



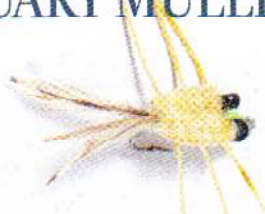
Ian's Claret Bumble p.27



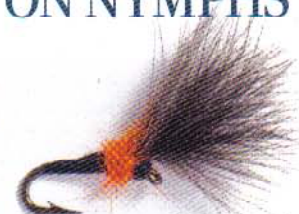
Flashback Damsel Nymph p.34



Sewin Snowdrop p.16



Casa Blanca Crab p.77



Orange Thorax Shuttlecock p.72

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Tying fat-back tubes for UK salmon

Somerset's Sawyer

Tips from the keeper of the reservoir

Boys on the black stuff

Tempting sippers from Irish flats

Moody lady

Are grayling really
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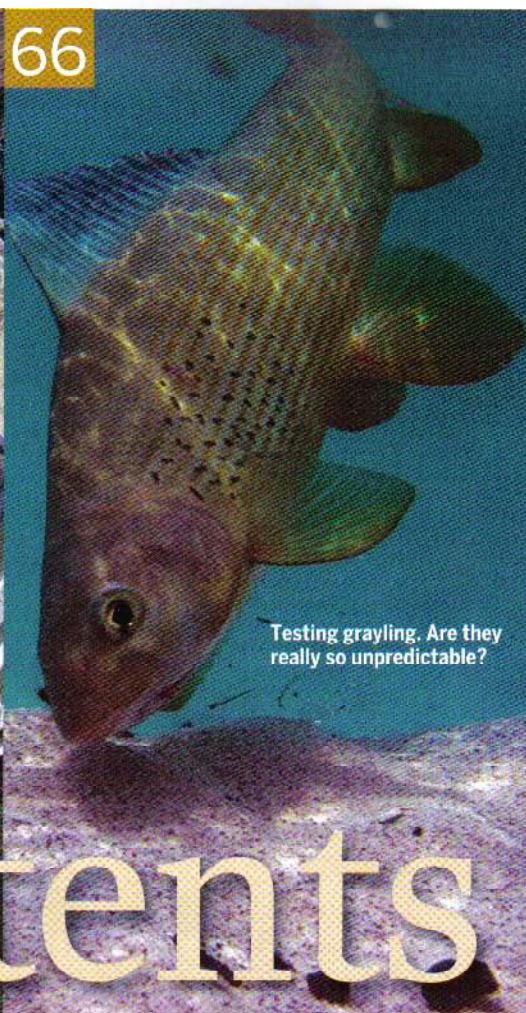
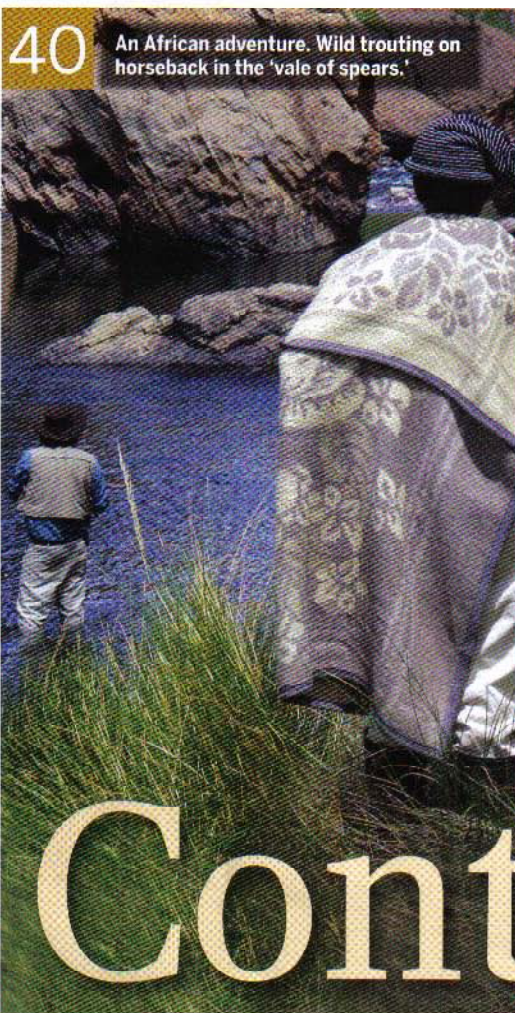
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40

