THE *Dyffryn Elwyre* SYSTEM

MARTIN & FERGUS GUIVER

For several seasons now, my son Fergus and I have been working on a weedless system for salmon and sea trout flies and have finally perfected a working design. We call it the 'Dyffryn Elwyre System' pronounced 'duf-frin elwire'. It is a play on words, based on where we live and fish: our house is named 'Dyffryn Elwy' and sits on the banks of the River Elwy or the Avon Elwy, as it is called here in North Wales. The river runs 20 meters from our front door and is where we mainly fish. We wanted to give our system an association with the river, having developed it to overcome the heavy leaf debris found in the Elwy at the back end of the season.

For the last five years or so, Natural Resources Wales (previously the Environment Agency) has granted special dispensation by individual application to extend the season on the Clwyd catchment from 17th November to 30th November, to prove that the salmon enter the Clwyd/ Elwy catchment very late in the season. The scheme has proved very successful and Natural Resources Wales intends to integrate the extension into the season here.

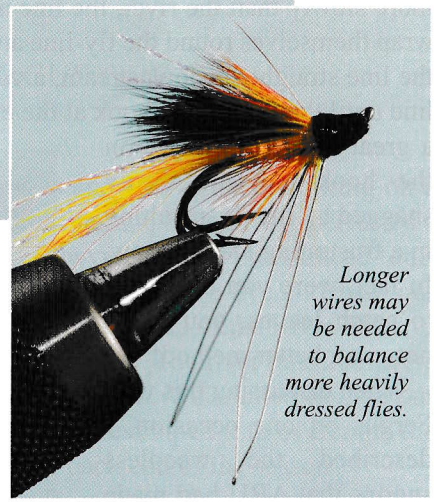
Historically, the end of the standard season was usually only just at or about the time the trees began to shed their leaves in any great numbers and one could fish without catching a leaf with every cast. Well, most years anyway! More recently the weather tends to undergo a marked seasonal change from mid-October onwards, with storms bringing the leaf fall forwards. Combined with the extension to the season, this makes for a long period of difficult fishing: as we all know, catching leaves on a regular basis is very frustrating. When I was still teaching Fergus the finer points of fishing, we found it doubly so, as he would make a good cast only to end up hooked on to a leaf as his line straightened.

I kept thinking about how to create a fly which would lessen or even eliminate this problem. I tried the obvious, tying the fly with the hook upside down in an anti-snagging style but this does not work with leaves! Using stiffer tying materials, even nylon bristles, to deflect the leaves did not meet with much success. You see, in the first instance, the leaves are caught not by the hook but by the fly-line as it crosses the flow of the river. Moving more slowly than the river, the line acts like a net, trapping leaves. These wrap themselves round the fly-line and turn it into a washing line. Then, as the line straightens downstream, a whole bunch of leaves travel down the line until they reach the hook at the end of the leader. The leaves can exert a great deal of pressure on the hook and are easily snagged by the fly, resulting in a frustrating leaf-a-throw. In fact, were you intending to catch leaves, you could not use a better method!

20g ABU Atom spoon that was of the weed-less option, bought in about 1970.

When discussing this with Fergus on one occasion, I described the weedless spoons that ABU had made in the past. As he showed some interest in these, I dug out the old pike fishing tackle from my youth and showed him an Atom and a Flamingo Spoon, complete with their weedless system. This gave you the ability to push the hook up into the body of the spoon, where it was protected from snagging weeds by the two covering wires. The theory was that when the pike took the lure, it would compress the guard wires and catch on to the one protruding point of the secured treble hook and pull the hook free of the body of the spoon. I also had to confess to him that although it did have a better anti-snag capability as far as weeds were concerned, I had always failed to hook a pike with them. The reason being, to my mind, that the single point that was exposed failed to get a good purchase on the pike's boney mouth structure.

Hairwing salmon fly tied on a double hook with Elwyre system in place.



Longer wires may be needed to balance more heavily dressed flies.

Fergus on the other hand thought that the ABU spoons had something going for them and plagued me to try and tie a fly with a wire anti-weed system to protect the hook point or points of a fly. Having started life in engineering, I was able to lay my hands on some very fine wire from my workshop that had originally been used for microswitch actuators and off to the vice we went. Problems soon emerged as we turned theory into practice.

