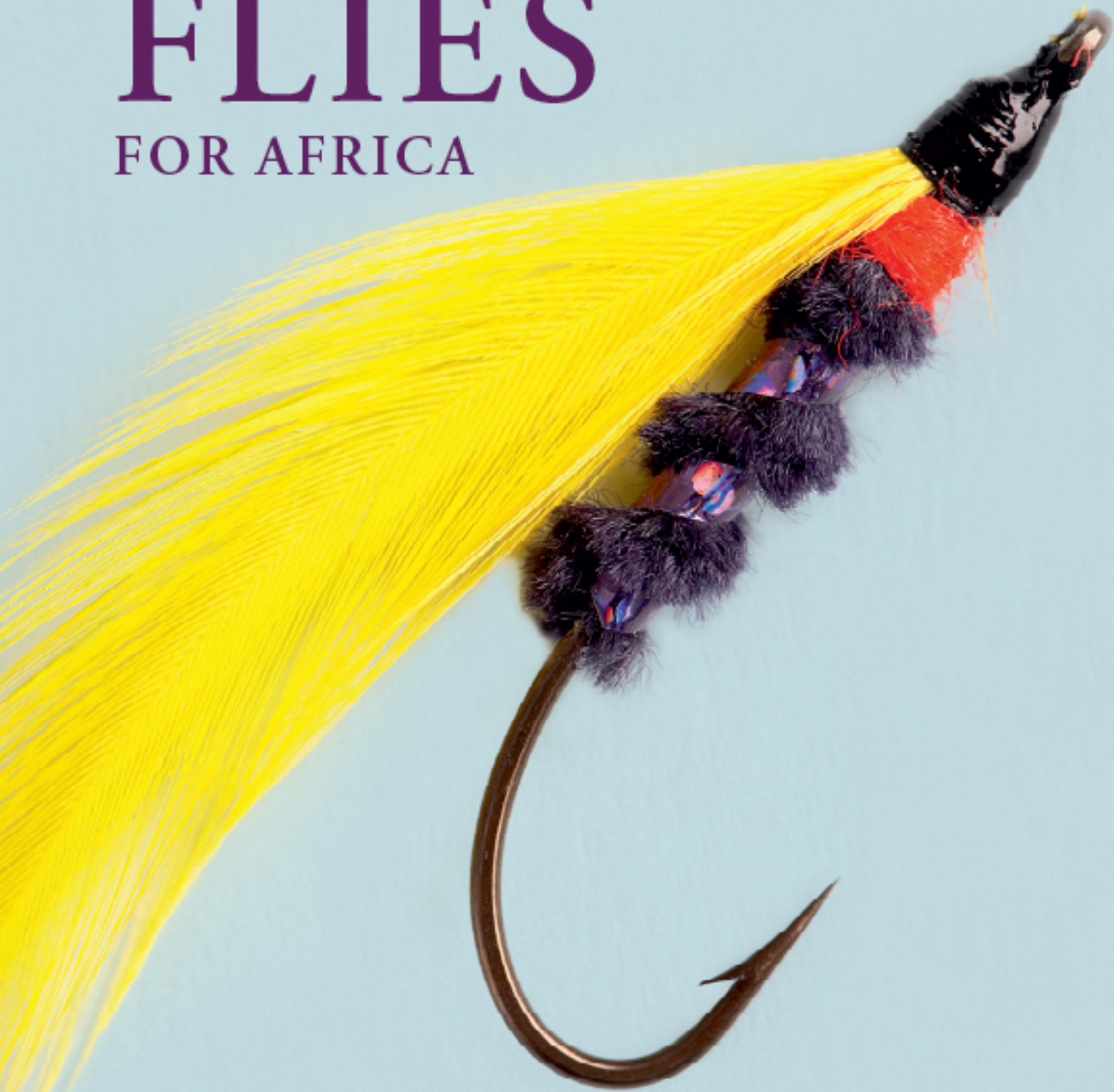


FISHING FLIES

FOR AFRICA



A Comprehensive Guide to Freshwater and Saltwater Flies

BILL HANSFORD-STEELE

FISHING FLIES FOR AFRICA



DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Roger (Steve) Stephens, the best fly-tying guru, my fly-fishing mentor, and life-long friend.

BILL HANSFORD-STEELE

FOREWORD

My fondest memories of William Hansford-Steele stem from a trip we took to the Bazaruto Archipelago in the early 1990s. Fishing out of the old Bazaruto Lodge, our party also included Mark Yelland and Jan de Beer. Even way back then Bill was well known in the South African fly-fishing fraternity, among other things for having caught the largest trout up to that point. In the company of such luminaries, I was sure that I was going to experience something extraordinary - and indeed I did. However, it did not relate to the fishing.

We were taking fish on almost every cast, so the action was hectic - but when I stopped to take a breather and looked around, Bill was nowhere to be seen. I finally caught a glimpse of him just before he disappeared into the dune forest, running around like a crazed person. He was brandishing something above his head, and for the life of me I could not figure out what it was. The mystery was later explained - it turned out to be a butterfly net; he was chasing butterflies for his collection! As I have found out over the years, there is a lot more to Bill Steele than meets the eye.

Hailing from Sussex, England, he learnt trout fishing from his fish-crazy father at the age of seven, spent his youth fishing, obtained his education, and took a job as a missile engineer with Hawker Siddeley Dynamics. He immigrated to South Africa in 1969, and his first exposure to African trout followed soon after. 1972 saw him catching tigers on fly and '73 getting into saltwater fly-fishing, followed by yellowfish in '78 (one of his favourite species to target on fly). While he loves fishing for almost anything with fins and is very experienced in most disciplines, he remains to this day true to his roots - a trout fisherman. Bill later bought a tackle store (for which, incidentally, Murray Pedder tied flies in the early 1980s). Fishing became his life, writing his passion, and the rest (as we know), is history.

If you are from our part of the world, you probably know Bill from his other books. These include *African Fly-Fishing Handbook* - for many the definitive work on fly fishing for trout and other species found on the African continent. This book took 13 years to come to fruition, and the second edition (which had 40% new content) took another four years to complete. Both

have become classics, and rightly so in my opinion. Bill is undoubtedly one of the most knowledgeable fly-fishermen I know, and his skills with the long rod need no expounding upon. But did you know that he also holds qualifications in Zoology, Applied Physics and Electronics?

When I asked Bill what his latest book was all about, the reply was unhesitating: 'Flies!' The concept for the book stemmed from a meeting with Ron Clay one day in his shop in 1985. Ron had come in and inquired about the availability of **Yarrow Yellows** (a South African pattern) and how to tie them. Having never heard of these, Bill was baffled, but later managed to obtain a moth-eaten example. However, notwithstanding extensive research, he learned that its history was forever lost - as he discovered to be the case with about 20 other South African patterns. This instilled in him the desire to record local patterns for prosperity. The list grew and grew and now, 25 years later, we have a definitive record, thanks to Bill.

Apart from identifying South African patterns and describing how they evolved, discussing European, American and Australasian influences and a historic overview of African fly-fishing, this is also a fly-tyers book, containing recipes, suggested alternative materials (Bill is very eco-conscious), how to dye materials, useful tying tips and essential components. Also included are African derivatives of salmon flies, and a chapter on collecting and framing flies (something I found particularly interesting). In keeping with the style of his previous books, Bill has done extensive research to ensure historic correctness, and it shows.

South Africa's fly-fishing history spans more than a century. We are a proud nation, particularly fond of fly-fishing, and deserve to have its history recorded. This book has done that - and so much more. It is a must-read for any serious fly-fisher interested not only in how things came about, but also in which local flies work best and how to tie and fish them. Bill Hansford-Steele has done a lot for South African fly fishing, and his latest offering forever earns him a place in my Fly-Fishers' Hall of Fame. Thank you, Bill.

PJ JACOBS


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INTRODUCTION

'I have seene a younge flie swimme in the water too and fro . . . , hath in the ende within some halfe houre after taken her flyte, and flyde quite away into the ayre, and of such young flies before they are able to flie away, do ffish feed exceedingly.'

JOHN TAVERNER, 1600

Fishing Flies for Africa is a book about practical fly-fishing and the history of African fly-fishing, a sourcebook of fly patterns, and a vade mecum of techniques associated with African fly dressings, and with flies used in Africa from around the world.

Wherever you live in the world, this book opens the doors to the almost-unknown world of African flies and their history. Many of these flies will work in any country just as well as in Africa, thus offering the cosmopolitan fly-tyer a whole new world to explore.

This book embraces the angler's flies from the Atlas Mountains in the north to Cape Town in the south, and all of Africa in-between. It cannot possibly record every fly ever tied in Africa, since many are ephemeral – creations of a moment and long since gone – and many have never got further than a few lines in the press and a quick demise. Some, although known by name, have simply disappeared. The flies covered in this book are those which have carved a name for themselves in the annals of African fly-fishing, or have grafted themselves to a particularly important part of African fly-fishing history, or are just plain loved.

A reference book of this nature will also inevitably reflect the author's own impressions, tastes, and beliefs gathered through a lifetime of fly-fishing. This book covers flies across a broad spectrum from the early 1800s right up to modern times. It includes the flies from elsewhere in the world which have been an essential part of this history, but most of all it includes the flies which have been distilled out of African fly-fishing and which are unique to this wonderful continent. I believe that all of the important and interesting flies are here, together with an entire landscape of significant patterns. Regrettably, as a result of space restrictions, some less significant patterns were dropped in the final manuscript, however, there are very few of these. South African poppers will form the basis of a new book to be published in the future.

Each fly is dealt with in terms of its development, its history, its dressing, and how to use it. Wherever necessary, old and ancient materials are discussed, together with suitable substitutions to enable the fly to be re-created using modern materials. Additional notes on the design of the fly and/or its tying process have also been included where applicable. Flies from other countries are often locally modified in Africa, and these changes are noted wherever they have occurred. Additionally, the popularity of each fly, from its inception to its eventual end or its continuing life, is recorded.

The flies which are so loved by fly-fishers are regarded by many as a great deal more than something to knot to the end of a tippet. Many fly-tyers have become collectors of flies, and many have become collectors of fly-tying materials. Both of these fascinating facets of fly-fishing are covered here. Methods for mounting,

preserving and storing flies, together with framing and labelling techniques, have become important criteria for the fly-collector. Frames of mounted flies representing a specific historic interest, or perhaps a developmental history, maybe a group of similar patterns, a thematic collection, or just something of great beauty, are now fetching large sums of money. Thus, not only are they of great interest to the tyer, but even the man in the street may well want a mounted frame of flies on his study wall. All the necessary techniques for both collecting and for framing are here. That surprising development for some – the man who ties or collects flies, but never fishes – is an expanding reality. Perhaps this book then is a first, in that it caters for the practical angler, the pure fly-tyer, and everyone in-between.

The illustrations of flies will at first glance appear to vary in the quality of tying. The reader should remember that, wherever possible, original flies have been used. These may have been tied by their inventors, perhaps by commercial companies, or found in old collections. These flies are supported by some custom-tied flies, and some tied by the author and other fly-fishers. Thus, a broad spectrum of tying standards is illustrated here.

Fly-tying materials have been a bone of contention between fly-dressers and wildlife preservation campaigners for perhaps a century-and-a-half . . . maybe longer. There is no doubt that the fly-dresser, together with hat- and dressmakers, furriers and ornamentalists, had a major and unsavoury impact on the world's wildlife, especially from the mid-1800s through to the 1950s. Today, with the coming of synthetic materials, the husbandry of domestic birds and animals, and sustainable hunting practices, there remains no real reason for fly-tying to have any impact at all on wildlife stocks. Almost every ingredient of even the most ancient trout and salmon fly patterns may be substituted with materials that have zero impact. The aviculturist and the gamebird breeder have become of increasing importance; the provision of feathers from aviary-bred stock ensures both a minimal influence on wild birds, and a continuing supply of once-rare materials. The proliferation of purpose-bred, so-called genetic plumage means that many materials are easily substituted with domestic bird feathers. Furs are readily substituted with a range of synthetic materials which often have a really broad-based capability, often better than the original fur. The age of the 100% synthetic fly has already begun.

Thus, this book takes a serious look at materials and their substitution. In fact, each individual fly has suggested substitutions where needed, and a whole chapter is devoted to the substitution of both fur and feather.

The history of African fly-fishing is also recounted here. Fly-fishing as we know it was inexorably linked with the introduction of trout to South Africa, but perhaps not so well known is that people were

angling with the fly long before that. Indeed, there were not many of them, and they fished only for yellowfish and springer for the most part, but these were men who would set out among lion and elephant and brave all kind of dangers just to cast their fur and feather concoctions to the denizens of Africa's pristine rivers.

There are great names in the crucible of African fly-fishing, men and some women who designed flies to meet a water lore understood by only a few. Among these are anglers such as Spranger Harrison, who in the 1930s designed many flies which are still in use today. These were flies especially for Africa, flies which set high standards and, from all accounts, flies which caught plenty of fish. Bertie Bennion wrote his great works in the 1920s, and here are tales of trophy yellows, trout and others ... all taken on the fly. Bennion wrote in a time when trout had been around for many years, but carp, bass and many other non-indigenous fish had not yet been introduced to African waters, or were just beginning to appear. This was a time when streams ran crystal clear, when for example the then-Transvaal's Klip River was pure enough to drink from, and when the impact of trout fishing was still embryonic.

Before the coming of these pioneers, much of African trout fishing orientated around British flies and British methods. Most flies were imported from Britain along with tackle and technology. Only in the 1920s did Africa begin to develop its own methods and its own flies. In the 1930s the Americans began to influence African fly patterns and by the 1970s they were having a massive impact on both patterns and methods. In the 1950s the New Zealand flies began a history of success in Africa, which continues to this day. All these influences and the strengthening thread of Africa's own fly development intertwined to bring us up to where we are today. Modern African flies and techniques can stand with any others in the world, and perhaps we in Africa have the added advantage of offering commensurate fishing to the highest of standards for trout, bass, and indigenous fish. In saltwater the African fly-fisher has few equals, and although historically it began with the imitation of American patterns, today many African-designed flies are as good as any in the world.

The pursuit of indigenous fish took a great leap forward in the 1980s. Today the number of anglers hunting yellowfish is huge and rapidly catching up with trout anglers. Men like Turner Wilkinson and Horst Filter have brought yellowfish on the fly to everyone who can handle a fly rod. Elsewhere, the pursuit of indigenous African sport-fish, including the tigerfish, Nile perch, and rhino fish, offers exceptional sport for the fly-rodder. Anglers fly in from all corners of the world to experience the African adventure, and to wrestle with its mighty gamefish. Along with this expansion into indigenous fishing has come a whole plethora of specialist fly patterns and techniques. Yellowfish flies are rapidly writing their own history, and many of the resultant patterns are to be found in these pages.

Throughout this book, the assumption is made that the reader is a practising angler, and thus basic fly-fishing terms, methods, and entomology are not necessarily described in detail. Any reader requiring more information is referred to the author's companion work, *African Fly-fishing Handbook*, also published by Struik.

NAMING OF FLIES

Some say that there are so many changes to existing fly patterns that the delineation between patterns is fading. The message is that a defined pattern no longer exists. I do not agree with this philosophy at all, and I firmly believe that it is up to us to preserve and record the original patterns in their original states. Some patterns could be seen to come close to merging, as for example the hypothetical adding of a green butt to a **Muddler** and calling it a **Viva Muddler**. But then, in my view, it means that we have three patterns (including the original **Viva**) instead of just two, not a merging into one, and that each should be recorded as such.

There is a strong tendency today to change/improve standard patterns. There is nothing wrong with that, but to add personal names to them, as for example commonly found in the huge range of **Lefty's Deceivers**, is improper. Most of these tyers have renamed flies simply to insert their names into the existing names of often-important flies, to which they in reality have no claim whatsoever. To me this is unethical. If you discover a new fly, by all means name it as you see fit, but do not name other tyers' efforts after yourself. Many such flies are not new, and are properly seen as modifications of an existing pattern. The better known and respected modifications to existing flies are recorded in this book, a practice I trust will continue to be implemented by other authors in the future.

Finally, beware the 'expert' angler, but do listen to the wise. There is no such thing as an expert in fly-fishing or fly-tying. In fact, the magic of both is the result of striving for this expertise, something which can never quite be achieved. Around every bend is more to be discovered, and more to be learnt.

AN IMPORTANT CONSERVATION MESSAGE

Along with the great sport of fly-fishing, let us not forget that the preservation of all rivers and waters across the globe is just as essential to maintaining human life as it is to saving our fisheries. Global warming, the great destroyer and evil of this greedy world, still continues unchecked. Global dimming, the diminishing of the sun's rays which reach the surface of the planet, is also having a measurable effect and, along with plastics and other dreadful pollution, is threatening to destroy the world we know. The poles are beginning to melt, there are holes in the ozone layer, and the flow of the Gulf Stream is weakening, threatening the entire climate of Europe. If allowed to increase unabated, all of this could eventually wipe out humankind!

All of us must unite to stop this destruction of our environment. Behind this all are the great industrialists, the uncaring governments, and those with megabucks earned from filth and no care for the future. It's not too late, but it is nearly so! As I write this, a wave of bacteria and sewerage has swept down through the beautiful Vaal River in South Africa, killing fish as it goes. The authorities hope, as always, that it will be flushed through and forgotten. No individual or group has been punished for the crime, and it is just a matter of time before it happens again, perhaps even sickening or killing those who drink this fouled water. Potential hazards like this cannot, and must not be allowed to continue. Such vile contribution, although minor on a global scale, might well one day be the straw that breaks the planet's back and thrusts us all into oblivion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book of this nature, spreading across the life of one individual, is bound to have been influenced by a virtual army of like-minded anglers. Many teachers of the art, great fly-tyers, superb fly-fishers, and simply splendid people have contributed in ways they never dreamt of to bring together the essence of this book. In particular, I would especially like to thank the following:

The late **William JJ Hansford-Steele**, my father. He put the first greenheart fly rod in my hand, tied on the first **Olive Dun**, and let me loose on the wild trout of the Sussex Rother at the age of seven. Without him, none of this manuscript would have happened.

Steve Stephens, a lifelong friend and probably the finest fly-tyer I have ever known, was my principal teacher in my early 20s, setting me on the right path, correcting a maze of self-taught errors, and developing a lateral mode of thinking that embraced the whole of nature including the fish, the insects, and the mysteries of tying. Steve reviewed this entire text, making many important comments and providing much advice. He was instrumental in tracking down the ancient British salmon patterns which came to Africa, and the history of many patterns originating in Europe. This book is dedicated to him – a small token for giving me a life of informed fishing.

