



Darley Dale Fly Fishing Club

Philip White: Fishing on the Derwent

Philip White APGAI: Fishing on the Derwent, an experts view

Of the rivers I have fly-fished in my life so far, I would say the Derwent, here in Derbyshire, is hard to beat. It has a wide range of habitats along its length, from hard running shallows through to deep, slow mystic pools. Along its tree-lined length there is a wealth of fly life coming from the gravels, rocks and weed beds as well as regular falls of all manner of terrestrials, either dropping off the trees or just blowing in from the surrounding farmland.

The Derwent has a good head of natural fish, wild browns and grayling in particular as well as the wild breeding rainbows that are found in parts of the river. Over the years I have fished and guided on various parts of the river. I really enjoy being in it – and yes, I do mean in it, as it is really necessary to wade.

The river Derwent offers fishing for all interests with super hatches of fly right through the season. A full day on the river can require a deep, searching nymph one minute; targeting ‘sipping’ fish on a tiny dry fly minutes later; and moving quickly to fishing a daddy long legs the next. Keep your eyes open and you can have a very full and eventful day on the river at any time of year.

Although I am best known for my time on dry fly only streams where there is no wading, one of the delights for me is being up to my waist, working a team of traditional spiders in the glides as I fish down the river, waiting for the ‘winking’ turn of a fish, or the movement of the leader that signifies a take. There is something timeless in this style of fishing. If I stay late I will fish the spinner fall and then, if it is late April/May onwards, I will hang on for that mad 10 minutes just on dark when the females of many species of sedges are egg laying. As the light goes they come skittering across the water from their hiding places in the bushes before diving/crawling down in the shallows to attach their eggs to the stones and underwater mosses, before they die and drift downstream. Some really good fish can be caught at that time, fishing a diving caddis at the tails of the riffles. These fish are often bigger than usual fish that hide away from the prying eyes and searching casts of keen fishermen during the day.



Fly Selection

Everyone has their own favourites but if you're stuck you shouldn't go far wrong with the following:

Dry

Early season: Olive quill, Greenwells, Rough olive, Adams, Black gnat, Blue Winged Olive, Kites Imperial Sizes #14 #16

Late spring: Adams, Beacon beige, Blue winged olive, Black gnat, Elk Hair caddis, Hawthorn fly Mayfly, Grey Wulff, Spent Gnat, Pheasant tail, Red Spinner, Sherry Spinner, Double Badger. Sizes #16 #18 (#10 – #14 for Mayfly, Spent Gnat and Grey Wulff).

Summer: Black gnat, various emergers, Black ant, BWO, Pheasant tail, Adams, Elk hair caddis, various sedges, Griffiths Gnat.

Nymphs and Wets

Early season: Waterhen bloa, Silver March Brown, Green Lurex spider, Black spider, Partridge and Orange, Greenwells and Snipe and Purple. These may need to be quite large and tied on heavy hooks to get down in the water #10 – #16 Gold heads, particularly Hare's Ear, will be well received.

Late spring: Go smaller with the same flies and start using the Pheasant Tail Nymph.

Summer onwards: When nothing is moving on the surface don't assume nothing is feeding. If you are up to the short line upstream heavy nymph technique using Czech nymphs you may be in for a surprise.



Fly Patterns for the river Derwent

Everyone has an opinion about successful fly patterns, matching the hatch and what works locally. In the end it's probably observation, size, colour and presentation that count more than the specific fly but this advice should get you started with patterns that work on the river Derwent.



The Expert View - Philip White

Over many years I have been asked to advise people on the flies they should use on the local rivers here in Derbyshire. Being a Professional Fly Tier as well as a river keeper for many years led me to develop my own range of flies to suit these local waters. Many of these flies are based on the traditional patterns in both colour and basic design, and the selection has been honed into shape over years of observation. It is based predominately on the hatch stages that flies go through in the 'dry fly' stage from the very early stage of emergence to the fully hatched dun and then on to the egg laying spinner stage, supported by two basic nymphal stages. Added to these are the Sedges and Terrestrials. With both my own and the more traditional patterns I have listed I do not specifically divide them into seasonal use, except for Mayflies and the like which are seasonal. A Greenwell's Glory is a good fly anytime of the year as is the Beacon Beige and the GRHE. I prefer to try to match the colour and size as best I can. This colour/size match can be very, very important during falls of spinner.

“I normally carry the following...”

Thorax Duns In yellow, tan, orange, and olive and in sizes 14 through to 20 for the majority of ‘olives’ found and in claret in sizes 18 and 20 for the Iron Blue Dun. The colour is given from the thread colour used to tie the flies. I find that, on the waters I generally guide or fish on, the yellow, tan, and claret work best early season, the orange, tan and olive through the middle season and back to the yellow, tan and claret towards the end but that does not mean I do not try all colours at all times. Fly colour is often dictated by daylight conditions – beauty is in the eye of the beholder and all that.