An African adventure. Wild trout on horseback in the 'vale of spears.'

66

34



Testing grayling. Are they really so unpredictable?



Damselfly hatching? You'll need Mick Huffer's secret weapon.

Contents

REGULARS

4 Shot of the month
Fishing the Alaskan picket-line.

5 First cast
Barrage of criticism.

6 News...
S&TA calls in the law; Killer shrimp found in Grahams; Tees barrage "doesn't work"; Border Esk licence-dodgers get off the hook; River Garry proposal falls short ... and more.

9 Letters
Don't tarnish Leven's sparkle; River rights; Registration needed; Cavalier attitude to Tees; On the perch; Feel good fly fishing... plus comments from the FF&FT Forum.

45 A View from the Chalkstreams
Gordon Mackie says river partnerships are great, but asks if anglers are still in control.

80 Vintage valuations
Chris Sandford looks at collectable catalogues; fishing tiles; and a vintage brass reel.

86 Web Directory
Readers' first port of call when surfing the web for reliability and quality.

88 Stillwater Scene
Scots third gold in a row; Results from Fishing for Heroes; Fishery reports.

98 Reflections
His rods and reels. By Diana M Erskine-Hill.

PRIZES, TRIPS, AND OFFERS

12 Fly Tyer's mug
Exclusive bone-china mug for the bench designed with a Ripley cartoon.

12 FF&FT baseball caps
Exclusive logo'd caps in green or stone specially designed for fly fishing.

32 Free Hardy EWS fleece
... when you subscribe to FF&FT this month!

65 Quiz COVER STORY
10 limited edition Wheatley Grafx fly boxes must be won!

73 Salmon school 2010
Learn to fish at the peak of the season with FF&FT on the Annan.

73 Sandison signed books
Exclusive! The 'staggering' *Rivers & Lochs of Scotland* and *Angling Lines*, both signed by the author.

84 The essential challenge
This month the free materials we supply should be used to design a tube fly.

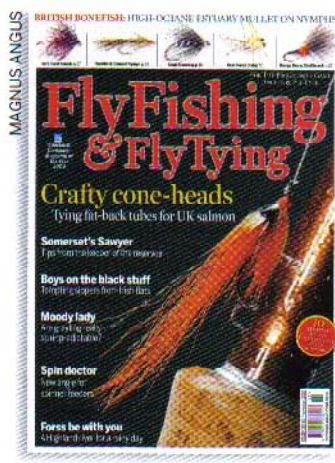
87 Come to grand slam country!
Fish for tarpon, bonefish and permit with editor, Mark Bowler in Mexico next March.