Angelo Komis is a superb angler, brilliant tactical theorist, and most importantly a talented inventor and tyer of flies. He is one of the real characters of the African fly-fishing scene, and freely gives of his encyclopaedic knowledge of fly-fishing.

Anne Anderson kindly gave me free access to her two fly collections, which contain many important flies from the 1960s. Anne is a special lady with a great love of fly-fishing.

Arno Laubscher of Scientific Fly (also known as SciFly), based in South Africa, supplied locally distributed African materials for fly-tying and photography, and also considerable expertise through his range of 'Grip' hooks.

Barry Kent arrived in Africa about the same time as I did. A pivotal point in my fly-tying occurred later, when I first met him at Dullstroom in 1970. He became a great friend, wonderful fishing companion, and a much-respected creative thinker in all walks of fly-fishing. Barry opened High Flies in the then-Transkei, and eventually moved on to America to spend, as he said, 'a life steeped in fly-fishing'. His influence on African flies was enormous and can still be felt to this day.

Chad Hubbard, owner of Bluewater Flies, has proven a solid support throughout this project. Chad supplied many flies and a great deal of locally based advice. Bluewater Flies produces some of the finest flies in the world, and I consider it a privilege to have been supported by a person of his calibre. Chad reviewed the entire text and made many valuable contributions.

Chris Ficq has a collection of flies passed down through a great many years, and which I was privileged to examine. Much information was freely given by Chris, who remains a formidable fly-fisher in his own right.

Don Lort. A great friend and sorely missed, Don died in 1994. He was a prolific fly-inventor, great angler, and excellent instructor. Many hours were spent with Don exploring ancient patterns and resurrecting them from old collections and manuscripts. Don was a master of blending furs, but is perhaps remembered most for his remarkable skills fishing with tiny nymphs, and his amazing and beautiful photography.

Hairy Fairy Flies' **Brian Peterson**, who died in 2006, built a fly-manufacturing business which every fly-fisher in Africa has been touched by at some time. Through Brian's flies, he also preserved many historical dressings, and developed a great many exceptional patterns himself. He was one of the special people who motivated me to write fly-fishing books, and was possessed of an in-depth knowledge of fly-tying. His son Michael carries on this fine tradition. Michael is a great angler and a warm-natured, helpful person. We all owe much to their company, which started many beginners down the road to success through their broad range of flies.

Louis van der Westhuizen. I can look back on 35 years of privileged friendship with this master fly-fisherman. Louis has a great and generous spirit, which he has shared with hundreds of anglers throughout his life. He has a special kind of wisdom about him, and has developed many flies and methods of fly-fishing, all of which have added value to every South African fly-fisher's arsenal.

Malcolm Meintjes has an old-fashioned mind when it comes to flies, and has ensured the continuation of many an old pattern which might well have disappeared without his support. He is also a prolific writer and fly-designer of considerable skill. Many local African patterns have been developed by him. He is less well known for his important work teaching fly-fishing and guiding to the young of less privileged communities. Many of these young people move on to solid fly-fishing guiding careers.

Marc Courtiade contributed to the tying of some of the more obscure patterns, and remains a rich source of information on the flies favoured by the younger generation of today. He fishes anywhere and everywhere with total enthusiasm, reminding me much of my own youth and total dedication to fly-fishing.

Mark Yelland, probably Africa's finest fly-fisher, possesses the highest level of skills in all aspects of fly-fishing. Here is a gentleman who has given freely of his advice for this book, and has been especially helpful in the development of modern and very recent patterns. He has also been a mine of information and supplied contacts for researching elusive and difficult patterns. Many commercially tied flies pictured here were supplied by Mark.

Mike Salomon, in the 1970s and 1980s, would invite a continually changing group of fly-tyers to a regular evening at his home. I was privileged to be one of these, and there, between glasses of good red wine and friendly banter, many wonderful flies were created while planning a good few trips to the then-Eastern Transvaal. Mike is noted for his considerable skill in fly design.

Mohammed Mia of Mia's Sports, with his magnificent shop at Woodmead in Johannesburg, has been extremely generous and a staunch supporter of this book. He provided many of the original

flies and materials used here for photography. I first met Mohammed in his early teens when he was working for his late father, Cassim, and supplying many of the goods for my own shop. Over the years, Mohammed has been an essential and enthusiastic supporter of my fishing and my books, and has also been a great and valued friend.

Murray Peddar. I first knew Murray when he was in his early teens and already tying flies that most would envy. His mentor was Terry Ruane, a master of the art and responsible for many dressings in his own right. Through his many articles, Murray continues to show us all how it should be done. Many flies tied by him are illustrated in this work, and demonstrate his remarkable skill at the fly-tying vice.

PJ Jacobs is the owner and editor of *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, a magazine dedicated to African fly-fishing and one with its finger on the pulse of worldwide fly-fishing. PJ has published many articles on locally developed flies through the years, often releasing the first information on new patterns. His magazine is an essential component of any African fly-fisher's arsenal. Special thanks must go to PJ for writing the foreword – an honour indeed from a fly-fisher of his calibre.

Ron Clay conjures up a picture in my memory of him creeping along the banks, using cover wherever he could, and all the while camouflaged in a Barbour jacket of ancient origin. Ron could winkle fish out of the most unlikely corners, and is a great fly-tyer, designer, and angler, always in the middle of debate, and always catching fish. He did much to influence African fly-tying. Ron read through the text, and proffered much useful advice.

Steve Barrow is a man who can bring to bear immense concentration and dedication to his fly-fishing. One of the best fly-tyers in Africa, he can produce dry flies as good as any. Steve has been a fine angling friend, and was a fellow instructor at Trout Hideaway for many years. Steve is noted for his resurrection of old, British North Country patterns which he used to great effect in African streams.

Yousuf and Mahmood Vaid, owners of the Blue Shop in Dullstroom, supplied access to their fly collection and were especially helpful with old, African salmon flies. 'Joe' Vaid has been a friend since 1970; he is a legend among the Mpumalanga fly-fishers, and has been a pillar of support for African fly-fishing for very many years. Many a famous angler has beaten a path to the Vaid's door, and all come away enriched with fly-fishing lore.

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Vanderbijlpark, and in particular Ridwaan Bham.

Thanks to my best buddies and fishing sons, Dale Steele and Ryan Steele, and to all those fly-fishers who have fished and tied flies with me throughout the last 60 years.

Thanks, too, to all the fly-designers, past and present, whose magnificent flies are recorded here. By their efforts, they have become part of an African craft which is now recorded for the benefit of those who will tie flies and make their way to the water in the future. Also, these are the fly-tyers who through their endeavours become real participants in African fly-fishing history.

Special thanks goes to Struik Publishing, and in particular **Linda de Villiers** for making the publication of this book possible, **Joy Clack** for advice, encouragement, and help with content, **Beverley Dodd** for design expertise and guidance, and especially my editor, **Anthony Sharpe**, for professionalism and dedication.

CHRISSE

Finally, and most importantly, my wife, Christina, who supports me constantly in my writing, fishes with me, and challenges me at every turn. She is at the core of this book, and through her unfailing encouragement and love, has enabled me to bring it to life.

Lastly, the opinions given in this book are mine alone and may be disagreed with in whole or in part by other authorities or persons. Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of content, there may be errors or omissions inadvertently included herein. Anyone noting errors or omissions should feel free to contact the editor for inclusion and correction in future editions of this book.

FLY-TYERS' INITIALS

Arch	Archival
AA	Anne Anderson
AK	Angelo Komis
AT	Author
CH	Chad Hubbard
Coll	Ex collection
CT	Commercial
DL	Don Lort
JA	Jean Anstee
LVDW	Louis van der Westhuizen
MC	Marc Courtiade
MM	Malcolm Meintjes
MP	Murray Peddar
MY	Mark Yelland
NOJ	Nolan Owen-Johnstone
PDB	Philip de Beer
R Cr	Rod Cross
RC	Ron Clay
RS	Ryan Steele
SDB	Scot de Bruyn
SB	Steve Barrow
SS	Steve Stephens
WA	Wolf Avni



1. A HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN FLY AND FLY-FISHING DEVELOPMENT

*How little does he know of angling who has merely fished the preserved
streams of fat and prosperous England.*

DR KNOX, 1854

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER THAT AFRICA'S FLY-fishing, and the flies of Africa, owe their birth to ancient fly-tying development in Europe and in particular the British Isles. Although trout were not introduced anywhere in Africa until the very late 1800s, fly-fishing was nevertheless practised by a few even as early as the late 1700s. Their quarry was the indigenous yellowfish of the South African Western and Eastern Cape streams and in particular the whitefish, or witte visch as it was better known then. In Natal, the scalie became the main target, and as fly-fishing spread to the then-Transvaal, the smallmouth yellowfish as well as the largemouth yellowfish (known then as the silver fish) were the main attractions. The very few who practised 'yellowfish on the fly' were confined to English fly patterns, and there is no evidence of any yellowfish flies being developed locally in those early days. Not so well known is the fact that the early settlers spent much time angling for springer (*Elops machnata* – initially, in 1800, believed to be a freshwater fish), and that some of these were taken in rivers on fly. There is one recorded case of an angler taking 150 springer to 3 lb (approx. 1.5 kg) in one day in the Fish River. Springer were frequently taken in that river up to 50 miles from the coast. The springer was traditionally 'ground-baited' before fishing commenced. They were considered to be natural eaters of flying ants/termites, thus this pre-baiting was often achieved by heaving an entire termite colony into the water.

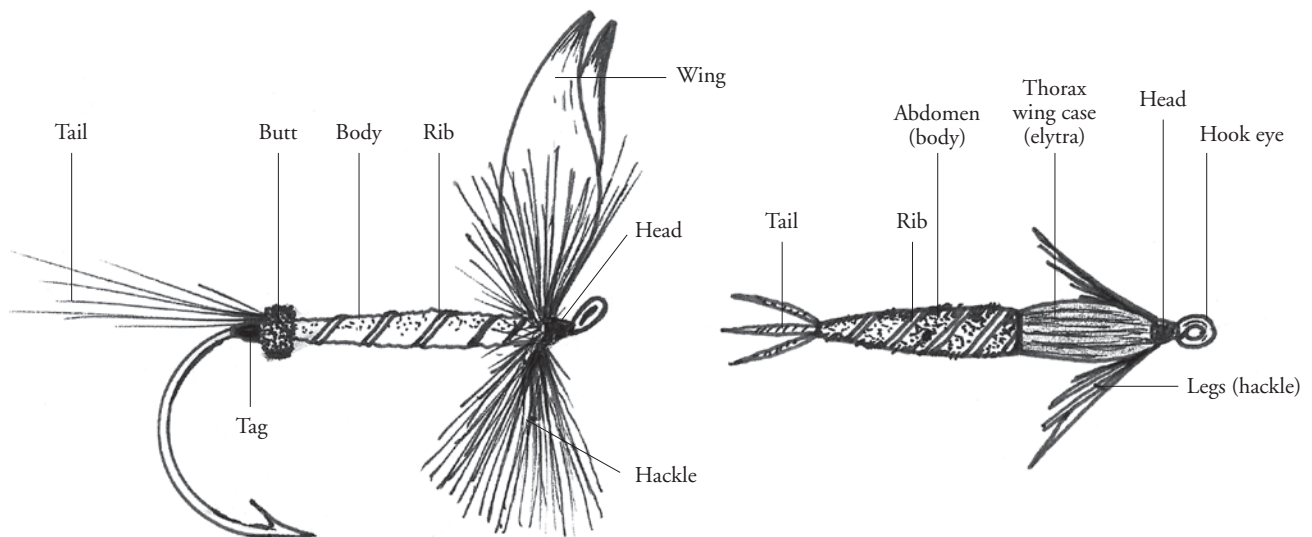
Costs of fly-fishing in the 1800s were, comparatively, extremely high, and without a doubt this was the enforcing economic factor which ensured the lasting snobbery associated with 'a gentleman's sport'. Flies were certainly not cheap and one Irish advertisement ran as follows:

Salmon Flies from 6/- (six shillings) per dozen
Lake and Sea-Trout Flies from 2/6d (two shillings and six pence) per dozen
Brown Trout Flies from 1/6d per dozen.

Seems cheap? Not really ... the average Irish boatman's wage at that time was 1/6d per day.

Similarly, in England in the 1870s, the cost of salmon flies was 1/6d to 2/6d each, in a country where a boatman earned as little as 3/6d per week. Thus, from a working man's point of view, each fly was a colossal sum of money, and a week's wages would purchase only three of the cheaper salmon flies.

These were days when pioneering miners in Africa thought nothing of stocking the table with a stick of dynamite, or in some cases actually hunting down big yellowfish and barbel (catfish) with the rifle. The gentle art of fly-fishing was thus viewed with some distrust by the average man of the time, and was of little interest to anyone not brought up with a rod. However, by the beginning of the 1900s, all the non-rod fish-catching processes had been outlawed and freshwater fish were to be taken 'fairly by rod and line'. In fact, the 'Fish Preservation Ordinance No. 10' was drawn up in 1921 in the then-Transvaal, and much of modern fish protection law is still orientated around that. However, there has never been any kind of closed season for fish, other than for trout in South Africa, which is quite the opposite to Europe where most fish species enjoy closed season protection. The closed season for trout in Africa has traditionally been from April to September, but in the early 1970s this was done away with, and closed seasons no longer exist other than voluntarily.



Parts of a dry fly

Parts of a nymph (from above)



Trout and their flies came to Africa in the last of the great sailing ships and black-smoked iron steamers of the 19th century. However, apart from the fish themselves, not much else of fly-fishing interest came out on clipper ships or steamers throughout the 1800s, and almost all the flies in use on the continent at that time had been purchased in England and brought out in the personal possessions of immigrants. No fly-tyers of the time are known or recorded, and tying one's own was probably not practised in Africa until around 1900, and even then by very few individuals.

By Bertie Bennion's time, some 20 years later (his main literary work came out in 1923), the choice of flies had proliferated and many were indeed being tied at home. The principal supplier of flies at that time was undoubtedly Hardy's of Alnwick in England, and even in those pioneer days of the early 1900s, they were prepared to tie up patterns to their African clients' requirements. Some of these flies left their names behind in articles and in the few books which have survived, but for many of them no examples remain, and we can only guess what they actually looked like. In those far-off days, fly-fishing was very much steeped in traditionalism and it seemed highly unlikely that many would step out of the accepted boundaries and create something new. Nevertheless, such a movement began around 1905 and, by 1930, many local patterns had been and were being developed.



A dressing of the Kom Gouw rendered directly to the cast, as was the practice in the late 1800s

The **Kom Gouw** (above) is regarded by most as the first fly of African design. It was a simple, brown-coloured fly, which made use of easily obtainable natural materials. Many of these materials are now difficult to acquire, but a perfectly good rendering of the dressing can be put together from alternative materials. This basic imitative dressing in traditional wet fly style is still a perfectly good fly now and, over 100 years since it was invented, there are still anglers who use it. Another very early fly was the **Kerr's Special**, which came into South Africa in 1880 in the fly box of Fred Kerr, and later became a popular pattern.

The rivers of the early pioneering days were all clean; there were no bass or carp or other exotic fish in the waters – those appeared much later. Much wildlife was still around, and in some areas large game and even lion were known to roam the riverbanks.

Bickerdyke, writing of the Great Berg River in South Africa in 1911, described the fishing of the time: 'Still later I met irideus (the rainbow) where he grows to over 1 lb, outnumbering the brown trout, which breed little but grow to 5 lb or 6 lb.'

RODS AND REELS

The first anglers did not even have the benefit of split cane rods, and most rods were turned from greenheart or lancewood, or simply cut out of the bush. These early wands were very inclined to break, immensely heavy, often very long (commonly up to 14 feet), and possessed an action that was very floppy. Nevertheless, I remember, as a child, owning one of these rods (a lady's eight-foot greenheart fly rod), which had been passed down by my grandfather and his father before him – I wish I still had it, but it disappeared in a 1980 house move. Interestingly, the rod's rings were black lacquered snake guides, and the reel fitting was brass with a sliding holder, with the whole rod lacquered in black. The tip ring was interesting, with its white porcelain insert, which, although chipped, was still functional.

In 1846 an American, Samuel Phillippe, put together the first split cane rod. It was originally made with four sections of hardened cane, and then later upgraded to six sections. The latter became the norm for all future split cane rods! Charles Orvis, Hiram Leonard and Hardy Brothers all jumped on the bandwagon. The British firm of Hardy Brothers just about stole the limelight from the Americans, and was mass-producing split cane rods in the late 1870s. These rods became famous around the world, and first came to Africa in the late 1890s. By 1910 they were in common usage in South Africa, although still rather expensive for many anglers (a Hardy 'Ideal' was five guineas in 1898 – a good month's wage for a gentleman), who had to be content with hardwood rods for a little longer until prices became more reasonable. The split cane rod not only cast further for similar effort, but weighed also a great deal less, was more durable and, because of minimal rod twist, was far more accurate. The Hardy 'Casting Club de France', for sale initially in 1887, weighed as little as 6 ounces – an astonishing feat in those days. By the end of the 1800s, the long rods of the previous century became shorter, eventually settling at around eight to nine feet, which is pretty much the standard for today.

Rods continued to take steps forward and, by the late 1950s, glass fibre rods with advantages over split cane, including cost, performance, durability and weight, began to take over. Many of the better fibreglass rods were superb compared with their cane predecessors and, by the early 1960s, were offering better casting power and more precise action. The first true fast-action rods appeared, with their greater distance capability, and became very popular, yet at the same time other specialist-designed rods such as 'Oliver's Allwater', Hardy's 'Jet' range, specialised tournament casting rods and the usually customised lead-core casters became



A typical 1950s hexagonal split cane rod (top), and a surviving example of an 'Oliver's Allwater' parabolic glass fibre rod from 1962 (bottom)

much sought after. The 'glass' rods reigned supreme through the 1960s, rapidly replacing cane, until their own demise with the coming of graphite (carbon fibre) rods in the early 1970s. Nevertheless, glass rods moved down into the cheaper bracket, and even today many a lad's or lady's first rod is made of glass fibre.

With graphite came less rod weight, greater casting power (10–15% better), and durability. I still have an early Fenwick 'lead-core casting' graphite rod, built in 1974, and it is as good today as when I purchased it.

