added to the cream Hareline Micro Flex tails which were then coloured with Sharpie permanent markers. This adds a further layer of waterproofing. My concern was that the Knot Sense might not adhere to the rubber tail tips if the permanent marker ink was applied first.

Attribution

A decade ago, a British fly tyer, Ian Moutter, was sitting at a traffic light on his way home when he was struck by an innovative idea on how to hackle dry flies. The result was a book called *Tying Flies the Paraloop Way*. He was later to find that three American fly tyers, Bob Quigley, Ned Long and Jim Cramer had independently come up with the same idea which was further publicised by Chauncey Lively.

Hans van Klinken makes the same point about the Klinkhåmer: **“Mike Monroe (also from USA) tied a similar fly for years before any of our patterns existed, at a time that we hardly knew what was going on at the US tying scene. He called this fly the ‘Paratilt’.**

While the idea of an emerger pattern with most of the body submerged was possibly first developed by Mike Monroe, it was Hans van Klinken who developed a pattern in 1984 and Hans de Groot and Ton Lindhout who named it. Together, they created a global fly design brand which is to emergers what Leonard Halladay’s Adams is to dry flies and Frank Sawyer’s Pheasant Tail is to nymphs.

In attempting to establish a chronology of the Composite Klink I would say that the idea of mixing a small and a large hackle on a dry fly to create a broken spectrum of light has to be attributed to Dr William Baigent more than a century ago.

The name, ‘Halo Hackle’ must probably be attributed to John Ketley and the method of supporting a softer, more willowy large and vertical hackle with a smaller stiffer feather wound through the larger one is also probably original to him.

The idea of a U-shaped piece of foam to cup the wing from beneath the hook shank in a parachute pattern was probably invented by Morten Oland. I don’t know if he also applied it to Klinkhåmer-style patterns but, back in 2000 when I first saw the sketch by Oliver Edwards, it seemed a logical progression to add it to Tom Sutcliffe’s Halo Hackle Parachute Emerger.

To Tom, then, goes the credit for not only using Baigent’s combination of a small and a large hackle on a parachute but also for creating a dual soft partridge and stiff rooster hackle parachute. This combination was brought to wider public attention when Fred Steynberg used it on his emerger and arachnid patterns.

I would say that the Composite Klink complies with all the requirements of a good small stream fly.

It is buoyant, presents softly, is easy to track in a variety of currents and light conditions and, according to publisher Paul Curtis, is a ‘remarkable fly’ when it comes to attracting trout and grayling in Wales. It’s cantilevered, flexible rubber tails with their sparkling tips create substantial movement below the surface where they are easily detected by fish—an idea extrapolated from Stephen Boshoff’s

thread-body, CDC-hackled ant.

It is said that failure is an orphan but success has many parents. In the context of the Light Bulb Edhåmer, the wisdom of Solomon rather than DNA tests would conclude that the person to whom most credit is due is Hans van Klinken – with a little help from Morten Oland, Tom Sutcliffe, Stephen Boshoff, the Montana Fly Company and Semperfli whose strong but thin 24/0 Nanosilk thread facilitates dubbing loop techniques.

And, for spreading the word, John Ketley with the Halo Hackle and Oliver Edwards who publicised Morten Oland's idea of a foam rubber wing support on Klinks.

One only has to look at a YouTube video 'Gordo's take on the Klinkhammer' to see how universal the concept of the dual-feather parachute emerger has become.



And credit for that idea, as far as I am concerned, goes to Tom Sutcliffe – read the tributes to him in the folder, 'Remembering Tom Sutcliffe' in the articles archive of the Cape Piscatorial Society.





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 barbles 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 by 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 Hiestermann 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 Macdhuil 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 these photos by Marcel Terblanche indicate, 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



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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.



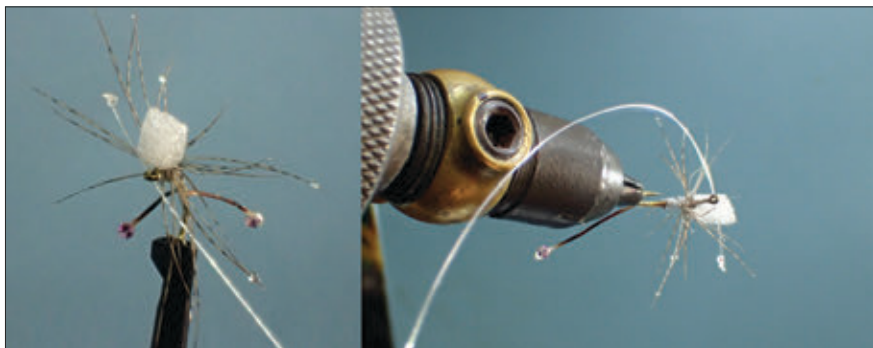


CHAPTER 20

Slip-Knot Emerger



A Slip Knot Emerger tied on the Tiemco 108SP-BL showing the UV resin 'Light Bulbs' on the tips of the rubber tails and the stop knot which allows the fly to pivot freely around the end of the tippet



Two views – left and right – of the author's Light Bulb Slip Knot Emerger

Aquatic scientists tell us that trout locate their prey through movement and contrast but I think you cannot rule out vulnerability as a factor. Aquatic insects are at their most vulnerable when they are pinioned in the surface film at the moment of eclosion.

The English Mole Fly and the French Pont-Audemer show that fly anglers have recognised for centuries that an aquatic insect is at its most vulnerable when it reaches the water surface and transitions into an adult insect.



The Pont-Audemer re-imagined by artist Marcel Terblanche as a Slip Knot Emerger

The video potential of modern mirrorless DSLR cameras shooting at multiple frames per second has given us unprecedented visual evidence of how trout predate on emerging aquatic insects such as mayflies. What is conclusively proved is that trout will swim around a mayfly which has successfully shed its shuck and is about to fly away. The preferred option is a mayfly where that process has been unsuccessful and it is unable to escape. That combination of frantic movement and vulnerability is key to which insect will motivate a trout to rise.

That ideal, a fly pinioned in the meniscus, resulted in different design approaches in the US and in England.

In the USA the goal was to imitate the emerging mayfly and Vincent Marinaro's Hanging Emerger, illustrated on page 82 of his book, *In the Ring of the Rise* (Crown Publishers, New York, 1976), shows that he forced the hook into an upright position by using a ruffling hitch.

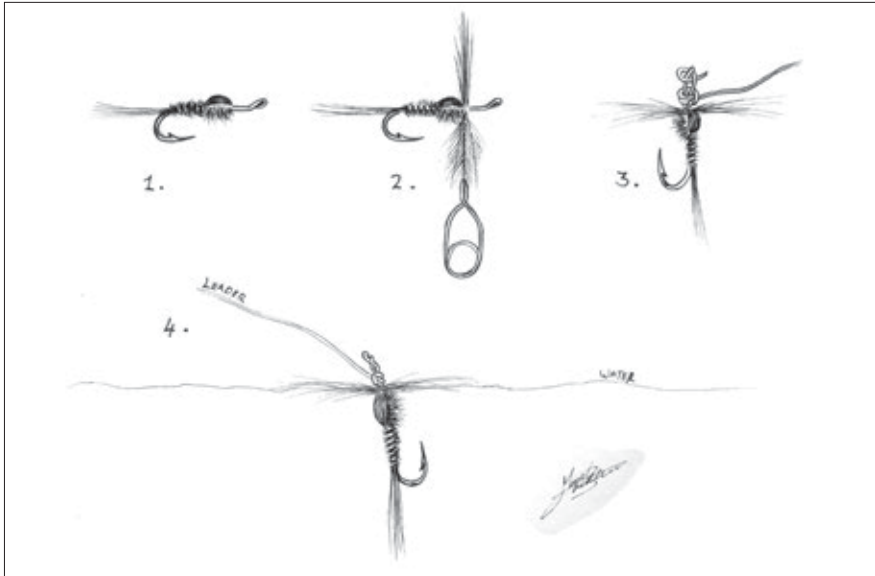
In the description of the design rationale for this fly (pages 84-85) Marinaro says: ***"I wanted above all to try to duplicate the performance of the nymph touching or clinging to the underside of the surface film with its head exposed and about to emerge."***

Describing how he solved the problem he refers to the hook he chose: ***"The wire is rather heavy in the bend then it tapers very finely to the eye. This is ideal for the hanging nymph because it helps concentrate the weight near the bend."***

He then says: ***"The body and thorax should be finished at least 1/8 inch short of the eye."***

He calls for a ***"...wide, sparse, spidery circle of stiff fibres around the neck. The tie-off point should***

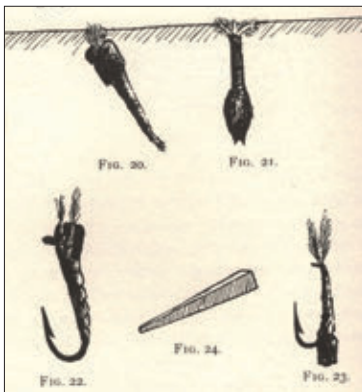
still leave some space behind the neck.



My thanks to Storms River artist and fly angler, Marcel Terblanche, for this rendition of Vincent Marinaro's sketch of the riffle hitch hanging emerger

The last and very important step is to tie the leader with a Turtle or some such knot, after which a riffle hitch or two half hitches are made around the neck of the fly. The fly will then be knuckled and standing out at right angles to the leader. The fly should be cast into the air above the water and be given time to upset so that the heavy bend falls and penetrates the surface film. Its descent will be stopped by the large thin spread of hackle resting on the surface and acting as a buoy, allowing only the head to emerge. That is the hanging nymph or emerger."

In a note accompanying the illustration he says: *"The riffle hitch will force the nymph to take a position at right angles to the leader and cause it to fall tail first into the water but holding it against the underside of the surface film by the surface support of the widespread, spidery hackle."*



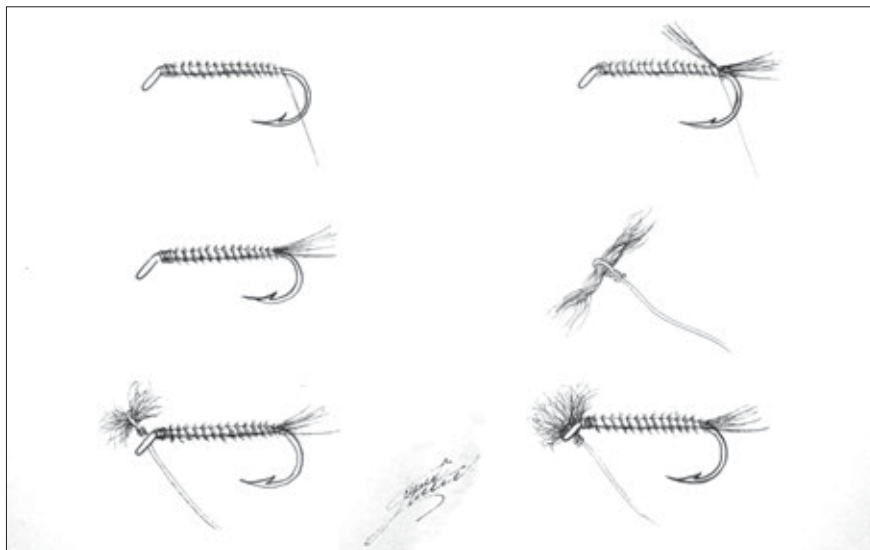
In England, imitating the chironomid pupa at the moment of eclosion was the design goal and Blagdon Reservoir, constructed in 1905, provided the research opportunity.

Dr James Cecil Mottram, a doctor specialising in cancer research, used cork at the hook eye and a greased leader for his midge pupa imitation, described in his 1913 book, *Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*.

(L) A scan from J C Mottram's 1913 book showing how he used cork strips to suspend the buzzer pupa imitation vertically in the meniscus

The next and singular pattern which also contributed to the evolution of my Slip-Knot Emerger was Frank Sawyer's Bow Tie Buzzer which was developed in the late 1950s at Alex Behrendt's Two Lakes fishery.

Sawyer was a pragmatist whose fly designs were based on an intensive study of aquatic insect behaviour – in this case the movement of chironomid pupae as they emerge. He realised he could more closely emulate that movement if the fly was free to pivot around the tippet.



Frank Sawyer's Bow Tie Buzzer as depicted by Marcel Terblanche – a singular inspiration in the design of my Slip Knot Emerger

Nick Sawyer, Frank's grandson describes how he designed a pattern which broke away from convention which is a fly rigidly tethered to the tippet.

"The important thing is to thread up through the hook eye, then disregard the actual nymph on the leader and fashion a slip-knot at the end of the tippet. Put a piece of wool into the slip-knot and pull the knot tight. Then with a sharp pair of scissors, cut away all but a tiny bit which should be held firmly in the knot. A small piece is enough, just sufficient to prevent it from pulling through the eye of the hook. If you make the bow too big the general effect is ruined and fish refuse to take. When rigged properly the bow tie should seat nicely in the hook eye when the nymph is slid down to it, and yet it should be free to move. The actual hook eye of the nymph is free on the leader and so rigged that it can wobble from side to side or spin completely round as though swivelled. This combination of movement is sufficient to delude fish into thinking the nymph is alive."

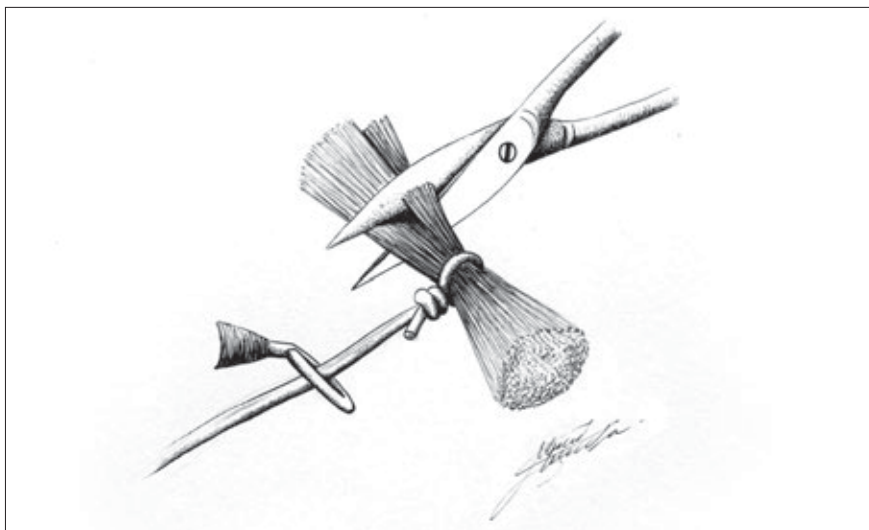
Sidney Vines, Sawyer's biographer, quotes him on this subject in his 1984 book 'Frank Sawyer – Man of the Riverside' which is available through the Internet Archive.

"Buzzer nymphs cannot swim in this sense; their movement to or from the surface is mostly in a vertical plane, upwards and downwards, not through the water. They have no real legs or setae to act as propulsion units. The manner of ascent or descent is by a series of loops or convulsions, a wriggle more than any straightforward swimming."

"Because of this and because also these nymphs have a habit of hanging in mid-water and at the surface, I found it extremely difficult to incorporate anything in the tying which could simulate movement, the kind of movement a fish expects to see.

"Then it occurred to me to try a nymph in two parts. One of the main features of the buzzer is the white fringe, or Celia, present at the front of the head. This shows very prominently when the nymphs are about to hatch and is in continuous movement. And I felt, if I made this separately, and so that it could have free movement in the water, that I would accomplish something worthwhile. Then it struck me that this could be carried on the end of the leader. A little bow-tie, in fact, which could move in the eye of the hook. At the same time, I accomplished something else for, with this attachment, the nymph could hang almost vertically in the water and, if so desired, the body could be made to spin around the leader.

"So now the secret, if indeed it is a secret, is out. All you have to do is to make up a nymph body of a size, shape and coloration to suit the natural, and then make up the bow at the end of the leader at the time you want to fish."



A Marcel Terblanche sketch showing how Frank Sawyer enabled his Bow Tie Buzzer to pivot around the tippet

All I did was replace the wool bowtie with a stop-knot – the Surgeon's Swivel – which, when cemented with Loon Knot Sense, was strong and allowed the size 16 Orvis Big Eye hook model number 4641 - which is the same as the Daiichi 1110 Big-Eye - Ring-Eye Hook - to spin around the 6x tippet in response to current pressure. I believe the Tiemco 108SP-BL – illustrated below – with its sharply downturned eye could also be useful in tying the SKE – I just wish the eye was bigger.