REVIEWS

22 On the bench
CdC in natural colours; pre-formed bodies; wee trebles.

90 Tackle bag
Speyworks 13ft #8/9; Greys GRXi+ #7; Wychwood Drop Dry wader bag; Snake Brand guides.

NOVEMBER 2010

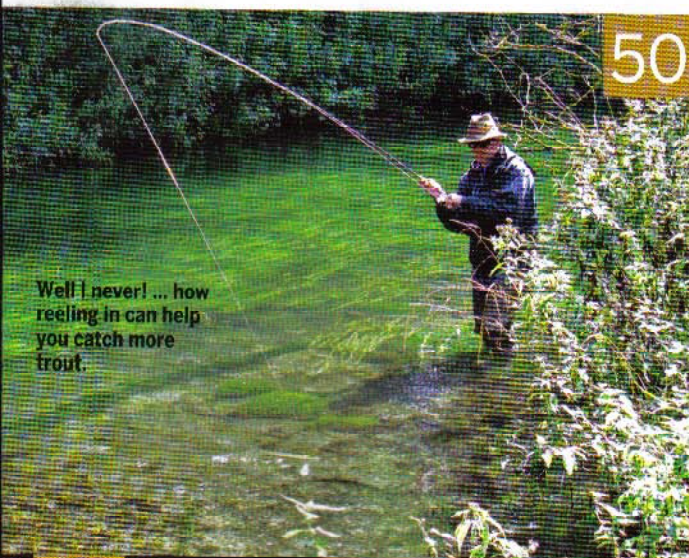


Autumn colours.

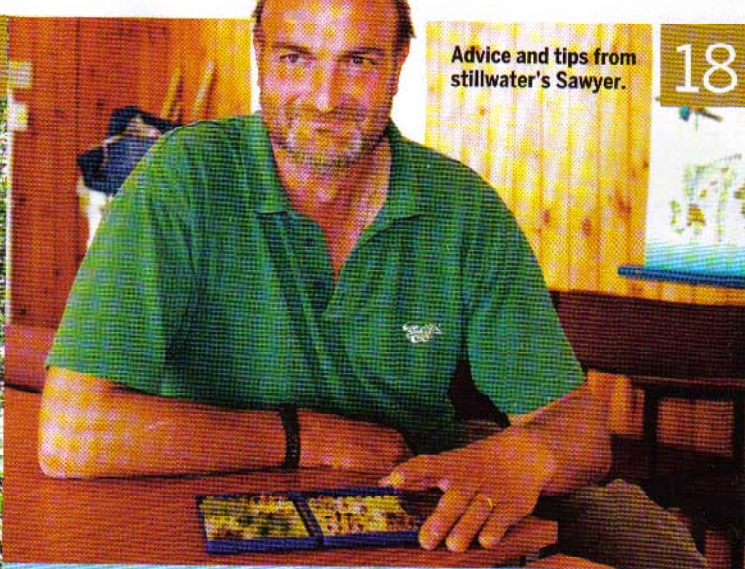


When the wild Irish browns are on the 'black stuff,' Specialist flies for smooth glides.

70



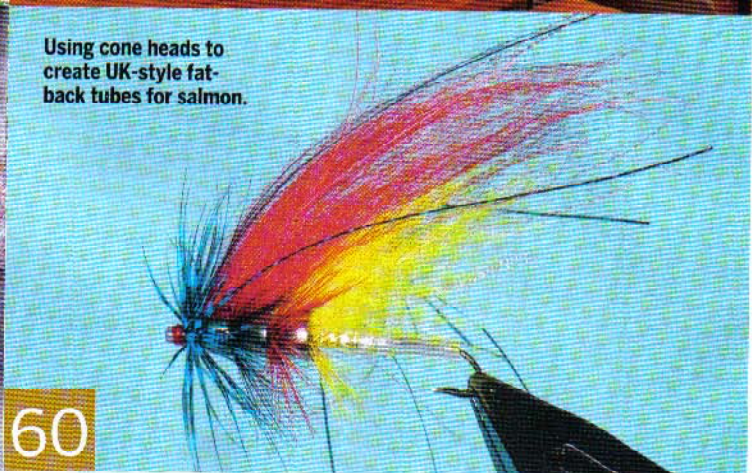
Well I never! ... how reeling in can help you catch more trout.



Advice and tips from stillwater's Sawyer.



Tying Bumbles Western Isles style.



Using cone heads to create UK-style fat-back tubes for salmon.

FEATURES

21 It's a rum old doo

... especially when you catch yourself, says Mike Harding.

24 Licence to fish?

Border battle: Esk test-case brings out the big guns. *FF&FT* investigates ...

