

Can Patterns of Flies...

Help us to understand puzzling Grayling Refusals?

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Pink bodies and yellow wings, brown bodies and grey wings, a yellow thorax, a red body and two black wings. Smarty tags and "invisible" hooks. Grizzly or cree hackles. The triumph of the aesthetic and narcissism or of the rationality and functionality? An exploration across the grayling flies searching for truth...

From the beginning of the grayling flyfishing, one of the aspects that most attracted fishermen, and in which most frequently was searched the answer to the enigmatic and apparently illogical refusals of this fish, has been the artificial fly.

Under this scenario, and in the context of our "explorations" of the fishing of graylings with a dry fly, a question had spontaneously raised in our mind. During these first 100 years of grayling flyfishing, during which thousand of people were confronted with the problematic behaviour of this fish, hundreds of dry flies were consecrated as the best for the grayling (and for this reason resisted across the time and generations). Such imitations represent the result of the efforts of many fly fishermen, some of them undoubtedly original and good observers, which were faced to the graylings of different countries and, consequently, in different local situations. It is true that a good imitation may represent the real solution to the continuous refusals typical of graylings, therefore the characteristics of such models should conceal the solution of the enigma. In conclusion, if some imitations are still today considered as very efficient flies for graylings, an unbiased analysis of them could give us useful information to select THE BEST FLIES for graylings, as well as discover some "preferences" of such a fish.

In fact, the main aim of this study was the identification of possible recurrent patterns (e.g. size, colour, structure, additive elements of dressings) characterising the classical and wellknown grayling dry flies. This might offer new information on fly pattern preferences of graylings.

How to objectively reply to such a question? The most important thing has been to find the way to analyse typical grayling dry flies in a totally unbiased manner. To do this, we followed a series of successive steps. First, we only considered the classical

grayling dry fly. That is we took into account the imitations that represent the original models, not still "contaminated" from the more commercial aspects of the modern flyfishing. To do this, we analysed 183 dressings reported in the following five books:

- (1) Broughton, R. 2000. The complete book of the grayling. Robert Hale, London, UK;
- (2) Courtney Williams, A. 1973. A dictionary of trout flies and of flies for sea trout and grayling. Adam & Charles Black, London, UK;
- (3) De Boisset, L. 1941. L'ombre poisson de sport. Librairie des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France;
- (4) Roberts, J. 1999. Flyfishing for grayling. Excellent Press, Ludlow, UK; and
- (5) Walbran, F. M. 1895. Grayling and how to catch them. The Flyfisher's Classic Library, Devon, UK.

Secondly, to try to order the apparent chaos of dozens of flies, we used a statistical analysis well-known to allow to make groups (clusters) on the basis of their features. The final output of such an approach has been a series of successive division and grouping of the fly sample on the basis of their similar characteristics, represented in the Figure 1. In such a graph, on the vertical axis are shown all the flies (for simplicity we only showed the principal groups and the most known dressings), whereas in the horizontal axis is shown the degree of difference among the flies or groups made by the cluster analysis (again, we only showed the principal elements). Each branch of the diagram (horizontal line) corresponds to a group, whereas the vertical junction lines among branches represent the level of distance (similarity) among groups. Groups very different among them are characterised by major distances (i.e. longer vertical lines). If the flies for graylings really represent the solution to the grayling enigma, the analysis should reveal what characteristics, common to many flies, are the preferred by the grayling. If this would be the case, we would expect that this analysis should evidence some colour patterns, fly sizes or a specific dressing features particularly "appreciated" by graylings.

Finally, always to avoid unnecessary complications, we only considered 8 parameters for each dry fly, that is: (1) the fly size, measured as the size of its hook (if a same model has been dressed on several hooks, we created classes of size); (2) body colour (13 classes); and the presence or absence of (3) hackles, (4) wings and (5) tails. We only considered the presence or absence of these last three components because they most contribute to the final structure of a fly than to its colour. Moreover, we included: (6) presence or absence of a tag and (7) the colour of the tag. In this latter case, we con-



sidered important to take into account the colour of the tag because it is considered as an attractive element of the fly more than contribute to generate a specific structure (e.g. as in the case of an upwinged imitation, in which the wings try to suggest the appearance of a dun). Finally, the last variable was (8) the type of the real insect to which the imitation refers, grouped in: (a) sub-imago and imago, (b) stonefly, (c) sedge, (d) gnat and midge, (e) terrestrial and fancy. In the case that a same model was dressed in both a wet and dry form, we only considered the dry dressing. Finally, for each dressing we only considered the original one and not the successive variations.

Differently from what expected, no specific or particularly interesting trends were obtained by the analyses, the main group being represented by 2 main groups and 2 subgroups. Flies were grouped by: (1) the colour of the body and (2) the type of the fly. Two main subgroups were obtained for the group 1, that is (1a) flies with a dark body (e.g. Black Snipe, BWO, CDC Pupa, Gim River Fly, Green Frutzel, Hodal Emerger No.1, Olive Maltard Dun) and (1b) flies of other colours (e.g. Bécasse de Devaux, Honey-Dun Bumble, La Favorite, La Loue, La Peute, Lunn's Yellow Boy, Orange Otter, Needle Brown, Sand Fly), whereas the group 2 was separated in (2a) imitation of terrestrials + fancy flies (e.g. Ants, Aphids, Apple Green, Badger Red Tag, Black Bibio, Bradshaw's Fancy, Cochy-bondhu, Cuiard, Green Insect, Grey Palmer, Jackson's Blue Midge, Killer Beetle, Knotted Midge, Norman's Fancy, Para-ant, Red Tag, Silver Witch) and (2b) imitation of aquatic flies (e.g. Adams, August Dun, Autumn Dun, Baby Sun Fly, Blue Dun, Buck Caddis, CDC Magic, Cinnamon Sedge, Gloire de Neublans, Grey Duster, Grayling Fiddler, Greenwell's Glory, Infallible, Iron Blue Dun, Klinkhåmer Special, Lunn's Particular,

Olive Sedge, Parachute Adams, Popa Caddis, Red Quill, Red Spinner, Rough Olive, Rusty Spinner, Sparkle Dun, Universelle).

