

Seven North Country Spiders For A Season



Wednesday, 6 May 2015 | Rob Smith

2 Comments

It could be said that in 1916 with the publication of Edmonds and Lee's *Brook and River Trouting*, the North Country school of fly-fishing was pretty much at its zenith. The Dales-rivers were yet to be blighted by the onset of modern farming practices and the insidious use of pesticides and fertilisers. The motor car, although still in its infancy, afforded wealthy anglers the opportunity of good access to many rivers without the crowds and traffic problems of today. Even the scourge of moorland gripping which would later have such devastating effects on our Dales rivers was yet to feature on the drawing boards of the men from the ministry.

In the early days of the last century the old classics of northern angling literature such Theakston, Jackson and Pritt, though still relevant were, however, starting to be challenged by an up and coming breed of modern angler. Fly patterns, that were once considered essential, were beginning to be discarded as the new generation sort to streamline the number of patterns needed on the Dales-rivers. Old favourites and duplicates were consigned to the dustbin of history, as anglers recognised there was simply no need to carry the vast catalogue of patterns of say Theakston, Jackson or even Pritt.

Edmonds and Lee were clearly at the vanguard of this movement, as the two authors' motivation seems to have been to both modernise, and streamline, the numbers of flies carried by the northern angler. Examples of the two authors' modern thinking can be seen in the correspondence between Harfield Edmonds and G.E.M. Skues, indeed several of the patterns included within *Brook and River Trouting* such as the 8b March Brown were given to Edmonds by Skues. Along with these Skues patterns, Edmonds and Lee also introduced several modern pattern interpretations of already established favourites, whilst at the same time pruning the superfluous duplicates found in the works of their predecessors such as Pritt.

For today's modern angler, the often the simple beauty of the North Country patterns blinkers the entomological reasoning behind the patterns existence. So it is well to point out that these simple patterns are steeped in centuries of entomological reasoning, with many patterns devised by keen angler-naturalists. Although T.E. Pritt, for many, the leading figure of North Country school, included several patterns from keen amateur entomologists so as Theakston and Jackson. He nevertheless, mistakenly believed there was no entomology behind the patterns. And it was not until the publication of *Brook and River Trouting*, that Edmonds and Lee firmly put entomology back at the heart of our relationship with the North Country wet fly, and further Pritt's process of rationalisation.

However, even today we need to ask ourselves whether there is a need for another streamlining of patterns. And can the angler suitably cover all the four major insect groups found on our dales rivers with under a dozen patterns. The answer is of course an emphatic Yes!

If a careful consideration and selection is made, it is possible to cover all hatch and fall situations with just seven carefully chosen patterns.

Of course any form of fly selection ultimately comes down to a matter of personal choice, and all anglers will have their own favourites that are always found on the cast, no matter what the hatch situation. However, with the following seven patterns I am confident of covering all eventualities on the freestone Dales rivers.

Black Magic

A clear example of the ever changing and forward thinking nature of the "North Country" school, can be seen with this relatively modern pattern, invented in the late 1960s by Frederick Mould. This pattern is quite simply one of the best trout flies ever invented, and was devised by Mould for use on his frequent trips up from Oxford to fish the Bradford Waltonians' beats of the River Wharfe in the 1960s. These prime beats originally stretched from the old bridge below Bolton Abbey and down to the village of Addingham, and were for many years under the stewardship of the local river-keeper Jim Wynn, himself an inventor of many novel trout and grayling pattern.

It is on these beats that Mould found himself in a quandary as to how he could effectively imitate the large numbers of black gnats and midges that he found in the slow back eddies during the summer months. His Black Magic pattern fitted

- [Blog Home](#)
- [New Products](#)
- [Store Events](#)
- [Shows & Game Fairs](#)
- [Trout Rods](#)
- [Salmon Rods](#)
- [Fly Reels](#)
- [Waders](#)
- [Fly Tying Blog](#)
- [Trout Fishing](#)
- [Salmon Fishing](#)
- [Clothing](#)
- [Tenkara Fishing](#)

the bill perfectly, and is today without doubt one of the most effective diptera imitations there is. From March through till October and, even into the serious grayling months of winter, the Black Magic covers a multitude of tiny black flies when it is dressed in the appropriate small sizes. During the high summer months when our freestone rivers are at an all-time low, and trout seem extraordinarily difficult to tempt, Mould's Black Magic often saves the day, either fished singularly or as the top dropper in a team of three. I've simply lost count of how many times this pattern has saved me from the ignominy of a blank day.