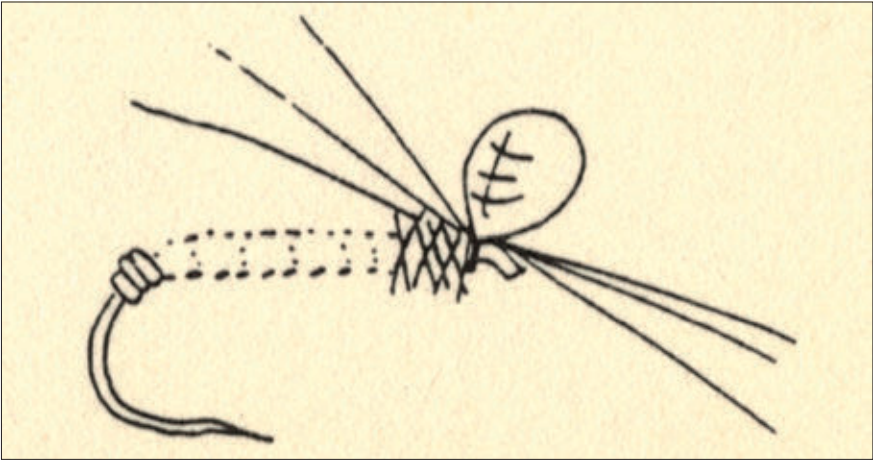
The next pattern which contributed to my thinking on the Slip-Knot Emerger was the Suspender Midge – a collaboration between John Goddard and Neil Patterson. The story is told in Patterson's wonderful 1995 book *'Chalkstream Chronicle'* (Merlin Unwin Books)

In 1980 John Goddard popularised the fly which uses a polystyrene ball wrapped in a mesh made from nylon stocking material and which is tied jutting forward above the hook eye. It provided the base for a parachute hackle. He called it the Suspender Nymph – a nice wordplay on what, in older

times, held the stockings up. This pattern, in turn, was inspired by the Natant Nylon Nymph of Charles Brooks, and merely substituted foam rubber for the dubbing which Brooks had encased in the stocking material.



The author's favoured hooks for tying the Slip Knot Emerger



A scan from Neil Patterson's book of his Suspender Midge

The goal as Patterson puts it, was a midge pupa that *“...hangs from the surface film like a ceiling light”*.

‘Umbrella Posture’

A game changer for me was reading the account by Dave Hughes in his book *‘Trout from Small Streams’* (Stackpole, 2002) in which he describes how the ‘umbrella posture’ of traditional soft hackles radically changed his catch rate on a small mountain stream.

Hughes had, without success, been fishing one of the steep-gradient, crystal staircase rain forest streams near his home in coastal Oregon.

Its trout were entirely disinterested in his usual small stream attractor dries or that old reliable, the Elk Hair Caddis.

Then he recalled that he had a small tin of soft hackles inspired by the books of Sylvester Nemes in his pocket. A size 10 Partridge and Yellow produced a Damascene moment and he took trout after trout, sometimes in successive casts.

The soft hackle acted like a parachute and held the fly upright in what he called an ‘umbrella’ posture and this, he believed, was what made it so deadly:

“The bright soft-hackle, with its yellow body and hackle of gray partridge, white speckled with black spots, was easy to see. Because it was tied on a dry-fly hook, it sank scant inches, then drifted along at the same level. Its posture was most interesting. You remember Mary Poppins descending over London in the opening scene of the movie, suspended from her umbrella? Take away Miss Poppins and a soft-hackle adrift on the currents would look precisely like that umbrella. The fly, probably because the hackle acted as a parachute, took the open, upright position, its splayed hackle up, its body vertical beneath it, the hook bend precisely like the handle of an umbrella held up against rain.

“The wet fly prompted all sorts of antics from trout the rest of that day. I’d be able to see into the water and watch them rush it in a bunch on the first cast to any pool, sometimes five or six of them at a time. The largest would often inhale it instantly, before any smaller trout could get to it. I’d play that trout to hand, unhook it, and drop it into the pool downstream from me, where I’d already fished. Then I’d cast again, the cloud of trout would appear again, and the next largest trout would take it, though slightly less swiftly. I’d play it out, release it downstream, cast again, and hook another, often in descending order of size.”

I had two questions after reading that account:

- How can I hold a soft hackle in the surface film in the ‘umbrella posture’?
- Why did this radical change in strike rate occur?

Holding it in the ‘umbrella position’ in the meniscus and at right angles to the tippet was achieved by me using a piece of foam rubber at the hook eye as John Goddard did with his Suspender Nymph and a greased leader combined with a Surgeon’s Swivel knot, popularised by, but not invented by Art Lee.

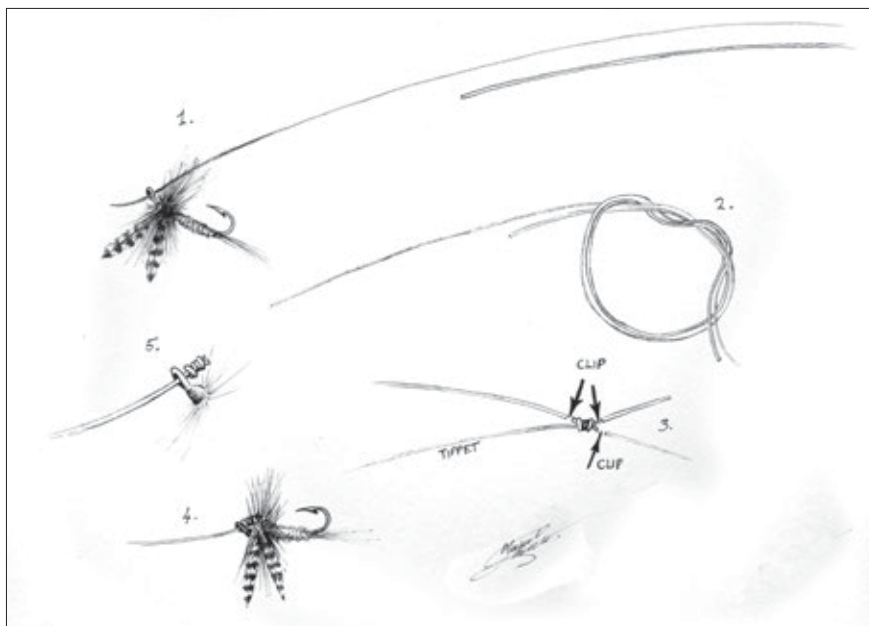
The Surgeon’s Swivel is just a triple overhand stop knot with the tags cut off and it allows the fly to pivot freely around the tippet.

The original idea of the Surgeon’s Swivel Knot was to use it with big-hackle Variant dry flies to prevent tippet twist.

To construct this knot, slip the fly onto, say, a 6x tippet. Take a few centimetres of 5 x tippet, lay it alongside the 6x mono tippet and tie a triple overhand knot using both sections of mono.

Lubricate with Loon Knot Sense and slowly tighten. Clip the loose ends.

Then use a small UV torch to cure the knot or expose it to sunlight. This fused knot should not fail you on small stream trout particularly when using today's softer-actioned fiberglass rods which are finding increasing favour with small stream fly anglers.



Tying the Surge's Swivel Knot – fused with Loon Knot Sense when tightening

In creating a 'hanging fly' with maximum movement - Sawyer's goal - I had one advantage that he did not – the Orvis Big Eye hook in straight-eye configuration.

It's a 1x fine hook patented by Jim LePage of Orvis in 1990. What is important in the context of the fly being able to pivot on the tippet in response to the pull and push of the current is that the internal diameter of the eye is much wider than is usual for this hook size, the same size, in fact, as a conventional size 10 dry fly hook. It is made by Daiichi who also market it as their 1110 model. The Tiemco 108SP BL in #16 might also have potential in this role.

The greased tippet

"And I grease the daylight's out of my leader. The whole thing, right down to the fly. I originally started greasing my leader with silicone dry-fly paste because I had trouble following my fly in a pocket water stream that never seemed to see the sun. I found I could trace the fly better by looking for the shine of the leader on the water, and it didn't bother the trout at all."

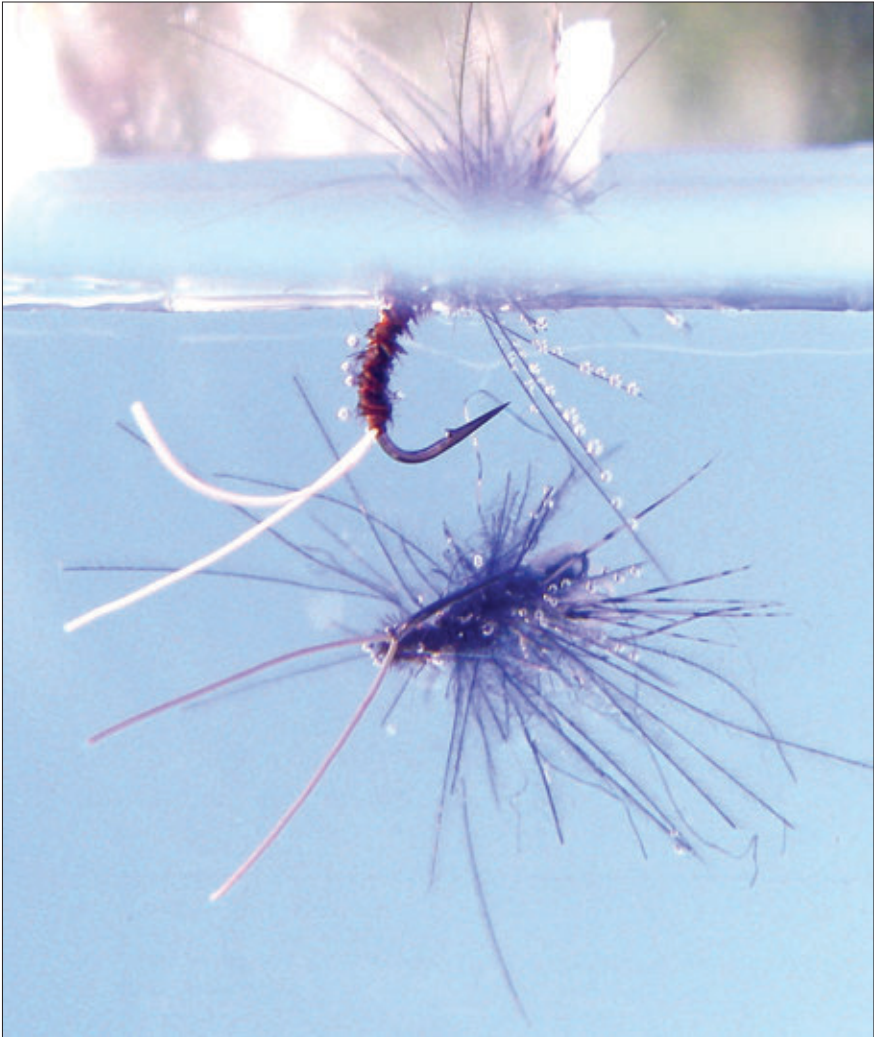
After I read that sentence in Tom Rosenbauer's 1993 book 'The Orvis Guide to Prospecting for Trout' my fly angling became more enjoyable and more successful. A leader greased with Mucilin was an essential element in holding the Slip Knot Emerger vertically in the surface film and I covered this subject in chapter six of this book. Frank Sawyer treated his leader with floatant when fishing his Bow Tie Buzzer.

Trout ignore floating mono on the rippled surface of small streams just as they ignore the hook in

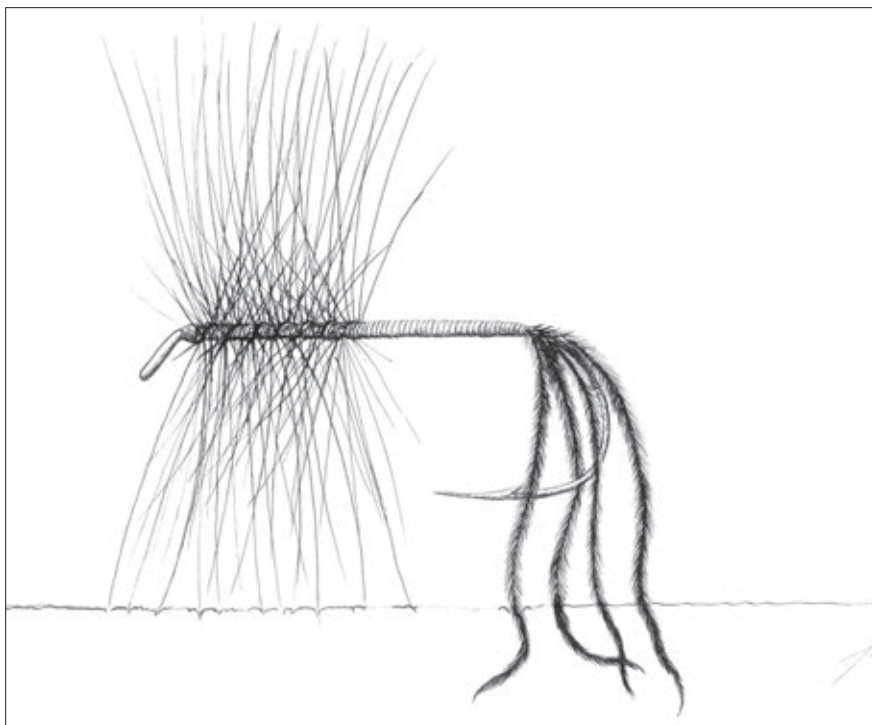
artificial flies – what they don't ignore is drag, and a greased tippet reduces drag because the moment a portion of it sinks, it is subject to the pull of the current.

The attraction of the dangling tail

The photograph below was taken in 2006 when I still had a macro lens-equipped DSLR and Stephen Boshoff had built a slant tank for Tom Sutcliffe and I. At the time I was experimenting with CDC in the hackle of the Slip Knot Emerger. It illustrates the role that dangling rubber tails can play in increasing the vulnerability factor and the movement in crippled emerger imitations.



I am fascinated by fly design in the context of movement being a trigger – the ‘Something Struggling’ idea I outlined in chapter 9 - and I return again and again to Gary LaFontaine’s 1990 book ‘The Dry Fly New Angles’.



Gary LaFontaine's Shroud as illustrated by Marcel Terblanche. LaFontaine described the movement of the dangling marabou tail as a major trigger – something that vindicated my use of fine rubber strands for this purpose



This is his Shroud (above), a dry fly with a marabou tail. Here's the sentence that resonated with me: "In our observations of attractors, the dangling tail was a tremendous trait for pulling trout from a long distance." After reading that, I added dangling rubber tails to my Sawyer-style soft hackle emergers and I was convinced that they were a significant trigger. They were thus an integral design feature of the Slip Knot Emerger as I tied it some two decades ago, using trigger colours such as black, silver and red.



The Slip Knot Emerger, as sketched by Marcel Terblanche, my favourite fly for fishing the trout streams near Cape Town before illness ended my angling days in 2010

The slight extra weight at the hook bend of the rubber tails assists in holding the fly in a vertical position.



(L) A Peter Brigg photo of an experimental Slip Knot Emerger I sent him which used CDC for the body of the fly – an idea derived from Hans Wielenmann's CDC and Elk

They also increase the leverage of the current on the Slip-Knot Emerger facilitating the rotating motion of the fly on the tippet and increasing the fly's movement.

By adding rubber tails, you double the size of the fly, making it easier for the trout to spot it at a distance without making it any more difficult to cast.

These ultra-fine but durable rubber strands were first marketed by the Montana Fly Company as 'Tentacles' and then by Hareline Dubbin as 'Daddy Longlegs'. Hareline has now introduced a

more flexible rubber strand called 'Micro Flex' which can be mottled, like the other brands, with a permanent marker.

You can adapt this procedure to your favourite emerger, whether it is Bob Wyatt's Deer Hair Emerger, a shuttlecock emerger such as the Plume Tip of Jeremy Lucas or an Australian pattern, the Possum Shaving Brush.

In 2013 I gave some of the MFC rubber strands to Rhodes-based guide, Tony Kietzman, promising him that they would double the catch-rate of his favourite fly, the Klinkhåmer. So much did that prove to be the case that he named the combination the Edhåmer.

The second question which needed answering was why the trout on the small stream being fished by Dave Hughes were indifferent to normally-successful attractor dries and relatively accurate imitations such as the Elk Hair Caddis on the surface but were so responsive to a soft hackle which was drifting just below the surface in the 'umbrella position'.

I found the answer in the fascinating 2013 book *'Fly Fishing Outside the Box: Emerging Heresies'* by Peter Hayes.

Hayes describes the period when *Baetis* mayflies drift to the surface after laying eggs on the stream bed as *'Fly fishing's new frontier'*.

He says: *"I have a very strong suspicion that the success in fast, rocky rain-fed rivers of the classic 'northern' spiders is due to their success in imitating the float-up Baetis spinner."*

This is corroborated by the following extract from Ralph Cutter's outstanding 2005 book, *Fish Food*:

"Baetis spinners are very buoyant and seem to have a difficult time retaining a grip on the streambed. They very deliberately lift and place one foot down at a time; sometimes they will reach out with a foot and tap the substrate in front of them as if they are testing for the best foothold. When they get lost to the current, it is all over; the mayflies don't struggle, swim, or attempt in any way to save themselves. They passively float to their doom. Baetis spinners are unique in that they 'fall up', floating upward wings-first. When they hit the surface film, they immediately get flipped and adhere to the meniscus on their sides. The wings remain stuck together holding that bubble of air, and from underwater it looks like they have a single wing sprouting out the top of the thorax. The spinners that reach the surface get stuck under the film, making them nearly invisible to the angler looking down into the water."