Firstly, having tied in the wire as a guard system to start it, it was impossible to tie the fly as the wire was in the way. Right! We tried solving that by bending the wire out of the way whilst we tied the fly. However, then we couldn't bend the wire back to a suitable position as it was too springy and too heavy a gauge. Even when we did get the wire into a 'nearly good enough' position visually, when we tested our pattern in the water, it was clear our anti-weed system had totally unbalanced the swimming action of the fly.

We realised we had to design a system which would overcome these problems. It quickly became apparent that the wire had to be super springy in order to maintain its structure and position. It also had to be thin enough to be workable and be mounted at the end of the tying process, to allow the

fly to be tied without hindrance and not affect the balance of the fly in the water. Maybe even enhance the pattern's balance and swimability. A big ask, I think you'll agree!

We could probably write a whole book on the stages of development but eventually we reached a point in our design process where we were able to meet all of the above criteria. We managed to source an ultra fine rustless wire with the right amount of stiffness and spring. Using a loop-type method to fold the wire enabled us to achieve the correct stability. The flattened loop of wire gives the right amount of stiffness to deflect the leaves yet is compliant enough to behave just like the rest of the dressing when a fish takes the fly. It also makes the wire more durable under the strains of casting.

As we use mainly double hooks in our fishing, our initial design had two wire loops, one covering each hook point. We thought that when using a single hook, we would only need one wire loop to guard the single hook point. However, testing single hook patterns tied this way, we found that the fly was slightly unbalanced and that a two loop system worked better. It stabilised the action of the fly and made it swim much like a fly dressed on a double hook. I have just started to play with a three wire system on a treble hook but have not yet perfected the folding method to keep the head of the fly neat enough. Nearly there, though!

This system of ours has one huge advantage, apart from the fact that it works ... and works well! It can be mounted on to the finished fly at the end of the tying process and still results in an acceptably-sized head. Furthermore if you're not a competent fly-tyer and buy your flies, with a small outlay to purchase a cheap vice, a bobbin holder and thread, small snipe nose pliers, some wire and a bottle of varnish, you can soon learn the skills required to add this system to any suitable fly in your box.

There is only one other consideration when tying or selecting your fly for The Dyffryn Elwyre system. As you can now fish in a river full of leaves, you don't want the fly to become lost in the soup, so use some of the modern sparkle in the dressing to make it stand out. Use a more generous amount than for a normal dressing, where less is often more. This is one occasion when you want the fly to stand out and look quite gregarious and if the sun obliges and shines, the fly literally 'lights up' with the extra sparkle and you hardly notice the leaves swimming alongside in the water. The fish seem to see it too.

I have to say that both Fergus and I are extremely pleased with the results of our efforts. On our final fishing outing last season, the river was full of leaves yet we fished without a problem: Heaven at last! I am sure someone will come along and refine the system even further, that is what always happens and quite rightly so! When you take a look at our finished fly and at the simplicity of it, you could easily think that it is an obvious and easy solution to the floating leaf problem. This is true of most successful developments, but they all share the same fact that the process in getting there might not have been quite so simple!

P.S. It's lucky we mainly go sea trout fishing as neither of us are what you would class as technical fly-tyers but, the sea trout don't seem to mind too much! PHEW!

