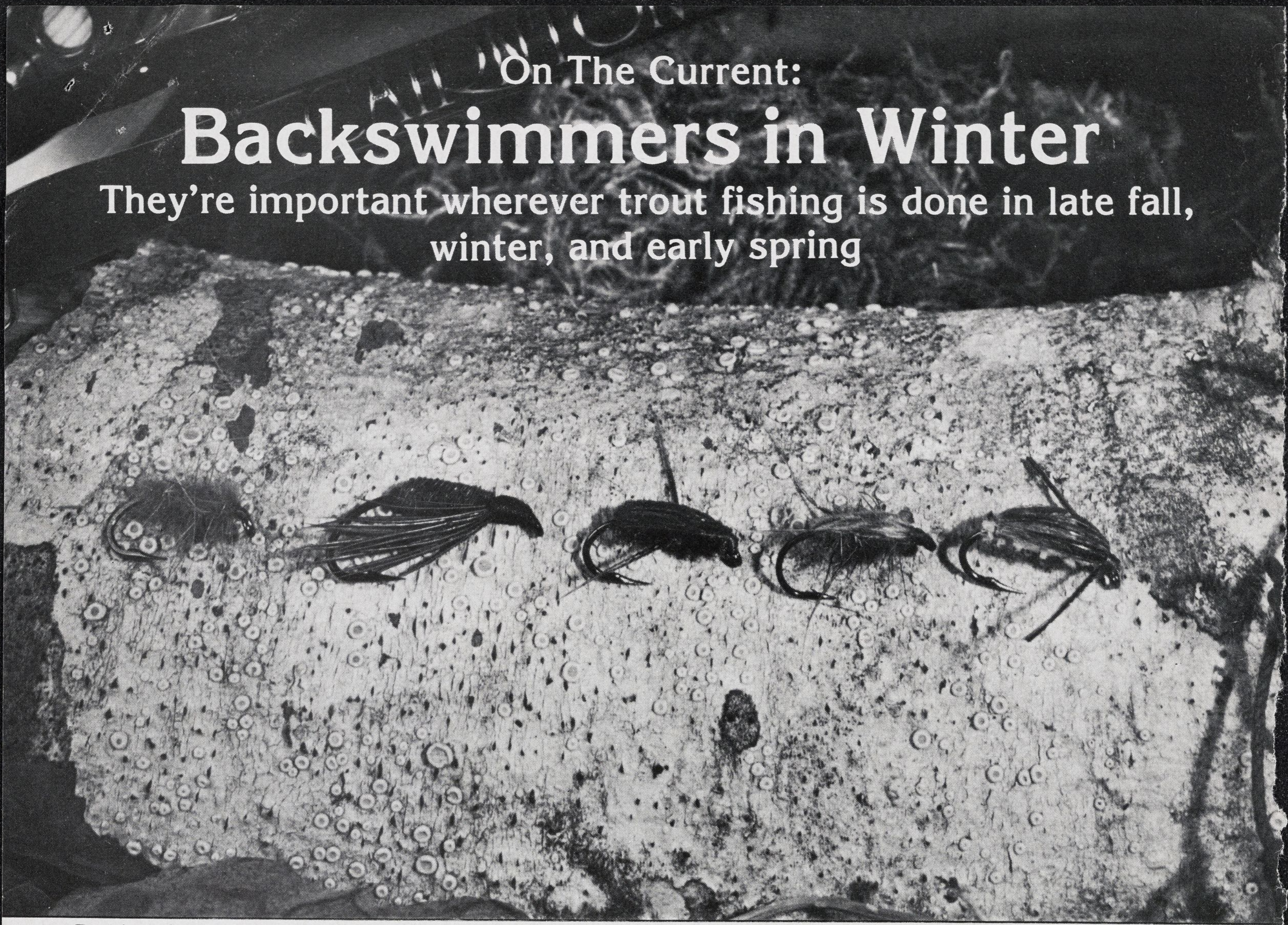
On The Current:

Backswimmers in Winter

They're important wherever trout fishing is done in late fall, winter, and early spring



Dressings for backswimmers include (from left to right): Dubbed Backswimmer, Teeny Nymph, Backswimmer, Grouse-winged Backswimmer, and Floating Backswimmer. — Photo by Andy Cier

Dave Hughes

Good article

It was an irrigation pond nestled in a draw on the wheatland steppes of eastern Oregon. The rancher had stocked it with trout. We spent our November nights shivering in a thin-walled trailer next to the pond; in the mornings ice rimmed the water's edge. But by noon the sun was out and weakly warm.

The sun drew up a modest hatch of midges every day, and we tried to match them and take the occasional trout that swirled out in the open water of the pond. They ignored us. It took a long time to notice that the rises of the trout were much too vigorous and bold to be wasted on a mere midge. So I decided to offer them something larger.

I tied on a No. 10 Teeny Nymph in natural pheasant tail color. I cast out and began to hand-twist it back in. I didn't retrieve it three feet before a boil shot up to the surface and my line tip shot a foot forward. I set the hook and a fat pound rainbow danced around the pond. When I finally netted it in the shallows, breaking thin ice to do it, I couldn't resist doing a stomach autopsy. My fishing partner had requested a trout for dinner anyway.

I sliced the trout open. It's stomach was packed to bursting with dozens of strange beetle-like insects. Some were still kicking, they had been taken so recently. They had light green bellies and dark olive backs mottled with black markings I tweezered a number of the insects into a vial filled with alcohol. Then I continued fishing the Teeny Nymph, and continued having excellent success.

When I got home I got out my entomology texts and fumbled haltingly through the keys. Finally I discovered that the insects were not beetles at all. They were backswimmers, *Notonecitdae* by scientific name. Several bits of information dug out of the texts told me what had been going on in that winter pond.

First, let me tell you what backswimmers look like so you will know one when you meet it. They have short antennae, beaklike sucking mouthparts, carapace-like forewings, and a few other entomological complications that work for you if you're an entomologist. But what they really are to most of us is critters that look like beetles that swim on their backs. That's how to identify them. Sweep a collecting net through the shallows of a pond or lake, drop the suspected backswimmer back into the water. If it swims upside-down you've identified it.

The reason those trout were taking them with big boils on the surface is keyed to a couple of aspects of backswimmer behavior. First, they have to come to the surface to get air. They pierce the surface film, capture a bubble of air along their bodies, and take their oxygen out of that. So they are found in the first two or three feet of water, rarely deeper. Second, they are predaceous. They capture a small organism — say a midge pupa — and insert a beak into it, like a mosquito inserts its proboscis into you. Then the backswimmer injects enzymes into

retrieval of the crate). A pair of Woolly Worms (black, white, pink, and purple are favorites but every week seems to bring out the "hot new fly") are affixed via eight to ten-pound leader five feet apart. The trout are not leader shy and the heavy tippet is needed to resist abrasion from the lake's coarse bottom. Using seven to nine weight outfits with very fast sinking heads the flies are launched as far as possible into the lake. After the Woolly Worms hit bottom, they are slowly retrieved back to shore. About two rod lengths out, the rod tip is lifted and the flies are allowed to hang just under the surface for a few seconds before being hauled out for the next cast. Very often the take occurs during the lift and pause.

The usual take is a dull thud and the fish slogs back into deeper water. The fight is usually less than spectacular however, the heaving and head shaking of a ten pound trout is reward enough for any but the most jaded fly fisher. When the fishing is slow, it can be a tedious exercise in heavy equipment casting, but when the fishing is hot it can be downright good! It seems that when the fishing is at its hottest, the weather is at its coldest. Pyramid fishing is winter fishing and winter at Pyramid means blustery winds, sub-zero wind chill, white caps and spray in the face, and happy anglers.

The cutthroat of today are distinct from the original strain which inhabited the lake. The original cutthroat migrated from the Columbia River into the vast Lake Lahontan which covered much of Nevada and northeast California. Over the centuries Lahontan receeded, leaving Pyramid and Walker Lakes as the last vestiges of this prehistoric sea. The fish thus isolated from their original ocean home evolved into the Lahontan cutthroat. The Pyramid Lake strain specialized in feeding on the prolific tui-chub, averaged twenty pounds and attained weights in excess of fifty pounds. These "salmon-trout" as the early settlers called them, ran up the Truckee River by the hundreds of thousands during their spawning runs.

Pyramid Indians netted and cured the trout and used the fish for both sustenance and barter. In the late eighteen hundreds about five hundred thousand pounds of the fish were iced and shipped by rail to consumers as far away as San Francisco and Chicago. Derby Dam (assisted by over harvest and pulp mill pollution) changed all that and by 1936 the strain was extinct.

Through the years the lake level dropped and alkalinity increased to the point where it appeared that Pyramid was a liquid desert. In 1950 on a pure hunch, a tentative plant of rainbows took place and the trout survived. Encouraged by these results, a plant of Lahontan cutthroat (not the Pyramid Lake race) was initiated and the rest is history.

Today, with a high tech hatchery and through painstaking management, Pyramid is kept well stocked with pure and nearly pure cutthroats of local origin. On going experiments with Walker Lake and Pilot Peak strains of Lahontan cutthroat may produce even larger trout in the future.

It is possible but rather doubtful that a natural run of Pyramid's fish will ever be established. Because of the severe drop in lake level, fish can only reach the Truckee through a mechanical elevator. Once in the Truckee the trout are STILL blocked from reaching their historical spawning sites by Derby Dam (seemingly violating every law on the books).

In fighting and territorial bickering between the Nevada Department of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Pyramid Lake Paiutes, makes co-ordinated fisheries management a near impossibility. Unofficially NDW doesn't even want cutthroats in the Truckee, their presence and "threatened" status could jeopardize the highly popular put and take rainbow fishery. USF&W is opposed to encouraging upstream spawning for fear that the anadromous fry would follow the unscreened irrigation ditches into the desert.

Other hurdles such as the unladdered Derby Dam, thermal and chemical pollution, fluctuating stream flows, altered riverbed substrate, and competition from introduced trout present a nearly insurmountable challenge to reestablishment of a wild run.

One man undaunted by the challenge is Reno's John Champion. Through years and years of bull headed effort, John has managed to convince a small but growing number of people that a run CAN be restored. Item by item, John is addressing and attempting to correct the obstacles so that the "salmon-trout" from Pyramid may once again swim freely into the waters of the Truckee.

For Pyramid Lake fishing information contact the Reno Fly Shop at (702) 827-0600. □

its victim. These reduce the interna parts of the prey to juices, which the backswimmer sucks through its beak like soda through a straw.

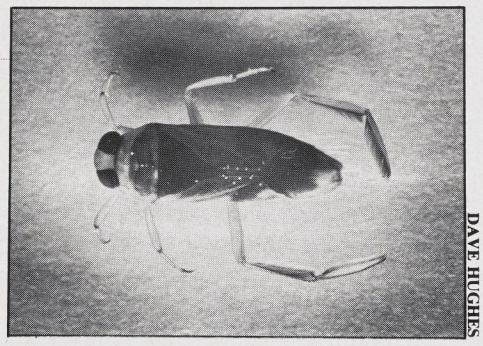
Putting these aspects together to make fishing sense out of them, we discover that the backswimmer hangs in the surface film, getting oxygen, while it waits for potential prey to drift by. Now one more thing: they have powerful swimming legs that look like oars. So there they are, hanging in the surface film, and a trout swims into view. They dive. The trout chases them down and takes them with a turn. A big boil is sent up to the surface. It doesn't look a bit like trout sipping midges.

Backswimmers live a year. They hatch from the egg in spring, grow all summer and fall, overwinter as adults, and lay the eggs of the next backswimmer generation in spring. What does this mean? It means they are largest — sometimes up to half an inch long — when other insects have hatched and are at their smallest. So they are most important when other insects are least important. Trout know this. They start looking for them in late fall, eat them all winter, and continue to look for them all spring. That's why the trout I caught on the ice-rimmed farm pond was packed full of them.

Backswimmers live only in still waters. I've found them in nearly every lake and pond and reservoir in which I've ever collected. I've never found one in a stream, even a quiet one, although I suspect at times they do appear in the backwaters of running water. They are distributed all across North America, in fact the world. They're important wherever trout fishing is done in late fall, winter, and early spring.

Dressings for backswimmers should recall both the shape and the behavior of the naturals. they should be beetle-like in appearance, with long oar-legs, and they should fish fairly close to the surface. I've had success with patterns that were no more than a loose ball of dubbing. The Teeny Nymph has served me well. Standard backswimmer dressings are excellent imitations. Most of these should be fished with dry lines, long leaders, and a slow hand-twist retrieve.

One of the most interesting notes on fishing them is in the Waterboatman section of Randall Kaufmann and Ron Cordes's *Lake Fishing With a Fly* (Frank Amato Publications). Backswimmers and waterboatmen are close cousins. Kaufmann and Cordes list a floating dressing for them. But their notes on fishing it are extremely original. Listen to them: "A sponge body and rubber legs may be used to create a floating pattern. This imitation is presented with a fast-sinking or sinking-head line, the leader being slightly longer than the depth of the water to be fished. The fly is cast and the line is allowed to sink to the bottom but the fly remains on the surface... When you want the fly to dive quickly below the surface you simply retrieve the line with quick, steady pulls or incorporate the hand-twist retrieve. When your imitation has reached the bottom you simply stop the retrieve allowing the fly to drift upwards in a natural manner toward the surface. When fishing a fairly long line in shallow water several retrieves can be executed effectively with the same cast." That's valuable information.



DAVE HUGHES

Backswimmers have an elliptical shape, grasping legs front and middle, and long legs behind that work like oars, sweeping the insect through the water upside-down.

PATTERNS FOR BACKSWIMMERS

Dubbed Backswimmer
Hook: Mustad 3906B Nos. 16-20.
Thread: Olive.
Weight: None, or 3-4 turns lead wire.
Body: Dark olive fur with guard hairs left in.

Backswimmer (Al Troth)
Hook: Mustad 7957BX Nos. 10-14.
Thread: Olive.
Shellback: Brown turkey.
Legs: Olive turkey fibers.
Body: Olive chenille.

Grouse-winged Backswimmer (Schwiebert)
Hook: 1X long Nos. 12-16.
Thread: Dark brown nylon.
Tails: Two pheasant-tail fibers tied short.
Body: Dark hare's mask dubbing on olive silk.
Thorax: Dark hare's mask roughly dubbed with guard hairs on olive silk.
Wing cases: Brown mottled feather tied in at hook bend and pulled over body.
Swimmer-legs: Two pheasant-tail fibers extended like oars.

Floating Backswimmer
Hook: Mustad 3906B Nos. 10-16.
Thread: Olive.
Shellback: Olive-dyed turkey quill.
Body: Closed-cell foam ribbed with olive thread.
Swimmer-legs: Two fibers drawn back from excess of shellback.

The dressing for the floating fly is not listed in *Lake Fishing,* so I've had a stab at it from my own winter-idled imagination. I'll get heavily corrected for it, but that's all right. You turn your imagination loose on the same problem, see what you come up with.

A few final notes on backswimmers. Although they are found most often in shallow weedy areas, they will move out into open water if food can be found there. That November day when I first discovered them, they were feeding on midges floating up to the surface to hatch. They fed on the midges; the trout fed on them. If you see bold swirling takes, remember that.

Backswimmers are perfectly capable of flying, but do so only at two times. The first is when their habitat is evaporating, disappearing. The second is for dispersal flights before mating in spring. It's nature's way of making sure that every body of still water has a population of backswimmers.

Whenever you fish still water, carry a couple of backswimmer dressings. Whenever you see fish taking with such vigor that you suspect they are taking something large and active, give them a try. You might give the trout a surprise... and get a surprise for yourself in return.

Dave Hughes is co-author of *Western Hatches* ($19.95) and author of *An Angler's Astoria* ($9.95) and *Western Streamside Guide* ($9.95). All books are available from Frank Amato Publications, P.O. Box 02112, Portland, OR 97202. Please add $1.00 per book for postage.

Trout Wars

The big losers are the trout

Ralph Cutter

In December of 1970 by a fourteen-to-one margin, the California members of Trout Unlimited voted to secede from the national organization to form a new trout advocacy organization: California Trout.

The reason? The Trout Unlimited California Council President Joseph Paul wrote, "As California volunteers we conceived, directed, and brought into being California's first wild trout project. We worked with the Sierra Club to win wild and scenic status for the Middle Fork Feather River. We helped win passage of the State Wild Rivers Act, we helped win [etc., etc.,]... all of these activities, these projects, these programs were accomplished by California volunteers contributing their own time, energy, and funds. The National T.U. did not allocate one cent of budget nor one hour of direct professional staff or administrative office expense toward attainment of these successes. During the same period of time California volunteers shipped eastward $50,000 in membership dues and contributions to finance the National Trout Unlimited."

Eighteen years later Cal-Trout remains very firmly entrenched as the preeminent wild trout conservation organization in the state. With single minded doggedness Cal-Trout has written a history, quite possibly unparalleled in any other state, of wild trout success stories.

At times, Cal-Trout has been loath to share these successes with other groups such as TU, the FFF (and their conservation arm the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance), Save Our Streams, and individual fishing clubs. This reluctance to share credit has led to a bittersweet, love-hate relationship among angling conservationists. Under Cal-Trout letterhead, I recently solicited a conservation organization to help with the blocking of a hydro project and was flatly told that they were "unwilling to get involved" because Cal-Trout would "take all the credit."

This type of animosity does not bode well for the future of California's pro trout politics. The divisiveness has already led to a plethora of lies, half truths and innuendo which do absolutely nothing to futher the cause of wild trout protection. The average dues-paying and labor-donating angler is besieged with conflicting signals from jousting trout groups and has no real means to separate fact from fiction.

To set the records straight, to squash the rumors, and hopefully *to get us back on the course of fighting for the trout instead of fighting each other,* I have asked the President of Cal-Trout and the Executive Director of Trout Unlimited to write their views on trout politics in California. (The conservation director of the FFF declined the invitation.) I asked for a brief history of their organizations, a record of their practices in California and a plan for the future in California. I also put forth the loaded question, "Does California need a multiplicity of pro trout organizations?"

Because I am long time member of TU, the FFF, and on the executive board of Cal-Trout, I have gone overboard to hopefully prevent unintentional biases from entering this article. Jim Taylor, a TU Director, and Jim Edmonson, a Cal-Trout Director have each acted as referees (and good friends) to see that I haven't strayed too far from the middle of the road. Here unedited, are the statements of Richard May and Robert Herbst:

CALIFORNIA TROUT

KEEPER OF THE STREAMS

Dear Ralph:

Repeated attempts by Trout Unlimited over the past ten years to compete with California Trout for West Coast conservation dollars have spawned the question, "Does California need two trout groups?" The answer is an emphatic "No."

For the past two decades California has established an enviable record in wild trout management, with only ONE active trout conservation organization. When something "ain't broke," it's dumb trying to fix it. California can do without the divisiveness, and concomitant confusion among anglers, of two groups with similar sounding names vying for attention and all-too-precious conservation dollars.

"The more the merrier," and "Let's have lots of groups working together," always sounds enticing, but it lacks logic more often than not and is especially misleading when applied to the trout conservation business. If one statewide group is good, then two would be better, and five terrific? The enemies of wild trout love the prospect, because dividing and conquering is something they know, understand, and implement all too well. Trout fishermen tightly organized at the most crucial level of government — the state — is what we need, and Cal-Trout is the proven best standard bearer for California.

Money: State trout groups like Cal-Trout and Oregon Trout keep all the money they raise, and, with rare exception, invest it all to benefit trout within their borders. It's how you get "More Bang For The Buck." No big magazines. Cal-Trout's annual budget is crowding $200,000 in 1988. Oregon Trout's is near $100,000. All of it is spent at home.

Manpower: Volunteers are great, but to be effective a group needs the continuity of experienced professional leadership at state and local levels. Only state trout groups seem consistently able to do this, because they have the money to do it. Even volunteers aren't cheap if you do things right, i.e., cover all their out of pocket expenses so as not to have them suffer "burn out." Cal-Trout has two full time headquarters staff plus several local representatives under contract, and is organizing for more. This level of professionalism is unmatched, and probably cannot be matched, by outsiders.

