Hooks of all shapes and sizes.

By

Laurence Davies

A few years ago Peter Dippenaar had been fishing the Lesotho rivers, using small dry flies (size 16), and he had many fish rise and mouth his fly but could not hook up. Why? I pointed out some possible reasons, such as stiff hackles, small gape etc, and also posed the question to Peter Brigg, our small stream, small fly wizard.

Peter suggested that he should change his hook to one of a bigger gape, (but still the same size 16). This confused me no end (not difficult I know) as I understood that a size 16 hook had the same gape, no matter what brand of hook used (as per the old Redditch scale).

I posed the same question to our other guru, Ed Herbst and got the same response – size 16 hook's dimensions can differ between brands, especially with respect to gape. In other words a size 16 hook could have the same gape dimension as a size 14 of a different brand!

Why then is it still a size 16 and not say a short shank size 14?

You have the situation that, in order to order a hook, you need to know the different sizes offered by the different brands. This not only applies to gape but also to shank length and wire thickness – all rather confusing.

Ian wrote about being equally confused in his article "Does Size Really Matter" which appeared in the November 2012 Bobbin.

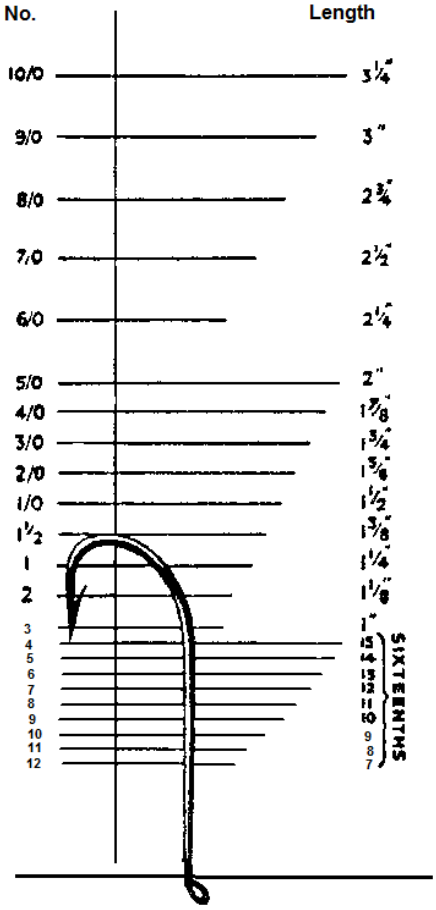
We are not only being confused by size and length, but hook shapes are another issue, some descriptions relating to the insect, or fly type, i.e. scud or Klinkhammer, are obvious, but Sproat, or Uncle Jack's favourite at one time, the Limerick (try getting a bead around that one)?

After starting this article, as above, I came across an article from the Fly Tying & Fly Fishing magazine November 2010, which I thought would be of interest to the members. Peter Lapsey makes some practical recommendations for hook makers to adopt in naming their hooks, which would hopefully take all of the guess work out of what to order and would ensure that you get exactly what you want. He also includes a useful sketch of how different hook shapes "bite".

I have also included an article on "System of Hook Specification", the Redditch hook system which I thought would be of interest, in particular the measurement of the length, what "1X long", or "2X long" relate to. Obviously this was printed a long time ago, before some hook makers departed from the norm, making their own rules and sizes, but the information is still appropriate. I thought that this would be an interesting precursor to Peter Lapsey's article "The Shape Of Hooks To Come"

SYSTEM OF HOOK SPECIFICATIONS

The Redditch Hook System named after the hook making town of Redditch, England, has been in use for nearly l00years, has been followed fairly closely and is an excellent system. It is being better observed today than ever and is the rough standard of hook manufacturers the world over. We herein illustrate this system.



The Redditch Hook System

The size of a regular fly hook is governed by the length of the hook shank, excluding the eye. The eye is never used in hook measurements. This applies to all shapes and patterns. The length increases from size 20 to size l2 by l/32 of an inch; from size 12 to 4 by l/l6 of an inch; from size 3 as on the chart illustrates.

SYSTEM FOR MEASURING THE LENGTH OF THE HOOK SHANK

The difference in the length of a hook shank from the standard length for its size and pattern is specified in X's and the word "long". lX long means that it is as long as the standard length of the next size larger hook, counting the odd length for a hook two sizes larger. 3X long, 4X long, 5X long, 6X long etc., hooks are all figured in the same manner. That is, a 3X long shank is identical to the length of the shank on a hook three times larger than itself; 4X is the length of the shank of a hook four times larger. For example, a 3X long shank, number l0 sproat hook has the same length of shank as a number 7 sproat, but it has the gap and bend size of a number l0 sproat. The eye of the hook is not counted as shank in measuring the length of the hook's shank.

The Shape of Hooks to Come

The final 'lesson' from this season is really no more than a "speculative plea' and stems from a number of discussions with a number of knowledgeable fly fishers, not least with Barry Unwin, who runs Fulling Mill Flies and is restless in his search for ways to improve fly patterns and fly dressing materials. It has to do with hook sizes and shapes.