Baetis is the most common species of mayflies on most small streams and the trout streams in Cape Town are not an exception to this rule.



(L) The photo of an egg-laying *Baetis* female was taken by Helen Barber James a decade ago when she was with the Albany Museum in Grahamstown. She is now Senior Curator of Natural Sciences, National Museum of Northern Ireland

She found it midstream and placed the rock on the stream bank where the mayfly completed the egg-laying process in about 15 minutes.



Rocks on the bed of the Sterkspruit stream in Barkly East are covered in *Baetis* egg patches

In 1994 I met Rebecca Tharme, an aquatic entomologist, while fishing a local stream.

She was working on a doctoral thesis at the University of Cape Town.

I asked her to give me a percentage breakdown of the number of aquatic insects per square metre of stream bed substrate and the results surprised me. I expected *Baetis* nymphs to dominate and they did – by a tiny margin - 4542 which made up 36.2 % of the total. Chironomids were almost identical in numbers, 4382 which made up 34.9% of the total.



The *Baetis* float-up phase includes the male which has a sacrificial role in the egg-laying process. To increase survival chances, the male accompanies the female, each with a bright and silvery air bubble between the wings. When egg laying is complete, both drift to the surface, buoyed by the air bubble.

The late Shane Stalcup, author of the 2002 book, '*Mayflies from Top to Bottom*' believed that the ideal material to mimic such air bubbles is silver Hareline Dubbin's Quick Descent Dub. It is by far the easiest dubbing to use for small flies because it is made of ultra-fine aluminium shavings and almost glues itself to the thread in tiny quantities.

(L) The ideal dubbing to represent the air bubble in the ascending post- egg laying stage of the *Baetis* adult

All of these concepts coalesced in my most successful fly on the trout streams near Cape Town.

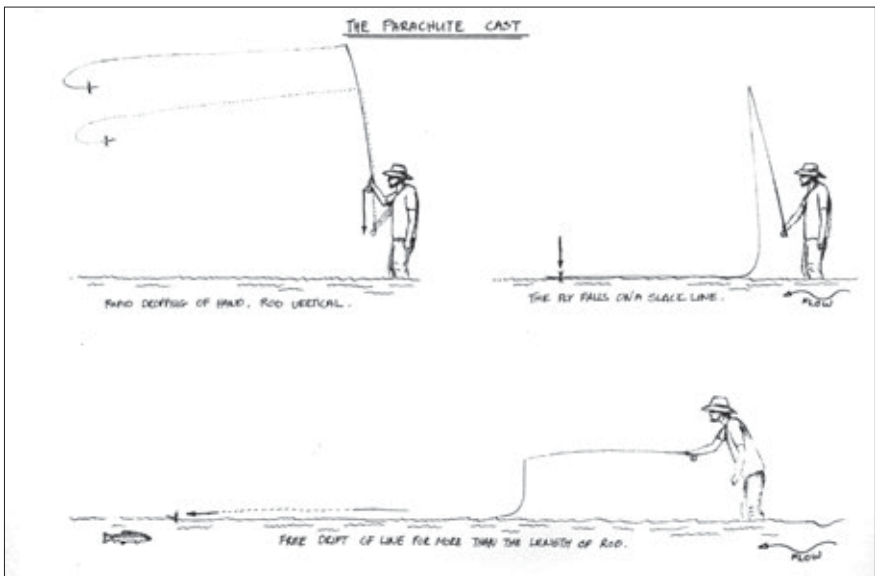
Although the foam post makes the Slip-Knot Emerger relatively easy to follow on the water, the greased leader can guide your eye to the fly particularly if, at the 4x section of the leader, you incorporate a yellow and red piece of Loon Two Tone Indicator tippet material. You can make this mono even more visible by using black neon Skafars wax where the yellow and red sections meet.

I first tried the Slip-Knot Emerger when I was fishing a small stream near Cape Town with Tom Sutcliffe. He claims in his much-loved book *Hunting Trout* that I am always last on the water leaving behind at the vehicle what looks like 'a grenade explosion in a well-stocked tackle shop'.

This, of course, takes poetic licence too far and so it proved when I first tried my Slip-Knot Emerger.

I was ready to go, sitting on the bank and looking downstream while Tom was still busy stringing his rod.

Keen to see what my new creation, with its antecedents in Marinaro, Sawyer and Patterson, looked like on the water, I executed what Charles Ritz described as a 'Parachute Cast' in his wonderful 1959 book, *A Fly Fisher's Life*.



An illustration of the downstream Parachute Cast by Marcel Terblanche – as depicted in the 1999 book by Charles Ritz, 'A Fly Fisher's Life: The Art and Mechanics of Fly Fishing'

Stop the rod high on the forward cast, drop the elbow to pull the energy out of the cast and feed line to facilitate the downstream float.

I noted with satisfaction, as my new creation bobbed merrily downstream, that the white Ethafoam post was easy to follow on the water.

In my fascination, I was caught completely off-guard by the rise of a trout which was clearly not a tiddler.

I reared back, fortunately without hooking up in the bushes behind me.

CHAPTER 20

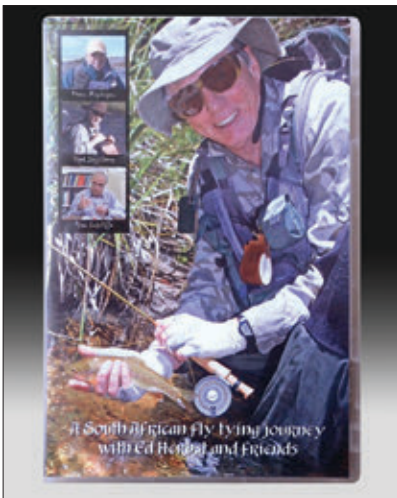
Waiting for few seconds to regain my composure, I put the fly back in the same current seam and, this time, there was a properly-timed strike and a hooked fish.

First cast with the Slip-Knot Emerger, a rise.

Second cast with the Slip-Knot Emerger, a sold take.



My first trout caught on the Slip-Knot Emerger. Photo by Tom Sutcliffe



What struck me thereafter when fishing this pattern on a greased leader and tippet was that trout started a slow rise much earlier in the drift than I had previously experienced.

My sense was that, thanks to the movement of the dangling rubber tails, they picked up its approach when it was still some distance away.

The movement of the latex rubber tails and the fly's posture in the water signalled vulnerability and the general impression of size and shape was something familiar to them given the number of up-drifting, post-egg laying and exhausted *Baetis* adults they would previously have encountered.

When Tom reached me, he took a photograph of me and my catch which I later used as the cover of a DVD which is available on Vimeo

(L) CD case cover photo of the first trout caught on its second take on the Slip Knot Emerger. Photo by Tom Sutcliffe

Dressing

Hook: Orvis Big Eye Ring Eye size 16 or Daiichi 1110 – an untested alternative is the TMC 108SP-BL. Its sharply downturned eye would allow space between the Surgeon's Swivel knot and the forward-projecting Ethafoam post.

Thread: White Textreme Extreme 10 denier which is the thinnest GSP thread on the market and almost transparent. Other substitutes would be 24/0 Nanosilk. UTC 70 denier and Veevus. 16/0

Tails: Ultrafine silicone strands such as Hareline Micro Flex tipped with UV light-cured Loon Knot Sense mixed with purple glitter dust. Veniard sells barred ultrafine 'Centipede' strands, but they are not translucent.

Body: Pheasant tail

Thorax: Hareline Quick Descent dubbing - silver

Hackle: Partridge

Foam post: Ethafoam packaging material

I start the fly by tying in two pieces of latex rubber strands on either side of the hook shank.

The body is pheasant tail tied in by the tips

Take the pheasant tail forward and tie off, leaving a space for the Ethafoam post, the partridge hackle and the dubbed thorax of silver Quick Descent dubbing.

Tie in a post of translucent Ethafoam packaging material projecting forward over the hook eye. Gary LaFontaine believed this widely available and inexpensive material has exceptional light-dispersing properties.

The best technique for tying in the hackle can be viewed using the key words YouTube + tightlinevideo + Hungarian Partridge Soft Hackle.

Above the body and behind the hackle, create a small thorax of silver Quick Descent Dub to represent the air bubble held between the wings of the ascending and post-egg laying Baetis adult.

The 'Light Bulb' soft hackle

If I were to tie the fly now, I would use the recent 'light bulb' technique, inspired by Cape Town-based split cane rod maker, Stephen Boshoff - tipping the ends of the partridge hackle and the dangling tails with a mixture of UV light-cured Loon Knot Sense.



On the resin tips of the tails, I would add purple glitter dust which would add to their movement and allow trout to more easily detect the fly visually. The photographed example at the start of this chapter gives some idea of this pattern evolution which I believe is a step along the journey towards what Peter Hayes described as 'Fly fishing's new frontier.'

Purple is the chosen colour for the glitter dust because the trout streams near Cape Town owe their whisky colour to a high level of tannin and experience has shown here and in the USA that trout respond very positively to purple flies in water with a high humic content.

(L) Split-cane rod maker, Stephen Boshoff, whose 'light bulb' concept is a significant fly-tying innovation



A Slip Knot Emerger on a size 16 Orvis Big Eye Hook tied by professional fly tyer Caleb Wilmott - @ wild_mutt_flies - whose flies are now sold through the Upstream fly-fishing shop in Cape Town

I believe the Slip Knot Emerger with its 'Light Bulb' dangling tails, held vertically on a greased tippet is a design which takes us closer to the 'frontier' described by Peter Hayes. Assisted by Vincent Marinaro, Frank Sawyer, Neil Patterson and Stephen Boshoff.

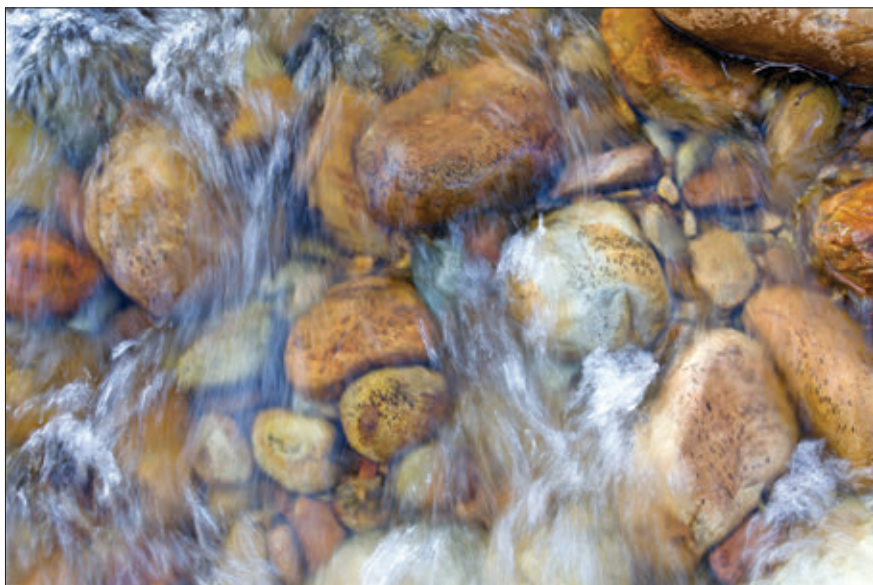




CHAPTER 21

‘Blackflies, Lords of The Rapids’

The Simuliid Nymph



“The black fly, or simuliid, is the least known and understood major trout food in North America. With a staggering wealth of scientific observation plainly accessible to angling researchers, how could the simuliids have been overlooked by experts and recreational anglers for so long?” Jeff Morgan, *“Productive Trout Flies for Unorthodox Prey”* (Frank Amato Publications, 2012). Photo by Brett Leslie.

In 1978, having started fly fishing, I ordered a copy of Ernest Schweibert’s double volume book *Trout*, all 1743 pages of it.

It was wise investment because it gave me an appreciation of the ‘match the hatch’ philosophy which had driven fly fishing for trout for centuries.

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

The problem was that on the trout streams near Cape Town, there are no hatches to speak of, certainly no hatches of any duration.

This is because, for both mayfly and caddis, most of their emergence and egg laying takes place at night.

The Western Cape province of South Africa has its rain in winter and by 15 October the water level has normally dropped sufficiently for fishing to be feasible and this is the most productive time of the year for fly anglers

Early spring has two brief hatches of short duration.

Two insects, the Net-Winged Midge (*Blephariceridae*) and the Black fly (*Simuliidae*) hatch in substantial numbers but you have, by happy coincidence, to be there when these emergences happen – they are not common occurrences.

I have seen black flies in their hundreds on the rocks in early spring, mating, then laying their eggs in little pink patches which quickly turn brown and resemble lichen. Many adults end up in the water and this can cause a frenzy of selective feeding.



(L) An adult blackfly laying eggs in spring on a trout stream near Cape Town

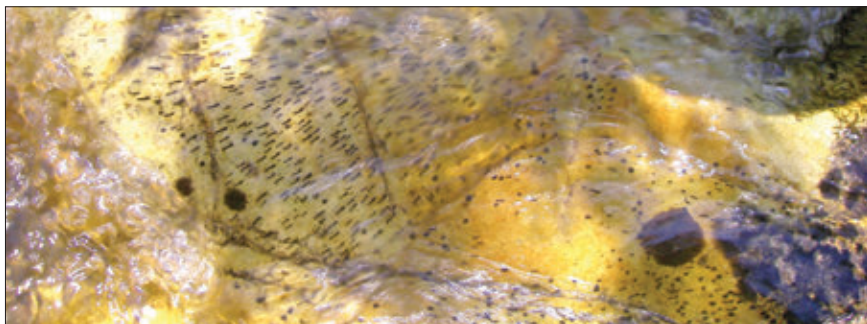
Within a fortnight or so this spectacular hatch is over, repeated later in the year in much smaller numbers.

There are two aquatic insects that were constantly present in big numbers for much of the year though - but no flies existed back in 1978 to match them.

The one was a micro-caddis. The 3mm sand grain larval cases of *Glossosoma Agepetus* are the most visible trout prey on the streams near Cape Town - present on almost every subsurface rock. In summer and autumn, the scurrying adults are everywhere on the waterline of the rounded boulders which comprise the stream bed.

But they are tiny.

The second, even more prolific, are the small black sausages that festoon the rocks in the rapids. The blackfly larvae are so prolific and so distinctive in shape, that I just knew that they would be a highly-recognisable prey image for trout.



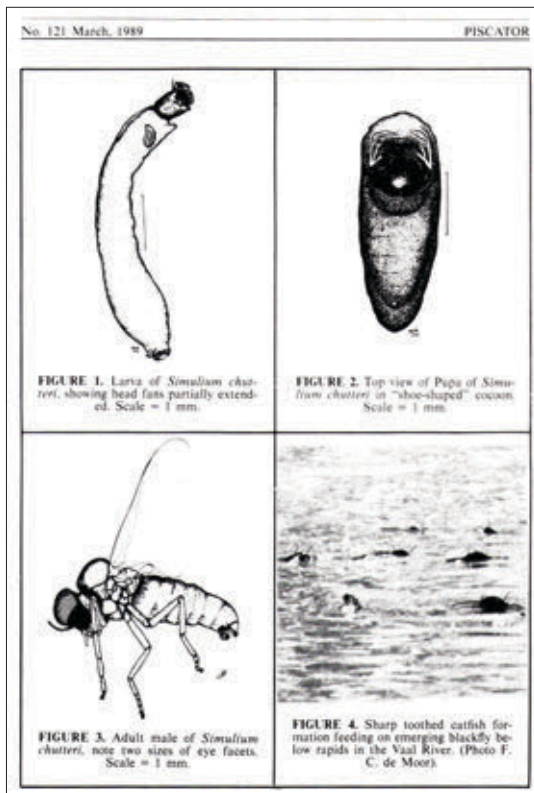
**Hundreds of blackfly larvae per square metre in the rapids of a trout stream near Cape Town.
Photo by Brett Leslie**

Trout have the ability, among the myriad particles coming towards them in the current, to discern and differentiate what is prey and the very distinctive shape and translucence of the Simuliid larva would make it stand out. It has a slightly larger abdomen than head, but the hourglass shape is distinctive. There is always the possibility that trout assume it to be an ant.

This belief was bolstered when I read that simuliid larvae, along with Baetis nymphs, are the most significant components of behavioral drift and members of the Cape Piscatorial Society told me that trout had been seen grazing these insects from the wall of a weir on one of our trout streams.

Somewhat to my surprise, no imitation existed and the insect did not feature in the extensive research on our trout stream aquatic insects undertaken by A C Harrison, one of the founders in 1931 of the CPS.

