

Flexible friends

WIM ALPHENAAR describes how fellow countryman Jan Reniers has perfected the art of tying and fishing the Snake fly



Above left: Jan Reniers behind his specially-developed Snake-fly vice.

We do not have the same, long history of fly fishing in Holland as in other countries. We have been only been fishing artificial flies and tying them for 50 years. In fact, the emergence of fishing artificial flies in Holland was an accidental event, when a few enthusiastic fly fishers discovered that it was possible to catch roach with a fly. Some of them had learned to cast and fish with a fly rod in England, France, Germany and other countries. They fished for trout elsewhere, yes, but they had never tried fly fishing in their Dutch homeland.

This roach catch 50 years ago was highly significant, and marked the beginning of Dutch involvement in fly fishing, as back in 1950 the only fishing option was in any of Holland's numerous slow-moving canals (polders), which lie below sea level.

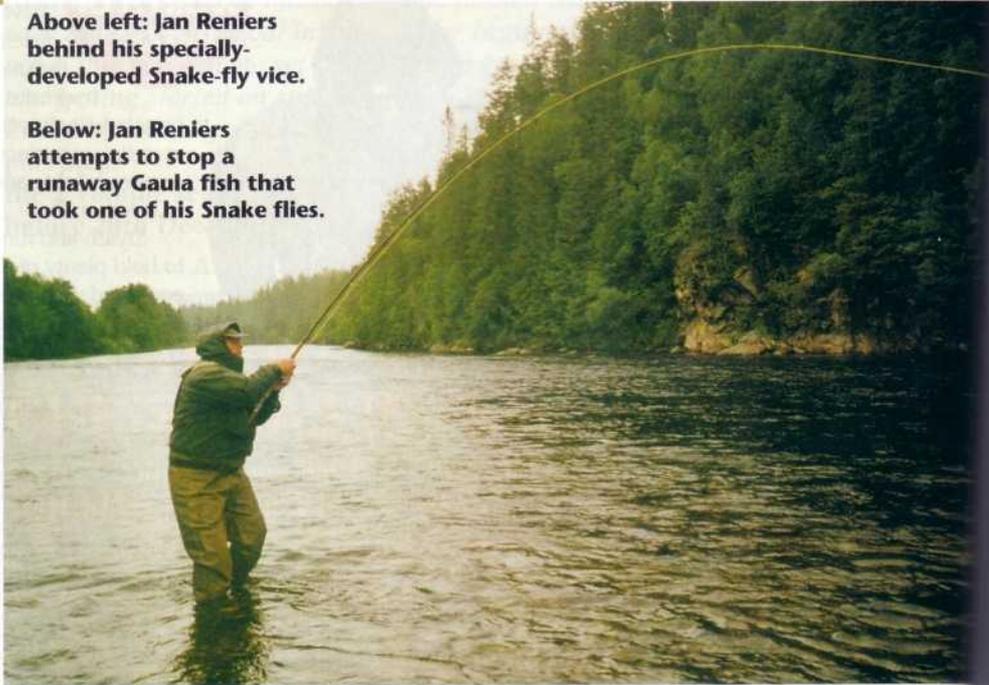
Much has changed since those days, and fly fishing as a sport has increased in popularity in Holland. We now have a good number of reservoirs where we can fish for rainbows and brownies, but unfortunately we do not have chalkstreams, rivers and mountains. If we want to fish in a river for salmon, trout or grayling, we have to visit our neighbours in Europe or Scandinavia to enjoy the sport of the Gods.

We also have a lot to learn. Tying flies required us to read lots of well-written English-language books to attain the level we're at now. Yes, there were huge arrears in our fly fishing and fly tying knowledge to be covered, but if we look back now on what's happened in a relatively short space of time, we actually have a relatively high number fly fishermen for a such a small country.

They do their job well, and we now have some very well-known tyers. One such luminary is my friend, Jan Reniers, who is an inventive, innovative tyer. One of his specialities is the Snake fly. He has been salmon fishing with variations of this style of fly for 22 years in Scotland and Norway, with great success.