Anyone who ties their own flies must have been frustrated by the disparity in hook sizes between manufacturers. One maker's #14 can be almost a full size bigger or smaller than another's, which is why so many people who publish fly dressings feel obliged to specify a particular type of hook - eg Kamasan B170 #10. My guess is that with no widely accepted international body to impose

change, it would be impossible to persuade all manufacturers to adopt a standardised range of sizes, but there is nothing to stop them changing the way in which they describe their hooks — by measurement, rather than by arbitrary size.

The two key measurements for any hook are the length of the shank and the breadth of the gape. Giving these two measurements to the nearest mm would allow easy comparison of one maker's hooks against another's. (That Kamasan B17O #10 would become a Kamasan 9x5 — a 9mm shank with a 5mm gape. A #6 Partridge Captain Hamilton Nymph hook would become a Partridge 15x6.) To accommodate the various shapes in which hooks are made, it would be necessary to add a one-word description — perhaps 'Round' for a round-bend hook; 'Shrimp' for shrimp, grub, caddis or buzzer hooks; or 'Curved' for such hooks as the Tiemco Nymph 8: Dry Fly and Klinkhamer hooks. And it might be necessary also to add a further one-word description of the weight of wire from which the hook is made — 'Light', 'Medium' or 'Heavy'. But even with these additions, matters would be simpler, rather than more complicated, and I for one would welcome such a change.

The second issue has to do with the shapes of hooks and their hooking potential. I am no engineer. It was Barry Unwin who pointed out to me that, for reasons better explained in drawings than in words (below), the commonest design, with the hook point parallel with the shank, is a remarkably inefficient hooker as compared with one with the hook point pointing towards the eye, and the more so with an up-eyed hook than with a down-eyed one.

The third question arises from fly fishers' reluctance to buy barbless hooks or flies tied on them. It was john Goddard who offered the explanation that even when a barb is squeezed down with pliers, there almost always remains a slight 'bump', which is often sufficient to prevent the hook from coming free, even when the line is slackened briefly.

Such issues may be minor details, but they may offer food for thought as we twiddle off next season's flies during the coming winter.

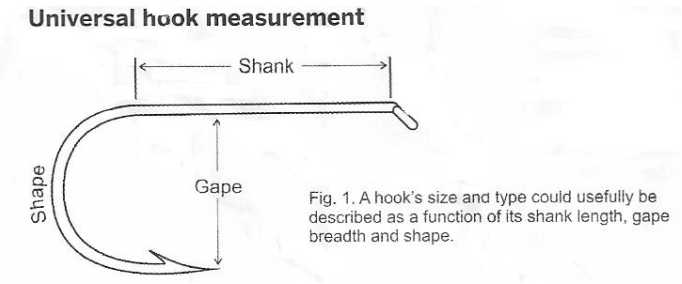


Fig. 1. A hook's size and type could usefully be described as a function of its shank length, gape breadth and shape.

How different hook-shapes 'bite'

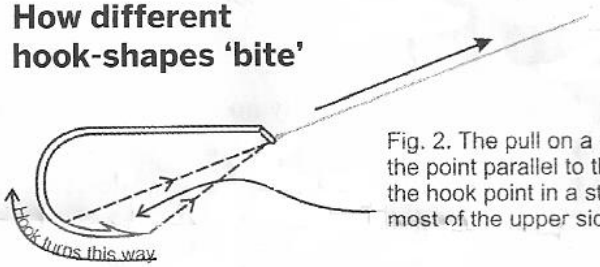


Fig. 2. The pull on a conventional hook, with the point parallel to the shank, does not pull the hook point in a straight line but is on most of the upper side of the point.

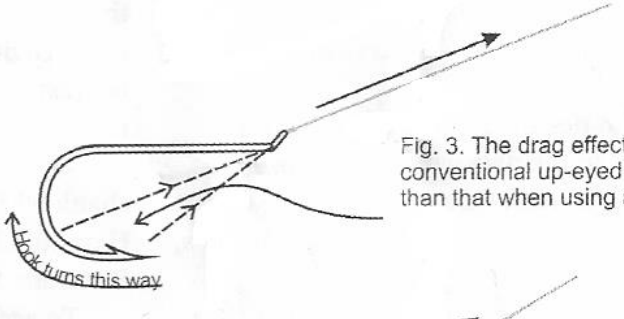


Fig. 3. The drag effect caused by pulling on a conventional up-eyed hook is even greater than that when using a down-eyed hook.

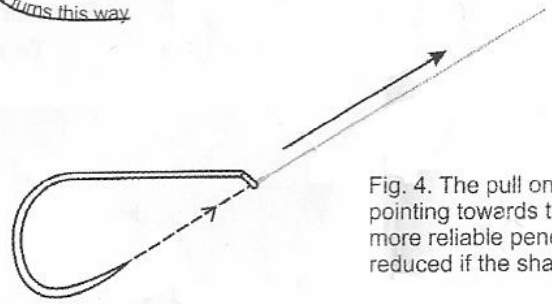


Fig. 4. The pull on a hook with the point pointing towards the eye should provide more reliable penetration. But the gape is reduced if the shape is not adjusted.