



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 24, number 1

January 2021

Secretary's Report **By Nicole March**

In December, we had a great first virtual meeting of the guild, via Zoom. Our monthly meetings using Zoom will be held on the third Friday of the month, at 7:00 P.M., until further notice.

As the meetings draw closer, you will get a Zoom link emailed to you at the beginning of the month, followed by reminders one week before the meeting, and then two hours preceding the scheduled meeting. Please do not click on the link until a few minutes before the scheduled time. You can join Zoom via computer, tablet, or phone, and you don't have to have your video or sound on if you wish to just listen and watch: it's totally up to you.



Is there a favorite fly in your pile?

The guild is putting together a presentation for the March meeting that will showcase the favorite patterns of our members. Because we are not able to have an in-person Rendezvous this year, we think that this virtual presentation will be a way of partially serving the same purpose. This is open to all members in good standing with a current membership. To be included in the presentation, please email the following information: your name, a clear photo of the fly, the recipe and materials list, and any notes that you have regarding tying or fishing the pattern. All pictures will be put into a PowerPoint slideshow and presented at the March meeting. Email your fly information to: catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com.

Schedule of Upcoming Virtual Meetings

January 15, 2021, at 7:00 P.M: Guild meeting and open tying/discussion

February 19, 2021, at 7:00 P.M: Annual Meeting

March 19, 2021, at 7:00 P.M: Presentation of the guild's favorite fly patterns of our members

New Voting Protocols for the Annual Meeting

Voting for the annual meeting will be done electronically only, via an online form. This month, you'll receive an email with the nominations for the open positions, and have the ability to nominate other candidates for consideration by the nominating committee. On February 1, 2021, you will receive an email containing a link to vote, and you'll have until February 18, 2021, at 11:59 P.M. EST, to complete your voting form. This will allow for the time needed to tally the votes before the next meeting where the results of the election will be announced.

To cast a vote, your first step is to enter the information required in the form. The most important part of that information is your name and the email address that matches the email address that you use to receive the guild's newsletters. You then proceed down the list, clicking your selections, then hit submit.

Regulations:

- You are allowed one vote per email address. If you submit the form twice, the first submission is the only vote that is going to count.
- If you do not enter your email address, your vote does not count.
- If your email address does not match our member list (this will be the same email address that you're using to receive the guild's emails), your vote does not count.
- If you are not a current member in good standing, your vote does not count.

Please contact us with any questions beforehand, so we can help simplify the process: CatskillFlyTyersGuild@gmail.com

President's Message

By Joe Ceballos

Welcome to 2021! I'm hoping that the holidays have given you some enjoyment and a glimmer of hope. With the advent of promising vaccines, we now have a way forward to getting back, somewhat, to the way things were.

Our first Zoom meeting appears to have been a success, and there are more to come. As mentioned earlier in the *Gazette* by Nicole in her secretary's message, there will be a virtual meeting on Friday, January 15, 2021. There will be advance notices of meetings, and when possible, additional presentations and open-tying events. I hope that we get many submissions from our members for the favorite flies focus of the March meeting. Remember, though, the most important thing to bring to the meeting—is your presence. As long as our wonderful members are there, the meeting is always bound to be a hit.

At one of our upcoming meetings, we will present the end product of our guild history video project. In the early days of building my leadership team, I reached out to Paul Dolbec and asked him to help expand the influence and relevance, here and abroad, of the guild in the fly tying community. I felt that Paul's background in consulting and international business development would be an asset to our organization. Fast-forward several months, and he's delivered the first tool from which we could share the mission and goals of the guild. This was coupled with an historical timeline crediting the people who have made or are currently making a contribution to the tradition of Catskill-style flies. Paul has prepared a PowerPoint presentation that we plan to use at shows, and at our presentations to other fly-fishing organizations. Paul credits David Brandt with assisting him in the creation of the content, along with input from a number of members that he interviewed in the course of the project's development.

