

My TRUSTED FLIES



I have been chasing salmon for a long time. I have sweated in neoprene waders, later changed to those “gifts from God”, the “lighter” brown waders by Red Ball, tried out hundreds of different rods, lines, boots, jackets, and most importantly all varieties of flies.

Text & Photos: Miki Äikäs

Year after year, the same flies remain in my fly box. Of course some patterns or individual flies have that extra “Something”, but mainly I have found those flies or patterns that are enough for me regardless of river or season – or at least I think so.

The major criterion for me has for years been simplicity, or better said, a simple fly tied from materials that work together and a combination of colors that seems to attract or aggravate the salmon.

We all have our own favorites, and therefore nobody can state with certainty which fly or color is the best alternative for salmon.

However, many fishermen follow certain habits when choosing their flies, myself included. When the water is colored, bright colors and flashy materials have shown their efficiency. Correspondingly, when the water is clear and the visibility is dozens of meters, certain styles and colorations of flies work well.

For a newly arrived fish a colorful fly is often the right choice even in clear water. A fresh fish is eager to strike, and sometimes it seems the fly reserved for the worst flood is the right weapon. On another day, the newly arrived fish will be spooked by flashing materials, which is when a subdued fly will do the trick.

These flies, or rather patterns, are the ones I use regardless of the water level, coloration, temperature, or other circumstances. Of course, I use many other flies as well, but these are the ones I chose for this article on the basis of the number of fish they have given me. There must be thousands of flies that are equally good or even better, some among my own patterns, but these sprang to my mind as soon as I started writing.

Whether the fly is important to the fish is a question no-one can answer – the most important thing is to be at the right place at the right time and to wish for some good luck. The salmon will certainly see the fly if it is delivered to the area where the salmon is. However, it is precisely the fly that the fish takes into its mouth, so the importance of the fly must be decisive.

For the last 15 years I have fished with monkey-winged flies

Vimu, Pumu, and Pearl Shadow. They have given me lots of salmon, and there are dozens of versions that anglers remarkably better and more experienced than I am using. A black wing and a body that is green, red, or pearly is a relatively certain choice on any river. I don't know why, but the salmon prefers that green-black alternative when the color of the water is normal. By that I mean the river's "own" color--clear, for example, or a shade of tea. I think a fly like this works best on a lighter line that makes it swim closer to the surface. Opinions vary about this, and even in my circle of friends some guys tie their own versions on copper tubes and fish them with sink lines.

I cast a fly like this with a float-belly line with an intermediate or number two sink tip. The flies also work on sink lines, but I want to let these flies swim in the pool "until the end"; when the line has done its course, the light flies still hover at the edge of the current and don't sink in the bottom. Many times the salmon will strike in very shallow water, and then "dangling" the fly there is the right way to trick them.

Ally's Shrimp is the "guaranteed" option

Ally is a real devious fly for the fish, and especially towards the end of the season smaller sizes like 10 or

even 12 are real poison to the old salmon. It works great throughout the season, and in my opinion it is at its best when fish travel in the river and new ones keep arriving all the time. The orange-black combination is really effective also for new fish, and if the color of the water is affected a little by rain, the orange color is still visible.

I think Ally's best features are its shape and color, and most of all the fact that it is one of the flies that practically never gets tangled enough to stop fishing properly.

I always use polar bear as the tail of my Allys, preferably tied on treble hooks. In the early season and midsummer, sizes 6-8 work faultlessly, and towards the end of the season I use smaller versions--size 8-10, depending on the river. In the Allys in the pictures I have used the Esmond Drury treble hook



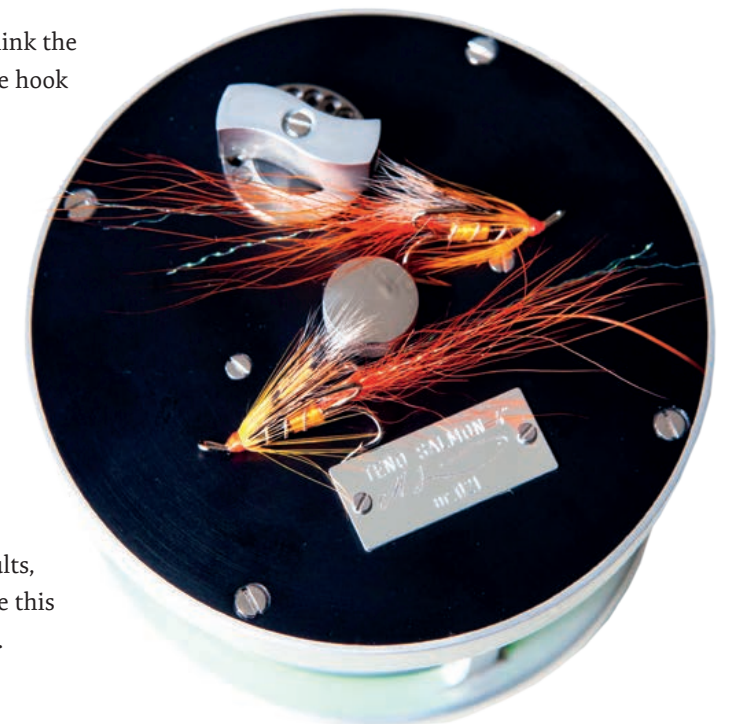
Monkey winged Phatas.

