

A BLIZZARD OF BLUE-WINGS

Paul Procter fishes Poland's San River, whose hatches of upwings have to be seen to be believed

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROD CALBRADE

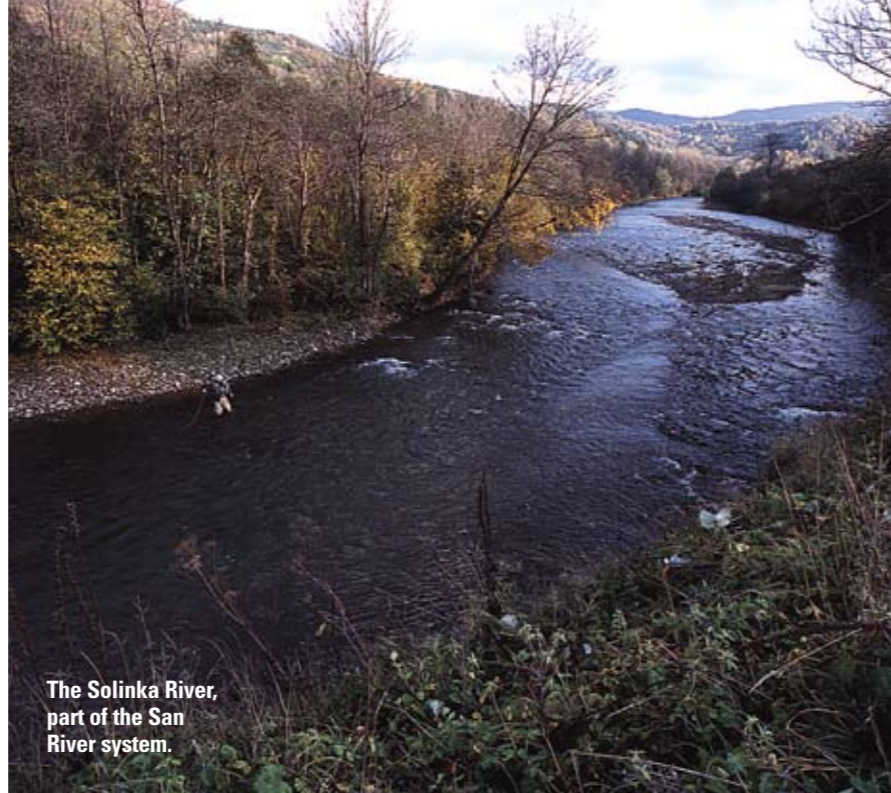
A BLIZZARD OF BLUE WINGS *continued*

WATERHEN BLOA

Hook Size 16-18
Varivas 2100
Thread Pearsall's silk No 4, yellow
Butt Pearly tinsel
Body Natural mole
Hackle Moorhen undercovert



With the inclusion of a tinsel butt, this elaboration of the Waterhen Bloa is a good imitation of emerging olives. Although the Varivas 2100 is labelled a dry-fly hook, it is ideally suited to Spider dressings, especially those required to fish near the surface.



The Solinka River, part of the San River system.

