



"When Flies Go Plop...."

by Jeff Wilkins

Why flies work, or better yet, why certain flies work has always been to me and to many others a perplexing thing. The primary issues normally are size, shape, and color, and in that order, but just knowing that doesn't seem to be enough for me. As a fly fisher, and more particularly because I design, tie, and sell flies for a living, knowing something extra special to put into a fly is a big deal. And occasionally, finding that nugget of truth results in much enjoyment for my customers who buy flies, and for me too! Such is the case with terrestrial flies.

Not all flies are equal. There are some good ones out there, and certainly there are many great tiers who turn out some truly great bugs. But what makes a good bug? What do the fish care about when it really comes down to it? Gary Borger, in his excellent work Presentation, touched on this when he addressed the subject of primary and secondary triggers. The primary trigger is what the fish respond to first, the one that is most "obvious and unique", that tends to draw a fish to it. The secondary triggers must also be present to have a consistently effective fly. I agree with Gary, and our experience with terrestrial flies have revealed some interesting things. I don't claim to have all the answers, just ideas, so here goes.

I would have to say that the single most important characteristic in a terrestrial fly is the way it lands on the water, the splash, or "plop" if you will, for it is that that signals "dinner" to an awaiting trout. Our onstream experience over many years and many days on the water seem to confirm this, and its especially interesting to remember all the times a fish came as much as five or six feet away to eat a fly. If its not the plop, what else could bring a fish from that far away to eat a fly? Nothing I would suggest. The other features like silhouette (a beetle, ant, or inchworm all have distinctly different forms), color, and legs would be secondary features. But again it must be the plop, an in my opinion, a good terrestrial MUST have it.

As a commercial fly tyer, and one who ties both for income and for a hobby both, I get to sample, experiment, and try out a lot of materials. In terms of durability, foam is an outstanding material. Deer Hair is good as well, but not as durable as foam given the same amount of use. But the real issue is what makes the fly plop. That not only comes from the foam, but primarily from what the body is made of. And bodies are often made of many materials, be they fur or synthetic in the form of dubbing, or braid, or just plain thread. The bottomline is whatever is used must be made from material that encourages a "plop" when the fly lands on the surface.

The main issue then is also not so much one of weight, but of density. Materials can soak up water, which is great, but the best is one that soaks up water and also has density. For this, natural but rough dubbings and braid bodies make the best flies. And the by-product is great durability, far surpassing other materials like peacock herl or hair. For this reason, we tie our flies with materials that will accomplish these objectives, with the end result being flies that both we and our customers have come to love.

con't to pg 2

Where Fly Fishing Is A Professional Passion....



"When Flies Go Plop...."

by Jeff Wilkins

I remember when my longtime friend, former guide with Jesse Browns in Charlotte, NC, and still the best sight fisher I have fished with, Malcolm Robertston of Winston-Salem, NC, and I first had our hand with these types of flies over 15 years ago on well known Bullhead Creek in Stone Mountain State Park. It was a thrilling sight to watch one 20 inch fish after another absolutely blast a beetle, ant, or inchworm immediately or within seconds after it would land on the surface. In fact, that started a long love affair with beetles in particular that stands to this day. Two common things present then and still present now in my flies like those.....tied with foam and with **dense** bodies.

What do I mean by **dense**? The material has a lot of weight to it, but lacks what I call "fluffiness". Once wet, the fly is both dense and heavy, resulting in a body and fly that go "plop", and say "food" to waiting trout. Other flies can have this too, ants with rough dubbing bodies like ice dub, sparkle body, and angora, all are rough and once wet get really heavy. Inchworms are also a favorite, as well as a favorite of trout. If you've ever used a deer hair inchworm, you know they catch fish. If you've ever used a green weenie, you know they REALLY catch fish. Again, the weenie once wet has a whole lot more weight and **density** to it.

Finally, one last characteristic, which too is a function of **density**, is how the fly sits on or in the surface film. **Dense, heavy** flies sit low in the surface film—not unlike the naturals when they fall into the water. I am amazed both in my own fishing and when guiding folks how many times a fish is caught at the end of the drift. There was no rise, no splash, no indication of a take, only the discovery that a fish was on at the end of the drift when you are ready to make another cast. My guess is that the fish takes the fly *subsurface*, which would explain why there is no indication of a surface take.

And remember the next time you tie or buy, **dense** makes sense.



20" plus wild brown on Foam Braid body beetle

page 2

Where Fly Fishing Is A Professional Passton....