I commissioned Dr Ferdy de Moor of the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, the pre-eminent South African authority on these insects, to write an article for the CPS journal, *Piscator*, of which I was then editor.



(L) An illustration from the article by Dr Ferdy de Moor

His article confirmed the important role that the most prolific insect plays in the small stream food web:

'Blackflies, *Lords of the Rapids*' appeared in the March 1989 issue of the magazine and it remains the definitive angling-related article on the species in South Africa.

His article confirms studies elsewhere in the world of the density and numbers of this species in streams. Here is a quote from his article relating to the population density of blackfly larvae in the rapids and runs of swift, high gradient mountain streams.

'*Simulium chatteri*, a species which lives in the swiftest of flowing water currents in rapids can, at certain times of the year, be found in densities of up to 400 000 individuals or 600 gm of black fly per square metre of river bed (de Moor 1982). In terms of the number of individuals collected from stones in rapids, black fly can form 95% or more of the local animals and hence can truly be considered as 'lords of the rapids'.

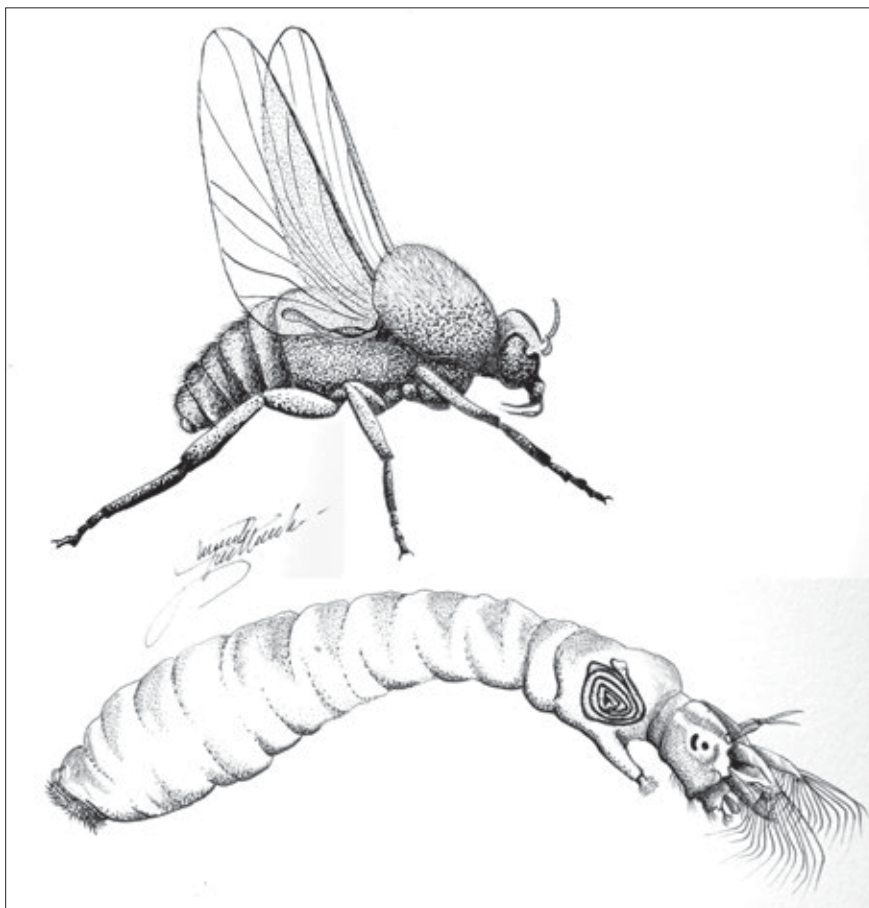
The article can be found in the 'Trout Behaviour and Diet' folder on the CPS website.

In his outstanding book *A Field Guide to the Freshwater Macroinvertebrates of Southern Africa* (Jacana, 2021 – now sadly out of print) Christian Fry lists the length of the larva as 7 mm whereas, de Moor says, the final instar blackfly larvae can reach 13 mm.

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

That dictates a nymph the size of a standard-length size 16 hook - but how to mimic the hourglass shape of the semi-transparent grey/green/brown body?

I was not alone in the search for an answer.



The adult blackfly (above) and the larval stage below – illustrations by Marcel Terblanche

Ernest Schweibert wrote extensively on what he called the 'Reed Smuts' and drew on the earlier work of J C Mottram, but his larval imitation had a dubbed body and was opaque.

Tom Sutcliffe, a surgeon in his time and Rhodes-based guide, Fred Steynberg, are adept at using a stomach pump to gently extract from larger trout, the insects upon which they have been feeding. The results are always the same – Baetis nymphs in slightly greater number than the Simulium larvae and a smattering of terrestrial insects, mainly beetles and ants but the occasional inchworm and hopper.



(L) The stomach contents of a trout caught by Fred Steynberg in Rhodes. Mayfly nymphs exceed blackfly larvae by a small margin

Trout in mountain streams elsewhere in Africa are no different.

Vernon van Someron spent two and a half years studying trout for his 1950 PhD thesis, *'The Biology of Trout in Kenya Colony'*.

He was based at the Kenyan Government's River Research and Development Centre situated on the Upper Sangana River, but his study also encompassed 15 other rivers and streams in the country which held trout.

His finding, based on stomach content analysis, is unequivocal:

'Simulium larvae are eaten in the greatest percentage, form the greatest bulk of the aquatic food taken, and are found in the greatest percentage of stomachs. Together with Simulium, Baetis nymphs constitute a major portion of the aquatic food eaten.'

Much the same situation pertains in the USA. In his book, *Productive Trout Flies for Unorthodox Prey*, (Frank Amato, 2012) Jeff Morgan writes: ***"I located more than 20 studies where black flies were, at least for a month or two, by far the most important food resource for trout, not to mention dozens more where black flies 'only' were more important than every single mayfly species with the exception of Baetis!"***

"Female black flies can swarm and concentrate egg laying in a relatively small section of stream. One study found a 10-metre section of a small stream with 3 million eggs, the result of 3750 females laying eggs synchronously!"

Morgan says that on many US trout streams black fly is the predominant food source in June and July – the height of the American summer.

For me, the breakthrough came in 2010 when the UV-light cured epoxy resins derived from dentistry appeared on the local market.

Thread is not used in the Simulid Nymph, just ultrafine wire from companies like Semperfli, UTC and Lagartun and two glass beads, the bigger one at the rear because the abdomen of the larva is slightly larger at the rear



I found that if I used two smoky-grey beads, a 15/0 Toho Silver-lined Grey (TR-15-29B) bead at the bend of the hook and a slightly smaller 16/0 Preciosa-Ornela glass bead at the eye, separated by widely spaced turns of wire, in black, green or brown, the resin sagged in the middle, replicating the shape and translucence of the blackfly larva which tapers from a bulbous rear to a small head.

(L) Early examples of my Simulid Nymph. Photo by Peter Brigg

If you need more weight, you could combine a 2mm and a 1.5 brass or tungsten bead available from Hareline in mottled olive.

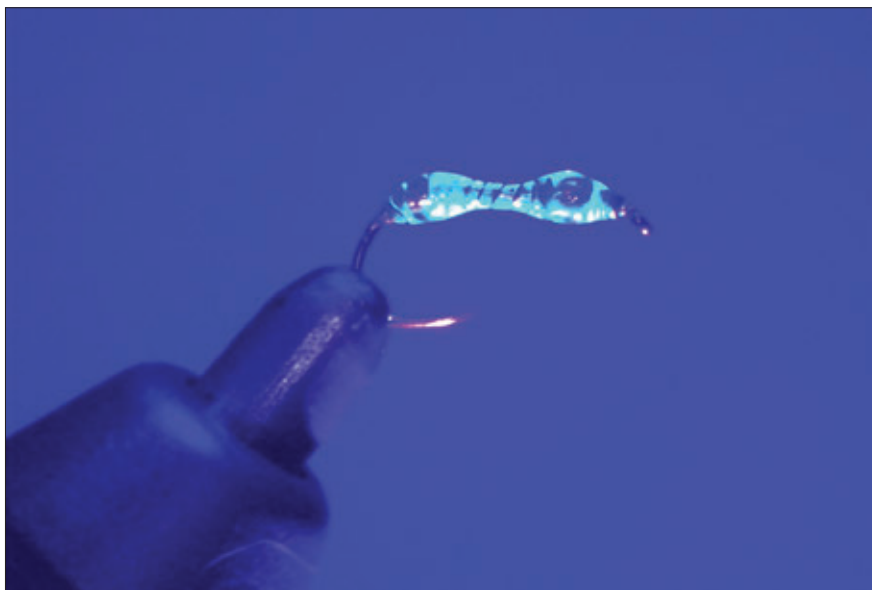
I put the wire spools on a Stonfo Bobtec bobbin holder because I find this offers me more control.



(L) Two stages in tying the author's Simulid Nymph – no thread, just wire is used

Here's the tying sequence:

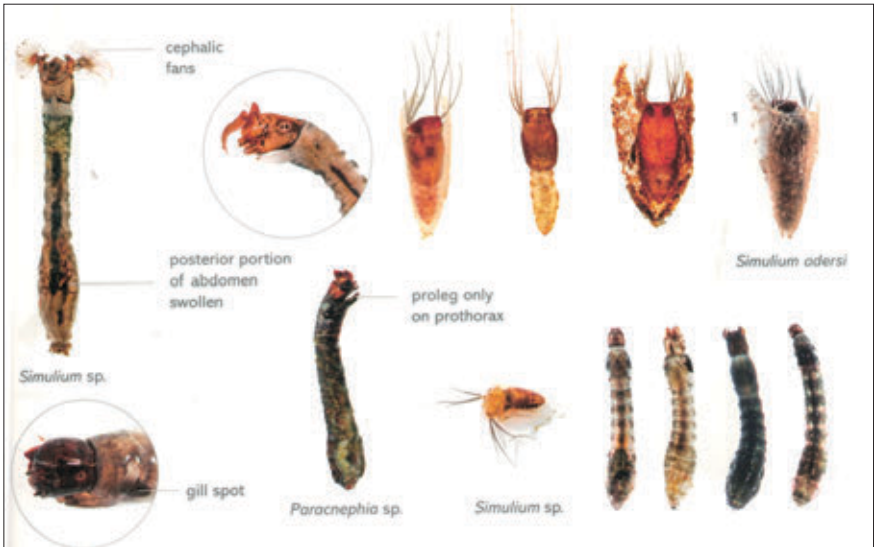
1. Create a small cone of wire at the hook eye and slide two beads onto the hook shank, the small bead closest to the eye. Snap off the wire.
2. Create another cone of wire at the hook bend and slide the bigger bead backwards against it. Snap off the wire.
3. Create a cone of wire in front of the bead at the rear and spiral the wire forward in open turns to the front bead.
4. Create a final cone of wire behind the front bead and whip finish. You now have two beads, encompassed by wire, creating two oval segments, the one at the rear being slightly bigger than the one at the front – thus imitating the shape and silhouette of the larva.
5. Apply the UV light-cured resin and cure.



A Simulid nymph under ultra-violet light showing its construction features

CHAPTER 21

The page on *Simuliidae* in Christian Fry's book shows that the colour of the semi-transparent larvae is not uniform although, from above and looking through the water, they appear black.

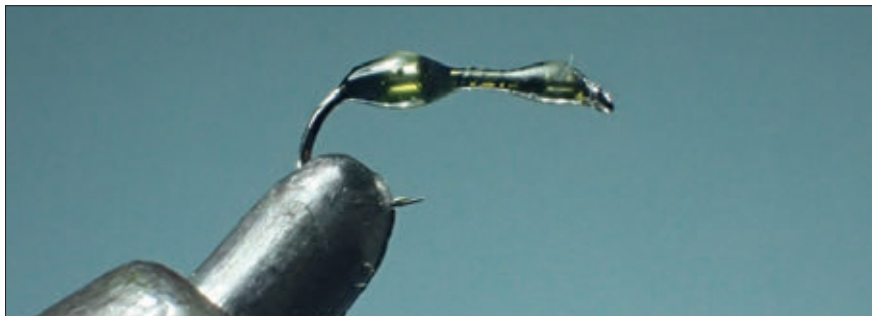


A scan from Christian Fry's book (above) and a photo (below) showing what they look like in their natural habitat. A striking visual feature of the larva, aside from its characteristic shape, is the prominent banding on the body



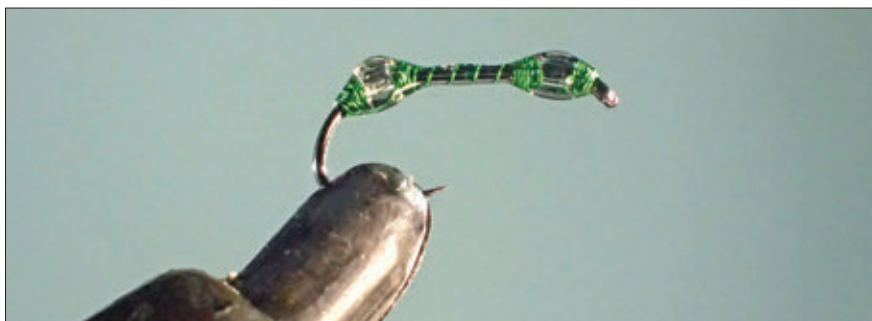
As a fly tyer I have derived great benefit from joining Instagram and one of those benefits improved the Simulid Nymph.

I follow #wgpenny on Instagram and, from him, I got the idea about blending different colours of UV resin and using permanent marker pens to achieve subtle shades. I now combine, for example, Gulff Motor Oil with Loon Olive and add some black glitter dust to create a mottled effect. Loon Smoke is also useful because when you look at the larvae on the rocks, they all seem a greyish black. Glitter dust can be added to these resins to create more sparkle.



A Simulid Nymph showing the effect when different colours of resins are mixed

Initially I used black wire for contrast. Our major yellowfish rivers such as the Vaal and Orange have significant populations of the apple green *Macrostemum capense* caddis larva. Professional fly tyer, Yaqoob TarMohammed -@Jozifly – had significant success on a small tributary of the Vaal using a Simulid Nymph tied with green wire. Perhaps the fish he caught took it for an early instar of the caddis larvae known locally as ‘Green Rockworms’.



A Simulid Nymph tied with green wire by ‘Jozifly’ proved effective on yellow fish

Black Fly life cycle

The life cycle of the black fly from egg-laying to emergence is takes about three weeks and, in the Western Cape, there is a massive peak in early spring.

Breeding occurs throughout the year however and we probably have about six annual generations.

As far as behavioural drift is concerned, black fly seem to be more important than Baetis nymphs according to the Blue Quill Angler Blog in a post headlined **‘Black Fly Larva and Their Importance to**

Trout Fishermen':

'In a recent study, black flies were consistently consumed by trout at a much higher rate than their proportion in the drift. While Blackflies composed about 10% of the drift, they made up nearly 70% of the trout diets in June and July! (The American summer).

If that isn't enough for you, consider that on the same stream, Baetis—the orthodox angler's security blanket – made up 70% of the drift and contributed a mere 20% of the total trout diet while other common drifters Ephemerella (PMD) mayflies, were nearly unscathed.'

Behavioural drift occurs at dusk and dawn with the major peak at dawn.

In this regard the Simulid Nymph should excel with its contrasting dark and clear sections and the ability of the latter to transmit and reflect light.

Early tests with my UV epoxy blackfly nymph by friends show that the fly seems to have a lot of potential. It is streamlined and smooth so sinks quickly, its translucence is exceptional and it is very durable

Andrew Ingram – Elandspad stream

Apart from a stiff downstream breeze on the Elandspad, conditions were perfect. As there was no obvious movement of fish, I decided to start fishing with the size 16 Black-fly nymph made for me by Ed. The first cast gave me my length and second was placed in a bubble line and in an instant my first fish of the season was on. From there things happened fast. Every couple of casts produced a fish, one which was blind in one eye!



Despite being blind in one eye, this trout took the Simulid Nymph avidly

About an hour later the fly, tied on with 7X tippet, was taken by possibly the biggest rainbow that I have seen on the Elandspad and after half a dozen cartwheels out of the water, the knot gave and the fish kept the fly. After that I tried Ed's #16 green and then red brassies for about an hour ... no luck ... and so decided to risk the second and last black fly nymph. Two fish later it was also broken off ...

Tom Sutcliffe - Lourens

We were on a low, gin clear mountain stream above Lourensford farm in Somerset West. Robin Douglas was using a small Para-RAB and I stuck with the Ed's nymph, both of us on a metre-plus of 7X tippet.

The first thing that struck me is that the glass bead version sinks really fast given its totally smooth surface, but in the fine flow the tungsten bead version tended to hang up a lot on stones. Then I also

noticed that the pitch-black fly was easy to follow in the drift, of course other than when I placed it in the fast, white water at the head of runs. This is where I thought I'd get most of my takes, given that the naturals prefer fast water. But I was wrong. The fly did best in the smooth-surfaced glides and tail-outs.

