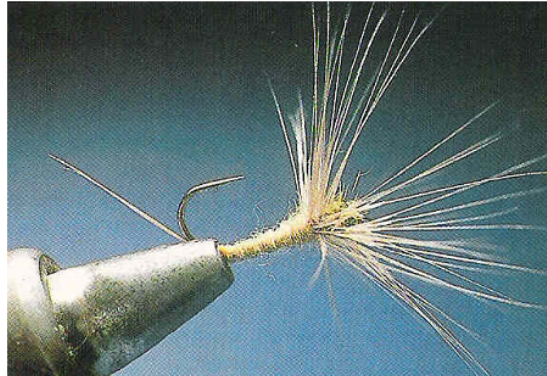


The Wisdom of Laurence Davies

December 2004

Funnel Dun Laurence Davies



I got the dreaded phone call from Jay - about needing someone to tie at one of our monthly meetings - would I be able to tie? He obviously hadn't seen my fly tying of late otherwise he wouldn't have asked me. Alternatively, he had seen my fly tying, but was so desperate that he asked me anyway.

Anyway, I was flattered and accepted. I don't know whether it was at his suggestion or mine, that I agreed to tie a dry fly and suggested that I would tie a Parachute Adams. It's a nice, effective dry fly which settles softly onto the water and is easy to see (an important factor to me nowadays). When Jay later phoned to confirm, he reminded me to bring along enough material for other members to use, because they would be copying the fly afterwards, and many might not have the necessary materials. It suddenly struck me that the most important materials for the Parachute Adams are the hackles. In fact most dry flies need the best quality hackles that you can afford, particularly in the smaller sizes. Now I have two capes which I use for most of my dry flies, by Metz, albeit second grade, that were bought over a decade ago (without my wife's knowledge of course). I was worried that those first-time dry fly tiers that wanted to tie more dry flies afterwards, would be hard pressed to justify the expense of a quality hackle for something which might not take their fancy (it is certainly cheaper to buy your dry flies). So I thought to myself, why not tie the Funnel Dun, which is not only a relatively easy fly to tie but also does not require quality hackles.

The Funnel Dun is a fly which Jack Blackman first introduced to us when we were still Natal Fly Dressers Society, Durban Branch - a long time ago. As Jack pointed out, it was a method of tying a dry fly where the cheaper Indian Game Cock feathers could be used very effectively, and could be tied in any combination of colours and materials to suit what you are trying to imitate. I have tied the fly in dun colours, light greys and browns and have also found black to be very effective (but have trouble in seeing the progress of the fly on the water). So the recipe I am about to give you is more a pattern or shape which results in the fly settling nicely on the surface. It is unusual in that the hook rides upside down. It provides an attractive silhouette and is relatively easy to tie.

- Hook:** An up-eyed dry fly hook is preferred but a down-eyed dry fly hook works as well, sizes 12 to 18
- Thread:** 6/0 - in colour to suit your chosen scheme
- Thorax:** Any dubbing material, usually darker than the abdomen. Hare=s Ear blend works well.
- Hackle:** Long barbed cock hackle - colour to suit. I prefer a length of 1,5 times the hook shank.
- Body:** Soft fur dubbing of colour to suit
- Tail:** Same as for hackle - again 1,5 times the length of the shank.

Tying Instructions

- Step 1 :** Place hook in vice, secure the thread and take it to a position just past the eye. Form a dubbing noodle with your selected material and form a neat thorax just behind the eye. The thorax should have a diameter of about a fifth to a quarter of the shank length.
- Step 2:** Strip the flue off the hackle and tie the stem in at the back of the thorax, with shiny side out. Trim off the excess stem and wind the hackle backward (towards the hook bend) two to three times around the shank and tie off. Shape the hackles so that they form a funnel shape over the thorax. This is done by holding the hackle tips in the fingers of the one hand and winding the thread loosely up the barbules with the other hand and then back again. This should keep the hackle in the funnel shape. If the thread is wrapped too tightly the barbules will splay in all directions.
- Step 3:** Wind the thread to a position above the barb and tie in three or four barbules for the tail. By holding the barbules down with your left hand, wind the thread to about a quarter of the way around the bend. Take the thread back to behind the hackle.
- Step 4:** Dub body material onto the thread and form a tapered body by winding back to the tail. Tie off at the tail with a whip finish. The tie off can also be done with a yellow colour thread to imitate an egg laying insect.
-

Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear



MATERIALS

- Hook:** #8 to #18 - usually 2x long (I prefer #14 and #16)
Thread: 8/0 pre-waxed black or brown thread.
Tail: A few guard hairs from the hare's mask
Rib: Fine gold wire or oval tinsel (copper wire or brass wire can be used)
Abdomen: Blended hare's ear fur
Thorax: Blended hare's ear fur
Wingcase: Cock Pheasant tail (English Partridge, Francolin or Turkey Tail segments can be used as an alternative)
Weighting: The fly can be weighted with lead wire at the thorax area, or with a bead head.

TYING METHOD

1. Tie in the tail and then tie in the rib, both at the bend of the hook.
2. Dub a thin noodle of fur and form the abdomen - to cover about two thirds of the shank.
3. Rib the abdomen with three to four turns (dependant on hook size) and trim rib after trapping it.
4. Tie in the wing case material and form the thorax with dubbed fur.
The thorax should be fairly prominent, and should end just short of the eye of the hook, leaving enough space for the head.
5. Bring the wing case forward and trim after tying down.
6. Form a neat head and tie off.
7. Varnish the head.
8. Form legs by teasing out the guard hairs.

FRESHWATER

JOHN BEAMS' WOOLLY WORM



By Laurence Davies

In my fly jacket I have four fly boxes, separate boxes for dries, nymphs, streamers/lures and a green fly box for some of the older style flies. In the green box there are some flies which have lain there unused for many, many years. Flies which were once *"hot"* flies and which are now no longer in fashion. Now I have often wondered, *"if these flies were hot then, why are they out of fashion now?"*

I know that some of the materials used in their tying are exotic, and are not readily available. Another factor of course is that the older flies were, in the main, more difficult to tie properly, anyone who had tied a wing to a wet fly from matching slips of wing feathers, will attest to that. Similarly with dry fly wings. And of course the proportions of tail and hackle length were critical, dubbing noodles had to be spot on, not rough and ready like we now have. A lot of the fly tying techniques learned in tying the older style flies are no longer practiced, or taught, because they are no longer essential.

So, there I was the other day, going through the green box and looking at some of the old fashion flies like the Invicta, Teal and Green, Alexander, Walkers Nymphs, Walkers Killer, Hammils Killer and Connemara Black, to name a few. I wondered to myself, how effective they would be today? Although I have often wondered that, I have never had the courage to try them out, mainly because I do not get to fish often enough, and when I do get to fish I use what had been successful the last time out. But, one fly caught my eye in particular, and which got me thinking that surely this is a fly which I must try out next time I have a chance. And that was the Woolly Worm, tied in the John Beams fashion, which I will refer to as the John Beams Woolly Worm (JBWW).

I am not sure when John first developed the fly, but I think that it must have been early in the 1970s. Now, many of the younger people will probably say; *"who was John Beams?"* John, along with Tom Sutcliffe, Tony Biggs, and Hugh Huntley, were leading developers/innovators of flyfishing in Natal, in fact in South Africa, especially in the 70s and 80s. They did not do this on their own I know, but it coincided with the birth of two clubs in the Natal midlands, the NFFC and Natal Fly Dressers Society (to the best of my knowledge, they were also pioneers in the formation of these clubs). The clubs were great forums for pooling of ideas. But these gentlemen, in particular, fished a lot together and spread the word through club newsletters, magazines and books. They were fairly competitive people, certainly amongst themselves. They also absorbed any written works on flyfishing, and I believe that this thirst for knowledge, competitiveness and innovation between this group of people was the catalyst to the rate of development of fly fishing in the country, the development of our own techniques and our own flies. **