and straightened the eye of the hook a bit, because I think the original angle is too steep. With little tricks like this the hook looks a lot better, to my eye at least.

Ally is a difficult fly to tie, and I think the shape should be "fluid" – the squirrel/tippet wing should not be elevated too much. I often have trouble getting the wing to stay low, especially if, for some reason, I have to attach the wing near the rib. Usually I put a drop of varnish at the base of the wing to lock it in place at a low angle.

A drop of glue or varnish can also be used at the base of the tail: this way the hairs stay away from the bend of the hook. A few strands of flashabou in the tail work beautifully, especially in bright weather.

I think Ally is a fly that simply can't fail to give results, as long as there's fish in the river in the first place. I use this fly with all kinds of lines and in all kinds of conditions.





The old war horse Glödhäck

The Glödhäck, a monkey-winged version in particular, has brought me more salmon than any other fly. I'm not, and never will be, a "man with thousands of salmon", and I don't even want to be. It is more I like to do the kind of fishing that insures I won't have much chance to boast about the number of fish I catch. Still, over the decades I have managed to catch some fine salmon, and many of them were deceived by the Glödhäck.

The Glödhäck is a version of the Red Butt, and actually that must have been its original name, but I got to know the fly as the Glödhäck, and so it will remain for me. A black fly, monkey wing, silver rib and a bright, fluorescent butt, is a reasonably fireproof package when going for salmonid fish. The same fly with a green butt is also a must for the salmon. I fish smaller towards the end of the season, distinctly bigger in the early season. I think this fly works best with a float belly line with a slow sink tip. Of course, sinking lines are also a functioning option.

Mikael Frödin's world-famous Phatagorva

This fly hardly needs describing, but I still want to share some personal experiences. First of all, for me Phatagorva is not only a fly for dirty or colored water; it is a fly that fishes well in all circumstances. Of course, it is at its best in slightly colored water, like in its namesake pool in the Alta. Still, I have caught several fine salmon with it from clear water even when the current was slow. Shades of brown, gold, copper, and orange fit together beautifully. If you look at the lures spin fishing people use in Norway, you often see the same colors.

I tie the fly on a tube, because I think it is a better option than a hook. I add some weight for example with lead yarn but don't use coneheads, because I simply don't like them. Sometimes I put a small copper tube under the dubbing if I want the fly to dive straight away.

The wing I tie from Fiery Brown dog and might add a little bit of long black monkey hairs on top. If I use only dog hairs in the wing, I place a few peacock herls



on top. Those I mostly tie in one at a time, because I feel they have more life tied that way. As opposed to the original, I prefer a smaller hackle, because I think too much hackle will turn the fly too much when it swims. I'm not a friend of big hackles in general, either. The hackle can be long and fluid as long as there's not too much of it: otherwise the hackle makes the fly swim "stiffly".

I think a fly like this is at its best when using sinking lines like inter-2-4- or 1-3-5.

Good old Black Doctor

This fly is dear to me for several reasons. Firstly, it has practically all the elements I think a good salmon fly needs. The color combination comes together with a certain way of building the wing to produce a "sensitive" fly with visible contrast that is almost unbeatable at certain moments. I always tie this fly on a double hook. For this one I would prefer a floating line with a sink tip or an intermediate line.

Green Highlander

As a fledgling salmon fisher I fished a lot with classic salmon flies, and sometimes I still do. At the time my favorite fly was the Green Highlander. I did catch some fine salmon with classic flies, but I soon noticed the versatility of different hair-winged and tube flies in various currents. I would never venture to claim that the classic flies are less effective than tube flies, but for my style of fishing the tubes or hair-winged flies are simply better suited. Anyone can form their own opinions about this, because nothing is right or wrong in salmon fishing.