There were two notable fish. The first was a trout I saw swing at least a metre to grab the fly. The second was a trout hanging well back in the smooth, crystalline flow at the tail of a wide pool. He was swinging side to side as he fed, looking as light as a feather in the water and it really was a beautiful thing to watch. I unhooked Ed's nymph, stepped to one side to get a better line on the fish, slipped and went in with a splash. I got up cautiously, looked for the fish, and saw he was still feeding!

I threw a cast that dropped the fly ahead and to the right of fish and in a second the current had swept the fly past him. But the fish swung around and chased the fly at least two metres, took it and I hooked him.

At the end of the day, I guess the scores between the Para-RAB and Ed's nymph were about even, but this little pattern shows serious promise.



A Deon Stamer net provides the backdrop to one of the two trout which chased the Simulid Nymph downstream. Photo by Tom Sutcliffe

Robin Douglas - Lourens

*We'd fished for about three hours and on approaching the penultimate pool on the beat, I noticed a trout feeding strongly in the tail of the pool. Tom quickly spotted it and commenced the stalk. He had his eyes firmly locked onto the fish and consequently took a tumble into the stream. Tom never missed a beat though and soaking wet, with his eye still firmly locked onto the feeding fish said, "I'm going to catch him for you, Robin". This was a difficult fish to cast to as it was sitting right at the tail of the pool in very clear and calm water. I was convinced Tom would line him but the cast was perfect. The fish turned and followed the fly, decided it did not want it and swam back to its station. Then it changed its mind, decided that it definitely **DID** want that fly, raced after it and ate it. I cannot remember when I have enjoyed the catching of a trout more. Nymph fishing at its best.*

Stephen Dugmore – Elandspad

But the Simulid! Wow, that was something. I fished it on a dropper under a Paraloop dry. The fish ate it like mad. I got a few on the dry, but the fish clearly really liked the Simulid more. On almost every cast the Paraloop would dip under. What a treat. It is definitely going to be my go-to dropper fly from now on.

Tom Sutcliffe says that the light transmitted through the clear sections of resin is a striking feature of the pattern.



In direct rather than reflected light, the distinctive shape of the Simulid Nymph is emphasised

Metal or glass beads?

As Tom Sutcliffe indicated, the Simulid Nymphs tied with tungsten beads tended to hangup on the bed of our shallow, boulder-strewn streams, but there is another reason – translucency – why glass beads are preferable. Under magnification, such is the transparency of Simulid larva that you can see its internal organs.

Colorado guide Pat Dorsey has proved the efficacy of clear, silver-lined beads with his Mercury line of flies and a review of the 1997 book 'Tying Glass Bead Flies' by Joe Warren can be found on the Global Fly Fisher website. The translucency of glass bead flies is a definite trigger for trout.

Orange River Simulium



**Daniel Rossouw with an Orange River yellowfish in the Richtersveld.
Would the Simulid nymph work here?**

‘In 1996 the Northern Cape Agricultural Union estimated that blackflies accounted for up to R88 million per annum in lost sheep production along 800 km of the Orange River, and a further R19 million in lost taxes. The main pest is Simulium chutteri Lewis, a species endemic to Southern Africa. This species disperses up to 80 km on either side of the Orange River, depending on wind direction, and is a problem from approximately Hopetown to the mouth of the Orange River, including the Richtersveld and Southern Namibia.’

That is the introductory paragraph of report by Ernest Myburgh of a government agency, the Water Research Commission, in a paper (WRC Report No. 1019/1/0) headlined ‘FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ADULT BLACKFLY (DIPTERA: SIMULIIDAE) SURVIVAL ALONG THE LOWER ORANGE RIVER, SOUTH AFRICA’.

Its basis is that while the adult male blackfly lives on nectar, the female requires blood to complete the breeding cycle. In Southern Africa it gets this blood from animals and birds, further north it preys on humans in 30 African countries resulting in millions of people being affected by what is known as river blindness – Onchocerciasis.

Figure 4 in the *Piscator* article by Dr Ferdy de Moor of barbel taking emerging blackfly adults in the Vaal River indicates that Simulium are not confined to clear, highly-aerated mountain streams and this opens the possibility of imitations being used in the Richtersveld section of the Orange River – although such a fly would need to be tied on a heavy wire size 16 hook to cope with the power of the yellowfish in this area.

The blue-spectrum Simulid Nymph



(L) A size 16 Simulid nymph tied with translucent glass beads and 0.01 purple wire

In his seminal 2002 book, *‘Trout and Salmon of North America’* Robert J Behnke writes of the trout’s eye: *‘The cones located in the retina are sensitive to wavelengths associated with ultraviolet, blue, green and red light. Their perception is greatest towards the blue end of the spectrum’.*

Purple is a combination of red and blue.

Both, on their own, are attractive to trout.

Blue appeals to trout. T C Kingswell Moore, in his 1960 book *‘A Man May Fish’* wrote that there were three mystery colours, gentian blue, claret and orange – rarely found in nature – which had a special appeal for trout. Claret is defined as ‘a deep purplish red colour’. In their 1973 study, *Choice of Colors of Food Items by Rainbow Trout (Salmo gairdneri)* Ginetz and Larkin fed fish eggs in different colours to rainbow trout and their preference was, in order, blue, red, black, orange, brown, yellow, and green.

In 1985, Charles Meck used blue Flashabou instead of peacock on his Royal Patriot and substantially increased his catch rate. In 1988, Australian guide Ken Orr fished an effective black seal’s fur nymph with a hot orange tag, but its success rate increased so radically when he added a rib of blue wire, that he called it the 007 Nymph because, as a client remarked: “It’s a licence to kill”.

In his classic book, *‘Rod and Line’*, Arthur Ransome wrote of how he took trout after trout on a bright day on an ant pattern he had devised but, a few days later in grey, overcast weather, they completely ignored his ant tying - although they responded well to other flies.

This ties into Gary LaFontaine’s ‘Theory of Attraction’ about how ambient light affects the way fish see prey.

In May 2024 I was given information that water colour can also be a factor.



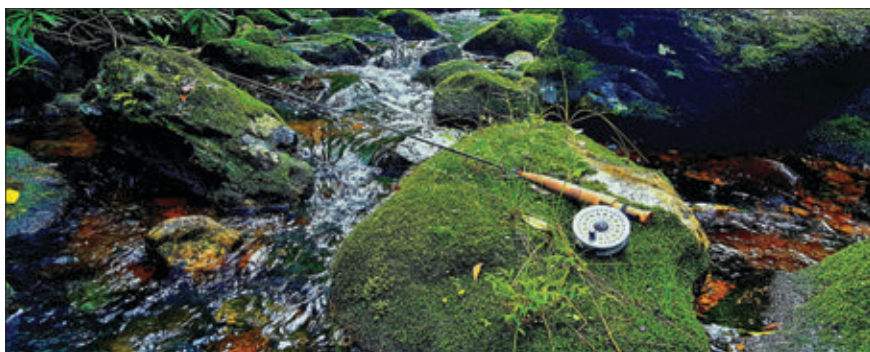
Trout streams near Cape Town have tannin-stained water. A photo of the Elandspad by Brett Leslie

Marcel Terblanche - @driftflyfisher- an artist whose illustrations add significant value to this book, lives in the densely forested, high rainfall area of the Southern Cape.

As a consequence of the high level of rotting vegetation in the water, many streams in the area are heavily peat stained and the tannins coat trout eggs and smother them.

A 1996 article in the history folder of the Cape Piscatorial Society archive which is headlined **‘Trout in the peat-stained waters of the Southern Cape’** opens thus: ‘The dark, peat-stained and acid waters which extend around the southern tip of the continent for about 300 miles from the Elgin District above Sir Lowry Pass along the “Garden Route” to the Humansdorp district, have been tried with trout on many occasions with but slight success.’

Brown trout survive in a handful of tiny streams here and Marcel found that simply changing from a black to a wine-coloured wire rib on a black soft hackle saw previously impassive trout charge from the opposite bank to attack the purple-hued fly.



The Southern Cape brown trout streams are literally strangled by vegetation, resulting in tannin-stained water and Marcel Terblanche found that flies containing a purple element were a significant trigger

In the USA, trout in streams with a high humic acid content invariably take a purple San Juan worm rather than the traditional red.

In the closeup photos taken by Christian Fry, the predominant shade seems to be a semi-transparent brown so in the photo at the head of this section of the article, I used glass beads in shades of purple, purple wire and covered the nymph with Gulf 'Motor Oil' resin mixed with purple glitter dust. Once cured, I gave it a coat of olive permanent marker ink and then another coat of Loon Smoke because, from the bank, they appear black.

In the trout streams near Cape Town, the water is the colour of whisky and a purple Simulid nymph might well prove very successful – time will tell.

Trees which have a relatively tannin content are wattle, oak, eucalyptus, birch, willow, pine, alder and hemlock but the tannin is most likely to leach into streams in an area where growth is dense and rainfall high. If your trout stream has a strong amber colour and a high population of Simuliidae, then an imitation of the larva containing a strong purple emphasis might well prove highly effective.



Dense bush and 47 inches of annual rain create the tannin-stained water of the Southern Cape's brown trout streams. Marcel has created a 2-weight, six-foot rod weighing less an ounce for these conditions

For further reference on Simulid larva imitations, I can strongly recommend the YouTube clip by professional guide, Brian Hilbert, which can be accessed online using the key words 'anglerscovey +bug-of-the-month-all-about-blackfly-larvae'. Another YouTube clip by Hilbert is titled 'How to tie Hilbert's Black Fly Larvae | AvidMax Fly Tying Tuesday Tutorials'.





CHAPTER 22

Hopper Design – a Continuing Quest



'Anyway, I put on one of Ed's Hoppers and immediately a large trout came unstuck from the very bottom of a run and, in a swoop, got itself solidly hooked lifting the fly a clear foot out of the water. Standing side on to the run I saw the whole take, and wondered when I had last seen a trout come up to the fly with such determination. To cut a long story short we caught fish until the supply of Ed's hoppers ran out about mid-afternoon, by when I was fast becoming a convert.'

Tom Sutcliffe *Ed Herbst's New Hopper Piscator* November 1998.

'As you fish it, say in a dead drift on a quick run, the legs stand wide and I imagine move, but not enough to excite the trout. It's when you twitch the fly that the legs really move. This is often an irresistible trigger and a key feature of Ed's pattern, one that lifts it above all other hoppers I've ever tried.'

Tom Sutcliffe, *Hunting Trout* (Freestone Press, 2002).

If one accepts that the average small stream trout is, as they say on the rocky streams of the Yorkshire Dales, 'four to the pound' then the hopper they fling from drift boats in the USA - hook sizes four to eight long shank - make no sense in that 'Lilliput Water' environment.

All I wanted was a 'Whisper Rod' hopper, a fly that would be easy to cast on the ultra-light line rods pioneered by Howard Steere at Orvis and, subsequently, by Jerry Siem at Sage. I wanted a GISS – general impression of size and shape - hopper pattern which ten to thirteen-inch small stream trout could get into their mouths.

As always, my approach was based on my reading.

I wanted a fly that incorporated the design thoughts of people like Gary Borger and Lefty Kreh when it came to imitating the legs of the insect because this, I believed, was the key to the success of the pattern.

What strengthened my belief that this was the correct design emphasis, was my experience with the first hopper I tied some 40 years ago, recreated here by Storms River professional fly tyer, Marcel Terblanche.



The author's first hopper based on the head design of the Muddler Minnow with the addition of two rubber legs and a wing of golden pheasant tippets

It was a mixture of existing ideas. It had a clipped deer hair head derived from the Don Gapen's Muddler Minnow which influenced the subsequent hopper designs of Ed Shenk and Ernest Schweibert on the Letort Spring Run.

The body was a piece of furred yellow wool, and the wing was made of golden pheasant tippets.

Hoppers play an important part in the diet of Australian trout and the first indigenous fly from that country, the Bredbo, dating from the 1890's, cracked the hopper code for contemporary fly anglers. It had a yellow floss body and wing of Golden Pheasant Tippets and was named after the river which flows through the village of Bredbo on the Monaro plains in North South Wales.

I reasoned that if this wing design worked in another southern hemisphere country, it would work on South African trout.

It had two rubber legs projecting backwards in a V-shape.

I'll never forget, indeed I am haunted, by my first experience with that fly.

What struck me on my first cast was that, when twitched, the legs would fold back against the body by the pressure of water flowing along the sides of the fly and, when the forward momentum stopped, they would pop out again.

Enthralled, I cast again because I wanted to observe the way the legs realistically opened and closed when twitched.

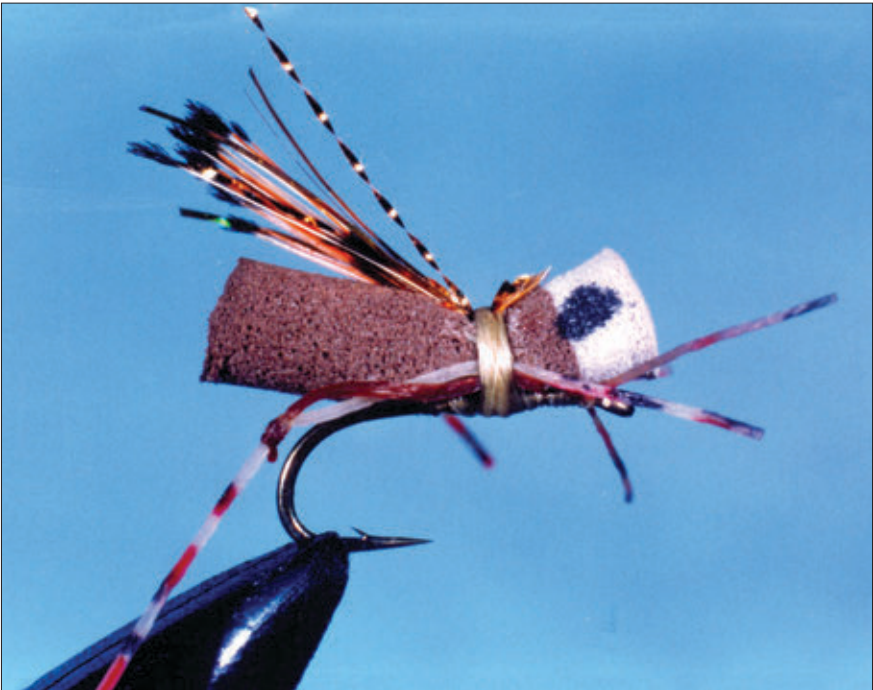
In a heart-stopping moment my reverie was interrupted when a giant head emerged, the hopper was inhaled in a split second and my 4x tippet was snapped in a heartbeat.

I often returned to that spot in subsequent years - without success - but the sight of that big head breaking the surface and then snapping my tippet, still lingers with me.

Hopper body material

What charted the evolution of my hopper design was, in the main, changes in materials – foam rubber for the body, latex rubber leg materials, plastic wing materials. And finally, because it substantially increases leg movement, the idea of counterweighting flexible materials from CDC to rubber strands with droplets of Loon Knot Sense, a design approach which came from split cane master, Stephen Boshoff.

The genesis of what became known locally as ‘Ed’s Hopper’ was the introduction in 1990 by Tony Skilton of Orvis of its foam rubber ‘Quick Sight’ ant bodies which had the bigger, rear section in black or brown and a white tip at the hook eye.



The Quick Sight Hopper used rubber strands of differing thickness for the legs

In the ant pattern, the cylinder is tied down tightly to the middle of the hook shank about a third of the distance from the white tip. Where the foam is compressed and narrowed at the tie-in point, a hackle is tied in to represent the ant's legs and a quick-to-tie, high-floating and easy-to-see ant pattern results.

On big rivers in the American west such as the Madison, several very effective hopper imitations such as the Madame-X and Turck's Tarantula have evolved with a rubber leg tied in a V on either side of the hook shank.

I was struck by the thought that, by tying a leg, in similar fashion on either side of the Orvis Quick-Sight Ant body and adding a Bredbo-type wing, I would have the basis of a possibly-effective hopper pattern.

What further influenced my approach was Art Lee's assertion in *Fly Fisherman* magazine that the McMurray Ant is the greatest dry fly ever invented. It was created in the nineteen sixties by Ed Sutryn of Pennsylvania and named after the town in which he lived. It proved so deadly that Sutryn patented the fly.

It uses two pieces of balsawood connected by a piece of nylon mono.



