Further notes on fly patterns

The braid Sunk Lure

Although I’ve returned to the Falkus/Rawling Sunk Lure (SL), I’ve also experimented with various braid-mounted sandeel representations. Through 2008-2010 I worked on and fished a number of different variants of the SL: Judd’s Moy version caught fish for me on the Gweebarra and elsewhere, though the hollow braid, stiffened at the vice by the application of superglue, had a tendency to soften after a day or two’s usage. That was easy to counter: the lure was so lightly dressed that the wing could be lifted aside and the braid re-stiffened simply by applying another go of superglue. All the same, I worried about that trailing and tiny treble. Although it often afforded a good hook-hold, the hook-hold could sometimes be too good: the treble could become so deeply embedded in the gristle of a fish’s mouth that the sea-trout could prove time-consuming to unhook. The last thing I want to do is mess about unhooking herling, particularly in the dark or the half-light. Accordingly, I tied up some Ruane SL’s using the same method of joining the hooks – hollow braid – but instead attaching a size 12 eyeless single as the rear hook. That is, the rear end of the hollow braid was simply pushed over the shank of the rear single, whipped down and then superglued. The wing was comprised of the familiar back-to-back blue hackles; I preferred then, and have come strongly to prefer now, a shade of kingfisher blue rather than darker or royal blue, because kingfisher blue seems far more visible in clear estuarial (or river) water than darker blues.

In 2010 I fished such SLs relatively extensively, and was even asked to tie some up for a kind correspondent. Here are the tying I notes I sent to him as I was working on the variant SLs I eventually dispatched:
Constructing the braid Sunk Lure

1. The lures are around 1½ inches long, which I find ample for Irish sea-trout, though I tie patterns up to 2 and 2½ inches for the larger Danish fish.

2. The hooks are of two types: the rear hook is a red-enamelled Gamakatsu spade-end hook with a Limerick bend, and the front hook is a Gamakatsu F314, which is one of my favourite hooks for saltwater sea-trout. Both hooks are wickedly sharp and are barbed, so you may want to nip the barbs down with a small pair of pliers before fishing. One drawback of these hooks is that they’re not saltwater resistant, so the lures need to be rinsed under a tap in freshwater after use. (I do this with all my saltwater patterns - just put them in a cupped hand, wash them in freshwater, then leave them to dry overnight on a tissue.)

   The red-enamelled rear hook may just add - that touch of red - to the attractiveness of the lure. It looks good to me - but I’m not a sea-trout.

3. The hooks are joined with 20lb. Gudebrod hollow braid. This is slipped onto the shank of the rear hook, whipped down and then treated with angler’s superglue - the waterproof kind. The front hook is then reamed onto the braid, the ream is whipped down, and then the shank of the front hook is superglued. I use 6/0 silk in both cases. These mounts should be bullet-proof, and I stress that I have never had a mount pull when using braid to join the hooks. But then again, I’ve never tied with spade-end hooks before. I have reinforced the spade end of the rear hook with an extra dob of glue, so that the braid is unlikely to wear because of abrasion....but you never know, in saltwater, so please inspect the lures after fishing.

4. Once the hooks have been joined, I apply three coats of silver-glitter nail varnish. I used three coats on the prototypes. Although nail varnish dries quickly, I leave 24 hours for each coat to dry. Therefore applying three coats will take three days - before the lures are subsequently dressed.

   Once the lures have dried, I have found that there’s still a small amount of flexibility in the braid between the two hooks. I like this - a certain amount of flexibility means less chance of a very stiff-shanked lure twisting out of the mouth of a hooked fish because of leverage.

5. For the dressings, I use very good quality blue back-to-back hackles. These are tied in so that their tips extend to the back of the barb of the rear hook. The wing should never (as in 'never once') wrap round the shank of the tandem during casting. Once the wing is tied in I bind in just a couple of strands of green or pink Lureflash - quite a subtle effect, but much better than a big, coarse lump of flash. I may also, if the mood takes me, add another couple of strands of very fine, mobile fluorescent tinsel. The aim is to produce a long, streamlined 'wing' shape.
Getting the ‘wing’ (the back-to-back hackles) to sit correctly is about the only trick to tying these lures. The ‘wing’ must sit properly on the shank; if it’s twisted, the lure will fish badly.