28 Sandison's Scotland

Bruce Sandison discloses a Highland spate river which can offer great fishing to the rain-drenched holiday-maker; focuses on Tongue Angling Club; and asks how catch-and-release and commercial netting can make sense?

40 Trekking for trout

Tony King was so determined to fish Lesotho's mountain streams that he saddled up a horse to get there.

66 The lady and her moods

Biologist Vincenzo Penteriani explains why grayling can appear moody and unpredictable.

74 Mexican gold

Mark Bowler reports back from the *FF&FT* reader trip to the get-away-from-it-all, grand-slam venue.

78 Dear Santa ...

FF&FT looks at gift ideas for the forthcoming festive season.

FLY-FISHING TECHNIQUES

18 Inside information

Charles Jardine visits Sutton Bingham reservoir to receive tips and wisdom from its own version of Frank Sawyer – the fishery manager.

46 Tactical flies

Pink Quill Spinner. Jeremy Lucas believes he has discovered the key to making his spinner stand out in a mass autumn fall.

50 Lessons from the season

Peter Lapsley learns to reel in to catch more; and details facts about Mayflies and hooks that he didn't know before 2010.

56 Off the coast

Coastal fly-rod, Colin Macleod seeks the 'British bonefish' and is left trembling.

70 Boys on the black stuff

Gwilym Hughes shows us how those difficult shy, sippers of smooth glides can be fooled.

FLY TYING

14 Black magic

The experienced angler, Moc Morgan tells us the two simple secrets to sea trout success.

26 Wild Trout's Wish List

Ian's Claret Bumble. Neil Patterson uncovers how to tie a Western Isles style Bumble.

34 Textbook Tying

Mick Huffer describes how to tie and fish his 'go to' Damsel Nymph, and divulges a secret weapon variant.

60 King cones

Frank Moors demonstrates how coneheads can be used in a practical fashion to create UK-style fat-back salmon tube flies.



A fly for highly-charged estuary mullet.

The lady and her



Experiments by biologist **VINCENZO PENTERIANI** attempt to explain why grayling sometimes appear 'moody,' unpredictable and refuse even the most proven dry flies

When fly fishermen started to focus their attention on the grayling as a quarry for dry fly, it became immediately notorious as a strange and 'unpredictable' fish. All grayling fly fishermen agree that it is difficult to predict the reactions of this fish to the dry fly and, as a consequence, our fly boxes contain a great number of highly variable imitations – from the fancy Red Tag to the imitative Klinkhamer Special. However, if we analyse this situation objectively, we all must admit that it is impossible that such fish, the result of millions of years of evolution, do not follow a series of rules that mirror its adaptation to the social and physical environment in which they live.

This is why, several years ago, I started to perform several field tests, and



Autumn grayling: what triggers them to rise (or refuse) a dry fly?

