by **J. Crossman**

Choose a Quill

HAVE you ever gazed into a tackle-shop window, spotted a vividly painted float and decided to buy it simply because it seemed a jolly fine float to have in your tackle box?

As a young angler, I remember going into a shop to buy a huge, cork-bodied float that had caught my eye. Fortunately, the tackle dealer was himself an angler and before selling it to me, he asked what sort of fishing I intended doing.

'Canal fishing,' I replied.

The man produced a long peacock quill—'This is what you want,' he said. 'It will make you all the floats you need for a couple of seasons, and it will cost you only a penny. The other float is for chub fishing in a big river like the Hampshire Avon.'

He was quite right, of course, though I came out of the shop feeling that my peacock quill was not really an adequate substitute for that outsize Avon float.

The peacock quill is still the cheapest and best all round float obtainable. Two or three inches from the thin end makes an ideal canal float, and the thicker part will make floats suitable for many rivers and pools.

If, after you have started fishing, you find that too much of the quill is sticking above the water, it is a simple matter to trim it to size with a snip of the scissors. Two pieces of valve rubber will serve to attach the quill to the line.

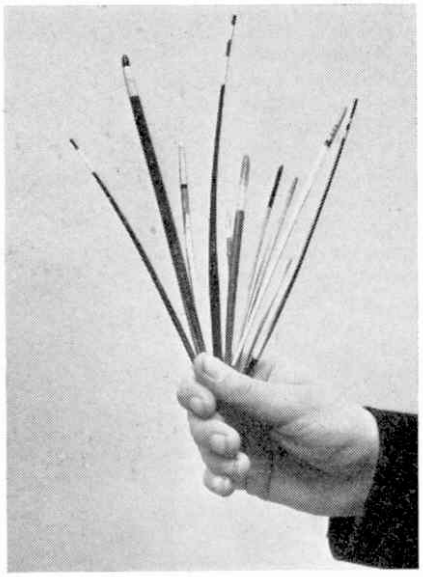
My only objection to peacock quill in its natural state is that it is conspicuously white and might scare fish. I prefer to paint all my floats a matt grey or olive green, except for the tips. These I paint in orange or white bands, separated by narrow strips of black. One or other colour scheme meets all my requirements —a white tip for dark water, orange for silvery surfaces away from the shadows of reeds or overhanging trees.

How much of the tip you paint is a matter of personal preference and eyesight, but bear in mind that when you are fishing, you will want as little of the float showing as possible. The less above water, the less resistance will be offered when a fish bites.

In calm conditions the float can be shotted down so that it is visible only as a water-level blob. On windy days, when the water is choppy, or when fishing at long range, it may help to have more of the tip showing, sacrificing sensitivity for visibility.

The more fishing I do, the more I'm convinced that a good angler equipped with simple quill floats can more than hold his own with anglers of similar ability with the widest possible range of shop-bought floats.

For running water, goose quills of various sizes are excellent. Their rather blunt tops are easy to see and provide surface buoyancy to ensure that they ride well in rough water.



Quills of all shapes and sizes! With an assortment like this, an angler can tackle any water.

The tail-end feathers of a crow make extremely delicate canal floats and an assortment of seagull and swan quills will provide a float to meet any condition of wind and water. A slender quill used upside down ('reversed' as anglers say) is exceptionally sensitive and can serve as an antenna float.

All quills have the merit of casting well and falling lightly on the water without fuss. Besides this, they have the advantage of costing next to nothing to make. A visit to a farmyard, a country walk and a stroll along the beach are all that are necessary to give you enough floats to last a lifetime!

From Floats to Bait

AN anglers' opinion poll to ascertain the popularity of various fishing baits would show that the maggot was a firm favourite. Results over the seasons would suggest that this preference is shared by the fish, too, for more coarse fish are tempted by maggots than by any other bait.

Perch, grayling and trout will seldom take a second look at a hook baited with bread, but I can think of no species of fish that is not regularly caught on maggot.

When casting, retrieving, or striking, the maggot rarely comes off the hook—a factor which is especially appreciated by contest anglers who like to keep the time spent on re-baiting to a minimum.

I think the success of the maggot is due to its being the most natural bait there is of a size which makes it suitable for angling purposes. The larvae of the blue bottle, maggots, must find their way into every kind of waterway at various times, and they are also similar in size and form to a host of water creatures and insects in their embryo stages.

A common mistake when fishing with maggot is to use too big a hook. I generally use a size 18 hook when baiting with a single maggot and sizes 16 and 14 when two or three maggots are the offering. Larger hooks may be used when baiting with a bunch of maggots for bream, chub, carp or tench.

There are times when chub especially seem to appreciate a substantial mouthful, but more often than not, fish will prefer a single maggot on a small hook to several maggots bunched like bananas on a large hook. After all, when maggots are thrown into the water they sink separately—not in clusters.

Bait your hook by nicking the point of the hook through the skin at blunt end of the maggot (the tail). Hooked this way the bait will wriggle enticingly, and the point and barb of the hook will not be impeded when you strike.

It pays to prepare maggots for fishing. Shop-bought maggots are usually packed in sawdust which is strongly tainted. Some anglers maintain that this taint is undesirable and can be detected by the fish, they therefore sieve off the sawdust and place their maggots in dry groundbait, bran, or breadcrumbs.

The maggots are then more pleasant to handle, being cleaner, and have a smell which corresponds with that of the groundbait used to attract fish to the swim. Maggots which have been scoured in this way sink more quickly than those which are greasy—and in running water quick-sinking maggots are a great advantage.

A useful sieve for separating maggots from unwanted sawdust can be made from a sheet of galvanise zinc with ⅛ in. diameter holes. If left on the sieve, the maggots will crawl through, losing much of their grease in the process.

The method used for selecting gentles. Only live ones wriggle through the mesh