Boron, and Kevlar rods appeared, each with their own advantages, but neither of which were able to supplant graphite, which, with improving resin development, went from strength to strength and continues to do so.



A collection of older reels. Around the 1900s the brass reels were most popular. The wooden Nottingham-style reels came later, followed by open metal reels.

By 1990, Hardy's, who continued to supply hand-built rods, reckoned that only one in 200 rods sold was split cane – the rest were graphite.

Reels, other than being extremely light today, still do follow, with few exceptions, the old, basic centre pin design popularised in the 1800s (see the photograph below, left). The originals were of brass, sometimes wood, but always heavy. Today, aluminium, and to a lesser extent magnesium, are the materials of choice. At the turn of the century it was not unusual for the same reel to serve for both course fishing and for fly-fishing. The fly line was always wound onto a dryer after use, and often removed from the reel completely.

FLY LINES

The cheaper fly lines of the 1800s were often made at home from horsehair; in Africa sometimes from cotton (there were no synthetic fibres in those days), and lines were either braided or plaited. Bickerdyke, as late as 1952, in *Angling for Game Fish*, published by Linkhouse, London, recommended a cheap line for boys with little pocket money: 'take 30 yards of twisted line; soak in boiled oil and one third varnish and allow to dry'. The oil was linseed and the varnish copal.

Other more expensive but favoured materials were plaited silk, horsehair, or mixed hair and silk. Mixed hair and silk was preferred by many fly-fishers since it was also available in tapered form, even in the 1800s. These lines were very prone to rot, but around 1870 a process was developed to impregnate silk with oils. These stronger and longer-lived lines replaced all others and became very popular. Usually they were treated with linseed



oil, a substance very likely to turn sticky in hot weather, or worse, simply to rot its way through the line if left wet as it was subsequently attacked by bacteria. Mice love linseed oil too, so I will let your imagination work out the demise of many a fly line. Every line had to be properly dried on a line dryer, involving a whole ritual that all fly-fishers went through at the end of a day's fishing.



Early fishing line from the 1920s

Dry-fly and floating-line fishing was inevitable at this time since early horsehair floating lines were actually almost impossible to sink. Silk fly lines with flies treated with mutton fat floated quite well, although a process of whipping the fly many times in the air to dry it was considered standard practice. Hardy's sold 'red deer' fat for floating flies and lines, but the biggest breakthrough was probably around 1900 with the advent of natural paraffin (kerosene) as a dry-fly floatant. Today, we would not even think of using it, since most believe the smell would drive fish away.

Those anglers with smaller incomes were limited to cheap cotton lines. These lines, by modern standards, were awful; they soaked up water and stuck to the rod, and often the line would not slide through the rings, making the casting process extremely difficult. The advent of harder, coated lines by Kingfisher changed this to a large extent. Although the care factor was ever present, at least these would slide through the rings and did not stick to the wall of the rod. Agate butt rings appeared on quality rods around 1900, and these made casting a good deal easier. Just before this, the first lines became available in tapered form, which performed much better in the air, and casting came at least somewhere near to being pleasurable. Even so, drying the line and treating it with oil was still mandatory. At the beginning of the century, primitive 'dry' floating lines designed with tapers were already around and were pivotal in the English movement toward using the dry fly.

The silk fly line reigned supreme right into the 1950s. These lines improved with time, and the later ones were really good, properly tapered lines and indeed offered a smaller diameter in tapered lines than the plastic lines that superseded them. Nevertheless, the coming of braided Terylene cores and plastic coatings ensured their eventual demise.

Plastic fly lines have also evolved to the point where today you can purchase a specialised taper for almost any purpose. The coatings are certainly more durable, and incredibly evenly placed onto the line core. In the 1970s it was not that unusual to find lumps in the plastic, even built-in twists of the core were fairly common. That old curse, 'line memory', has largely disappeared today, and the fly-fisher can confidently expect to be 'in touch' with the fly and be able to detect the faintest of bites. The latest lines have a constant stretch and sink rate along their entire length, some are almost invisible in water, and their durability is legend. The most recent developments include triangular section lines, bubble-finish outers for improved sliding, and clear lines in intermediate and floating densities (also known as slime lines).



A modern clear floating line

LEADERS

As if the old lines were not enough of a problem, the early fly-fisher also had to contend with gut leaders. Gut leaders (casts as they were then known) replaced even worse horsehair leaders as a result of the greater strength of gut. The gut leaders had their own idiosyncrasies, and one would not dare put a knot in the stuff, or attempt to remove the ever-present coils, without first soaking it for an hour or two in water (preferably warm water). The gut was easily abraded by fish teeth, and needed to be replaced from time to time. Each replacement required a soaking time, and the whole process must have been a real nuisance.



A gut box, c. 1925

It is significant to remember that some flies in the 1900s (most flies at the turn of the century) were still supplied attached to the gut (often tied as an integral part of the fly). Some of the reasoning behind ready-gutted flies was that one simply replaced leader and fly in one operation, and this approach remained popular even into the 1930s. Specialised pocket boxes and wallets were developed at this time to hold 'flies to gut', the use of which has long since disappeared.

In the 1800s, animal 'catgut' was in fact rarely used by anglers (this, by the way, was made from sheep intestines and never from cats – a story in its own right) and was largely surpassed by more expensive silkworm leaders. By the early 1900s silkworm gut was universally in use. These leaders were made from natural silkworm 'silk' and, to add confusion to the work of historians, were nevertheless universally referred to as 'gut' leaders. Silkworm silk is more durable than animal gut, it is clearer (a great aid in fly presentation) but nevertheless has similar problems to animal gut. It still breaks too easily under sudden shock, and also needs a good soak to handle it.

Leaders took a giant step forward in the early 1950s with the advent of nylon monofilament. Although much maligned at first, because knotting nylon with existing knots was very unreliable, its future was nevertheless assured. The stuff was stronger for a given diameter, quality tapers were available, it slipped through the rings with great ease, it was much less visible in the water and, once the knots were understood, its breaking strain was greatly increased. Such was the versatility of this material that a good few fly dressings call for monofilament in their recipes.

Nowadays fluorocarbon monofilament, which has a similar refractive index to water (and hence becomes invisible in water), is in common use. However, the use of this line is frowned upon by conservationists as a result of its extremely long decay life of some 3 000 years – time enough for one strand to kill many birds by getting entangled by accident around a leg, wing, or throat.

WET OR DRY FLY

Ogden is generally credited with the floating fly invention, but deliberate floating fly technique first appeared in print in Pulman's *Vade Mecum of Fly-fishing* in its 3rd edition, published in 1851. This specifically mentions fishing with a floating fly and the necessity of false casting to dry the fly. By the time trout reached Africa, dry-fly fishing was firmly established in England, and indeed the techniques and tackle came out with the first trout to arrive. However, it failed to really catch on in Africa, and wet-fly (sunken fly) fishing has always been the favoured African method, and remains so to this day. However, most modern fly-fishers can and do use dry flies at appropriate times, many specialising in this, and thus dry-fly fishing is accepted as a standard method in Africa today, although less often brought to bear than wet-fly fishing.

The oft-recommended cast (leader) in the late 1880s was three yards of fine, round, even gut. Since gut often came in shorter lengths (short lengths were cheaper) this was invariably knotted. To this gut, one was advised to attach only one fly. More could be used, but one might expect, and I quote, 'to bring one's tackle into utter grief every two or three casts'.

You can certainly say that 'the ancestral fly-fisher had to be a person of great determination and of necessity, overflowing with enthusiasm', and certainly that appears to be exactly how most of them were.

FISH INTRODUCTIONS

Bertie Bennion wrote: 'When the Voortrekkers, who shall have a capital V, became pioneers in 1835, the fish in South Africa were native fish only'. The 1820 settlers had also found these same pristine rivers, most of which contained fighting yellowfish, which could be taken with the fly. Some river netting took place, but essentially everything was clean and virtually untouched. In 1867, several keen anglers in the Cape were able to get legislative sanction for the introduction 'into the Cape Colony' of 'fishes not native to such waters'. The first imports were golden carp and dace (an introduction which failed) in 1868. But it was not until the 1880s that serious efforts to transport salmon and trout ova from England began. Yet another 12 years passed before any kind of success could be measured. Even then, aspirant fly-fishers were asked to wait a further three years to allow the fish 'to settle in'. From this small start, trout were introduced into Kenya, Nyassa (Malawi), Tanganyika (Tanzania), and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Salmon, sadly, failed to survive anywhere in Africa. The only indigenous African trout are the brown trout to be found in the Atlas Mountains of Algeria and Morocco. They are notoriously difficult to get to, and little is really known about them in terms of fly-fishing.

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN FLIES

In the mid-1400s, Dame Juliana Berners laboured away at her great work, *A Treatyse of Fysshynge Wyth an Angle*, which was eventually printed in England in 1496. Thus, a disturbing





This early Ogdens catalogue from the UK specifically lists flies for Africa among others. The cover, and also one of the pages including African flies, is shown.

precedent was set in the minds of male chauvinists, a precedent that has been forever written into history: 'a lady was the fountainhead of fishing wisdom' (ref. Larry Kohler, *Treasury of Angling*, published by Hamlyn, London 1966). So be it, but this lady was nevertheless one of the first to note the imitative association between fishing flies and insects.

By the angling writer Charles Cotton's time, in the late 1600s, the relationship between fly and insect was already well established, but the imitations were often crude. However, things took a giant step forward around 1770 when Charles Bowlker wrote the following: 'It is very necessary to take notice as you walk by the river of the particular sort of Fly that the trouts leap at, then catching one of them and having a bag of materials for that purpose, try how far art can imitate nature, and tho' you miss at first, yet by diligent observation and experience, you may soon arrive at perfection, and take a particular pleasure in Fly-making.'

Thus, fly-fishing in England entered the 1800s with imitative fly-tying already on a firm basis. It was this early basis that accounted for many of the popular flies which were developed in the UK in the century that followed, and which are still highly regarded today. However, imitative fly-fishing came to Africa

rather late, mainly because no original thought was required in the early days. Companies like Hardy Brothers, Farlows, and Ogdens put out lists of flies for African use, and in the main the fly-fishers of that time took their advice without thought and fished with the patterns suggested. They caught fish, the traditional established flies of England worked well enough, and the process was easy.

An interesting phenomenon was the inclusion of salmon flies into the overseas recommended lists of flies for African use. There were no salmon in Africa, yet these large, gaudy wet flies did well in the African streams and rivers. They were very popular in the early 1900s, perhaps peaking in popularity in the mid-1930s. Thousands of these beautiful flies were imported. However, they had two unavoidable drawbacks: their cost, and the fact that the local fly-tying industry could not master the often-complex tying procedures embedded in these flies. This resulted in 'local replacement' of materials and dressing style, which in turn led to a range of flies endemic to Africa, but developed from overseas salmon fly originals. By 1960 this process of change was complete, and even today one can easily purchase 'Africanised' salmon flies and, furthermore, they still maintain a certain popularity.





A fully dressed Jock Scott salmon fly (top) with the reduced African dressing (bottom)

Africa largely avoided the stigma of the English ‘Halford debate’ on dry flies. All other methods were, in Halford’s belief, ‘quite unacceptable’. Halford and other so-called ‘purists’ had no time for the wet fly expert and regarded him as a lower life form. However, in Africa, trout fishing was just that – it was trout fishing and ideally done with a fly. The local attitude was ‘so let’s get on and enjoy it’, and no time was ever given to such futile debate as to whether flies should sink or float. Nevertheless, the initial development of local flies was held back by a plethora of effective patterns pouring in from overseas, and little thought was given to improving them for local conditions. But, with the coming of Bertie Bennion and other thinking anglers, Africa’s own fly patterns were beginning to emerge. By the 1930s this movement really got going, and many of the older African flies were developed at that time. Albeit, they were nearly all traditional-style wet flies (there was but a smattering of dry flies) but this was the thin edge of the wedge and much more was to come.

HOOKS

In Dame Juliana’s time all hooks were made by hand, and usually the hand of a local blacksmith. Most were forged from soft iron out of square section needles. The gut ‘tipper’ was wrapped onto the hook prior to dressing the pattern, and all flies of this time (and some, although relatively scarce, even up to the 1930s) were tied ‘to gut’. Throughout the 1800s, flies were still being tied on heavy, hand-forged, iron hooks. These hooks were really heavy and usually assured that a fly would sink quickly. In fact, dry fly hooks of fine, hard-tempered steel wire were only just appearing at the end of the 19th century, and manufactured (rather than handmade) versions were not

far behind them. Flies tied to a length of integral gut were still available, but these were rapidly being replaced by flies on eyed hooks. Examples of these old, gutted flies are hard to find today, since in most of them the gut (and fly) have decayed and fallen apart, unless purposely protected. Fly boxes of the time were lined with felt or sheepskin, and it would be another 30 years before plastic foam-lined boxes first appeared on the scene.

Eyed flies originally appeared with their eyes made from pig-bristle loops, but eyed steel hooks were promoted on the UK market in 1879. By 1900 flies tied on eyed hooks were being advertised by all the major suppliers.



Part of a commercial catalogue from the late 1800s showing an assortment of flies sold ‘ready tied’ direct to gut on ‘no-eye’ spade hooks

In the mid-1980s, chemically sharpened hooks became readily available in almost every conceivable design one could think of. Early ones were a touch brittle, sometimes poorly tempered, and points often broke off. Tempering is now done in liquid nitrogen, and these problems have been put right. Today’s hooks are wonderfully reliable and extremely sharp. The huge range of hooks available today means that any fly can be tied on precisely the correct hook to get the best possible result.

It is interesting to note that, even as far back as the 1930s, there was a movement promoting the use of barbless hooks. Catch-and-release, although not seen as such, was in its embryonic days, and many an African fly-fishing club requested that unwanted fish be returned.

Will the development of fly-fishing stop? Of course not, technology will continue to open new doors to new materials and methods. Fly-tying and fly-fishing will continue to step forward as new materials and techniques become available. A day will



come when everything we do now – our wonderful latest designs and technology – will look old-fashioned to someone in the future, just as we look back on 100 years ago and wonder how on earth they managed.

The major steps in African fly development from standard traditional patterns can be roughly summarised as taking place around the following dates:

- Primitive flies for yellowfish (1790)
- English standard dressings (1880)
- African locally designed wet flies (late 1920s)
- Nymph-style flies (sporadically from 1935)
- Flies influx from the USA (1935)
- New Zealand and Australian patterns (1945)
- Streamer-style flies (1950)
- Cheap flies from the East (c. 1950)
- Modern fly lines and leaders (late 1950s)
- Synthetics in dressings (1960)
- Fluorescents (1962)
- English reservoir and other modern styles (1963)
- African saltwater (1974)
- High-level imitative patterns (1980)
- Serious yellowfishing on fly (restarted around 1984)
- Inland African endemic gamefish on fly (c. 1990)
- Modern imitative American and European patterns (1995)
- Flies from the Web (1998)

Note: The dates listed above are indicators only and many exceptions exist.

MATERIALS AND ETHICS

One of the intrinsic problems with flies has been the sourcing of materials. In the 1800s, many exotic birds with desirable, fancy (and sometimes not so fancy) feathers were considered absolute ‘must-haves’ in order to properly tie certain patterns. This was especially the case with salmon flies. The result was a tremendous drain on some of the world’s wildlife resources. Together with fly-tying, the dress- and hat-manufacturing industries also drained these precious resources.

The price of rarer materials skyrocketed and in some areas of the world the conservation regulations were tightened up, resulting in some materials simply becoming unobtainable. However, technology came to the rescue, and today many of these materials can be substituted with synthetic equivalents. As an example: seal’s fur, a material which has always been so important in very many fly patterns, can now be substituted with Antron.

Other impetus has arisen from domestic breeding of some rare birds by aviculturists. The further selective breeding of domesticated fowl and other birds provides not only better-quality materials, but many substitutions for rare feathers. In the world of furs, almost all natural furs can be substituted with synthetics. Polar bear fur is a typical example where today synthetics not only imitate the original fur, but in many cases provide a superior fly-tying product.



Real polar bear hair (left) and a synthetic (right)

THE MOVE TOWARD INDIGENOUS FISH

Fly-fishing has always had a good following in Africa, and throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s its practitioners increased fairly steadily, but it was not until the 1970s that the ranks of fly-fishers really began to swell. Later, during the 1990s, there was a massive increase in fly-fishing interest, as whole families, rather than just gentlemen anglers, began to fly-fish. The increase was so great that in some areas access to good waters became expensive and difficult, as demand outstripped supply. This difficulty in finding good trout water was the catalyst for a major change to fly-fishing for indigenous African fish. Perhaps the fastest growing aspect of this is the pursuit of yellowfish, and to a lesser extent Nile perch, tigerfish, catfish, and others. Today, there are fly-fishing shops in almost every big city in eastern and southern Africa, and a few are now appearing in the west coast African countries as well.



Perhaps the highest achievement in African freshwater fly-fishing is the capture of the Goliath tigerfish, a denizen of the Congo river system and Lake Tanganyika.



PRACTICALITIES AND GROWTH

It is important to look back to the 1930s, which was a time of rapid increase in communications, roads and technology in many African countries. Spranger Harrison was designing his first 'African' flies, and shops were beginning to have specialist corners for the fly-fisherman (corners very often shared with hunting accessories and apparel). R Doyle Hemmingway, in his *Fly Fishing for Trout – Principles and Practice*, published by Heath Cranton, London 1935, gave the cost of a basic outfit for fly-fishing (including a split cane rod) at between eight and 20 pounds before importation. This was indeed a large sum of money for the average man in those days. By purchasing a greenheart rod, one could shave at least two pounds off the price. Hemmingway strongly suggested purchasing second-hand gear in order to get going.

It is interesting to note that fly line and reel were of very similar price. Today, even the very best lines are cheaper than most quality fly reels. Also of note is the fact that the angler of the 1930s could already purchase a choice of tapered lines, the double taper being the most popular. Additionally, this line might be purchased as a floater, or as a fast- or slow-sinker. The concept of a balanced outfit was also well understood in the 1930s. However, the use of gut for leaders still persisted, and would do so until the 1950s. Leaders (casts) were still preferred at two yards (approx. two metres), but the use of a 'point', consisting of a 12–16 inch (approx. 300–400 mm) length of finer gut, was accepted practice. An important upgrade in the 1930s was that gut casts were acquired as standard practice in tapered form, and at this time the 'X' system for rating casts became well established. The number before the 'X' designated the number of times the gut had been pulled through a standard gauge in order to achieve the taper.



