

The real reason why the DDD works?

By Ian Cox



Having good friends is a joy. Having good friends with access to fly fishing water is a blessing. Words cannot inadequately describe what it is when that water happens to be what was known reverentially as Kimber's Old Dam (now called Heatherdon). You see this water has not only been unbelievably good for the better part of a century it is also the birthplace of iconic flies such as the DDD (Duckworth's Dargle Delight) and the Red Eyed Damsel. Heatherdon is a very special place.

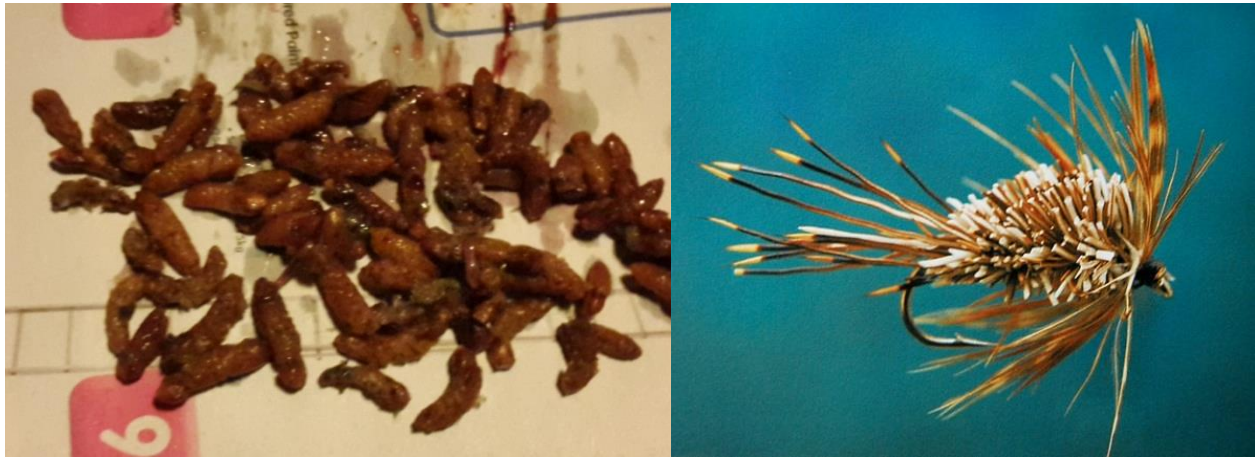
So you must accept that it is a considerable understatement when I tell you that I recently had the pleasure of enjoying what was possibly the best days fishing of my life at Heatherdon not to long ago. And I must tell you it wasn't just the fishing, though being three up before Jay Smit got his float tube on the water and watching Gordon Van der Spuy catch nothing with tiny little Western Cape midgey thingamajigs, did add materially to the occasion.

It wasn't just the company though fishing with old friends such as Jay, Gordon and Karl is a delight or even the food and the booze which when Karl is around are always superb. Nor was it the weather which was perfect or the fishing conditions that were more so.

What made the day magical was the combination of these factors that resulted in a whole which like Heatherdon cannot be adequately described other than to say that whole was not only greater than the sum of these parts, it was substantially different.



Another is that we think we discovered the real reason for the success of the DDD. Tom Sutcliffe will tell you in [Spirit of Fly Fishing](#) that the DDD is a beetle imitation that evolved during the mid-1970's through a lot of friendly input in the Dargle district around the fishing of Bill Duckworth. And I would not dispute his account. After all he was there. Except for one thing, we that is, Jay, Gordon, Karl and I are no longer convinced its beetles these fish are feeding on. It may be those little male cones that appear on pine trees in early spring. We arrived at this conclusion after opening up one the few trout that Gordon did catch.



Boy were we surprised at what we found. The fish was chock a block full of little male pine cones. Which prompted Jay to say; “They look just like DDD’s”. And so as far as we are concerned the DDD imitate a pine cone!

It is of course entirely possible that it imitates nothing at all and that trout eat it merely because it is there. I was reminded of this when reading the outstanding online fly fishing newspaper [Midcurrent](#) and in particular an interview with [Greys Sporting Journal](#) editor, [James Babb](#). On the subject why trout eat sticks he wrote:

As kids my brother and I talked about why trout eat sticks, and it's because they don't usually see small sticks the size of flies floating down the stream. And it's that unfamiliarity that could trigger them to try something. My father explained this to us when we were going through a brief flirtation with exact imitation after reading Matching the Hatch. We were trying to convince my father that you couldn't catch trout on flies that didn't exactly match something—that he had been doing it his whole life didn't matter to us. We were eight and ten at the time. What does he know? So to prove the point, he flicked a Chesterfield butt into a nice looking slick, and a trout came up and ate it. He said what did that imitate? Reverse snobbery.

I could not agree more!

This takes us back to Gordon, and the fact he caught any fish at all given those absurd little Western Cape midgey thingamajigs he was fishing with. It turned out that notwithstanding the long lecture he gave me about infinite superiority of fishing techniques of the Western Cape he switched flies. He might have gone out with one of those long leader Frenchie rigs adorned with a multitude of tiny flies but he came back decently attired with a red eyed damsel swinging behind a papa roach.

And the fish we did not release. Well they went very well with Jays lamb chops at the braai we had that evening.