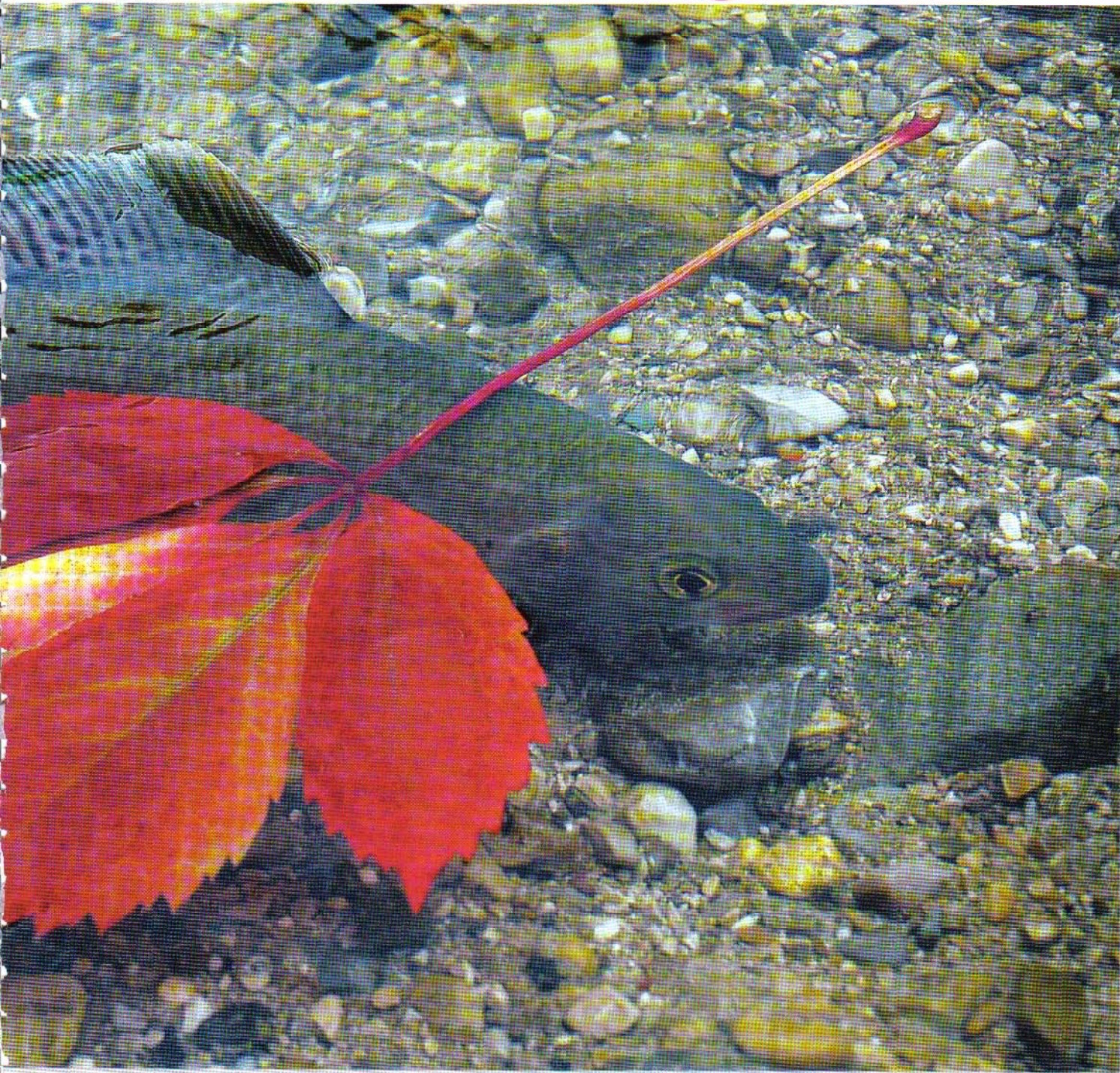


Purple Ugly, a great fly for grayling from northern Sweden, given the right conditions.

spent many hours observing the reactions of grayling to dry flies fished on several European rivers (mainly Finland, France, Italy, Slovenia and Sweden) to try to improve our know-how of the 'enigmatic' reactions of grayling towards dry fly patterns and presentations. Accurate behavioural observations of grayling during dry fly presentations have the potential to help us to gain information which may help to improve our understanding on the reactions of this wonderful fish to our flies.

This 'scientific' approach also took

mood swings



into account the analysis of grayling social typologies (solitary individuals against schooled fish), behavioural response to the stage of insect emergence (before, during, just after, or during no insect emergence), and grayling responses to fly features, presentations and tippet diameters.

In addition, I analysed grayling behaviour under different conditions (from the typical flood-plain rivers with slow-moving water and constant food availability, to the narrower mountain streams characterised by fast, tumbling

water, and an irregular food availability on the surface), as I surmised that water-dependent conditions may determine different types of reaction from the grayling.