I do not use a hackle or anything else extraneous on my Sunk Lures. The effect is of great simplicity, I hope. I also try to tie flies which fish well and are durable.

6. The lures are finished with a standard whip finish which is then treated with three coats of varnish.

Please bear in mind that Sunk Lures sometimes don’t work, even when you expect they should. Last year, for example, I was fishing an estuary in Mayo and a couple of local anglers were getting sea-trout on spoons (2-3 inches long) and spinners. ‘Aha,’ I thought, ‘on with the Sunk Lure.’ I tried several kinds of Sunk Lure but didn’t get a single offer. I changed to a smallish Teal, Blue and Silver, while a friend of mine changed to a small lurex-bodied Alexandra. Both of us went on to have a grand afternoon....and the locals were still getting fish on their 2-3 inch long spoons. Most odd, that. Anyway, if you can fish the Sunk Lures at dusk on the ebb or first of the flood I dare say you might do well...and there’d be a chance of picking up small bass, too, I suspect.

![The braid SL](image-url)
What I didn’t tell my kind correspondent was the trouble I experienced getting hold of some silver paint here in the Netherlands. Eventually, and simply because ‘Do you have a small tin of silver Humbrol enamel like the stuff I used to use in the old days?’ was somewhat beyond my Dutch, I settled on silver nail-varnish. On www.chrismccully.co.uk I told the story of the traumatic day I got my hands on the relevant material:

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**Tandems and the cosmetics counter**

Friday, 8 April 2011 at 13:40

When I was very much younger, the archetype of femininity was provided by the girls and ladies who staffed the cosmetics counter at the local department store. Yes, I had many a little frisson there in Busby's (before it became Debenhham's) or Brown and Muff's (before it vanished completely) as my pathetic six-year-old self passed through Lipsticks and Powder Puffs - without knowing entirely what kind of a little frisson I was having, or even, come to think of it, what a frisson was. It was just the girls, your Honour - made up, coiffured, every smile a professional rictus. And besides, they smelt so nice.
I hadn't thought about Busby's for decades, nor indeed about *frissons*, whatever they are - a kind of classy fish-finger, one imagines - but a few days ago I had cause to visit a Dutch cosmetics counter in search of some silver nail varnish. This isn't entirely, or even at all, an experience for the faint of heart, but I shall tell you about it, if only by way of a terrible warning.

Well, then. I recently found a way of making tandem mounts which involved a short but productive fiddle with hollow braid. Well and good. Braid joins two hooks...touch of angler's superglue...job done - or almost. I decided to daub the tandem mount with silver paint. Now, in England I know where to go to get my tiny tin of Humbrol. But in this part of the Netherlands, at least, I'm clueless. Then I began to think - and this is where I began to go wrong - of nail varnish.

Nail varnish, it appears, comes in many hues. Gone are the days where it was Blossom Red or Blossom Red. Today, you must select one of hundreds of bottles, all with different names for the radically different colours - some plain, some spangly, some sparkly and some banana-flavoured. How do I know this? I know this because I hung about for a bit in Cosmetics (there in a Dutch department store equivalent to Busby's as it was before the Fall) feeling very confused in my winningly sartorial Barbour jacket which carried, as always, a becoming whiff of Residue of Returned Roach.

I needed silver. I looked at nail-varnish bottles. 'Nagellak,' it said on the labels. Not much help there, then. Then I looked on the bottom of one of the bottles: 'Sunset Strip,' it announced. But what did Sunset Strip look like, once applied? Hard to tell from the bottle alone. Then I caught sight of a set of cards hanging by the.... OK. Fine, I didn't catch sight of a set of cards. I actually got the set of cards tangled in the elastic cords which control the hood of my Barbour. That's how I discovered the set of cards. Anyway, the set of cards contained printed samples of the colours of the bottles. I checked out Sunset Strip, Mulberry Cocktail and Luscious Shrimp.