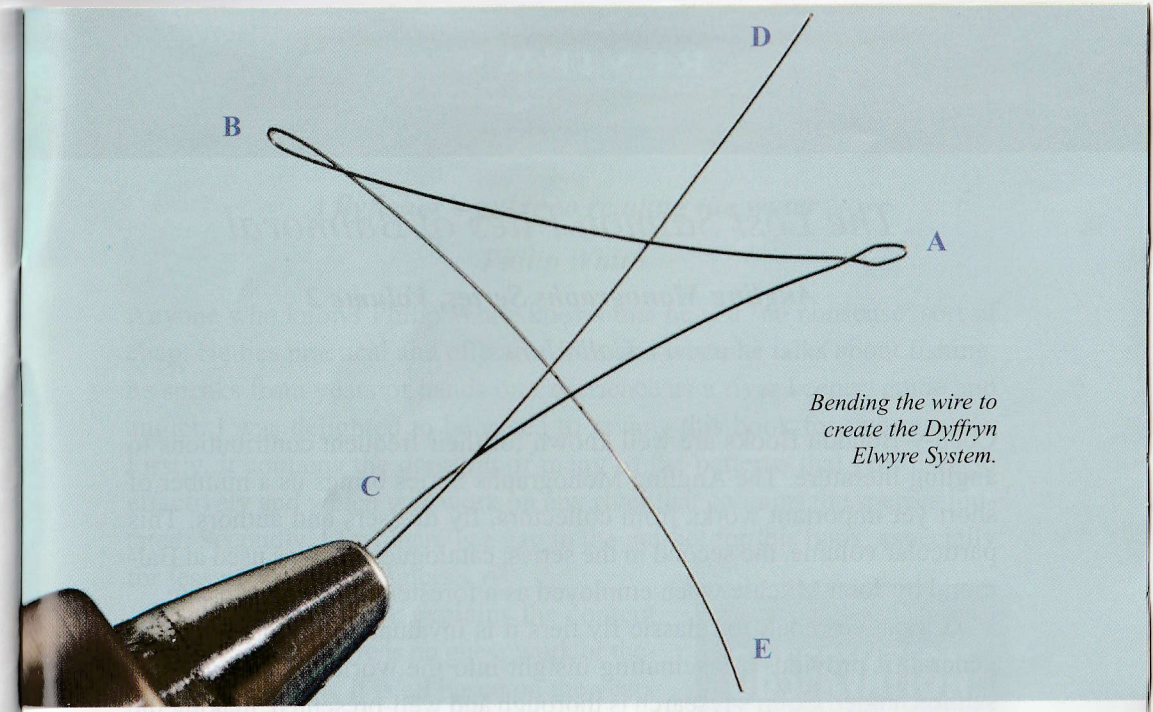
How to make the Dyffryn Elwyre System

- You will need some ultra-fine rustless wire - stiff and springy enough, yet strong enough to maintain its shape and functionality. An internet search for '000 piano wire' or '000 grade music wire' will turn up a fair few options and you can buy 3' lengths for a couple of quid.
- Take a length a little over four times the intended length of the 'arms'.

  N.B. No need to use a vice for this - the wire was only placed in a vice for ease of photography.
- Bend the wire in half, creating a slightly bulbous tip in the middle (A).
- Then bend each half back on itself, making a loop in the middle of each 'arm' (B and C) to form a triangle, as shown below.
- Tie in the first loop (A) and the 'single ends' of the 'arms' (D and E) at the head of the fly.

Tips:

- The bulbous tip (A) helps secure the Dyffryn Elwire System onto the finished fly. Originally we relied purely on inserting the tying thread into the looped centre using a couple of loose turns and then tightening as the sole means of securing the wire to the fly. However, we found that the bulbous end creates a more secure fitting and stabilises the wire on the fly.



Bending the wire to create the Dyffryn Elwyre System.

Flies tied by Martin Guiver and photographed by Richard Ellis.

- Secondly, the two 'single ends' of the 'arms' (D and E) must be slightly longer than the looped centre arm. This helps to stop these single arms pulling out when fishing the fly.
- With small flies, a single folded wire does work better using the next wire size up, providing you don't go too heavy and unbalance the fly.
- Check the balance of the fly in the water, slowly cutting back the wires until you obtain that nice sort of hovering action at the depth the fly-line dictates the fly should swim at. You will find that generally, the wire arms will be short of the hook points when you achieve this but bent into the right angle both in width and distance from the fly's body it will work perfectly well!

Martin Guiver has been a member of the FDG for longer than he cares to remember. Martin and thirteen-year old son Fergus are perfect tiers of flies for sea trout according to Hugh Falkus' maxim: the rougher the better! They both enjoy making and naming their own creations and catching fish with them. One of Fergus' first creations, aptly named the 'Fergus Fly', has accounted for the only double figure sea trout we have caught, on his very first night fishing trip.