

the advent of nylon and its effect on angling



By GREEN NYMPH

THE date of the introduction of nylon to the angling world, I cannot remember and I have no wish to enter into a discussion or controversy about this. But it is pretty certain that for salt-water angling, as far as Durban and district is concerned, nylon rapidly began to oust the ordinary flax or linen line shortly after the last war. It was on the market before this and was, I think, pioneered by the Du Pont de Nemours Coy. of New York.

My introduction to it was an accident. Before coming to South Africa in 1936 I called on my doctor to bid him goodbye. In those days most Scottish doctors had their consulting rooms in their houses, and I was shown in. Just as we sat down to have a chat, a patient was announced.

While the doctor was absent, I noticed a long slim box on the desk beside me, with four different colours and thicknesses of what I took to be 12 inch lengths of silkworm gut, as was commonly used in those days to knot together and to make fly leaders or casts, and traces.

I picked up one of the thicker strands and was astonished at its softness and suppleness. The thinner sizes were even more soft and supple. Presently the doctor came back and noticed my interest "I'm so glad you saw that, Bill; it's made by an American firm. It's been sent to me to try as sutures but the damned stuff is useless. The knots keep slipping and I can't be bothered with it. Take it and try it out for your trout fishing." I put the box into one of my packing cases and forgot all about it after coming to Durban. I rediscovered it about a year afterwards and, in my enthusiasm to try it out, tied up one or two trout leaders.

The ordinary fisherman's knot did slip with a vengeance so I tied a blood knot and kept pulling until the knot stopped slipping and seemed to be "set."

As I was to fish the Loteni River with friends, I made up six leaders with looped ends and two droppers, each leader tapered to the thinnest size.

The old silkworm gut was stiff and hard by comparison and had to be steeped in water before tying or it broke when tightening up.

To be able to tie those lengths of nylon just as they were picked out of the box was very satisfying but I little thought of troubles ahead.

My two friends Ted and Ken, who still fish with me, each tied on three flies and we all looked forward to a happy day. Both went upstream and I, contrary to my usual custom, began to fish down.

The trout were rising and presently a fish took my top dropper and after a splash or two, broke free; another fish broke free from the second dropper and then I realised that the two flies were gone.

This nylon stuff isn't as strong as silkworm gut, I thought. I wound in to tie on two new flies and then discovered there was no breakage. The little pig's tail curl at the end of the nylon indicated that the knot had slipped. I had used the usual turtle knot. On tying on the two new flies I put an extra turn round the standing part and put a knot on the end to make sure. This cured the trouble—but not all of it.

I took several trout and in those days the Loteni had lots of trout of a pound and over. A fish around that size rose near the far bank and I was forcing out a long line to cover the rise when away went the whole leader and three flies, I had simply cast it off. Examination showed that the knot had slipped. For a blood knot to slip was unthinkable, as far as silkworm gut was concerned, but this new nylon was certainly slippery.

When I rejoined Ted and Ken they too had been cursing the new leaders

and had changed to silkworm gut casts.

Nylon, however, has been improved considerably since those days and today each angler adopts a knot which he has found best for his purpose.

I still use the blood knot carefully tied and pulled tight. Any slippage would be sheer carelessness in tying.

From making nylon in 12 inch lengths it eventually was made in 40 inch lengths. After the war many surf anglers used it, and today it is made in many strengths up to about 200 lbs. and in lengths of 500 to 1,000 yards. By and large the only anglers who use the old flax or linen "cord" line are the recognised shark anglers who usually fish 18 cord line. The reason for this is that the terrific strain of nylon would burst the wooden Scarborough reel while playing a large shark.

Improved methods of manufacture have led to production of better quality nylon and surf anglers and ski-boat anglers mostly use nylon for their fishing. For use on fixed-spool reels it has no rival, especially for those enthusiastic light tackle anglers who use nylon of 6-lbs. breaking strain or less.

It is equally effective for spinning very light spoons in bays and lagoons and for the bass angler, and I believe it will retain its popularity for a very long time. Surf and ski-boat anglers went through a period of trial and error and damaged many reels, until it was discovered that it was fatal to play a fish by winding the nylon back on the reel by sheer force.

The fish had to be brought in by "pumping". The stretched nylon, recovered by winding in, shrinks on the reel, gradually exerting extreme pressure on the reel drum. As it shrunk in length it increased in thickness and became an extremely hard mass and,

Turn to Page 38

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THE ADVENT OF NYLON AND ITS EFFECT ON ANGLING

Continued from Page 22

whether the reel were of metal or wood, burst spools were frequent. The pieced-up Scarborough reels were less susceptible to breakage, especially if they had a thin inlay of wood in the centre of the periphery of both sides.