School lessons

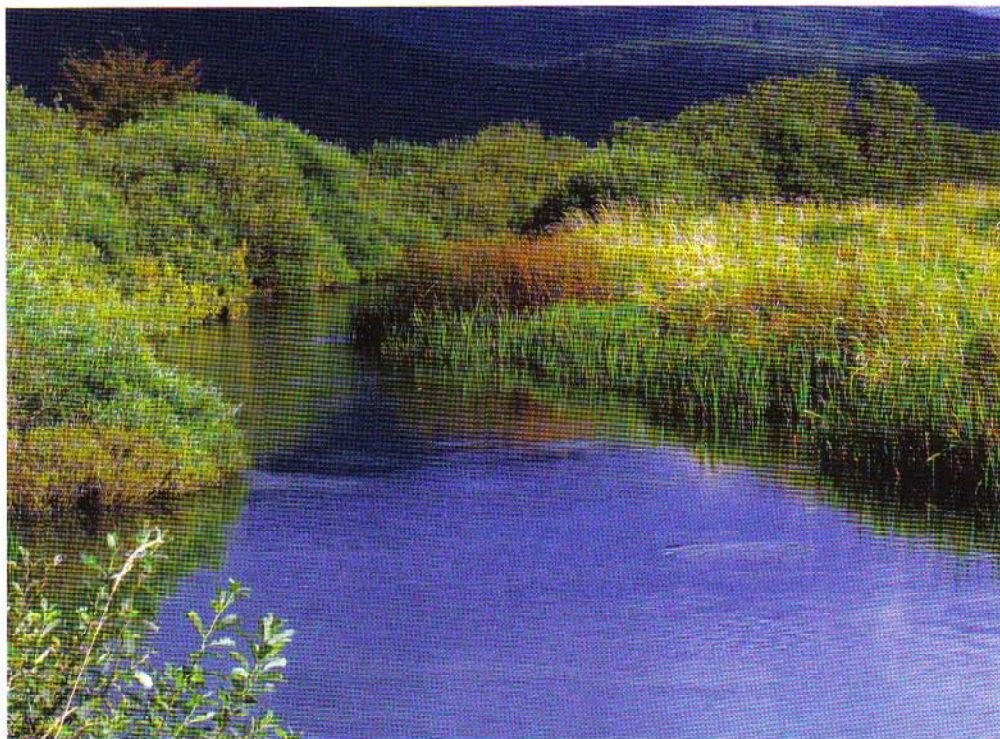
I started by considering the main social structure of the species, ie the school. This form of grouping represents an efficient anti-predator strategy, which models the individual behaviour of each fish in a very peculiar way and, consequently, partially explaining why

grayling in a shoal may appear so 'strange'. When fly fishing for grayling, we should consider the implications of a 'lifestyle' within a group, which is a key of understanding the 'psychology' of this fish. First of all, when we present a fly to a fish, we should consider that numerous individuals of the school contemporaneously see both the imitation and the reactions of its neighbours. A group works like a unique entity, in which the duty to share the resource with your neighbour is compensated by a more secure situation.

◀ If an individual detects a danger, all the school members receive the information. Consequently, what follows your fly presentation (a refusal, the hook-up of a school member, the fly dragging in the current) will interact with more than one individual at one time, and this will determine subsequent reactions of the school, as in a chain reaction. For example, an unnatural reaction of a school member to a dry fly has the potential to condition the reactions of all the other grayling in that shoal. The end result of this group strategy is that our chances of success decline with time spent fishing over the shoal. The chances of a grayling rising to a dry fly at the first cast are over 80%, dropping to 40% after our fly has passed over the school for the third time ... Under such a scenario, the best fishing strategy might be to avoid insisting fishing over the same group: the more casts you make, the longer it will take for the school fish to return to a normal, secure, situation.