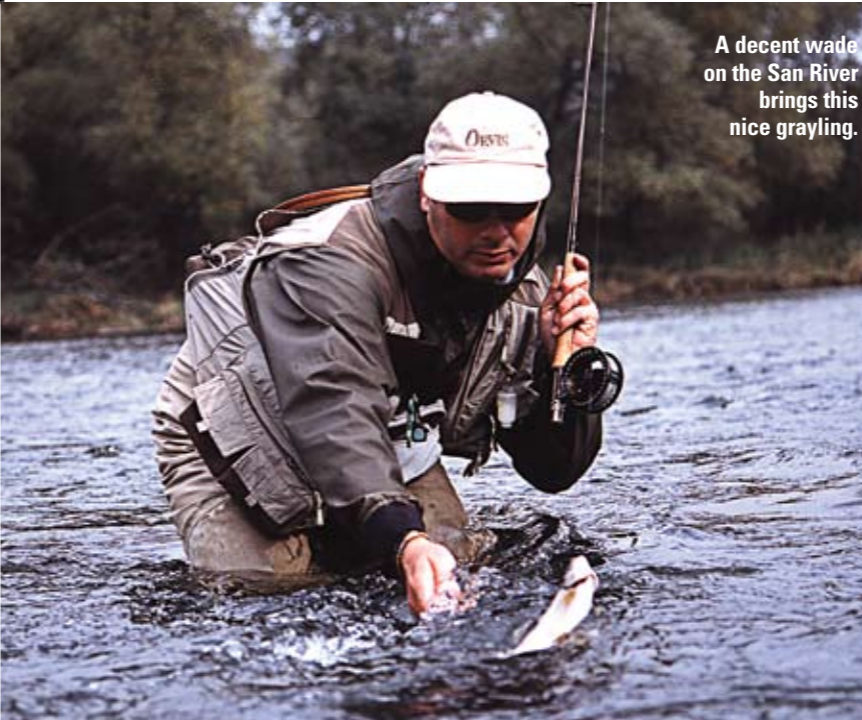


Paul believes that rough terrain equals good fly-life.

IF I AM going abroad to fish, one of the first things I'm keen to establish is what fly-life can be expected. The more rural the place, the better the insect population. Rough terrain is no place for intensive farming practices and such areas usually consist of small plots worked by hand. Mainland Europe is a fair size and if you look hard enough there are quiet corners to be found. Poland – population 38 million – might be considered sparsely populated for its size, but head towards the Carpathian Mountains and it really is remote. It is here, in the Bieszczady National Park in south-east Poland, that the mighty San River rises. Springing up on the Polish-Ukrainian border close to the village of Sianky, the San flows roughly

north-west through heavily wooded country. But its 259-mile journey is soon interrupted by two large dams, forming the huge lakes of Solinka and Mycskowce. Below the downstream lake of Mycskowce the San carves a 100-metre-wide swathe through ancient Polish forests and meadows as it charges to meet the Vistula River. Now its more stable levels and temperatures provide the perfect habitat for flies and bugs. Although wide, the San consists of wadeable shallows for much of its length. Vast pools and runs littered with pea gravel and pebbles attract hordes of tiny invertebrates. Since the 2005 European Fly Fishing Championships were held on the San, Jeremy Lucas has been prattling on about dense hatches of fly. He has described them as "blizzard hatches". Such terms should not be used lightly in my

grayling. Indeed, it's claimed that grayling numbers in the upper reaches are unsurpassed anywhere in Europe. Trout are well represented throughout the San, too, and where deeper water is found huchen terrorise coarse-fish, small trout and grayling. These secretive salmonids are not indigenous to the San but have adapted well since being introduced into the Vistula basin. Hatches tend to follow the same pattern as those on our own rivers. Large dark olives and stoneflies dominate the spring but eventually give way to summer sedges and midge. Then there are the blue-winged olives (b-wo), which have been recorded in every month of the year. Late summer and autumn are the peak times when, in cooler temperatures, hatches can last all day. And if that's not enough, as evening approaches female b-wo



A decent wade on the San River brings this nice grayling.

rising fish giving the impression of a turkey shoot, your mettle will be tested to the full, I can tell you! Since first visiting Poland four years ago, I've returned every autumn to enjoy the b-wo carnival. Granted, we still get reasonable hatches of blue-wings in my neck of the woods, but sport tends to be confined to an intense hour before dark. Time is precious, and it takes a strong-willed person to sit back and watch such wonders of nature. Besides, poor light often obscures close scrutiny. Given daylight, and hatches lasting for many hours, the San is the perfect place to study a hatch in all its glory. Such situations allow for experimentation with fly patterns,

fish seem keen on picking off nearly all the duns drifting by, often moving as much as 3 ft to do so. Once things are in full swing, the distance fish are prepared to move reduces significantly. At the height of the hatch, despite duns carpeting the surface, trout and grayling instinctively identify current lanes carrying the bulk of the food. Here they sit, picking off flies with great precision. At this stage their preference has changed and, while the odd dun is still taken, many fish appear to be rising to nothing. This is when observation pays. Stationing myself immediately downstream in the feeding lane of grayling, I discovered they were

CDC PARADUN (POLISH TIED)

Hook Size 16-20 TMC 103 **Thread** Olive 14/0 Sheer
Tail Light dun cock hackles fibres **Body** Stripped peacock quill
Wing Natural pale CDC **Hackle** Ginger cock