By this time I was being eyed somewhat suspiciously by one of the nice ladies who staffed Cosmetics. How different this lady was from the archetypes of my imagination. That same imagination conjured, as it had done for decades, fragrance, tact, that rictus of professional smiling. The lady whose gaze had fastened - as I say, had fastened rather suspiciously - on the Barbour was for one thing almost entirely cross and for another, so heavily made up that she was almost entirely yellow. 'Bloody hell,' I thought. 'I hope she doesn't ask me whether she can help me.'
'Can I help you?' she asked, under brows which had, if not beetled, then certainly done something a touch arachnid.

'Er....' (Good opener, Chris.) 'Er.... I'm looking for some silver nail varnish,' I said. It's not the kind of sentence you find in even chapter 9 of How to Bang On in Dutch, but there we are.

The yellow lady walked over. Was it my imagination, or did she flinch when she caught the aroma of Returned Roach? 'Silver....,' she mused, sulkily. 'Do you mean Violet Vision or Happy Anniversary?' Violet Vision, it appeared, had a touch of purple spangle about it, while Happy Anniversary was....

Happy Anniversary was more or less plain silver, though with a hint of tropical yoghurt. Stupid of me. The yellow lady, sensing my hesitation - justifiable under the circumstances, one would have thought, since it takes time to work out whether saltwater sea-trout will appreciate something yoghurty - began to tap her foot. 'Do you want this Happy Anniversary or not?' she asked, clearly by this time suspecting a sort of battered transvestism.

'Well, you know....' (Nice one, Chris.) 'Well, it's...for fly-tying, you see....'

'For....what?' (arachnid eyebrows lifting into yellow incredulity). 'Yes, I make my own...er....'

Arched eyebrows became live spiders. Yellow incredulity became mottled horror.

It was Julius Caesar, as reported by some rather more literate sidekick, who went, saw and conquered. He'd clearly never been confronted with Cosmetics and the yellow lady.

I quailed. I paid. I fled.

Irrespective of the trauma caused by the getting of silver paint, these lures were effective (though not always and not everywhere), and because of the relative workability of the hollow braid they were, I thought, easier to tie than the monofil-joined tandem mounts advocated by Rawling and Falkus. All the same, the fact that (as on Judd Ruane’s
variants) the braid became waterlogged and saggy was in the end discouraging. And therefore, for the time being, I’ve returned to SLs tied on monofil. I doubt, frankly, that Falkus/Rawling’s version of the Sunk Lure can be improved.

Рagworm representation: Рag Nobbler

Though the Worm Fly (see Nomads hard text) can be pressed into service as a ragworm representation, a pattern more closely representing a ragworm may be tied on a size 8 long-shank single (straight-eyed streamer hooks are ideal) wrapped with 4-8 turns of fine lead wire. Black 6/0 thread is used. A small loop of nylon, or plastic-coated wire, is tied in at the bend of the hook – this discourages the tendency of trailing tail fibres to wrap round the bend of the hook during casting - and thereafter a longish tail of marabou fibres (or Spey hackle fibres) is tied in. The body is then wrapped tightly with green sparkle chenille. The fly is whip-finished and several coats of varnish applied to the head.

The reason for the nylon or wire loop at the tail of the fly is that the presence of such a loop inhibits (though it doesn’t altogether prevent) the wrapping of the trailing marabou or Spey hackle fibres around the bend of the hook during casting and fishing.

The similarity of this pattern to the inelegantly-named Dog Nobbler (a creation of Trevor Housby in the late 1970s) will be apparent. 10lb. nylon should be used to fish what is a relatively heavy fly. The pattern may be allowed to sink and is then fished in strips and pauses, during which the mobile fibres of the ‘tail’ will pulse. It is the erratic action of this pattern that seems to attract sea-trout.
Natural ragworm

*Shrimps – the Pattegrisen (Pink Pig)*

Besides the Grey Fred described in the *Nomads* text, another shrimp-representing pattern I use is a radical caricature of the size and colour of some saltwater shrimps: it’s the Pattegrisen, better known among native English speakers as the Pink Pig. I find the original, which was designed by Claus Eriksen in the 1990s, to be hugely complicated though rewarding to tie. The Spey hackle fibres are wonderfully mobile and the salmon-pink colouration is easily visible to foraging sea-trout.