F – Flies A very simple pattern which I have adapted slightly to suit my eye. Same sizes and colours as for the Thorax Duns.

Almost Duns In the same colours and sizes as above and using the same rules of preference. These represent the half hatched fly still with its shuck attached and the wings still partly rolled.

Spinners In pale yellow, golden yellow/amber, hot orange and red, again in the same sizes as above. These are the colours normally found in the egg laying females and are matched, as best as I can, to what I see on the water or migrating upstream to lay their eggs.

Sedges I carry two types of hair wing sedges in sizes 10 to 16 and a fluttering caddis pattern in sizes 12 to 18. The colours I favour are tan, olive, grey and cinnamon for the hair wings and pheasant tail brown and heron grey for the fluttering patterns. I also like a heavily dressed grey or cinnamon skittering/diving caddis pattern for late evening after the sun goes down when the big flies come back to lay their eggs in the shallow runs.

Stoneflies These have always been ignored, or at least almost ignored but I find an imitation of the Little Yellow Sally, Willow Fly and a darker brown version are almost a must in the summer and autumn months particularly.

Nymphs I now use a range of Summer Duck nymphs for all my Baetis style nymphs, based on the Pheasant Tail Nymph style, again using the colour of the thread as my base colour. I use them in yellow, tan, orange and olive. In addition I use black beaded versions to get down deep and also have some with a hot orange head (why do they take them?). I use the Red Fox Squirrel Nymph tied short, plump and heavy for the Heptagenid (Stone Clinger) Nymphs.

Cased Caddis I have my own range of 3 different coloured Head Down Caddis nymphs in sizes from 10 to 14 which cover most eventualities.

Non Cased Caddis I have my own versions in three basic colours of dirty olive/cream, ginger/tan and dark olive/light olive (different design) to cover the free living caddis we see around here. Sizes 10 to 14

Terrestrials I carry Daddy Longlegs size 10 or 12 (May, August and September), Hawthorn size 12(April/May), Black Gnat size 18 and 20(anytime), Dark Terrestrial size 18 and 20(anytime), Greenfly size 24(High Summer), Black Beetle size 18(High Summer) and Heather fly size 10 and 12(High Summer) as normal.

Mayflies I have a range of 9 patterns that go right through the hatch stages, all tied on size 10 hooks.

From knowing many members of the club, both past and present, I know there is still a strong liking for the older, more traditional flies and I would venture the following from what I have gleaned over the years:

Dry Flies

Winged or Hackled flies representing Duns – Gold Ribbed Hares Ear, Beacon Beige, Blue Winged Olive, Rough Olive, Pheasant Tail, Tup's Indispensable, Greenwell's Glory, Pale Watery Dun, Hassam's Pet and various Mayfly patterns,

Spinner Patterns – Red Spinner, Rusty Spinner(there is an old Derbyshire pattern and the more modern USA pattern in regular use now), Sherry Spinner, Lunn's Particular, Lunn's Yellow Boy, Houghton Ruby and, again, Mayfly Spinners.

Sedge Patterns – Cinnamon Sedge, Silver Sedge, Red Sedge, Wickham's Fancy, March Brown (I know, I know, but it is a brilliant fluttering caddis imitation) and the Grannom.

Terrestrials – Daddy Longlegs (10 and 12), Hawthorne (12 and 14) and Black Gnat (18 and 20's). I would include Red Tag, Orange Tag (Treacle Parkin), Terry's Terror and Eric's Beetle here as well, as I am sure that they are often taken as beetle imitations and I would have them in sizes 14 to 18.

Fancies not in specific Groups – Double Badger (use any time in 12 to 20's), Griffiths Gnat (as for Double Badger), Blanshards Abortion (14, 16 and 18's), John Storey (14, 16 and 18's).

Wet Flies

North Country Spiders – Partridge and Orange, Partridge and Yellow, Snipe and Purple, Snipe and Yellow and Greenwell's Spider are all commonly used in sizes 14 and 16. I also have a modern one that works well on the Derwent tied with a copper wire body, brown Partridge hackle and either peacock herl or hares Ear thorax.

Nymphs – most popular is the Gold Ribbed Hares Ear, both normal and with a bead, An Olive version in normal and beaded styles, the Sawyer Pheasant Tail, Sawyer Grey Goose, Sawyer Grayling(Killer) Bug and the Prince Nymph, again both normal and with a gold bead. More recently the Copper John nymph has come on the scene from the USA. Sizes for most of these are 12 to 16 but the Copper John goes down to 20.

Also under the general heading of nymphs are the various Shrimp patterns and the Czech Nymphs found in most peoples boxes now. The Czech nymph is the best Non Cased Caddis imitation readily available on the market and I suggest it accounts for more than its fair share of fish. Sizes are usually 12 and 14 for shrimps and 10 and 12 for Czech nymphs.