

Caddisfly

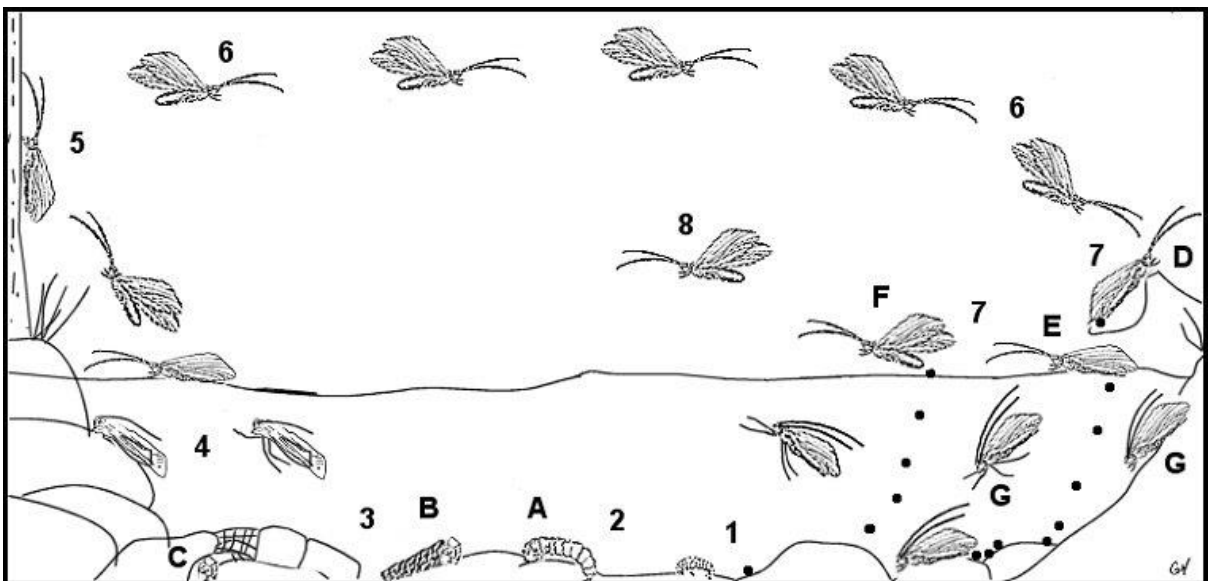
By

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Caddis belong to the order Trichoptera which translates from the original Greek as hair wing. So when we talk of an elk hair caddis we are committing the sin of tautology. Sedge is another name for caddis.

They are found throughout South Africa and in all waters, from still to very fast flowing. For more on the caddis and its lifecycle see [Caddis Fly](#).



Most of the Caddis' life is spent underwater as a larvae. Caddis larvae are either cased (which is when the larvae build a protective casing of debris around them) or the free living soft and squidgy larvae which don't.

Cased Caddis larvae are confined largely to the acidic streams of the Western and Southern Cape. In fact only one family of cased Caddis larvae is found outside these streams. They are the Pisuliidae and they construct a case out of twigs. They are also by far the largest member of the caddis having a case of some 2 to 2.5cm in length. Pisuliidae are found throughout South Africa in shady conditions generally where water is slow moving. It is unlikely that you are going to spend much time imitating cased Caddis larvae.

For the most part when we imitate Caddis larvae we go for the soft squidgy ones. These do not get very big. They average around the 1 to 1.5 cm mark.

South African's are no strangers to fishing larvae imitations. Put simply the Czech Nymph much loved by those who pursue yellows on the Vaal, while originally a shrimp imitation, has morphed into a case-less caddis larvae. Mention the [Mustard Caddis](#) or Humpy's favourite and you are talking caddis larva imitations. There are dozens more. Indeed any weighted smooth bodied slightly dumpy bead head fly ties on a size 12 to 16 emerger hook qualifies as a caddis fly larva. Caddis Larva are colourful ranging from chartreuse through honeys and mustard colours to beige and brown. Hence the colourful aspect of a yellowfish fly box. See [Control flies – an Introduction](#)



Caddis larvae imitations are another fly that you do not fish on the retrieve. This is because Caddis larvae, cased and otherwise, spend most of the time attached to structure sometimes by a long thread. However they can and do cut loose from time to time when they and crawl wriggle or drift elsewhere. Sometimes they do this en masse.

So it does not take much to work this out but Caddis larvae are fished on the bottom on a dead drift.

Caddis transform to a free and fast swimming pupal form about two weeks before they emerge from the water as adults. One doesn't often find South African fly fisherman

specifically targeting Caddis pupae perhaps because Caddis Hatches occur mainly at night in this country. So we do not really get to see them. Recall those wispy little hatches you get around dusk especially round November through January, chances are you are looking at a caddis hatch. So it follows pupae imitations should also work around that time.

The caddis hatch is a big deal in North America where they hatch in their millions. The dynamics of the hatch are superbly explained by [Gary Lafontaine](#) (the Author of [Caddisflies](#)) in an article entitled [Anticipating a Caddisfly Hatch](#) . However, his suggestion that Caddis Pupae are aided in their journey to the surface by a bubble of air that forms between the pupal skin and the insect has not been verified by science. It nonetheless put Antron Yarn on the map as a fly tying material and of course Gary Lafontaine's famous Sparkle Pupa.



