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SOUTH AFRICA: R32.95 (VAT INCL) OTHER COUNTRIES: R28.90 (TAX EXCL)

Incorporating movement and sound into your flies

By Murray Pedder

Predatory fish hunt using some or all of their senses, depending on the conditions and available food. Sight, sound, vibration (water displacement) and smell all play a role. For the fly fisherman, smell is not a factor unless, of course, you are adding artificial mixtures to your flies, which may be common practice in other forms of fishing, but is certainly unacceptable in fly fishing. What is perfectly acceptable, though, is the incorporation of movement and sound. As fishermen, we all know how effective the famous Rapala lures with diving lips and rattles are. These lures not only present themselves to fish by sight but also through sound, vibration and water displacement.

Over the years, we have increased our success in every area of fly fishing, from trout to larger offshore species, and in this article I will be covering techniques to add movement and sound to your flies. Although the focus will be on only a few patterns, these ideas and techniques can be incorporated into many of your favourite flies, providing you adapt them slightly to benefit from the extra effort and to make the most of the addition of certain components.

ADDING MOVEMENT TO FLIES

I have seen so many ways of adding movement to flies over the years, and some fly-tyers go to great lengths that do not really warrant the time spent. The most practical and easiest ways are by incorporating either a plastic lip and lead keel, a plastic disk simply slid up on the front of the leader, or Marc Petitjean's Magic Heads, which are available in a huge range of sizes for large salt water patterns right through to small #18 nymphs. I do not see any use for the really small heads, but have used the smaller fresh water heads for damsel nymph and leech patterns.

DIVING LIPS

Over the years, I have included diving lips (similar to Rapalas) in a number of surface and subsurface patterns, from larger baitfish to damsel nymphs. The lips are easily fashioned from pliable plastic. Nowadays I use ladies' nails for the medium to large flies, and plastic from blister packs for the medium to small flies. It is important to prepare the lip so that it can be tied in with relative ease. Do not make it too large, as this will cause leader twist. The beauty of these lips is that they can be fine-tuned and trimmed with scissors once the fly is complete to get just the right amount of action. The all-important lead keel is a must, and if not included will not give you the action you should be getting.

PREPARING THE LIP

Ladies' glue-on nails are available at Clicks or Dis-Chem and come as a complete set including all the different sizes, from pinkie to thumb. They have a natural curve and are pliable, so they are perfect for diving lips on medium to large flies. Cut a section of the nail to a long tapered point, and tie it in before you tie any part of the fly. The plastic from blister packs comes in different thicknesses, but it is relatively easy to find a thickness that works well for smaller streamers and damsel nymphs. Cut a long triangle from a section of blister packaging and score it down the middle with the point of your scissors. This will enable you to fold the lip in half and create the curved lip that is inherent in the ladies' nails.

Left: Building sound into a fly by incorporating beads or rattles is a good idea when fishing discoloured water.

WIGGLE DAMSEL

Hook: Standard shank, wet fly, such as Grip 12004.
Lip: Plastic from a blister pack, prepared as described.
Eyes: Burnt mono.
Tail guard: Mono loop.
Keel: Fine lead wire.
Tail: Strung marabou.
Ribbing: Fine wire.
Body: Dubbing or wound marabou.
Wing case: Mottled turkey, Thin Skin, raffia.
Legs: Partridge or any soft hackle to suit.
Head: Dubbing or marabou.

You can apply this technique to any of your favourite damsel patterns. Just tie the fly on standard shank, include the lip, tail guard and keel, and your favourite pattern will have a whole different action.



WIGGLE MINNOWS

Any baitfish pattern can have a diving lip included, but stay away from a solid-bodied fly with no soft, long tail. I have included diving lips in flies for largemouth bass, largemouth yellows, trout, tigerfish and various salt water species. The salt water minnows and tiger flies do not last, and although I am comfortable with getting only one fish on a fly, the Magic Heads are probably going to be more practical for tigers and salt water species.



LARGIE MINNOW/ CRAFTY MINNOW

Hook: Gamakatsu B10S.
Tail guard: Mono loop.
Keel: Lead wire.
Lip: Ladies' plastic nail.
Tail: Either rabbit strip or Craft Fur, in various colours (black is the most popular).
Head: Dubbing brush made from Craft Fur or llama fibre, or a pre-made brush from Fishient.
Eyes: Dumbbell eyes.

BETTS BULLET HEAD

Betts Bullet Head is the first fly with a diving lip that I tied and is still one of my favourites. It can be fished on floating and sinking lines, and although originally designed for bass, I believe it will work for many other species. We often find ourselves using the old faithfuls and not experimenting enough. This particular pattern has such an unbelievable action, it is almost unfair to use it. John Betts introduced this fly years ago and it was his use of the lead keel that took diving lip flies to the next level. Combining foam, lead and diving lip was and still is ingenious. Tie up a few and test them in the pool – you'll be amazed! You can tie this pattern very large or fairly small for trout, so I have not specified hook size in the dressing. Colours and material selection are up to you. Just remember the long, soft tail and lead keel (below) and you are on your way.



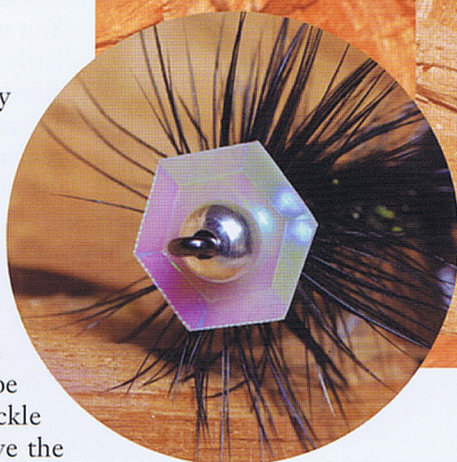
Hook: Of your choice.
Tail guard: Mono loop.
Keel: Lead wire.
Lip: Plastic from a blister pack, or ladies' nails.
Tail: Long, soft tail materials such as marabou, Flashabou, strung saddles, or a combination of these.
Body: Two lengths of foam, tied along the sides of the hook.
Eyes: Dressmaker's pins or doll's eyes.