Snake potential

When time and opportunity is limited, it is not so easy to dedicate time to a new style or type of fly, especially when you are



Below: Jan Reniers attempts to stop a runaway Gaula fish that took one of his Snake flies.

fishing for something as elusive as a salmon. Obviously, you need time to work out how and when it works best, and in what conditions, what materials work best with the style, and in what combinations. The fly must be tested in practice and appropriately modified, and - of course - it must also catch fish. Snake fly styles have been around for some time. On the Brora, Rob Wilson was using stainless steel wire-bodied Brora flies in the 1950's and 60's. Later, salmon and sea trout mounts were tied on heavy nylon and covered in Mylar, and also some of the thin, lightweight but strong pike wires were used as the flexible mount. These fly styles were seen as a useful alternative mount to the Falkus tandem Sunk Lure which, in turn, was itself derived from the tandem Worm Fly - a long-established favourite fly.

Twenty years of Jan's research and practice have paid off and his Snakes deserve a place as a special type of fly to fish for salmon, sea trout, and even pike. For Jan, the basic idea for this fly came from the late Hans de Groot, a well-known Dutch tyer of salmon flies. Hans had many friends in many countries and his name is still widely known. When he discussed the concept, Jan, realising the potential of these Snake flies, set about finding out more about them, began using them in earnest,

and developed some special dressing techniques to improve them.

Why Snakes?

To tie the modern Snake style you need braided nylon. One of the problems with braided nylon is the flexibility of the material - if you fix the nylon on a treble or double and place the hook into the vice it would not be possible to tie in the other materials on such a flexible mount, but Jan uses a special accessory to his vice to make the job easier. Alternatively, another vice can be used. Other, simpler ways to secure materials onto the braid are:

- 1) use Superglue to secure the braid loops. When dry, this creates a hard, inflexible section of the material which can then be clamped into the vice and used as a foundation for applying the thread and tying materials;**
- 2) clamp a darning needle into the vice and feed the braid onto it. Use the rigidity of the underlying needle to help apply the thread and winging materials to the braid, and when the fly is complete, slide the braided mount off the needle.**

These more-involved methods are perhaps slightly fiddly and discouraging to the tyer, but don't let this put you off - the advantages when it is fished far outweigh the disadvantages!



Green Highlander Snake.

If we fish a Waddington or a heavy tube fly, the fly can reach very high speeds on the end of a fly line. A gust of wind can alter the loop of a fly line, and possibly endanger your ear or face; fly fishing without glasses is no excuse, and can cause you a lot of trouble. Every year there are accidents with these heavy flies, and you would be prudent to fish a sink-tip fly line and a lighter fly.

When it comes to tube flies, length of tube also matters. When using a longer tube the fly action is not so smooth, it is stiffer and the weight of the fly is also heavier. If a salmon is hooked on a long tube, the fish will normally scream off diagonally downstream to try to lose the hook. With a long, rigid tube the leverage that occurs when this happens is often more than enough to prize free the hookhold and the fish is lost. However, with a stiff but flexible mount like the braided Snake mount, the chances of your fish unhooking itself are greatly reduced.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the lightweight construction of the bodies of these flies means they don't sink so quickly as, say, a Waddington or a tube; the Snake fly has more inherent movement in the water and the flies tends to work better in slacker currents, too. The Snake can also be fished with more confidence on a heavy sinking line, the light mount fluttering across the bottom of

'THE SNAKE FLY HAS MORE INHERENT MOVEMENT IN THE WATER'

Green Highlander (variant)

Hook: Treble Partridge X3 BL, size 8.

Tail hackle: Lemon.

Body: Yellow floss, green dubbing rib with a yellow and green hackle.

Ribbing: Oval silver tinsel.

Wing: Green, over red fox tail hair over yellow Crystal Hair.

Underwing: Small bunch of dark brown fox tail hair.

Cheeks: Small jungle cock feathers on both sides.

the river, rather than the denser bodied Waddingtons and tubes which cause flies to plunge and drag into the rocks and weed.

The basic Snake mount

Braided nylon, as I mentioned, is the basis of a Snake fly. Depending on the size of the hook to be attached we can use 25lb or 35lb BS braided nylon. First of all, thread the end of piece of nylon braid through the eye of a needle (see pic 1, overleaf).

Take a treble or double hook and feed the hook onto

the braid. Now thread the point of the needle inside the weave of the braided nylon and feed the needle up the centre of the braided nylon for about 25mm to 30mm (1 - 1¼ inches), (see pics 2 and 3).