Now, many people know about Tom, Tony and Hugh, and the flies that they developed, but very few know about John Beams who died over twenty years ago. John wrote many articles about his fishing trips, often with Tom. He contributed a lot to the Piscator and The Creel, the newsletters of the Cape Piscatorial Society and Natal Fly Fishing Club respectively. And he wrote a booklet for the Farmers Publication on fly fishing, *"An Introduction to Fly Fishing in South Africa"*. A very useful and practical book for its time..!

The one fly which he developed, as said earlier, was the Woolly Worm, the tying of which is totally different to the American version with the same name, The American version looks like a large hairy caterpillar. John's fly is a nice, buggy fly which imitated many of the insects in the water, depending on size and colour of the fly.

Many prominent flyfishers claimed the JBWW to be the best all-round nymph of that time (80s and 90s). In fact Tom Sutcliffe, in one of his articles said that, should he be limited to fishing one fly for the rest of his life, then the JBWW would be it. Because I remember him saying that, or something along those lines, I posed the question to Tom. *"Why is it now out of favour, because, if it was such a hot fly then, then surely it would still have good catching powers?"*

His response was as follows:-

The John Beams Woolly Worm was a great fly and believe it or not, up at Barkly East, staying with Basie Vosloo in a rainy 10 day break, I was limited to fishing headwaters of streams high in the mountains and the lake on his farm. I also did a lot of tying to while away the dark-sky time. One of the flies I tied for old time sake was a JBWW.

I did it in the deeply traditional Beam's way.

- I dressed the shank with black silk and added a long tail of soft black cock hackle.
- Just where the tail begins, I tied in a short piece of very bright red wool, placing it on top of the tail as it were, to form a so-called tag. Modern writers would call it a hot spot.
- Then I moved the tying thread forward to the eye and tied in a large black cock hackle with one side of the quills stripped off to avoid too much density. I also tied in a piece of round gold ribbing at this point, a vital step!
- Then with the thread back at the tail I tied in four peacock herls by their tips, twisted them, but not too tightly, and wrapped them to the eye.
- Then I covered them with a few wraps of tying thread to add strength, ending with the tying thread all the way up the shank and then back at the tail.
- Now I wound the hackle back to the tail in an anticlockwise direction and trapped it at the tail with the silk. Grabbing the end of the ribbing I wound that back to the tail as well, in a clockwise direction, again to trap the hackle and secure it firmly.
- Once the ribbing was back at the tail I trapped it securely with tying thread, trimmed it off, then wound the tying thread back through the hackle to the eye where I formed a neat head and added a drop of varnish.

The fly was now almost bullet proof with added layers of thread and ribbing trapping everything nicely against the hook shank, something JB was very particular about.

In all the years we fished lakes together, I never saw one of his WWs come apart. Having watched this fly being tied by John a few hundred times I can tell you this is how he tied it, just using smaller hooks for the rivers where it was one of the best flies ever for stream brownies and about all he ever used in the Bushman's and the Mooi. That same day I fished this pattern in Basie's lake and had four fish all around four pounds. The fly has not lost any of its charm, but then why should it have?

I next asked Tom about weighting of the fly, because in the earlier years, sinking lines were more popular than floating lines, and I was wondering if he used the fly with a sinking line, because he had made no mention of weighting the fly. Similarly I commented on the heavier hooks which were prevalent then.

His response was as follows:-

We were on to floating fly lines by the late 1970's and certainly never used sinkers much ever after that, if ever. The floaters were just too much fun and too good in the shallows. We did weight the Beams Woolly Worm, but never heavily. We did a barley twist wrap of lead wire up the hook shank as I remember and were using the heavy Mustad traditional wet fly hooks in standard shank length, or the equivalent Partridge hook that was made of a slightly finer wire. Sizes 8 and 10 were most used.