My version is actually a black-winged Highlander. I tie the body imitating the original one, but I use black fox or monkey in the wing. I may put some green polar bear under the wing if I happen to have suitable and high quality bear hair at hand. This fly is really good in clear northern waters, and it has saved many trips for me. I tie these on tubes almost exclusively and cast them with floating lines.



Some helpful observations

When it comes to salmon fishing, I think every angler should use their own brains instead of repeating the same formula as the others. I am convinced that a salmon will fetch the fly, if he can see it, and for some reason is in the right mood, even if the fly passes the salmon at some distance. In flooded waters the salmon look for a “clear route” that can also be vertical. Oftentimes when the river floods, the trash brought by the flood swims at a certain depth and it may be that depth is different in different parts of the stream.

An excellent example of this is the experience of a good friend and highly experienced salmon fisher years ago at the Tana River.

My friend was fishing there in June, and the water was high and cold. Most of the fishermen in the ring fished with sinking lines and large flies that swam slowly near the bottom. They were catching nada.

Further downstream a local fisherman was rowing a boat in the stream pool trolling a fly, and his fly rod kept bending constantly. My friend noticed this and decided to go ask for advice, because nobody else was catching anything. The rowboat guy was using a floating line, and after a short chat he showed my friend his fly, which was very small compared with those the guys on the bank were using. The guy explained that the trash in the water sinks almost to the riverbed due to the currents under the rapids. The salmon swim just below the surface despite the water being cold and the current strong, because the water is clear just under the surface.

My friend accepted the advice. He changed to a floating line and a smaller fly. The result was breathtaking. After many days without a

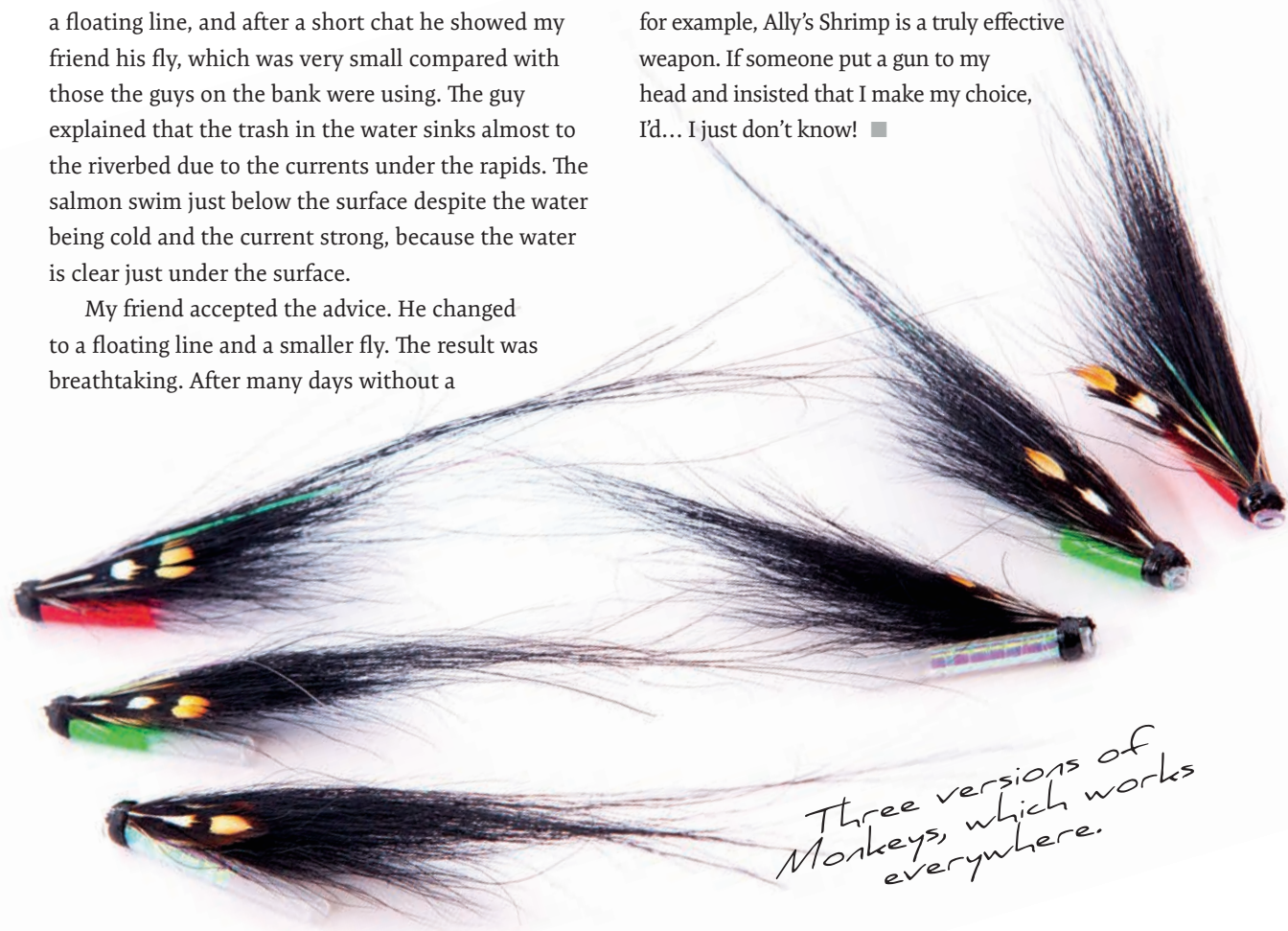
catch my friend caught about a dozen big salmon, all from right under the surface.