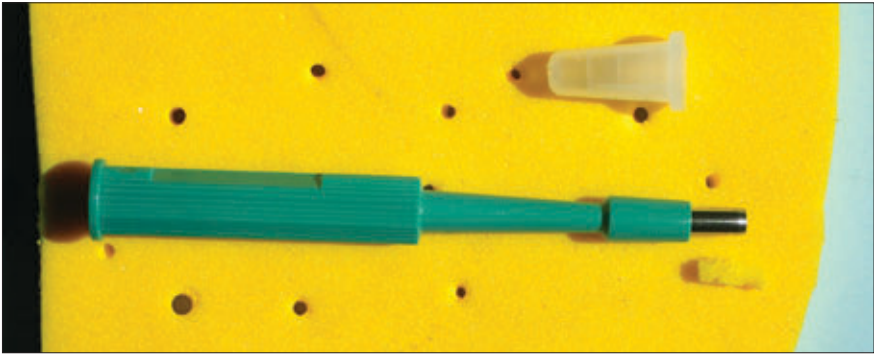
(L) Ed Sutryn's McMurray Ant bodies as marketed decades ago by Orvis

I realised that if I used this principle but with foam rubber – cutting the solid cylinder into two pieces and mounting the smaller piece protruding over the hook eye and the rear, bigger piece as an extended body projecting slightly past the hook bend - I would be able to tie hoppers down to size 18. Buoyancy was improved because the foam rubber sections were now above the heaviest sections of the hook, the eye and the hook bend. This created more space for the tie-in points of the rubber legs and the golden pheasant neck feather.

Initially I used foam rubber cylinders extracted from a yellow camping mattress with a leather punch which is used for creating holes in belts.

You can see an internet article on this using the key words: 'Tom Sutcliffe + Tying Ed Herbst's Hopper'.

Today I would use biopsy punches which are available from your local pharmacy. This approach became redundant for me, however, when I discovered Larva Lace Foam Rubber and, more recently, when Hareline introduced Drew Chicone's Fettuccine Foam - thin slices of square 4mm foam rubber which can be stretched to further reduce its diameter.



A biopsy punch – which your pharmacist can order for you – on a piece of camping mattress foam rubber

The Gunville Drill bits from Upavon allow you to produce these foam rubber posts in six sizes and the You Tube Clip from Fly Fish Food provides useful instruction.



These foam rubber posts can be “waffled” to add contrasting colours – see the You Tube clip ‘Hatching foam pupa - Daniel Bergman’

Here are the two quotes which influenced the leg design of my pattern:

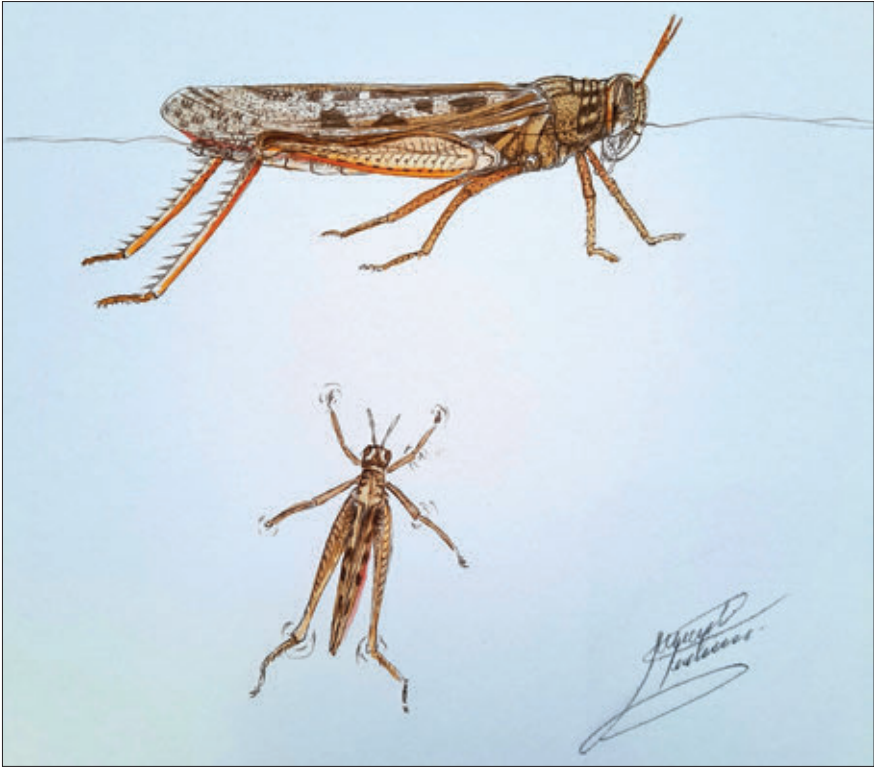
‘I once lay on the bottom of a stream and had someone toss live grasshoppers onto the surface. Every hopper that came by had its legs protruding through the surface. For this reason, I now only use hopper patterns that have legs.’

Presenting the Fly – Lefty Kreh (Lyons Press, 1999).

‘Those big hind limbs push well away from the body and become a prominent feature. When seen from underwater, the distinctive angle of these big kickers make the insect look bow-legged.’

Designing Trout Flies – Gary Borger (Tomorrow River Press, 1991).

Hoppers have a thick upper leg which projects sideways while the lower, thinner portion of the leg points downwards.



The body profile of the hopper in the water – aside from the body, the dominant element is the splayed legs. Illustration by Marcel Terblanche

To replicate this, I coupled two strands of rubber of different thickness and connected them with an overhand knot. This doubled rubber is then tied in at the junction of the wing and the body. I cut one strand of the thicker rubber away at the knot to create the hind leg and another piece of the thicker rubber away at the tie-in point to create the foreleg.



Combining rubber strands of different diameters facilitates the creation of a hopper imitation leg which mirrors the thick/thin profile of the insect's leg

Today one has a wide range of latex rubber legs from which to choose.

In trying to reduce the hook size of my hopper, I was encouraged by these two quotes, one from Peter Leuver in Australia and the other from Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch in the USA and I believe they make a compelling case for smaller sizes when it comes to Lilliput Water hoppers:

'I've tried nice big hook sizes when big juicy hoppers were bounding onto the water's surface but the smaller sizes always out-fished the bigger sizes. Number 14 seems to be the optimum size.'

Fur and Feather – Peter Leuver – (Kangaroo Press, 1991).

'Many of us have found that the smaller hopper and cricket patterns out-produce the larger ones in many instances, so don't be afraid to try some of these little guys in size 14 and 16. Immature forms are quite small and imitations can frequently be the fly choice of the day.'

Terrestrials – Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch – (Stackpole Books, 1994).

The latter title is available through Google Books and the point made by Steeves and Koch is

important because the hoppers go through four to six moults before reaching maturity in late autumn. The smaller, infant hoppers with their distinctive silhouette will thus be accepted by trout without reticence or suspicion.

The foam rubber terrestrial imitations are quite top-heavy and, if tied on light-wire hooks, they tend to land on their side.

What has greatly facilitated the tying of such mini-hoppers was the introduction of thin but strong gel-spun polyethylene threads such as 20 denier Semperfli Nanosilk and 10 denier Textreme Extreme thread which enable one to tie in materials on small hooks without creating bulk.

(L) The trout that took my hopper pattern weighed more than my Orvis One Ounce fly rod. Photo by Tom Sutcliffe



The evolution of the Ed's Hopper

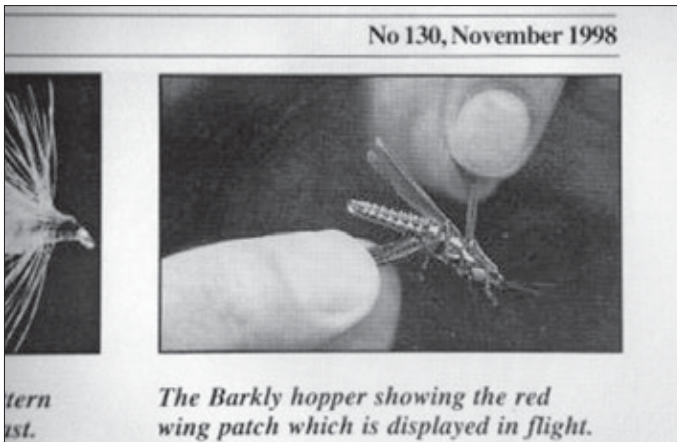
In 1998 I fished the Bokspruit stream in Rhodes with one of the first Sage SPL O-weights to reach these shores.

Two farmhands and their dogs arrived and stopped to watch me. I asked if they would like some fish for the table and they nodded enthusiastically. Fishing the head of a large pool and hardly moving my feet, I hooked seven fish and landed five in about a dozen casts with my new hopper.



Tom Sutcliffe releases a rainbow trout which was deceived by the author's grasshopper imitation

I think the fly was so successful in the North-Eastern Cape because its shape and silhouette are instantly recognisable to trout in those rivers which flow through grass-covered valleys. About forty years ago Ron and Robin Moore were fishing the upper Rifle Spruit on a farm they then owned in Barkly East. The way the light fell on a pool enabled them to see each trout clearly and they experimented with a variety of flies. The overwhelming favourite to which the fish came again and again was a Parson's



Glory, a New Zealand Matuka pattern with a tan body and wing and a tail of red hackle fibres.

(L) A scan from the 1998 issue of Piscator

Their assumption was that the fish took it for a "Barkly Hopper" the local grasshopper which displays a vivid scarlet flash on its legs and, in some species, in the wings.



Several South African hopper species, predominantly tan in colour, have a flash of red in the wing or the leg

I accordingly started adding two pieces of red Micro Krystalflash to the top of the golden pheasant tippet wing which made the fly a lot easier to follow in the drift.

Fishing my hopper with the Orvis Ultrafine 2-weight and the subsequent 'Ought Weight' Sages provided some memorable days for Tom Sutcliffe and I.

Tom described his first experience of the hopper in the August '98 issue of the FOSAF magazine *Flyfishing*:

'On the other side of the Naude's Nek pass, near Maclear, I fished the upper waters of the Pot after joining up with Ed Herbst and Kim Visser, owner of Fly Fishing Adventures. Eddie had raved about this stream and a day or two earlier he claimed the best fishing of his life on it, taking about 60 trout on a new foam-bodied hopper pattern.'

'It's a quick, very clear river in its higher reaches, flowing across a glittering bed of gravel and pebbles, and it's stiff with diamond-bright rainbows. Trying Ed's hopper on my new Sage 0-weight, I took trout from this pretty place with such uncommon certainty and precision that for a short while I was at risk of believing I had at last mastered fly fishing, a dangerous conviction, I've learned - always as fleeting and as transitory as those ethereal mayflies that hatch in the lambent light of a late summer evening.'

Every run the hopper slipped through rose a fish, and it rose them in the shallows and in the deep pools and against the banks, in the tails of runs and the necks of the pools, everywhere except from the grass alongside the stream, and even then I half expected a fish to leap out after the fly. Some rod, some river, some fly!'

The hopper provided me with an almost cathartic release from the dead—drift strait-jacket. I usually fished it upstream but, instead of lifting off to cast again when drag set in, I'd start twitching it and the drag became an ally instead of the enemy of success it is usually perceived to be.



Getting there ... The Pendulum-Leg Orange Hopper with mottled plastic wing. The current version has Micro Krystal Flash antennae ripped with Loon Knot Sense resin

Because that is how a hopper behaves. It lands in the water with a splat and then, stunned, floats downstream for a while without moving. Thereafter, as if suddenly awakening to the danger, it kicks frantically for a while towards the bank before running out of steam and floating listlessly for few metres before trying again.

The hopper is a wonderfully forgiving pattern. It matters not if your cast is indelicate – hoppers normally cause a ruckus when they land on the water. It matters not if your cast is off-target – you simply twitch it to your target area.

You also don't have to fish it upstream. It is just as successful fished across or downstream because, as I have said, when drag sets in you just fish it for what it is - a small popper.

The hopper proved most effective after 10 a.m.

At sunrise hoppers turn sideways towards the light, foraging more actively as their body heat increases and becoming sluggish if the sky clouds over or a cold wind starts blowing.

While it was the Australian use of golden pheasant tippets for the wing that influenced my hopper designs, I was to discover that what became known as Ed's Hopper also influenced Australian thinking.

If you do an internet search for 'Nobby Hopper + Fly Anglers Online' you come across an outstanding article on the evolution of hopper design in Australia which contains the following passage:

'Dan's Hopper, or the now-called Nobby Hopper, made its way to South Africa. As in Tasmania, the pattern was too big to represent local hoppers. A resourceful South African fly dresser made the fly smaller, but there was one important change to the legs. He put a knot in the legs making that dog-leg or grasshopper-leg shape, now commonly associated with many hopper patterns. It was found that this method of tying the legs had two important attributes. First, the legs acted like outriggers, making the fly more stable on the surface. Second, from an anglers and a fish's point of view, it was much more realistic. The two red legs poking into the surface at the rear end of a

hopper seems to be a powerful trigger used on many of today's successful hopper patterns.

'The South African version, with its knotted legs, made its way back to Australia. It was discovered in a Melbourne tackle shop by Andrew Braithwaite. Andrew re-introduced it to David Scholes as the South African version of the Nobby Hopper.'

Platon Trakoshis, a most talented fly angler and fly designer and a columnist for *The Mission* magazine provides some beneficial tweaks in his 2025 article headlined ***'Ed's Hopper – Step-by-Step Fly Tying'*** (Also found in the Terrestrials folder on the CPS website).

Orange rubber legs

The experience on the trout streams near Cape Town is that orange rubber legs add significantly to the success of hopper patterns, as does twitching the fly during the drift to activate the legs.



An early version of the Pendulum Leg tip – on later versions, purple glitter dust was added for trout in tannin-stained streams

Gordon van der Spuy - aka the 'Feather Mechanic' - can testify to the importance of the twitched hopper. From a high vantage point, he watched a friend fishing a hopper beneath him. The hopper would drift un-assailed until he twitched it – and then a trout would immediately arrow to the surface.

There's an interesting quote on this by Al Troth in one of my favourite books, ***Wisdom of the Guides*** by Paul Arnold (Frank Amato Publications, 2005).

Q: "Do details on a fly, like legs on a hopper, really make any difference?"

Troth: "Hard to answer. Sometimes they sure do. I remember in 1986 we had a fantastic hopper season on the Bighorn River. In 1983 I'd originated a fly called the MacHopper which had rubber legs. But the first occasion I had to really use it was in 1986 during that great hopper fishing on the Bighorn. I was fishing with my son, Eric. We're coming down one of the first runs just below the put-in place at the dam, and he dropped the fly out. I can still see the thing happening. A nice big brown came up and hung under the fly. I said, 'Shake the rod tip'. He shook the rod tip and the legs twitched a little bit, then POW, gone. We had great luck twitching those rubber legs on that trip. But the trout in that river had been fished over so hard that they were looking for something to authenticate the naturalness of the hopper pattern. We had fantastic luck with that pattern the rest of the season."



The change to camping mattress foam rubber saw a separation of the body segments to create more space for the wing and rubber leg tie-in point. Photo by Peter Brigg

In his wonderful book 'Call of the Stream' Peter Brigg recalls that in 1996 I sent him one of my hoppers - illustrated above - which he still has. It was the version made from foam rubber segments extracted from a yellow camping mattress with a leather punch.

His experience replicates what Gordon van der Spuy and Al Troth experienced:

'Ed Herbst once explained Leonard Wright's 'three-tumbler-lock' theory to me. It goes like this: when a fly drifts into the trout's window of vision, it will notice a familiar shape, size and perhaps even colour – it looks different to the inanimate twigs, leaves and other debris. You now have the trout's attention and it watches more closely, identifying other recognisable features like the wings, legs or tail – tumbler number two clicks into place. The third tumbler clicks into place when the fly-fisher gives the fly a twitch. At this point the trout's mind is made up that this is not just something recognisable, but something that's alive. The next response needs no explanation except to say it's what we set out to do in the first place – deceive the trout.'

'I recall an incident a few years ago while fishing a long, slow, deep run in the iNgwangwane River in the southern Berg. I had cast a hopper onto the edge of the current seam near where the water cascaded in. The fly drifted down towards me, then almost in ghostly fashion, I saw a decent trout appear and hang a few feet below the surface, its focus clearly fixed on the fly. It had obviously recognised what it felt was a familiar food source but was still uncertain. I slowly drew in the slack line and then twitched the rod tip. The imitation rippled the surface, as a struggling hopper trapped in the surface film would do. The trout's response was fast – in a split second it rose, sucked in the fly, turned and dived back into the depths. I felt its weight and the rod bent in response. After a short fight I held it in my hand, a beautiful 16-inch rainbow cock fish. It proved that movement is an irresistible trigger.'

Peter's observations to me on hopper behavior when they first land in the water (below) are informative when it comes to hopper design. Keep in mind that hoppers breathe through spiracles – holes in the body which transmit oxygen to the trachea which distributes it to body tissue. So, they would breathe in water which would increase the sense of panic:

'The first reaction when the hopper lands in the water is its feeble attempts to free itself by kicking and the occasional fluttering of its wings as it tries to lift off and fly. The legs are useless for swimming and end up below the surface much like your new pattern. I'll be introducing those to my

hoppers in future. When it uses its wings, you get that hint of the orange colour. These attempts to reach safety don't last long, the back legs end up slightly splayed and below the surface and it also folds the wings against the abdomen. This is where the narrow profile, blunt head and legs are prominent as it slowly drowns, but continues to float on the surface.