Gary Lafontaine's deep sparkle pupa (1) and the emergent sparkle pupa (2)

Fred Steynberg' lists his sparkle pupa as one of his [top six](#) small stream flies so it a pretty deadly fly in this country as well. This is how he described it in an article posted of Tom Sutcliffe's iconic [The Spirit of Fly Fishing](#) web site:

One of my favourite caddis pupa imitations. This specific imitation works well on all the rivers around Rhodes, Barkly East, Lady Grey and Maclear. It is definitely one of the most underrated flies, possibly because anglers are often not sure when to fish it. I often fish it on its own to trout that feed below the surface or in tandem behind a weighted fly for Smallmouth yellows.



Fred Steynberg's Sparkle Pupa imitation

As Lafontaine points out, when you are fishing a caddis pupa you are in fact targeting the first stage of the hatch or what he calls the first concentration. This is what he says about it.

when trout are keyed to the inert insect near the bottom the way to fish an imitation is dead drift with the standard upstream or across-stream nymph presentation. An occasional tightening of the line, kicking the fly into brief motion, followed quickly by a mend that drops it back into a drift can be added to the basic method.

The next stage or what Lafontaine calls the second area concentration occurs in the surface film. It takes a lot for the pupae to penetrate the surface film which results in a huge concentration of pupae. This gives rise to the kind of feeding frenzy we all associate with hatches. This is what Lafontaine says about a trout's feeding behavior during this stage.

A trout can feed in one of three ways when it begins taking pupae from just under the film: it can hold at the bottom and when it spots an ascending pupa it can follow the insect (seldom trying to grab it while it is swimming) and suck the pupa in as the insect begins struggling to shed the shuck; or the trout can hold at the bottom and watch for emergents already in the surface film and rise for the pupae as the insects pass over; or the trout can hold just under the surface and sip emergents drifting toward it. Which feeding mechanism a trout uses is determined by the quickness of the insects and the speed of the current. A trout only feeds the third way, holding under the surface, in the gentler flows. It feeds in either the first or second way in faster currents.

The peak feeding, with fish rolling and jumping all over the stream should be a time when fly fishermen master the fish, but it can be a time of total failure and frustration. Too often anglers fail to realize that the insects are hesitating and concentrating under the film, not on it, and as a result they mistakenly assume that it is an occasion for dry flies.

Again, an effective tactic for fishing this stage of the hatch is one not usually associated with caddisflies. Especially when trout are holding just under the surface or rising to pupae already in the film, an emergent imitation designed to ride semidry generally outperforms any sunken fly fished with an active presentation. Used either dead drift or with a twitch and swim, the “damp” imitation stays in the surface film for the entire time, not just for a moment at the end of a swing or lift.

A technique that kicks the fly into a pulsing swim toward the top, the Leisenring lift, is generally effective when trout are rising all the way from the bottom to take emergents. A sinking pattern is cast upstream and allowed to drift near the bottom, but when it reaches a likely holding spot it is teased to life, hopefully in front of a trout. It is a method that demands skill in reading water if the angler is not casting to visible fish.



The Invicta which dates back to 1879 is caddis (sedge) pupa. It was designed to imitate the dark sedge pupa just before the fly reaches the surface film



A realistic emerging Caddis pupa pattern



A well wetted Wyatt's deer hair emerger though strictly a dry fly can also imitate a subsurface caddis pupa struggling to break through the meniscus

Less traditional but more obvious forms of caddis pupa are increasingly catching the South African fly fisherman's attention, so much so that Grip even offers a hook for it. Their [14731](#) hook is designed especially for emergers and caddis pupa.

Then of course there is the dry fly, though as I have already demonstrated the line between dry and emerger can get very blurred. It is then that the Goddard's Caddis, the [Elk Hair](#) Caddis and [CDC and Elk](#) come into their own especially if you are sight fishing for yellows on Sterkfontein Dam. But these are not the only flies that imitate an adult caddis or sedge fly. Tim Rolston's [Goose Biot Micro Caddis](#) also does the job as does the locally grown [Kent Caddis](#). Colour wise they range from brown to grey. They also make pretty good small grasshopper imitations.



A Goddard's Caddis, an Elk Hair Caddis and a CDC and Elk



A pair of Kent's Caddis' photo courtesy of Peter Brigg

Caddis are unusual in that some species swim back into the water as adults to lay their eggs. Some drop their eggs onto the water dam buster style just as stonefly do. They then die. Underwater swimming adult caddis glitter and shine and are easy prey. So are those that die over water. The only pattern that I know that may imitate the former is the silver bodied version of the Invicta. I suppose drowning a Goddard Caddis will suffice though there are doubtless others. Similarly there seems very little difference between a spent caddis imitation and its adult counterpart.

For more on what flies to use and why look no further than Tim Landwehr of the [Tight Lines Fly Fishing Company](#) and his you tube video aptly named [The caddis fly life cycle and what flies to use](#)