Bring the needle tip out of the braid at this point. Draw the needle out and this will form a braided loop containing the hook, which can be adjusted for size by drawing on the tag end. Cut the excess flush with the mount's braid.

Slide a piece of silicone tube onto the nylon braid and slide this over the eye of the hook. This is a must because the hinging action of the hook eye on the braid loop could cause the braid to abrade through friction and eventually sever the

A superbly conditioned silver Gaula fish for Jan Reniers.

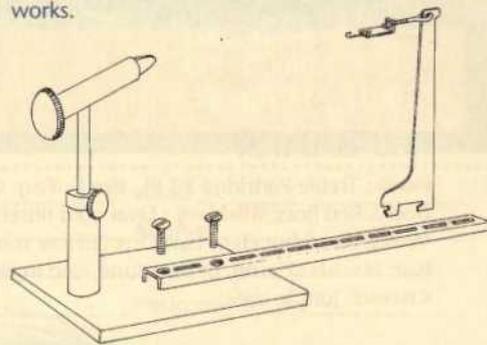
Special vice

One of the problems in the beginning was the vice - how to tie materials on a flexible piece of braid? To tie his Snake flies Jan developed a new type of vice which you can see in the photograph opposite.

The vice itself is pretty standard, but has a rotating head. On the opposite side of the pedestal there is an adjustable holder, and attached to this holder is a stem with hook. After the treble hook of the braided mount is fixed in the vice, the loop of the other end of the mount is slipped over the small hook of the holder.

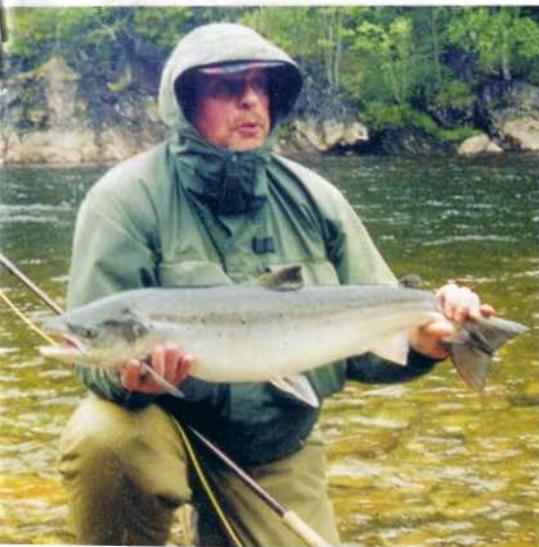
With the adjustable screw on the holder any length of mount can be held, and then stretched very tightly. The tighter the braided nylon is stretched, the thinner it becomes. When the fly has been tied and you take the fly out of the vice the fly tying material is bound fast onto the stretched braided nylon.

This vice in limited numbers and, costing about £200, is a very neat piece of craftsmanship. However, it is possible to stretch the braid using a special (and cheaper!) construction. You can make it by from one of those adjustable bookshelf holders that you find in DIY stores and a bicycle-chain stretcher. Bolt or pin the adjustable slotted wall bracket to the vice pedestal or bench and slot in the shelf holder at a working distance from the vice. Drill a hole in the very end of the shelf holder and attach the bicycle-chain stretcher here. Using a hook on the end of the stretching device, simply twist the threaded stretching device to increase or decrease tension on the braided mount. To make this construction (see drawing) you must have a few DIY skills, but it works.



nylon at this point; a simple piece of silicone tube prevents this!

Repeat the same loop-forming procedure with the needle at the other end of the length of braid (depending on how long you wish the mount to be; it could be two, three or four inches) and make a small loop here. Again, feed about 2.5cm to 3cm of braid inside the end of the braided nylon to make it secure. You now have the base on which to tie the Snake fly - on one end a hook is attached and on the other end there's a loop eye on which to tie the leader tip (see pic 4).



Dressing Snakes

There are several ways of tying this pattern, but it is my pleasure to share the technique with you - the principle is the same as the sequence of illustrations.