As an end result, no real preferences for specific dressings or colours were detected by the analysis (main clusters simply reflected the entomological characteristics and classification of the insects of our rivers and surroundings) and, consequently, graylings seem not to have particular preferences for specific patterns of dry fly. Therefore, the most important consequence of such a result is that we have to be very cautious when considering the fly as the magic tool able to solve each grayling fishing situation.

Under such a scenario, we cannot find easy solutions in a specific dressing, a body colour or the presence or absence of wings, except when the dry fly that we choose correctly reflects the feeding scenario of the graylings we are fishing. When dressing our flies for graylings during the long nights of the winter or just before to go fishing, we have to always consider that does not exist miraculous fly dressing... all dressing can be miraculous, if used in the correct situation.

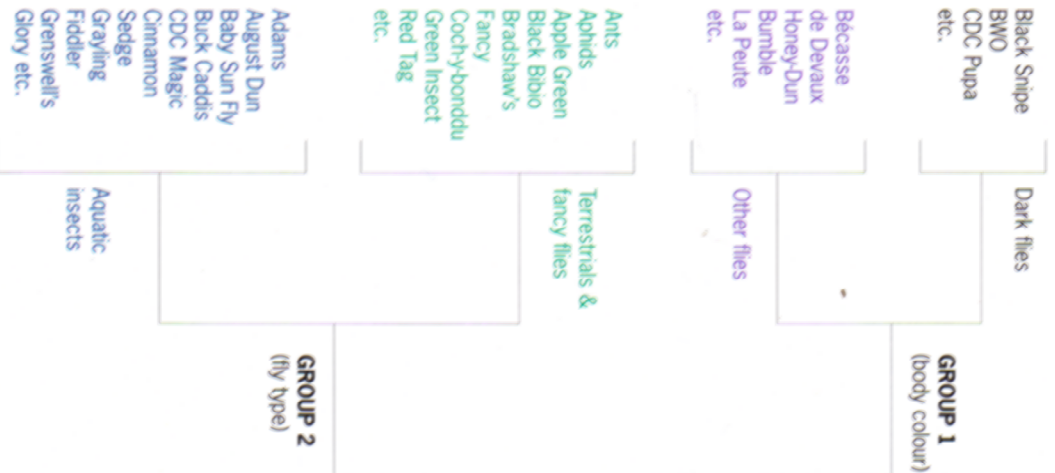
That is, on the basis of the outputs of the present analysis, statements like "...graylings are attracted by red body..." or "...this fly with white wings is exceptional..." are a non-sense, and the same fly that showed to be excellent one afternoon, can be totally ineffective the day after, same hour, same water... if the local conditions have changed.

At the end of 1800, in the last page of the chapter on flies and dressings, and after the presentation of 12 dressing of the dry flies indispensable for efficiently fishing the grayling, F. M. Walbran wrote on his book *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". Few pages before, at the beginning of this same chapter, Mr. Walbran stated that: "...although a grayling may refuse a fly a dozen times, he very often changes his mind at last...". Yesterday: 12 dressings and graylings apparently "puzzling" and "unpredictable"... Today: hundreds of available dressings and... graylings apparently "puzzling" and "unpredictable..."

This is an important point that need reflection... One century ago there were a lot of graylings, more than now, they were under a low fly-fishing pressure and the dressings were much less perfect than today. Today we have less, more fished graylings, the available dry flies are infinite in number and very accurate, but refusals of graylings are

still the main problem... But we continue to find a solution of the grayling enigmas in our fly box... Probably, if after the thousands of fly fishermen that were confronted with graylings and the dozen of years that have flew away from the beginning of the modern flyfishing, nobody found a solution to the high rates of grayling refusals in dressings, this means that we do not have searched in the correct direction. Or we have only "discovered" partial truths of a more complex system...

Figure 1



Grayling in Norway

The Gjerfioen Fluefske Experience

Dr. Hugo Martel

Belgium Area Secretary

My curiosity was highly stimulated by reading in "Grayling" the article from Snorre GRØNNÆSS about the grayling fishing and his personal approach about it in the Trysil river in Norway. As a friend told me it was probably one of the best grayling rivers of Scandinavia, I did not hesitate and went with some friends to discover the Trysilelva, in the province of Hedmark, near the Swedish border and to meet Snorre.

Nearly 200,000 big and small lakes and countless rivers make from Norway (with a surface of 323,750 km² for 4.5 million habitants) a real fisherman's eldorado.

The Trysilelva is a wide river of 60 – 100 metres with various types of water and a lot of typical grayling glides. The history of the fishing was described in the previous article about Gjerfioen Fluefske. Snorre has now under his management 7 km of the river in a unique landscape and pleasant surroundings (it remembers me Canada) south of the little village of Plassen. There is a bag limit of 1 grayling and 40cm is the minimum size.

The trip was without problems. From Brussels to Oslo (flight of 2 hours) and then some 3 hours with the linebus to the little town of Nybergssund where we met Snorre. With his thirty years old van (his "fishing office" as he said) he brought us to the cabin in the flyzone at hardly 50 meters from the river. First we had done some purchases in the local supermarket as we had to cater for ourselves for a