Influence: A state trout group interfaces with government where most trout related decisions are made... at the state level. Even federal agencies like U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service make most decisions at regional and state levels, not Washington, D.C.. Trout management, furthermore, is a state responsibility, not a federal one, under almost every circumstance. (National Parks are an exception, but even there, decisions generally are made at the Park, not The White House.) Given this line-up, where would you suppose you should apply your most effort? The answer is obvious.

Lobbying: Most laws relating to trout are state laws. You need a consistent effort in your state capitol to advance your cause and keep your pants pocket from being picked. In California, three registered lobbyists watch Cal-Trout's interests and the trout-wallet. What about when there is a legitimate national trout issue? Groups

On the Current: Damselflies

Wooing the trout with damsels

DAVID HUGHES

An adult damselfly.

Dave Hughes

It was a small forested pond in the coastal mountains, nestled in the trees at the end of a long trail. The sun drew morning mist off its surface. Cedar waxwings speared accurately upward, from perches on limbs, to intercept midges hovering idly high above the water.

No trout were working yet. This was no surprise to me: no insects were hatching yet. I didn't expect any surface activity until late in the morning. But I didn't expect to hover idly like the midges, waiting for something to happen. A cedar waxwing might get me.

I puffed up my antique Water Walker float tube, slipped into my lightweight waders, pulled on my flippers, and backed awkwardly into the pond. I began half casting and half trolling a size 10 Olive Woolly Worm. I started with this fly because, although the life of a pond is largely a mystery, one part of it is not: any still water with substantial weed growth will have a supply of damselfly nymphs. And in any water with lots of damsel nymphs an Olive Woolly fished slow will take a trout now and then.

By the time surface activity started and I switched to a mayfly dun dressing, I'd hooked half a dozen trout.

Damselfly nymphs are easy to recognize. There is nothing to confuse them with, for nothing else in the world has three tail-gills shaped and veined like willow leaves. Damsel bodies are long and slender, the legs frail and stick-like. Damsel eyes are large and round and set out to the sides of the head.

Damselfly adults need little introduction; we've all known what they look like since we were curious kids hanging around water, wondering what was in it. The adults have

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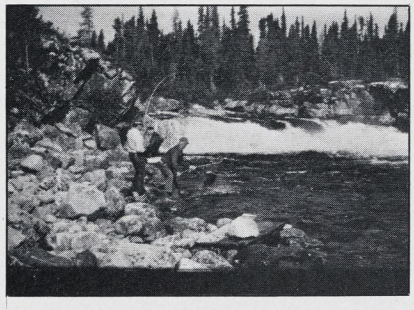

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long slender bodies, no tails. The four wings are held straight out to the sides in flight, folded straight over the back at rest. The eyes are big and round like a startled little girl's.

Damselfly nymphs are primarily still-water dwellers. But they can also be found in the quietest stretches of running water, and also in any still backwater formed by a stream. They make their living in an odious way: they creep around in the weeds on those fragile-looking legs; whenever a smaller organism comes within reach, they shoot out an extendible set of jaws, grab the victim, wrestle it in, and eat it alive. Pretty bad behavior for something with such a gentle name.

Patterns for Damsels

OLIVE WOOLLY WORM
Hook: Mustad 9672, Nos. 8-12.
Thread: Olive.
Tail: None.
Hackle: Brown or grizzly, soft, palmered.
Body: Olive chenille.

PHEASANT RUMP
Hook: Mustad 9671 nos. 8-12.
Thread: Olive.
Tail: Tuft of pheasant rump underfeathers, dyed olive.
Body: Pheasant rump underfeathers, twisted on silk and spun on body.

BLUE DAMSEL
Hook: Mustad 79580, Nos. 14-16.
Thread: Gray.
Tail: Peacock sword.
Rear hackle: Grizzly, undersized.
Ribbing: Fine silver wire.
Body: Light blue floss.
Wings: Two light grizzly hackle tips.
Front hackle: Grizzly.

GINGER DAMSEL
Hook: Mustad 79580, Nos. 14-16.
Thread: Tan.
Tail: Light tan elk hair.
Rear hackle: Light ginger, undersized.
Ribbing: Fine gold wire.
Body: Tan floss.
Wings: Light ginger hackle tips.
Front hackle: Light ginger.

The life of a damselfly lasts about one year. They spend most of this time under water, as nymphs. When mature they migrate toward shore where they crawl up on anything that protrudes from the water before hatching into the adult. Their swimming during this migration is extremely labored and slow. They undulate their bodies vigorously from side to side, with the same motion as a swimming snake. But for all their effort they accomplish little forward motion. They often get the urge to emerge all at once; at times great formations of them move toward shore. Trout like this: damsel nymphs are such easy targets.

Emergence itself is generally at night, as a protection against bird predation. But it is the migration, not the emergence, that is of most interest to fishermen.

Nighttime temperatures are the prime movers of hatches: damsels like the warm months, and there will be hatches of various species all through May, June, July, and August in almost all still waters in Canada and the United States.

The adults are less often important to the angler. There are times when they are taken, though, and it's worth keeping an imitation or two in your stillwater fly boxes. Adult damsels are as mean as their nymphs: they fly through the air with their legs formed into a sort of catching-basket. They hunt down small midges, gnats, blackflies, and mosquitoes, bless them, and land to eat them before taking off to find another.

The adults are available to trout on warm summer days when they fly about idly over the water, sometimes landing on it. But they are more available to trout when a hot summer wind gusts through the reeds around the lake, scattering them out onto the water. When this happens the shoreline will boil briefly, then subside until the next gust. It's tough to tell what is going on, but worth your patience to find out.

Patterns for the nymphs are usually based on one of two things: exact imitation of the natural, or imitation of the action of the natural. Remember that difficult sinuous swimming motion? In my opinion a pattern that imitates the movement rather than the appearance will catch a lot more fish. That's why the Olive Woolly Worm, tied with a soft palmered hackle, catches lots of pond fish for me. An exact imitation with no working parts—what I call a "plastic pattern"—catches few fish for me.

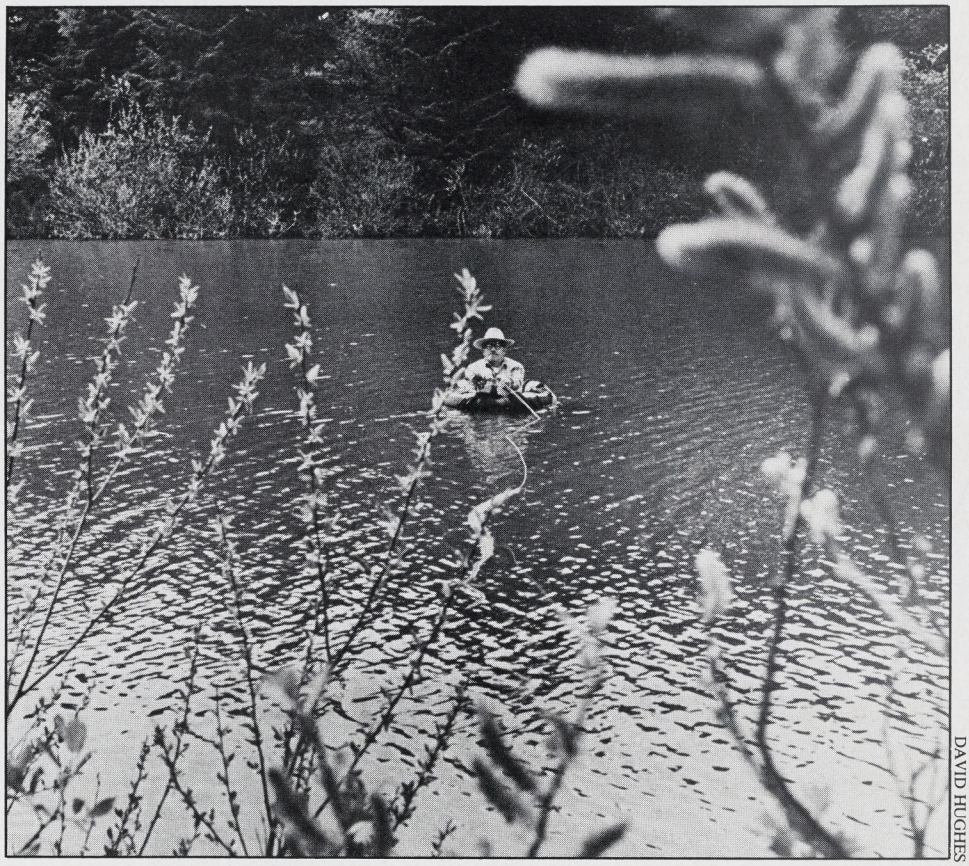
The best dressing I have encountered is the Pheasant Rump. It was introduced to me by Rick Prange of Boise, Idaho. It is tied with the very soft underfeathers from a pheasant rump, the little feathers hidden under the larger feathers used to tie the Carey Special, which if tied sparsely can also be a good damsel nymph dressing.

Though there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of species of damselflies, the nymphs come in two essential colors: olive and dark brownish-olive. This is simply because they depend on camouflage for safety, and these two colors are the predominant colors of lake and pond vegetation.

Presentation of nymph patterns is simple: they should be retrieved with a slow hand-twist. Let the soft materials provide the enticement. I generally fish them on a dry line and a long leader, but I usually fish shallow lakes and ponds. If you must go deeper it will be wise to carry a full range of lines: wet tip, wet belly, wet head, and HiD. Your goal is to bring the nymph right in above the weedbeds. A cast-and-count-down method might be necessary to find the right depth, lengthening the count on each experimental cast until you tick the weeds, then shortening the count a second or two and fishing out your cast at that depth.

Although you might want to experiment, two dressings for the adults will give you a good place to start. They are the Ginger Damsel and the Blue Damsel as written about in Terry Hellekson's *Popular Fly Patterns.* They have fore and aft hackles, and will blow across the water on the same gusts that propel the adult damsels out of the reeds. Try them, then improve on them if you see a need to in your own fishing.

One last note before you stride over to your tying bench to tie a few damselfly dressings: don't get bugged by damselfly entomology. All the nymphs have the same shape; they vary only in size and color. And all the adults are the same shape; they, too, vary only in size and color. So just tie something that looks alive—even if it's as simple as the Olive Woolly Worm that does so well for me—and go fishing.



DAVID HUGHES

Damselflies are usually most abundant near the shoreline.

Note: Dave Hughes is co-author of *Western Hatches* ($18.95). He is the author of *An Angler's Astoria* ($8.95), and *American Fly Tying Manual* ($9.95). These books are available from Frank Amato Publications, P.O. Box 02112, Portland, OR 97202. Please add $1.00 postage per book.

Damsels with a wiggle

There's only one way to make large nymphs really look alive, says Kenneth Robson

BEFORE the opening-up of small stillwaters, the damselfly, that brilliant harbinger of summer, had hardly been considered worth imitating in any of its stages.

Among those early writers on fishing stillwaters possibly only Joscelyn Lane had come up with a representation of the damselfly nymph which incorporated a bunch of olive-dyed cock-hackle fibres cut square to simulate the breathing filaments at the rear, which are a particular feature of the nymph. Since then many effective nymph imitations have been devised.

What I am concerned with here is a pattern associated with one particular aspect of the damselfly nymph — its movement. Although during its life as a nymph it is mainly a crawler or slow walker, there are occasions when it swims — and quite quickly.

Later, when the time comes for it to transform into an adult, it rises to the surface and swims ashore with a wiggling, undulating action. As Brian Clarke said, you can't imitate that articulated wiggle on a single, stiff longshank hook.

This characteristic led the American fly-dressers, Swisher and Richards, to devise a pattern using two hooks linked together to produce the desired serpentine action of the natural. Even John Goddard's more simplified version takes some time to dress, and I have never found it to work any better than the single-hook model.

The success of marabou in the tails of lead-headed lures and Tadpoles prompted me and other anglers to experiment with something similar in a damsel nymph pattern to produce this articulated motion. Richard Walker pointed out that by exaggerating certain features of a fly in its imitation, responses could often be triggered off in the trout.

The Damsel Marabou Wiggle Nymph places the emphasis on movement and colour. The tail of green and yellow marabou is supplemented by two strands of green flashabou. The legs of the natural nymph are used mainly for crawling, but strands of green and yellow marabou tied in on each side of the thorax respond superbly to a long, steady retrieve, giving a lifelike and enticing movement to the forward part of the fly. The green and yellow marabou and the flashabou have a brightness and sparkle which outshine the natural, but are calculated to attract the trout's attention, especially on sunny mornings with a nice ripple on the water.

On two such days in early May — at Lapsley's Trout Fishery and Rooksbury Mill respectively — this pattern took bag limits by 11.30 am. In both instances fish were moving in the upper layers of the water and decisively took leaded versions pulled long and steadily through the water. Certainly the fly looked enticing as it was fished, but no real damsel nymph was wiggling to the shore to hatch at that time of year. So do the fish take the fly — especially with its flashabou embellishment in the tail — as a lure, or does its exaggerated movement and colour trigger off some instinctive memory or response which registers damsel nymph?

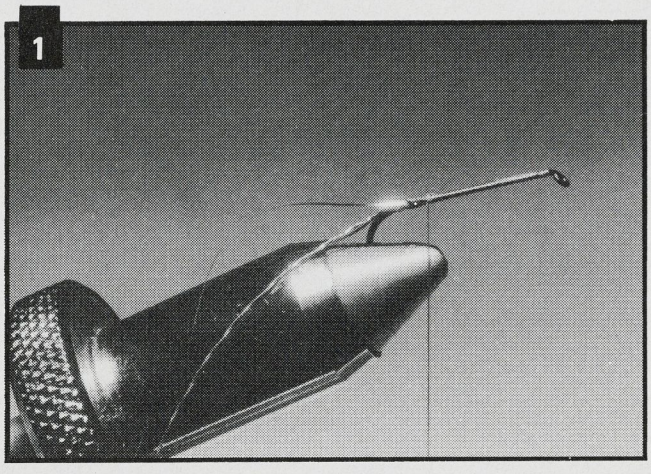
On another occasion as late as the last week in October on a sunny day with ripple and some dragonflies about, the Damsel Marabou Wiggle Nymph took one fish, after which all interest evaporated until I put on another version with a darker green tail. This was taken on the drop.

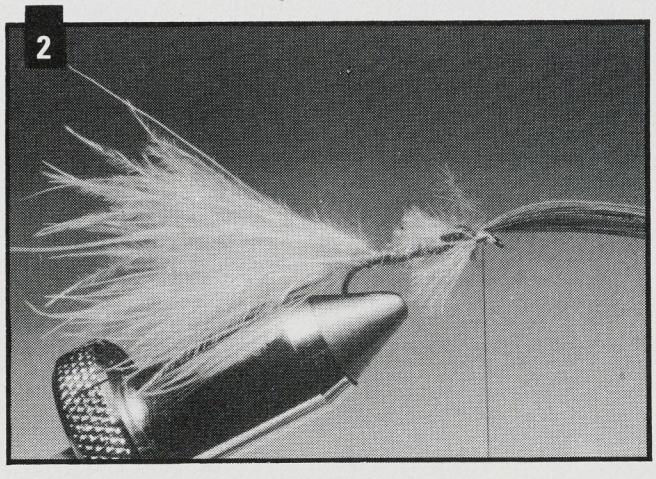
Of course, as with all patterns, the nymph is not a universal panacea. On one hot, sunny day in July with damsel adults all over the lake the fish were taking olives and the trout came to a PVC Nymph and a Collyer's Green Nymph. Only two days previously with adult damsels again out in force my orthodox Damsel Nymph produced no response. A change to the marabou version took two fish, and when the fly was cast near reeds where damsels were hatching it was seized as soon as it hit the water.

Always carry leaded and unleaded patterns in your box as sometimes the fish want your fly in the surface making a wake and on other occasions just below. Remember that you are imitating a characteristic of the damsel nymph which is particularly appealing to the trout.

Tying the Damsel Marabou Wiggle Nymph

Hook: Size 8-12 longshank.
Silk: Olive waxed.
Tail: Plume of green and yellow marabou with two strands of green flashabou.
Rib: Oval gold tinsel
Body: Olive seal's fur with a touch of amber.
Thorax: Dark-olive seal's fur.
Wing case: Six olive feather-fibres.
Legs: Five or six fibres of green marabou mixed with three or four yellow, tied on each side of the thorax.
Head: Oval shape, and pronounced, of olive tying silk and well varnished.
Weighted version with lead wire.





Run the olive tying silk in neat, touching turns from the eye to a point just above the barb and bind in a length of fine oval gold tinsel to the hookshank. Catch in two strands of green flashabou on top of the hookshank to produce a long tail. I prefer it under the marabou tail, where I feel it is more conspicuous to the fish.

Take three bunches of green marabou fibres (lighter shade) and two of yellow. Lay alternate bunches of green and yellow carefully on top of each other with their tips matching. Pick up the whole bunch between finger and thumb and check that the tail is one to one-and-a-half times the length of the shank. Trim the butts for the length required, allowing for tying in on top of the hookshank, moisten the butts with saliva and twist between finger and thumb to achieve a shuttlecock effect. Tie in with silk and bind firmly down. Cut the two strands of flashabou to the same length as the plume of marabou.

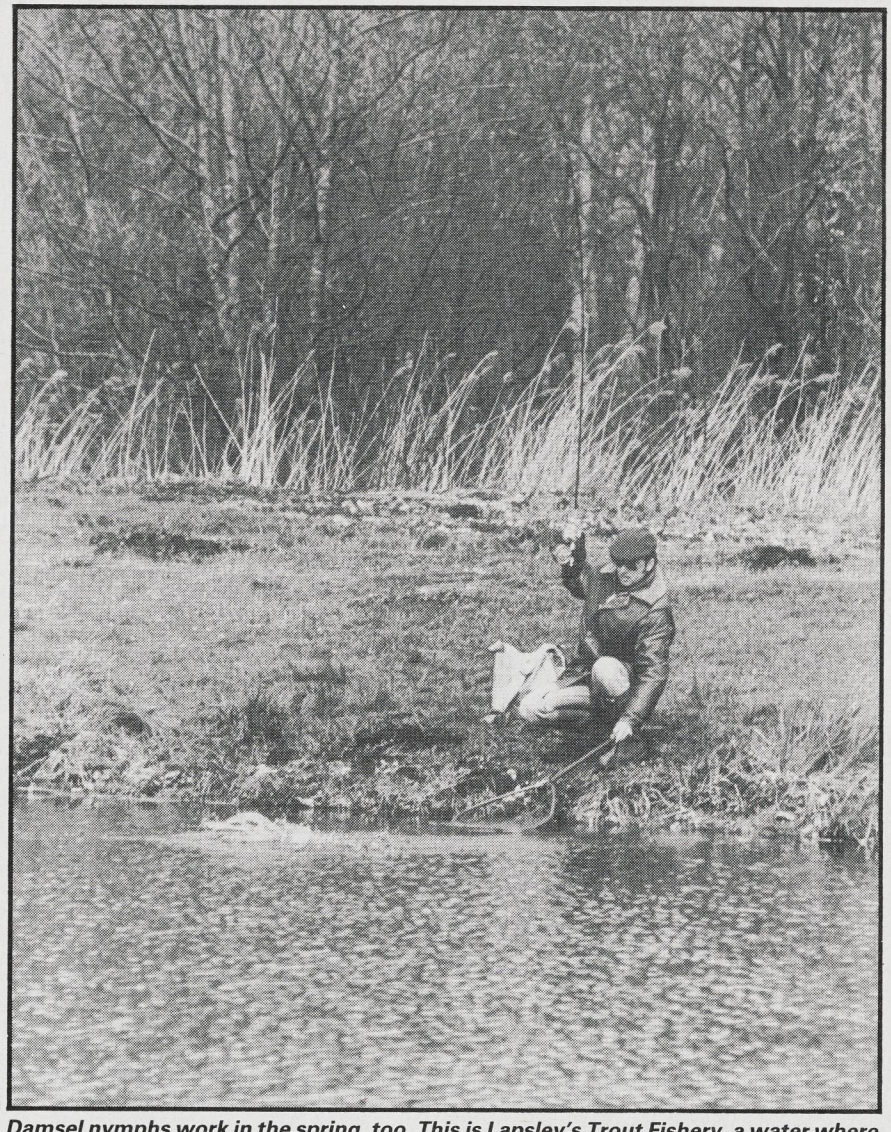
The seal's fur is pre-eminently olive, but a pinch of amber gives it a golden tint which enhances the body colour. I prefer to mix mine manually, blending them in the palm of one hand with a finger. Dub the mixture thinly on the tying silk, remembering always to roll the fur between finger and thumb in the same direction. Too little at a time is better than too much and, though it should thicken slightly as it is wound three-quarters of the way along the hookshank, it should be borne in mind that the body of the natural is essentially slender.