Later on in the year as the memory of the trout season fades into the November mists and the frosted grass crackles under my feet. I give this fly a flash of fine red tinsel ribbing, which beguiles grayling on into the harder frosts of a Dales' winter.



Black Magic

Hook – Kamasan B525 Sizes 16, 18 & 20

Body – Black Uni-Thread

Thorax – Peacock Herl

Hackle – Black Hen

Winter Brown

For the angling historian this pattern is a confusing one and arguments can rage over whether the Brown Owl and the Winter Brown are in fact just variations of the same fly. Curiously, in early fly lists and manuscripts the Brown Owl and Winter Brown are often twinned together, which could point to one being a variant of the other. Which came first is hard to tell, however the first known mention of both patterns dates back to James Pickard's Wharfedale fly list of 1794.

However, it is T.E. Pritt in his 1886 publication "*Yorkshire Trout Flies*" that the division between the Winter Brown and Brown Owl clearly starts to widen, and the dressing of the Winter Brown starts to utilise the under-covert feather of the woodcock. Earlier lists and manuscripts make no mention of whether the feather used was either a under or over-covert, so it is possible that the original Winter Brown was dressed with the over-covert of a Woodcock which has the same chestnut hues as that of a Tawny Owl over-covert found in the Winter Brown. It is following Pritt's publication that the two patterns become wholly separate, and the confusion regarding the lineage of these patterns stems. So much so that 30 years later, Edmonds and Lee repeat Pritt's example and seek to divide the two patterns entomologically to be imitations of trichoptera and perlidæ respectively. However, the good old Winter Brown happily covers a vast number of needle, stoneflies and sedges, and is a good point fly that can be used all season long. Although it is generally thought of as a Spring and Autumn pattern, I have nevertheless found the Winter Brown to work well throughout the whole of the season, particularly in the months of May and June when needle and stonefly hatches are at their peak on the Wharfe and Ure.

I never like to see the exposed tying silk that is sometimes seen on poorly dressed examples. And so I dress this pattern by wrapping the peacock herl head first, before moving on to wrapping the hackling, forming the silk body, and then whip finishing directly behind the woodcock hackle.

Winter Brown

Hook – Kamasan B525 Sizes 14 & 16

Body – Orange silk

Head – Peacock Herl

Hackle – Woodcock over-covert

March Brown

Many years ago when I was nobbut a lad, I attended a Fly Dressers Guild meeting at which two famously grumpy Yorkshiremen were almost coming to blows over the merits of imitating the March Brown on Yorkshire's rivers. One side rather forcefully stated that the true March Brown was not found in Yorkshire and so could not be actively represented by this fly pattern. Whether the population of true March Browns is both large and widespread enough to fully justify the entomological reasons for this pattern version I will leave up in the air. However, it is well to point out that the River Tees has long been known to have healthy populations of the true March Brown. And as the River Tees forms Yorkshire's traditional boundary with County Durham, we could therefore argue that half of the river along with its insect populations fall within Yorkshire!

However, from a fishing point of view I stand in the affirmative camp. This version of the March Brown is a suitable imitation of not only March Browns but also Large Brook Duns, of which there are healthy and widespread populations and also at a pinch various sedges.

Though this dressing first came to prominence with Edmonds and Lee's publication, it is in fact a pattern originating from J.W. Reffitt's fly list. Reffitt was a close friend of Pritt and a fellow member of the Kilnsey Angling Club and along with Pritt,

a co-founder of the Yorkshire Fly Fishers Club. During the late 1890s Reffitt became acquainted with G.E.M. Skues, and gave the dressing and some tied examples to Skues, who equally did the same through later correspondence with Harfield Edmonds. This Reffitt dressing of the March Brown gives us a classic example of how various patterns in Edmonds and Lee's publication were influenced by both the ancient and modern thinking. And in the case of March Brown 8b, both philosophies at the same time!

I rate this pattern very highly and would happily fish it every day of the season, its snipe rump hackle dances and quivers with the currents flow, and prove a very enticing lure to trout. During a couple of memorable July days on the Wharfe below the hamlet of Drebley, this version of the March Brown just seemed to beguile every trout it was cast to. Fished as a point fly up through the boulder-strewn pocket water, that is such a feature of this famous beat, it brought up trout from everywhere with unfailing regularity.