This flimsy Paradun has proved its worth time and again. If tying your own, in order to keep the hackle sparse, try removing the fibres from one side of the hackle stalk prior to winding.



deceiving the bigger fish. Leaders of 15 ft-16 ft with 6x (approx 3 lb) tippets are the norm. Apart from the first 8 ft of this, which consists of a shop-bought tapered leader, the rest is made up of 2 ft lengths graduating from 1x (about 8 lb) down to 6x (about 3 lb). This will include a number of knots, which you might find alarming, but remember: they will help with turnover. Simply put, long leaders reduce the amount of fly-line lying on the water. And as monofilament possesses less surface area than a fly-line, this goes some way towards reducing drag. A hatch in full swing on the San is something to be savoured, if only because of the sheer numbers of fly. Last autumn I attempted to count the number of duns drifting past me in a 2 ft-wide foamy channel. Richard Tong set his stop-watch for one minute. Thirty seconds later we abandoned this exercise, purely because I couldn't keep up with the amount of fly. We recorded 119 duns in 30 seconds. Richard was keen to point out that I'd actually missed a good proportion of these, too. A

"Such is the density of fish and fly on the San River that friends have spent the best part of a day moving a mere ten yards"

CDC PARA SPINNER (POLISH TIED)

Hook Size 18-20 Justice Wave Bend **Tail** Ginger cock hackle fibres
Body Bright-orange tying thread **Thorax** Brown tying thread
Wing Natural CDC **Hackle** Ginger cock

With so many natural spinners returning to the San, it's important to have the right pattern. This little dressing seems to sort out some of the better fish. When dressing the fly, a layer of varnish over the thread body helps protect against the trout's teeth and keep it intact.



book and, although sceptical, I was intrigued. If the hatches were only half as good as Jeremy boasted they would still be something very special. Even more appealing was the fact that many of the flies were of the same species that we'd expect to find on our home rivers. Large dark olives, blue-winged olives and pale wateries were mentioned, plus sedges and midges. Then there's the freshwater shrimp, which keep fish ticking over in the rare absence of any hatches. It is not surprising, therefore, that such a rich larder supports a huge head of trout and

spinners return to lay their eggs. I've fished the San with friends who pride themselves on covering a fair stretch of water in a day's fishing. But such is the density of fish and fly that they've spent the best part of a day moving a mere ten yards. I know it all sounds too good to be true – a fishing Utopia where you can be chucking at rising fish all day without moving your feet – but everything comes at a price. With so many naturals on the surface, trout and grayling hold a PhD in fly-recognition and soon spot the impostors. Despite the number of

too. And with a month's worth of emerging olives packed into one day, winning formulae can quickly be found. It almost feels like cheating, as patterns that don't work are soon discarded. Equally, fish are keen to show their approval by pouncing on others that make the grade. At home, during sparse hatches I'm happy to put my faith in a handful of patterns (and there's no time to waste). Howard Longstaff, who accompanied me on a recent trip, had it right: he changed flies after every couple of fish. During the early stages of a hatch,

selecting emerging nymphs and stillborn duns, or at least those that had been blown over. From my findings, casualties made up some 20 per cent of the surface drift. This may not sound much, but do the sums when thousands of duns are emerging and the numbers stack up. Being armed with such knowledge is one thing; carrying it to a satisfactory conclusion is another. Terminal tackle needs careful consideration. While a standard leader of, say, 9 ft-12 ft will suffice, a longer one is dramatically better, especially when it comes to

CDC SHUTTLECOCK (WOJTEK GIBINSKI)

Hook Size 18-20 TMC 103 **Thread** Danville's Flymaster 6/0 shell pink
Wing Natural CDC

I nabbed this deceptively simple pattern from Wojtek's box. Flies really don't come any sparser than this. Curiously, Wojtek prefers pale-pink thread for his tying though occasionally he's been known to use a conspicuous red thread.