'The most vulnerable stage is clearly during the first period - the plop, kicking back legs and wings open. It's once again the attraction of action and movement. I have watched many dead hoppers drift without any interest from the trout - a twitch changes that.'

My experience is that water flow past the hind leg compresses it against the body when twitched and it then pops back into its original position when the uninterrupted drift resumes and I think this opening and closing movement could be a significant trigger.

This suggests that it might be beneficial to eliminate the front leg so as to enhance water flow to the back leg.

You might want to conduct a swimming pool test to determine whether that is a viable proposition.

I didn't want a fly named after me and I tried to give this one various names, as the 'Terrestrials' folder in the Cape Piscatorial Society's articles archive will prove – 'Orvis Hopper' when the Ultrafine 2-weight fly rod appeared on the market and 'Ought-Weight 'Opper' when Sage introduced its Whisper Rod version.



Catching a trout on a hopper imitation on the Sage Ought-Weight in 1998

In vain

There is even a room at Branksome farm guest house on the banks of the Sterkspruit River in Barkly East named 'Ed's Hopper'.



The 'Ed's Hopper' room in the Branksome guest house in Barkly East

Work on a size 14 small stream hopper design which is quick to tie, easy to cast, buoyant, visible in the drift, has a lot of leg movement and pops well when twitched, continued.

Ideally, as little of the foam rubber body as possible should extend beyond the hook bend as possible to enhance hook-ups.

The hopper's wing, when it is on the water, sheathes the body and the tip of the wing protrudes slightly beyond the abdomen. In silhouette against the sky there is no separation of wing and body which distinguishes the majority of the majority of current bullet head deer hair hopper designs. These designs, more closely resemble a rubber-leg caddis than a grasshopper.



Peter Brigg, however, points out that a deer hair wing incorporating Krystalfash helps track the hopper in the drift.

A golden pheasant tippet wing overlaid with two strands of micro Krystalfash or red wedding organza would seem to be the ideal compromise, being less wind-resistant than a poly yarn or deer hair design and its track record in Australia over decades shows it to be extremely effective.

(L) The yellow wing on this grasshopper is well matched by the colour of the wing of golden pheasant tippets on the first 'Ed's Hopper'. Photo by Marcel Terblanche

The choice of hook is crucial. It must be heavy enough to anchor the bulky and top-heavy fly in

the water ensuring that it lands upright on every cast, but it must be light enough to ensure that the hopper stays afloat all the time.

It must also have a gape which is wide enough to facilitate successful hookups and, at the moment, the Tiemco 1000SP-BL seems to me to be the best compromise.

We have seen two significant design changes in hopper imitation in the past half century.

In the early 1960s Ernest Schweibert and Ed Shenk added a wing made from a turkey feather segment to the Muddler Minnow creating what became known as the Letort Hoppers.

Two decades later, Doug Swisher and Carl Richards co-authored the immensely-influential 'Selective Trout.' and introduced an adult stonefly imitation, the Madam X.

It combined a bullet head design using deer hair in the style pioneered by Keith Fulsher in his

Thunder Creek patterns which used buck tail to create a minnow profile.

To this they added rubber legs tied on either side of the hook shank in an X shape.

The head/wing shape combined with rubber legs defines the silhouette of modern hopper imitations and foam rubber tied the hook shank now forms the body in most popular patterns.

As I see it, this commonly-used design resembles a caddis more than it does a hopper when seen from beneath - but it does not matter. The Madam X is easy-to-tie, and the deer hair wing adds buoyancy and makes the fly more visible in the drift.

Furthermore, the horizontally-jutting rubber legs also add to the way in which the fly is supported in the water, facilitating its buoyancy.

Adding two strands of orange Micro Krystal Flash to the top of the deer hair wing does not significantly add to the weight of this fly, but does significantly improve visibility.

I felt, however, that a more realistic silhouette could be achieved, a fly that looked like grasshopper rather than a rubber-leg Elk Hair Caddis.

The story of how a balsawood ant inspired a foam rubber hopper is well documented in the 'Terrestrials' folder of the Cape Piscatorial Society's articles archive.

Hopper body colour

'... hoppers range through an entire spectrum of colors, but we tend to tie them predominantly in yellow. Vince Marinaro may again have something to do with this, as he is very adamant that the only color for a hopper should be yellow. His advice is to "use nothing but yellow imitations, a butter yellow or maize color". We have, however, had a great deal of success fishing hoppers in colors other than yellow – brown, tan, green and orange, to name just a few.'

Terrestrials Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch (Stackpole Books, 1994).

A further thought on hopper design is found in **A.K's Fly Box** (Lyon's & Burford., 1996). Best found that hoppers in high altitude streams were sometimes green or tan and that fishing the relevant colour played a significant role in catch rates.

To hedge my bets, I use fluo green UCT 70 thread at the tie-in point of the legs and the wing.

Hoppers have prominent eyes and it is easy to create a black eye on the foam rubber with a permanent marker.

An evolution of the original design using tan Fettuccine Foam rubber includes an orange section in the leg because orange is a proven trigger - I know that because there were probably hundreds of occasions when trout frustratingly rose to my orange yarn strike indicator, ignoring the little sunken beetle drifting beneath it. Golden Pheasant tippets have always featured as the wing in Australian hopper patterns and orange rubber legs have proved to be an essential trigger on the trout streams near Cape Town. Orange Micro Krystal Flash or wedding organza fibres on top of the golden pheasant neck feather wing, add a further highly-visible orange feature to the fly.

Based on the experience of A K Best, green hoppers, if prevalent, are successful in high altitude streams in the USA but there are, according to Gary LaFontaine's 'Theory of Attraction', reasons why, under certain conditions, orange and green flies are successful based on ambient light. On tree-lined streams green flies do well and at sunset, orange flies excel.

So, what I now call the Fettuccine Hopper has orange micro-Krystal Flash on top of the orange wing and an orange section in the cranked rubber leg. The tie-in point uses fluorescent green UTC 70 thread. It lacks front legs to improve water flow past the body, this creating greater activation of the all-important rear legs. This pattern was succeeded by the Orange Hopper which has a more realistic silhouette.



The Fettuccine Foam Hopper – the product of three decades of fly design evolution



Fettuccine Foam Hopper success on the upper Bokspruit, Gateshead farm. Photo by Sean Vosloo

The ‘Light Bulb’ hopper leg

As described in previous chapters on the Light Bulb Spider, the Halo Hackle Klink and the Slip Knot Emerger, Stephen Boshoff’s idea of creating a cantilever effect in pliable materials by weighting the tip with drops of UV resin is, in my opinion, a game-changer which will, over the years, become as significant a design concept as Russell Blessing’s creation of the Woolly Bugger.



Stephen Boshoff – originator of the 'light bulb' concept in fly design

I added to the visibility of these 'light bulbs' by mixing glitter dust with the Loon Knot Sense resin on both rubber legs and antennae made of Micro Krystal Flash.

The Orange Hopper

Once again, the appearance on the market of new materials advanced the search for a more realistic GISS-factor and improved buoyancy in a hopper imitation.

CHAPTER 22

A few years ago, the Larva Lace company in the USA produced a soft Evazote foam rubber for fly tying which had a subtle glisten. It was then sold to another company whose main focus was bass fishing. The subsequent Larva Lace was stiffer than the original.

I have now found the ideal substitute locally. Shown here is Wapsi Evazote Fly Foam in 'Salmon Fly Orange', code WPF 8275, which is made in Taiwan. It is soft and elastic, has a subtle sheen and is semi-translucent which could be important against our bright, southern hemisphere sky. The other, differently-coloured, Evazote foam rubber sold by Wapsi seems harder and stiffer.



The Wapsi foam rubber favoured by the author for his hopper pattern

In my opinion the development of hopper imitations has been in stasis for decades. The only major



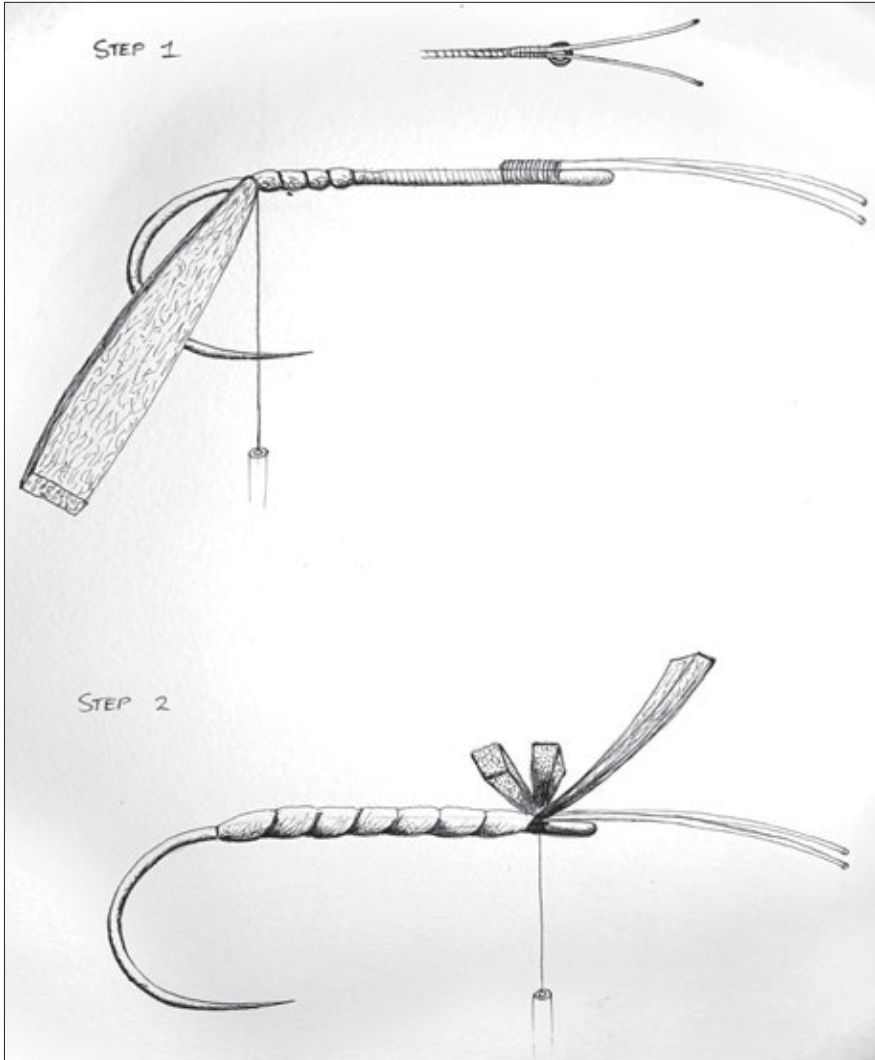
change from the original deer hair bodied Madam X, originated some 40 years ago on Montana's Bitterroot River by Doug Swisher as a stonefly imitation, being the adoption of a foam rubber body.

(L) The start of the Orange Hopper body construction – the creation of the abdomen section of the fly

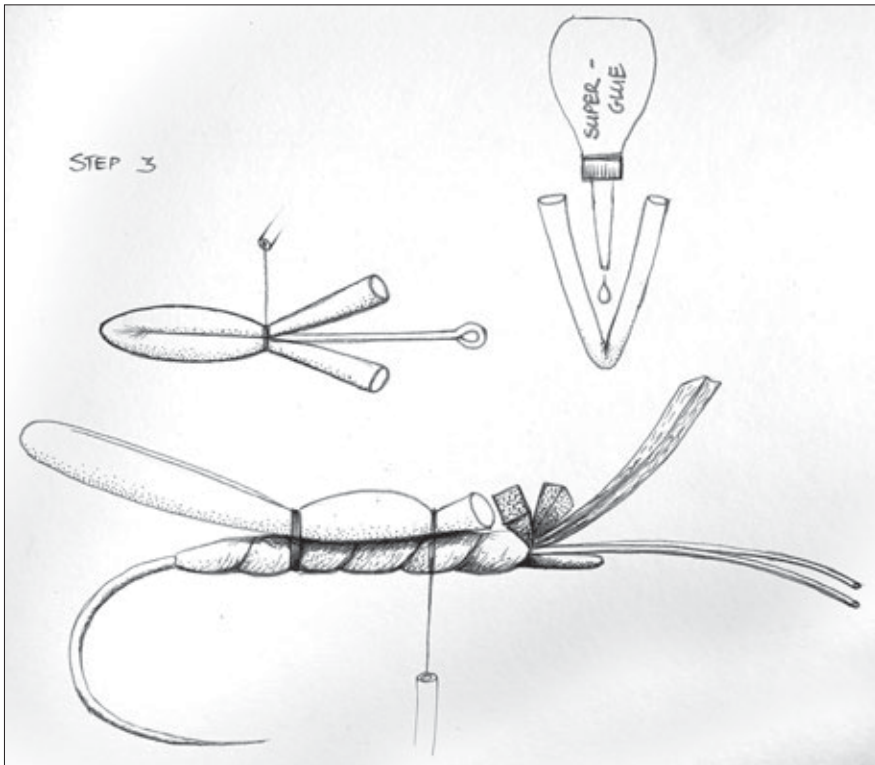
I think the big breakthrough for

THE DELICATE FLY FISHER - ED HERBST

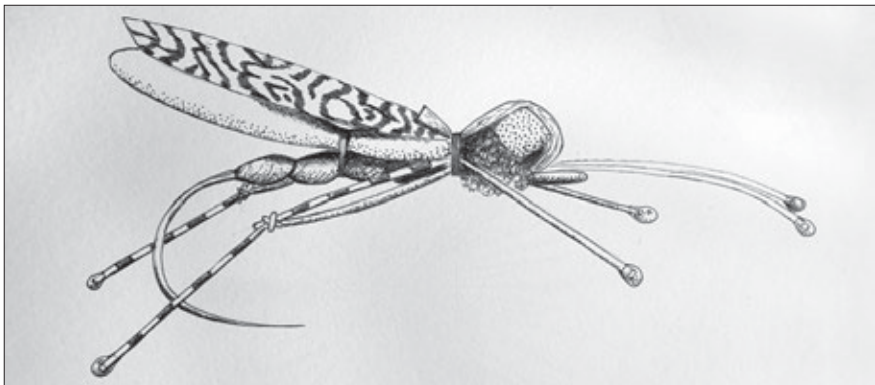
me was the realisation that if I superglued a thin strip of this soft and pliable Wapsi foam rubber into a U-shape, I could place it on top of the #12 TMC 101 hook so that it protruded fractionally beyond the hook bend, creating buoyancy without reducing the hook gape. Ahead of that, I could create a foam rubber head with Fettuccine Foam rubber which emphasised the insect's prominent eye. Beneath this doubled body, the hook shank could be covered with the same material, creating an all-foam rubber body, possessed of excellent buoyancy.



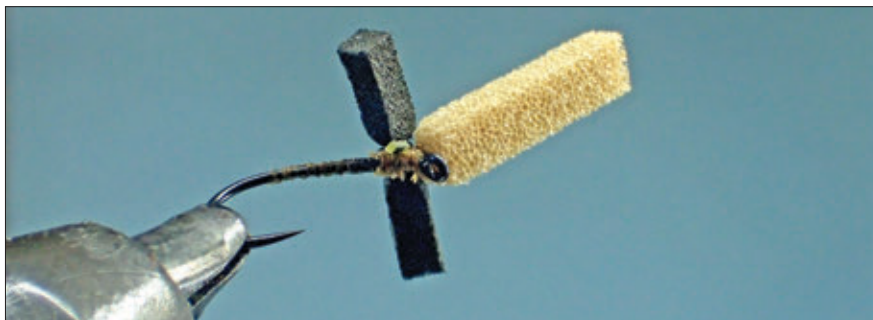
Three illustrations by Marcel Terblanche of how he ties the Orange Hopper



The orange Wapsi foam rubber forms both the underbody and the 'abdomen' of the Orange Hopper



The final stage in the tying of the all-foam rubber Orange Hopper as sketched by Marcel Terblanche



The first stage of constructing the head of the Orange Hopper using stretched Fettuccine Foam strips



The final stage of the head and eye construction of the Orange Hopper using stretched Fettuccine Foam in two colours

Hoppers drift low in the surface film with the heavier abdomen submerged. The wings are not held aloft, they sheath the body, so the choice of mottled and translucent Wapsi Thin Skin plastic material for the wing was obvious.



**The Wapsi Thin Skin material works well to mimic a grasshopper wing on the Orange Hopper.
Photo by Marcel Terblanche**



(L) Matthew Sephton fishing the Orange Hopper on the Three Drifts stream on Pitlochrie farm in Barkly East. Photo by Wieke Langner

I received a message from Matthew Sephton - @threedriftsfishing - while fishing the Orange Hopper on the Three Drifts stream on a beautiful Barkly East farm, Pitlochrie - visit their website.

'The hopper has been pulling even the largest most lethargic fish from the bottom and eliciting some serious interest.'

'I caught 8 fish over 14 inches in 1 pool yesterday - they wouldn't leave it alone.'