A leader container for the pocket. This was also used to dampen leaders in the 1930s.

A couple of items in common use in the 1930s, but seldom seen today, were the 'cast damper' and amadou. The cast damper was a 'must' in the old days; it was absolutely necessary to avoid

unsightly coils in the leader, and also to render the leader pliable for knotting. However, gut left in the damper too long could eventually rot, which was preceded by a condition in which the leader became white. Although more visible to fish, this white gut was considered quite useable, and many fly-fishers would dip the gut in silver nitrate solution, which then turned it black. A common, but incorrect belief at the time was that the silver nitrate also strengthened the gut. Unused leaders were dried and kept between leaves of chamois, wherein they might last a year or two. It was also common practice to polish gut casts with glycerine prior to use. Not so well known is that a kitchen industry existed whereby silk gut with broken tips or excessive abrasion could be sent in for repair.

Amadou is in fact a fungus but, back in the 1930s, it was the finest material around for drying floating flies. Surprisingly, in some parts of the world amadou is making a comeback today, because some believe it is better at the job than the modern chemical drying agents.

Grease was used both for cleaning floating lines and preparing them, and also for applying to dry flies to 'float' them. No silicone or other inert greases existed and the grease was therefore almost always of animal origin, with the exception of the kerosene mentioned previously. An alternative was oil, and a product known as Mucilin was much-favoured for this dry fly task.

In the 1930s, there was a strong movement towards 'no-wing' hackled dry flies, believed to float much longer than the winged versions and be less inclined to drown. Some anglers resolutely refused to put anything on a dry fly, believing the pristine fly to be superior to an oiled one. These 'clean' flies drowned quickly, but were soon floating again after a few false casts to throw off the water from the hackles. Other commonly held beliefs were that wings caused the fly to spin, and also that only a really well-tied, balanced fly could hope to float upright – apparently most commercial patterns of the time were inclined to float on their sides.



The Mucilin bottle was the standby of all dry-fly fishers from the 1930s to the 1950s, eventually being replaced by silicone or wax floatants in the late 1950s and 1960s.



The sparsely dressed fly was also appreciated at this time, and as one writer was moved to write: 'An overdressed fly is as much a mistake as an overdressed woman – both get attention of the wrong sort, and are likely to fail in their purpose.'

The African commercial companies offered very few dry flies to their customers at this time, and the reason was not hard to find. Fly-fishers of this era (1930s to 1950s) were extremely aware of quality. Any dry fly with an inferior-grade hackle or one tied unevenly, or any tied with a badly finished head or varnished hook eyes, would in all likelihood be immediately rejected. These were all things that could be got away with on wet flies, but never on a 'dry'.

MAJOR INFLUENCES

In England from the 1930s and onward, the beginning of reservoir fly-fishing got underway as a result of water authorities stocking a few large reservoirs with rainbow trout and opening them for public fishing. Blagdon and Ravensthorpe were two of the better-known ones. On these reservoirs, and the many others that became increasingly available, an aspirant fly-fisher could find reasonably priced fly-fishing, and the whole sport was opened up to many an angler who could never have afforded it before.

This influx of keen anglers resulted in a sudden increase of new 'lake' fly patterns (many also developed from Irish and Scottish lake patterns) and a growing awareness of stillwater entomology. This movement brought new flies to many far-off shores, including Africa, and was also responsible for similar movements starting up elsewhere. It was not long before dam fishing (stillwater fishing) for trout acquired impetus in Africa, and the new flies became part of our fly-fishing history.

Almost in parallel with this awakening, new American flies began to filter into Africa. By the late 1940s and 1950s this trickle of flies became a torrent, and Africa was quick to take on the streamer type of fly and to develop its own versions for both bass and trout. These two influential forces continued unabated and, in the 1960s and 1970s, American streamers, British stillwater flies, and a rapidly growing interest in imitation and entomology took hold.

Parallel with this influx was the appearance in the late 1940s and early 1950s of the New Zealand and Australian flies. These became of major influence in African fly-fishing, and some of these patterns are still rated as the best by many modern anglers. It was at this time that Lionel Walker jumped on the bandwagon and introduced his own brand of New Zealand flies into Africa. These included the all-time favourite **Walker's Killer**, a fly which is still a best-seller some 50 years later.

It is interesting to note how the New Zealand patterns infiltrated Africa. It happened as a result of several commercial fly-tying firms in South Africa and Kenya acquiring contracts to tie flies for the New Zealand and Australian markets. Labour was comparatively cheap in Africa, offering opportunities for labour-intensive industries to compete on world markets. These flies were tied in Africa and exported from Kenya, Nyasaland (Malawi), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and South Africa.

However, bright marketeers soon took note of their popularity in the countries they were destined for, and concurrently tried them out in the South African and Kenyan markets. They were immediately successful, and it was not long before **Matukas** and **Red Settlers** could compete on equal terms with the best in Africa.



Perhaps the most popular African wet fly of all time, the Walker's Killer is an example of New Zealand ingenuity adapted to South African conditions.

In the 1970s several major leaps took place in fly design, which had a major impact on African flies. Among these, the increasing influx of streamer patterns using synthetics from America, and the simultaneous arrival of reservoir flies from the UK incorporating fluorescents, caused the greatest change. Many of these flies grew from match (competitive) fly-fishing – yet another growing aspect of fly-fishing. Hand in hand with these flies came modern casting techniques such as the 'double haul' and shooting head techniques, and anyone in Africa who took time to learn these methods would have been streets ahead of their companions. In fact, the double haul had been popularised in the 1930s on the Pacific coast steelhead trout streams of America, but it took another 40 years to get to Africa. The other major change was the rapidly accelerating availability of stillwater trout fisheries. But perhaps the biggest impact was the rapid growth in the number of fly-fishers and the concurrent justifiability of fly-fishing-related industries.

By the 1980s the new flies and the thinking behind them had thoroughly permeated African fly-tying and a rapid acceleration in local fly design took place. This was a two-pronged development in that some excellent wet and also dry imitative patterns appeared concurrently with the design of really good lure flies and streamers. In the salt, imitative thinking was born, and flies that copied the creatures of the sea and estuary began to carve a niche.

Perhaps the latest phase in African fly development has grown from the internet. A few young anglers are, to some extent, turning their backs on African traditional and even later-designed flies. They have been seduced by the 'dark side', as some might say, and we are faced with 'if it's not on the Web, then it's probably no good' syndrome. Then of course there is the added glory of being the first to notice something new before



anyone else. This has led to the appearance of some really poor patterns which, having been mentioned once in an article somewhere, are then taken as ‘gospel’, until disillusion sets in. There are of course exceptions to this, and some really good patterns have arisen from this source. In the meantime, we are surrounded by a plethora of wonderful locally developed patterns, to which modern technology can be easily applied to great advantage. Many of these are far superior to foreign patterns developed for conditions thousands of kilometres away, and they remain the mainstay of African fly-fishers. Personally, I welcome new developments, new ideas, and fly-fishing creativity. But, it needs to be positive, based on sound reasoning, and in the long term suitable to local needs. Having said all of this, some great flies continue to come in from Europe and the USA, but they are in the minority, and only a few of them are really good enough to succeed in our local conditions.

Today, flies are available in Africa from a great many sources; shops for fly-fishing have sprung up everywhere. This is great stuff, so shop around, compare them all; but use a filtered ear to eliminate unnecessary techno-babble. In general, the 10 year and older established facilities offer the best advice – advice which has been gleaned over many years of serving fly-fishers, and which is often based on true experience and accumulated wisdom. As in all things, there are exceptions, so check as many as you can.

Where to in the future? Well, here are three ‘up to the minute’ bass flies from Angelo Komis. They all exhibit simplicity, fantastic contrast, plenty of movement and a refreshing step in imagination.



Modern, innovative lure flies by Angelo Komis of South Africa

CHEAP FLIES FROM THE EAST

Before leaving this chapter, here’s a warning note on what *not* to buy. Part of the history of African fly-fishing must include the influx of cheap flies from overseas and in particular from the East.

After the Second World War, and beginning around 1948, the Japanese began exporting angling kits around the world. These were usually nicely boxed and contained split cane rods and an assortment of tackle, including flies. Plenty of these came into South Africa and Kenya. These kits were cheap, and the rods were surprisingly serviceable for a couple of years (I still have two of them – long since put to rest), but were inclined to eventually warp and split. The flies were awful – figments of imaginings that were based on zero resemblance to any standard pattern in the world. I remember in particular an eye-catching ‘bumble bee’ in purple and green. As you might expect the hooks were very soft and just about useless.

This was the beginning of a cheap fly-manufacturing revolution that spread to Hong Kong, and nowadays is firmly established in China. The consequence is that the world has been flooded with cheap, nasty flies which sell in supermarkets, corner shops and the like. They sell for a fraction of the cost of decent flies, and are often eagerly taken up by beginners to the sport of fly-fishing. Many of these tyros may well give up as a result and be lost to fly-fishing! Examination of these packaged flies will often reveal flies already unravelling, even before the packaging has been opened. Once again, the hooks used remain almost useless. Be careful of these! Although they have been in Africa for almost 60 years, most of these flies still fail to resemble any useful or known pattern. Nevertheless, they continue to appear.

Look to your local tackle dealer or specialist fly shop for good advice and tackle, and avoid buying seriously inferior products which may well put you off fly-fishing forever.



This set of flies is typical of fly imports from the Far East – nicely packaged, but of poor quality.





2. SOUTH AFRICAN NYMPHS AND DRY FLIES

*Fly-fishing is a skill, laced with artistry –
Fly-dressing is artistry laced with skill.*

ANON

THE EARLY DAYS OF FLY-FISHING IN AFRICA WERE LARGELY orientated around wet flies. Included in this were traditional attractor wet flies, imitative wet flies, salmon flies, and sea trout flies. Dry flies were available from overseas suppliers in Europe, but were largely ignored right up until the 1930s, and even then interest was minimal. During the 1950s, an expanded interest in dry flies occurred, but the really exciting time for dry flies was probably the early 1980s, when they took hold in a big way.

Standard nymphs, as we know them today, were also latecomers to the African scene, and seem to have appeared in earnest in parallel with the development of these flies in the UK, and especially so in response to the increasing use and diversity of these patterns on the English reservoirs during the 1960s. They were around in Africa as early as the 1930s, but relatively little attention was paid to them. Today, however, they are among the most popular of patterns, and are carried by every freshwater fly-fisher.

Most nymph patterns are exactly that – imitations of sub-aquatic nymphal forms of various insects, whereas the dry flies are imitations of the hatched adults. There is a kind of halfway metamorphosis in patterns, which has appeared quite strongly in the last 30 years, and that is the imitation of emergers. These are insects, usually in the surface film, in the process of hatching; a stage at which they are most vulnerable to predation by fish.

Modern dry flies have diversified in several directions and designs. However, the older, traditional-style winged and hackled dry flies continue to be very important, and are closely followed by ‘no wing hackled flies’ and ‘parachute hackled flies’. New styles such as ‘no hackle duns’ have not made much headway in Africa, and very few exist in modern African fly design.

The majority of fly-fishers, even as late as the 1980s, had little interest in dry flies, rather leaving it to the ‘experts’ to experiment with them. Thus, I remember with some surprise in 1986 discovering Plewman’s (at that time, one of the Invicta club waters in South Africa), which was entirely limited to dry fly-fishing. It was even more interesting to see that a good many trophy fish were taken with diminutive dry flies on this water, and it was most encouraging for all the Invicta club members to realise the real potential of the dry fly. It is quite educational to see how a lesson is appreciated when you have little choice!

The fact remains that most dry flies in use today in Africa have British or American origins, and but a handful of patterns can truly aspire to being called purely African. Among these is

Tom Sutcliffe’s **DDD** – perhaps the finest fish-catching fly invented for African conditions?

The development of nymph patterns is a different story, and among them are a great many locally developed patterns which are extremely effective. Many of these later flies have arisen from a new and deeper understanding of African entomology and the imitation of the life forms of African waters. This has occurred in spite of a dearth of information on African aquatic entomology. You can test this by trying to discover the vernacular and taxonomic names of African mayflies – long may you search, often in vain, to acquire worthwhile information. However, most national museums have ‘named collections’ of the aquatic insects found in Africa, and it is quite possible to get permission to examine these. In very recent times, publications on the subject have in fact began to appear, and in particular *Aquatic Invertebrates of South African Rivers* by A Gerber and MJM Gabriel, published by the Institute for Water Quality Studies in 2002; a most useful basic guide to the aquatic insect families, although you will still need to search elsewhere for specific information.

Perhaps one of the more motivating aspects for the dry-fly angler has been the development of really good floating lines, and especially floating lines with little or no coil memory. These lines make dry-fly fishing very much easier as a result of positive and continuing contact with the fly. The latest floating lines are also transparent and consequently less visible to the fish, and very much more shadow-free. Strides forward have also been made with floatants and drying agents. Greased, almost-‘float for ever’ leaders and tippets are taken for granted nowadays, but you should always remember that a greased line causes a lot of refractive effects and surface disturbance. Thus, you should never grease the last few centimetres of your tippet.

Tougher and finer wire hooks; synthetic, buoyant flosses and foams; deer hair bodies and many other factors ensure a much better and longer float capability in modern dry flies.

The development of nymph patterns has taken great strides forward with the embodiment of synthetics in modern nymph dressings. A whole group of very attractive ‘flashback’ nymphs has appeared, and with these patterns the use of metal beads, for heads and for weighting, has also expanded the usefulness of many existing patterns.

For me, nymph and dry-fly fishing summon up a picture of finesse, in which lighter outfits and lines, an approach of delicacy and skill, and the history and application of knowledge – together with a blending with nature – all come together in a grand synthesis of the art of fly-fishing.



ABERDARE NYMPH

TROUT



MALCOLM MEINTJES, C. 1985

This pale-coloured stillwater nymph looks a bit like the mixture that might come out of the box if you shook up a **Hot Spot Nymph**, a **Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear** and a **Dragon 'O' Nymph**. Malcolm designed this fly for half-light conditions on dams in the Highveld. It is an attempt to incorporate a 'hot spot' of fluorescence into a general imitative pattern, thus providing a point of attraction in adverse light conditions. Unusual in small nymphs, the addition of marabou to the dressing provides movement. The fly is fairly successful and now, some 20 years down the line, is still being marketed.

Design notes: This fly incorporates the combined trigger points of mayfly nymphs, sedge pupae, stonefly nymphs, and buzzer nymphs, together with a thoracic 'hot' target spot. The **Aberdare Nymph** is also known with a small brass bead head.

Tying notes: Wind the palmered hackle over the thorax in three turns only, and then pull the wing case fibres over the top of thorax and hackle, for tie-in at the head. Keep the dressing of this fly slim, with a tapered abdomen.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12 or 14, down-eye, bronze

Silk: Black

Tail: White marabou, length as abdomen

Body: Dubbed or wound pale grey wool

Thorax: Fluorescent pale yellow wool, palmered with a small, white cock hackle

Wing case: Fibres of black or dark brown cock hackle

Head: Varnished black.

METHOD

Stillwater: Fish with a floating line. Allow the fly to sink, and retrieve with a figure-of-eight. Intersperse with the odd slow strip retrieve.

ANGELO'S CORIXID

TROUT



ANGELO KOMIS, 1992

Quite independently of everyone else, Angelo Komis did his own research on the natural olive corixid, and also noticed the winter feeding of trout on these small insects. This fly is his imitation.

Design notes: The olive corixids are quite small, and the size 16 hook is probably the most useful size.

Tying notes: Prior to applying the Flashabou to the body, varnish the silk under-body and wrap while tacky.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–16, down-eye, pre-weighted at the thorax with thin lead wire

Silk: Black 6/0

Body: Pearlescent Flashabou over a built-up tying silk body, and ribbed with very fine silver wire

Back (wing case): Fibres of cock ringneck pheasant, centre tail feather, dyed olive

Paddles: One on each side, each being a fibre from the same feather as used for the back

Head: Long flue, bronze peacock herl.

METHOD

Stillwater: Fish the shallows and margins using a floating line, and a sink and draw retrieve.

ANGELO'S SHRIMP

YELLOWFISH



ANGELO KOMIS, 1990

Another of the great flies designed by Angelo Komis. Rodger Kennard first wrote this fly up in *Flyfishing* magazine Vol 3, No 14 in 1990, in his article 'Yellow Fever'. A simple scud imitation, it rides 'point up', resembling a drifting scud when retrieved.



Design notes: The naturals imitated by this fly are transparent-to-translucent creatures. In spring, the females carry a bunch of pinkish eggs under the body. An optional dressing is available to match this.

Tying notes: Some materials have been upgraded, and thus modern ties of this fly often use green-coloured copper wire for the ribbing, and 'Scudback' or similar for the back.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–12, Mustad 94840 slightly bent with pliers (modern scud hooks are ideal), pre-weighted with rolled wine bottle lead foil along the top of the shank

Silk: Brown

Body: Dubbed cream or tan seal's fur substitute (SLF). Optionally, for imitating egg-bearers, use pale pink. Palmer the dubbed body with a grizzle or cree cock hackle, trimmed on back and sides

Shell back: A strip of clear or cream latex pulled over the back and ribbed with gold or copper wire.

METHOD

Running water: Cast upstream with a slow-sinking line and dead drift back.

ANT, BROWN

TROUT, BASS, YELLOWFISH



BILL HANSFORD STEELE, 1975

Medium-sized, brown-coloured ants are very common all over Africa. The sugar ants are perhaps the best known, since they often come into houses almost anywhere and raid sugar bowls. The Australian bull ants are similar in build. These African brown sugar ants are usually bigger than the common black ants, which often hatch near African waters, and are always bigger than the red ants. Any brown or tan-coloured ant species can be copied with this dressing. Used as a dry fly for stillwater it works well, but when the fish start rising in earnest it often does better *right in the surface film*. This is most easily achieved by cutting the hackle flat underneath the hook. Stream versions need the full untrimmed hackle.

Design notes: Body shape is important in this fly, which should be tied with a thin waist like that of the living ant. Early tyings used thin hackle point wings (as pictured), but these are not essential, and can be omitted.

Tying notes: Do not varnish the body as in some UK ant imitations, as this will cause the fly to lose much of its buoyancy.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10, up-eye dry

Body: Pre-waxed, rich ochre-brown tying silk, shaped as an ant body

Hackle: Ginger cock (optionally cut flat underneath for 'in the surface' stillwater fishing)

Wing: Pale blue-dun cock hackle tips, sloping back.