Now take the oval tinsel and rib the body in spirals in the opposite direction to that of the seal's fur. Tie down and cut off the surplus.

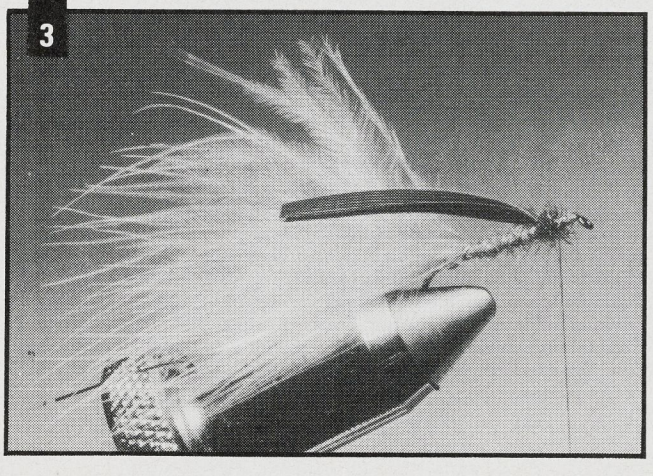
The wing can be of any dark-olive slip of fibres, such as heron. Tie about half a dozen fibres on top of the hookshank with the tips pointing towards the hook eye. Now dub some darker olive seal's fur on to the silk and take around the shank to make a thorax, leaving enough room to form a head at the eye.

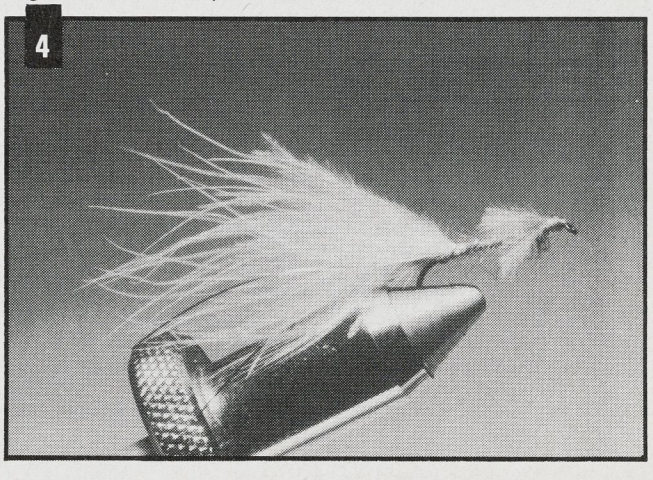
Now put together about five or six individual fibres of green marabou together with three or four yellow, moisten the butts with saliva and twist together to form a slim plume. Repeat the operation for the legs on the other side of the body. Tie the two plumes one on each side of the thorax. Give the butts of each a little pull through the two securing loops of tying silk. This tends to bring the plumes to more of an angle to the thorax. Clip the butts and bind down the surplus. The marabou "legs" should be no longer than three-quarters the length of the hookshank. If the plumes are too long, clipping the marabou has no ill-effect on the action of the fly. The best way to do this, and to make sure that the legs are equal on each side, is to draw up both plumes of marabou in finger and thumb vertically above the hookshank and clip them to the desired length.

Now pull the feather fibres tightly over the thorax and legs, cut off the surplus and bind down securely. All that remains is to make a conspicuous oval-shaped head with the tying silk, leaving a minute gap between it and the wing case. Give the head two coats of varnish for a nice finish. ■



Damsel nymphs work in the spring, too. This is Lapsley's Trout Fishery, a water where the writer's artificial is highly successful.





SCOTTISH SCENE

Drift-nets not to blame?

SANA'S MIGRATORY Fish Committee holds its inaugural meeting in Perth on October 27. No doubt the problems of salmon conservation will be among the subjects to be discussed. Perhaps a few thoughts will be directed towards an astonishing interview on radio from Sir Michael Shaw, Tory MP for Scarborough, who, when speculating on the decline of salmon stocks, stated that the blame for another bad year for the Scottish netsmen was not due at all to the north-east drift-netters because their catch of salmon is so small relative to the total salmon catch over the whole country. He said there were other reasons: pollution, poaching, and netting further afield was possibly heavier now than in the past. He accused the Scots of poaching their salmon to death and said that they were being caught wholesale at the mouths of Scottish rivers.

His NE drift-netters, he said, were in favour of tagging and he issued a challenge to Scottish fishermen; have salmon tagged to prove they have nothing to hide! He didn't mention that the Scottish fishery boards and netsmen are, in fact, all for tagging, whereas anglers and fish-farmers are not, mainly because this method of control would be very difficult to operate. But there is little hope from Sir Michael of any help there to limit the activities of the NE drift-netters.

Loch Awe's illegal fishing

THE LOCH AWE Angling Association's "threat" to apply for a Protection Order if anglers do not adhere to legal fishing practices and the Country Code has caused a bit of controversy. Naturally enough, those who do not pay for this "free" fishing, have five or six illegal set-lines going at one time, litter the bank with their rubbish and create serious vandalism by setting private property on fire, are up in arms. But the rest of us sympathise with the Association and wish them luck in their plea for a clean-up of this famous loch. The Association say that they do not wish to introduce permits and fees in an otherwise "free" loch, but if the anglers at the centre of the storm do not mend their ways then a Protection Order will be sought — and that would mean the issuing of permits and an end to "free" angling on Loch Awe, which would be a pity for the majority of us who fish legally.

Time-share worries

THERE WAS AN early hint in last month's "Scottish Scene" that throughout Scotland anglers are beginning to organise themselves in opposition to what they describe as "the evils of time-sharing". They see their fishings at risk. It doesn't matter whether they are private lessees, club or hotel lessees or just those engaged in the tourist industry, the end result is the same to them — the cessation of availability to locals and visitors alike.

They see very clearly that whenever fishings are sold on a time-share basis they are gone for good. They will never be available again to the ordinary angler because each rod, each week or each fortnight will be owned by individuals and therefore the fishings, as a whole, can never come on the market again and will be "irrecoverable". They say that if the time-share mania accelerates there will be few fishings left for the ordinary angler. And it is not just salmon fishing, which is the mecca for time-sharers. Brown-trout fisheries are also at risk and the angling clubs in Caithness are still very worried about the future of the trout lochs which they presently rent from proprietors and fear time-sharing.

But what can be done to slow down or stop this modern trend? Reports from the Highlands indicate that there is a determined effort going on to undertake the only possible remedy. One club has embarked upon the course of trying to purchase the fishings they administer for themselves as a local amenity and for the visiting angler who, they say with some authority, contributes so much to the economy of the tourist industry.

When the Hydro-electric Board sold off its major beats of the River Conon last year — and which were immediately offered to the public on a time-share basis — certain lesser beats were retained by the Board in the hope that local interests might purchase them with the aim of keeping them in public hands, as it were. The only success was when the Ross and Cromarty District Council bought the estuarial beat for salmon and sea-trout and asked the local club, which had been the lessee for many years, to manage this bit of fishing for the benefit of anglers. But the Upper Conon and the River Blackwater remained and the club involved here, the Loch Achonachie AC, did not get the full financial backing they had hoped for from the Highland Development Board or the Regional and District Council to purchase these fishings.

Now, say the club, if they do not manage to gather at least a third of something like £90,000, the Upper Conon and the Upper Blackwater may go the same way as the lower Conon beats and be sold off in time-shares and therefore be a great loss both to local anglers and the tourist economy.

The club management committee has arranged a public meeting for November 8 in Maryburgh Community Hall, Dingwall, and the MP, MEP, Highlands and Islands Development Board, Regional and District Council and others have been invited to be present and participate. The purpose is to raise capital.

Club members themselves realise the importance of self-help and have suggested that perhaps something like £100 from each of them would not be too great a price to help retain these fishings. But a lot more than that is required — and from other sources. A suggestion was made by some regular English visitors, who wish to be identified with any move to "save" the Conon and Blackwater, that they might purchase associate memberships. There could be many others with a similar philosophy.

The club has said it is no secret that entrepreneurs wait in the wings to purchase these fishings and that public bodies and MPs were horrified at what happened to the beats which were sold last year.

The club states that, if it raises funds by its own efforts, bodies such as the Highland Development Board, the tourist associations and the Regional and District Councils may be further encouraged to assist. What is required here is a mere drop in the ocean compared to what well-known companies spend on other sporting events by way of advertising.

St Andrew's "notice to quit"

St Andrew's AC, who have had the fishing at Cameron Reservoir for many years, have been served with a notice to quit by Fife Regional Council. The Region claim that they had to spend thousands of pounds after cut weed threatened to block the reservoir's draw-off towers and outlet pipes and are claiming the money from the club. In the meantime a "notice to quit" has been served. The club claim they had not cut weed since July, and that gale-force westerly winds in September — believed to have been up to force 8 — broke and uprooted weed from the loch, then carried it down to the outlet pipes.

One of the regional councillors admitted that the council had been "a wee bit careless" in maintaining the reservoir, and that strainers were missing from the ends of the pipes.

Schiehallion

DON CONDIT

Upper left, Adolescent Damsel Nymph, Brown Phase.
Lower left, Damselfly Larva

Upper right, Adolescent Damsel Nymph, Green Phase.
Lower right, Mini-Damsel.

The Damsel Syndrome

Bob Terrill

This account is written to inform rather than to entertain, and for good reason. Little has been published on the damselfly nymph and most of this meager output is either useless to the practicing angler or seriously misleading, as the author learned by many years of experience with numerous patterns. The beginning of wisdom on the subject is that there is no simple or singular solution to the problem of the artificial damsel.

Prone to follow "authentic" advice, the author spent many fruitless hours of labor under the spell of the late Bill Blades—father of the exact imitation school—in tying and fishing the "real McCoy." However, this study is inspired not by a spirit of controversy but by remembrances of sheer delight in a hefty rainbow's strike when taking one of these elusive nymphs. It "creams" the fly like a defensive back hitting an open field receiver. Unlike the rather gentle twitch of most nymph strikes, this one elicits a head-on smash. If for no other reason, the search for successful damsel patterns, and damsel water, should be a feature of every fly fisherman's endeavors.

Origins and Acknowledgements

The "discovery" of the adolescent nymphs: Anglers familiar with Ernest Schwiebert's masterpiece, *Nymphs,* have long admired his beautiful renditions of the mature damsels and, in particular, the two large species unique to the West – the Green and the Sepia. Both are characterized by slender, elongated bodies ending in three paddle-shaped gills (or "tails"); three pairs of multi-jointed legs; complex thoraxes of moderate sizes; and broad heads encasing fabulous eyes.

Over a five-year period the author, certainly not an entomologist, devoted his energies to tying and fishing reasonable facsimiles of these beauties only to meet with consistently disappointing results, even in the midst of swarms of hatching "blue darning needles." About the same success ratio resulted from the

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use of patterns developed by such noted tiers as Polly Rosborough, Gary Howells and various eastern outfits, as well as even more fanciful creations of the author's own imagination.

This long and futile period, extending over seven years, suddenly ended one July day when an "adolescent" green damsel nymph affixed itself to the idle blade of an outstretched oar and was stealthily captured for close study. In length it was about seven-eighths of an inch, the same as the mature nymph, but it possessed none of the latter's wondrous ornamentation and appendages.

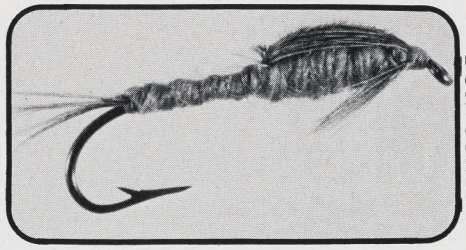
In color it was a chartreuse olive shade, its tapered thorax area was round and bulging with nascent parts, and both body and thorax were banded with light, cocoa brown stripes. Its rudimentary head was the same light brown and the gills appeared as three short fibers extending from the tail position. On some later specimens it was noted that small "legs," also cocoa colored, had begun to emerge.

The practical conclusion, even for a non-entomologist, was self-evident; namely, that the mature nymphs in preparation for their ascent into the air must be positioned on or very near the stalks of reeds, grasses and rocks protruding from the water. Thus, they would be an unlikely staple of the trout's diet. By contrast, the adolescent swimmers wandering in search of food would be easy pickings for a rainbow and a rewarding mouthful.

This would be an ideal place to sound a note of self-congratulations and claims to originality. What actually happened, however, was quite to the contrary. Mr. Jim Wong of Oregon State University had already arrived at the right conclusion.

Light years ahead in the lake's entomology he had, coincidentally with the author's "discovery," tied a replica of the adolescent nymph and was soon enjoying the pleasure of netting and releasing 2- to 6-pounders with regularity. For the author, it only remained to join in the fun, simplify procedures, participate in trials of lines and leaders, and to learn that on certain days a brown-hued adolescent would capture the trout's fancy.

Unless there are authenticated claims to the contrary, Mr. Wong's name should be associated with this great pattern, *circa* 1968.



DON CONDIT

ADOLESCENT DAMSEL NYMPH

Hook: Mustad 33960 (sproat bend), No. 8, 4XL (or 79580).
Thread: Fly Master, tan (brown).
Weight: Fine lead wire (.020 or .017 in.).
Padding: Green (brown) 4-strand darning cotton, or rayon floss.
Tail: Pheasant rump fibers, "green" phase (or colored dark brown).
Body: Chartreuse olive yarn. Universal Vise Corp. No. 126 is exact shade. (For brown, sepia color yarn or "Sealex" dubbing.)
Ribbing: Light "straw" colored yarn. For the brown, fine oval gold tinsel; also for the olive species, if preferred. Reason for the pale golden yarn: it turns "cocoa" against the wet olive yarn, whereas a brown strand turns black and turns off the trout.
Wingcase and Legs: Whole, tan pheasant rump feather. For the brown nymph, use reddish brown Pantone marking pen with feather laid on a plastic surface.

1. Wrap hook slightly into the bend; leave bobbin hanging. Then, at front end of shank, bend on seven turns of .021 inch lead wire (or nine turns of .017 inch) to form a 3/8 inch base for thorax, ending *exactly* 3/32 inch in back of hook eye.

2. Tie in three or four rump fibers for a 3/16 inch tail.

3. Bring thread forward to a point immediately *in front* of the lead, and tie in a 4-inch length of padding material. Spiral it rearward in a single layer over the lead; then taper in rear of lead and bring forward tying off just in front of the lead to produce the characteristic silhouette.

4. Spiral thread back to tail and tie in a single 4-inch strand of ribbing (if yarn); next, tie in *only* two strands of olive (or sepia) yarn. Then bring to the *rear* of the tapered thorax and tie in, shiny side down, a whole rump feather, stripped to about one inch in length, leaving 3/4 inch of exposed fibers, pointing rearward. Trim off stem. With tying thread *in back* of the exposed rump fibers, take six or eight turns to elevate them for subsequent working space.

5. Bring thread forward to a point 3/32 inch in front of hook eye; then wrap body material forward, causing the rump feather wingcase to stand erect, and tie off at 3/32 inch in front of hook eye. (If dubbing, after step 4 return thread to tail position, tie in a 6-inch loop for a 4-inch thin "noodle" of sepia dubbing material; then return thread to eye position and, after twisting the dubbing tightly, wrap forward as detailed above.)

6. Spiral choice of ribbing material forward with eight or nine turns, and tie off. If a single strand of yarn, handle carefully with hackle pliers, making a few initial twists to prevent splaying.

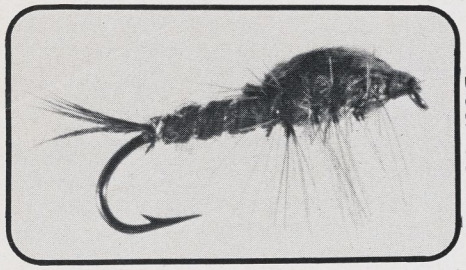
7. Bring the rump feather over the thorax in a firm grasp and tie down in back of eye with three wraps; then with left thumb and forefinger, divide and pull the exposed 1/4 inch tips downward and slightly back, taking additional thread wraps to secure them in this position as emerging "legs." Tie off with a small, beady head. (If leg fibers are excessive, thin out or shorten with fine bladed scissors.)

The Mini-Damsel

In this same exciting season, the author also had the good fortune to observe a resident of the local area, happily taking rainbows at the unlikely time of mid-afternoon on a day that had not produced well on the full size adolescents. The stranger generously shared his pattern, which he called simply a "little damsel," and it has continued to prove its merits ever since in the hands of others.

Only the trout will ever know whether they take this smaller, olive brown creation with the bulging wingcase for a damsel in some stage of metamorphosis or, instead, as an attractive morsel from some other aquatic insect family. Nevertheless, it produces well in damsel waters and on days and at hours when the genuine thing has failed. The author hopes that the real originator of this nymph, presumably from Bend, Oregon, will please stand up and be identified.

A practical study of the adolescent damselfly nymphs and the larva.



DON CONDIT

MINI-DAMSEL
Hook: Mustad 38941, sproat bend, No. 10 (or Mustad 9762).
Thread: Fly Master, olive.
Tail: Short pheasant rump, preferably stained brown.
Body: Olive brown yarn, or Sealex No. 104 dubbing.
Ribbing: Fine oval gold tinsel, or copper wire.
Thorax: Fine, olive green chenille.
Hackle: Furnace, India saddle, short fibered.
Wingcase: Guinea hen body feather, daubed with Pantone 457M marking pen.

1. Tie in three or four rump fibers for a 3/16 inch tail; then tie in three inches of ribbing. Return thread to midpoint of shank.

2. Tie in two strands of yarn, spiral firmly to tail and return to tie-in position, tapering slightly forward. (Alternatively, dub from tail to midpoint of shank.)

3. Spiral tinsel forward with five turns and tie off.

4. Tie in guinea hen body feather, stem forward, shiny side down; trim excess to leave 3/32 inch working space behind hook eye.

5. Prepare hackle feather by clipping the fibers from its underside; tie in by stem at midpoint of shank, leaving 1/4 inch of stem exposed.

6. Tie in chenille by binding to shank *without stripping;* bring chenille forward with four or five tight turns to 3/32 inch behind hook eye.

7. Spiral hackle forward for a sparse effect; clip fibers from top area.

8. Gather guinea feathers fibers in a firm "pinch" and pull forward over thorax. Tie down and trim excess carefully to avoid cutting into tie-down. Finish off with small head.

The Enigma of the Damsel Larva

It was nearly two decades ago, by a most unlikely chance, that the author saw his first damsel larva. Arriving at about one o'clock in the afternoon with a companion at a Central Oregon lake noted for its damsel hatches, we promptly took a shiny four-pounder on a Muskrat Nymph. With no food since early morning, we were ravenous and hurried back to camp with this choice rainbow as our intended meal.

Immediately after filleting the fish, I opened its stomach and beheld a novel sight—it was packed with bright, fluorescent green larva that could only have come from the damselfly. They were in such fresh condition that some still wiggled as I laid them out with a knife blade for closer inspection. In addition to their striking color, they were uniformly 3/8 of an inch long and a bit less than 3/32 of an inch in diameter.

Suffice it to say that many attempts at fishing exact duplications yielded never a bite. Yet the thought persisted that here, evidently, was an excellent source of trout food; and I preached the gospel of the larva to fellow anglers in the hope that some day an effective pattern would turn up.

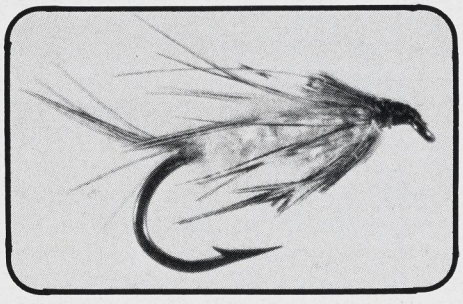
And, on a completely unanticipated occasion, it finally did as the proceeds of a trip to British Columbia from which a sudden illness had disbarred the author. One of my intended companions, Robert H. Mitchell of Portland, Oregon, returned with a satisfied grin and handed

over the larva pattern that did the job.

