

# Squid Patterns

*Mark Bantich reckons squid patterns are underrated.*

Squid are something of an anomaly in the world of fly fishing. For some reason they are only given much thought if dipped in batter and deep fried. This is not surprising given that they taste fantastic. What is surprising is how few folk realise how prolific a food source they are for a great many fish species.

This is a good thing. It means that if we tie flies that move like squid, something will generally want to eat them. And in many ways we already do tie and use patterns that do a reasonable job of imitating them – deceivers and 3D flies for instance. But there are a number of patterns designed specifically to represent these little fellows and each one of them has characteristics that replicate the defining features of squid – shape and movement. In real terms, that means focusing on tentacles, eyes, their mantle (the tube) and their relative proportions to one another.

We all know what a squid looks like, give or take – a mantle (the tube-shaped bit) that contains the major internal organs and then a head with tentacles sticking out. They also have eyes – big, dark and way out of proportion to the rest of their

## GREEN EYED MONSTER



Jon Makim's Green Eyed Monster is the pattern most suited to small sizes because it doesn't rely on hackles that are often hard to find in very small sizes. Rubber materials commonly used in crab patterns make excellent tentacles but in this pattern, tied slightly larger, Jon has used wider plastic strips to maintain correct proportions.

A body of fine synthetic dubbing completes this very basic, yet incredibly effective pattern. By adding wraps of lead wire to the hook shank it can be tied to be almost weightless or as heavy as you like. The real feature of this fly are its large green eyes. The rationale is simple and one used in many patterns – show fish what they're used to seeing, but make it a little different, and often it'll get eaten.

body. There are a few more bits and pieces that we need to be aware of, but we'll get to those later.

To put all these components together it is necessary to learn a little about their life history – firstly, most squid species don't live for much more than a year, and they never seem to stop growing. They tend to aggregate to spawn, and very few test a ruler past about 60 cm (giant squid excluded of course, but I've never seen a chicken with hackles ten metres long before, and I sure as hell aren't going anywhere near any chicken that does, so we can rule that pattern out).

Their generally diminutive size is probably explained by the way they move, particularly their preference for jet propulsion. It's a great way to move, and a serious party trick, but it tends to not work very well when you get big (the physics of propulsion has them licked). Hence the little tykes stay small. It also explains the spawning bit. If you're small, grow quickly and die young, evolution says you gotta get some nookie going. So they gather in great numbers and get to work, so to speak. Then they die. Seriously. There is a lesson somewhere in there.

## GHOST SQUID



The Ghost Squid is a pretty generic amalgamation of a number of patterns that focuses strongly on maintaining fly proportion in hook sizes around 1/0 to 4/0, hence it is tied on long shanked hooks. As a result, this is not the fly to be throwing at very large fish. Leverage, plus a general dearth of very long shanked hooks capable of handling excessive torque means very big fish will spit this fly pretty quickly.

Other than that, it is a pretty basic pattern. Hackles and some flash are tied in at the hook shank, and then any fine synthetic material is either spun or tied hi-tie style forward to the hook eye. Trim the fibres into that mantle shape and glue on some eyes. Using synthetics for the mantle helps this pattern shed water on the first pickup, making it relatively easy to cast.

## EP TANDEM SQUID



Meet the big girl of the squid pattern world – the EP Tandem Squid. Tied on two 8/0 hooks joined by 100 pound wire, she's over 30 cm long. This is not a pattern to tie if you're short on material or in a hurry to go fishing. Or if you want to go fishing with a six weight. Or a ten weight for that matter.

It's also not a pattern you'd use if you were chasing large GTs around wharf pylons or coral bommies. It is really designed as a finesse pattern for tempting big, cagey fish that don't live six feet from structure. Think bluewater sharks and other oceanic predators. It takes too long and costs too much to tie to use it anywhere else. And it definitely is a finesse pattern. Tied correctly, it moves like like that girl you remember in that nightclub you went to once. It's that good.

The interesting thing about beasties that are small, live in the sea (or anywhere for that matter) breed like flies and grow really fast are that they get eaten. Big time. Squid, the oceanic varieties in particular, tend to be pelagic in their habits, and therefore get hammered by pelagic fish. Many species undertake major migrations from spawning grounds to nursery areas and back again getting munched all along the way.