METHOD

Stillwater: Pre-proof the fly before use, by soaking in good-quality silicone floatant overnight. Ant hatches are land-based, and are dependant on offshore winds to distribute them across the surface. Let the fly lie still on the water, giving it 'life' with occasional twitches. The best target area is usually at the start of the lee shore ripple.

Running water: Keep the fly riding high on its hackles, and drift down over fast, shallow runs under grass tufts and bushes.

ANT, RED

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



BILL HANSFORD STEELE, 1974

The little red ants of Africa are not at all like the active reddish wood ants of Europe; they are very much more aggressive, as any one that lives in Africa will tell you. Kneel on one of their nests by accident and you will soon know all about it. One of their characteristics is a near-absence of the usual thin waist one associates with other ants. Thus the body of the fly can be tied in the normal way for dry flies, i.e. no waist. They are also noted for their small size. Nevertheless, they may hatch in large numbers and can thus become quite important. The naturals are common in some areas and absent in others. They tend to ride high on the water, and hackle clipping under the hook is not necessary. Because of the naturals' small size, they are totally entrapped by the surface tension, and are thus at the mercy of breezes and feeding fish.

Tying notes: This fly usually has the hackle placed *midway* along the body, as in the American-style dry fly ants. The hackle on the pictured dressing imitates the legs of the ant, and is tied at the front.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 16–22, up-eye dry

Silk: Black

Body: Pre-waxed, brick-red tying silk, tied without the usual ant waist

Thorax: Black silk



Body hackle: Red game cock, tied at the body centre, or optionally at the head

Wings: None

Head: Clear varnished black silk.

METHOD

Stillwater: Pre-proof the fly by soaking it in silicone floatant overnight. This pattern should be cast out and left to float in the surface film without any twitch retrieve. These ants are so small that they are usually bound by the surface tension, and are almost unable to move. Fish the edge of the lee shore ripple.

ANT, WHOULSTON'S BLACK

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



PHIL WHOULSTON, 1971

Phil Whoulston was a railway signalling engineer who immigrated to South Africa in 1970, and became very well known in South Africa's Dullstroom area, as a result of his ability to cast long distances and his successes with big rainbows. He developed this fly especially for the black ant 'falls' on the Dullstroom area stillwaters, but it was soon found to be effective everywhere. The winged black ants, and also winged termites, hatch in profusion, often just before thunderstorms. The associated storm winds frequently drive the natural ants well out over the surface.

Design notes: This is an imitative dry fly that copies many species of black flying ants and, in smaller sizes, black flies, snipe flies, atherids and many small midges. This pattern uses foam in the body to ensure long-term floating capability and thus it does not need to be proofed. By *not* proofing, one also ensures that the fly floats 'in the surface' rather than on it. Size 14 is ideal for stillwater ant imitation, but smaller sizes should be used for black fly, snipe fly and other Dipteridae imitation when stream fishing.

Tying notes: The dressing is straightforward. When tying the body, make a single layer of black pre-varnished tying silk along the hook shank, and tie in the foam body while still tacky. I have seen examples with the hackle in the middle of the body, but they do not seem as effective as the standard hackle tying.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 14–18, up-eye dry

Silk: Black

Body: Black foam strip, wound tightly around the hook, and tied down in the centre with black silk to give an ant body shape. The ideal foam has a silvery sheen

Hackle: Black cock

Wings: Originally, fibres from black tail feather of a vulture. A bunch of feather fibres is laid at 90 degrees across the hook, and then tied down flat using 'figure-of-eight' lashings. The wings are cut square at the ends. The whole wing length (tip to tip) equals the hook shank length

Substitution: Dark turkey tail feather fibres or goose primaries dyed black are good substitutes for vulture tail feathers.

METHOD

Stillwater: Whoulston's pattern is highly buoyant and is taken well during a fall of ants. Cast it out just past the initial ripple of the lee shore breeze and allow it to lie, with an occasional twitch to liven things up.

Running water: This fly is also affective when drifted under grass tufts and bushes on fast-flowing streams. In smaller sizes (16–18), it is taken for many aquatic Dipteridae. In really rough water, this little fly will mandate floatant proofing to keep it on top.

ATOMIC WORM

YELLOWFISH



ANGELO KOMIS, C. 2000

These little running water nymphs are great for fishing the tail end of pools and eddies, wherever buzzers are likely to hatch. In general, these insects in larval form (bloodworms) prefer a slower current over gravel or sandy bottoms, although some species are very fond of muddy bottoms (normally a feature of static water or along the edges of weeded runs). The great majority of the buzzer larvae, and to a lesser extent the pupae, are red in colour and occasionally green. This is a good fly in dark, cloudy weather conditions. Yellowfish look for these little insects being washed downstream, and will usually take them immediately on sight.

Design notes: A slim body shape is important in the buzzer pupae and bloodworm imitations, and this is achieved in this dressing. The inner glow of the fluorescence in the pattern gives it a 'living' effect.

Tying notes: In the small size 16 flies, ordinary monofilament line in pale green, or dyed red, is easier. Some commercial ties are sold with clear monofilament-wound bodies rather than 'V'-rib, in all the sizes and for both colours.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12–16, sedge hook, down-eye or Grip 12803

Silk: Either fluorescent red or fluorescent green



Body: Fluorescent red or green silk over-wound with red or pale green or clear 'V'-rib in close turns

Head: Tying silk, varnished.

METHOD

Running water: This little fly sinks well, and can be fished in slow water conditions with a floating line and a slow retrieve. In fast water I have found it excellent used as dropper above a larger weighted nymph. The New Zealand 'dropper nymph' method, in which the tippet and the **Atomic Worm** are tied to the hook bend of a heavier nymph, is also an excellent method.

AZURE DUN

TROUT



BILL HANSFORD STEELE MODIFICATION, 2002

The azure mayfly lives in high-country streams, and prefers the smaller, fast-running, rock-strewn rivers. The wings are an exquisite iridescent shade of cyan, and on this relatively large mayfly dun they are a beautiful sight in full sunlight. I first came across these flies on the Whisky Spruit and the Spekboom River in Mpumalanga, South Africa. They were hatching sporadically on a dull day and rainbows were taking them from the surface with splashy rises. Later we found the flat-bodied, dark straw-coloured nymphs on the stream bed rocks. The **Azure Dun** dry fly imitates the natural dun, which usually rides high on the surface. On first hatching, they often gyrate around quite a bit before getting lift off.

Design notes: This dressing is derived from the **Blue Dun** fly, the major change being to the hackle.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–10, up-eye, fine wire

Silk: Grey

Tail: Fibres from a medium blue-dun cock hackle

Body: Fine, slate-grey Polyfur

Wings: Optional, slips from pale grey-dyed mallard primaries, usually left out

Hackle: Bright cyan-blue-dyed cock

Head: Clear varnished tying silk.

METHOD

Running water: The naturals are found hatching over rocky bottoms with fast, clear, flowing water, and you will need to surface drift the fly down through these fast runs.

BAETIS NYMPH

TROUT



PETER IMMELMAN, 1996

This is one of many mayfly nymph imitations, in this case particularly imitating the tiny nymphs which are so common in African streams. Pick up any stone from the bottom of a fast-flowing clear river or stream, turn it over, and invariably you will find a couple of small nymphs scampering across the wet surface. These little nymphs are a major source of protein and energy for the trout, and they often feed on them throughout the day. Most of these *Baetis* nymphs are dark in colour, and no larger than a size 16 hook. This fly works well right on the bottom, and although the original was not tied with a brass bead head, the addition of one can improve its effectiveness.

Design notes: This is an exceptionally well-designed *Baetis* nymph imitation, as one might expect from Pete Immelman, who ran a commercial fly-tying operation for many years in Mashishing (Lydenburg) in South Africa. Pete was a bit of a legend in the area, and was known by one and all as 'Fishy Pete'.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 14–18, down-eye, Kamasan B175 or equivalent

Silk: Black

Tail: Two strands of black Ultra Hair

Body: Lay down a single layer of silk, and wrap black Krystal Flash over

Thorax: Black Antron dubbing

Wing case: Green peacock herl

Legs: Black Krystal Flash.

METHOD

Running water: Use a sinking line, cast upstream, and dead drift back. Fish eddies and pockets using a slow retrieve.



BAGWORM

TROUT



MURRAY PEDDAR AND RYAN STEELE, C. 1986

A while back, we used to run fly-tying specials on Saturdays outside the shop, and all were welcome to watch or participate as they wished. This was a rather quieter day than usual, and Murray Peddar and Ryan Steele (under Murray's direction) concocted this simple 'bottle brush'-style nymph fly, amid much discussion and rejected trial dressings. Don Lort first tried this fly, more to motivate young Ryan than any other reason, and discovered it was a very effective deepwater fly. This fly looks an untidy mess, but actually simulates similar untidy caddis cases and also Aeshnidae dragonfly nymphs, and it does it extremely well. Don named it the **Bagworm**, and although it remains a fly known among only a few anglers – those few who use it, know how good it really is!

Tying notes: The trimming of the finished fly should result in an untidy body of approximately 2.5–3.5 mm thickness.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8, Kamasan B800, 2–4X long-shank, down-eye, optionally pre-weighted with fine lead wire along the shank

Silk: Black

Tail: Dark brown spade hackle fibres, splayed

Body: Dark brown Antron wool with a spade hackle palmer wound forward from the rear, another palmered forward from the centre of the body, and finally one at the front in the usual hackle position. Once these three hackles have been wound, trim them to a fibre length of 3 mm maximum, but leave the forward hackle trimmed to twice this length

Head: Varnished black.

METHOD

Stillwater: Twitch this fly along the bottom with a fast-sink line, using a figure-of-eight retrieve and an occasional strip.

BB

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



ANON., 1921

Named in honour of Bertie Bennion, author of the old classic texts, *The Trout are Rising in England & South Africa* (1920) and more importantly *The Angler in South Africa* (1923). The **BB** fly, almost lost to fly-fishing in the mists of time, is known in both wet and dry versions. Bennion used this fly in the streams around Johannesburg and the Vaal Triangle in South Africa (when they were pristine and clear flowing) with great success for yellowfish. The dry fly imitates lacewings, small sedges and moths, and various terrestrials. The wet fly, although designed for clear water, also works well in coloured water, where it is taken for a damselfly nymph and various other mayfly nymphs. It is also a soft contrast attractor pattern. The combination of khaki and yellow seems to be effective in both still and running water.

Design notes: The **BB** is a good cold water fly in both streams and stillwaters. The colour combination of 'canary yellow and khaki' is unusual by today's standards. However, tied as a nymph pattern (body and thorax khaki, elytra and legs yellow) this colour scheme has been found to be highly successful with indigenous yellowfish. The yellow used was soft and most certainly not bright or remotely fluorescent (still to be discovered at that time).

Tying notes: Use standard techniques, but note that the wing in the dry fly was a split wing double.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12 or 14, down-eye Limerick for the wet fly, and up-eye size 12–16 dry for the dry fly

Silk: Khaki

Tail: Fibres of cock hackle dyed canary-yellow

Body: Dubbed mohair dyed khaki

Rib: Fine gold wire

Hackle: Cock, dyed canary-yellow

Wings: Cock hackle points dyed canary-yellow and sloping back, optionally no wings (wet fly); dyed canary-yellow mallard wing slips (dry fly).

METHOD

Stillwater: Use the wet fly with a strip retrieve on a slow sinker. It is especially effective over deep, cold water in winter and spring. In summer, it will often work stripped slowly and steadily just under the surface using a floating line.

Running water: The fly should be proofed and surface drifted under grass tussocks and bushes. For yellowfish in streams, use



the wet fly fished across and down, or alternatively upstream dead drifted over shallow, stony runs with an intermediate line.

Opportunities for further development of this colour scheme are there for the experimentally minded fly-tyer.

BEADY DAMSEL

TROUT



VARIOUS, 1975 TO PRESENT

Bead-bodied flies have been with us from as far back as the late 1960s, when they were already used in UK reservoirs. Many have come and gone since those days. They are usually simple flies, although **Brew's Glass Bead Nymphs** (page 29) have the advantage of body hackles – not found on other bead-bodied flies.

In 1972, anglers were fishing Dullstroom Dam with a bead-bodied fly version of the **Mickey Finn** (page 337), designed by Phil Whoulston and simply called the **Red**. It had four red beads in the body, a yellow bucktail tail and a yellow bucktail wing. I remember catching stockie rainbows with it, but it never really caught on.

The **Beady Damsel** is one of the many bead-bodied flies which have reappeared in the last few years, and are really very much the same as the bead flies of the 1980s.

Design notes: The beads supply a certain amount of flash and translucency to any pattern, but are also useful in providing weight to the fly, which is effective in fast and also deepwater.

Tying notes: The clear beads used in these patterns are marketed in South Africa for the craft market and are used in many local home industries. The much older (and scarcer) beads from the Victorian era are considerably smaller and will not fit onto normal wet-fly hook shanks. However, if you can find these tiny beads, they are very useful for eye imitation in damsel nymphs and water boatmen.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8, long-shank, bronze, barbless

Silk: Black

Tail: As shank length, four or five fibres from a cock pheasant centre tail feather

Body: Five gold/amber glass beads threaded onto the shank and pushed up against the thorax. The binding at the rear on the tail fibres holds the beads in place

Thorax: Peacock herl

Wing case: Fibres from a cock pheasant centre tail feather

Hackle: Long fibres (length to the tail end of the fly) from a cock pheasant centre tail feather

Head: Small, varnished black.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a sinking line, and fish this fly around weed beds with a slow strip retrieve.

BLACK AND GREEN BEETLE

TROUT



ANON., DATE UNKNOWN

This pattern is a relatively modern imitation of one of the high-country 'back swimmers' (Notonectidae). I do not know who designed the fly.

Tying notes: Some commercial examples have an alternate body tied with pearlescent Flashabou over fluorescent green floss.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 14, down-eye Kamasan YK4A, Grip 12004, or similar

Silk: Black

Body/Thorax: Green Krystal Flash from the eye of the hook to the bend

Legs: Black horsehair or dyed black Tynex monofilament, two each side and two forward

Back: Clump of black horsehair from eye to bend as a shell back

Finish: Tie-off is at the thorax/abdomen join. A tiny tuft of fluorescent orange wool is tied in at this point on the back.

METHOD

Stillwater: This fly is best fished with a floating line; retrieve just-subsurface in short jerks. Work around reeded bays and along the margins. This is a good fly for cold days in winter, but it also works throughout the year.

BLACK STONEFLY

TROUT



PETER JACKSON, 1991



This running water nymph is especially designed to imitate the brown and dark grey stonefly nymphs found in Lesotho as well as in the South African Mzimkulu and Mooi rivers. There are not many imitations of dark stoneflies available, but this one is a very good pattern for searching shallow, stony-bottomed rivers.

Design notes: The legs are optional in this dressing, but Peter Jackson hypothesised that the splayed legs of a drifting nymph frantically searching for a foothold are a typical characteristic that triggers a trout into attacking this food morsel. Some tyers simply use a black cock hackle to simulate the legs.

Tying notes: The abdomen (body) is tied slightly tapering. The original was tied from an unknown dark grey feather picked up at Kamberg in KwaZulu-Natal. The nylon recommended is rather thick, and the tyer may find it easier to tie in 4 kg monofilament line, or even use 'Tynex' for the legs.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12, Kamasan B800, down-eye, pre-weighted at the thorax area with wine bottle lead foil

Silk: Black

Tail: Two peacock herl tips

Body: Feather fibre from a black egret, goliath heron, or similar

Thorax: Black Antron dubbing

Wing case: Feather fibres as per body

Legs: Black 7 kg nylon monofilament 'superglued' to the shank under the thorax

Substitution: The black egret feather fibres can be substituted with fibres from a black bantam tail feather. The goliath heron is a protected species, and should never be used.

METHOD

Running water: 'Shotgunning the pockets' (the pools and runs) with a floating line, i.e. roll casting upstream into likely areas, and dead drifting back, is the preferred method.

BLOEMHOF SHRIMP

YELLOWFISH



ANON., C. 2003

This is an excellent South African stillwater yellowfish fly, designed to imitate scuds and caddis. I have enjoyed great success with this fly in clear water on bright days, such as you occasionally find on the Vaal River at the commencement of spring.

Design notes: This is a bright fly in which the tinselled body simulates trapped air quite well. I am convinced that many fish

take this fly for a corixid water boatman and its accompanying air bubble. It imitates corixids, backswimmers, scuds and caddis – quite a combination.

Tying notes: It helps to expose a turn or two of the fluorescent tying silk at the end of the body, where the tail is tied down.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10 or 12, scud hook (short-shank)

Silk: Fluorescent orange

Tail: Material as for the back, length as hook bend depth (shank to point)

Body: Short-fibred Fritz, or similar synthetic chenille, in 'peacock', and ribbed close with white floss

Back: Pale tan Raffine or Swiss Straw, pre-wetted and stretched over the back. The end is left as a tail

Thorax: Effectively, the tie-off behind the head is a few clear varnished turns of the tying silk

Head: Optionally, a gold metal bead 2.5 mm.

METHOD

Running water: Casting upstream and dead drifting back works well. It will also take fish as the point fly below a **Czech Nymph**.

Stillwater: Fish around weed and reed beds using a floating line and a sink and draw retrieve.

BOWMAKER'S SPECIAL

TROUT



DR ALAN BOWMAKER, 1989

When I visited Dr Alan Bowmaker in KwaZulu-Natal in 1994, he was intensely involved in farming and marketing ducks, but prior to this, he had been introduced to me as the one-time curator of the Durban Aquarium. He is well known among scientific circles for various fish research papers.

Conversation soon switched to fish, then to fly-fishing and, quite unexpectedly, I found myself in the company of a master fly-tyer and designer. Alan had spent some time in Zimbabwe, and had then returned to South Africa. Thus, here was a man with a broad-based scientific background in fish, and a wide experience of fly-fishing founded on the rivers and streams of southern Africa.

The **Bowmaker's Special** is a large, stillwater insect imitator nymph fly with a difference. This is a good fly! I have found it particularly useful on hot summer days when damselflies are coming off the water in numbers.



Design notes: The main differences from most other fly designs are the epoxy body construction and the use of fluorescent fishing line to give an inner body 'life glow'. The **Bowmaker's Special** works primarily as an imitator of damselfly nymphs, but can also be used to imitate small fry by simply changing the retrieve.

