

# Bream Candy

*Chris Dunham looks into his bream fly boxes*

The best fly fishers of bream I've met have been hunters. They are more often than not singular in their pursuit, preferring to haunt local waters alone or in the company of a good friend at rather odd hours of the day and night. They spend more time on the water than their partners would consider healthy and share the attributes of determination, an ability to focus and the desire to understand their prey and habitat. We're not talking full camouflage gear and face paint stage but hovering awfully close, if you know what I mean.

The one overriding observation I've made about these bream nutters is that rather than being deterred by adversity and a seemingly inexplicable maze of contradictory information, they are spurred on to develop ever more effective bream fly patterns and methods of employing these creations. They are some sort of fishy mountain climber whose worst day would be to catch the largest and most cunning bream on the planet – the last snowy peak. But it's okay, it can't be done. Those big bream are much too smart.

I would like to take a wander past a few bream flies and share with you some of my thoughts and observations on why they may or may not work.

A lot of flies can be employed to deceive bream and given enough time and variety of location and situation you could probably land bream on nearly all of the commonly used fresh and saltwater flies. But which patterns are the stand out ones? That's the real question. Which flies are clearly of more interest to bream than the others?

There is almost an obligation historically to start with the BMS and variations there of. A lot has been written about Murray Wilson's superb all round pattern the Bullen Merri Special, or as it is known the BMS. I don't want to bore the well-read fly fishers out there but this pattern is well worth a further close inspection.

The BMS provides a silhouette that is suggestive rather than harshly defined. The dubbed BMS blend fibres, when wet, form the ghostly impression of either a baitfish profile or shrimp that can be seen into and through in areas, just like many of the natural items. The gold tinsel rib glints out through the dubbing in irregular sections which is not dissimilar to the lateral line many fish display.

The soft and mobile dubbed body of a BMS has movement; the pattern rides level in the water when tied with a light tippet or loop knot, presents quietly on the water surface and is easy to tie with inexpensive materials. The BMS is also a very breamy sort of size that generally promotes a serious strike or taste test rather than a curious tail nip.

Tail nipping is an aspect of bream fishing that many fly fishers report and many have difficulty overcoming. The BMS has, apart from its appropriate size, another feature that discourages tail nipping and that is the 'focus point' of the pink or red tag on the PA BMS variations. During the mid 90s we noticed that Murray's Olive BMS was more often than not attacked right at the red thread collar that is tied directly behind the glass bead at the eye of the hook. Our deduction was that since the bream were focused on this point we might be able to direct the strike closer to the point of the hook with a red tag placed at the very bend of the hook. Enter the PA (pink arsed) BMS.

Speed and style of retrieve also plays a large part in tail nipping. Once the fly is tied and presented and your hanging onto the other end of the line the last option left to you, in so far as influencing the outcome, is how you 'yank the chain'. Keep mixing up the retrieve until you find just the right set of movements to trigger as aggressive a response as possible and be prepared for it to change not just from day to day but from hour to hour.

USD Merri Minnow Rust





Opposite Page: from top to bottom - BMS Estuary PA Chartreuse, Fuzzel Chartreuse Bead Chain, Mini FPF Purple, KBF Yellow and BMS Estuary Tan.



The original Olive BMS has spawned many variations in size, weight, colour and hook profile but all have the one common thread of a dubbed and teased out BMS blend body. By pinching together various colours of BMS Blend any number of subtly variations in tone, colour and highlight can be achieved. BMS flies tied on a stainless hook, usually a Mustad Allrounder #6, are referred to as an Estuary BMS and are a good platform to start imitating aspects of marine life from your local estuary.

The BMS Hammerhead is an upside down (point up) weighted BMS variation originally tied for deep water breaming and hunting WA bonefish. It should be noted that all of the BMS variations can be tied on freshwater, stainless or stinger hooks, for bream or bass for that matter. The freshwater hooks are usually super sharp but rust quickly and will straighten on large fish. The stainless are not as sharp but less likely to straighten and less inclined to rust. Stingers are somewhere between the two; being black nickelled they take longer to rust than the freshwater hooks and are super sharp.

Murray usually ties Hammerheads on the Mustad Signature Series Tarpon hook which has a very good point and a strong shape.

The more successful Hammerhead colour variations to date are black (which has hints of red, purple and green through it), purple and pink arsed black, PA chartreuse, PA white, olive (with a gold rib), PA olive and red.