His account bears relating since it illustrates the adage that truth can be revealed to an honest man even under adverse circumstances. Mitchell and Don Condit, whose photographic work graces this article, chanced upon two trollers hauling spinners and worms through some of the world's best fly water at a remote B. C. lake. As the two parties met and exchanged ritualistic accounts of the day's fishing, Mitchell casually asked one of the worm artists if he'd ever heard of a local green damsel larva imitation. Rummaging through a box of miscellany, this gent handed over several nymphs that looked much like fat-bodied Carey Specials, with streaming hackle and fluorescent green chenille bodies.

With an engineer's keen eye, Mitchell saw possibilities in these odd-ball creations as potential larva and proceeded to "barber" them ruthlessly before casting. Success was immediate and sustained.

So here, fellow anglers, is the story in brief of how the author's fantasy of many years standing, materialized in the form of a larva that *works* whereas, for reasons yet to be explained, exact replicas are a "bust." So far as known, since no similar pattern has been published, Mr. Mitchell may be credited with a "first," even though he acquired his raw materials from a dubious source. Mitchell also developed a logical method of fishing his creation which will no doubt stand the test of time.



DON CONDIT

DAMSELFLY LARVA

Hook: Mustad 7957BX, No. 8. (Light option, Mustad 3906B).

Thread: Fly Master, olive.

Tail (optional): Three short 1/8 inch "green phase" pheasant rump fibers.

Body: Medium size, fluorescent green chenille (or nylon yarn).

Hackle: "Green phase," pheasant rump feather, short fibered.

1. (Optional.) Tie in a 3/16 inch tail of three rump fibers.

2. Clean 1/4 inch of chenille; tie in at bend of hook and wrap forward in tight turns, tying off 1/8 inch behind hook eye.

3. Select a short-fibered rump feather. Clean stem and tie in *by the tip,* shiny side forward, using four thread wraps. Trim excess.

4. Grasp butt with hackle pliers and hold erect with right hand. With moistened left thumb and forefinger, stroke fibers rearward and repeat while carefully laying in two turns of hackle. Finish with small head.

5. Give hackle a sparse and "scraggly" appearance by clipping off about half the fibers at random lengths, mostly near their base for a "collar" effect.

Note: *If your chenille body appears excessively "fat," it should be slenderized before hackling by trimming back the chenille fuzz with fine, curved scissors.*

Notes on Fishing the Nymphs and the Larva

The present account contains no startling revelations about the habitat of

the damsel nymph or how best to fish it. Nevertheless, a summary of some generic knowledge may prove useful to anglers not yet steeped in experience with this particular pattern.

Damsel nymphs and larvae typically inhabit the weedy margins of lakes in waters from three to nine feet deep at the extremes. Small coves of this character are especially choice spots because long casts can be made from a boat anchored just outside, thus covering lots of water without disturbing the feeding trout.

Also, if the shore is gradually sloping, it becomes feasible and effective to wade close to the outer edge of the weedy margin and retrieve long casts back to the trout's lie—a highly productive technique for expert casters. But most often, the only possibility is to work the shoreline from a boat, sneaking along and casting into clear spaces or alongside the weedbeds.

As to lines, specialists like the weight forward slow sinker typified by Scientific Anglers WET CEL I. First, its sink rate is slow enough to permit the optimum "creeping" retrieve without dragging bottom in relatively shallow water. Second, it allows the retrieve to proceed on a level plane, in contrast to the sawtooth motion resulting from the retrieval of a sinking tip line. Nevertheless, it should be added that the latter *certainly* will take trout in damsel water, even though experiments give the slow sinker the edge.

Next, a 12- or even 14-foot leader has the edge on a 9-footer, especially on glassy smooth water. Needless to say, in both cases leaders (compound tapered) should be attached to the fly line with epoxy slices or nail knots. Also, it is highly advisable to inspect the leader frequently for the presence of "wind knots" which are always a possibility when making long casts with very long leaders and a No. 8, 4X long nymph.

Green, Brown or Miniature?

The selection of a green or brown variant can, of course, be determined only by experimenting. The green species is the more common but even on the same lake the brown is a "must" on certain days or periods. Both yield the same results, however, when the damsels are on the wing; namely, trout hit them with a smash that will be fatal to the tippet if the line is wadded up tightly when retrieving. The angler's gaze and attention should not be allowed to wander during this exercise.

There are inexplicable occasions, even during a damsel hatch, when only the *miniaturized version* seems to capture the rainbow's whimsical imagination. It can be fished successfully in a more careless manner than the true adolescent nymph and it is often productive when the main damsel feed is over. For this reason "our gang" of casters seldom gave up without first giving the "olive Montana," as it became known, a good try.

Finally, whether brown or green, the major damsel feed is usually limited to a relatively brief period of about three hours, beginning no earlier than 10:00 a.m. (DST). Why the brunch syndrome? Do the adolescents initiate their final metamorphosis in that interval and climb onto the reed stalks for their last stage of development before taking flight in the ensuing day or two? We can only hope that the entomologists will provide the answer in some publication readily accessible to the practicing fly fisherman.

Fishing the Damsel Larva

In recent years the first stage of the caddisfly family has become a staple of angling literature. The damsel larva's *modus vivendi,* on the contrary, remains shrouded in mystery.

As to numbers, the larva must be many times more abundant than the adolescent or adult nymphs, or the winged damsels—in that order. At the very minimum it can be assumed that each "blue darning needle" female will deposit more than 100 fly speck size eggs, to judge by their extended ovipositor duct.

Therefore, only 1,000 females would deposit 100,000 eggs per day in a good damsel lake. In a short season, say 60 days, this number would total 6,000,000. If only five percent successfully settled, incubated and survived, the result would be 300,000 larva by the following summer season—or about 3,000 times the *daily* average number of fully mature nymphs and winged damsels.

Accordingly, in terms of these crude probability estimates, the angler's use of a productive larval pattern should be decidedly worthwhile. All he needs to do is compete with the trout and various predators, including dragonfly nymphs and, undoubtedly, the damsel's older kindred, the more fully mature nymphs of the same species.

The larva, having only feeble means of travel and subsisting on plankton, will be clustered in favorable hatching areas close to or on the lake's bottom, where they are easy pickings for the trout. To judge from intact stomach contents, the trout's feeding must be voracious when a brood of larva is encountered. The practical problem is to tie and present a pattern which is especially attractive amidst a swarm of, say, 500 to 1,000 larva.

The use of a medium fast sinking line or a sinking tip is essential in order to attain the necessary depth, as much as 9 or 10 feet. Ultra long leaders defeat this objective because of the buoyant quality of their lengthy terminal strands of fine diameter nylon. Likewise long casts, beyond 35 or 40 feet, are unnecessary and have the drawback of diminishing the angler's "feel" of the bite of the hook into bottom vegetation. After any indication of a momentary "tick" the fly should be inspected.

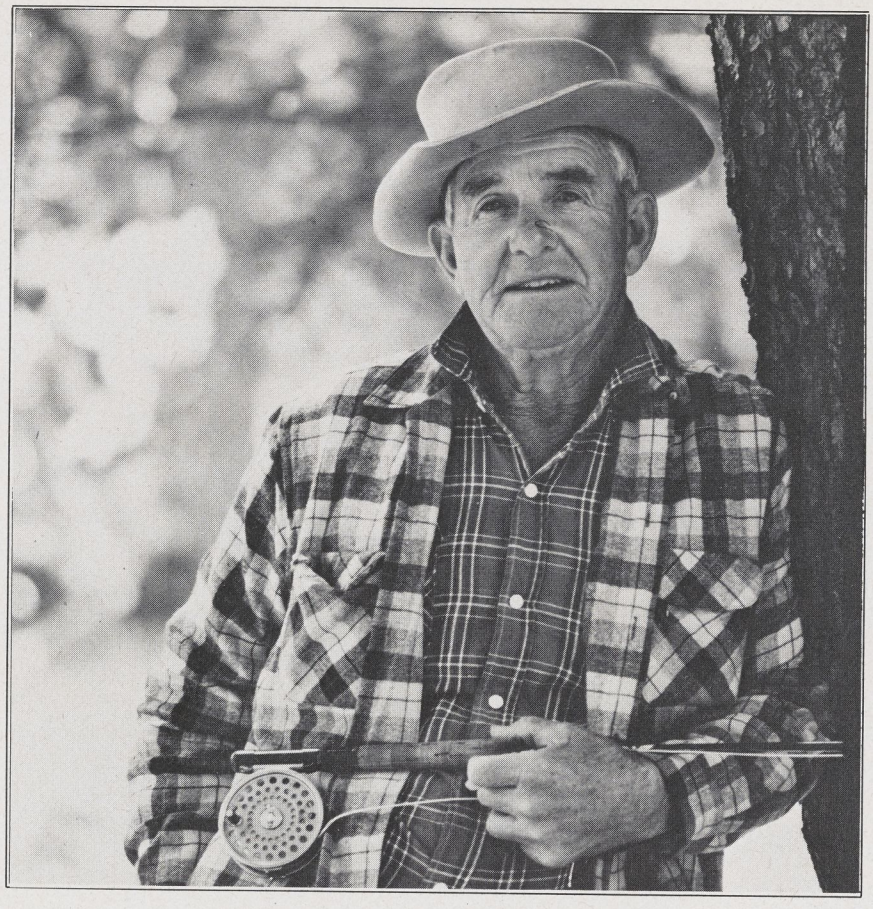
All things considered, a 7½- to 9-foot leader tapered to 4X or 5X is the optimum, and a very slow "creepy" retrieve, with hesitations, is basic. After several likely areas in the vicinity of weedbeds have been worked over without result, it's time to begin trolling slowly with the oars or, possibly, drifting with a gentle wind.

The search is worth the effort. When a cluster of fluorescent chartreuse larva has been located, the action can be fast and furious, with ten or more rainbow coming to the net per hour. With patience and imagination the venturesome angler can reap a rich reward.

Calling All Entomologists

Meanwhile, western anglers and their associations should encourage entomological studies to learn more about the development of the damsel's eggs. What is their incubation time, what conditions are optimal, what is their average survival rate? Do brown damsel nymphs spring from brown larva as supposed and, of course, assumed by the taxonomists? What orders or magnitude should be assigned the number of eggs deposited by the female damsel and what is the ratio of eggs hatched to surviving larva, to larva relative to adolescent and to adult nymphs?

But if all this were known with certainty, would any element of suspense remain for the well-read angler who, while sitting at home or in camp with his calculator, could forecast the most probable number of rainbows to be netted that day? True, with sufficient data, the probability of any event can be computed, but at the water's edge pale mathematical abstractions must yield to the flesh and blood inspiration of *possibility,* the stuff that anglers' dreams are made of—especially those smitten by the damsel syndrome.



John Lester Hightower: A Fly Fisherman

See bead-eyes

Chiyo Sagara

John Lester Hightower has been using a fly rod for more years than most of us have lived. His first fly rod, a dim memory in his Texas boyhood, was a "long stick that I tied some eyes on," he says. He made his first rod by selecting a willow branch, stripping its bark and systematically turning it to dry.

Across our country, sprinkled in small towns and large cities, there are anglers like Hightower. They don't write articles. They don't make speeches. They're hesitant to give advice but always eager to help. They're the antithesis of the "fly fishing snobs." Their love of fishing is matched by their dedication to protect the environment that supports it. Scratch a fine fisherman and you'll uncover a firm environmentalist.

I met John Hightower (or Les, as his friends call him) a few years ago when he was visiting long-time friends who owned the Montana ranch where we stayed during a family vacation. I'd done very little fly fishing and obviously needed help. I quickly agreed when Les suggested that we fish together the next day. The "next day" developed into a week. Now we fish together whenever we can. Les told me that once, years ago, he made up his mind to fish an entire season, every day, covering the streams and lakes near his home of Dutch Flat, California.

"Didn't matter if it rained or the wind blew," he says; "didn't matter if I was sick or well, I went out every day.

"Some nights I'd come home and brag to my wife, 'I got those trout whipped. I *finally* know how to get 'em every time.' I'd be so foolish-proud, thinking I'd licked those fish. Next night, I'd come home, my tail between my legs, all but crying like a baby because I didn't know a thing about fishing.

"But I learned. I learned by going

Nymphs with "eyes" devised by Les. The eyes are made by melting the ends of short segments of nylon.

out every day and pounding that water. I'm still learning. And it's a measure of my foolishness that after all these years, those trout are still smarter than me. But now I know that I never want to know *all* about it. It'd be a sorry fate to go out and know you're gonna catch every fish you cast over."

Les uses a graphite rod, "the longest and limberest I need to get the fly where I want it." A weight-forward line with a tailored leader delivers his fly. Like all good fishermen, he's an accurate caster.

"The closer you can put that fly so it floats in front of a trout's nose, the better chance you have of getting him. He fish "blind," preferring to search for "working fish," trout that are rising. He watches carefully, selects the largest and most promising fish and plots the best approach. "Good fishing is like good hunting," he says. "Fire away at a flock and you'll miss every one. Pick *one* out and go for him."

He enters the water well *upstream* from his quarry and casts his dry fly downstream. "That way, the fish never sees that godawful line whipping over his head. He only sees the fly drift down to him, just as it should." He casts with easy grace and just as his leader is unfurling, pulls rod and line towards him in a horizontal retreat. The

Learn some new things from an old master.

Even if he's chock full, float a fly right over him, so close all he has to do is rise and open his mouth. He's so hoggish he'll do just that – most of the time."

When Les fishes a stream, he resembles a hunter. He stalks. Rarely does fly continues its gentle fall with enough slack line to assure a drag-free float of one or two feet, "all you need if the fly's put in the right spot."

Les carries an assortment of flies in various boxes, stuffing them in vest pockets like a kid does with candy. Many of his flies have no names other than "some bugs I tied up last night." Their anonymous identities are made distinctive by the way they're tied. The sparse hackle patterns have a section cut away from the bottom, exposing the belly of the flies. Although similar to the Waterwalker style, Les's method is much easier to tie and, for him at least, equally effective. Usually, he fishes with No. 16's or smaller and a parachute hackle is a favorite style on the smaller patterns. All barbs are flattened to facilitate the quick release of fish.

Damsel Delusions

George Wentzel

Water levels in the canyon fluctuate drastically because of the Utah Power and Light Company dam at Alexander. One can see by the scarcity of aquatic insect activity that the daily rises and falls of the river have taken their toll on the ephemerids and caddises that once filled the air over the Bear River. For some reason, however, this stretch seems to host an abundance of damselflies, particularly late in the season. Perhaps the chimerical damsels start out their idyllic lives in the reservoir behind Alexander Dam, but, wandering too close to the turbine intakes, suddenly find themselves streamborne. The husky rainbows of the canyon seem to like the arrangement.

I was releasing a shimmering 14-incher when I noticed the boulders upstream disappearing under the rising water. It was time for me to take my afternoon siesta.

Reeling in, I waded to the edge of the river and made my way over the broken basalt to a large juniper, under which was the only grassy patch on my side of the canyon. I stretched out in the cool grass to wait out the torrent now roaring through the rift. In about an hour the river would return to its more tranquil flow. For now, it was time to relax and enjoy the still cold bottle of Lowenbrau sagging in the rear pocket of my fishing vest.

It was pleasant just lying there on my back, watching giant cumulus clouds piling up over the Wasatch Mountains far to the south. A golden eagle spiraled high over Sheep Rock, borne aloft on the hot August thermals. The scents of sage and mint filled the air about me. I closed my eyes for just an instant. Suddenly *I became aware that I was not alone.*

"Beautiful day," said a voice nearby.

I opened my eyes and turned toward the voice. An old man was sitting there. His face looked familiar, but I couldn't place him.

"Do I know you?" I asked. For some reason I wasn't startled by the sudden presence of a stranger. It seemed as though I had expected him to be there in that enchanted setting.

"I'm Bill Blades," the old man said.

"Bill Blades," I repeated in awe, making a quick mental note to stop mixing my blood pressure medicine with the Lowenbrau.

William F. Blades had been one of the greatest fly tiers of all time. I had been tying flies for over a dozen years before an old friend gave me a copy of Blade's book, *Fishing Flies and Fly Tying.* The book was a turning point for me. Through the book I developed an appreciation of artificial flies that reached far beyond their purposes as simply fishing lures. The act of tying itself became an expression of my own creativity, a pastime in its own right. *Blades had died over a decade ago.*

"Well, this certainly is an honor," I blurted. "Care for a swallow?" I said, offering the specter the half-full bottle of beer. Under the circumstances I didn't know what else I could do.

"Thanks," he answered, taking the bottle. "One doesn't get much of this stuff where I'm at."

"It figures," I thought.

The old man picked up my fishing rod and inspected the damselfly nymph hanging in the keeper.

"Pretty good damsel imitation," he said. "I like these partridge body feather legs." In his book, Blades' version of this nymph called for trimmed hackle stems.

"Yeah," I said, a little sheepishly, now wishing I had tied that particular fly with hackle stem legs. "It's harder to pronounce this fly's creator's name than it is to tie the fly."

"I like the bulging eyes," he said.

"My old army dog tag chain."

"Makes a pretty realistic looking nymph."

"The guy's name is Hellfried von Hollegha," I interjected, "an Austrian."

"I take it that you like to fish with realistic looking flies," he went on.

"Well, they're a lot more interesting to tie," I answered. "But I'm not so

sure they work any better than the suggestive patterns."

From behind a nearby boulder there was a clamor and out stepped what appeared to be yet another apparition. He was also wearing thick spectacles and was rather heavy-set. He looked familiar to me, too.

"Charlie Brooks," I exclaimed. "Wait just a minute, you're not dead yet. Get out of this hallucination."

"I heard what you were saying to Bill about suggestive patterns working just as well as the exact imitations,"he said. "Go ahead and tell him."

"Hold on there," interrupted Blades. "If my style of tying can fool entomologists, I know it'll fool trout."

"Yeah, well how come more fish get caught on the suggestive patterns rather than on the so-called exact imitations?" Brooks said, taking off his glasses and cleaning them with a red bandana. I was worried there for a minute when he pulled off the glasses.

"Most tiers can only tie the suggestive patterns," Blades retorted. "It's just simple mathematics, there are many more suggestive flies getting flipped into the waters than the exact imitations, that's all."

"Wait a minute, you guys," I tried to break in. "I've got some great Enzian schnapps in my truck. How about if I go get it and we all have a snort?"

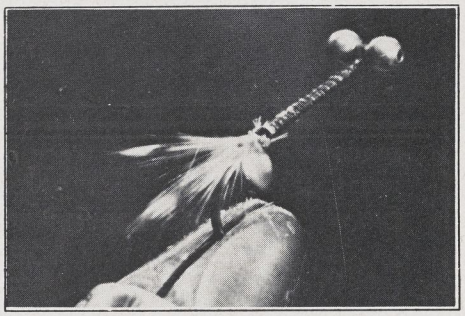
I started up the canyon wall towards the truck when I remembered that I also had a six-pack in the ice chest.

"Would you guys rather have a beer?" I said as I turned.

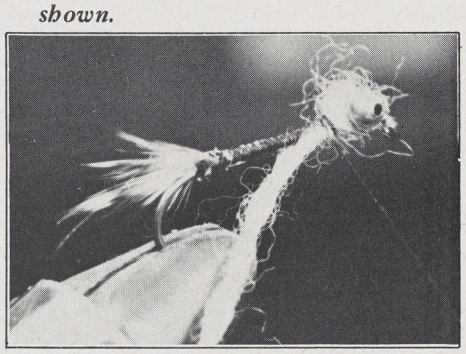
They both had disappeared. A breeze came up and the juniper rustled. It was evident that I was alone in the canyon. The iced-tea waters of the Bear were lowering. In a few minutes the river would be wadeable.

I put on my vest and picked up my old fly rod. For an instant I thought I detected a twinkle in the bead-chain eye of the nymph dangling on the hook keeper.