In the original dressing a tuft of Antron was left projecting over the eye of the hook. This was remarkably life-like but had the effect of turning the fly over on the retrieve. I omit the tuft; the fly fishes much better as a result.
**Hook**: size 4-12 Partridge saltwater (CS54)
**Silk**: pink, white or grey 6/0 or 8/0
**Underbody**: tungsten foil tied on the underside of the shank
**Tail/mouthparts** (i): Spey hackle fibres, salmon pink
**Tail/mouthparts** (ii): teal fibres
**Tail/mouthparts** (iii): Fly Eyes
**Body**: SLF dubbing, shell pink, tapered so that it’s thickest at the rear of the hook
**Body hackle**: Spey hackle, shell pink
**Rib**: clear fine nylon (0.15mm)
**Shell back**: pink Antron

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**Tubes**

I don’t often fish tubes for Irish saltwater sea-trout. When I do want to fish a sandeel-suggesting pattern 1½-2 inches long I prefer the relative lightness and mobility of braid-mounted or other tandems (SLs) or various kinds of Snake (see above). Further, the fact
that such lures are relatively flexible means that they potentially offer little leverage in the mouth of a hooked sea-trout. They’re also light to cast and fish, which in my view enhances the control one can exert over the fly.

My reluctance to fish tubes is possibly a mistake. A look into Denis O’Toole’s fly-box in 2011 revealed rows of beautifully-made tube-flys (up to 2½ inches long) which Denis uses as hist first line of attack on Wicklow sea-trout. Indeed, he caught and released a magnificent Irish fish of over 16lb. on a black and red tube earlier that same summer.

In theory, the tube detaches from the treble (or better, the single) after the fish is hooked. In practice, I’ve found that the tube often stays attached to the hook. This may not matter if the hollow rubber sleeve mounted between tube and hook is itself flexible (more flexibility = less leverage). Where the tubing is short and stiff then that may indeed matter.

Denis ties his tubes in two colour schemes: black and red and black and blue. Some strands of silver flash are always incorporated into the ‘wing’ of the pattern and the whole dressing is kept as sparse and light as possible. I also note with interest that on some of his tubes, clearly intended to be fished at night, Denis incorporates a luminous green bead into the dressing at the tail-end of the tube.

**Tube flies (Denis O’Toole)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hook</th>
<th>size 10-12 treble, double or (better) Salmo Salar single, debarbed, size 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>red, 6/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube</td>
<td>¾- 1½inch plastic-lined aluminium tube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint between tube and hook</td>
<td>rubber tube sleeve, clear, black or fluorescent red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tail beading (optional)</td>
<td>fluorescent green bead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>silver tinsel or holographic tape, ribbed fine oval silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Wing’</td>
<td>black hair (top of the fly) and kingfisher blue hair (bottom); two or three stands silver flash worked in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Head:** red silk varnished with bright red varnish

**Denis’s tubes**

*Snakes (James Waltham)*

The original sea-trout Snake was first described in James Waltham’s indispensable *Sea Trout Flies* (1988) and I tied my first approximations of Waltham’s Snake patterns in 1991. In those originals, the Snake was tied on a size 6 or 8 Wilson single to which was affixed a size 14 or 16 treble. (The treble may be replaced by a single; although I carry patterns sporting trebles I usually prefer to fish with single irons, particularly at night.) The two hooks were joined by nylon (10lb. nylon in Waltham’s original instructions). Once the two hooks were joined, the bend of the Wilson was cut off with a sharp pair of pliers, and thereafter braided tinsel slipped over the mount, to be secured by tying silk on
the rear treble. At that point, the silk was tied off (i.e. on the rear treble) and then reattached at the head of the mount, thus securing the braided tinsel – the body of the lure. Thereafter a hair wing was tied in.