Even with this precaution, occasionally a reel would split if the angler, against his better judgement, had to pit all his strength against a large cantankerous fish. Today it is the practice of the makers of first-class reels to line the inside of the reel drum with fibre-glass "cloth".

In the hands of experienced anglers it is now a rare occurrence to have such a reel burst because of the terrific side pressure of tightly stretched nylon, once the angler has played and landed his fish. The inexperienced angler, however, still contrives to split even a good reel, whether it be a Scarborough or a salt water fixed-spool reel when used in the surf.

When one sees anglers using 30-lbs. nylon on a fixed-spool reel, with the slipping clutch tightened up so hard that it cannot slip, it is not surprising that lots of these reels are broken. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that little practice is necessary in learning to throw out a bait or spoon with such a reel. The user of the

Scarborough reel has to learn the hard way and only practice makes perfect.

The most successful surf anglers are undoubtedly those who use Scarborough reels and star-drag metals and plastic-multiplying reels, whether they use an overhead cast or a side swing. I doubt if 1% use cord line as nylon has taken over from flax.

It is impossible to say if some better fishing line than nylon may be invented or produced but it will have to be something specially good to put nylon into second place.

These are the days of wonderful development in the world of plastics and who may hazard a guess at their future?

THE BIRDS OF THE SERPENTINE

Continued from Page 15

The dark, little bird, known also as the African Little Grebe, is blessed with a rippling, musical laugh. When observed it dives, and continues doing so at regular intervals, until the danger has passed.

This disappearing trick is also a characteristic of the other Grebes. Every time the launch approached the huge flock of Great Crested Grebes, feeding nearby, it was a case of "bottoms up" and the birds dived to safety, later to reappear either to the right, or the left, or even behind the craft. It was impossible to flush these excellent swimmers.

No breeze had fanned the sheltered channels of the Serpentine but on the lake there was a welcome coolness in the air. The launch rippled its way around the island in the middle-said to be inhabited only by wild goats and scorpions. Twenty minutes later it re-entered the Serpentine on the homeward run.

Again I passed the huge stick nest among the reeds in the centre of the channel. Here, surely, was evidence that birds, so blessed with beauty, have no intelligence whatever. No family could possibly be raised in so public a place.

Again I heard the plummeting "plop" of a Kingfisher as it hit the water, and saw, once more, the Purple Gallinule scintillating in the sun. I glimpsed the green in the wings of a Black Duck followed by the unhurried, gliding grace of a Purple Heron in flight. The Darter was back on its original perch. Far upstream a Sea Eagle hovered high in the sky.

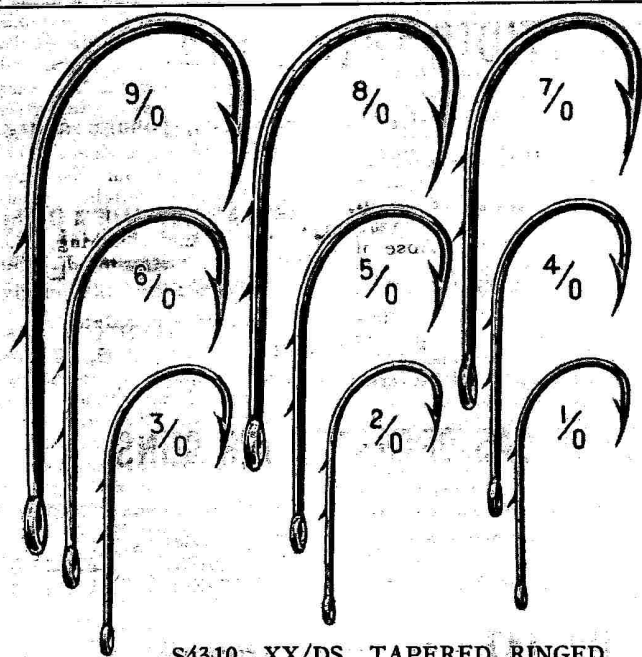
My magic morning was over.

WHAT ANIMALS SEE

Continued from Page 12

one on either side of the head, they do not provide stereoscopic sight.

Some creatures have remarkable range of sight, horses for instance (hence the need for blinkers), and also hares, which can see right behind them with an overlap from both eyes back and front. We can normally see



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