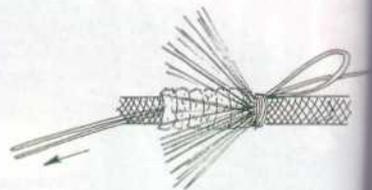
First of all, you must make the braided nylon mount and stretch this with the hook in the vice and the loop on the holder. Start your tying thread at the point where one piece of braid enters the other. I do this for extra security - to bind the two sleeves of braid together. Actually, Jan Reniers told me that this is not necessary, but I still do it anyway.

Slide a piece of Mylar piping or EZ-body - depending on what kind of fly you want to tie - over the braided nylon. A body of floss or other material such like Krenik cord can also be wound up the tensioned body and also looks very nice. A nice body variation is black EZ-body with broad silver tinsel Superglued over it.

On the hook end of the mount, you can tie in a butt of wool and a hackle - just as you would do on a normal salmon iron. As using a whip-finish system on such an apparatus is difficult, I fasten the end of the tying thread with a nylon loop (see diagram, above). Using the same loop you can pull the remainder of the wool under the wool tying to secure that, too.

If you have made a body of tubing you can wind a hackle with wide turns over the Mylar body to the other end and fasten with some turns of the thread.

Then tie in the throat hackle, a



piece of a speckled guinea fowl feather, for instance.

A bunch of hair from a calf tail, artificial hair, or long hair from a fox tail, can be then tied in as the underwing. A small bunch of Crystal Hair or Twinkle (Lureflash) over the underwing makes the fly more attractive.

For the overwing you can tie in a second or even a third small bunch of different coloured hair. Add Crinkle Hair to make the wing more attractive. There are many possibilities to tie a wing combination and this is just one example, Jan Reniers' other patterns, illustrated left, show how different materials can be incorporated into Snake fly patterns.

Any hairwing pattern can be used on a Snake fly style so long as care is taken over the choice of the correct material.

Make the Snake flies for fishing sea trout in the same proportion as depicted here, but smaller, and for salmon tie a variety of sizes - from short to long.

The fly pictures in this article show Jan Reniers' tying style for Snakes, but of course you can make your own patterns.



Highlander Special

Hook: Treble Partridge X3 BL, size 8. **Tail hackle:** Lemon. **Body:** Yellow and green floss. **Body hackle:** Lemon (under the wing). **Wing:** Green, over black fox tail hair over yellow Crystal Hair. **Underwing:** Small bunch of dark brown hair of a fox tail. **Hackle:** Heron, or substitute, tied in like a Spey hackle. **Cheeks:** Jungle cock.



Black Water Ghost

Hook: Treble Partridge X3 BL, size 8. **Tag:** Red wool. **Body:** Black floss. **Ribbing:** Oval silver tinsel. **Wing:** Small bunch of black fox tail hair over blue fox tail hair.



Red & Black

Hook: Treble Partridge X3 BL, size 8. **Tag:** Oval gold tinsel. **Body:** Red floss. **Ribbing:** Oval gold tinsel. **Wing:** Small bunch of black fox tail hair mixed with pearl Crystal hair. **Hackle:** Heron, or substitute, tied in like a Spey hackle. **Cheeks:** Jungle cock.

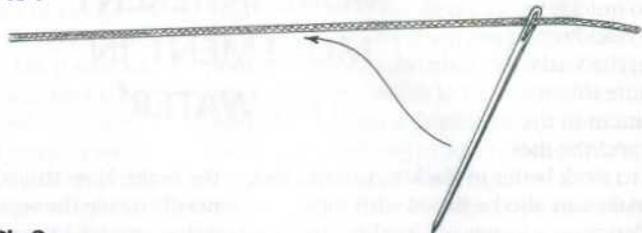


Copper Shiner

Hook: Treble Partridge X3 BL, size 8. **Tag:** Oval silver tinsel. **Tail hackle:** Red. **Body:** Kreinik copper wire or copper Body Wrap (Lureflash) with a red front hackle. **Ribbing:** Oval silver tinsel. **Hackle:** Blue (a few turns before the body). **Wing:** Small bunch of black fox tail hair mixed with copper Crystal hair.

THE BASIC SNAKE MOUNT

Pic 1



Pic 2



Pic 3



Pic 4



The vice Jan Reniers uses in this article is available from MTP, Zevenbergsedijkje 34, 3079 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands.