

Black Griffith's Gnat

Rob Denson ties a variant of an American dry-fly that is as deadly on stillwaters as it is on rivers

IN APRIL 1990, I fished the Derbyshire Derwent for the first time, just below its confluence with the Wye. A cool Easter easterly made things a little tricky in the morning, as did opting to fish my lovely new Poly-yarn Sherry Spinners before lunch!

Help was at hand, in the shape of Chris Lea, the then proprietor of Bakewell's "Piscatoria", who issued the permits for that stretch, and was out to check on his guests. After scoffing at my fly choice, Chris deposited a couple of curious, spiky-looking little dry-flies into my box and implored me to try one soon. I did, immediately, and it worked. It worked, very well indeed, tempting countless browns, and my very first wild rainbow. The fly that I have to thank that day is also the fly responsible for lowering my interest in over-complicated tying - the Griffith's Gnat.

Like many classic flies, the provenance of the Griffith's Gnat is uncertain. George Griffiths of Trout Unlimited fame is often credited with its creation, though this appears to be a popular misconception. The story goes that George was shown the pattern by Walt Shaw as long ago as 1939. The fly was an instant hit with George, rapidly becoming his favourite dry-fly. The name Griffith's Gnat" stuck. It is still unclear, however, whether Walt devised the fly, or simply passed it on from an unknown source. The "Griff" stayed stateside until well after the end of World War II, when anglers began to travel again in earnest. Even then, it took its time, remaining relatively obscure on these shores until the 1990s.

Theories abound as to why the Griff works so well. Listen to them, if you must, then discount them. Trust me, there is only one reason; well, lots of little reasons, to be precise: dimples - lovely, shape-shifting, light-bending dimples. The Griff suggests a vulnerable insect on or in the surface film - where fish like them - like nothing else you'll ever tie. The hackle-points dimple the film, suggesting legs, life and struggle. Devilishly simple and supremely effective. Job done. Fish don't count tails or turns of rib; they look for life, or impending death, then eat it.

I've tied and tried the Griff in many colour schemes over the years - cree, ginger, Greenwell's, olive, badger - for the sake of matching the hatch. They've all worked, and worked well, but I rapidly came to the conclusion that the dimples are the key, and other than visibility on our part, colour is largely irrelevant. I now only carry the original (grizzle) and the Black Gnat pictured above. Of course, black is a natural and irresistible choice when small black stuff is on the water, but even better among white stuff - froth, foam, "soup" and bright light - being easily picked out



Hook Size 14-24 fine to medium wire dry-fly hook **Body** Peacock herl, one strand **Hackle** Grizzle cock (original), black (Black Gnat), or any colour you like **Thread** Black, white, or grey



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by both you and the fish.

Whatever colours you tie, don't miss out by thinking that the Griff belongs exclusively on the river. Loch, lake, tarn or reservoir, stillwater fish look for dimples too! Again, the Griff transcends issues of matching the hatch, and is every bit as useful and effective on stillwater as stream, if not more so. Vary the size, and buzzers, caenis and sedge are covered, as of course are gnats! **T&S**

TYING TIPS

- Lay base thread (eye to rear), tie in hackle (by the tip) and peacock at rear. Wind peacock to eye, followed by hackle.
- For added durability, run a drop of varnish along base thread before winding peacock.
- Genetic hackle is best, but not essential. Good-quality saddles will do, and are better than standard necks.