I find the Snake wonderfully effective but time-consuming to tie. Patterns with silver bodies, black hair wings and jungle-cock eyes have worked for me (as for many others) both in salt- and freshwater, though blue variants are also successful. One essential tying note, however, is to form the hair wing carefully: it should never be too long, i.e. the tips of the trailing hair should never extend beyond the shank of the treble. A further tying note is also in order: I’ve found it tricky to get hold of the braided tinsel favoured in Waltham’s original dressing, and use the smallest diameter of hollow silver mylar tubing as the body. As Waltham notes, however, hollow mylar traps air, making the lure too buoyant. I counter this problem by finishing the head with clear epoxy applied over two stick-on eyes.

The great advantage of the Snake is that because the mount is flexible it offers little leverage to a hooked sea-trout.

**Hooks and mount:** size 8 single to which is attached a size 14 or 16 treble. The hooks are attached with nylon (I use 14-20lb. nylon depending on the size of the lure). The bend of the leading hook is then cut off with pliers.

**Silk:** black, size 6/0 or 8/0

**Body:** hollow silver mylar, as fine in diameter as possible, secured to the rear treble and then pulled forward and secured at the front of the lure.

**Wing:** black (or any favoured colour of) hair

**Eyes (optional):** small adhesive eyes

**Head:** epoxy or Bug-Bond
Snakes, seen here with a White Minkie

A variant of the original Snake may be made on a mount constructed with hollow braid. In this variant, a loop is formed by doubling the braid through itself with a darning needle and then securing the loop with superglue. This loop forms the eye of the lure – the loop to which the leader knot will attach. (An alternative mount may be made by attaching a swivel.) I then push the open, trailing end of the braid over a double hook (Partridge Big Mouth doubles, size 14, are satisfactory) and secure the braid to the shank of the double by wrapping tightly with 6/0 thread and then securing with superglue.

The next step is to sleeve on hollow silver mylar. This is bound to the rear of the treble. Secure the whipping with superglue.

For added security, but also for attractiveness, I sleeve some fluorescent red tubing over the braid and mylar, then over the shank of the small double.
The thread is re-attached at the eye of the lure, just behind the braid loop. The mylar is secured behind the braid eye at the front of the mount and a black hair-wing added. Two junglecock cheeks complete the dressing. The head is then varnished with black varnish (three coats) or secured with epoxy or Bug-Bond.

![Variant Snake, seen here with a head swivel](image)

See also [http://www.seatroutfishing.net/index3.htm](http://www.seatroutfishing.net/index3.htm), from which I have derived great instructional help in constructing various kinds of Snake mount.

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**Derry Bull**

**Hook:** size 8-14 Kamasan B175 (sizes 10-12 are standard)

**Silk:** black 6/0 or 8/0

**Tail:** two strands pink crinkly flash material together with royal blue marabou fibres or the blue fluffy fibres from the base of a blue-dyed guinea-fowl feather

**Tail cheeks:** two small junglecock eyes either side of the tail

**Body:** flat silver tinsel, ribbed oval red or silver
**Hackle:** blue jay or guinea fowl, tied as a full but sparse hackle

A pattern of my own which I tied in 2009 as a stylisation of a saltwater shrimp, using that favoured colour, blue, as an attractor together with hints of red and silver so that the fly would stand out in relatively clear water. The fly owes something both to the Delphi and the Grey Fred (see above): the tail of the pattern stylises the eyes and breathers of a natural shrimp.

It was the late Richard Walker who cautioned that no fly should ever be publicised until and unless it has taken fifty fish. This one passes the Walker test and has also taken three Mayo grilse for its sins.

The name of the fly was arrived at by accident on the Mayo Owenmore. One evening I was watching Gardiner climb over a barbed wire fence in his body waders. ‘Tricky operation,’ I said helpfully (without actually helping him at all), ‘particularly if someone’s hung like a Derry bull….’

Gardiner, one leg winningly cocked, began to laugh and then fell backwards into a field.