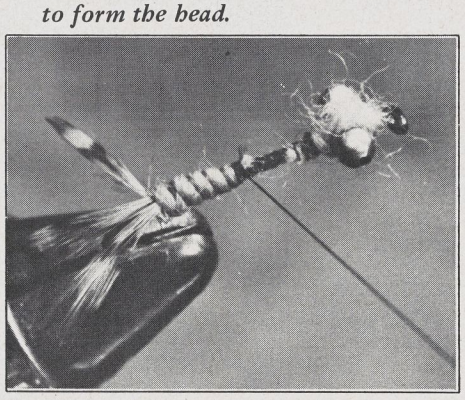
"Maybe those blood pressure pills and Lowenbrau aren't such a bad combination after all," I thought as I waded out into the clear turbulence of the murmuring Bear.



1. After winding the size 10 or 12 3XL hook with tying thread, the bead chain eyes are tied on with a couple of tight figure eights and glued. The tying thread is then taken to the bend of the hook, and three hackle tips are tied in as shown.

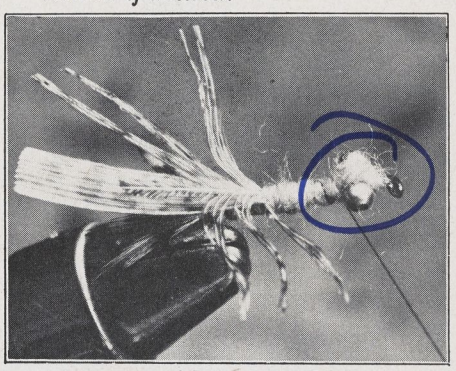


2. Yarn of the desired color is tied in behind the eyes and figure eight wound around the bead chain eyes to form the head.

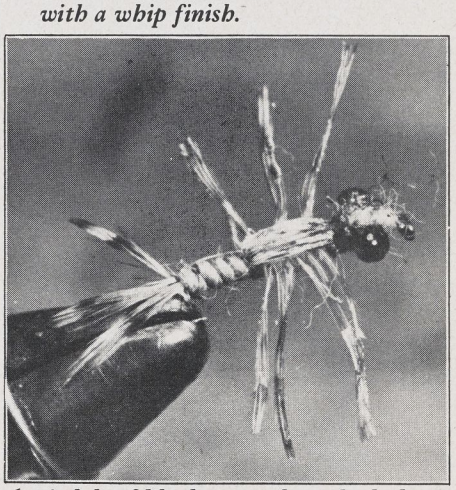


3. After winding the tying thread back to the tails, the abdomen and ribbing are tied in and formed. Since damselflies' colors vary with their habitat, the material should match local insects' shades. Tans, browns and green predominate.

4. A partridge body feather prepared to be tied on by its stalk at the rear of the thorax. When in position under the wingcase, the three pairs of legs can be coated with head cement if desired.



5. Wingcase and legs are tied in at rear of thorax, and then that part is wound onto the rear of the head. Wingcase and legs are tied in, reverse order, folded toward the front and then tied off behind the head with a whip finish.



6. A dab of black enamel on the bulging eyes gives the fly a finishing touch, if not a mysterious twinkle. Photos by the author.

Damselflies

Individual steps in tying the Janssen Damselfly from the pattern given in the accompanying text. Photo by Ron Cordes.

Fishing the Henry's Lake Damselfly Hatch

RON CORDES

When the discussions of fly fishing enthusiasts turn to great hatches, it is the likes of the Green Drakes and the Salmon Flies that are frequently mentioned, for those are among the traditional hatches that have compelled men for decades to travel great distances with great expectations. A lesser-known yet exciting and perhaps more unusual hatch is the damselfly hatch of Henry's Lake in southeast Idaho.

During late June and early July, the availability to trout of damselfly nymphs in Henry's Lake is at its peak. When the phenomenon occurs, the trout become appropriately selective in their feeding habits, as with other major hatches. Obviously, presentation of a well-designed damselfly nymph with an appropriate retrieve during this period of selective feeding has the potential to yield outstanding fishing, the very sort of angling expected during these "high holidays" of the angler's season.

Although damselfies hatch in waters across the United States throughout the entire summer, the unique physical characteristics of Henry's Lake contribute directly to the intense period of peak activity that characterizes this hatch. The average depth of Henry's Lake is only twelve feet and the thick ice and snow covering it each winter can result in a heavy winter-kill of aquatic life in the shallow areas along the shoreline. The damselfly nymphs respond to this threat by migrating each fall into deeper water.

Then, in early summer as the water warms, a massive damselfly migration begins. Thousands of mature damselfly nymphs, totally exposed to the predatory trout, swim at various depths toward shore with a side-to-side motion. When they stop to rest periodically, they gradually sink, often in a downward spiral. Then they resume their slow swim toward shore where they crawl onto weeds, logs, or any other available object. After lying in the surface film, where their breathing apparatus undergoes the change necessary to enable them to emerge from the water, they crawl out and slowly shed their nymphal shuck.

During this period the damselfly nymph might be referred to as an emerger, but it might be more appropriate to classify it simply as a "migrator," because it spends much more time migrating than actually emerging.

Among those damselfly-nymph imitations that have proved effective during this migration, one of the finest has been created by Hal Janssen, an innovative West Coast fly fisherman with whom we fished Henry's Lake most recently last summer. The materials employed by Hal for this pattern are as follows:

Hook:	Mustad 9672 3XL (down-eye) #8–12.
Tying Thread:	Pre-waxed olive (Herb Howard).
Tail:	Brownish-olive marabou (1/3 body-length).
Abdomen:	40% bleached beaver mixed with 50% olive rabbit and 10% fluorescent-orange rabbit.
Rib:	Tying thread.
Wing Case:	Mottled turkey wing.
Thorax:	Same material as abdomen, palmered with ginger hackle (clip top and bottom; trim sides short to imitate legs).

By combining the knowledge gleaned by Hal during his past trips to Henry's Lake with our observations that summer, we were able to determine that in presenting the damselfly pattern the single most important factor is the retrieve. Keep in mind that, while the damselfly nymph may not be a particularly efficient swimmer, its movements are methodical and repetitive. Thus with the Janssen damsel fly pattern, very short strips during a slow retrieve with regular pauses is particularly effective, each strip of the line being only an inch or so.

Occasionally modifying the retrieve in an erratic manner can provoke a strike. Perhaps this sudden unusual motion captures the trout's attention and momentarily separates the imitation from the multitude of naturals. Keep this technique of deliberate variation in mind when fishing the damselfly hatch and experiment in particular with variations in retrieve until you hit one that is a strike-provoking supplement to the normal methodical retrieve.

One final consideration that will frequently spell the difference between success or failure among anglers fishing the damselfly hatch is the position of the rod tip during the retrieve. Keep it at—or even below—the surface to avoid the sagging loop of fly line that inevitably hangs from a rod tip held above the surface during a slow retrieve. Only by this technique will the more delicate strikes be felt.

Fast-sinking and extra-fast-sinking lines are generally employed with nine-foot leaders tapered to 5x. Depths at which to begin the retrieve must be found by trial.

When conditions are favorable, large trout may be found cruising weed beds. Photo by Don Blegen.

Looking into Lakes

Where the fish move—but the water doesn't

RON CORDES

FFM West Coast Field Editor

Fly fishing for trout in lakes has long been a puzzle for some anglers, while others have wrongly written it off as a challenge not worthy of the effort they devote to understanding streams. But any angler who troubles to give lake fishing a little thought will quickly find that lake and pond fishing have their own set of rewarding challenges that can be the equal of the toughest chalk stream in the world.

Unlike a specific river with its essentially repetitive pools and riffles, a lake may extend out of sight without so much as a clue to its character. Where then does the angler begin? There are no slicks, no runs, no comforting rocks or boulders. There is no fast water, no holding water, no eddies—in fact, there is no help, or so it seems at first glance.

Despite the broad physical differences between lake and stream environments, many of the same factors govern areas where trout may be found and caught in both cases. These can be considered under the broad categories of habitat and available food. I will be discussing various items under these categories separately, but you should remember that lakes, like streams, are complex systems in which all things are constantly interacting. Individual aspects can be isolated for detailed discussion, but it is the system as a whole that produces our fishing.

Every lake has a character equally revealing as that of any river. Instead of pools and riffles, the significant factors in a lake may be points of land, drop-offs, bars or shoals that will be cruising areas for feeding trout at various times of the year. We may fish a riffle in a given stream knowing that trout will move into that riffle in response to hatching mayflies. If we observe schools of baitfish or concentrations of nymphs on a lake shoal, we fish there in the morning or evening when trout will be

After a three-year study of the diet of lake trout ALEC PEARLMAN sheds . . .

New light on the damsel nymph

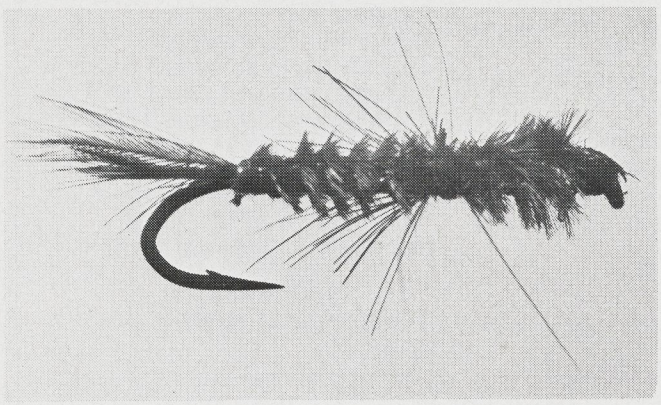
DAMSEL nymphs found in fish in early April

DAMSEL FLIES and their nymphs have been referred to in fishing literature for some years now — if rather half-heartedly — but the last two or three years has seen an upsurge in interest in them and in the use of artificials. This has been due partly to the increase in stillwater trout fisheries of every kind, from small gravel-pits to enormous reservoirs, but it has also been due to that dedicated band of keen fishermen-cum-angling-journalists who regularly keep our fishing literature very much alive and always eagerly awaited.

Although I am not really a member of this august body, I have somehow stumbled into print for the very simple reason that I am always anxious to pass on the knowledge I may gain from time to time by careful observation and regular autopsies of all the fish I catch. Damsel-fly nymphs are a case in point. Having read all that I could find, I had to write to *Trout and Salmon* magazine to ask if any reader could tell me what happened to the damsel "fry" before they became those damn great nymphs we have been exhorted to make or buy and fish with during the "damsel season".

I have now been on the damsel path for three seasons, and although I have not got the complete answer yet, I can at least pass on this interim report which begins to throw some light on the answers to my original question — what are they before they become nymphs so large that they need to be represented by dressings on size eight long-shank lure hooks? And, do fish feed on them?

The answer to the last one is a very definite 'Yes!' I have found on the evidence of many autopsies from fish caught in various damsel-infested waters that trout feed on the nymphs at all stages of their development, and what is more, they feed on them right through the season from opening day!



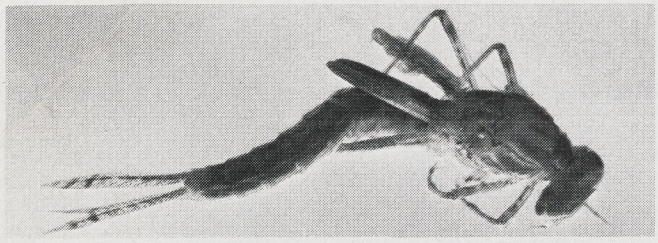
EARLY - SEASON damsel - nymph pattern in olive-dyed ostrich herl which is effective in April and May.

As to what they are and what they look like, this is not quite so easy, as they are constantly changing in shape, colour and size, and not being an entomologist I cannot fit a time-scale to this development. It is obvious that they are not hatched all at the same time, but emerge as adults over quite a long period of about some three months. The nymphs therefore overlap in their development stages, so that a fish can be feeding at the same time on three or four different stages.

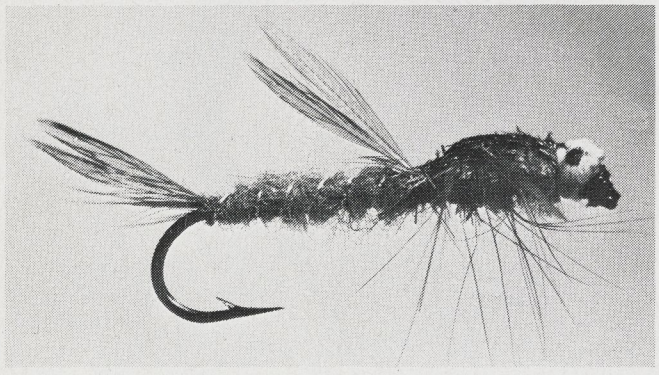
To give a practical example of this, I can say with certainty that I have caught fish on all three nymphs on a cast before any adult flies were seen, each one representing a different stage of growth. A later autopsy showed that some of the catch had a wide range of nymph sizes and growth stages, while others had none.

In some ways the bag limit at any particular water will prevent full investigation, but I now have sufficient evidence to show to my own satisfaction that: Damsel nymphs are a favourite trout food; that fish will feed on them whatever the weather conditions; and that they can be fished right through the trout season.

Most artificial representations are



TOP: Almost fully-grown nymph — note the embryo wings; these incline at 45 degrees when the nymph is swimming.



BOTTOM: Pattern to represent the mid- and late-season nymph. The hackle-point wings are omitted in the mid-season version.

large and attempt to portray the fully-grown nymph, as do most of the recommended dressings in all the books on fly-dressing and in all the dressings described in angling journals. It is most important, however, to realise that this is only one facet of the damsel nymph as trout food, and these, therefore, can be fished only at or during hatching time.

The very-early-season nymph is quite small, usually about 12-14mm in length with a thorax about one-fifth the body size. Its colour is usually a very pale olive-green, translucent, and can be described only as diaphanous. Its shape, however, follows that of the adult nymph so well described in current literature: the body is segmented and well-tapered towards the tail; the tail is three fins on edge and can well be simulated by small throat hackles on their edges (two is enough); the thorax is self-coloured as is the abdomen; the legs are bold and spring from the centre of the thorax; and the head is large, flat and prominent with large eyes. There seem to be various shades of colour even at this stage, some greener and some browner.

The later nymph, coming in early May, is by now bigger, about 25mm in length, and keeping the same outline as its forerunner. Here I should mention that the outline is the most important recognition point as far as the trout is concerned; colour seems to come second in importance, and this applies to all stages. Now the colour can vary even more and I have found nymphs in bright sea-green and rich brown, but at this stage they have developed a brown cap over the thorax, which appears to be the beginning of their wing cases. Segmentation is more marked and this needs to be shown in the artificial by gold or silver wire.

The nymph in June is almost ready to hatch, but at the same time fish have constantly shown evidence of feeding on the two earlier nymphs. This fully-developed nymph still holds the same outline as in its earlier life, but is much more "meaty" in the body and thorax, has a very definite brown wing case over the whole thorax, and from the back of this springs a sort of embryo pair of wings, sticking up at a 45 degs angle to the body. These, like the tails, can be represented by small throat hackles to match the overall body colour.

This colour now varies even more than in the previous stages: olive-green, pale, dark and golden; brown-olive, brown-green and brown. I have even come across specimens with a bright green underside and a brown upper side. This fully-developed nymph can be anything from 30mm to 40mm in length, and even larger. As far as colour is concerned, this seems to darken as the season advances, and in September I have taken fish on a dark brown, fully-grown nymph.

It seems quite certain that as research and development in this field continues and is pursued by workers more qualified as entomologists and biologists, the importance of the damsel nymph to the stillwater fisherman will become even more recognised, and it will eventually take its place beside the midge pupae as an all-season fly, capable of taking fish at any time, provided it is fished correctly.

Because of the great variation in size and colour, and the very long season of activity, it is quite conceivable that the success of many other lures and nymphs is attributable to the damsel nymph. Many of the long thin flies such as Ivens' Brown and Green Nymph, the Green Beastie, Brown Beastie, Green Rabbit and the Ombudsman, to name but a few, could well be taken for a brown or green damsel.

Yes, the damsel is developing very well, and she is going to be wooed by all the fly-dressers and stillwater fishermen in the next few years if I am any judge of fish flesh!

Damsel nymph dressings

Early-season

Hook: Mustad 79580/12 or 9672/10.
Tail: Two small throat hackle tips on edge.
Abdomen: Light olive/green seal's fur, dressed loose and trimmed and tapered.
Thorax: As abdomen, but thicker.
Rib: Thin clear nylon to beginning of thorax.
Leg hackle: Olive cock, large, then trimmed to ¼in.
Head: Large, olive marabou silk, waxed.

Mid-season

Hook: Mustad 79580/12.
Tail: As early-season nymph.
Abdomen: As early-season, and brown/olive.
Rib: Silver wire, fine.
Thorax: As abdomen — with warm brown raffia sub. over back.
Leg hackle: Olive/brown or brown cock, a large hackle trimmed to ½ in.
Head: Large, white marabou silk, waxed.

Main-season

Hook: Mustad 79582/10 and /8.
Tail: Dark olive or brown throat hackle, ½ in long.
Abdomen: Dark olive seal's fur or wool, or brown/olive or brown.
Rib: Silver wire or tinsel.
Thorax: As abdomen, with warm brown raffia sub. over back.
Wing cases: Two small feathers as tail, sloping back from thorax.
Leg hackle: Brown cock, large, trimmed to ½ in.
Head: As mid-season nymph.

Late-season

Hook: Mustad 79582/8.
Remainder as main-season nymph above, but all brown.

Why trout take lures

Fish aren't the only food-forms they represent, says JOHN GODDARD — and he believes he has discovered why alien greens, blues and reds sometimes do so well

IN HIS EXCELLENT ANALYSIS of why trout take lures (March and April issues) Brian Clarke quite rightly pointed out initially that over the years it has been generally accepted that most lures were intended to represent small fish, fry or sticklebacks on which trout are reputed to feed avidly at all times. Up to a point I confirm his findings in this respect, as over the years, during my own research, particularly with autopsies, I have seldom found small fish in the stomach contents, except on certain waters at specific times of the year.

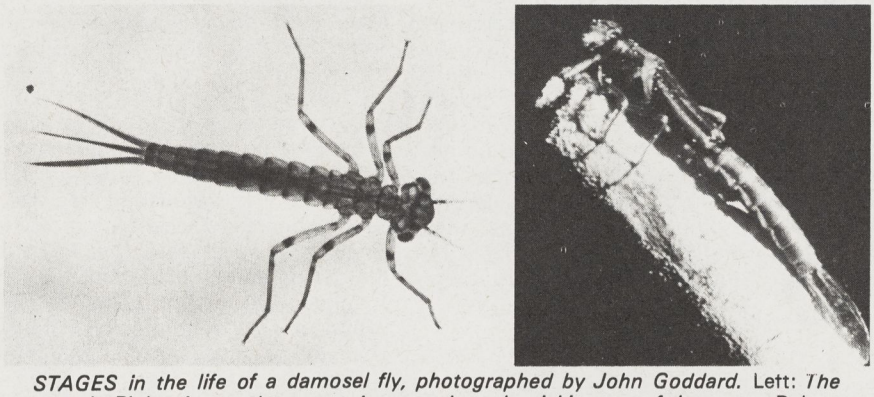
But while I agree that trout do not accept lures as food in the form of fry throughout most of the summer, I must also point out that on those waters where fry do abound, many trout, particularly the larger browns, do settle down to feed upon them exclusively, usually during the late summer when the fry start to shoal in the margins or when they emerge from the sanctuary of the weedbeds in shallow water.

I can quote many instances at such times when I have caught trout that have been so full of fry that they have been literally spewing them out of their mouths as they have been netted. In fact, on several stillwaters that I fish for two or three weeks during late July or early August it is all but impossible to catch trout at all unless one is prepared to mount an imitation of a stickleback or a perch fry. According to Brian, autopsies carried out over a period of two years by him and several friends does not confirm this, but, in fairness, the reason for this is probably due to the absence of this phenomenon on the waters they fish.