However, we should not forget the individual experience of each member of the school, which can complicate the parameters playing a leading role in our fishing success. Several elements can help us to understand if we are using the right fishing strategy, demonstrating that the grayling is not 'strange' but only adapted to its social and natural environment. The scientists' behavioural concept known as 'distance of renunciation' represents the length covered by the fish to take the fly before abandoning and returning to the school: the longer the distance, the closer we are to the best imitation. Obviously, the reaction of an individual will always be observed by several other school members, thus conditioning successive reactions when the fly is presented again. Several other elements linked to the natural history of grayling may also contribute to determine their behaviour, such as levels of hunger, annual and circadian rhythms, as well as availability and quality of food.

Red Tag: recognised as a grayling favourite since 1850, when they are 'on red.'



What's on the menu?

Refusals are a typical scenario of grayling dry fly fishing. The relationship between grayling feeding activity and successful flies has the potential to give us useful information for a correct approach. I collected information on the food preferences of Slovenian grayling in four rivers (Unec, Obrh, Sava and Soca) to detect what artificial flies were successful under specific feeding circumstances. Diet description was obtained by analysing the food in grayling stomachs, collected by a stomach pump just before the fish was safely released.

My analysis of grayling diet reflects the importance of upwinged flies (mainly nymphs and emergers), as well as terrestrials. The scarce number of sedge is quite surprising, but this was probably explained by local conditions. Therefore, grayling diet seems to confirm their role of 'upwinged fly-eaters' (mainly in the nymphal form), their interest in emergent and sub-adult/imago insects was also very high. When relating the specific diet of grayling with their dry fly preferences, duns undoubtedly represented the most 'functional' and frequently efficient of dry flies; in other words, this is the type of fly imitation that best worked in many different situations. In fact, duns were really effective not only during hatches of upwinged flies (ie the specific 'dun' situation) or when grayling were feeding on nymphs (when also emergers were excellent), but also when grayling were predating

A grayling rises, but which dry fly will you choose to present to it? The author has discovered that, in a hatch, matching the insect closely can increase your chances by 65%.

on other groups of insects.

The situation in which grayling seemed to be most selective was during a dun hatch. In fact, under such a situation, only duns and emergers were really effective. Terrestrials were another group of flies that proved to be very effective dry flies for grayling, catching them in a number of situations, except during upwinged hatches.

Whilst presentation and drag, local conditions of water and stream speed, features of the imitation, individual specific reactions of the grayling, and so on, will determine the ultimate success of our dry fly, correct understanding of the feeding choice of the grayling that we are targeting will undoubtedly increase our catch-rates. The choice of a dry fly that specifically imitates the size, shape and colour the grayling's natural prey (ie, the dominant insect in the diet) drastically enhances our chances of success. My experience here has shown that it can increase the catch by more than 65%. A very high percentage for a fish regarded as strange and unpredictable!

Patterns and puzzles

Pink bodies or yellow wings, a red body, two black wings, smarty tags, 'invisible' hooks, grizzly or cree hackles. Are these essential components of a grayling fly simply aesthetic, or the pinnacle of rational, functional fly fishing?

First, a question. During the first one hundred years of grayling fly fishing, during which thousands of people were confronted with this fish,

'The chances of a grayling rising to a dry fly at the first cast are over 80%'



hundreds of dry flies were considered as the best for grayling (and for this reason continued to exist across generations). Such flies represented the result of the efforts of many fly fishermen, some of them undoubtedly original and good observers, which were faced with grayling of different countries and, hence, under different local situations. If some of these patterns are still considered as efficient grayling flies, analysis of their main characteristics should enable us to select the best flies for grayling, as well as uncover some of the grayling's genuine 'preferences.'

To do this, I analysed 183 dressings reported in the classic grayling books by Broughton, Courtney Williams, John Roberts, along with L De Boisset, *L'ombre poisson de sport*, and Francis Walbran's 1895 book, *Grayling and How to Catch Them*.

