

Color Theory for the Hatch-Matching Angler

The hatch is on . . .
but is the proper-color fly?

Gary LaFontaine FFM Rocky Mt. Field Editor

THE ANGLER ON THE STREAM during those frenzied moments of insect abundance fusses through a myriad assortment of patterns. If the man is a meticulous soul who is prepared for the crisis, he creates a fly of appropriate coloration at streamside to match the natural. "Now," he announces. "This is it."

To which a skeptic might reply—"Don't believe your own eyes."

It is a fine ritual, indeed, for the studious fly fisherman to hold a natural and an imitation up to the sky to examine the specimens for comparison in the available light—a procedure based on the patent fallacy that trout and man view color in the same perspective.

The natural insect is a vibrant blend of shading, not a monochromatic wash. Visible colors of the spectrum combine in impressionistic mixture to lend the tone of dominant hue—but a sticky problem for the fly tier exists in the range of visible colors that contribute to the sum effect of the shade.

The human eye records color in a wave-length range of between 1/33,000th to 1/67,000th of an inch, but the trout eye additionally perceives

color of a lower range in the ultra-violet bands of the spectrum. The trout also views a color that is a combination of light-values, but the resultant combination is different than the color effect that a human eye perceives with the absence of shorter-length bands.

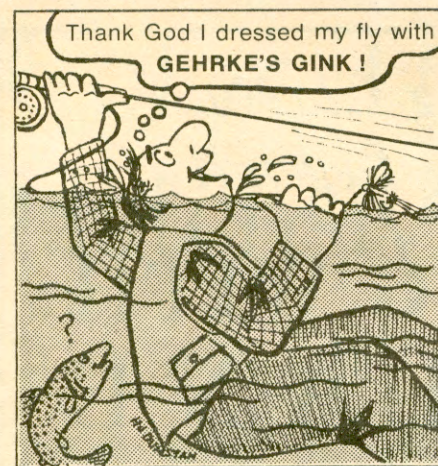
Some colors visible to a trout are invisible to an angler. Viewing a fly against the natural light of the sky displays the limit of the spectrum visible to man against a chroma-context of a

different background. A possible assumption is that even the sky is a varying shade to the violet-sensitive visual sense of the trout.

The direct rays of the sun act only upon the translucent portions of the artificial fly. Any color-view of the bottom of the solid materials of the fly is cast by rays reflected upwards from the streambed. Light bounced off the jumble of rocks spatters the underside of the artificial with a varying speckle



Pencil sketch by Jeffery Johnson



Color Theory

of intensity.

Pragmatic anglers of the English chalk streams often match a natural insect according to a proven color preference of the trout. The chosen body of the imitative pattern for the Blue-Winged Olive (*Ephemerella ignata*) is an orange quill. If the color correlation is not consistent with the perspective of the fisherman, in the evening dim the selective trout nevertheless chooses the fly which appears quite different to the eye of the angler.

Possibly the strongest argument for impressionistic blending of the materi-

als of artificial flies is a simple admission: The angler does not always know for certain which color-effect the trout perceives as dominant.

In the tying of patterns to match a natural insect it is simple to include in the dubbing blend an array of minute particles—wools, fiber acrylics, natural furs—in color specks too small to be particularly noticeable in the final mix. Even in the lighter blends of dubbing it is possible to incorporate fragments of pale green or fluorescent orange or mottled brown as bits of fine contrast to break the solid intensity of white or cream.

The two-fold benefits of the impressionistic fly are the color variegation and the color diversity. The varying chromatics of the material add a subtle shading reminiscent of the living insect to hint at possible tones unseen by the angler. The mix of the blend offers multiple color-effects to tempt the selective trout.

Gary LaFontaine, FFM's Rocky Mountain field editor, is a professional psychologist and lay entomologist. He also has a novel in the works and a fascinating new book on fishing western streams, the latter scheduled for publication by Mountain Press this winter.

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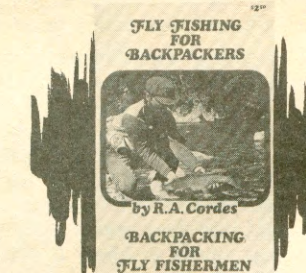


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