

## Brian Calvert on Grafham

Brian is secretary of GWFFA, editor of Grail (Grafham Reservoir Anglers Information Letter), and well-known figure on the bank at Grafham. Indeed he is co-author with Henry Lowe of "Grafham from the bank", an excellent read even for established anglers. Brian likes to travel light to facilitate moving around until he finds the fish. There was obviously a lot to talk about but to start with he dealt with some of his favourite flies. Brian produced a broadsheet describing various home grown patterns, the tyings of some of which are reproduced below. These flies have evolved over the years to suit his style of fishing - casting out and letting the wind take the flies "around the bend". A 9½-foot AFTM 6 rod was his usual tool. The line was a cheapie floater from the lodge, which are reputed to originate from Shakespeare. He has been known to use braided leaders but has not succumbed to the fluorocarbon craze, from the bank at least. Occasionally a shooting head outfit is used when the fish are otherwise out of range. Interestingly, instead of braided nylon backing, he uses a non-stretch line, which was considered essential to feel takes at long range. For the most part his aim is to get to the reservoir at an early hour and chose an area where the fish have not been driven out by thoughtless wading. Yes, he does have a pair of chest waders!

His favourite fly over the past 14 years has been the *Green and Brown Minkie*. Not the green and brown alternating ostrich herl rib as in Ivens G&B, but a green wool or seal fur body and a brown wing of mink where the skin does not extend beyond the bend of the hook. Select mink pelts with a very thin leather backing if at all possible. Cut strips by holding one end in the fly tying vice with the hair pointing towards the jaws, and run a razor blade down the edge. Strips less than 2mm in width are perfectly feasible.

**Hook:** 8 or 10 Kamasan B170 and B175

**Tail:** None

**Body:** Medium green wool or seals fur.

**Rib:** Gold wire wound through the mink.

**Wing:** Dull, dark brown, long fibres from mink or a fur strip

**Overwing:** Bunch of mink fibres

**Hackle:** Red fibres at the throat.

This fly is used on the point with perhaps a pheasant tail as a dropper. Weighting is optional. Because it is dark and reasonably bulky, it works best in coloured water.

A better fly for clear water is the *Winter Grey Mink*, again used on the point.

**Hook:** Kamasan B170, B175 or the B200 for deeper work, in size 10.

**Thread:** Orange.

**Tail:** None

**Underbody:** Orange or green tying silk.

**Body:** White SFL, thinly dubbed on a dubbing loop of pearl 'Twinkle'.

**Rib:** Silver wire.

**Wing:** Thin strip of grey mink>

**Overwing:** Bunch of long dark fibres.

**Cheeks:** Fluo green or orange floss tufts - kept very short.

**Hackle:** Red or yellow feather fibres as a beard.

**Head:** Orange thread.

This was the first time I can recall seeing a dubbing loop demonstrated and it proved to be an effective method of introducing a bit of sparkle into the body. The philosophy with this fly is to keep it light and translucent. For deeper work rely on the use of a heavier than normal hook.

The *Sunny Jim* and *Wickham Mink* are variants of the Grey Mink but they are based on gold and ginger, colours well known for their effectiveness in bright conditions.

**Hook:** Kamasan B170 and B175

**Thread:** Orange

**Tail:** None

**Body:** Gold tinsel (tie some with a red butt)

**Rib:** Gold wire.

**Wing:** Ginger mink.

**Overwing:** Dark brown fur fibres.

**Hackle:** Red or yellow feather fibres as a beard only.

**Thorax:** Tie some patterns with red and others with a yellow seals fur thorax.

**Cheeks:** Tie some patterns with red floss cheeks.

**Head:** Orange thread.

Again tied slim and sparse. The Wickhams version has a palmered ginger hackle tied in before the mink wing. Clip the top half of the hackle to give room for the mink fur to fit snugly. The function of the hackle is to slow the rate of sink. The versions with red in them were claimed to be excellent in bright conditions.

*The Bugler* and *Muddler Mink*

These are another pair of highly successful flies, particularly later in the season. These are wake rather than point flies.

**Hook:** Kamasan B170 (size 10) with B830 for a big wave.

**Thread:** Dark

**Tail:** Grey mink with white under brown marabou for less buoyant versions.

**Body:** Pearl fritz or pearl angel hair for less buoyant versions. White deer hair for the Muddler.

**Back:** Oval of 3mm thick white ethafoam or similar.

**Hackle:** Optional but combed Angel hair throat helps "lift" in smaller sizes.

**Eyes:** Optional but black fabric paint\* on Ethafoam or black over yellow on Muddler looks good.

(\*Tulip paint from Heffers, see also their 2mm thick foam sheet in a range of colours)

Check that these flies float before venturing to the reservoir. The Bugler is recommended from the bank as, correctly tied it is unsinkable. It was claimed to produce exciting takes, with visible takes. A picture of the Bugler (AKA The Wake-up - get it?) and other hot Grafham flies can be found on the GWFFA web site, [www.gwffa-grafham.co.uk](http://www.gwffa-grafham.co.uk)

I liked the fact that Brian has dispensed with the use of superglue for many tasks and prefers the Loon PVA cement (SportFish catalogue p. 78) as it is solvent free and doesn't knock yer head off if you should get a whiff of it.