I then used their main characteristics – for example, size, colour, hackle, tag, tails, etc – to form separate basic groups for analysis. In doing this I was hoping to reveal which characteristics are preferred by grayling, anticipating that the analysis would highlight some colours, fly sizes or specific dressing features particularly 'appreciated' by grayling.

I considered it important to take into account the colour of the tag because it is considered as an attractive element of a grayling fly. I also took into account the type of natural insect on which the imitation was designed, eg, sub-imago or imago, stonefly, sedge, midge, terrestrial and fancy.

Contrary to my expectations, no

The grayling's underslung mouth means it is well adapted to take items off the river bed, but not so good at taking flies off the surface.

specific or particularly interesting trends were obtained from this analysis. No real preferences for specific dressings or colours by grayling were detected by the analysis (main clusters simply reflected the entomological characteristics and classification of the insects) and, consequently, grayling seem not to have particular preferences for specific patterns of dry fly. Therefore, we have to be very cautious when considering the fly (and its colour ...) as the magic tool required to solve each grayling fishing situation. It seems that we cannot find easy solutions in a specific dressing, a body colour, or presence or absence of wings, except when the dry fly that we choose correctly reflects the feeding preferences of the grayling we are fishing for on that particular day. When dressing our flies for grayling during the long winter nights, we have to come to terms with the fact that the miracle fly dressing does not exist ... all dressings can be miraculous, if used in the correct situation! I'm afraid that, on the basis of my analysis, statements like, "... grayling are attracted to red bodies," or "... this fly with white wings is exceptional," seem to be nonsense, and the same fly that was found to be excellent on one afternoon, can be totally ineffective the day after, at the same hour, on the same water ... if the local conditions (and grayling needs, physical condition or behaviour) have changed.

At the end of the 1800s, in the last page of the chapter on flies and dressings, and after the presentation of twelve dressing of the dry flies indispensable for efficiently fishing the grayling, FM Walbran wrote in *Grayling and How to Catch Them*: "These twelve patterns are sufficient for any grayling river in this country, and may be fully relied on as having been thoroughly tested by the most experienced and successful fly-fishers". A few pages previously, Mr Walbran stated that: "... although a grayling may refuse a

fly a dozen times, he very often changes his mind at last". So, yesterday we had twelve dressings and grayling apparently "puzzling" and "unpredictable" ... Today, we have hundreds of available dressings ... and grayling apparently "puzzling" and "unpredictable!"

A century ago there were a lot of grayling (more than now), they were under a very low fishing pressure and the dressings were far less perfect than today. Today, we have less but more pressurised grayling, the available dry flies are infinite in number and very accurate in imitation, but refusal still remains the main problem. Perhaps we have not been searching in the right direction. Or we have only 'discovered' partial truths ...

Does tippet affect success?

The diameter of the tippet leader has frequently been considered to be one of the most important factors determining the success of dry fly presentation in grayling fly fishing. So, I tested this by using the same dry fly mounted on two different tippets (0.12 and 0.16 mm) and presented them both, at random, to the same fish. Although more tests need to be performed in the worst fishing situations (eg rivers characterised by very low streams and absolute water clarity), my results so far show that both the number of fly refusals and hooked grayling was not significantly affected by tippet diameter. This initial information seems to indicate that the effect of the leader's diameter on the catch rate of grayling is low, or possibly related only to very specific conditions. Another possibility is that tippet diameter could be positively correlated to the size of the dry fly. Of course, as anglers, we know it is not hard to suppose that when we are using a very small dry fly (eg an imitation of *Caenis*), a thick tippet can make its presentation appear unnatural because it limits the fly's movements in the surface currents.

Thanks to Agostino Roncallo, who tied most of the dry flies which I used during this work, and to Drs. Joze Ocirk and Miha Ivanc (Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia).

Vincenzo Penteriani is a biologist from Spain, and is one of the overseas area secretaries for the Grayling Society. He is currently working on a book on dry-fly fishing for grayling. ■