

The 'one fly' question strikes again (no pun intended)

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Introduction

As someone with more than a passing interest in all things fly fishing, I've noticed over the years that the question leading with: *"If you could use just one fly ..."*, has been a catalyst for countless fly fishing discussions. In fact – and I didn't know this until I started to draft this article – there are even 'one fly' fishing competitions held both here in the UK and overseas. (I have led a sheltered life).

Anyway. I thought it would be of interest to fellow Groe Park and Irfon Angling Club (GPIAC) members (indeed, to all who might read our club website), to discuss the 'one fly' question. That is, in the context of my own experiences from fishing GPIAC water for several years. I will do this based on the question:

"If I could only use one fly on GPIAC water throughout the season, what would it be?"

Being the author of this article means, that I can make my own rules up as I go along, so I've decided to answer the question in terms of both one wet fly (i.e. nymph) and one dry fly. To explore matters further, I will also list my GPIAC 'top-five-countdown' – a kind of *"in reverse order the results are..."* that precedes these 'superlative' wet and dry flies. How good is that!

Now let me contextualise matters before I start. (Please read as *"Don't hit me with a big stick when you next see me on the riverbank, because you didn't catch using these flies"*).

What follows is purely a collection of my own opinions. Although, having tried more fly patterns on GPIAC water than I care to remember; at most times of the year; in most weather – and water – conditions; I hope what follows is of interest.

Of course, you don't have to agree with what I've written here. But whether you agree or not, I hope you enjoy reading the article!

My 'one' wet (nymph) fly

In reverse order, I would rank the top five nymphs as follows (cue: 'pick-of-the-pops' theme tune)...

Wet rank fifth: Orange and Partridge Spider

A very simple fly, both to tie and to fish but one whose ability to provoke a take can be temperamental in my experience. Nonetheless, in certain conditions it is very effective and for me has induced numerous slow, steady and determined takes, when everything else has failed.



What, I understandably hear you say, are these 'conditions'? Imagine a slow run, such as the slightly deeper water upstream of the Aber pool. It's a warm day, the sun is shining and there are few clouds in the sky. The fish are tantalisingly sipping the surface in a seemingly random pattern. And you've thrown your entire box of fluff at them. To no avail.

Enter the Orange and Partridge Spider – tied contemporary fashion with bright orange thread (apologies, purists). Fished down and across as (or as part of) a spider team, just below the surface. Gets the Grayling every time. But beware, if conditions aren't right, leave it in the fly box.

Wet rank fourth: Copper Wire PTN

I stumbled across this little beauty while on the web, searching for 'boobys', 'nymphs', 'baby dolls',

‘suspenders’ and ‘dabblers’. *I jest*. (Who names these flies anyway?)

This version, of what is arguably one of the most famous trout flies, is tied solely with very fine copper wire and Pheasant tail barbs.

I like it for three reasons: i) so do the fish, sometimes; ii) it sinks easily and gently which is perfect for fishing the duo; and iii) because on those days when our quarry are otherwise occupied, small Chub will always inquire of it. Indeed, those Chub whose mouth can accommodate a size 18 hook are even catchable with it.



Wet rank third: Weighted Hare's Ear

What can one say about this icon of a fly?

Arguably, the most reliable all-rounder – and this includes on GPIAC water. Use with a lead wire underbody to get it down more quickly.

I prefer Rabbit fur and guard hair when tying this on size 14 hooks or smaller.



Wet rank second: Tungsten Nugget

Simple to tie, simple in design, simple to fish. Yet a bullet-proof pattern for Grayling all year round.

On slower glides, I like to offer this singly and upstream in the warmer months; and as part of a team using either Czech nymph or French leader, when fishing for Grayling, October onwards.

The tungsten makes it a great sinker. The pattern can easily be varied, both in terms of body colour and by the addition of different ribs. Squirrel fur makes a good dubbing material and for the rib, stretched mirage tinsel is particularly attractive. (Hold each end of a length of large-width mirage tinsel and pull; when stretched it takes on a lovely metallic blue hue).



My 'number one' wet fly: The Irfon Bug

And so, to conclude this first section, my one wet fly would be: The Irfon Bug'.



This is a pattern I developed and named myself. But I'll be realistic here; there is only so much that can be claimed as 'new' or novel regarding the application of fluff, synthetics and wire to a fishing hook.

Hence, as the picture shows, the tail end is attributable to that notorious inventor of Grayling flies, Frank Sawyer, or his 'killer bug' to be more precise. Note the wraps of copper wire at the bend of the hook, for example. The body meanwhile – there is no discernible thorax – was inspired by my liking of a 'buggy' hare's ear thorax.