This perfect San grayling was rising sporadically during a heavy hatch.

conservative estimate suggested that no fewer than 250 duns were passing our position every minute. Add that we focused only on a 2 ft section and you begin to realise the enormity of such an event. Did I mention this took place during a blizzard with an air temperature of 2 deg C? Imagine the hatch in temperate conditions.

it's more to do with identifying which currents are carrying the bulk of the fly over prime lies. Your imitation needs to land in the precise flow that is channelling food to the fish. An inch either way and it's swept to one side. Add slack line into the equation and things become even trickier. Even when your fly floats



An opportunity to study in daylight a hatch of b-wo.

“I pride myself on tying a decent fly but the Poles take it a step further”

Impressive though this sounds, it comes at a cost. Given the amount of fly drifting over their heads, the fish can't afford to be choosy! Trout and grayling are quick to take advantage of filtering currents and potential feeding lanes, and position themselves accordingly. They concentrate on extremely narrow bands or seams. Seldom do they take every single natural drifting over them. They rise randomly, so patience and accurate casting must be exercised.

Pinpoint accuracy doesn't necessarily mean dropping a fly on the nose of a fish. In these situations

precisely over the spot, the chances are it will go untouched. As I said earlier, these fish may let several naturals pass by before sipping down the next three. The emphasis is on how the fly behaves. An imitation that doesn't correspond with the thousands of naturals will stand out. Any hint of drag and it's game over – you'll need to rest that fish and probably change your fly, too.

I pride myself on tying a decent-looking fly, but the Poles take it one step further, tying flimsy, dainty dressings on fine-wire hooks. I always marvel at their exquisite creations. Clearly the success of their flies relies on sparseness – cul-de-canard is a commonly used material, dry-flies often consisting of one feather plume and a thread body. With a single turn of hackle and an ultra-slim abdomen, even their parachute flies are scantily dressed.

Wojtek Gibinski has guided on the San for years and understands the movements of grayling better than most. Despite the river's stable water conditions, grayling have nomadic tendencies and seasonally some areas perform better than others. Weather is a factor, too. A stiff wind helps lift duns from the surface a bit sooner, whisking them away to safety. In such conditions Wojtek heads for more sheltered parts. Using a single dry-fly he focuses on one fish

at a time. With several grayling taking flies at the surface, it's easy to start firing off casts in all directions. But such discipline is well rewarded: his casts-to-fish ratio speaks for itself.

Spiders also charm many a San grayling, though rules stipulate that no more than two flies may be used. Patterns such as Waterhen Bloa, Hare's Lug and Plover and Snipe and Purple will serve you well. Generally two flies will fish higher in the water than three. In fact, often a single Spider presented in the surface film has tempted a finicky grayling for me. Stewart-style Spiders do well, anointed with a drop of floatant.

So why is nymph-fishing placed down the rankings here? Every year, I arrive on the San armed to the teeth with delicate nymphs, but the only time they get a wetting is when I am working fast runs with a Spider. In these circumstances a small beadhead will act as anchorman, helping to slow the progress of my Spider. Although used for sacrificial purposes, such nymphs sometimes take fish, for the grayling do occasionally have their heads down.



OLIVE BIOT NYMPH

Hook Size 16-18 Varivas 2120 WB
Thread 14/0 olive Sheer **Weight** Thin adhesive lead **Tail** Coq de lion hackle fibres
Abdomen Olive turkey biot **Thorax** Hare's ear dubbing **Head** Fluor pink tungsten bead

Carefully winding a turkey biot concave-side uppermost results in this amazing segmented effect. A guide: 1.5 mm beads (size 18 hooks), 2.3 mm (size 14-16). Surprisingly, a bright bead works extremely well in clear water.



PP EMERGER

Hook Size 17-19 TMC 212Y **Thread** Sheer 14/0 primrose **Butt** Pearly tinsel **Body** Olive Superfine dubbing **Wing and stubs** Natural CDC **Thorax** Sandy-coloured hare's fur

Albeit rather embellished, this is my interpretation of the original Polish CDC Shuttlecock. The pearly butt is self-explanatory. In my mind, exposed CDC butts protruding rearwards rest on the surface to suggest the unfolding wings of upwinged flies.

FACTFILE

Travel Pioneer Flyfishing is one of the leading operators on the San system. Through Pioneer, trips to the San River are hosted by Paul Procter. For further details visit: www.paulprocterflyfishing.co.uk Or contact Paul on 01229 580 190. Mobile: 0786 665 4091.