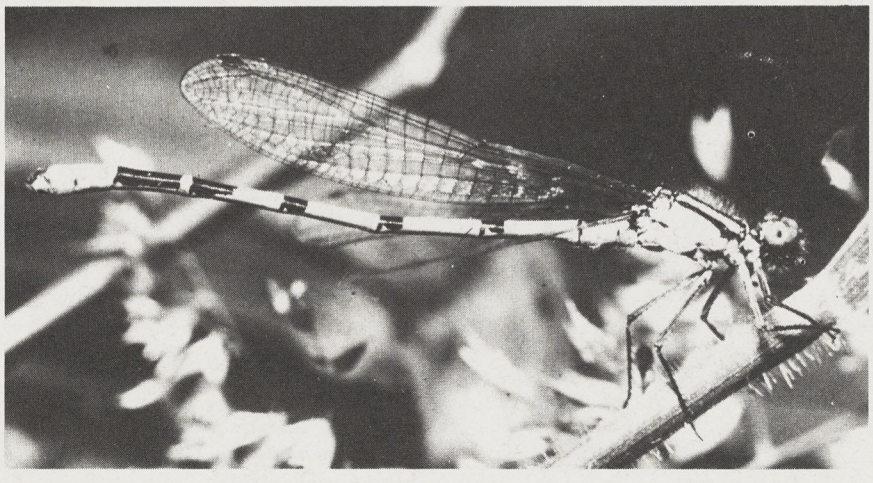
The other theories advanced are that trout are motivated to take lures out of fear, aggression, curiosity, or as some other form of food. In his final analysis Brian seems to favour curiosity, and while he puts forward several excellent theories to substantiate his conclusions, I am afraid I do not altogether agree. In my humble opinion I think we have to look at this situation from a far broader spectrum.

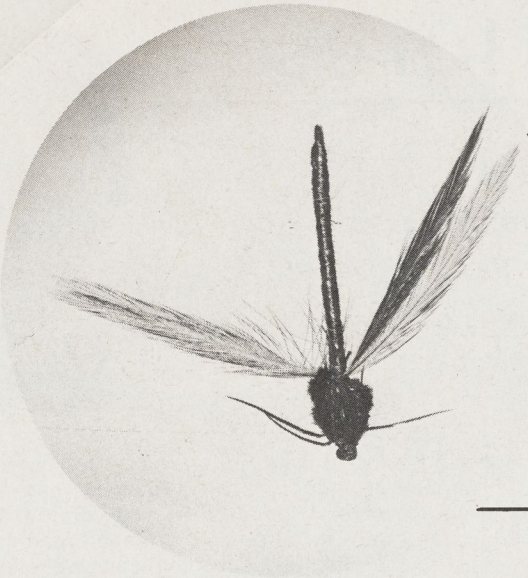
I feel that up to a point we can discount the fear aspect, and aggression, except possibly just before pairing and mating, or on those few stillwaters where trout, even rainbows, stake out territorial rights to a certain area of water. As for curiosity, I agree Brian has a good case in some respects, as from my own observations I am sure he is right that some trout do follow a lure to investigate it, and then often take it into their mouths to feel or taste this strange invader. On the other hand, I am sure many anglers will have had experiences similar to my own when using a lure, when trout, and in some cases the same trout, will follow a lure almost to the rod tip time and time again, but consistently refuse it. Conversely, I have on occasions mounted a different lure, and every trout that I have covered has immediately accepted it without hesitation. In the latter case I am sure it is accepted as a form of food.

Because of all this I am inclined to think that trout accept lures for a number of reasons, depending on a variety of factors appertaining at the time — weather, water temperature, depth of water, time of day, as well as the other reasons put forward. In addition, I suggest one other factor which I think Brian has overlooked, and which I am sure is equally valid. This is the automatic reflex action which all trout seem to possess. How many times have we all experienced the surprise take of a trout as our fly has landed in the



STAGES in the life of a damosel fly, photographed by John Goddard. Lett: *The nymph.* Right: *A nymph transposing on a branch sticking out of the water.* Below: *A fully emerged male.*





John Goddard's dressing to represent a green-bodied adult female damosel fly which he now knows trout can encounter underwater. The bend of the hook is hidden behind the shank.

water, or other occasions when a lure cast behind and to one side of a trout that can be clearly seen is immediately snapped up by the trout as soon as it appears in his window?

Finally, I definitely disagree with Brian's reasons for dismissing the motivation of trout to take lures as some other form of food. I am sure that at times certain patterns of lure are taken as a form of food if the trout is hungry and if the lure loosely represents a form of food on which it has recently been feeding. "Where," asks Brian, "is there anything in either of these natural larders — whether in what we know they do eat, or in what they have available to them if they wish — that looks and behaves like most (or, indeed, any) of the lures that habitually catch trout?" Well, I would put forward the following examples.

The Worm Fly: This is one of the earlier and most popular lures, and, as I suggested in my book *Trout Flies of Stillwater,* this is quite a good representation of either an alder fly larva, or certain of the darker species of sedge pupa.

The Black Lure: A very popular and often effective lure, it is, I am sure, taken at times for some of the large dark-coloured leeches that are common on many stillwaters.

The Baby Doll: This — in fact, many basically white-coloured lures — is undoubtedly taken for one of the many of the larger pale-coloured species of sedge pupa.

The Teal and Green: Typical of green-bodied lures that are probably taken for some of the larger green-coloured damosel nymphs.

I could quote many other examples, but up to comparatively recently I have always been puzzled as to why many large lures with predominant green, blue or red dressings should often prove effective, as I could think of no true form of aquatic life that even loosely approached such colours and sizes. But last season I discovered, by pure chance, the probable answer even to this mystery.

On a calm, warm summer day in July last season, my colleague, Cliff Henry and myself decided to spend a complete day on our local reservoir catching and photographing damosel nymphs, in order to establish the reason for the wide range of colours in which they are found. Taking a boat and resisting the strong temptation to take our rods as well as our cameras, we proceeded to a quiet bay where we had previously spotted a lot of these particular nymphs. We anchored the boat close to the branches of a submerged tree that were sticking up out of the water, as we reasoned that any nymphs in the area would be sure to make for these branches as they always transform into the adult winged form via emergent vegetation.

☆ ☆ ☆

Sure enough, we found several nymphs drying out on the branches in preparation for the final moult, and these we duly removed and photographed. We then settled down to observe the arrival of further specimens, while at the same time idly watching masses of the large adult blue-bodied winged males and green-bodied females gyrating around the branches. My reverie was suddenly interrupted by Cliff saying: "You won't believe this, but I am sure I just saw a winged adult emerge from beneath the surface!" I was just about to make a sarcastic reply, when to our absolute amazement we both clearly observed a repeat performance, literally under our noses. Determined to find the reason for this phenomenon, we both settled down patiently to a searching appraisal of the situation.

It was shortly after this that we both noticed a lot of winged adults were mating in the air and copulating tail to tail. The blue-bodied male seemed to be the predominant partner, supporting the female, who had her wings partially closed. After a short interval a pair alighted on one of the branches and the male, still supporting the female, proceeded to crawl backwards down the branch until the female at his tail was pushed underwater. As soon as she was fully submerged, they parted, and she continued on her own to crawl underwater down the branch to a depth of 3-4 ft until she found some weed where she commenced to oviposit.

Fortunately, the water was very clear and we were able to note her actions closely, but even now, in retrospect, it seems incredible that she remained underwater, moving from weed patch to weed patch, quite rapidly, for more than 25 minutes. At the end of this time she was many feet away from where she originally descended and, having completed her task, she then swam, or rather struggled, to the surface. All this time the male had been slowly circling over the area where they parted company, but as soon as she emerged above the surface he darted down and joined her again, when they flew off. During the ensuing few hours we observed many other pairs do a repeat performance, some females remaining underwater for more than 40 minutes.

Over the years, many authorities have reported finding adult winged damosel flies in the stomach contents of trout they have caught, and to the best of my knowledge it has always been generally accepted that trout have obtained these by leaping out of the water and intercepting low-flying specimens. Due to this chance observation, it now seems beyond reasonable doubt that during the mating period of these flies in July and August, trout will feed upon these underwater where this occurs. As many of these adults are upwards of 2 in long, this could account in some instances for trout readily accepting what are normally considered extremely large lures. While the most common damosel flies are blue- or green-bodied, there are other species with red and other body colours, so this could well provide room for much experiment. We have dressed some artificials to represent these adults underwater, and we are now eagerly awaiting a chance to try them.

☐ *Brian Clarke has been invited to reply to John Goddard and to the correspondents whose letters appear in the May issue and elsewhere in this one. He will do so in the August issue. — Editor.*

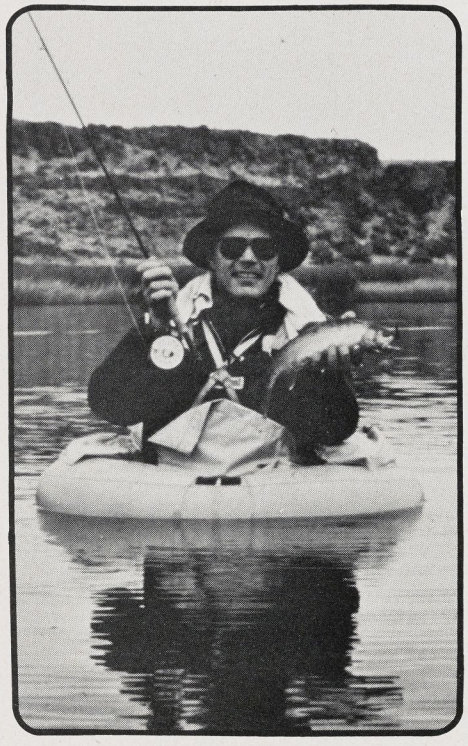
The Leecherous Dragon

by Scott Hagen

About three years ago, on a cool and cloudy morning, I was paddling around in my float tube at one of my favorite high desert lakes. Fishing was quite slow; I had not had a strike in over an hour. After a bit, two guys in a canoe appeared, make a slow pass around the end of the lake and picked up a fish each. The next pass brought another fat rainbow to the net.

Swallowing my pride (I don't have much to begin with) I asked them what they were using. I was promptly rewarded with a close look at a Black Leech, size 8, and advised to troll it very slowly.

A search of my fly boxes uncovered a couple of flies that barely qualified. One of them was left in the mouth of a fish and the other took four trout in about an hour.



Shortly before noon the sun burned through the clouds, a Chironomid hatch followed, and both the trout and I forgot about leeches. The next morning, however, weather conditions were identical and again the leech was the solution.

This experience got me started trying different leech patterns. Some were easy to tie and some weren't. Most of them were ineffective. The flies that caught the most fish were made with marabou.

In order to best simulate the silhouette of a leech (a flat ribbon-like body) I tried one with the marabou feather tied horizontally the length of the body, matuka style. The fly looked like a refugee from an 1880 dance hall girl's hat when dry, but at a slow troll in the water the marabou laid back along the body and undulated just like the real thing. As a bonus, the matuka tie also seemed to cut down on the possibility of the marabou tangling around the hook bend.

I used this pattern, mostly in black, the rest of the spring and the following fall whenever the normally effective flies didn't produce. The leech started out as a fly of last resort, but it is now my first choice if no hatch is in evidence.

As this fly was used more frequently it became obvious that it wasn't always being taken for a leech. An inordinate percentage of strikes were happening while the fly was being rapidly stripped after ticking a weed or after a missed strike. The most likely alternative to a leech seems to be a dragonfly nymph. I've never personally observed dragonfly nymphs swimming but all the books say that they swim very slowly under normal conditions. However, when necessary, they can dramatically increase their speed by ingesting and exhausting water in spurts—a sort of jet propulsion.

The fisherman can best simulate this motion by taking three or four 18-inch jerks or "rips" on the fly line. In order for this to work well, however, the rod must be pointed directly at the fly and the rod tip in the water. If this is not done the rod action will absorb the energy of the jerk and turn it into a pull.

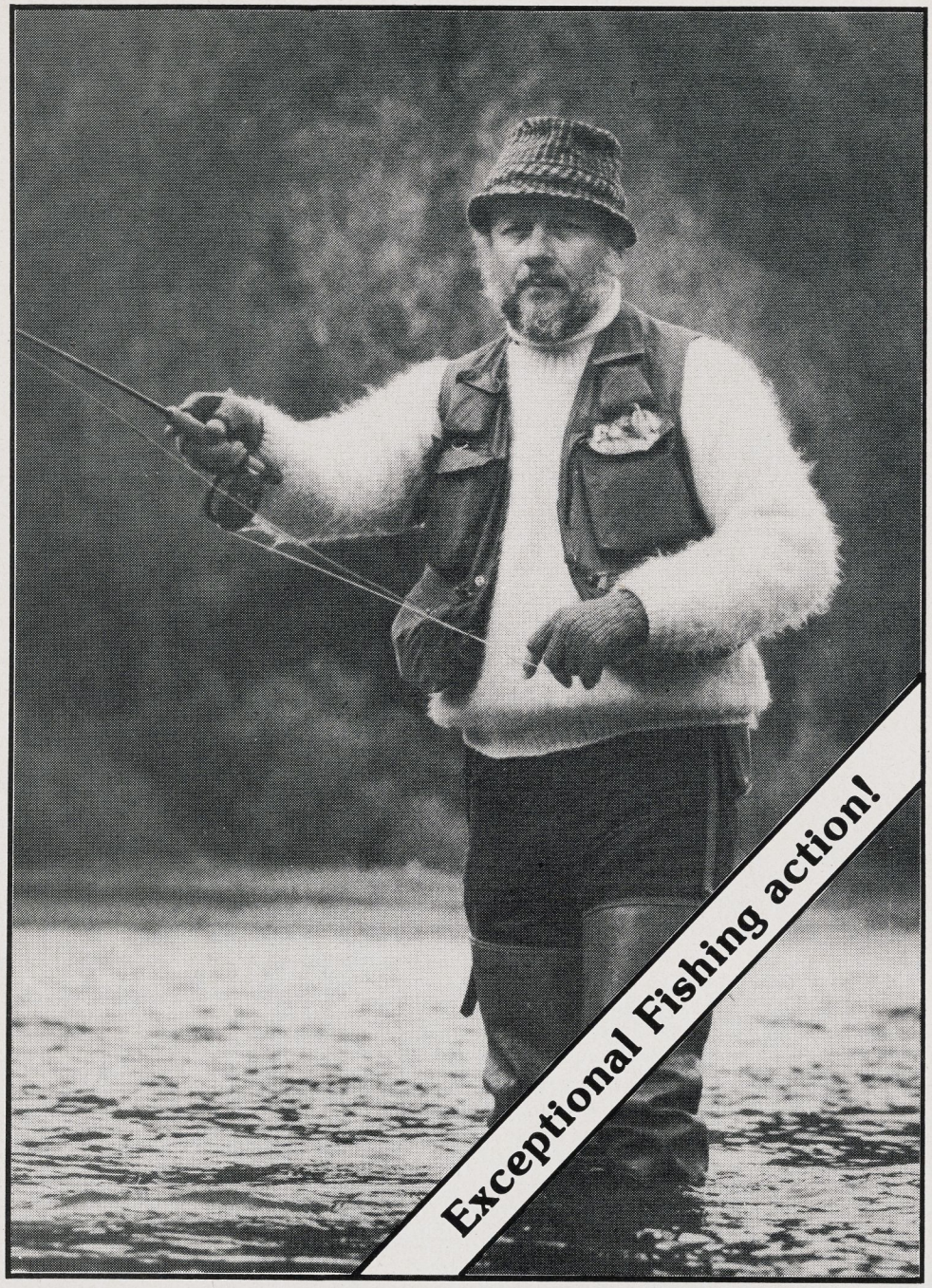
The most effective fishing technique that I have been able to devise is to slowly troll the fly on a long line. Take three or four rips after about 20 feet and hold the stripped line. After trolling another ten feet, take two or three more rips and continue to troll for another ten feet. Release the stripped in line (while still moving) until it's all back in the water. Continue to repeat the entire sequence until you feel that the fly should be checked for weeds or other problems.

The purpose behind all this is to simulate a dragonfly nymph swimming at normal speed and then becoming alarmed and shifting into passing gear. If there is a trout in the area this action is more likely to trigger his predatory instincts than a slow, steady pace.

Represent leeches and dragonfly nymphs with a single fly.

A strike can come at any time, even when the line has been released and is slipping back into the water. Most strikes occur during the strip or just as the fly goes dead. The line should be held between the thumb and forefinger only. Fish have a tendency to take the fly with vigor and the line must slip through your fingers on the strike or you will get "busted off." This technique is difficult to learn and requires great self control but is absolutely essential to the conservation of fly tying materials. The use of 3X or heavier tippet material helps.

After I decided that this fly was supposed to be a dragonfly nymph, colors more representative of the local specimens were used with a slight improvement in effectiveness. Don't be afraid to experiment. On a bet, I tied one fly in a particularly nasty shade of purple and caught a 16-inch brown trout with it. My respect for the selectivity of browns was somewhat damaged by this episode; however, my awe has since been fully restored by a recent trip to the Madison River.



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LEECHEROUS DRAGON

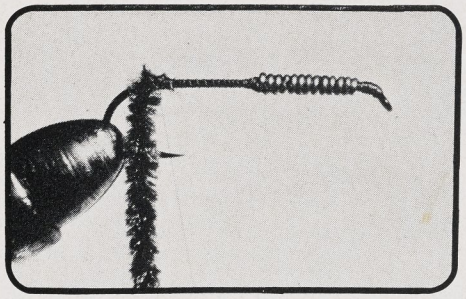
Hook: No. 6, 4XL.

Thread: Nymo color to match body.

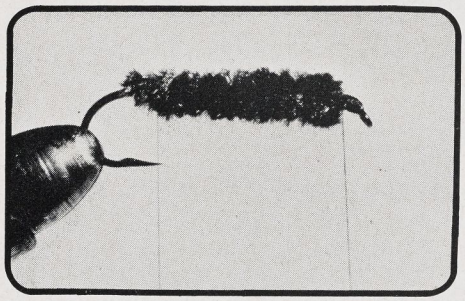
Body: Medium chenille (selected fly color).

Wing/Legs/Tail: Whole marabou feather (section cut along spine), matching body color.

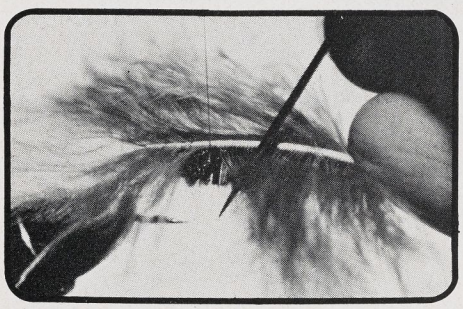
Head: Tying thread.



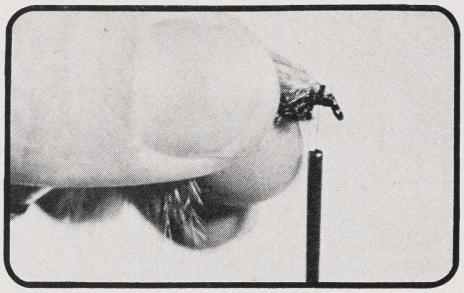
Step 1: Bend down the hook barb and sharpen the point. If the fly is to be weighted, wrap the forward half with suitable fuse wire. Start the tying thread at the front and wind it to the bend. Tie in medium chenille and a generous length of thread. Half hitch 2-3 times and leave thread dangling.



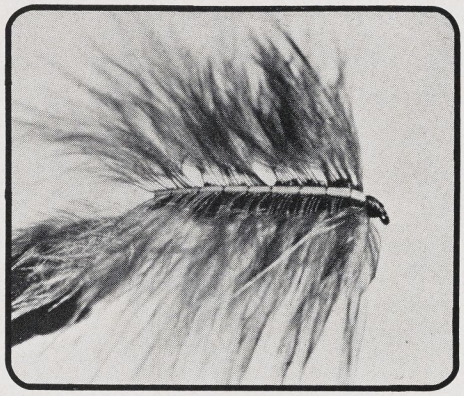
Step 2: Wind the chenille forward to within 1/8" of the eye, forming a fairly plump body. Tie off chenille with 3-4 half hitches.



