

# A Hidden Gem

Peter Hartley discovers Little Heath Farm – one of Bedfordshire’s best-kept secrets – a gem of a smallwater fishery where punts allow anglers the luxury of their own floating platform.

**L**ittle Heath Farm takes ‘difficult to find’ to a far higher level. Even with the help of a satnav you will need to keep your wits about you to find it!

The fishery is hidden to the west of Gamlingay on the Bedfordshire/Cambridgeshire border. The approach in itself is a challenge, as negotiating the large potholes of the unadopted road leading to the fishery is quite tricky. The road then narrows to a track that meanders its way through a wood before opening out to the owners, Alan and Pauline Garthwaite’s, bungalow.

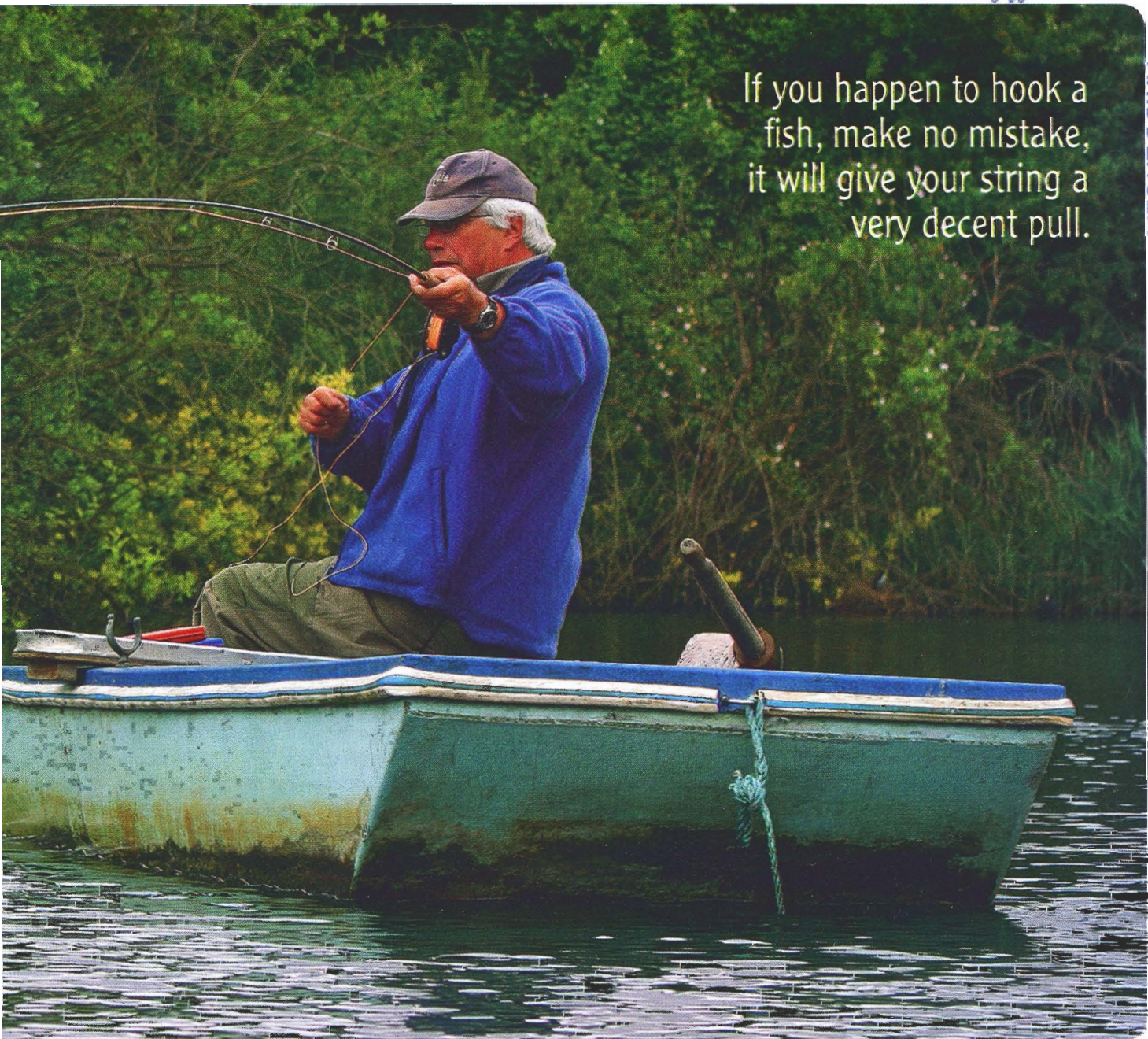
It’s not until you park, however, that the lake reveals itself. Walk over the well-manicured lawns leading to the water’s edge and six acres of the most delightful fishery you could possibly imagine lies before you. Dark and moody to the right, the calm water reflects the dense wood that grows and overhangs right over the eastern bank. The lake then lightens up to a well-controlled, tree-lined north bank complete with a natural island. This is home to many species of wildlife and waterfowl that frequent this beautiful mature 100-year-old lake.