Finally, the (all-important on this pattern) red head, came about by accident. I usually tie my weighted flies in this way for easy identification in a fly box, but I found out unintentionally, that alternatively coloured heads make for a much less effective fly. At least, on GPIAC water.

Smaller sizes can be fished traditionally or as a dropper on the duo. Larger sizes can be fished as per the Tungsten Nugget earlier.

My 'one' dry fly

I've caught most of my GPIAC surface fish (including the odd Chub and Dace) on a small 'armoury' of dry fly patterns. As above, I list these in reverse rank order as follows.

Dry rank fifth: Parachute variants

Tied simply has proven best for me, on a straight shanked hook (for some reason I just can't seem to take to Klinkhammers).



The tail is optional, a micro-dub body in charcoal grey, green, or 'natural', and a brown (or brown and grizzly) hackle.

The colour of the post can be to personal taste – I've not noticed any effect of its colour on the fly's efficacy.

Dry rank fourth: CDC Shuttlecock Buzzer

No tail, very slim body of micro-fine dubbing in dark or olive green, with little definition to the thorax.



I have tried more pronounced and different coloured bodies; and added thorax covers, but none of these has improved my catch rate. Choose a CDC colour to suit the prevailing light conditions. Black is effective when fishing the (predominantly West-facing) Wye stretches upstream, on a bright afternoon.

My only gripe with CDC is when it gets slimed up – which by definition is when you are catching fish and least want therefore, to mess about trying to dry or change your fly.

Dry rank third: Brown Bumble

I thank Lance for putting me on to this one. (For those who might not know, Lance is our Club Secretary).

It's a kind of Griffiths Gnat with Peacock herl body and palmered brown genetic hackle (with barbs trimmed along one of its sides for a 'light' dressing).

It floats well, offers good visibility and on 'the day', Grayling love it. Downside is, that due (I think) to the palmered hackle, it can cause twists in lighter tippets. However, I'm reliably informed (at the time of writing) that the use of hen, rather than cock hackles, helps alleviate this problem.



Dry rank second: Balloon Caddis

This is my second-best performing dry pattern. Although officially called a Balloon Caddis, Lance affectionately refers to it as a 'Lighthouse'. This at least adds testament to its visibility, regardless of conditions!

It sports a Deer Hair wing that extends slightly over an orange polypropylene equivalent. The dubbing is squirrel, and the thorax cover is dense foam colour to personal taste. The key to this fly being effective is in my opinion a distinct coloured egg sac at the tip of the body, which extends its butt into the surface film.



As with most dry fly fishing, avoid dragging it at all cost if fishing for Trout or Grayling, but I've been told, that GPIAC Chub like to chase a dragging fly. (An experience yet to savour).

My 'number one' dry fly: Simple Midge

Simplicity rules the day again. This somewhat basic dry has done the business for me, especially during 2015.

Cock hackle barbs for the tail, grey, green or brown micro-dubbing body, and a generous helping of brown hackles. Note that the hackles are trimmed underneath the thorax area, allowing it to sit snugly in the surface film. This also lets the fly present horizontally, rather than sitting up like it's begging for food. Resultantly, in my view, this encourages takes.



For me the Simple Midge has worked equally well right through the season; is good when the fish are 'finicky'; is virtually indestructible; floats well even having been chewed (by the fish, not me) and surprisingly for its size, is quite easy to see in various light conditions.

I use the Simple Midge whether fishing by sight, or simply 'speculating'.

Concluding thoughts

If you came here looking for a silver bullet, I'm sorry that there isn't one. Rather, all of the above is solely my opinion, or perhaps more accurately, my preferences. You are free to disagree with anything in this article if you want to.

This is because (aside from being a fundamental democratic right) fishing is all about personal preferences and confidence. The latter, for me, overrules everything. If you are not confident that you are on fish; or are using the right fly; or method of presentation; or anything else for that matter, your fishing will suffer because your mind will not be focussed.

All of the flies photographed herein were tied by yours truly – and no flies were injured during the writing of this article. To view more examples of my flies, why not visit my online shop? The web address is given in the header above. Alternatively, if you want some flies tying or simply want to 'say hello', please do email me (address below).

Finally, and in no particular order, a personal plea:

- Please only handle fish with wet hands. Dry hands ultimately kill fish.
- Please use barbless hooks. Some of the patterns shown above are barbed, but I always flatten these before use.
- Above all else, enjoy your fishing. ☺

Wishing you 'tight-uns' and 'bendy rods',

Gary

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