A Three Drifts stream rainbow trout that took the Orange Hopper. Photo by Matt Sephton



Hoppers on the Holsloot stream near Cape Town. Painting by Marcel Terblanche

In the July 1986 issue of the American magazine *Fly Rod & Reel*, Gary LaFontaine wrote an article on hopper patterns and came to a fairly logical conclusion:

'But overall, the weighted Joe's Hopper was the deadliest of all hopper imitations. The angler wading upstream, drifting the fly naturally with the current, not only caught as many or more trout than he could with any surface pattern, but also fooled larger ones. The biggest trout, always the most cautious, seldom rose during a grasshopper bonanza; during the normal fishing days of summer, they might ignore all surface food but they still recognised one well enough to accept one drifting at eye level.'

The Sunken Hopper

'Finally, if trout are giving your dry fly the cold shoulder, put a slit shot on it and fish it wet. It isn't nearly as much fun, but even the most jaded trout can hardly turn up its nose at a drowned hopper at mouth level.' **'Fish Food – Ralph Cutter** (Stackpole Books, 2005).

The Sunken Hopper was clearly an idea with which LaFontaine was pre-occupied because he



subsequently wrote to the late Rick Keam, Australia's pre-eminent author on fly design and this prompted Keam to write a beautiful coffee-table book *'Dressed for Dinner'* in which he pays tribute to LaFontaine:

(L) A scanned photo from Rick Keam's book, 'Dressed for Dinner' which shows that a drifting hopper is semi-submerged

‘This book began in the early 1990s at the urging of Gary LaFontaine. Gary was struck by an article I had written comparing his own observations of the occasional value of fishing a sunken grasshopper imitation on western US waters, and my similar experiences in Australia. There was nothing especially revolutionary in this. The dwindling few anglers who had grown up fishing live grasshoppers were aware that many did not float, but entered the water head-first and sank, sometimes catching more fish than any surface imitation.

‘It wasn’t until I started studying the float posture of grasshoppers that I realised how thoroughly the dominant parts of their image were submerged.’

LaFontaine again expressed his thoughts on this subject in one of my favorite books, *The Dry Fly – New Angles*, which was published in 1990 but he did not show a specific pattern – somewhat strange for someone who constantly experimented with new designs. All he did was add lead wire to successful contemporary floating hopper patterns.

Around 1990, LaFontaine was diagnosed with a slow, degenerative ailment, Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) but, in the ensuing years, before his death a decade ago, he published two more books, one of them *Trout Flies – Proven Patterns* being a catalogue of his designs.

Wanting to leave a record he also collaborated with Al and Gretchen Beatty who published *LaFontaine’s Legacy – The Last Flies from an American Master* several years after his death.

They remark that he wanted to cover all the bases and he even included an imitation of a house fly – but no sunken hopper ...

The reason is simple, he simply weighted a floating Joe’s Hopper which he tied in two versions: ***‘One fly was wrapped with lead wire, heavily weighted for bouncing along the bottom; the other, wrapped only with a ribbing of copper wire, was a lighter pattern designed to drift high in the water column, less than a foot below the surface, like a freshly drowned grasshopper.’***

LaFontaine’s hopper chapter in *The Dry Fly New Angles* provides outstanding analysis, but the chapter on grasshoppers and crickets in Ralph Cutter’s fascinating *Fish Food – A Fly Fisher’s Guide to Bugs and Bait* is also valuable:

‘Finally, if trout are giving your dry fly the cold shoulder, put a split shot on it and fish it wet. It isn’t nearly as much fun, but even the most jaded trout can hardly turn up its nose at a drowned hopper served at eye level’.

So, where’s the mystery?

Well, given the endorsement for what seems a fairly logical idea by people like LaFontaine and Cutter, you would think that internet is flooded with video clips on how to tie such patterns.

It isn’t.

Tim Flagler of Tight Line Productions has posted a typically excellent video of what he calls the ‘Drowning Hopper’ but, given its deer hair wing, I don’t think a call to the NSRI will be needed anytime soon.

Rick Takahashi and Jerry Hubka list more than 150 hopper imitations in their encyclopedic 2014 book *Modern Terrestrials - Tying and Fishing the World’s most Effective Patterns*.

Of these, only three are designed to sink and they are conventional hopper patterns with an added metal bead at the eye of the hook to assist the sink rate.

By far the best analysis of hopper design is found in the 1994 book, *Terrestrials – A Modern Approach to Fishing and Tying with Synthetic and Natural Materials* by Harrison Steeves and Ed Koch.

They, too, sing the praises of the sunken hopper but provide only one specific imitation – of a species of hopper which seeks refuge from danger by diving into the water where it can remain for

about nine minutes, walking along the stream bed. It is not a species which exists locally as far as I can ascertain:

‘We have to this point discussed only the floating patterns, which are familiar to everyone. What about fishing a sinking hopper or cricket pattern? Is there any place for them in the fly box? The answer is a resounding yes. Gary LaFontaine wrote a wonderful chapter testifying to the effectiveness of the sinking hopper in his book The Dry Fly, but it has attracted little attention from the general angling public. Likewise, Ed Shenk has spoken on the effectiveness of the sinking cricket, but again most people seem to have passed this pattern by. Well, if anglers do not care to exploit these sinking patterns (or any other sinking terrestrial pattern), we’ll just keep our little secrets and continue to chuckle all the way back to car, even if our wrists ache.’

Their review of historic and contemporary hopper imitations is trenchant.

They point out that drowned hoppers drift close to surface, vulnerable, visible but not bouncing along the riverbed and that when one lands in the water it prefers to kick itself to safety rather than fly away from the clingy water surface. What is not irrelevant is the fact that crickets, locusts and katydids all have a grasshopper shape and all will be eaten by trout if available. Here is their trenchant analysis of factors that contribute to the GISS-factor in a drowned hopper.

Size: ‘Many of us have found the smaller hopper and cricket patterns outproduce the larger ones in many instances, so don’t be afraid to try some of these little guys in size 14 and 16. Immature forms of these insects are quite small and imitations of them can frequently be the fly of choice for the day.’

Legs: ‘On a dead hopper or cricket, the muscles relax, and the legs trail well behind the body of the insect, more or less dangling limply in the current.’

Eyes: ‘What really draws attention to the head of the insect are the eyes which are quite large in some species.’

So, the challenge for me was to tie an effective sunken hopper using modern materials.



The materials used in tying the Sunken Hopper with Wapsi Thin Skin wing material and Chewee Skin body materials on the left. Photo by Jan Korrubel

I wanted it to be relatively small because in Australia, they have found the most effective hook size to be 14 but the adult hoppers I came across in Barkly East and Rhodes were about a size 12 and often had a flash of red in the legs or wings. However, once you started adding bead chain eyes and lead wire, size 16 weighted hoppers become more difficult to tie.

Rubber legs will create movement. That movement can be increased by using Stephen Boshoff's 'Light Bulb Legs' idea – a small blob of UV resin on the tip of the leg which creates a pendulum effect, increasing the droop of the leg and giving water currents more surface area to activate. The legs will incorporate an element of orange, a proven trigger on these flies.

Soft, stretchable materials are a boon to fly tyers because, simply by increasing or reducing tension, you can control the dimensions of the fly and on this one I have used Hareline UV Chewee Skin for the body. In olive or tan it is ideal. You could also try Hareline's Scud Back, natural latex sheet or Veniard's tungsten sheet for the body.

The bead chain eyes are plastic because I want this fly to stay close to the surface and these are available in shops that sell Venetian blinds and curtain materials.

For the legs I have combined different thicknesses of barred latex legs, which are translucent, using orange and olive. They and the Micro Krystal Flash antennae are weighted with drops of UV resin at the tips to create a 'cantilever bounce'.

Here's my attempt at a somewhat different approach to hopper design and the goal is to get it to sink just a few centimeters below the water surface because that's what drowned hoppers do.



My first attempt to create a lightly-weighted, barely-submerged hopper pattern

As Gary Borger says in his 1991 book, *'Designing Trout Flies'*: ***'Those big hind legs push well away from the body and become a prominent, unique feature. When seen from underwater, the distinctive angle of those big kickers makes the insect look bow-legged.'***

I bar the rubber materials by holding the strand against a cotton ear bud and then touching it with a permanent marker.

I use a 1x fine TMC 101 straight eye hook in size ten because it gives me the tying space I need and because my friend, professional fly tyer Jan Korrubel, says bigger hoppers intimidate the tiddlers.

My thread of choice is Veevus 16/0 in fluorescent green because it is thin and strong and the colour might be a trigger. UCT Ultra Thread 70 Denier in fluo green would be an alternative.

For weight I use Hends or Veniard flat lead tied beneath the hook shank - but keep in mind that this is a theoretical design and you might want to use metal bead chain for the eyes if more weight is needed to slightly submerge the fly.

Dressing

Hook - TMC 101 # 10

Thread - Veevus 16/0 or UTC 70 denier in fluo green

Weight - Hends or Veniard flat lead beneath the hook shank

Eyes - Small plastic or brass bead chain – black

Antennae - Hareline Daddy Long Legs in tan or olive barred with a permanent marker or Micro Krystal Flash. A small dot of UV light-cured resin is placed at the end of the antennae

Body - Hareline UV Chewee Skin in olive or tan

Legs - Two diameters of rubber. A small dot of UV light-cured resin is placed at the joint and tip of the leg

Wing - Wapsi Thin Skin

I start by attaching the antennae, barring them with a permanent marker and then attach the UV resin + purple glitter dust 'light bulb'. This might need several small applications, curing each one to create the correct size.

The plastic bead chain eyes are attached to the bottom of the hook shank and so is the flat lead.

Tie in a tapered strip of Chewee Skin at the hook bend and wind forward in overlapping turns to create a body which tapers towards the rear. End the body a few millimeters behind the eyes leaving space for the rubber legs and Wapsi Thin Skin to be attached.

After tying in the legs, place a tiny drop of superglue at this point to anchor the wing being careful not to get any on the antennae or legs because it will shrivel them.

Place a few turns of thread over the wing to anchor it and apply another drop of superglue before whip finishing at this point.

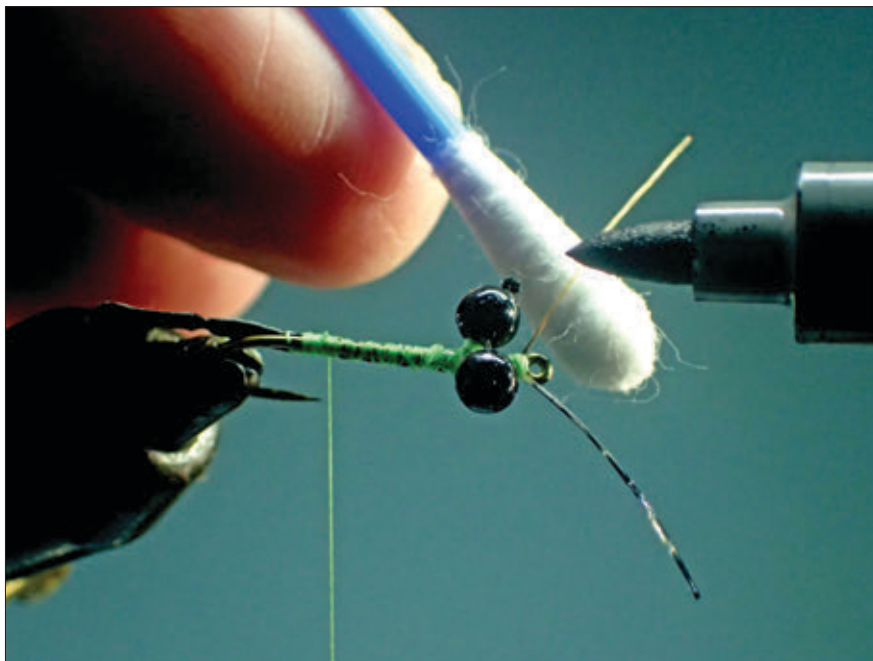


To enhance the movement of the fly in the water, I believe it is imperative when attaching it to the tippet to use a loop knot. The Lefty Kreh Non-Slip Loop Knot was difficult for me, so I just used a Perfection Loop, covering it well with Loon Knot Sense before tightening. I would anchor the hook in the stripper guide which left both hands free to gently tighten the nylon until the loop was the correct size.

(L) Sunken Hoppers being tied by Jan Korrubel, chairman of the Natal Fly Dressers Society. The lead wire beneath the hook shank is obvious

In the past, I loved the subtlety of fishing sunken beetles in spring and little copper wire ants for the rest of the season using a small yarn strike indicator and a greased hi-vis leader.

I now regret that I did not follow Gary LaFontaine's advice and try the sunken hopper as well. All I had to do was put a split shot on the tippet ahead of my early foam rubber hopper which were based on the balsa wood MacMurray Ant and which proved to be very successful...



Mottling the antennae on a sinking hopper before adding the UV resin 'light bulb' tips

The sunken hopper was first tried by Ian Cox and Jan Korrubel at the annual Rhodes Wild Trout Association Festival – Ian Cox caught a trout that would not fit into his 32-inch net and Jan Korrubel was broken by what he described as the most savage strike he has experienced in decades of stream fishing. Gary LaFontaine was right.

When hoppers are most effective

The best time to fish hoppers is late autumn when they reach maximum size and begin mating and laying eggs. I covered this in Chapter 12 – 'Terrestrials – a Seasonal Rationale.'

My theory is that hoppers prefer crops like lucerne to indigenous grass species which probably contain protective toxins and, when I see White Storks diligently pecking their way through a lucerne field close to the riverbank, I believe that fishing a hopper, floating or sinking, in that area, is the correct approach.

Hoppers reach maturity and maximum size in autumn which is when the storks are preparing to migrate to Europe and the UK to breed so, for the storks, this is a happy coincidence and, for the anglers, a welcome portent of good fishing.





Ed Herbst Biography

Ed Herbst became an angler as a toddler when his widowed mother took him by bus to Durban harbour where, fishing from a pier, he hooked a rock cod.

Subsequently his angling progressed from fishing local rivers with bait to spin-fishing dams for bass. Then, when he was in his mid-thirties, his employer, the television news section of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, transferred him to Cape Town and he was able to join the Cape Piscatorial Society.

His rise to prominence as a fly angler was a consequence of his ability as a communicator, a skill he shared with his best friend, the late Dr Tom Sutcliffe - as numerous online articles attest.

In his mid-seventies a rare neurological disease (CIDP) affected his balance and put an end to wading small streams, the only facet of fly angling that appealed to him.

His role in promoting fly fishing was recognised when he was appointed president of the CPS and vice president of a lobby group, the Federation of South African Fly Fishers (FOSAF). He curates the articles archive of the CPS, an important historical and literary resource.

While he continued, after retiring as a TV news reporter, to writing online articles on the interface between media and politics, his discovery of Instagram — @ed_herbst346 — and the writing of this book, took precedence.

Reviews

The Delicate Fly Fisher is special and unique in many ways. It started as chapters available on the public web-page of the Cape Piscatorial Society. Ed – true to his nature – sharing his knowledge and what he loves so much generously and for free.

Then, in its focus, it is undoubtedly the most in-depth work on small stream fly fishing in the Cape and South Africa generally, perhaps even world-wide. In approach, it reflects Ed's occupation as investigative journalist, the importance of continuous exploration, learning, and small innovations.

Whether the rod, fly, or fisher's clothing, nothing escaped Ed's attention. Rooted in insights gained from decades of experience on local beats as well as prolific reading and study of texts from elsewhere — both old and new —The Delicate Fly Fisher's approach may benefit fly fishers generally, whatever the species they pursue or nature of their water.

- Stephen Boshoff, internationally-renowned split cane rod builder

“Ed Herbst began his fly-fishing in the Cape streams in the 80's and his contribution to the sport since then has been enormous. Ed has edited the internationally accredited 'Piscator' for many years, has contributed selflessly to the training of people entering the sport and has championed fly fishing in the public media.

His work for the CPS and FOSAF is legend and it is unlikely that there is any other fly fisher with Ed's academic knowledge. He is one of the great personalities in South African fly fishing.”

- Citation written by Tom Sutcliffe — 22nd April 2004



The Delicate Fly Fisher



"For years I have followed the writings of Ed Herbst as he shared his wealth of knowledge, espousing his passion and love for light line, small stream, trout fly fishing. His work and our serendipitous friendship fuelled the growth of my own interests in this direction, as it did with many other fly fishers. Sadly, Ed has not been able to fish now for a number of years due to a debilitating medical condition. However, this did not diminish his enthusiasm, and he continues to widen his already extensive knowledge, especially creative fly design, and experimentation. The Delicate Fly Fisher is a culmination of a lifetime of his understanding, research, practical experience, and a significant contribution to fly fishing and small streams in particular."

- Peter Brigg, author of *Call of the Stream*, who runs a website of the same name. In 2017 he co-authored with Ed Herbst the book on South African indigenous fly patterns, *South African Fishing Flies*.