The western side is heavily reeded leading back to the sloped lawned area where the fishery’s six punts are moored. All the punts were hand-built, more than 25 years ago, by Alan and are testament to his woodworking skill as they are all still in remarkably good condition.

The lake itself has a fairly stable depth of between four and 10 feet, but the main feature is a large 40ft hole just off the north bank. Alan retained this for a “little interest” when he drained the lake shortly after buying the 20-acre property.

“It always seems to hold fish, especially during the hot summer months when they tend to congregate there for the cooler water,” explained Alan.

The lake holds both rainbows and browns, which Alan grows on himself in cages to the right of the property, and is stocked once a week. The grown-on fish have time to acclimatise as they are



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kept in the cages for at least three to four weeks before being released. This care is reflected in their fighting qualities.

They're not the biggest resident fish you will ever come across but the fishery records stand at 12lb 2oz for a rainbow and 7lb 4oz for brown trout, so larger fish are possible. If you happen to hook a fish, make no mistake, it will give your string a very decent pull.

For decades the fishery has attracted a regular band of anglers, some returning to the venue every week for nigh-on 20 years, and you can instantly understand the attraction.

There is no road noise at Little Heath Farm, all you hear is... nothing, total peace and quiet, just a few squabbling coots and moorhens and the 'swoosh' of feeding sandmartins as they dive down to grab a tasty pond olive off the water's surface.

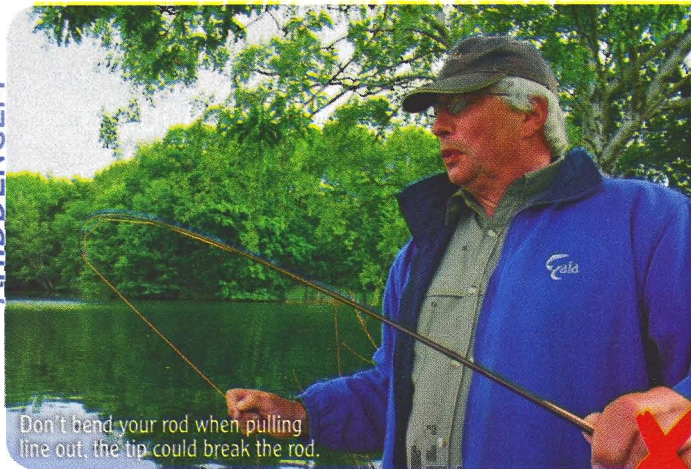
### Diawl Bach

**Hook:** Kamasan B175 size 12  
**Thread:** Fluoro orange  
**Rib:** Thin copper wire  
**Tail & Hackle:** Natural game cock  
**Body:** Peacock herl

