

A FLY-TYING EVENING WITH JEFF WILKINSON

Jeff Wilkinson runs Razor Sharp Flies. He is a local in the sense that he lives just 30 miles down the A10 in Ware. In between his day job, he ties quality flies commercially to order and also supplies a limited range of fly-tying materials prepared by himself. He has been a regular at Grafham for 30(?) years and his flies feature innovative touches which he has found enhances their killing properties especially during competition angling. He joined the England team in 2011. I noticed that Charlie Abrahams raved about his micro booby following a successful session on Bewl.

He admitted a preference for snakes and blobs and the like but over the past 4-5 seasons he has developed a liking for nymphs. Looking at Grafham, it is full of non-native shrimps, so we started off with a demo of tying his favourite imitation. This could best be described as a suspender pattern in so far that it sinks very slowly and sits on top of any debris on the reservoir bed. The hook was a No.8 Hyabusa barbless grub pattern. A 10mm length of 4mm dia. yellow booby chord was tied in (as a single eye) but this must be trimmed to achieve the desired level of buoyancy. He employed scissors to trim the chord as he considered it generated a ragged, more natural outline than produced by the Dremel honing method. The body was dubbing made up of a mixture of sunburst rabbit and FNF minkie hair which had an olive colouration (see the picture). This combination of hair had important properties in that it trapped micro air bubbles. I think JW might be able to supply this? So, 3 turns of dubbing were held down with a 5mm wide transparent plastic strip (described as Cellophane but I am uncertain if it really was that as it is biodegradable). The body was finished with ~7 turns of silver wire and the fur teased out with a dubbing brush I forgot to mention the tail which was made from selected coarse rabbit hairs. I can't remember if the foam was painted before or after the body stage. The important point is to coat the foam (after adjusting the buoyancy) with Fire Orange acrylic paint known as Humbrol 209 (Hobbycraft, Cambridge?) which, apart from providing a target, seals the pores. It does however, have a limited life. Hopefully the photo will provide tyers with a better idea of the construction than my description!

We got talking about hoppers which I thought were dry flies. In fact, JW always fishes these flies sub-surface. The fly was tied on a B175 size 10 equivalent but tied on a bright nickel barbless version obtained from Elite Flies run by Sam Bailey ([www.ebay.co.uk > str > elitefliesflyfishing](http://www.ebay.co.uk/str/elitefliesflyfishing)). I am not sure of the exact pattern but Elite Flies provide an interesting range of hooks in a variety of finishes. According to JW, Elite also sell the best Jellite Fritz on the market. Meanwhile back to the vice. The pattern was essentially black with a few turns of Glo-brite No.4 tied in at the rear of the fly. The body was constructed from a single fibre of black pheasant, with turns of black holographic tinsel. The legs were made from 3 black pheasant tail fibres, each containing a single knot. These were tied in beard style underneath the body. The fly was finished with a few turns of a natural black hen hackle. As readers will see, the legs are barely visible compared with patterns often seen in the press.

No demonstration would be complete without a blob. This was in fact a demo showing how fast it was possible to tie the pattern. The hook was again bright nickel sourced from Elite Flies, with neon yellow and golden sunburst fritz. Personally, I have never tied this

pattern but JW said it was much easier to handle the fritz if it was first soaked in water and wrung out before using it. 4 turns of yellow were used at the rear and 3 turns of golden sunburst at the front. The fly was completed in 1 minutes and 6 seconds.

Snakes are very popular at the moment at Grafham. The first stage is to join 2 hooks which were nominally size 10 in length but had a gape of a no.6, again obtained from Elite Flies. I was surprised to see that the fly was tied rear end first. A length of Drennan 12lb bs Cameo braid was tied to the eye using a Rapala knot which, unlike the blood knot, allows the hook to swivel. Rabbit strip was stuck to the shank using Super glue (the one with a brush) then tied in (on the rear hook) pointing towards the bend where it was secured with a few turns of thread. The strip was then brought forward and tied in at the eye. The length of braid was fed through the eye on the front hook, the length adjusted to match the available rabbit, brought back to the rear of the shank and secured with turns of thread and Loctite. At the same time a length of nylon was also tied in (eventually) to secure a small tungsten bead at the head. The shank on the front hook was treated to a layer of holographic tinsel which then supported some fritz. The rabbit was then tied in at the front with a tungsten bead and plenty of Loctite. It remained to remove the bend on the front hook. A decent pair of pliers is the tool of choice: JW recommended holding the barb in a pair of hackle pliers in order to prevent the dangerous bit of steel flying out of sight! Sorry, I did not get a photo of the finished product.

JW retrieves Snakes hand-to-hand (pull – pause) rather than roly-poly. He was not averse to using a 15lb bs leader.

I have heard that JW may join Invicta. I am sure he would be pleased to answer any questions.

A few personal after-thoughts.

Recent competition results at Grafham suggest that the various shrimp patterns have not been nearly as effective as Snakes. It has been argued that it is because the water level rose faster than the ability of the shrimps to follow suit. Whereas this may apply to the natural bank, it does not explain the loss of effectiveness on the dam where the change in level was mainly vertical.

The winner last Sunday was using a “Chammy Snake” motionless, held vertically in the water using a bung. I wonder what the trout thought it was eating or perhaps attacking?

I noticed that JW went to great pains to achieve maximum flexibility between the front and rear hooks by using the Rapala knot and super thin braid. I realise that the front hook was removed to minimise catch-ups with the rear hook but I wondered if the extra flexibility still caused snagging?

Lots of anglers have reported a high proportion of pluckers which failed to materialise in a firm take. I wonder if these trout may have been attacking the front of the lure? There are several sea trout flies which retain the major hook at the front and incorporate a “wee double” in the tail. Any thoughts?

David Jones

Photos Below:



Jeff Wilkinson in action



Underwater shrimps showing bubble retention



Showing the texture and the colour of the 50/50 dubbing mixture for the Grafham shrimp



Black hopper



The 1 minute blob!