

# SPRING BLACK

*Try this twist on a North Country classic, urges Rob Denson*

**H**OW TIME PASSES. It's six years ago to the month that occasional T&S writer Bob Smith sent me a box full of the most enchanting and exquisitely beautiful North Country flies to photograph for his now classic book *The North Country Fly: Yorkshire's Soft Hackle Tradition*. I spent countless hours shooting them; much of the time I just gazed through the macro lens, admiring the way a few wisps of fur and feather harmonize to create the illusion of life. It gave me a real sense of how alluring these delicate, diaphanous creations can be to our quarry. Simplicity, as always, is the key. A deft touch helps, too.

One of the bonuses of photographing other people's flies is that by seeing them in the flesh, and breathing them in, so to speak, you become inspired. Much more so than just seeing them in print. Another bonus is that, more often than not, you get to keep them.

One of my favourites from the dozens I shot for Bob's book was the Spring Black, which, according to Bob, pre-dates William Lister of Wharfedale, who first documented the pattern in 1712. Apart from being yet another simple little beauty to photograph, the Spring Black gave me an idea. Now, if you were paying attention last month, you'll remember that I mentioned twiddling sparse, lightweight nymphs on a floater to tempt trout that were "bulging" as they took ascending pupae very close to the surface. The Spring Black - or to be precise, a slight variant - has become one of my first choices for such occasions.

Originally conceived and fished as an early-season midge pattern for the North Country streams, I saw no reason at all why it wouldn't turn a few heads on stillwaters. Midges are midges, trout are trout, and a fly with a 300-year heritage must have something going for it. And fly-tyers are fly-tyers, and have to fiddle about. A couple of slight twists, including some twisted tinsel, a matter of weeks after receiving Bob's parcel, and the Spring Black variant was ready for its first outing on Stocks Reservoir. On this particular outing, the bulging buzzer-feeders were not in evidence - a cool March breeze and a good ripple saw to that - but the Spring Black variant did account for half-a-dozen, clean, lively rainbows, including a couple of overwintered residents. Fished on the top dropper, with some sparse Diawl Bachs or Crunchers below, and tight to the margins, they were kept high in the water with a floating line and a medium-paced figure-of-eight retrieve.

In the five seasons since that first outing, I've encountered the bulgers many times, and shown them the Spring Black. They like it. My usual MO when the fish are a matter of inches below the film is



**Body** Peacock herl, rubbed to remove some of the flue  
**Rib** Gutermann Sulky fine red holographic, twisted  
**Hackle** Black hen **Head** Two turns of peacock herl - not rubbed - in front of the hackle



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first of all to try the Spring Black on the tail. The hackle will help to hold the fly higher for longer than a skinny Buzzer pattern. If the flies are getting too deep too quickly, then the obvious solution is to form a washing line with two Spring Blacks - or maybe one on the top dropper with a Buzzer, Diawl or Cruncher in the middle - and a small black Booby or Hog on the tail. Mr Lister might not have approved, but it doesn't half work. **T&S**

## TYING TIPS

- To prepare the peacock herl for the body, simply run an eraser gently down the length of the herl once or twice, or run it between your thumbnail and forefinger.
- For the rib, double the fine holographic, tie in the loose ends of the resulting loop, then twist into a tight rib. This turns the tinsel into a very strong, fine "oval" tinsel.
- Two or three turns of hackle should be more than enough - keep it sparse.