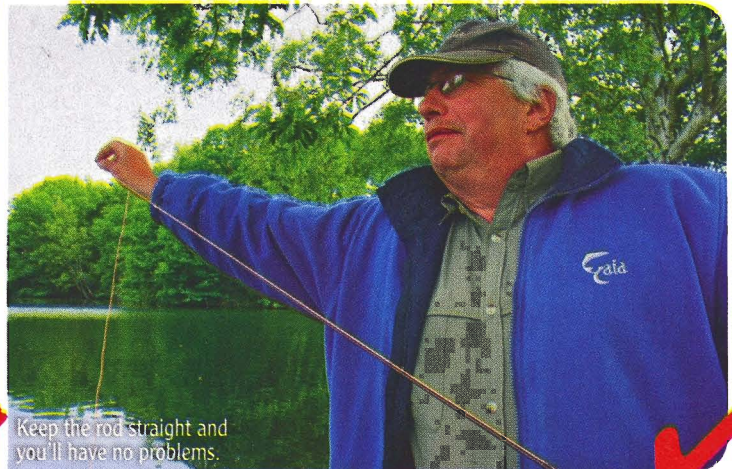


### Cruncher

**Hook:** Kamasan B175 size 12  
**Thread:** Brown  
**Rib:** Thin copper wire  
**Tail:** Pheasant tail fibres  
**Hackle:** Greenwell's hen  
**Body:** Pheasant tail fibres  
**Thorax:** Peacock herl



Don't bend your rod when pulling line out, the tip could break the rod.



Keep the rod straight and you'll have no problems.

It's Peter Hartley's first visit to the fishery. "Although I have lived nearby for many years I really didn't know that the place existed," says Peter. "Seeing this vista is a real revelation, I can't wait to get out on the water, it looks so fishy."

Tackling up his Greys Greyflex 6/7-wt, 9ft 6in rod, Peter, somewhat surprisingly, chooses an Airflo Sixth Sense 7-wt floating line. "I really like Sixth Sense as it has very little stretch and I can feel the gentle takes a whole lot better than I can with a line with stretch. I need to be very careful when playing a fish because of the lack of stretch. However, I hardly ever bully my trout to the net, I tend to play them out, especially on a fishery such as this where there's a catch-and-kill policy," explains Peter.

Putting the bottom two sections of his rod together, Peter threads the floating line through doubled over. He then threads the line through the loose top section before securing the rod into one piece. "A nasty habit I see a lot," says Peter,

## Peter didn't earn his England international cap for nothing and soon has the beating of his feisty opponent, slipping the 2½lb rainbow into his waiting net.

Anglian Water's chief casting instructor, "is angler's bending their rod tips to near breaking point while pulling their fly line out through the rings of their rod. If they would take a second to put the rod butt on the floor and pull the line out straight from the top ring, it would save many a top section from breaking."

He also has a rather unique way of setting up his leader. Using 7lb Fulling Mill fluorocarbon, Peter attaches the leader to the braided loop with a five or

six-turn blood knot (untucked), then reels the fly line back to the spool giving him a 19ft leader length. He then constructs two 'paternoster-style' blood loops. "I tend to use Fulling Mill fluorocarbon for the main leader as it's slightly stiffer than the supple 6lb Sightfree fluorocarbon I use for the 9in dropper lengths," added Peter.

He makes a classic three-fly selection to start the proceedings. A size 12 Cruncher on the top dropper, a size 12 Red Holographic Diawl Bach on the middle dropper and a size 10 Epoxy Black Buzzer on the point. "I've put the heavier Epoxy Buzzer on the point to get the flies down quickly," explains Peter.

"I've had a good look at the water and although it's holding a slight tinge of colour, apparently due to some spawning tench, the clarity is pretty reasonable. However, the fly life hatching off is mainly very small pond olives and buzzers, which I suppose is what the sandmartins are looking for. That's why I have gone for size 12 dropper flies, but I



Although Little Heath Farm trout aren't huge they represent a proper challenge and they fight extremely well.

am prepared to drop to either 14s or even 16s if it's necessary. We'll see."

Peter has taken some advice from Alan, who has suggested starting at the east end of the lake in front of the cages. If that's too productive, move to the middle of the lake between the island and the boat dock where he has seen a few fish moving during the morning.

With the punt sparsely packed Peter casts off. The craft rows remarkably well and will provide a very stable platform for fishing. Rowing to the area close to the cages, Peter tries to set a drift up, but, although there is hardly any strength to the breeze, what there is, is being funnelled through the umbrella of trees surrounding the lake, blowing the drifting punt in all directions.