Freshwater patterns tied on short shank curved hooks are generally strong enough to land decent sized bream in the upper reaches of estuary systems. Scud, damsel fly larva and caddis are all taken by bream in these quiet waters. The Fuzzel Scud and Fuzzel Caddis are two patterns I've used in WA with success and I know that Murray uses the Fuzzel Scud at a particular time of year to imitate a caterpillar hatch that the bream in one of his local west Victorian rivers feed on. Bead head damsels worked in the upper reaches in sandy shallows can produce some fast action and be prepared to do battle with school mulloway from time to time in these same locations.

Fuzzel Buggers in black, brown and olive work a treat on bream. Murray ties these on a heavier black high carbon hook that will rust, given time, but are super sharp and strong. In order to avoid tail nipping and short strikes it's worth cutting the marabou tail back to about half the body length. Just tear off lengths of the marabou tail between thumb and forefinger ensuring a ragged tail end that is better than the blunt, clean cut provided by scissors.

By now your probably beginning to wonder whether I've forgotten about the bream and had slipped into some freshwater trouty induced nonsense. Given the number of patterns that are normally associated with freshwater fishing



Left: BMS Salty Black. Above: Estuary BMS Bead Chain PA Black.

that would be a reasonable assumption. If you really want to make a distinction between fresh and saltwater fishing (a pointless distinction in my opinion) then we're pretty much in a no mans land. We need to remain as adaptable and flexible in fly selection and use as the bream themselves are in the range and variety of foods they can adapt to.

Estuary Perch in the upper estuary/river sections of Victorian rivers are known to feed on stick caddis. While I've not fished for bream with a stick caddis yet it would be a technique worth exploring since the two species of fish co-exist in the same waters. It's this sort of line of enquiry and adaptation of technique that has brought us great patterns like the BMS.

A Rabbit Matuka All Black is one of my favourite nighttime bream flies. When spring tides bring the high water mark up to and past reed banks on the Swan River in Perth the bream follow. There's plenty of food to be had in the extra metre of flooded grassy bank and they make the most of it.

If the night breeze is not too strong and the mosquitos not too pressing a four weight floating line, nine foot tapered leader and an unweighted dark streamer pattern like the Rabbit Matuka can provide hours of fun. The strikes are often very aggressive surface strikes, with the bream making small jumps when hooked in the very shallow water.

Just as common freshwater patterns can be adapted to bream in saltwater environments, so too can saltwater flies be downsized to suit. The Mini FPF is one example of a Swan River pattern that's brought great results when fished either hard up against the concrete bridge supports or away from the structure no more than a foot or two below the surface.

The KBF Yellow is a Perth pattern developed by Kris Jackson that borrows something from the recent fashion of soft plastic fishing. Kris' use of a worm hook and sparing amounts of Ghost Fibre and Unique Hair wing make this fly easy to fish over broken, mussel encrusted river bottom without losing too many flies. The KBF is simple, elegant and effective.

Are there generalisations that can be made about bream flies? Sure. And every trip you make for bream from this moment forth will disprove every assumption I'm about to put to print – but here goes anyway.

Flies that can be fished in or near the surface at night and present a solid outline against the night sky (ninety percent

being black and the remainder red) are essential.

Flies which have the Clouser Deep Minnow jiggling qualities are hard to resist for bream in and around broken rock reefs and other cover. They are however soon figured out by the bream and ignored unless a strong current is keeping their interest up.

Olive and gold as a colour combination works better than most other colours when fishing upstream in slightly brackish reaches, while white/pearl and pink or chartreuse works best nearer the sea.

For daytime bream flies it is better to underdress than overdress the fly. Bream will attack flies as large as a 1/0 deceiver, but on the whole the strike rate is better with smallish flies and apart from the problem of hook strength there is no pattern too small.

Don't waste your time tying on hooks that are less than razor sharp. 34007's are cheap but they are pretty average when compared to a Mustad Signature Series hook. Check the hook point often when fishing and sharpen at the slightest suggestion of a dulled point.

Ok, that enough bull about what I think works. What I would like to see are letters to the editor saying I'm full of it when it comes to bream because "Joe Blow and I caught a hundred bream at night on white 4/0 overdressed Closures". (If you do send me letters, please make sure you also send sample flies so I can test your theories...about a dozen should do - Ed).

And remember, if your favourite spot looks like being targeted by a bream nutter just slip into the conversation that the bream there are all easy to catch – he'll probably sort of glaze over and wonder off.

Caddis patterns are proving effective in freshwater reaches.