Step 3: Select a marabou feather and cut a section along spine of the feather the length of the body. Lay marabou on top of the body, big end of the spine at the head, with the fronds aligned on a horizontal plane. Tie down forward end of spine while maintaining alignment with left hand. Separate fronds on the side facing you 1/8" from rear of the spine with a dubbing needle. Bring thread left at rear of hook up through split in the marabou fronds. Continue to use dubbing needle to separate fronds and spiral wrap tying thread forward to the head, securing marabou to the body in the manner of a matuka fly.



Step 4: Half hitch several times, whip finish, and lacquer the head.



Finished fly. . .proceed to the nearest lake to test the strength of your tie. If the marabou isn't torn up in a matter of hours, you're doing something wrong.

To Match a Minnow

by Don Zupan

I had seen the riffle a hundred times from the bridge. I don't know why I hadn't fished that part of the river before. Maybe it was because there always seemed to be someone already there, or because it was cold in March, or because the lake was red hot, or regular fishing season had opened, or countless other reasons. I hadn't fished the river much since my younger days when worm drowning and spoon lobbing were the order of the day. Mostly I had just never found a decent imitation of the chub minnows found in the Klamath Lake river system.

Most of the minnow imitations ranged from wooden plugs with thirty-nine size 5/0 treble hooks hanging from them (difficult to cast with a fly rod) to conventional streamer patterns such as the Thunder Creeks and Polly Rosborough's Polar Chub and some local offshoots—none of which seemed too effective. At least they weren't effective for me.

All that was left to fish the riffle was to call Troy to see if he was ready to dust the cobwebs off and get out for the first excursion of the year. A good fishing partner is like a doctor. He should be on-call twenty-four hours a day and always be willing to give advice. He should also have a wife who is close friends with your wife. Troy McGrew is that kind of partner. I called him up and he was ready to go at a minute's notice.

While driving to the river we talked of how we were crazy to go out on such a cold day. There was a definite lack of confidence; it was that feeling that we were just going out for the sake of shaking cabin fever. If your love and infatuation for fly fishing is like mine you start getting cabin fever in September. When we reached the river I quickly got everything in order. While Troy was getting his cumbersome stockingfoot waders on (which he swears he will soon get rid of), he beckoned me to go ahead. I headed out and soon found a little trail which wound down to the river through a blackberry patch, the only blackberry vines east of the Cascades. Being an Eastern Oregon rimrocker, I hadn't gained a full appreciation for losing one's clothes and skin to those wonderful vines.

After licking my wounds, I decided to be daring. I clipped off the Muddler Minnow and put on the minnow fly that I had concocted. Like most flies that seem to be pretty exacting, I figured it wouldn't work. Besides I didn't figure I would catch anything anyway so I might as well catch nothing with the minnow as with something else.

I waded out across the river toward our family doctor's backyard. Spectators are always good for your ego when you are really hot. Thank God there wasn't anyone standing anywhere around. I worked my way onto a reef which ran straight out maybe thirty or forty feet. The riffle I had never fished was right below me. I finally waded to that almost perfect spot. The perfect spots you can only reach if you wear stilts when you wade.

I finally started to cast the high density sinking line, working out thirty or forty feet of line. By the time Troy walked up, a huge rainbow trout was thirty feet into the backing. All of this occurred on my first cast on a bad day with a fly that, because it was so different, wouldn't work. Everything had gone right except for a lack of spectators to swarm down and enhance my ego with their umpteen questions about everything from what kind of line, fly, and rod I was using to from which J. C. Penneys store I bought my undershorts.

I am lucky enough to have always lived in an area abounding in huge trout, and, believe me, that rainbow trout was as nice and wild as any I had ever caught. The fish was fully seven pounds.

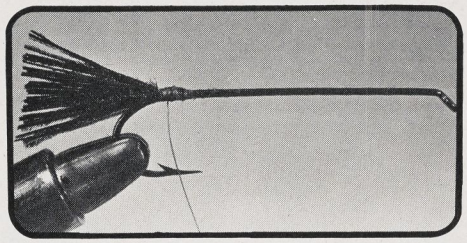
That was the only fish I landed on that particular day. I had found, however, a minnow imitation that looked good and often worked. I have since successfully trolled with the fly. I also know of a man who has caught striped bass on this minnow pattern.

Many fly tiers get caught up tying patterns which, though very good, may not suit their particular area. Dark stonefly nymphs are a good example. They range in color from black to light brown depending on your locale. They also range in size. Such is the case for many minnows. They vary even more than specific insects. The ones in our area seem to be of two or three general types; although my research is not conclusive. One specimen is very dark, ranging from blackish green along the back with a black stripe on the side to bright silver sides with a white belly. The other minnow is brown gold on top with a dark brown stripe (almost black) and a whitish gold underbelly. The latter is more of a sucker than chub or shiner.

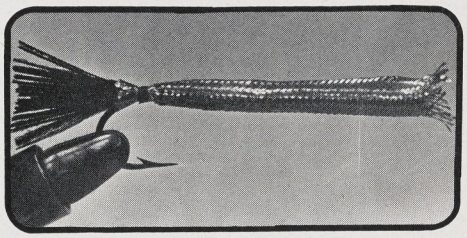
With some research and a little imagination you can match the minnow hatch. I will use the chub shiner as an example. You can use any material that suits you, as well as any hook size. I use a size one only because I haven't been able to find any decent larger 3 or 4X long hooks. I sometimes use twos and fours. I subscribe to the old philosophy that big fish eat big lunches.

CHUB MINNOW

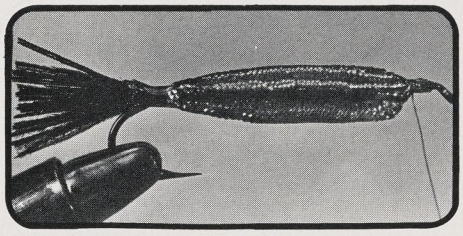
Hook: Any good 3 or 4X long hook.
Thread: Gray nymo 1/0 or any strong gray thread.
Tail: Peacock herl or sword.
Body: Large silver mylar tubing—marked with black and olive felt markers.
Shoulder: White calf hair (unstacked) and clipped peacock herl.
Underwing: Gray squirrel (optional).
Top Wing: A large bunch of peacock herl clipped to represent a dorsal fin.



1. Starting below the eye, wrap the gray thread to the bend of the hook and half hitch. Tie in the peacock herl to simulate the minnow's tail.

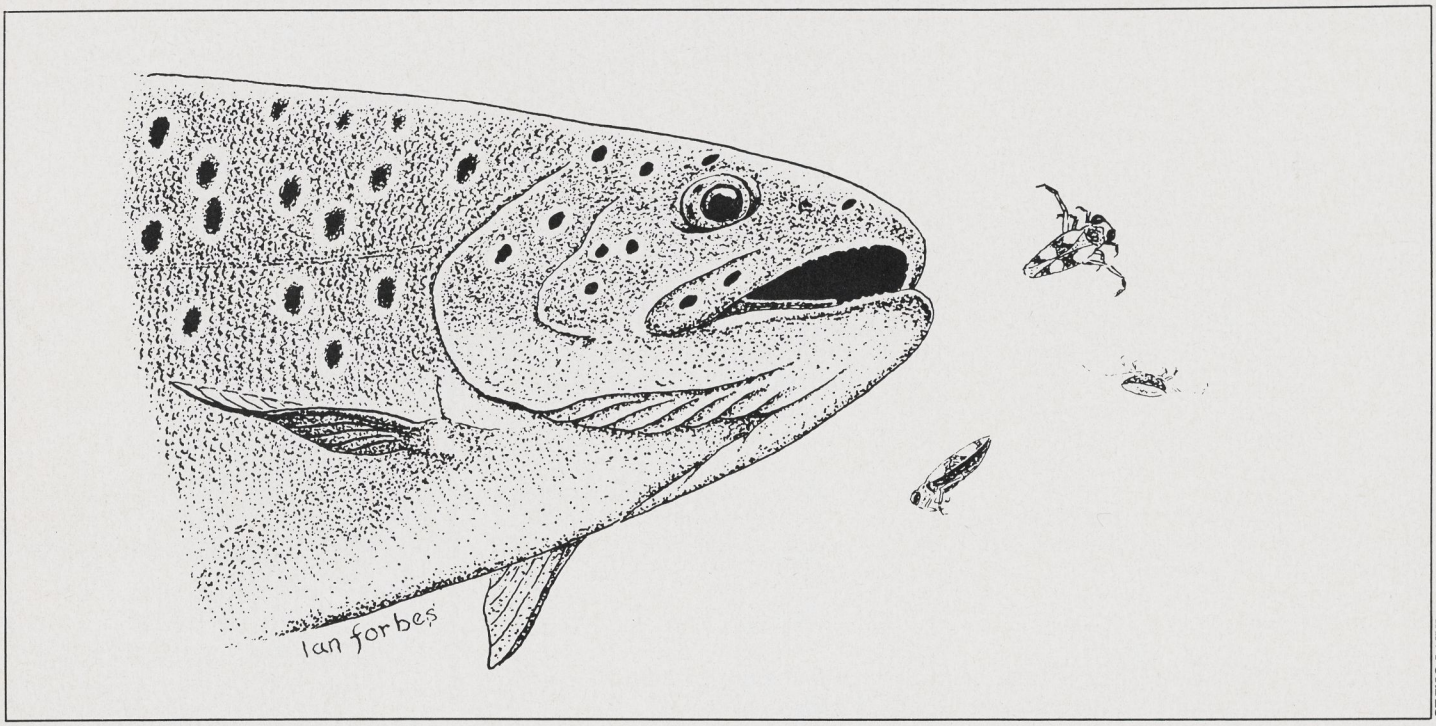


2. Insert a piece of mylar tubing the same length as the hook over the hook shaft from front to the back. Make sure to remove the string from inside of the mylar tubing. I feather the tubing a little to stream back behind the tie-off point. This adds a little sparkle. Whip finish this tie for added strength. Cut your thread after the whip finish.



3. Restart thread behind the eye. Pucker the mylar tubing backwards to

The Notonecta Backswimmer



IAN FORBES

Their feeding response is triggered by some visual stimuli

Ian Forbes

A number of years ago my friend Jeff and I arrived at Strubel Lake on a sunny morning in early October. Strubel Lake is a clear little pond not far from Rocky Mountain House in Alberta. The lake was flat calm but covered with the swirls and boils of actively feeding rainbows. Easy pickings, right? Wrong. Two hours of casting, changing flies, changing leaders, more casting got me nowhere. Jeff did a little better when he finally caught a small rainbow on an oddball fly he had acquired in the distant past. I pounced on the unfortunate trout to perform an autopsy.

The little fellow was of a size that we would normally release but I was desperate to learn what the rainbows were so excited about. On cleaning it I discovered its stomach was stuffed with backswimmers, but nothing I had in my fly box came close to representing them. They were not the little black water boatmen I was used to but large (size 10) olive-brown beetles with dirty white wings and distinct swimming legs.

We rowed as fast as we could back to the truck where I got out my portable fly tying kit, to make up some copies. I had some chenille that was the same color as the body of the natural and some off-white deer hair for the overwing. I used a rubber material for the legs and black Pantone pen to color the wing markings. I weighted the flies to make them sink so we could use our floating lines. Not wanting to miss out on the fishing, I only tied up three flies and we were back in business.

I don't know if it was the second or third cast that we caught our first fish but we had steady action after that. The new fly changed our luck for the better and we often both had fish on at the same time.

That fly served me fairly well for several years after whenever I found trout feeding on backswimmers. It was a good fly but certainly not perfect and on several occasions I had only mediocre success with trout selectively feeding on backswimmers. I wanted to know why but the answer only came through close observation of the natural.

This water beetle, notonecta, is equally at home in air and water and will often fly from lake to lake. It hits the water with a splat and has to swim furiously down to feed or lay eggs. It carries a silvery air bubble with it as it swims and will float back to the surface if it stops swimming. Although trout will feed on backswimmers all season long it is the autumn egg laying time that trout will turn selective and hunt for the returning adults.

When trout are dining selectively their feeding response is triggered by some visual stimuli. It may be the specific action of an insect on the surface, a particular size or outline of an insect or the silvery air bubble that some insects carry with them; such as the hatching caddis pupae or an adult backswimmer.

With the backswimmer there are several stimuli that cause trout to feed on it. First of all the splat of a landing backswimmer will attract the attention of a trout aware that a "splat" indicates dinner is served. The same heavy-handed presentation to a trout delicately feeding on mayflies will scare it half to death.

It's important to note, however, when dredging, that you should keep the rod tip low and excess slack from the fly line; then you'll have a direct link to fish. In rivermouth sections, although imperceptible, there *is* a constant flow of water. The current puts a pronounced belly in your fly line, and detecting strikes is tough, often requiring a sixth sense to know when a trout is mouthing your offering.

There were times during our four-day blitz when a shallow retrieve was more effective than fishing deep. These periods typically came when the lake calmed to a mirror finish. Then, only a carefully presented fly would take fish. The ticket here was a long leader (12 to 14 feet) tapered to 5X. Once the unweighted fly reached the 3-foot level the left hand stripped line to approximate the slow swimming action of a damsel. It was usually during the pause, when the nymph drifted helplessly down, that the fish took. This strategy required constant attention to detail throughout the retrieve, otherwise the trout shunned the offering.

On July 5th the damsel migration ebbed and during the lull Stuut and I switched to Golden Scuds (*Gammarus*), size 12; and Woolly Buggers, green and olive, with black marabou tails (size 8, 3X long). Both patterns were weighted with five turns of .17 lead wire. The shrimp was most effective when fished parallel to the railroad grade at midday. Here, cutthroats cruised the rubble bottom searching for fat crustaceans. By positioning and casting either right or left of the grade, we hooked fish after fish. They weren't the husky models, taken earlier in the week, but fine 3-lb. trout.

Later that day we tubed the inlet waters some 30 yards off the railroad bed and used a tactic stream fly rodders call the swimming-nymph-swing, or, in belly boat parlance, float tube trolling. In the upper inlet the strategy was to SLOWLY fin into the rivermouth, and cast the weighted nymph (in this case a Woolly Bugger) to either side, letting the subtle currents quarter the nymph below or downstream. Or, the fly was cast downstream and "trolled" back and forth in an "S" pattern. If there were takers during the "swings," the fly was then stripped in slow, foot-long pulls. If this didn't get the cutthroats' attention, we mixed the retrieve—length, speed and rhythm.

Although I used a 9-ft., 7-wt. rod for all my fishing on Spinny, a 10-ft. stick in the same weight class would have been better. A longer rod gives additional leverage when floating low in the water. Kim's 9½-ft., 8-wt. served him well on Spinny; later Antero Reservoir.

Despite the fact that Spinny Mountain Reservoir is presently riding a crest of popularity, there are ominous clouds on the horizon which may or may not affect the quality and quantity of trouting in the future. Like other Denver Water Project Reservoirs (Elevenmile and Antero), Spinny Mountain is on the downward slope as a producer of heavyweight trout. Hard to believe, but that's the normal course of events with sagebrush floodings. Quick to rise and quick to fall. It's in the cards. Or is it?

How many years will it be before the Spinny's balanced ecosystem and forage base are depleted? Creel census studies show the average weight and length of trout to have dropped from just two seasons ago. Perhaps it's the liberal creel limits placed on the fishery (1986 daily possession of five fish). Perhaps it's competition with other trout species for available food stocks, or perhaps it's just the ecosystem itself. Fishery officials are quick to point out that the reservoir is operated on a put/take basis and to hold fish over from season to season is not sound trout management. Finally, a healthy, but expanding population of northern pike is on the prowl in Spinny and this just might be the proverbial straw (in a complex set of fishery questions) which breaks the reservoir's back. Hopefully this and other complex biological questions will be addressed quickly and directly, thus preserving a truly unique fishery for future fly fishermen to enjoy.

The second most obvious stimulus is the unique shape of the backswimmer with its visible swimming legs. All imitations of notonecta are tied with these features in mind and most tiers make their flies with materials the same color as the naturals.

The last two stimuli are not as noticeable to the casual angler. When the backswimmer lands on the water it will often stay right there, floating on the surface before swimming straight down, head first, dragging a silvery air bubble with it. The novel diving action and very obvious air bubble will quickly trigger the feeding response of trout used to dining on backswimmers.

My original pattern imitated the first two stimuli and to a lesser degree the diving action but failed miserably at representing the air bubble. To some trout this was important. On a clear little lake near Kamloops, in late September, this was most visibly demonstrated to me.

That sunny afternoon I was presented with the lovely sight of fat Kamloops trout slashing at something near the surface. I tied on my favorite old standby, a green Deer Hair Sedge, and proceeded to make a few casts but quickly changed to a backswimmer when my boat and the water nearby were bombarded by the flying adults. I expected some fast and furious action but it was not forthcoming. Sure I caught some nice trout but nothing like what I'd expected. Something about the fly was wrong because I often saw trout, including one over two feet long, race over to my fly, then turn away when it began to sink. It was then that I began to closely watch the naturals and saw the silvery air bubble.

Knowing the problem and solving it are two different kettles of fish or in my case no fish for the kettle. I experimented with tinsel but wasn't happy with the results. Gary LaFontaine's work with Antron for caddis pupae imitations rang some bells so I borrowed his technique for use on the backswimmer. I discovered that by greasing Antron, air bubbles stuck to it like glue. I also duplicated Gary's method of pulling over a loose overbody fo silvery Antron.

To get a head-down, tail-up position of fly I weighted the front half and used an underbody of expanded packing foam on the rear half. For the overwing I used another strip of packing foam and marked it with a black Pantone pen. The body is loosely dubbed with a 50/50 mixture of dark olive and brown Antron. For spun fur (Antron) bodies I always use a dubbing loop.

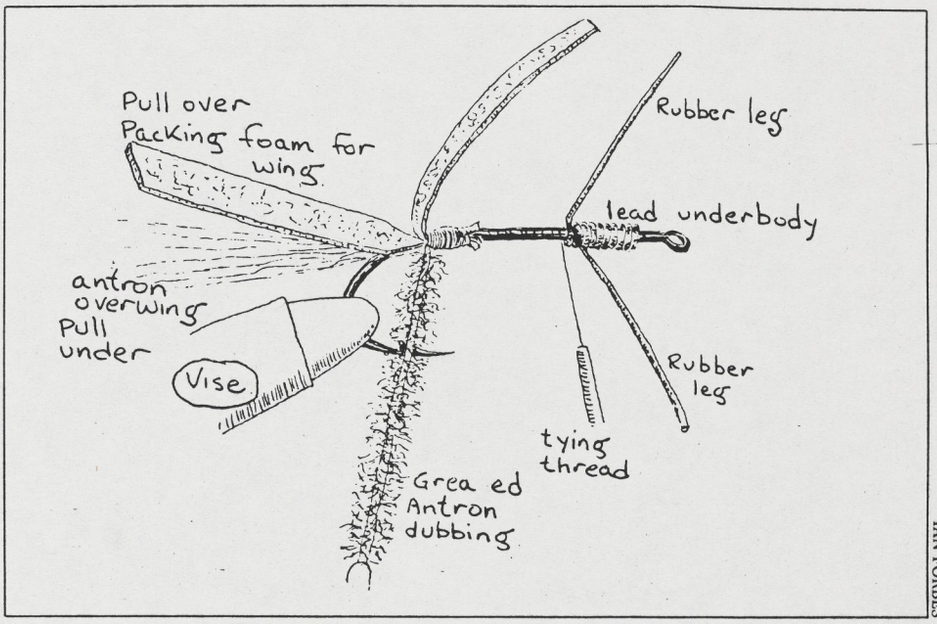
For the legs I stayed with the thin rubber material, tied straight out or slightly forward for maximum action. The rubber is tougher than strips of pheasant tail and does a better job of imitating the kicking action of the natural. The shorter grasping legs of the natural are of no use on the imitation so I leave them off.

The packing foam wing and greased Antron body overcome the weighted underbody, causing the fly to float. This is not a disadvantage because trout often take naturals resting on the surface. To pull the fly under I sometimes use a sink-tip line, causing the fly to swim straight down like the natural. I like at least a 4- or 5-lb. tippet because trout rally smack the fly hard.

Several 15- to 17-inch rainbows and a lovely brace of 19-inch coastal cutthroat showed no sign of hesitation when they took my new imitation last fall and I'm looking forward to many further encounters.