"I've not actually managed to get a cast in yet," bemoans Peter. "Although I really dislike using one I am going to be forced to use the anchor." Dropping the white pre-tied anchor over one side of the punt he attempts to put a line out. The free end of the boat is waving about on the water like an out of control magician's wand.

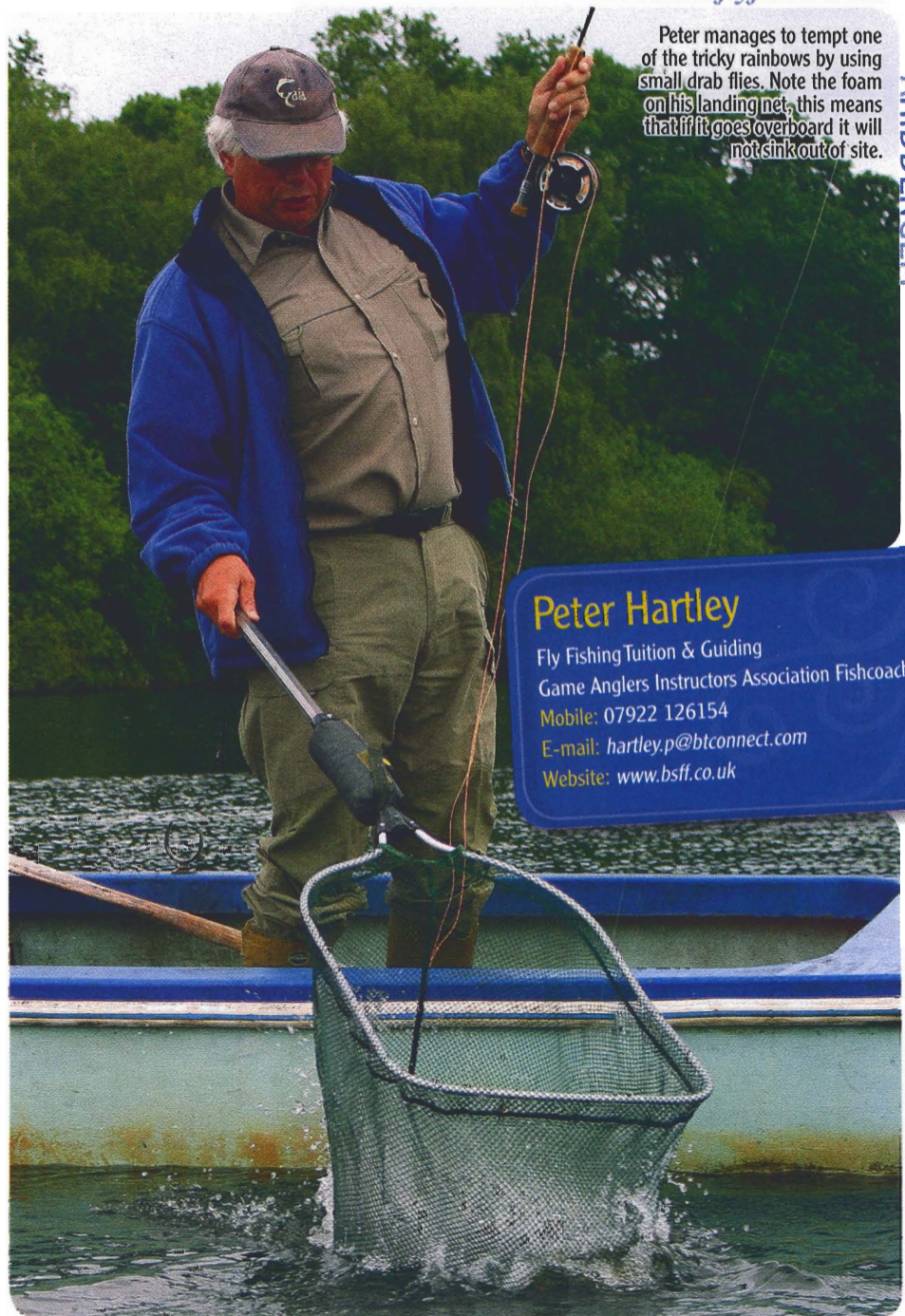
"I've got no choice but to drop the other anchor down to try and stabilise the punt and get it pointing in the right direction." At last the punt seems to have steadied itself and Peter can, finally, make his first cast of the day.