March Brown

Hook – Kamasan B525 Sizes 14 & 16

Body – Orange silk dubbed with rabbit fur dyed a reddish orange

Rib – Fine gold wire

Hackle – Snipe rump

Tail – Snipe rump fibres

Waterhen Bloa

In my opinion this is simply one of the finest trout flies ever devised and is rightly at the heartbeat of all North Country fly-fishers consciousness. Mistakenly, some anglers believe the Waterhen Bloa is only a fly for the early season, and simply fail to appreciate the patterns effectiveness all season long. Let's be clear, the Waterhen Bloa imitates not just Large Dark Olives but a vast array of other adult baetis, and when dressed in the appropriate sizes it will take trout and grayling on every day of the year, no matter what conditions.

Although, modern convention is to dress many North Country patterns with just a ghosting of dubbing, it was not always thus. And any detailed look through ancient manuscripts and fly lists shows the patterns to be more heavily dubbed than is now the acceptable norm, indeed even the hackling was of a more dense fashion than is now the case. It would be interesting to see how North Country patterns dressed in the true traditional way fared with today's trout, I doubt whether there would be any appreciable difference in catch rates. However, this pattern is significantly improved with the meagreness of dubbing.

A good trick when trying to achieve a sparsely dubbed body is to strip all the fur from a mole skin and keep it in a small tub. Then after you have suitably waxed your silk, just touch-dub the silk with the mole fur. Wrap the silk in tight touching turns and then if there is still too much dubbing for your liking, simply use your thumb nail to remove the excess.

Like Mould's Black Magic, the Waterhen Bloa also lends itself to being fished singularly to trout feeding on emergers. Often, when the trout have fooled me in to thinking they are taking dries, but are refusing every offer, my brain clicks into gear and I snip off the offending dry and tie on a Waterhen Bloa with instant success. This pattern gives the perfect impression of an emerging olive struggling to break free from the surface tension of the stream. And as such when fished as part of a traditional team of three, convention dictates it to be positioned on top dropper, where floating down in the surface film, it again looks every inch an emerging or crippled dun, and regularly entices even the weariest of trout.

Waterhen Bloa

Hook – Kamasan B525 Sizes 12, 14, 16 & 18

Body – Yellow silk dubbed with mole fur

Orange Partridge

Along with the Waterhen Bloa and the Dark Snipe and Purple, the Orange Partridge forms the North's holy trinity fly patterns. Although some authorities have suggested that this old pattern is a simple variation of the old Wharfedale Brown Watchet pattern, minus the herl head. The reality is however something quite different, with early lists of Wharfedale flies never featuring the Orange Partridge until Pritt's publication of 1886. It seems Pritt took his inspiration to include the Orange Partridge from Henry Wade's "Halcyon" published in 1861. And although Wade was himself a Yorkshireman, the pattern more probably originates from County Durham, where Wade lived, worked and fished.

Like many of the North Country wet fly patterns, the Orange Partridge has the ability to effectively cover several hatch and fall situations in one go, which in turn adds to its popularity amongst anglers. Although Pritt preferred to fish this pattern on the Dropper, the reality is that no matter where the pattern is placed within the team, it is a marvellous fly. Sadly over the past decade or so, some fly-dressers have become somewhat fixated in regards to the correct shade of orange silk to use for this pattern. And here again convention and reality becomes somewhat confused. This stipulation by some in regards to the correct silk shade has no historical basis in fact, as various ranges of orange shades were used throughout the years by many different anglers and fly-dressers. It is not until Edmonds and Lee's publication of 1916 that a standardisation of silk shades was sorted in regards to the various North Country patterns.



Orange Partridge

Hook – Kamasan B525 Sizes 12, 14, 16 & 18

Body – Orange silk

Hackle – English partridge, the brown speckled feather taken from the middle of the back.

July Dun (Blades)

This cracking little pattern is now pretty much forgotten outside and a few North Country fly aficionados, which is a shame, as it is one of the best imitations of Caenis, Spurrings and other small light coloured naturals. For me it has pretty much usurped both the Snipe and Poult Bloas and has become my standard go to pattern when the "lighter" stuff is emerging. On one memorable evening fishing behind St Peter's at Addingham, this old "Sproats" pattern fooled countless trout and grayling. As I slowly inched my way upstream through the shin deep run of water and on to the slow ponderous glide of the Suspension Bridge pool.