I posed the same question to Dean Riphagen about the fly and asked his opinion about its waning popularity.

This was his response:-

In terms of the WW I personally think it's an outdated fly that has died a slow death. It's no different to the Walker's Killer. We don't even stock them in our shop (the WK). Nobody wants those flies any longer and I only really incorporated it in my first book because John was such an important figure in the SA fly-fishing scene. Young, thinking anglers want imitative patterns now – very few young, imaginative anglers want to pull Woolly Buggers around all day in a Stillwater, they'd rather fish smaller, imitative patterns like Flashback Nymphs, corixa imitations etc on floating lines.

The JBWW patterns which I followed in my first book was given to me by Tom Sutcliffe, Beams had tied the fly himself for Tom. I also have the original RAB (tied by Tony) plus the original ZAK and DDD (tied for me by Tom). The DDD looks NOTHING like how Tom ties it now, and remember Tom put in writing in one of his books that a ZAK should never be tied with a bead. Now he only ties them with beads. I guess what I'm trying to say is that patterns evolve and a fly now might look nothing like it looked 20 years ago when it was first originated. The Humpty is a classic case of this.

When did I last use a Woolly Worm? We'll I have a whole box of Woolly Buggers and probably haven't fished a WB in eight years, possibly longer. The WW would be even longer than that!

As you can see, Dean lumped the JBWW together with the Walker's Killer and Woolly Buggers, as flies which died a slow death.

It is interesting to see the differences between Tom's and Dean's approaches. For Tom, the JBWW is still a good fish catching fly, as he proved to himself recently, whereas Dean has not fished the fly for about ten years. I should note that the tying of the tag, as detailed by Tom above, differed from that in Dean's book, where the tag is tied at the back of the abdomen. The tying of the tag at the back of the abdomen is also shown in the pictures in John's book. I had always seen it being tied on top of the fly, as per Tom's description.

(Included are photos showing the difference between the two flies). I tied the one with the tag on top using an old Mustad size 8 hook, hence the wicked barb).

I do not agree with Dean's comments about "*young thinking flyfishers*" only using imitative flies, and therefore they would not consider the JBWW, Woolly Bugger and Walkers Killer type flies any more. Firstly, age has nothing to do with it (unless you believe that "old dogs can't be taught new tricks"). I would tend to agree that the Woolly Bugger and Walker's Killer are not, to some, strictly imitative flies, but they catch a lot of fish and you only have to read Dean's book's to see how successful he had been using these flies in his earlier fishing experiences. Obviously one's favoured flies and techniques develop and change with time. Dean's current preference, as he says, is for smaller, imitative flies, as he believes that is the right way to fish, and that is where he gets the most enjoyment. That is not to say that his technique will catch more trout.

Because when you talk to competitive flyfishers (representative anglers), who are out to catch as many trout as possible in their allotted time, their favoured fly seems to be the Woolly Bugger. I saw this when watching a TV programme showing the Protea's team practicing ahead of an international tournament. On that day they all seemed to be using Woolly Buggers. But, I imagine in Dean's mind, it is not about catching lots of fish, but in fishing a particular style where he gets the most satisfaction.

We have all seen the same argument about whether it is better to fish dry flies or nymphs, or whether it is better to fish upstream or downstream in rivers. There is no one-answer which fits us all - some are only happy fishing dry flies, even if it might result in catching fewer fish. But is flyfishing only about catching lots of fish? In my opinion your fishing technique should be based on the conditions that prevail and whatever method or style gives you the most satisfaction. It is not for me, or anyone else for that matter, to say which is right or wrong. I digress from the JBWW I know, but wanted to clear up Dean's comments, at least in my own mind.