I'm not sure if the silvery Antron body is necessary but greasing the Antron and dubbing it loosely to create air pockets is vital to the success of this pattern. Greased natural seal's fur is a fair substitution for Antron because it also collects air bubbles but it is more difficult to manage and not quite as effective.

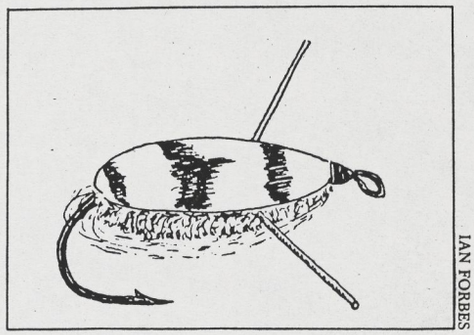
Keep a dozen size 10 or 12 backswimmer imitations in your fly box this year and you won't be caught short when trout start slashing at these flying water beetles.



IAN FORBES

Tying Instructions for Backswimmer

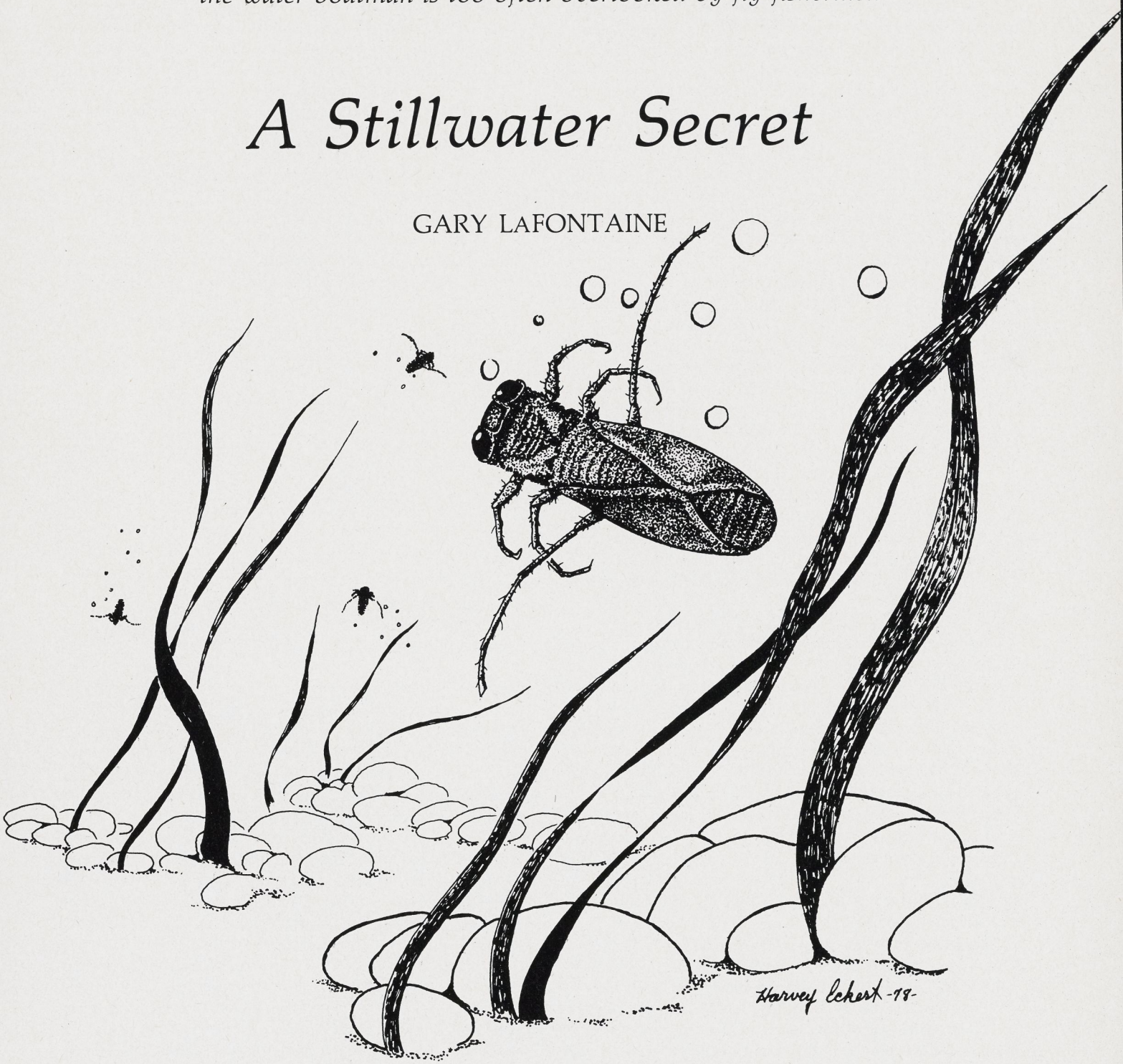
1. Prepare materials: color rubber legs with waterproof felt pen, sharpen size 10 hooks, cut 1/4-inch strips of packing foam, and mix Antron or seal's fur dubbing (60% olive, 40% brown).
2. Put base of thread on hook, so body materials won't spin, and wrap lead solder wire over front half of the hook (next to eye).
3. On top of the lead wire tie rubber legs so they stick straight out; leave them a bit long so they can be trimmed to length later.
4. At the bend of the hook tie in two strips of foam (one for the back and the other for the underbody) and a small piece of the dubbing to be used as an overbody (to collect air bubbles).
5. Paint tying thread with a sticky wax (I prefer cross country ski klister) and spread the fur or Antron dubbing along it. Make a dubbing loop and spin, making sure the fur isn't too tight.
6. Move the tying thread to the lead wire and wrap the foam underbody up to the lead. This will cause the fly to sink head first.
7. Cover whole body with dubbing and tie off, then pull the remaining piece of Antron loosely under the body and tie off at head.
8. Pull the foam over the back and cut it off ahead of the hook's eye. Using a black waterproof pen (Pantone) mark the foam like the natural.
9. Grease the body with fly floatant so it will collect air bubbles.
10. Fish the fly with a sink-tip line.


IAN FORBES

An important early-season insect in ponds all over the country, the water boatman is too often overlooked by fly fishermen

A Stillwater Secret

GARY LAFONTAINE



DURING THE SPRING THAW the drive over the dirt roads to check the pond became a ritual, a performance necessary every five days or so to ease the tensions of a fishless winter. By late April, the snow had melted, puddles were collecting on the ice, and small wedges of open water were forming in the shallows. Finally a warm wind arrived in the hollow, breaking up the cracked shell ice and mixing the waters of the pond.

I parked the car and trudged over the soggy meadow, bypassing the lower basin. After circling the rusting hulks of gold-dredging machinery, I climbed a waste pile of gravel and sat there to watch the welcome spec-

GARY LAFONTAINE has traveled and fished extensively throughout the East and Rocky Mountain states, and now fishes and writes from his Deer Lodge, Montana, base.

tacle of some 20-inch fish cruising the shallow cove below.

I sneaked down and started roll-casting with a new type of fly pattern, following a plan I had thought through a thousand times during the past winter. I brought the fly back with a fast retrieve and one of the trout rapped it solidly, but I flinched so hard on the strike that I snapped the 6x tippet.

Some stones rattled down from the hill where a man and a woman were walking along the crest. They stopped and stared at me, clinging to their spinning rods and cans of bait. I quickly cast again, hoping they wouldn't come down and wanting at least one fish in case they did decide to fish and spooked everything back to deeper water.

After I hooked and landed two of the big browns, I called up to them, "There's room on the other side of the cove."

They sat on the rocks until I caught a third trout. "I've been fishing this spot for three days," the man said loudly to the woman. He stood up and more stones clattered down the slope, popping along the edge of the water. "The son-of-a-bitch comes here and makes it look easy."

"Easy?" I yelled as they started to walk away, wanting to run up there and tell him about the four fishless years here, the long days of frustration when these same trout snubbed every fly, the experimental patterns and techniques that had failed.

"I never caught anything," he shouted at me as he left.

AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING the year a common beetle-like insect — the water boatman *(Corixidae)* — becomes the prevalent aquatic organism in numerous ponds and lakes around the country. The insect goes through a developmental cycle that includes an egg, five nymphal stages, and the adult. The adult overwinters — usually hibernating in the bottom mud, but sometimes swimming around under the ice — and mates in early spring. Throughout the fall, winter and early spring, as different populations of boatmen peak, the insect assumes great importance in the diet of trout, because the populations of other food organisms are apt to be at the low point (in terms of availability to trout) in their respective seasonal cycles.

Every fish from the Gold Creek Dredge Ponds that I checked contained fresh water boatmen in its stomach, but I had never worked up an exact imitation of the insect. Scud, damselfly nymphs and midge pupae triggered obvious spurts of selective feeding in the still-water environment, but when the trout fed on the boatmen, their activity always seemed random. At least that was the case until Galen Wilkins and I encountered a "fall" of egg-laying boatmen.

On an early-spring afternoon, we passed the back cove of the pond — this bowl of clear and shallow water was usually fishless — but we stopped in awe on the hill when we spied trout cruising just under the surface. The entire basin was jammed with large browns.

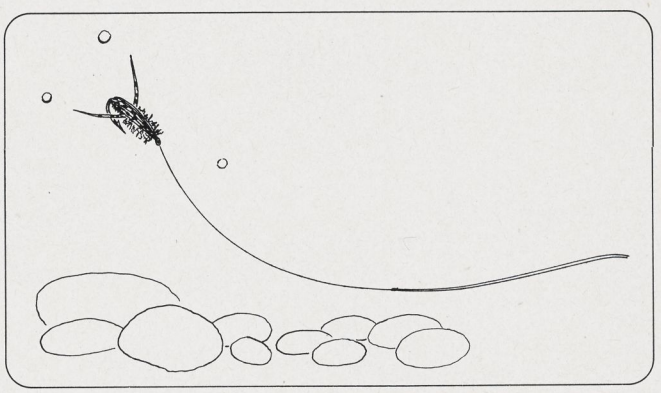
Egg-laying insects hit the smooth surface, spun in frantic circles to pierce the surface tension and dove for the bottom weeds to lay their eggs. The fish were frantically intercepting the bugs falling all over the cove.

This feeding spree turned us into total bumblers, but we finally managed to lengthen leaders and tie on flies. After we went to opposite ends of the cove, where we could easily crisscross the whole pothole, we failed to cast with any forethought. We scattered tosses to any fish that swirled and changed flies every few minutes; our sloppy flailing neither put down nor caught any of the trout.

I admitted my own loss for an immediate idea. "I've never seen a feeding pattern like this."

"What's causing it?" Galen asked.

"Water boatmen," I answered, but that knowledge didn't help. The color, size or shape of the fly weren't the primary factors in this selectivity. The fish were



keying on the splat, fuss and dive of the insect, and none of the flies we carried had the physical properties necessary to mimic that telling action.

OUR SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION to this problem started with references in American angling literature — *Fishing Flies and Fly Tying* by Bill Blades and *Matching the Hatch* by Ernest Schwiebert — but although these books had valuable information on the life history of the order, the recommended fly patterns were not satisfactory for matching the diving motion of the insect.

While gathering facts on the water boatman, we found that the phenomenal feeding triggered by this egg-laying process wasn't limited to a single pond. Not only did the sprees occur on other still waters in western Montana, but far-ranging fishing friends reported the same activity scattered throughout the West.

During a trip for Kamloops rainbow in British Columbia, I encountered a fall of water boatmen in the bay of a small lake. The trout fed in the same manner, cruising not so much in schools but as individuals, a fish actively chasing an insect as it crashed on the surface. All my casting produced only a single trout, but the six-pound rainbow was crammed with boatman adults.

We dumped adults into an aquarium at the Angler's Agency in Deer Lodge, Montana, where they carried through their egg-laying process. We watched them chug along the surface and then dash in a slanting dive to stick their eggs to the weeds. We listed the visible characteristics of the insect that might control selective feeding by trout. There were, in order of importance:

the shimmer of enveloping air globules, size, shape and color. In watching them further, we became more certain all the time that the most important recognition factor for the trout was the peculiar activity of the water boatman.

Bill Seeples provided a clue as he sold flies to a customer. He recommended one of my patterns, a Natural Drift Stonefly Nymph, saying, "It's not enough for a fly to look like an insect, it has to act like one." He dropped the artificial into the aquarium where the pattern sank with its head upright. "That's the way the real stonefly holds itself when it drifts in the current, and this fly is carefully balanced with lead wrapping to act just that way," he explained.

I looked at the tank and thought: "If we can tie a fly to balance head up, we should be able to tie one to balance head down."

Graham Marsh and I sat down at the fly-tying bench, putting together prototypes and dropping them into the water. Finally, we constructed an imitation that tipped head first and sank — a pattern that would "dive" with proper rod manipulation.

The pattern is fished with a sinking-tip line, which sinks faster than the fly so that at the start of the retrieve the imitation dives downward. The rod tip should be poked into the water at the completion of the cast and, after a short pause, the retrieve carried out with quick strips.

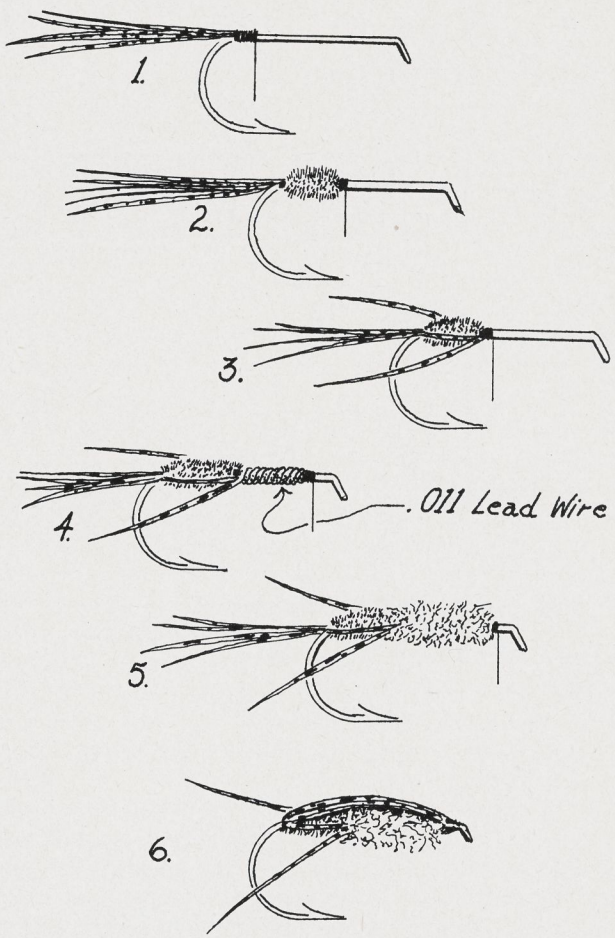
The Diving Water Boatman solved another feeding puzzle as well. The swirls and dashes of marauding trout in the pond shallows during the fall were also made by selective fish concentrating on individual boatmen swimming to and from the surface to replenish their air supply through the surface tension. The action of our pattern mimicked the antics of the naturals returning from the surface.

When Fred Arbona and I seine-tested the Dredge Ponds in late September, each scoop of the net revealed why trout preyed almost exclusively on the water boatmen. Every sampling produced hundreds of active boatmen but only minor populations of mayfly nymphs and olive scud. The food supply was so limited in variety during the autumn that a fly fisherman needed only four or five patterns to match any feeding situation.

During two years of testing, the Diving Water Boatman proved indispensable when trout were feeding on the naturals. In difficult waters — those high-fertility ponds that are cold enough to support trout — this specific imitation has often been the solution for selective fish in the fall and spring.

The basic pattern has been successful for angling friends in Idaho, Wyoming, California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico and British Columbia. It should also be important in the eastern United States and eastern Canada, where trout ponds at higher elevations often hold good populations of water boatmen. All over the more northern sections of the country, when many early-season streams are apt to be high and cold, anglers should be looking to trout in ponds, who in turn will be looking at the ubiquitous water boatmen.

Diving Water Boatman



HOOK: Mustad 94840, #14-18.

THREAD: Brown.

BACK: Pheasant tail-feather fibers, pulled over top of entire fly.

BODY: Rear 1/3 is spun deerhair, clipped short; front 2/3 is gold Sparkle yarn, dubbed shaggily.

LEGS: One pheasant-tail fiber on each side.

WEIGHT: .011-inch lead wire wrapped over forward ½ of hook shank.

Tie in pheasant-tail fibers at the rear of the hook shank with their butts extending forward (1). Spin brown deerhair over rear of shank and clip to shape (2).

Pull forward one strand of pheasant-tail fiber on each side and tie off to form legs. Clip to desired length (3). Wrap .011-inch lead wire over forward half of hook shank (4). Dub gold Sparkle yarn over the forward two-thirds of the hook shank (5). Pull the remaining pheasant fibers over the back of the body and tie off at the head (6).

To test the finished pattern, drop it in water. It should sink head first. If it doesn't sink readily, more lead wire should be added to the forward portion of the hook shank in subsequent flies. GARY LAFONTAINE

The second of two articles on
the whys and wherefores of shooting-taper fly lines.
This time: casting and fishing with shooting-taper systems.

SHOOTING-TAPERS – II

DAN BLANTON

IT WAS EARLY SUMMER and I was working the inlet stream of a small, weedy lake in northern California. There was still plenty of early-season water volume, and the last 200 feet of stream, before it fully entered the lake, had a good current and a hatch was in progress. On both sides of the stream and for some distance into the lake, dense weeds grew to within a half inch of the surface. The weeds lined the shoreline like a lush, eight-foot-wide, green carpet and it was very difficult to wade to its edge. Small minnows in large schools used the vegetation for protection against predatory trout. The minnows were swimming in the half inch of water above the weed tops, and they scurried as I worked my way with difficulty through the weeds.

Several good trout were rising about midstream, approximately 20 feet from me. Using a floating shooting-taper line, and quartering my cast slightly down and across, I made a mend in the air and shook a little slack into the line. The 10-foot leader piled in a heap and the size 18 Adams began to drift lazily toward the feeding station of a fair-size trout. It took, and after a couple of fine jumps, followed by much zig-zagging and thrashing about, I was able to slip the net under a fat rainbow of 18 inches. Subsequently, I managed two more fish with the across-and-down dry fly — another rainbow and a brown from the same slot — before I finally put the other fish down.

Looking downstream about 50 feet, I saw a large trout rising steadily near my side of the stream. Since I was standing up to my waist in the dense weeds, I wasn't interested in trying for better position — which might possibly spook the trout — and decided to give it a try from where I was standing. I stripped about 20 feet of monofilament shooting-line from the reel, false-cast once to extend the taper a couple of feet beyond the rod tip, and made a downstream serpentine cast, dropping the fly several feet above the rising trout. As the curves in the head started to unfold, I began letting the monofilament shooting-line slide through my fingers at a controlled rate. The heavier shooting-taper easily pulled the monofilament without dragging itself or the leader and fly. The fly drifted for about 10 feet — right into the maw of the waiting trout. I hooked the fish but broke it off by setting the hook too enthusiastically — a habit developed from years of saltwater fly-fishing. This technique, called "shooting slack," is an extremely effective method for achieving drag-free, downstream drifts.

Still standing in the same spot, and still using the floating taper, I switched to nymphs and took several more respectable trout, some by using the shooting-slack trick. Finally, I changed to a sinking-tip head and began working a small Muddler, covering the stream thoroughly, above, across and below me. I managed to entice fish from just about all of the water, with the most strikes coming when I fished the fly parallel to the shoreline weeds. Most of the trout were brookies and I hooked some of them as far downstream from me as 90 feet, without ever moving from my original post. Later, I moved into the lake and had even more luck using a full-sinking shooting-taper and fishing my flies deep.

By using a system of shooting-tapers, I was able to cover a variety of productive waters — on the surface and at different depths. I simply put my fly where the fish were.

Because of the proliferation of fly-line densities in recent years, the versatility of the shooting-taper system, and the ease with which it is employed, many fly fishermen believe that if you're not using shooting-tapers for all your fly-fishing you may be missing the boat. This opinion can be contradicted, and in some cases it should be. There are situations that command

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DAN BLANTON has been experimenting with shooting-taper systems for several years in a wide variety of angling situations throughout the West Coast states and elsewhere.