

mop fly is the latest craze but is unlikely to revolutionise baiting methods

## Do not be deceived the mop fly is no magical solution

## **Brian Clarke Fishing**

hat was a jolly good joke, the story a couple of weeks back that a fly made from clippings from a floor mop and weighted with a ball of metal behind the eye could be the irresistible lure that trout anglers have long pursued. Indeed, the amusement that the publicity for this alleged earth-shaker generated has not yet died away.

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Anglers have been trying to improve the effectiveness of the flies they make ever since Dame Juliana Berners published the first designs in 1496, but only the most fanciful thinks that a fly effective in all circumstances is possible and only the lobotomised would use one if it

emerged as it would remove all That has not stopped some from seeking immortality by trying. All manner of materials have been used

manner of materials have slight in the pursuit of the magic fly furs, feathers and leathers urine-stained wool from a ram's

scrotum not excluded.
Thousands of variations have been promoted over the years, many of them merely tweaks to established patterns. An extra turn of silk here, a minor change of shade there is claimed to have set a bomb ticking under the fly fisher's world and lo! — Cod's Wallop is in the headlines, only to be gone again before the ink is dry. The mop fly — a confection said to be so deadly that some want it banned — is just more of the same.

Anglers make several types of a generic term that covers imitations of real flies, of little fish large gaudy confections, some looking a bit like flies, some not. Anglers tie them with the aim of getting trout to react in one of three typical ways. The first hope is that a hungry fish will see the fly as food and try to eat it. The second — because fish are curious—is that a trout howing seen the fly will is that a trout, having seen the fly, will take it into its mouth to feel and explore it; and the third is that, because trout can be aggressive, a fish will attack and seize a pattern on

will attack and seize a pattern on sight, especially if others are near.

Traditional, imitative fly fishing on chalk streams is based on the first of the three. Imitative fly fishing was pioneered by Frederic Halford and George Selwyn Marryat, two wealthy, scientifically minded men who, in the late 1800s, studied the winged flies scientifically minded men who, in the late 1800s, studied the winged flies they saw hatching from the River Test in Hampshire and who created floating or "dry" flies to imitate them.

Two books under Halford's name

— Floating Flies and How to Dress Them (1886) and Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice (1889) effectively codified the art of dry-fly fishing as it is practised the world over today. GEM Skues pioneered imitations of the underwater, nymphal stages of the same species that he found hatching on the River Itchen in the

the same species that he found hatching on the River Itchen in the early 1900s. His flies, like those of Halford and Marryat, were designed to be accurate for size, colour and shape. All were around half an inch and all were drably coloured because the naturals are drably coloured.

In hyping the mop fly to the lengths that they did, reports described casts made by an angler on the River Test that allegedly showed the miraculous superiority of the new arrival over traditional patterns. First,

arrival over traditional patterns. First, a conventional dry fly was cast to a trout and was ignored — an entirely predictable result: trout see traditional dry fly imitations alongside natural insects weekly and become ever more discriminating. The difficulty of persuading a fish to take an artificial suggestion of the natural flies all around it, is what fly fishing is all about. So the fact that

nsning is all about. So the fact that particular fish refuse a particular fly proves absolutely nothing.

Next, a mop fly was cast and one of a group of fish immediately grabbed it, a result heralded as confirming the mop fly's magical powers. But again, this reaction proved nothing because like was not being compared to like. Teaser designs like the mop fly—heavily weighted unnaturally large heavily weighted, unnaturally large and unnaturally-coloured — are traditionally banned on the River Te and so the fish in question will likely have seen nothing like them before Any one of 100 weighted confections like the mop fly, cast among innocent trout in such circumstances, would

rout in such circumstances, would produce a similar response from a fish that is hungry or curious.

There is no doubt that on still-waters, where brightly coloured and often large patterns are widely used, the mop fly would, in experienced hands, catch some fish — but then pretty well anything would flies made hands, catch some fish — but then pretty well anything would: flies made of white wool like the baby doll, flies made from bright orange feathers like the whisky fly, flies made of differently coloured chenilles like the

montana patterns would all catch.
What is more, for good measure, all have in their time been banned and yet still trout and fly fishing thrive.
So yes, the alleged infallibility of the newcomer made a very good joke. But is the mop fly going to kill off fly fishing as generations have known it?

Are we all going to be murdered in Are we all going to be murdered in our beds? I think not.

Brian Clarke's angling column appears every month in The Times

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