Coming back to Deans lumping together the JBWW with Woolly Buggers and Walkers Killers, I don't believe that is a fair comparison. Because the JBWW, tied in the smaller sizes is imitative of a number of insects, as he, himself states in his book. And some would argue that, with quite a lot of imagination I know, the Woolly Bugger and Walkers Killer are also imitations of certain insects.

So, in summary then, I believe that the JBWW is still an effective fly, and when tied using peacock herl, is not far removed from Tom's original tying of the Zak, and everyone knows how effective that fly is. It is an easy fly to tie; the materials are readily available and cheap. The fly is also effective when using seals-fur bodies in black, brown and olive, in fact, tied in black with a silver ribbing it is very effective indeed. It is a "buggy" fly, and the use of a red tag could be that extra trigger which will entice the difficult trout, in both rivers and stillwater.

Is anyone fishing the fly? If so I would like to hear your comments on the fly, or comments on anything that I have written above that you might agree or disagree with. In fact if there any comments; please write to the editor and give us your thoughts on the subject.

** I should clarify that I believe that these gentlemen accelerated the development of flyfishing techniques and flies in the early days, whereas there are many people who contributed to the growth of fly fishing in SA by their writings and work in promoting fly fishing in the early days - a small sample of these people from Natal would include Bob Crass, Neville Nuttal, Jolyon Nuttall, Jake Alletson, Bill Small, Robin Fick, Roger Baert and Jack Blackman. And I am sure that many of you could add a few more names to the list.

I refer to the new clubs NFFC and Natal Fly Dressers Society (NFDS) in the article. DFT are a spin-off of NFDS, starting out as the Durban branch of NFDS, which held its own monthly meetings for many years, until there was a parting of the ways when the Durban chapter members formed the Durban Fly Tyers way back when.



September 2004

CAR VS CAD

By

Laurence Davies

Many people have spoken of why they fly fish, be it in salt or fresh water. Many will tell you that it is: because of the beautiful surroundings; to pit your wits against a wily fish; to enjoy the thrill of the fight; being out in the elements; to be able to hold in the hand and release a beautiful fish to fight another day ie Catch and Release (CAR); to extend your knowledge and understanding of the quarry and its habitat; the thrill of the outing; the friends made and the camaraderie of like-minded fishing nuts. I could go on and on. Very few will offer, "Because I like eating fish" i.e. a Catch and Devour (CAD).

I fish for all the reasons given above, but I also want to catch something that I can eat. I love eating fish. It is obvious from my portly figure that I love eating, full stop. Now, before I am stoned for making the statement that I love eating fish caught by fly (and any other accepted method), there are certain target species and conditions where I will accept that the respective norm is CAR. In freshwater these include river trout, but only in some rivers – more about this later, and yellowfish. In the salt, they include kingfish and the small, generally non-edibles like wave garrick, threadfins and such. I will certainly keep a decent sized sand gurnard, grunter or shad, all delicious fried in butter, with a squeeze of lemon.

In days of yore, CAD was the norm in fishing for trout in rivers. I have copies of Veld and Vlei and SA Angler, dating back from 1948 to 1966, with many tales of good catches and pictures of strings of trout caught from our rivers. As awful as some of these catches are, based on today's standards, they have to be tempered somewhat by many factors. Many of those would have been from a single outing, maybe the only outing of the year (read Rapture of the River where transport was by ox-wagon or on horseback, or included train and buggy trips, and later by traversing gravel roads of terrible condition by car (Trout Fishing in Natal by Neville Nuttal). And if you consider the anglers total for the year and compared it with the ones and twos taken by local anglers or more regular anglers, it would be far less over the whole fishing season. I remember the debate which came about when the NFFC proposed lowering the dam catch limit from four trout to two. How some spoke of a four fish limit being unacceptable, almost barbaric in these times, and yet some of those same critics would fish almost every weekend and keep their regular ones and twos each outing. Many favouring the four trout limit would invariably be fishing once or twice a year. Even if it was four trips a year, his total for the year would be 16 fish which pales in comparison to the regular angler who could catch between 50 and a hundred fish a year. Who is the holier now? The same comment arose when someone fishing the Mooi, kept their 8 bag limit, and there was an outcry and immediate call for a lowering of the limit. Although there is a daily limit, there is no season limit, so the regular flyfisher could make a huge dent in the fish stocks when compared to the more casual angler.