Just think: if you were making your way through sleet or rain, wouldn't it be easier to walk next to a wall than walking in the thick of it? Next to the wall the rain is less trouble and the going is easier. Maybe the salmon thinks the same way and looks for a clean path in the trashy water.

Success with only one fly?

This is something I have thought about a lot. Not so long ago I talked about this with a friend of mine. We were wondering if it could be possible to fish with only one fly throughout the season, for example with Ally's Shrimp. We decided that the answer was “Yes”, and I started wondering if I'd have the guts to try using only one fly from my Scotland trip in the spring all the way to my autumn fishing. Were I to do that, I'd be faced with an almost impossibly difficult choice: Vimu, Ally, Glödhäck, or...?

With Vimu and monkey-winged tubes the advantage would be their easiness and good swim, plus the possibility of changing the hook. On the other hand, for example, Ally's Shrimp is a truly effective weapon. If someone put a gun to my head and insisted that I make my choice, I'd... I just don't know! ■



River Tay Springer with Ally's Shrimp.
Photo: Seppo Turunen

Tying Hints

- ✓ When tying a tube fly wing from somewhat stiffer materials like polar bear, Bucktail or monkey, it pays to leave the stems of the wing to support the material to be tied next. It is for example easier to make a monkey wing position itself well on the tube when it is supported from below by e.g. Bucktail stems. After tying in the material, it is always worth it to add a drop of varnish that will lock the thread and material in place. When the materials are in place and positioned correctly, a sharp knife is used to cut everything extra from the stem.
- ✓ Tying the wing of a Black Doctor, and why not fox-winged flies in general, the wing should be tied in a way where it “gets air”. Too much material in the wing only spoils the package, and I think a steel brush is an indispensable tool here. Of course, in the tying phase you should think ahead to the brushing that comes next and tie the materials firmly. Too much flash should not be used, because it suffocates the wing's movement.
- ✓ Tying the ribbing it pays to use an old trick that diminishes the “bulge” at the point the ribbing is attached on the hook. When the ribbing is in place and locked with a couple of turns of thread on the underside of the hook or tube, the surface layer of the ribbing is peeled off before cutting it; after that, it is easy to snap the inner core of the ribbing, and that disgusting bulge becomes almost nonexistent. It makes it far easier to tie in the hackle and later to make a small and neat head.
- ✓ The front hackle of e.g. Black Doctor is made from Guinea Fowl. I think that hackle ought to be halved and to use most of all those smaller feathers with a fine little patterning. The bigger feathers, of which there are unfortunately too many in the bags bought from shops, feel somehow too stiff to make a good hackle. I always prefer buying a whole pearl hen skin (or skin half) that has more of those smaller, better feathers.
- ✓ Strengthening silk bodies always use superglue. Varnish is to be avoided, because it turns the silk darker. And if you put thread on the hook under the body, white thread is the correct choice. I many times tie flat silver tinsel under the silk, so the silk remains bright even when wet. Superglues have their differences, and I've noticed that some of them darken the silk too much. Locktite glue does not, and that's the glue I've been using the last few years. A warning: the superglue fumes are really harmful, and I hear they might weaken your near vision, so better not splash too much glue around so your eyes stay healthy.