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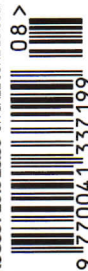
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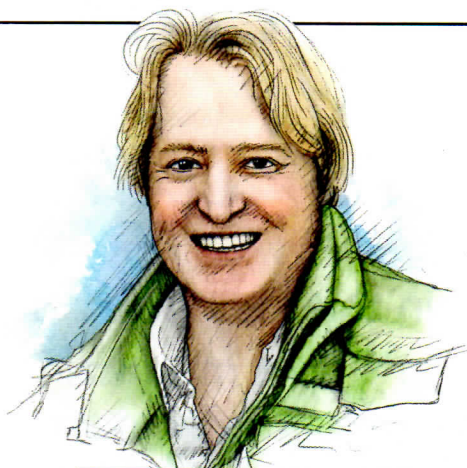
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## CHALK TALK

# Is it sporting?

*Simon Cooper* ponders good conduct on the chalkstreams

**I** FOUND MYSELF IN A BIT OF TROUBLE last year with the Mop Fly - writers in certain publications railed against this modern innovation for reasons I wasn't entirely clear about, other than the trout liked it more than them. This being the month of the Daddy-long-legs, it's worth asking why this fly stirs similar passions.

You are, it seems, either a Daddy man or not - I have actually witnessed one angler turning away from another in disgust at the sight of his companion tying one on, muttering something along the lines of "Not a real fly, (expletive) unsporting." But how can this be so?

Well, the crane-fly (*tipula spp*) is most definitely a "proper" fly, falling under the diptera group of flat-winged flies that includes hawthorn and gnats. Our grumpy friend might just accept that (I'm sure he uses a Black Gnat with aplomb), but equally retort that it is not a river fly, but a terrestrial, the larvae living along rather than in the river. Again, not entirely true: crane-fly larvae inhabit the mud in the margins of lakes and rivers.

So, in the absence of fact, it must come down to that old intangible, "unsporting", and the accusation that certain Daddy-long-legs patterns resemble a decaying fish pellet. Now I've handled tons of fish pellets in my time so believe me when I say they do not miraculously transform themselves into facsimiles of the Daddy-long-legs on impact with water. I think we could all probably name half-a-dozen flies that are more pellet-like.

In the end, I think the unthinking bias against the Daddy is visceral rather factual. Some people, for perfectly honourable reasons, don't like to take the well-trodden path to fishing success. For them, succeeding with the unusual is more pleasurable than succeeding with the usual. I applaud them, but don't denigrate the reasonable choices of others.

## Hatching this month

In the heat of August (OK, we can hope), it is all about making two smart choices: what you wear and how you fish. Do dress for the weather: ditch the sweaty wellies, heat-absorbing

green attire and heavy waistcoat. If you are comfortable in shorts, a T-shirt and sneakers, for goodness' sake wear them. Summer days are long. Fish are patient. It is sometimes a battle of attrition, so go for comfort rather than obeying a dress code that doesn't exist.

As to the hatches, it is all about olives, sedges and midges: bring Blue-winged Olive, Lunn's Particular, Klinkhamer, Daddy-long-legs, Red Buzzer and Killer Bug. But there is more to it than picking the correct pattern.

Fish who have lasted this long are wise. Stealth, presentation and accuracy are the order of the day.

I drop down to my lightest tippet and take care to apply shine-reducing mud to the final six inches.

*"In the end, I think the unthinking bias against the Daddy-long-legs is visceral rather than factual"*

## The keeper's fly

Depending on your perspective, Martin Browne, as custodian of the water on the River Avon once cared for by Frank Sawyer, has either the most enviable or unenviable post on the chalkstreams. Carrying the baggage of history is not always easy. The Avon is a very different river to the one Sawyer made famous during his prime years of the 1950s and 60s. But Martin, who is very much his own man, carries the mantle of the Services Dry Fly Fishing Association (SDFFA) river keeper easily.

The SDFFA is an unusual fishing club, the 6½ miles of continuous river, is run for the benefit of serving or retired members of the Armed Services, with the annual fees scaled according to rank. The membership is regularly in flux, as regiments arrive from, or depart to, tours abroad, though that may change a little with the 4,000 or so returning from Germany to new homes built on Salisbury Plain. Something of a mixed blessing as the already scarce natural resources of the Avon Valley will be impacted by the new homes.

I'm sure the irony of the SDFFA name and Sawyer's association with the Pheasant Tail Nymph has not escaped you. It certainly tickles Martin and you might also be surprised to hear his top tip for August is a dry-fly rather than a nymph. For on the Avon it is all about the Glorious Twelfth, that time around mid-August when trout switch from nymphs to dry-flies.

However, Martin has not entirely shaken off the Sawyer legacy, for his fly of the month is a lightly-coloured, dry Pheasant Tail, with the underside of the hackle trimmed and in ginger rather than the more common red. And if that fails, Martin recommends the fly he advises for every month of the season, another Sawyer classic, the Killer Bug. **T&S**

Martin's dry Pheasant Tail tied with a Sawyer thorax.



■ Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks, the chalkstream fishing specialists ([fishingbreaks.co.uk](http://fishingbreaks.co.uk)). He is the author of two books: *Life of a Chalkstream* and *The Otters' Tale*.