Some will argue that all river-caught trout should be released, and I agree that some rivers cannot take the pressure of fish being removed from the water and the fishery would not survive without catch and release. The Cape Rivers spring immediately to mind, as well as some of the high mountain waters of KZN. But there are many rivers and conditions under which trout should be removed in order to improve the fishery. Bob Crass, in his book "Trout Fishing in Natal" wrote of a few occasions when the Mooi River had a problem being full of stunted, trout, and the river was poisoned with rotenone to thin them out. A few years after each event the trout fishing improved incredibly. Now, which is better, to catch a few fish of a decent size or catch a lot of stunted fish? I fished Rhodes for the first time last year and, as beautiful the area and the rivers are, the fishing to me was spoiled a little because there are too many small fish. Where is the thrill in catching thirty to forty trout a day, 6" to 8" in length, (I did not

catch as many as that but I know of many who have boasted about such catches). I know that under those conditions one can improve one's trip by hunting and targeting only the larger fish, by testing patterns and techniques, using the opportunity to hone your skills. Dave Prentiss had decided that was to be his target for that trip, be selective and hone up on his skills, rather than catching as many as possible .Catch and release is the order of the day in these waters, but this should only be dependent on the conditions, water levels, good spawning conditions and fish stocks. Under the conditions which we experienced last year, anglers should have been encouraged to remove fish. As far as eating small trout is concerned, many of the old brigade have spoken of how delicious the small trout are, fried crisply in butter.

In fact, part of the wonder of trout fishing to me in my earlier years was reading, not only about the catching of trout, but the cooking and eating of trout as well. Especially alongside the river. I never got to try it, but I could only dream of experiencing it. Who would not wish to have a lunch of trout alongside the river with a lovely fresh salad and a glass of champagne as Tom enticed us with his images from the chapter "Treats with Trout" in his Book, "My Way with Trout". He also had our mouths watering with simpler methods using newspaper, or just frying them, alongside the river, with butter. Neville Nuttall did much the same in his book "Trout Streams of Natal", as did Jolyon Nuttall when writing for Veld and Vlei during the 1960s, popping up to Chestnuts on the Umgeni, to comply with a promised fish supper. So, to me, I was brought up to understand that catching trout was synonymous with eating trout. A word of warning - many of the trout rivers are in areas which often have devastating fires so do not light fires except in designated area.



Trout wrapped in bacon

Too many sprout about catch and release as if it is not negotiable, and you are made to feel guilty if you keep a fish for the table. I say rubbish; at no time should you feel guilty about keeping a fish - where allowed of course.

Don't tell me that trout are "too beautiful and precious and must be released to fight another day". They are indeed beautiful, and precious, but often these words come out of the mouths of people who have fought a fish to a standstill and, when releasing the fish, it has no chance of survival. But they still take the sanctimonious air of having done the right thing!. They have fished with inappropriate tackle, maximised the fight, and will boast of the time taken to land a fish, because, after all, " it is all about the fight between the angler and the quarry", take loads of photos, and then patting themselves on the back, release the fish, which, even if they did spend a few seconds trying to revive it, ended up on the bottom of the water, as crab food. There have been a number of fishing programmes where fish are held up for show while the egotist (or as Jim once said Boogaminas (a bit of pidgin Zulu), pontificates about all things beautiful about the fish whilst it is gasping and dying in his hands, and then releasing it by spearing it head first into the water so that it looks like it is swimming away, just before the cameras pan away so that you do

not see the fish turn belly up. In our family, when we see this showboating we invariably yell, “put the fish back you *****(chose your own expletive)”. I have got that one off my chest!