So where next? Brian had just come back from a week in the Bahamas. Unfortunately his photographs were still at the processors. Bonefish were the objects of his attention although Barracuda and Permit also abound. This is normally boat fishing but it can also be done wading if the right areas are selected. He went with his reservoir gear. Apparently the line tray was a bit of a novelty to the natives. The rod was built by John Hutchinson of Biggleswade (01767 317122) on a four piece Harrison blank ([www.harrisonrods.co.uk](http://www.harrisonrods.co.uk)). A big, wide arbor, reel was essential. Brian had a 9/10 Battenkill I believe. Dynema backing could usefully increase the capacity of the reel and will be on Brian's shopping list for the next trip. Hmmm, Dynema - non-stretch and less dense than water - I wonder if that is any good for backing on shooting heads at Grafham?

You need to be able to see the fish. Hence ideal conditions are clear water, sunshine and little wind. When the fish appear they do so in vast shoals but they never swim in a straight line. They follow the tide into the creeks and leave the flats as the tide ebbs. Bonefish are bottom feeders and are seeking out crabs and other food items in the mud. Quite often the first you will see of them is a puff of mud. They are easily spooked especially by a clumsy cast. Brian was using straightforward lures - size 6 and 8 with a lot of pink hair and sparkle in them. Pink seems to be a good colour to use in the sea. The idea is to cast at the shoal and hopefully a fish will deviate from its path and take the lure. Expect to make 10 casts for every take. Even the most modestly sized fish fight like no other species weight for weight. Brian caught fish to 7 lbs. and lost another rated in double figures.

The best time of year to go is probably late November, December and early January. I am sure Brian would be willing to divulge further details to interested parties. Bear in mind that it is going to cost something of the order of £2 grand for a week's holiday, although there are offers in TF for \$2000. *A personal input.* I have not been to the Bahamas but I have been to Australia a few times. Conditions are not always ideal for fly-fishing. Take some alternative kit or you may be disappointed (TF Feb 2002 p.60-61). You need to be aware of the power of the sun - unlike the guy in the May issue of TF, p77. Sun protection is absolutely essential. Finally don't go poodling about in the water bare footed unless you have first ascertained from the locals what nasties might be lurking in the sand.

Brian had brought his custom boat seat along. He didn't like the thought of paying £160 for an aluminium item so he designed and built his own out of ash, which set him back about £15. This consisted of two parts, one of which slid into the other. The advantage of one section being significantly narrower than the other was that it made sitting astride it that much more comfortable. Norman made his boat seat from a pair of aluminium step ladders, a concept which aroused much laughter in the audience when our resident comedians suggested ways in which they might be arranged. I don't think the rules specify the height of the seat!!

We finished the evening talking about, for example, the opening of Wyndhams Way, a path which starts at Plummer Park and goes around the edge of the sludge lagoon to The Seat. Thanks to the sterling efforts of John Mees and his mates, together with some input from GWFFA members, this path re-opens up a lot more bank which would be very useful when there is any south in the wind. Eventually an access road and car park for anglers will be built. Patience - one step at a time chaps! The Seat is being refurbished and will have a plaque in place in memory of Wyndham Davies - what a splendid memorial. Brian is the GWFFA rep on the Grafham Users Committee who have come up with guide lines for anglers and sailors alike, in an attempt to generate a bit of harmony through making each other aware of their needs. These will probably be printed as a poster by AW and they may appear elsewhere in this issue. My son is a windsurfer. His view is that we can go fishing anytime, whereas windsurfers have limited windows of opportunity i.e. windy days. So it's the anglers who should make concessions! He doesn't sail at Grafham you will be pleased to hear. But if you want some top quality luggage at knock down prices try [www.rikswindsurfing.com](http://www.rikswindsurfing.com) He is quite prepared to sell kit to anglers and you could give him an earful at the same time! Personally as a one-time bank angler I have been harassed far more times by boat anglers than Yachts. Even out on the water, I understand that some play fish with the rod under water to avoid unwanted attention. As for chest waders, the idea that wading anglers are in the least bit considerate of their comrades, does not fit with my experience. Perhaps times have changed but I doubt it.

Finally we talked about prospects for the coming season. Apparently the water level is low which minimises erosion of the banks. However, when the water level is raised, as it inevitably will, later in the year, the submerged banks will be barren so for the bank angler it may be hard going. At least we had a few tips to make our lot that much easier.

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