Tying notes: Quick-set epoxy glues tend to flow before setting. Remember, it is important to keep the fly rotating until the epoxy has hardened (see drying machine on page 417).

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8 or 6 long-shank, straight-eye, bronze, Grip 13802

Silk: Black

Tail: Small piece of black feather fibre

Body: Lay down a bed of black silk, over this tie a rib of just-open turns of 5 kg fluorescent yellow Stren monofilament fishing line. Leave one-fifth of the shank exposed at the bend end of the shank. Coat the remaining body with quick-set Bostik epoxy (the type that cures yellow – most cure clear). Taper this coating carrot-shaped, thick end at the head

Hackle: Short-fibred black cock

Head: Black, varnished.

METHOD

Stillwater: On hot, balmy days when fish are swirling just below the surface, fish this fly with an intermediate line and a medium-paced retrieve. This is also a good fly in coloured water. Fish it deep on a fast-sinking line with a strip retrieve if imitating fry, or with a slow, steady retrieve for imitating damselfly nymphs.

BREW'S GLASS BEAD NYMPHS

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



HARRY BREWS, 1998

The clear bead body for imitating shrimps (top), and the green bead body for imitating insects (bottom)

These are excellent glass-bodied stream nymph patterns, almost **Woolly Worm**-style in appearance, which have taken a lot of fish for Harry Brews, including an 8 lb (approx. 3.5 kg) specimen from the Spekboom River in Mpumalanga.

Design notes: These flies achieve movement, transparency and weight, all in one fly, imitating both insects and freshwater Crustacea.

Tying notes: The body hackle point forms the tail, and is then wound forward over the beads and tied off behind the first bead. I have also seen examples with an additional hackle right at the front, behind the hook eye. Barbless hooks are preferable in this fly, since the beads are much easier to place on the shank. The tail wrapping should be large enough to hold the beads in place.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–12, down-eye

Silk: Black

Body: Four glass beads, either green (insects) or clear (shrimps), varnished in place

Hackle: Black cock palmered through the bead body.

METHOD

Running water: Use a sinking line, and tumble the flies along the bottom with occasional twitches and jerks. The clear bead fly, when used for yellowfish, should be fished down through rocky and gravel-bottomed runs.

BROWN NYMPH AND THE GREEN NYMPH

TROUT



ART FLICK, PROMOTED IN SOUTH AFRICA BY BARRY KENT, 1974

The Brown Nymph (top), an insect imitator, and Kent's Brown Nymph (bottom), a fry imitator

The **Brown Nymph** and the **Green Nymph** were used by Barry Kent in the Dullstroom area for some years before being written up in *Piscator* No. 93 (Autumn 1975). They are similar flies, in typical nymph design style, which use differing colours. I find the **Green Nymph** particularly useful in the clear shallows of large



stillwaters, especially at dawn and again at dusk. Both are fair imitations of pond olive and small damselfly nymphs, which are found commonly across the high areas of Africa. Much later (around 1981), and unfortunately confusing from a nomenclature point of view, Barry released his **Kent's Brown Nymph** and his **Kent's Green Nymph** from the High Flies factory in the then-Transkei. These are entirely different flies to the previous nymphs, being designed as pin fry imitators and following very closely the **Brown and Green Nymph** (page 240) designed by Tom Ivens in the 1950s in the United Kingdom.

The Brown Nymph and the Green Nymph – promoted in South Africa by Barry Kent, 1973

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–14, Mustad 94840, or similar

Silk: Either olive or brown

Tail: A few fibres from a brown partridge hackle (natural for the **Brown Nymph**, dyed olive for the **Green Nymph**)

Body: Wind the body with the herls from a goose primary previously dyed olive green or medium brown. Barry preferred to use the feather from a goose shoulder. Rib the wound body with oval gold tinsel

Thorax: Dark olive seal's fur for the olive version, and fur from a hare's mask for the brown version

Wing case: As the body material – a few fibres from a dyed goose shoulder feather

Hackle: Tied as a throat, two turns of speckled brown partridge hackle, dyed olive green for the green nymph, and natural for the brown nymph.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line and a 3–4 m leader. Allow the fly to sink right down, and retrieve with a figure-of-eight. On occasion, these flies will also work well fished in the surface film.

Running water: Cast upstream with an intermediate or slow-sink line and dead drift the fly back.

Kent's Brown Nymph and Kent's Green Nymph – 1981

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12 or 14, Grip 12004, or similar

Silk: Black

Tail: Peacock herl

Body: Green or brown floss ribbed oval gold tinsel

Back: Peacock herl (same fibres as tail)

Hackle: Natural red cock

Head: Peacock herl.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line over shallows and the edge of weed beds and other structure. Use a twitching retrieve to impart dashes to the fly.

BTF

TROUT



TONY BIGGS, DATE UNKNOWN

This little dry fly is the work of Tony Biggs, a much-respected angling writer resident in South Africa. It was developed for exceptionally shy brown trout in clear Cape streams. I have tried it in clear streams throughout southern Africa, and also in Kenya, and have found it most useful. On really difficult low water on bright, sunny days, it can prove to be a real saviour. It is a mayfly spinner imitation.

Discussion points: This is a pattern where the designer gives a broad spectrum of options, so many in fact that one can consider the possibility of several patterns here. Essentially, one may choose materials to imitate the specific spinner hatching at any time. Thus, by tying many of the possible variations, one can in theory cover the broad spectrum of potential spinner species. The designer's dressing is given below, and I have followed this by three useful combinations for African use.

Design notes: This is a long-hackle spider dry fly, similar to the 'variant' type, with the hackle wound at the body centre. It is a stream fly. It is also similar in form to the better-known **RAB** (page 75).

Tying notes: The application of the hackles is peculiar to this kind of fly. The 'legs' hackle is the chosen body material (always long-fibred), which is wound halfway down the shank from the tail end, and then spread with the tying silk to form the 'legs'. The first hackle (which is the first one of two given in the dressing under 'Hackle' below) is then tied directly in front of this. The second hackle is tied in three-quarters of the way along the shank and wound back through the first hackle, in one turn, and tied off at the legs. The first hackle is then finally wound through the second hackle (palmer-style), and tied off at the head. Each hackle should have no fewer than three turns and no more than six.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 14–18, down-eye dry fly, bronze

Silk: Light mauve, or fawn, or black

Tail: Always the same as the chosen first hackle colour

Body: Egyptian goose barred breast feather, or blue crane primary feather fibres, or pheasant tail feather fibres

Hackle: High-grade cock hackles. Designer's choice is either:

- Cree and iron-blue dun
- Cree and badger
- Badger and blue dun



Substitution: Egyptian geese are common in South Africa and the breast feathers may be picked up in April and May alongside most waters. However, an acceptable substitute for overseas tyers is mallard bronzes from the drake.

The blue crane is protected as South Africa's national bird. Goose primaries dyed initially in pale grey Dylon (five minutes) and then in sky-blue Dylon (five minutes), can replace these. Commercial substitutes for heron are also available.

Combinations of choices for the dressing which I have found useful are:

- a) **Silk:** Fawn
Body: Egyptian goose
Hackle: Cree and iron blue dun
- b) **Silk:** Black
Body: Pheasant tail
Hackle: Cree and badger
- c) **Silk:** Light mauve
Body: Blue crane substitute
Hackle: Badger and blue dun

These three dressings cover most of the mayfly spinners encountered in Africa.

CADDIS PUPA

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



BLUEWATER FLIES, 2005

This example tied by Bluewater Flies is noted for its short-shank hook, producing a compact, 'meaty-looking' fly. This is one of the more recent caddis pupa imitations, and one I like to fish just under the surface, especially when trout are 'head and tailing' to emerging caddis adults. It is primarily an imitation of long-horn caddis pupae.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–10, 2X short-shank, straight-eye, Fulling Mill Scorpion 31140, or similar

Silk: Black

Body: Dubbed lime-green SLF, ribbed gold wire over body and shell back

Back: Few fibres of cock pheasant tail pulled over the back with two long fibres extending rearward from the thorax rear

Thorax: Peacock herl

Head: Brass bead.

METHOD

Stillwater: Fish on a floating line using a long leader, greased to within 10 cm of the fly. Use a figure-of-eight retrieve. This is an ideal method when sedges are hatching and buzzing across the surface of the water.

Running water: This is a good dropper fly for a **Czech Nymph** rig, and also works well dead drifted back just under the surface.

CADDIS POOPAH

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



HOOKED ON FLIES, 2005

This little caddis imitation is marketed by Hooked on Flies of Mondeor, Johannesburg, and is one of a considerable range of well-dressed flies produced by them. It is rather long in the body for a pure caddis grub imitation, and appears to work by offering triggers of both variously coloured bloodworms and caseless caddis. It is a very effective fly and works well in all waters. The **Caddis Poopah** is available in olive (the favoured colour), brown, black, and orange versions.

Tying notes: Burn off the tail end of the Vernille using a cigarette lighter. The tie-off is behind the head bead.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–14, Kamasan B400, or similar

Silk: Black

Body: Pale green Flashabou ribbed fine copper wire, the rib also holds down the over-body

Over-body: Olive Vernille extending a whole shank length from head to body end

Antennae: Laying back over the body and extending to the end of the over-body, two fibres of well-marked grizzle spade cock

Thorax: Black ostrich herl

Throat: Dark red cock tied short

Head: Brass bead.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line and a long leader to match the depth. Retrieve with a figure-of-eight.

Running water: Cast upstream and dead drift the fly back, close to the bottom.



CARIBOU SPIDER

TROUT



MARK MACKERETH, C. 1955

This is a South African dry fly for rough, clear water, and offers exceptional buoyancy. It was developed for the Cape streams, but works well throughout KwaZulu-Natal, and is a good Highveld low-water fly. I have found it most useful on all headwaters of African trout streams in many countries on the continent.

Design notes: This is an ‘in the surface’ dry fly which represents many terrestrials and adult aquatic insect forms.

Tying notes: The hackle is tied ‘parachute style’ (i.e. flat on the thorax area), and the tip of this hackle feather points forward over the hook eye, for slightly less distance than the body length. The body hair is spun onto the bare hook shank, and ideally a drop of varnish should be applied before every spinning. The body trimming needs to be done before applying the hackle. Ideally, make up a few bodies, and then tie in the hackle after trimming the body (sort of production-line tying).

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12–16, down-eye dry, bronze

Silk: Grey or black

Tail: None

Body: Caribou hair spun on the bare hook, and clipped close

Hackle: Cock well marked grizzle, tied parachute-style with hackle tip pointing forward over the eye

Substitution and changes: The late Jack Blackman, in *Flies and Flyfishing in South Africa*, published by Accucut, 1985, gives a modified version of the **Caribou Spider** with an additional short tail of grizzle hackle fibres and the body of spun deer hair (replacing the caribou) ‘trimmed close as a sausage’. This is still the currently accepted standard used by commercial and private fly-tyers. However, please note that many commercial ties leave out the forward-pointing hackle tip, an omission which is to the detriment of the fly.

METHOD

Running water: Dead drift down over rough, clear water, with a tippet greased to within 10 cm of the fly.

CHAD’S CRYSTAL THORAX

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



BLUEWATER FLIES, 2005

This excellent little nymph is rather like a beaded **GRHE** (page 250) with considerable added flash. It is available in different colours; the orange one is given below. I find this dressing to be very versatile. Even though appearing rather bright for clear stillwater, it actually works well, and also works very well in tumbling streams and rivers. The orange version has considerable advantage over the standard **GRHEs** in its ability to imitate yolk-carrying, freshly hatched small fry.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–14, Kamasan B170

Silk: Brown

Tail: Pale dun cock hackle fibres

Abdomen: Brown Antron or hair from a hare’s mask, ribbed gold oval tinsel

Thorax: Orange Krystal Flash, or similar

Wing case: Peacock herl

Head: Brass bead.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line and search the shallows around weed beds, using a jerk-stop-jerk retrieve. Alternatively, try fishing with a floating line and a long leader, working over rocky bottoms and around deepwater weed beds.

Running water: Slip the fly down through runs and riffles on a sinking line, or alternatively cast upstream and dead drift back.

CHAD’S FLOATING SNAIL

TROUT



BLUEWATER FLIES, CHAD HUBBARD, 2003



The puzzle of imitating floating snails has been with us for a long time. **Cliff Henry's Floating Snail** (page 249) was the only partially workable one available for many years, and then came a few deer hair attempts which unfortunately did not have the right floating capability. **Cliff Henry's Floating Snail** was hard to tie, and many were put off from even attempting it. But then, out of the blue, this eloquent yet simple, working pattern by Chad Hubbard arrived. It really works, and can be the key to great sport when most go home sadly disappointed after being surrounded by rising and apparently uncatchable trout.

Tying notes: The float is large, almost half the body size. Cut the Plastazote into a strip with a square cross section (much the same dimensions as you would use for a single **Booby** (page 278) fly float).

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–12, Kamasan B170. The Kamasan B100 or Partridge YK4A are perhaps better

Silk: Black

Body: Thick mottled chenille, in brown and black, or olive and black

Float: Black Plastazote or polyurethane foam, tied large.

METHOD

Stillwater: Cast out and retrieve with a figure-of-eight and the occasional twitch, at a speed just sufficient to keep it under control and the line in touch. Concentrate on the fly, since it is easy to lose sight of it.

CHARCOAL NYMPH

TROUT



BILL HANSFORD STEELE, 1975

Standard Charcoal Nymph (top). This dressing by Murray Peddar (bottom) shows what kind of realism can be achieved by the enthusiastic fly-tyer.

This useful stillwater nymph fly arose from a still, hot day in Mpumalanga, South Africa, when not even vespers disturbed the water's mirror surface. Nothing was working, and I decided to spend an hour hunting aquatic insects. I searched the dam wall stones along the water's edge, and found a great many dark grey Ephemeroptera nymphs, each with a distinctive reddish spot near the wing case. I had nothing even close to them in the fly box, and that night I tied up some imitations. The red spot on these wild nymphs was typical of the 'key colour' that fish search for, and thus I highlighted this with a fluorescent neon-magenta collar. This fly has been very good to me, and many other anglers too, having produced many good bags over the years – often when nothing else would work. The **Charcoal Nymph** resembles many aquatic insects, but especially the darker mayfly nymphs.

Design notes: Charcoal (or deep grey) comes much closer than black to the colour of the living nymph. A mixture of charcoal and dark brown Antron dubbing also works well. The magenta must not be too extensive, and the three turns must be wound one on top of the other (i.e. resulting in a one-turn width). A 'single width turn' collar has proven to be better than a wide collar.

Tying notes: After tying down the wing case, the end of the feather fibres should be brought under the fly to simulate legs. The body is slim and tapered.

Variations: This fly is also known with a brass bead head.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–14, Grip 12803, or down-eye, nymph-style bronze, pre-leaded with fine wire at the thorax

Silk: Black

Tail: Black shiny cock hackle fibres

Body: Dubbed charcoal Antron fibres, slightly tapered and ribbed with fine red copper wire

Collar: Three turns of neon-magenta fluorescent DRF (Veniard) floss

Thorax: Black seal's fur

Wing case: Fibres from the tail feather of a black cock

Head: Black silk varnished black

Substitution: Antron wool dubbing, or other commercial dubbing, may be used to replace seal's fur.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line and sufficient leader length to allow the nymph to work the bottom. Retrieve using a slow figure-of-eight. This is a good fly on dead-still, mirrored-surface waters, and is also good at dawn and again at dusk. It is most effective fished over rocky and gravel bottoms.



CHRISTMAS BEETLE

TROUT



TOM SUTCLIFFE, 1989

Tom Sutcliffe's living Christmas beetles are very similar to those insects I have been writing about for years as 'little grass beetles', and there are many species of these. In Mpumalanga and Gauteng the beetle species are usually brown or pale brown, and easily imitated with a dry **Coch-y-Bonddu** (page 287), but the KwaZulu-Natal species encountered by Tom are small, grey beetles. This imitation copies these well, and when the trout get preoccupied with these beetles, not much else will work. This fly will also take trout when no beetles are in evidence.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 14 or 16, up-eye dry fly

Silk: Grey

Legs: Ten fibres of cock pheasant centre tail feather. Start the dressing by tying these in as a tail (they will become the wing cases)

Body: Fine deer hair spun along the body. Trim to a beetle shape above, with the underside trimmed flat

Wing cases: Pull the pheasant tail fibres over the body, leaving some fibres as legs, and tie down at the head. Twist the ends of the fibres around the shank to form the head.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line and fish this fly 'dry' in the ripple line on the lee shore.

CLARET AND DASSIE

TROUT



ANGELO KOMIS, 1996

This fly by angling writer and instructor Angelo Komis is a nymph-style, soft hackle wet fly, initially designed for the Mooi River in KwaZulu-Natal. It originated on the 'Coldstream' beat

on the Mooi. Angelo had been having some success with a red **Walker's Nymph** (page 90), and the thought came to him of trying that colour scheme (but darkened for *Leptophlebia* (mayfly) imitation), in the British North Country hackled wet fly style. The result was this very successful pattern for running water.

Design notes: This fly offers plenty of hackle movement, and also good colouration which comes close to natural African *Leptophlebia* and some *Baetis* nymphs.

Tying notes: Use a long-fibred hackle feather. The dassie, or rock hyrax as it is also known, is common in Africa. The correct fur comes from the back of the dassie.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–14, 2X long-shank nymph, optionally pre-weighted with lead wire at the thorax

Silk: 6/0 brown

Tail: Black cock hackle fibres

Body: Claret seal's fur, ribbed medium gold flat tinsel

Thorax: Over the lead wire, dubbed dassie fur, teased out

Hackle: Two turns of brown speckled hen hackle

Substitution: Cane rat fur and even hare fur (from the back of the hare) can be used in place of dassie. 'Blue' (grey) rabbit fur may also be used.

METHOD

Running water: Use a floating line, cast upstream, and dead drift back.

CREAM DUN

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



ANON., C. 1970

This split wing dry fly was for a long time sold under the name of the American fly, the **Light Cahill** (page 324), and was in fact an 'incorrect' local South African commercial tie of that pattern. On the rare occasion an incorrectly tied pattern proves to be as good as the original, and sometimes better. Because of South Africa's stream-side entomology, this one was better in some situations than the original. The author first differentiated these dressings in a magazine article in 1974. The **Cream Dun** is now recognised as an African pattern in its own right.