Many times this happens with large, trophy fish, the fish is released “for the benefit of the environment, because of the need to conserve, etc etc”. But the fish would not be threatened if we did not fish for it! If you are serious about CAR then at least ensure that the tackle is appropriate, bring it in as quickly as possible and release it as quickly as possible, and do not fish in warm water conditions with its low oxygen levels . They say that you should hold your breath for the time that the fish is out of the water. The same for a fish that you wish to keep, bring it in as quickly as possible and tap it on the head. Not only is this more humane, but when fish are fought for a long period, the resulting lactic acid build up in their body spoils its eating qualities.

As far as fishing for trout in dams is concerned, whether you keep a fish or two depends on the resources and the management policy of the club or establishment. If they have the resources to stock their waters so that anglers would be able to take out two fish per day, then so be it. If not, then limits should be reduced, or in some waters only CAR should be practiced. There has been huge debate in Britain about CAR, with some introducing it recently in order to maintain cost viability. I fished a water near London where CAR was not permitted, and when you reached your limit, you packed up and went home. Over here, where fish can be kept, once you have reached your limit you can carry on fishing. And then you have the dilemma where an angler has caught his limit, catches another trout which is bleeding from the gills, or wounded in some other way, and will surely die if released, so the fish is killed and added to the bag. Someone from FFA posed the question about keeping a wounded fish after you have reached your limit. I pointed out that our clubs seem to prefer a wounded fish to be kept and not released to land belly up. This of course could lead to abuse. If you were fishing provincial waters or in the sea, and you exceeded your quota, regardless of the fish’s condition, if caught, you will be fined.

I could probably go on a bit more about CAR vs CAD, I haven’t even mention PETA, or whether fish feel pain, which is a whole new ball game. But I think that I have said enough, got things off my chest, and hopefully you will never feel guilty about keeping a fish for the table. It is a personal thing.

One last thought, and something which has always amazed me, is that some of the most successful local fly fishers that I know, with freshwater and saltwater species list numbering in excess of 70, do not eat fish, although they have been known to keep an occasional fish for a friend.

Bon Appetit!



July 2014

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.

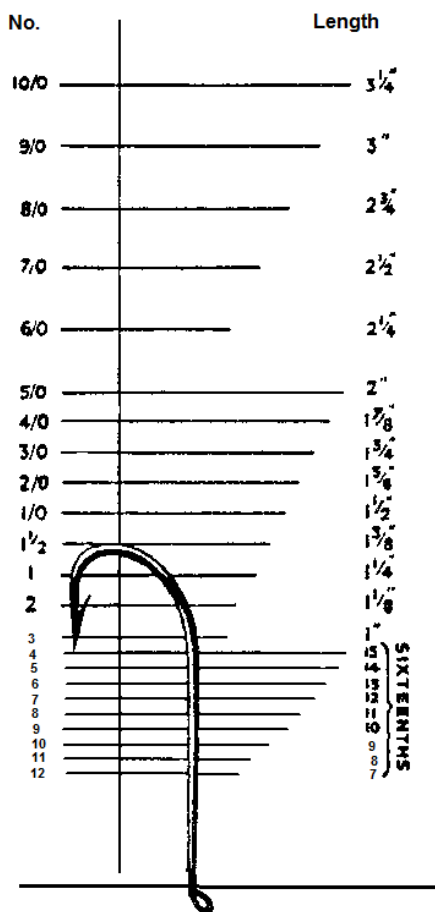
We are not only being confused by size and length, but hook shapes are another issue, some descriptions relating to the insect, or fly type, i.e. scud or Klinkhammer, are obvious, but Sproat, or Uncle Jack's favourite at one time, the Limerick (try getting a bead around that one)?