LEAD KEEL

What is a lead keel and how do we include one? It is simply the point of most weight in an area of the fly pattern, and has two functions: to keep a fly riding the right way up, even when it is stripped very quickly (tyers often use it on wide-profile flies that have a tendency to swim on their side when stripped quickly); and, in flies with diving lips, to exaggerate the side-to-side action, as the weight works in conjunction with the lip by kicking the fly side to side way more than if the keel was not included. The keel is glued onto the bend of the hook with Super Glue, so you need to apply it before you start tying the fly or things can get pretty messy. You can vary the number of turns (but never fewer than five), and match the lead's diameter to the hook's wire diameter.

SEQUINS

The quickest and easiest way to get some extra movement from your larger nymphs and streamers is to slide a transparent sequin onto the leader with the concave side facing forward towards the butt end of the leader. This technique works well with stillwater and river flies. The sequins are available in different sizes and can be kept in a separate box in your tackle bag. Using only a sequin will give the pattern a slight side-to-side movement with a little bit of a wiggle and vibration. To increase the action, add a small lead keel to the bend of the hook. The sequin can also be built into the pattern. First, depending on the action and weight you are looking for, slide a metal or glass bead onto the hook. Once you have included the sequin and bead, you can continue tying the fly as you normally would. Adding a sequin will really pay off when combined with flies tied with relatively long, soft tail materials such as marabou, rabbit strip and saddle hackle.



SEQUIN BUGGER

Hook: Standard shank, wet fly, such as Grip 12004.
Bead: Glass or metal bead.
Disk: Transparent sequin to suit hook size.
Keel: Fine lead wire.
Tail guard: Small loop of mono.
Tail: Marabou tied longer than usual.
Ribbing: Wire or oval tinsel.
Body: Chenille, Crystal Chenille, peacock herl or dubbing.
Hackle: Saddle hackle.



SEQUIN LEECH

Hook: Standard shank, wet fly, such as Grip 12004.
Tail: Rabbit strip.
Body: Palmered crosscut rabbit, or rabbit in a spun loop.
Disk: Sequin slid onto the tippet before tying the fly on.
Keel: Fine lead wire.

Note: The Sequin Bugger (above) and Sequin Leech (top) will have a better action when tied on standard-shank hooks as opposed to traditional long-shank hooks. To stop tail wrap, make the tails longer and include a tail guard.

MARC PETITJEAN'S MAGIC HEADS

In the early part of 2000, the Swiss tyer Marc Petitjean introduced the Magic Head – a pliable, plastic, cup-shaped component that can be tied into the fly or slid onto the leader once the fly has been tied. Over the last 13 years, anglers have taken a number of species using these heads. They are available in many sizes and can be cut with scissors to achieve less or more side-to-side action. Marc does not mention a lead keel, but if you want to increase the action, include one in the pattern. The two most practical applications, in my opinion, are on all minnow and baitfish patterns, as well as on damsel, leech and tadpole patterns. Using them is straightforward, so I am not going to discuss any particular pattern. Maurice Robertson and fishing friends have been taking good large-mouth yellowfish using them on some of their favourite patterns (below).



ADDING SOUND TO FLIES

Not a very comprehensive subject this, as there are only two acceptable ways I am aware of to add sound: with plastic or glass rattles that are available to fly-tyers and lure makers, and with the sliding bead technique.

A) RATTLES

If using rattles, go for the glass ones, as they create a much better sound, even though they are not as durable and will break more easily than the plastic ones. Flies that give off a sound are a good idea in discoloured water. Maurice tells me that a fellow angler is doing well with the Petitjean Magic Head and rattle included

in the usual patterns. Rattles can be attached to flies using shrink tubing, pushed into a foam body (bottom right), and some kits come with plastic sleeves to attach them to lures and flies. They are only really practical with larger flies.

B) SLIDING BEAD TECHNIQUE

Many years ago, we played around with a fly that would create a sound using beads, cones and long-shank hooks. The Tic Tic Fly was born at Highland Run for a night-fishing session, and the browns would not leave it alone! Rattles weren't an option, since we didn't have any with

us, and we thought we had created a completely new pattern. However, further investigation revealed that it had been done before. This sliding bead can be included in any baitfish or streamer pattern.

TIC TIC MINNOW

Hook: Any 4X - 6X shank.

Tail/body: Rabbit strip, saddle hackle, Craft Fur, Flashabou, or a combination of these materials.

Cone: Size to suit hook, glued in place.

Eyes: Stick-on or dome eyes.

Sliding bead: Brass or tungsten.

TIC TIC STRIP LEECH

Hook: 4X long shank, such as Grip 13812, #4 - #8.

Tail: Rabbit strip.

Body: Black rabbit in a spinning loop.

Cone: Size to suit hook, glued in place.

Sliding bead: Brass or tungsten.

With any sliding bead pattern, you need to dress the fly right at the end of the shank so that 90% of the shank is free of any thread and materials. Choose the right bead size and make sure the bead can move freely on the shank.

Finally, tie all flies onto the leader and tippet with a nonslip Loop Knot such as a Rapala Knot. This increases the action of any fly. Your retrieve of flies with rattles and sliding bead must be erratic and short and sharp to capitalise on the sounds the flies can give off. Happy hunting.