The orange Sixth Sense floating line is dramatically silhouetted against the backdrop of the dark wood, and Peter's 'sexy loops' on the backcast are perfectly framed as he projects his flies forward. The cast turns over exquisitely; Peter makes one sharp jerk on the orange fly line to raise the flies enticingly in the water. He then straightens the fly line and starts his retrieve.

Peter is fan-casting the water in front of his boat when the fly line visibly moves forward against his retrieve. "That was the gentlest of plucks and it didn't stick, but at least I know I've got fish in front of me," reasoned Peter.

In the next 20 minutes there were no further offers, so a move to the centre of the lake is suggested. "The fish are higher in the water than I first thought," remarks Peter. "I am going to change the point fly to a Dabbler to make more disturbance in the water, because the bubbles created by the heavily dressed fly sometimes act as an attractor to the trout, and they follow it until they spot the nymphs."

The theory sounds very plausible;



Peter manages to tempt one of the tricky rainbows by using small, drab flies. Note the foam on his landing net, this means that if it goes overboard it will not sink out of site.

## Peter Hartley

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Peter has a deep-rooted knowledge regarding the psyche of the rainbow trout. With the very next cast his fly line – like a wire cheese cutter – is whipped skywards sending a shower of water droplets cascading back to the surface of the lake. Arching the Greys Greyflex rod horizontally, he exerts the maximum pressure on his unseen adversary, turning the trout's head, narrowly avoiding a nasty encounter of the sunken tree roots variety, as the fish makes a charge for the safety of the island.

"This trout is really going," says Peter. "I don't think it's an enormous example, but it's really taking line from the reel." True to his word, Peter is giving the fish a fighting chance. The rod bends over in protest as it's forced to prove its pedigree.