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 100years, 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 12 by 1/32 of an inch; from size 12 to 4 by 1/16 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". IX 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 10 sproat hook has the same length of shank as a number 7 sproat, but it has the gap and bend size of a number 10 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 B170 #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.

Universal hook measurement

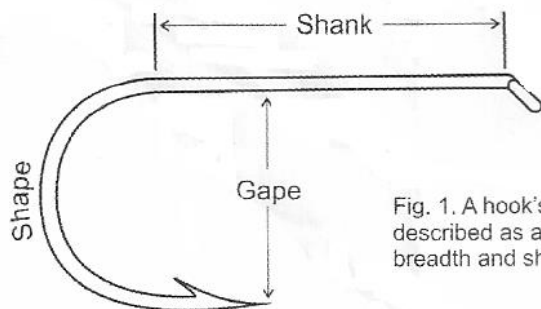


Fig. 1. A hook's size and type could usefully be described as a function of its shank length, gape breadth and shape.

How different hook-shapes 'bite'

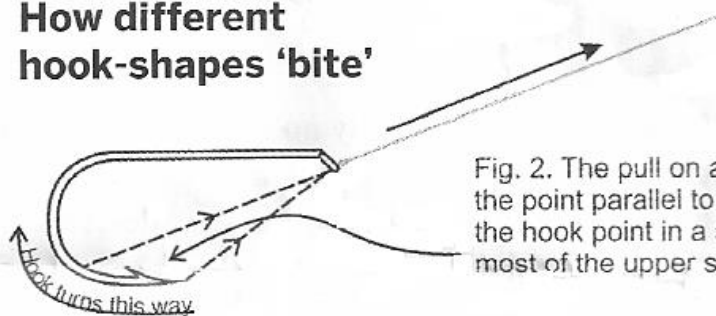


Fig. 2. The pull on a conventional hook, with the point parallel to the shank, does not pull the hook point in a straight line but is on most of the upper side of the point.

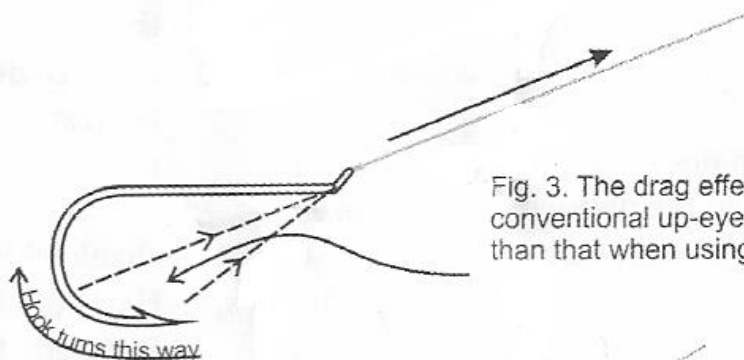


Fig. 3. The drag effect caused by pulling on a conventional up-eyed hook is even greater than that when using a down-eyed hook.

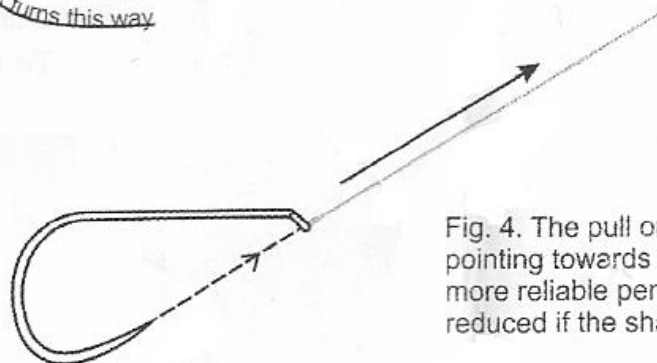


Fig. 4. The pull on a hook with the point pointing towards the eye should provide more reliable penetration. But the gape is reduced if the shape is not adjusted.