This is a stream fly pattern for the fast waters of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, where pale-coloured mayflies are often encountered. It has also proven to be a good yellowfish dry fly, as



a result of imitating the common, pale dun-coloured, hyaline-winged mayfly spinners of the South African Vaal system and elsewhere. It will also take fish in a hatch of Vaal grey buzzers.

Design notes: Although this is a fly born by accident rather than design, it does come very close to many pale-coloured mayflies, sedges, and adult buzzers. Polyfur is a buoyant material and improves the floatation of this fly.

Tying notes: The Polyfur body is tapered toward the tail. The **Light Cahill** original calls for lemon wood duck flank for the wings, but the **Cream Dun** split wing is always tied from slips of mallard grey breast feather.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12 or 14, up-eye dry, round-bend bronze

Silk: Cream

Tail: Whisks of cream cock hackle fibres

Body: Dubbed cream Polyfur

Hackle: Two turns grade AAA cream cock hackle

Wings: Slips from natural grey mallard breast feather.

METHOD

Running water: All floating line, dry fly techniques.

CRYSTALBEL NYMPH

TROUT



RON CLAY, 1993

Ron Clay initially devised this stillwater, hackled wet fly to imitate green corixids in clear water. The dam of its initiation was the Crystalbel at the Millstream resort in Mpumalanga, South Africa. This is Millstream's 'catch-and-release' trophy dam, containing some great fish which have given many an angler a day to remember. I had one such day in 2006, taking three fish over 6 lb (approx. 2.5 kg) and one of 7 lb (approx. 3 kg) in a single session.

Design notes: This fly uses the green/black contrast attractor formula, which is very effective on stillwater flies. The hackle provides movement and leg imitation. In late summer, switching to an orange or magenta head enables the angler to imitate hatches of sedge.

Tying notes: The body should be wound over a silk bed, with a still-tacky varnish coating. Long-fibred hackles are preferred.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–14, standard shank, down-eye, bronze, optionally pre-weighted on the back

Silk: Black

Tail: Tuft of black marabou

Body: Wound black Tuff (thin) chenille

Hackle: Four turns of black hen

Head: Fluorescent signal-green floss, varnished clear.

Optionally, in late summer fluorescent orange or magenta.

METHOD

Stillwater: Use a floating line and a long (4 m+) leader, with a slow figure-of-eight retrieve.

DAMSEL NYMPH (BLACKMAN'S DAMSEL)

TROUT



JACK BLACKMAN, C. 1980

This fly was first published in *Flies and Flyfishing in South Africa* by the late Jack Blackman. The pattern is generally accredited to Blackman himself.

Design notes: Features of the living nymph pivotal to this pattern are the flat, splayed tail and the eyes. All the colour versions given by Blackman occur in nature; he recommended autopsying the day's first catch in order to select the correct colour. Be aware that trout stomach acids can alter the colour of the nymphs, generally making them much paler than the living ones. The natural, paler-coloured (yellow, grey, white) nymphs tend to inhabit only high-altitude waters. Dark olive is the most useful all-round colour version.

Tying notes: The body is dubbed with short-fibred seal's fur to achieve the slim profile so typical of the living nymphs. Blackman used 5 kg dark green monofil for the eyes (tending to make them blackish when the ends are burnt). Clear monofil (7 kg) will provide a clear, sparkling eye, seen by some as an improvement. Make the eyes by cutting a 3–4 mm length of monofil. Burn the ends flat and tie down just behind the hook eye with figure-of-eight lashing.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–14, long-shank, straight-eye, bronze, optionally pre-weighted with fine lead wire at the thorax, try the Grip 13802

Silk: As body colour

Tail: Three cock hackle tips, colour as body, and splayed flat

Body: Dubbed seal's fur tied very slim either dark olive, light olive, yellow, black, white, grey, insect green, or brown

Eyes: Burnt dark green nylon monofilament

Thorax: Continue the body dubbing over and around the eyes

Substitution: Ready-made eyes for damselfly nymphs are available at fly-fishing shops, and are simply tied in.



METHOD

Stillwater: Blackman recommended fishing these nymphs with a 'floating line and a long leader, the retrieve being short, sharp draws assisted by movements of the rod tip'. He recommended fishing along weed beds and in the channels between them. He also advised using this fly for evening fishing in the shallows among reeds and grasses. He was aware that a pre-leaded version for fishing deep and slow was worth having in the fly box.

On hot, calm days when damselflies are hatching (given away by the subsurface swirls of feeding fish), this fly works well fished fast on an intermediate line just below the surface. Alternatively, twitch it through the surface film on those rare occasions when damsels are all over the surface, prior to mating among the bank-side weeds.

DARK FERRASH

TROUT



ANON., PRE 1950

This is an imitative stream dry fly of some antiquity, which may be used floating on the surface, or 'drowned' just below it. It is aptly named; the 'Dark Ferrash' was the executioner of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. This fly copies the dark-coloured species of grasshopper that often fall from riverside grasses and vegetation. It was popular 50 years ago, but is almost unknown today. This is surprising, since it is a really good terrestrial pattern, if rather fragile. **Tying notes:** Examples examined had the kickers' herls knotted at the 'knee' joint. Kickers are tied on the side of the body at the thorax area.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–10, up-eye, bronze

Silk: Red

Tail: Golden pheasant crest, with tips of Indian crow each side

Tag: Flat gold tinsel

Body: Bronze peacock herl, ribbed with scarlet floss, and a palmered natural red cock hackle over

Kickers: Use the quill points of black ostrich herl, with the herl cut close to the tip

Antennae: Tips of bronze peacock herl

Substitution: The brick-red Indian crow feathers are replaced with brick-red-dyed hen or mallard breast feathers.

METHOD

Running water: Proof the fly well. Use a floating line and drift down under bushes and overhanging grass.

DASSIE DAN

TROUT



HAIRY FAIRY FLIES, 1985

This grey-coloured South African wet fly/nymph is in some respects rather similar to the American **Casual Dress** (page 325). Like that fly, it is also a good general-purpose nymph pattern, with pronounced damselfly imitation qualities. It is also taken as a fry imitation. All in all then, the **Dassie Dan** is a good general attractor pattern.

Tying notes: The body is spun using long-fibred grey dassie (also known as rock hyrax) fur. As the tie approaches the hackle area, the dassie fur fibre lengths increase, thus producing a thicker collar hackle of fur. The optional fine lead wire weighting is applied under the dressing, and to the thorax area of the fly only.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–10, down-eye, 3X long-shank, bronze, optionally pre-weighted

Silk: Black

Tail: Dassie fur

Body: Spun dassie fur, working into a dassie collar hackle

Head: Grey/black ostrich herl in front of the hackle

Substitution: The grey fur of the dassie can, at a pinch, be substituted with fur from a 'blue' rabbit (actually grey).

METHOD

Stillwater: Fish around the edges of weed beds with a floating line.

Running water: Dead drift back with plenty of interspersed sharp twitches, on a sinking line.

DIGGER'S RED

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



MALCOLM MEINTJES, 1974



This South African stillwater nymph is a bloodworm imitation. Bloodworms are the larvae of non-biting midges (Chironomidae), otherwise known as buzzers. They occur on most waters in huge numbers, and represent an important food source for the fish. Generally, they prefer water over 2 m deep, although some species (such as the Vaal grey buzzer) will live in water as shallow as 25 cm. They are important imitations on those grey days with a wind across the water, but no sign of fish activity at all. Often on such days, the trout as well as yellowfish will be browsing midge larvae off the bottom, and can be taken with a good imitation.

Design notes: Most bloodworm imitations fail as a result of a lack of movement. This pattern, by incorporating marabou fibres in the tail, provides this necessary key movement. The fluorescence, worked into the body, enhances the key colour of the natural, providing a target for the fish.

Tying notes: The tail length should be as for the hook shank. A useful method for the body is to dub it, then rib with the fluorescent yarn (rayon floss is a good material). Finally, apply the pearl Flashabou rib in the opposite direction. The original is described below, but a crimson variation may be more useful for yellowfish in rivers. The preferred brown for the body is chestnut or ruddy brown.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–12, down-eye, originally long-shank; nowadays more usefully tied on a 'nymph' bend hook, bronze (or silver)

Silk: Scarlet

Tail: Bunch of red marabou

Body: Tied slim, of brown dubbing mixed with fluorescent red yarn, and ribbed with pearlescent Flashabou

Head: Dubbed scarlet seal's fur

Substitution: Seal's fur may be substituted with Antron wool fibres or Partridge SLF dubbing.

METHOD

Stillwater: Fish over deep water very slowly, with a figure-of-eight retrieve, right on the bottom.

Running water: Look for slower running water, flowing over sand or mud bottoms with depth of a metre or less. Cast upstream using an intermediate line, and dead drift back.

DON'S DRAGON

TROUT, BASS, LARGEMOUTH YELLOWFISH, ALESTES, CATFISH, BREAM



DON LORT, 1986

This fairly modern nymph imitation by the late Don Lort is a very useful pattern indeed, and will work in every stillwater you come across, and also in many streams. It imitates the nymphal form of dragonflies and in particular the darter dragonflies (Libellulidae), which are very common throughout Africa. It also imitates small emperor (Aeshnidae) dragonfly nymphs quite well. Don's various nymph flies were always imitated from nature, and in this respect he would keep a jar of nymphs in front of him while working on the design of a new pattern. Only when he felt that his designs had been adequately proven would anyone hear about them, and then with typical generosity he would hand them out to everyone and wait for the feedback.

Design notes: The design aim was for a compact, flattish-bodied nymph, with pronounced eyes as the pattern's hot spot. Mobile flash was added to improve attractiveness and simulate leg movement.

Tying notes: The flattish, wide body is first laid down before the pattern is commenced, and may be achieved using string or wool along the sides. Allow for a thinner neck, and then make the head as wide as the body. For weighted versions, Don would alternatively use lead wire (in place of the string or wool) along the sides for body shaping, as well as on top.

The eyes are trimmed back flush to the head on completion. The most useful hook size is 10. The most useful colour is grey. The dubbing is blended; Don's suggested mixes are as follows:

Grey: grey 75%, olive 10%, brown 5%, blue 5%, fluorescent orange 5% – olive Krystal Flash

Olive: olive 50%, dark olive 25%, brown 10%, grey 5%, blue 5%, fluorescent orange 5% – yellow Krystal Flash

Brown: dark brown 50%, pale brown 25%, olive 10%, orange 5%, blue 5%, fluorescent red 5% – root beer or copper Krystal Flash

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 4–12, down-eye, bronze

Silk: Black

Tail: A few fibres of Krystal Flash approx. 3 mm long

Body: Note that legs and eyes are tied in before wrapping the body and head. Pre-shape the body (see above). Dub the desired colour mixture, and wind the body and head with the dubbed silk, leaving a thinner neck for realism

Eyes: Tuff (suede) chenille. Tie a short piece in at the head, across the hook, with a figure-of-eight binding

Legs: Use matching Krystal Flash (as above), and tie in a few fibres across and on top of the hook, at the waist. Trim these on completion to protrude 4 mm.

METHOD

Stillwater: Don used a Hi-D line, letting the nymph fish right on the bottom. Vary your 'sink count down' until you are sure the fly has sunk completely, then stick to that depth. Fish it right on the bottom with a slow retrieve interspersed with fast 10 cm dashes.

Running water: Use a fast-sink line and dead drift the nymph back, tripping it along the bottom. A good fly over fine gravel bottoms in rivers, and in the tail ends of weirs.



DON'S NYMPH (DON'S GREY NYMPH)

TROUT



DON LORT, 1990

Don Lort tied many nymphs, and was a great follower of the style of CF Walker (UK). This was the best of his small nymphs, and although designed for stream fishing, it also took many stillwater trout. **Don's Nymph** was originally designed for use on South Africa's Sabie River, where it imitates the nymphs of slate-winged and other dark Baetidae mayflies. It is a very good clear-water fly, which I have found takes fish even when no apparent hatch or surface activity is evident.

Design notes: The body dubbing is a blend of colours and materials, which also entrap a little air, causing the nymph to shine underwater.

Tying notes: Optionally, one can weight this nymph with a few turns of fine lead wire under the thorax. The wing case fibre ends should be brought under the fly to simulate legs – many commercial versions fail to do this. The body should be fairly slim and tapered, thickening considerably in the thorax area.

Variations: This fly is also known with a small brass bead head.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12–18, curved-shank nymph hook, down-eye, bronze

Silk: Pale grey

Tail: Half dozen fibres of bronze mallard

Body: Dubbed with a blend of wools, mixed in an electric food blender (page 422), as follows:

Grey Acrylic wool – 90%

Neutral Antron – 10%

Rib: Fine oval silver tinsel

Thorax: Picked-out body dubbing to give a ball shape at the thorax

Wing cases: Bronze mallard fibres, tips tied under and slightly splayed to simulate legs

Head: Clear varnish.

METHOD

Running water: Cast upstream using a floating line and the finest tippet you can handle. Dead drift back, watching the fly line tip for indications of takes. A 'sight bob' is a useful aid, since many takes are extremely gentle.

Stillwater: Use a floating line and a non-weighted nymph, and fish in and just below the surface film using slow 20 cm pulls. This fly will also perform well fished sink and draw in the shallows over rocky shores, especially in the early hours of the morning.

DRAGGIN FLY

TROUT



ROBIN FICK, 1990

Robin Fick's flies are legend in KwaZulu-Natal, and here is another of his excellent patterns. It is a good match for stillwater, summertime, olive-coloured dragonfly nymphs.

Design notes: In this pattern, Fick combined the best of his damsel and dragon nymph patterns, and imitated the broad design concept of the **Woolly Buzzer** (page 354). The tail has good action; the profile is correct for these nymphs. The body hackle creates plenty of vibratory movement for attraction, useful in stained water, thus combining these features to form an effective pattern for most occasions.

Tying notes: The eyes should be tied in across the shank prior to winding the head dubbing.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–12, Partridge 'Captain Hamilton' nymph style.

The body may be usefully pre-weighted for deep water, using lead wire

Silk: Olive

Tail: Not-too-long olive marabou, mixed with five strands of pearlescent Flashabou

Body: Dubbed olive seal's fur with rib of gold wire. The dubbing is blended from olive green, black, and brown.

Dubbing is ideally matched by varying the seal's fur blend to the aquatic vegetation colour (varying from bright green to drab olive as the season progresses)

Body hackle: Palmered along the body with an olive-dyed cock hackle, previously stripped of fibre on one side

Head: Dubbed as body

Eyes: Black Tuff chenille, cut close

Substitution: The seal's fur may be substituted with Antron wool fibres or a commercial substitute such as Partridge SLF dubbing.

METHOD

Stillwater: This fly is best fished near weed beds, using a floating line and a slow retrieve interspersed with fast jerks. It will also be taken fished statically right on the bottom. Fish also commonly take the fly as it is sinking (on the drop).



DRAGON 'O'

TROUT, BASS



HAIRY FAIRY FLIES, C. 1980

Some common colour variations of the Dragon 'O'

This nymph fly, in its various colours, has been on the market for over 25 years, and still has a good following. It imitates a damselfly nymph in the smaller sizes (10–12), and a dragonfly nymph in the larger sizes. The purple version is popular with deep, clear-water bass fly-fishers, and the others are popular stillwater trout flies.

Design notes: These nymphs give a full body shape, with plenty of fibre movement.

Tying notes: The body can be wound from ostrich herl, or thick marabou stems from the bottom of the marabou plume, or the fibres from the downy pre-dyed body feathers of chickens.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–12, long-shank, down-eye

Silk: As body colour

Tail: Approximately half shank length cut square – the ends of the body material

Body: Form a rope of a dozen feather fibres, and wrap these over a bed of tacky varnished silk

Rib: None, but the stems of the body feather fibres form a ribbing effect

Thorax: Wool wound in a ball shape, colour as in table

Wing case: Feather fibres, see colours in table

Hackle: Cock hackle, tied under the wing case, colour as in table

Eyes: Formed from dark nylon monofilament, with the ends melted into blobs.

METHOD

Stillwater: These are good flies when fished around weed beds with a sinking line and a slow retrieve. For deepwater bass, use a fast-sink line, and fish in channels between rocks, over old roads and gravel bottoms, and search old quarry workings.

DRAGONFLY NYMPH, BLACKMAN'S

TROUT



JACK BLACKMAN, C. 1975

This is perhaps the most simplistic dragonfly nymph imitation of all. The late Jack Blackman's favourite colours were the dark olive version and the black version, but all the colours work. Note that Blackman's damsel imitation is a different fly (page 35).

Design notes: This is a heavy nymph designed for working shallows right on the bottom, but it is also a very suitable fly for working the depths. It imitates the body shape of Aeshnidae emperor dragonfly nymphs, which are common throughout Africa.

DRAGON 'O' COLOUR	BODY	THORAX	WING CASE	HACKLE
Brown	Brown	Brown	Dark brown	Brown
Grey	Dark blue dun	Pale blue dun	Dark blue dun	Pale blue dun
Olive	Pale olive	Grey olive	Dark olive	Olive
Purple	Purple	Purple	Black	Black
Black	Black	Black	Black	Black



Tying notes: The body is tied to a flat but thickish profile, achieved by pre-tying a suitably shaped under-body. Wind the lead strip forward from the tail, stopping just short of the head area, and flatten with pliers. Extra turns of dubbing are applied to the head/thorax area.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–12, 3X long-shank, down-eye, round-bend, bronze

Silk: As body colour

Tail: None

Under-body: Lead strip (or suitably trimmed wine bottle lead foil)

Body: Dubbed seal's fur in either dark olive, light olive, black, brown, or cream

Legs: Cock hackle fibres to match body colour, tied under the head

Head: Built up dubbing, and colour as per body.

METHOD

Running water: Cast upstream with a floating line, and allow the nymph to free drift with the current.

Stillwater: Jack Blackman caught a great many trout with this fly, by using a floating line and a long (4–5 m) leader, fished around weed beds, but always in the shallows. Takes on this fly may occur on the drop (as it is sinking), and even when left to lie on the bottom. The usual retrieve advocated by Blackman was a slow retrieve of stop/start movements. Another good retrieve, which others find successful, is to figure-of-eight retrieve with occasional long, fast dashes. This fly also works fished in very deep water, right on the bottom.