Cuttlefish, on the other hand, preferring to spend their days loping near the bottom on sandy patches, get hammered by reef species, flathead, flounder and anything else that likes those areas. Of course, there is a seriously large member of the family, the giant cuttlefish *Sepia apama* which lives in South Australia. Growing to almost a metre in length, they are probably a little too much for most species to chew.

Most tuna species feed extensively on squid, as do tailor, kingfish, snapper, the mackerel clan and so on. In fact, if it swims and eats other fish, at some stage it probably eats squid.

An understanding of how squid live and what they look like is essential for knowing what makes a good squid pattern, which is why we covered some of the more useful aspects of their morphology and life history earlier. We know they generally don't grow very large, but squid also lay eggs, which means that when they hatch they're very, very small. So we can assume that squid patterns, on the whole, could be anything from a size 10 to a tandem 8/0 pattern.

We know that they move mostly using jet propulsion, hence the front part of the fly doesn't need much movement (but needs to maintain that tube shape) and the back part is where it all happens. We know that they have 10 tentacles, but they generally don't appear independent of one another, which means tying ten tentacles is pointless – how they move is far more fascinating – the scientific term is 'sexy', and it's one I endorse. Undulating, smooth, methodical and slinky. These are the features that need to be mimicked, and while there are a decent range of materials that do this, hackles are way out in front. I sometimes wonder why chickens don't have gills instead of lungs. Their feathers are wasted on land. The very

## ACRYLIC SQUID



This is a wonderful pattern designed by Glen Mikkleson, a well known US fly tyer. It has all the elements of a great squid pattern, with one nifty feature – it is extremely light relative to its size. The mantle of the fly is essentially hollow which is how it achieves its lightness.

Glen ties an underbody of flexible tubing, such as Flexo Tube, that he then covers with epoxy. In this version Jon Makim has added glitter to the epoxy and dotted the hackles with a permanent marker to give a speckled appearance. The Acrylic Squid is best tied in smaller sizes and is limited only by the size of the feathers. The better fly stores will have capes that have a range of smaller feathers down to at least a size 4 hook.

## PINK LIZZIE



The Pink Lizzie is a creation of Brisbane fly tyer Gordon Low. It is a cross between a baitfish and a squid and has its roots in Gordon's love of longtail. As he says, "I know longtail eat baitfish and squid, so I tied this pattern to hedge my bets." Gordon's favourite tuna flies have all pink in them, hence the colour scheme.

The fly is far less bulky than it looks. The hackles and eyes are tied in right back on the hook bend. The thread is then wound to the hook eye and a small clump of EP fibres are tied in facing forward, then folded back over themselves. This fly sheds water fast and is pretty aerodynamic in the air, allowing fast presentations to tuna. It has also proven effective on a great many other species too.

best patterns all have hackles to represent the tentacles. How many you use is not that important as long as it doesn't look like someone choked a feather duster.

We also know that they have eyes so big they could prop up a Wallaby scrum and that these sit between the mantle and the tentacles. It really is big and dark and very important in a pattern because it gives fish something to aim at - it's dead centre and hard to miss. Fish tend not to worry too much about nuances. If they can line it up and swim hard at it, they mostly do.

Squid mantles are probably the reason why most folk don't tie squid patterns. It just looks too hard to imitate because of its length, so tyers find themselves tying everything jammed up against the back of the hook to make space for the mantle and then find the finished fly still looks like a baitfish because the eye is set too far forward. The mantle is certainly a substantial component of the overall body length and there are only three ways to get around this – either find hooks with longer shanks, extend the body back past the hook by tying the pattern onto heavy mono

or wire, or, thinking laterally, tie the tentacles smaller and shorter. Proportion in fly tying is everything. With squid, if the tentacles are long, the mantle needs to be long. Shorten both up and you have imitated a baby squid that is easily tied on a standard hook.

Squid can be a colourful lot too and it is something worth thinking about when tying patterns – in fact, they have the ability to change colours to reflect mood and location. Cuttlefish are particularly adept at it. Even so, there are only a few colours worth considering for most squid species – white, tan and mottled brown. I'd throw in pink there too, just because pink really works.

Squid are an important component of the food chain and well worth representing in your fly box. They are both abundant and relatively straightforward to tie, making them something of an ideal pattern to tie. Just be sure to concentrate on patterns that highlight the essential elements of tentacles, eyes, the mantle and their relative proportion to one another.