As Gardiner fell I thought instantly of the little pattern I’d begun to fish earlier that summer, whose protruding tail-end junglecock could, under a hurried and slightly touched glance, look something like a scrotum…. And thus the Derry Bull acquired its name which, for all Gardiner’s efforts to bowdlerise and re-christen the fly, seems to have stuck.

I fished the pattern on South Uist in 2010, where it took several finnock. In the ‘patterns’ columns of the relevant fishing ledger – columns replete with Bibios, Soldier Palmers, Bruisers and Clan Chiefs – I wrote (proudly, I confess) ‘Derry Bull’. Wegg, looking over what I’d written, raised both eyebrows in the general direction of Iceland. ‘Derry…. What on earth’s that?’ he asked. I explained gently that ‘that’ was the name of the successful fly. (I may also have explained about scrotums, I forget….) ‘You can’t write that in my fishing diary!’ expostulated Wegg. Sorry, Wegg. I could and I did.
The Derry Bull

Father Ronan

With Colin Folan’s permission I give the dressing of the Father Ronan here – a pattern devised by Colin’s father, Murt Folan, and one used on Lough Inagh and elsewhere. I’ve seen many ‘new’ Irish sea-trout patterns over the years. Many, including several of my own devising, have proved to be fly-by-nights. This one isn’t: it’s been a well-kept secret since 2005 and has taken hundreds of sea-trout.

Hook: Kamasan B175, size 10  
Silk: green  
Tail: GP topping, tied fairly full and long  
Rear body: red holographic tinsel  
Front body: lime green glista dubbing  
Body hackles: red and yellow cock wound together  
Rib: very fine gold wire  
Wing/front hackle: bronze mallard tied Dabbler-style  
Cheeks: split junglecock eye feather
Father Ronan

*Goat’s Toe*

**Hook**: size 8-14 Kamasan B175 (sizes 10-12 are standard)
**Silk**: red 6/0 or 8/0
**Tail**: red wool
**Body**: red floss ribbed closely with peacock herl
**Rib**: fine oval silver tinsel (this may be omitted)
**Hackle**: blue peacock sword feather
A Lough Eske white-trout on a Goat’s Toe

A remarkable fly. It resembles nothing on earth. Perhaps it owes its attractiveness to the prominent red in the dressing together with the mobility of that blue peacock-sword hackle. This is another fly I’ve never done well with but which I’ve seen others use with great success: Lindsey Clarke swears by it as a point fly for Donegal sea-trout and Peter Joyce, renowned gillie on Delphi, regularly uses the pattern over Doolough white-trout.

Secret Weapon

Hook: size 10, with trailing treble (size 16) tied in just behind the bend of the single
Silk: brown, 6/0
Body: buff wool/any brown dubbing
Hackle: ginger or red hen
Wing: sparse brown mallard
Secret Weapon

Hugh Falkus’s Secret Weapon was designed complete with a wickedly-sharp and tiny trailing treble in order to hook those sea-trout that were indulging in one of their favourite pastimes – merely nipping at the artificial fly at night. Falkus’s theory was that if a couple of maggots were attached to the bend of the single then sea-trout attempting to nip at the maggots would be hooked by the trailing treble (see pp.60-61 of the second edition of Sea Trout Fishing).

Nowadays I don’t like fishing treble hooks over any sea-trout, particularly at night: tiny trebles can prove time-consuming to remove from fish one wishes to return unharmed to the water (and that, these days, is almost every Irish sea-trout); where trebles are used at night and a large fish is encountered then the treble can sometimes become entangled with the meshes of a standard landing-net, or where a landing-net isn’t used, can easily lodge in a finger or hand during the unhooking process; and the mount – single hook with trailing treble – is time-consuming to tie.

If I do wish to fish maggots (called in and around Dublin ‘chandlers’ – see the entry for the river Dodder in the Gazetteer in the Nomads book text) then I simply nick a couple of maggots onto the bend of a standard white-trout fly. The maggots should be nicked onto the hook via their blunt ends. As every writer notes, maggots are very easy to flick off the hook so fly-casting should be as as soft and smooth as possible.