DUCKWORTH'S DARGLE DELIGHT (DDD)

TROUT, YELLOWFISH, BREAM, BASS



TOM SUTCLIFFE, 1976

If there was a prize for the best and most useful African fly developed in the latter half of the 1900s – the **DDD** would win it hands down. The **Walker's Killer**, **Adolf**, and **Beam's Woolly Worm** are African frontrunners, but the **DDD** is the best of the bunch! Tom Sutcliffe originally designed this fly to imitate beetles, but time has shown it to imitate many creatures, including sedges, grasshoppers, mayflies, various terrestrials and others. It is named after Bill Duckworth and the Dargle River of KwaZulu-Natal. Designed as a dry fly, and indeed it is a splendid

one, many anglers are surprised to find that the original dressing also works well when fished deep, imitating snails and various nymphs. It has been the subject of many variations and colour changes, which have been variously named, but to my mind they are simply the **Yellow DDD**, **Orange DDD**, the **White Hackled DDD**, and the **White Winged DDD**.

Almost without exception, commercial tyers have changed the standard dressing materials – the most notable change being to substitute deer hair for the standard klipspringer hair. This makes a lot of sense for the professionals, since klipspringer is only likely to come one's way either through hunting, or as road kills, and not in sufficient quantities for factory tying. However, the markings on klipspringer hair are more pronounced than deer hair, it is a finer hair, and also floats better because of its cellular construction. Nevertheless, some klipspringer hair (enough for amateur tyers) does come onto the South African market from time to time. Another common change in shop samples (probably unnecessary), is the insertion of Flashabou into the pattern. Finally, many fly suppliers tie the hackle with deer hair.

Design notes: Perhaps the most important feature of the **DDD** design is the amazing floating capability of this fly. This, combined with its 'buggy' appearance, makes for a winning combination. This is an ideal fly with which to learn dry-fly fishing.

Tying notes: Tom Sutcliffe advocates an untidy tie for best results. The body needs to be tied tight, spinning as many fibres as possible along the shank. It is easiest to tie lots of bodies, trim them all to shape first, and then apply the hackle.

DDD Original dressing

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–12, 2X long, down-eye, bronze (later changed to standard hook shank)

Silk: Black

Tail: Klipspringer fur

Body: Spun klipspringer fur, trimmed to a tapering shape

Hackle: A dun spade hackle (later text gives black or brown).

DDD Commercial dressing (also as given by Blackman, *Flies and Flyfishing in South Africa*, 1985)

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 6–12, down-eye, bronze (some are produced on up-eye hooks)

Silk: Black or brown

Tail: Bunch of deer hair fibres

Body: Spun natural deer hair, trimmed to a tapering shape

Hackle: Ginger or brown cock.



Orange DDD



DEON ELLIS, EARLY 2000s

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 12–16

Silk: White

Tail: Ginger cock with two strands of orange Krystal Flash

Body: Spun, dyed orange deer hair, clipped to shape

Hackle: Ginger cock.

Yellow DDD



THIS DRESSING BY THE LATE ROD CROSS, EARLY 2000s

Design notes: A really bright version of this pattern in fluorescent yellow is also known.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8 or 10

Silk: Black

Tail: Cream cock hackle fibres

Body: Spun primrose yellow-dyed deer hair, clipped to shape

Hackle: Dark furnace cock.

METHOD

Running water: The DDD can be advantageously pre-proofed, i.e. dip a few into floatant, allow them to dry, and carry them around in a small pillbox.

Allow the fly to drift down through rough water, also under bushes and bank-side vegetation.

An alternative method is to fish the DDD wet without floatant. This can be done drifting under the surface with a slow-sink line, or dead drifting the bottom with a fast-sinking line.

Stillwater: A very easy method is to get the wind behind you, and simply cast out on a floating line, allowing the fly to sit on the water's surface. Watch carefully and concentrate on the fly (or you may well miss many takes) – an effective method! Alternatively, cast to observed rises. This fly is good at seeking out feeding trout.

DULLSTROOM DUN

TROUT



ANGELO KOMIS, 1989

This successful little dry fly has carved a useful reputation among South African Highveld fly-fishers. It was designed by Angelo Komis to imitate especially the mottled-wing mayflies, with tan bodies segmented in dark sepia, which hatch over stillwater. These mayflies commonly occur in high country.

Tying notes: Angelo's original dressing is given below. The rib is often omitted on commercial ties, and the hackle is commonly found tied only in blue dun. Both of these errors reduce the effectiveness of this otherwise very good fly. The dyed mallard feathers are in fact a substitute for 'summer duck breast feathers'.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 14 or 16, fine wire, down-eye, bronze

Silk: 8/0 dark tan

Tail: Fibres of medium blue-dun cock

Body: Medium tan polypropylene dubbing ribbed with 3/0 dark brown thread

Wings: Mallard breast dyed 'summer duck'

Hackle: Mixed grizzle cock and medium blue-dun cock.

METHOD

Stillwater: Fish the shallows near reed and weed beds, on warm evenings in late spring and summer. Cast out, leave it to rest, and give an occasional twitch.

EMERGING NYMPH

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



ALAN YATES, 1957

This is a Cape nymph fly of considerable stature, and designed by Alan Yates years ahead of its time. It will stand with any modern nymph pattern, and is a very good fly. Yates developed



his **Emerging Nymph** after reading an article by Richard Walker (UK) in the *Fishing Gazette* in 1952. He spent some five years refining the pattern before releasing it to the public. This nymph represents the emerging mayfly just at the time the nymphal skin splits. At this time, just for a brief moment, the wings are held erect to dry. They look like a pair of small sails. And this is when the hatching nymph is most vulnerable, and coincidentally most attractive to the trout. So, here is a pattern representing the wild mayfly nymph at its most defenceless and attractive moment. The dressing below was considered by Yates to be a 'general' pattern, and he felt that much scope existed for developing further **Emerging Nymphs** to imitate specific nymphs in nature.

Design notes: Although designed specifically for streams, this fly is also effective during a hatch of stillwater pond olives, and other lake *Baetis* species.

Tying notes: This fly is most usefully tied on a light wire 'nymph'-style hook, rather than the down-eye dry used in the 1950s.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–14, down-eye, dry

Silk: Black

Tail: Three fibres of cock pheasant centre tail feather

Body: Bronze peacock herl ribbed flat gold tinsel

Thorax: Bronze peacock

Wing: Cock coch-y-bonddu hackle fibres, bunched and standing vertically

Wing cases: Magpie tail slips, shiny side out, tied around the wing roots and over the thorax

Throat: Brown partridge hackle fibres tied spent

Hackle: Hen cinnamon and black tied sparse

Substitution: 'Cinnamon and black' hackles are rare in fly-tying shops. They come from golden 'Seabright bantams', which are very popular among South African ornamental chicken breeders. If you can't get them, use a Pantone pen to mark the edges of a plain cinnamon feather. (I have known many a fly-tyer to be seen hanging around the chicken pens at bird-selling emporiums, ardently looking for pick-ups.)

The magpie slips may be replaced with slips from a black (with green gloss) bantam tail feather.

The fly hangs in the surface film better if the gold tinsel is omitted. Some modern ties use pearl Flashabou for the rib.

METHOD

Running and stillwater: Use a floating line and a tippet/leader greased to within 5 cm of the fly. Pre-proof the fly with an effective floatant.

EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (ET)

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



MARK GRIFFITHS, 2003

This excellent terrestrial imitation was developed initially for the streams of the Western Cape in South Africa, but has since proven itself all over southern Africa in both still and running water. It has also served a useful apprenticeship among the yellowfish of the Vaal/Orange system and the yellows of the upper Zambezi. It is a great performer on windy days, when little is hatching, but when nevertheless the odd beetles and grasshoppers are being blown onto the stream. The original parachute post on this fly was white, but this may be difficult to see in rippled water with bright sunlight. In most terrestrial and beetle imitations, this 'sight aid' is probably best rendered in fluorescent pink, with fluorescent orange being a close runner-up. Griffiths suggests two main sizes: size 14 for general use and a size 10 for days when beetles and grasshoppers are prevalent.

Tying notes: The back foam is tied in at the bend and brought over the body. The legs are tied in at the tie-in point *before* the foam is tied down. Clip the foam square at the head end to form the head. Alternatively, use any 6/0 silk for tying.

Wind five to six turns of hackle anti-clockwise around the post – Griffiths advised tying each turn below the one before it. On completion of the hackle, trim the post to the required size.

Finish the fly by placing a few drops of head cement on the hackle post, and on the body wraps.

This fly rendered in all-yellow coloured material is becoming a popular alternative.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10 or size 14, down-eye, dry fly hook, e.g. Partridge YL3A or equivalent

Silk: Either 70UTC for the size 14 or 140UTC for the size 10. Colours red or chartreuse to create a hot spot at the thorax tie-down

Body: Peacock-coloured polypropylene dubbing

Legs: Pre-knotted pheasant tail fibres

Back: Black polyethylene foam

Post: White polypropylene yarn, or coloured as tying silk

Hackle: Grizzle cock, shiny side up, fibres 2x gape size. Tie in behind the post, and tie off the hackle tip under the head.

METHOD:

Stillwater: This fly will work very well fished static just in the lee shore ripple; there is no need to proof the fly.



Running water: Use a floating line, and grease the leader/tippet to within 10 cm of the point. Search the edges of pockets and pools, and the runs near the bank, especially under tussocks and bushes.

FICK'S CADDIS IMITATIONS

Robin Fick is one of the leading fly-tying innovators in South Africa, and his work *A Simple Guide to the Aquatic Life of the Stillwaters of Natal and my Imitations Thereof*, undated (mid-1980s), published by the Fly Fishers Association, is essential reading for any South African fly-fisher. Unfortunately, the document is scarce, and difficult to acquire at this time. Fick tied a complete range of caddis imitations, covering all the stages of the African caddis fly metamorphosis. In the intervening years, some of these patterns have been modified by other tyers. The dressings given below are those given by Robin Fick.

Fick's Caddis Cased Larva

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



ROBIN FICK, C. 1980

There are a great many caddis larvae that build cases for protection and camouflage. These include the superfamily Rhyacophiloidea, which contains species which build cases from stone and from sand, and the superfamily Limnephiloidea, which use bits of reed and leaves. Some of this latter group also use sand particles. Most caddis species are case-specific, and these insects will always build cases which are similar in content. Because of the many species, the body tyings can be varied to imitate the different types.

Design notes: This fly is tied slim, to imitate the living caddis.

Tying notes: Choose the dubbing material to imitate the required colour of the nymphal case. In most cases this will be dirty olive or mixed browns.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–14, Partridge 'Captain Hamilton' nymph bend, bronze. Alternatively, Mustad 9671

Silk: Black or brown

Body: Various mixed dubbings to create the colours of the natural's case

Legs: One turn black or brown hackle of short fibre

Head: Tying silk varnished.

METHOD

See **Fick's Free Living Caddis Larva** alongside.

Fick's Free Living Caddis Larva

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



ROBIN FICK, C. 1980

The free-living or caseless caddis larvae, which belong to the superfamily Hydropsychoidea are also popularly known as 'rockworms' and are of great importance to the stream-fisher. They occur in several colour forms, green being the commonest. They are essentially creatures of flowing water, are taken freely by trout, and are also an essential part of the yellowfish larder.

Design notes: Swannundaze (a transparent nylon material) is used in this pattern to create a 'living' effect. It also provides weight to the pattern.

Tying notes: Slightly stretch the Swannundaze as it is applied, keeping tight turns for a uniform segmented body. Swannundaze is normally applied over a single-layer silk under-body, which matches its colour. Although not given in the dressing, I assume this is the intention.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 8–14, Partridge 'Captain Hamilton' nymph bend, bronze. Alternatively, Mustad 9671

Silk: Black

Body: Fine, green or white, Swannundaze

Legs: One turn of short-fibred black or grizzle cock hackle.

METHOD

Stillwater: Fick suggests fishing on the drift with little or no retrieve. Cast out on a floating line, and allow the wind to move the fly across weed openings.

Running water: Cast upstream, and dead drift back on a floating or intermediate line.



Fick's Caddis Pupa and Fick's Caddis Emerger

TROUT, YELLOWFISH



ROBIN FICK, C. 1980

Fick's Caddis Pupa above and Fick's Caddis Emerger below

These two flies are especially good when caddis are coming off the surface at evening time.

Design notes: The **Fick's Caddis Pupa** is a stillwater nymph design incorporating Antron fibres. These fibres deliberately trap air bubbles in the fly, and thus simulate the silvery sheen of the living pupa body.

Tying notes: Fick also ties this fly with a looser over-body of crinkly Antron, with some strands trailing behind as a tail. He calls this the **Caddis Emerger**. As it enters the water, trapped air is released in an explosion of bubbles, making it very attractive to nearby fish.

Fick's Caddis Pupa

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–16, Mustad 94840

Silk: Cinnamon

Body: Cinnamon ultra-translucent dubbing, thick at the back tapering to the front

Over-body: Clear Antron wool fibres

Hackle: As legs, one turn of grizzle cock hackle extending just past the body

Head: Either ultra-translucent dubbing (as body), or peacock herl.

Fick's Caddis Emerger

Dressing is as above, but the over-body Antron is tied looser, with some strands extending beyond the tail.

METHOD

Stillwater: Both patterns should be fished with a floating line.

Fick's Caddis Pupa is fished *just below the surface* with a short jerk

retrieve, whereas **Fick's Caddis Emerger** should be fished *in the surface film* using a figure-of-eight retrieve. This surface film retrieve is achieved by greasing the tippet and leader to within 10 cm of the fly, whereas the 'below the surface retrieve' uses no grease at all.

FLASH FLIES

This is a generic name, which covers many and various nymph designs incorporating 'flash' products in their dressings. Initially, you could simply add flashy materials to existing nymph patterns, and of course you can still do that. However, there are now many 'flash' patterns which are original in design (not related to any standard nymph dressing) and can stand on their own merits. It is these that we shall deal with in this section. The motivation for many of these new designs has been the growth in yellowfish fly-fishing, but, some have also arisen simultaneously in the trout world. Many of them are quite garish, and some trout anglers avoid them. Nevertheless, some are excellent fish-catchers, and they are certainly worth more than a passing glance.

Most follow a standard tying formula and vary only in the colours used, yet others are more advanced and include hackled legs and so on. A lot of them are from the tying benches of commercial tyers who have been quick to spot their angler-catching potential. As a result, most of their actual inventors remain mysteries. All of them are noted by bead heads, and flash material bodies and thoraces.

Tying notes: With all of them, commence the tie by first fixing the bead in place. In some cases the hook must be de-barbed in order to slide the bead onto the shank.

Blue Delight

YELLOWFISH



ANON., 2003

Yellowfish, without a doubt, have a fascination with blue-coloured nymphs (see also **Smillie's Blue Nymph**, page 83), which would appear to simulate the UV component of 'grey' and possible 'bright blue-green' rockworms (caseless caddis nymphs). The **Blue Delight** and other blue nymphs are good performers in bright, sunny conditions, when many other patterns fail. They are generally fished on the dropper, although they perform quite well on their own.

Tying notes: Proportionally, the abdomen takes up 50% of the rear straight part of the hook shank, the rest is occupied by the head bead and the thorax. The bead goes on first, and should be glued in place, and also locked in position with a few turns of silk.



The final whip finish will be behind the bead! The **Blue Delight** wing case is formed from the ends of the body Lurex.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–14, down-eye, round-bend or Grip 12004

Silk: Fine black

Tail: Fibres from a black cock hackle, length as body

Body: Medium, bright blue Lurex

Thorax: Dubbed black short-fibred Antron or seal's fur, picked out to simulate legs

Wing case: Bright blue Lurex

Head: Blue glass bead.

METHOD

Running water: On bright days, tumble these flies down through shallow, well-oxygenated runs, using a floating fly line. Also use a twitch retrieve at the tail end of pools and eddies. Some good yellows have been taken with this fly in difficult low water and bright conditions.

Flash Attack

YELLOWFISH, TROUT



ANON., 2003

This fly and the ubiquitous city traffic light have a lot in common – both have lots of colour. I suppose this could be termed an all-water, key colour, contrast attractor nymph. This fly leaps out of the fly rack in a tackle shop, begging to be bought. This is a nymph for slightly coloured water such as you might come across at the beginning and the end of the rainy season. It apparently works well in dull light conditions.

The **Flash Attack** imitates the general body shape of nymphs, but otherwise it resembles nothing I have ever seen in the water. This fly does, however, have its supporters, and certainly the design combines a lot of insect triggers. Its interest to anglers as a kaleidoscope of colour will no doubt sustain it in the future.

Design notes: Within this fly can be found key colours of rockworms, cased caddis, and also caddis pupa. The body in particular is rather lifelike.

Tying notes: The finished fly should be slim. The final tie-off whipping is behind the head bead.

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–14, down-eye, bronze

Silk: Orange

Tail: Hot orange cock hackle fibres. Length as body

Body: Takes up 50% of the hook shank length only. Medium, pale green holographic tinsel

Thorax: Orange Antron dubbing or wool (not fluorescent)

Wing case: Single strand of the body material

Head: Blue glass bead.

METHOD

Running water: This is a fly for overcast conditions and shallow, slightly coloured water. It is a useful dropper for the Czech nymph method. It is also a good pattern for the unweighted fly (point fly) in the 'dropper nymph' method, using a floating line over shallow runs. Dead drift the fly back towards you, to give the fish time to spot it.

Stillwater: Primarily used for trout in dull weather conditions, with a wave on the surface. Use a sink-tip line and cast with the wind blowing sideways on. Allow the line and the fly to drift around, retrieving only at the end of the drift.

The Flash Back Nymph

There appear to be two dressings of this fly, both sold under this name. The better-known one has a claret thorax, the other a grey thorax. These are, comparatively speaking, more quietly coloured nymphs compared with the other flash flies in this family. They are nymphs for all waters in normal daytime conditions. Both are extremely flexible imitators. In particular, they simulate mayfly nymphs, but are also useful renderings of the Vaal grey buzzer.

Design notes: The claret-thoraxed version is very good in high-altitude waters containing *Leptophlebia* mayfly nymphs, whereas the darker Baetidae nymphs like the Vaal black mayfly are better imitated by the grey form. Both are fine buzzer imitations.

The Grey Flash Back Nymph

YELLOWFISH, TROUT



ANON., 2001

Grey Flash Back Nymph viewed from above

MATERIALS

Hook: Size 10–16, down-eye, bronze

Silk: Grey

Tail: Fibres from a blue-dun cock hackle

Body: Dubbed grey Antron, ribbed oval silver tinsel

Thorax: Grey Antron wool

Wing case: Pearlescent Flashabou

Head: Optional gold metal bead.