Fish just seemed to be mesmerised by this pattern, taking it at on nearly every third or fourth cast. As the late evening sun turned the river's surface to a pink blush and increasing numbers of trout could be seen leisurely sipping down emergers and crippled duns. Blades' July Dun fished singularly to these rising trout worked its magic. In the evenings of summer months, when used as part of a team, I generally use it on the 1st dropper with the Orange Partridge on the point and the Black Magic as a top dropper. That way I cover the caenis and spurwing hatches and the Orange Partridge and Black Magic covers various returning spinners and black-fly.

July Dun

Hook – Kamasan B525 Sizes 16 & 18

Body – Straw or very light coloured silk

Thorax – Peacock herl

Hackle – Fieldfare rump (I use hackles from a stuffed Fieldfare purchased from Ebay. However, a suitable alternative is Coot over-covert or California Quail neck feather)

Yorkshire Greenwell

Many years ago, more than I care to mention in fact, I met an old dales angler on the riverbank just below Mucker on the River Swale. As all passing anglers do, we discussed the fishing and what the trout were taking. Up until that day I was rather dismissive of this great old pattern, mainly due to the poor quality of the hitherto flies I had seen up to that point. Nevertheless, as the old angler opened his fly-box and gave me a couple of his flies, he remarked "Greenwell is the only fly you'll need lad, use it every day of the season when the olives and on" as I looked at his flies rather sceptically and thought "Funny looking Greenwell". These were I later found out a traditional Yorkshire variation on the good canons famous pattern using woodcock slips for the wings instead of blackbird. Logically, the mottled tones of the woodcock slips should not represent the grey wing shades of various olives. However, this pattern does work and like all North

Country wet flies, it really comes into its own when through pacey water such as riffles and runs. The hackle, while dressed quite sparse should nevertheless be quite long and extend about 5mm beyond the point of the hook bend when wet.

Ever since that chance encounter in the late nineteen eighties this variation on the Greenwell has always occupied a prominent place in my fly-box, and has accounted for thousands of trout over the intervening years. Sadly, I never met that old dales angler again or ever found out his name. However, a couple of years ago whilst researching North Country flies and anglers for a forthcoming publication. I chanced to find references to William Greenwell and Swaledale. For twenty years before returning to take up his duties at Saint Mary-The-Less, Durham. William Greenwell was a curate without parish and lived in Brampton-On-Swale and the surrounding area, no doubt taking the opportunity to fish this beautiful dales river.



Yorkshire Greenwell

Hook – DKamasan B525 Sizes 14 & 16

Body – Yellow coloured silk well waxed to an olive shade or Pearsall amber silk and ribbed with fine gold wire

Wings – Woodcock wing slips

Hackle – Coch-y-Bonddu or Furnace hen

And there we have my “Magnificent Seven” spiders for a season’s fishing on the dales rivers. No doubt some will question my selection and be quick to mention several of the famous patterns I have let out. Nevertheless, these seven patterns have been the basis of my season’s fishing for more years than I care to remember. And having stripped my fly-box of the superfluous, I feel this canon of patterns will ably cover any situation on the freestone rivers of the dales. Give them a try, you might just find yourself stripping down and re-organising your flybox.



Leave a Reply and share your opinions!

John Osbaldeston

Thursday, 7 May 2015 | 10:49

If your club wants a GOOD speaker with great river fishing knowledge, this is the guy !!

▶ [Reply...](#)

Ian Porter

Thursday, 7 May 2015 | 16:28

Brilliant article, got me tying spiders for the first time in years!

▶ [Reply...](#)

Name: *

E-Mail Address: *

Will not be published

Comment: *

4 + 5 = *

Please add the two numbers

SUBMIT COMMENT

Site

[Terms & Conditions](#)
[Postage & Delivery Information](#)
[Privacy Statement](#)
[Site Map](#)

Fishing Links

[All Water Fly Fishing](#)
[Pennine Fly Fishing Guides](#)
[Yorkshire Fly Casting](#)
[Walton Hall Fly Fishery](#)

Local Links

[The 3 Acres Inn](#)
[Fly Dressers Guild](#)
[Cumbria Fly Fishing](#)
[Grayling Society](#)

Contact

[Contact Us](#)
[Read Our Blog](#)
[Site Map](#)
[Newsletter](#)

© 2014year Fly Only.

Fly Only, The Willows Business Park, Near Bank, Shelley, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. HD8 8LU. Tel: 01484 600555