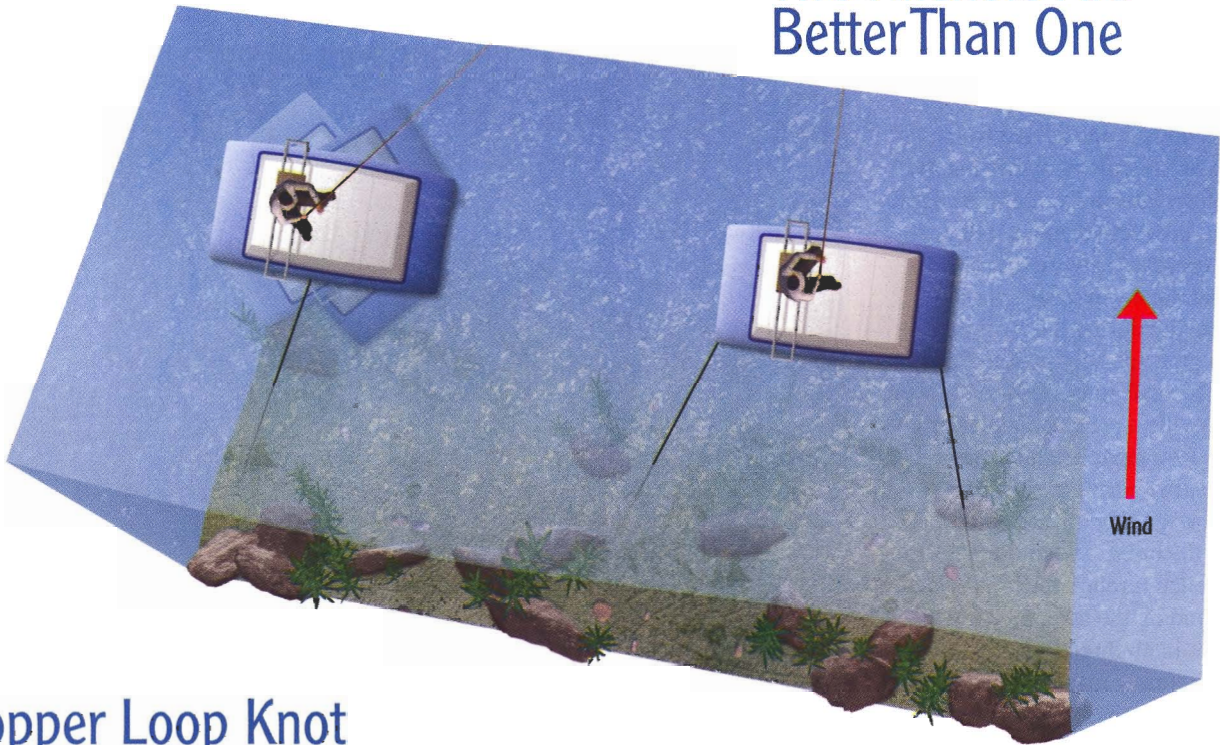
However, Peter didn't earn his England

international cap for nothing and soon has the beating of his feisty opponent, slipping the 2½lb rainbow into his waiting net. "It took the Cruncher on the top dropper," he says. "They must be up in the top couple of feet, so I think a two-fly cast may yield better results." Peter repositions the Cruncher and Diawl Bach then recasts.

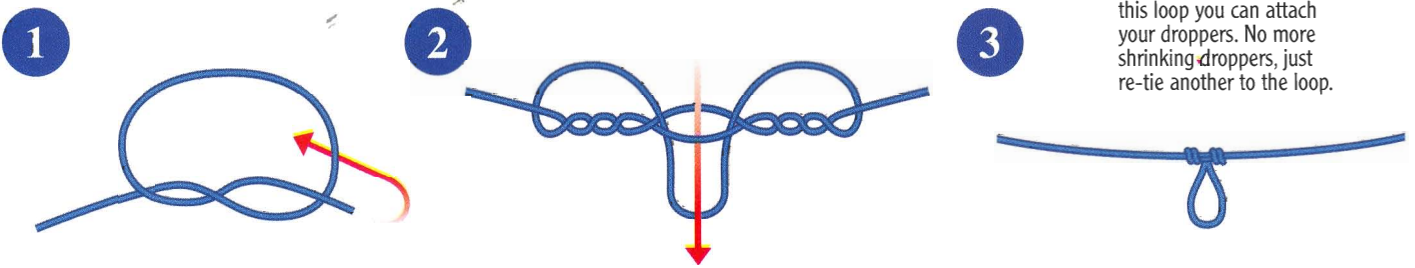
"I've not bought a commercial fly for many years, I tie my own all the time. Unlike some anglers, my patterns tend to follow traditional tyings with nothing too unusual or gaudy, I like to 'match the hatch' certainly in regards to the size of hook," says Peter.

One very interesting observation is that the insect and fly life on Little Heath Farm is of the very small variety. Without a doubt the fishery is not giving up its fish easily on this visit, and Peter has to really work hard for the smattering of offers that he is having

# Two Anchors Are Better Than One



## Dropper Loop Knot



Now that you've formed this loop you can attach your droppers. No more shrinking droppers, just re-tie another to the loop.

"I'm loath to put a full 'washing line' on with two Boobies – one placed on the point and one on the top dropper leaving two nymphs to hang in the water – as I think that it would be something of an overkill on such a small water.

"However, I have gone back to three flies with a small debarbed Booby on the point to keep the cast up in the water," explains Peter.

The change brings almost instant results with a heavily spotted 3lb rainbow taking

the Red Holographic Diawl Bach. An afternoon's instruction session for Peter Hartley brings a premature end to his first visit to this very scenic fishery, but a promise to return follows as he says **goodbyes to the genial owners.** ■



**Editors Note**  
– Always wear a life jacket when fishing from a boat. Only stand up when you need to, when playing a fish for example.

## Fact File

### Little Heath Farm Trout Fishery

**Location:** Little Heath Road, Gambingay, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 3LL  
**Tel:** 01767 650301  
**Contact:** Alan & Pauline Garthwaite  
**Season 2009:** March 28th to December 31st  
**Species:** Rainbow and brown trout  
**Tickets:** £18 for four fish, boat: £4