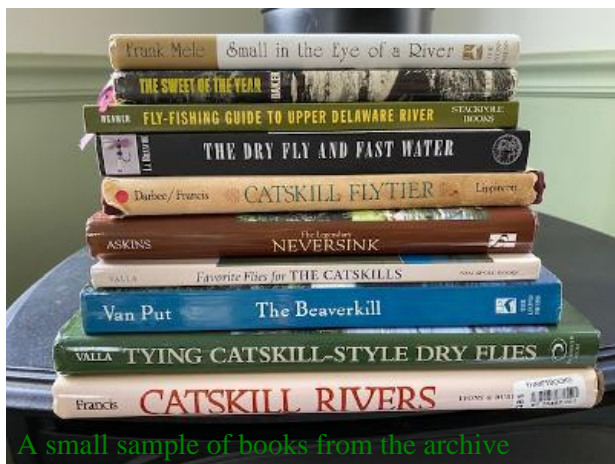
Paul has been determined in his pursuit of completing this mission, and he was not to be denied the purpose of his work, even as the COVID-19 virus made face-to-face meetings impossible. He wrote a detailed script of the presentation, and he sought and received the support of Tim Flagler of

Tightline Productions, who graciously donated his time and added his well-known voice to the narration the PowerPoint. Paul then recruited close friend and fishing companion Jim Sweeney, a former video production manager for a number of news organizations, to develop the video capability. Jim is now also a member of the guild, and we want to recognize and thank him profusely for the time that he has volunteered to make this a very worthwhile presentation.

The bottom line is—we now have a full-length video, hosted by Tim Flagler, the voice of fly tying in America. My sincere thanks to Paul Dolbec, Dave Brandt, Tim Flager, and Jim Sweeney for donating their time and service to the guild.

The Guild’s History Project Book Archive By Paul Dolbec

The historian team of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild has assembled a list of books that we believe are relevant to the needs and interests of the guild’s membership. We are guided by the traditions set forth in the guild’s mission statement. The existence of a book archive contributes to serving the third and fourth elements of that statement: *providing a forum for the sharing of information*, and to



A small sample of books from the archive

promote the development of future generations of Catskill fly tyers.

The content of the book archive, spanning long-past to current publications, is managed by the guild’s historian team: Paul Dolbec, Ed Ostapczuk, Joe Ceballos, and Chuck Coronato. Although the initial emphasis for this book list was to have focused on the history of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, we have expanded the focus to the Catskills and fly fishing in general.

Because the book archive is too lengthy to include in the *Gazette*, it will be emailed as a separate document to all of the guild’s members.

Expect the archive to arrive before the guild’s Zoom meeting that is scheduled for January 15. The book archive will also be featured on the guild’s website: <https://catskillflytyersguild.wordpress.com>.

Members of the guild are encouraged to suggest books to be added to the list. The email containing the book list will outline the procedure to submit suggestions. These submissions will be used to periodically update the book archive on the guild’s website.



Winter Fishing

It was quite a year, wasn’t it? I’m not sure if it’s my age or just my mind forcing it past me at a rate I’ve never experienced, but 2020 just flew by. So much happened, yet I feel like I accomplished nothing.

It’s over now, this year that will be remembered in history as “the worst,” and while nothing much is actually different except the numeral, we can at least feel some relief that it is over.

As I mentioned in the last *Gazette*, this upcoming season, starting on April 1, 2021, will also be the first ever in the Catskills that fishing for trout in our streams will be allowed continuously. There

will be an open season year-round for trout. I have expressed my feelings on this to my friends, to the conservation-minded organizations in the Catskills, and mostly to the people who passed it at the DEC.

It's almost here, and although I will miss the Opening Day festivities: the anticipation that comes with the first day of April, and looking forward to the Opening Day reports from the area fly shops, I'm keeping an open mind with fingers crossed that these new regulations won't harm the population of wild trout or impact the streams in a bad way.

Many areas in New York and Pennsylvania have had open water year-round. And while I'm of the opinion that the Catskills are different—special, if you will—if we as anglers and stewards of our streams keep spawning areas undisturbed and do not fish for trout during these times, it's possible that this can work.

Then there's the actual winter fishing. Winter is not the most comfortable of seasons to be standing in and around flowing water. However, if solitude is what you desire, there's no better time to fish than the dead of winter.

Very cold water temperatures make trout slow, and while there is the possibility of trout taking small mayflies and stoneflies on top, it's mostly a subsurface game.

Generic nymph patterns fished deep in the water column will take lethargic fish during the winter, but trout won't move much to eat, so reading water and covering likely spots thoroughly will increase the chances of hooking up. I obviously have no long-term experience in the Catskills during the winter, but I've fished many times in New Jersey's open sections of public water and can attest that working a likely run patiently can be very productive, because the fish are always there. They just aren't as frisky as they are in warmer water.

I like heavier nymphs such as Copper Johns, Rainbow Warriors, and weighted Hare's Ears in sizes 14 to 18, but what I really like are handwarmers and a short trip. I'm also very diligent to wade in shallow water, never over my knees, and I keep a change of clothes in the vehicle—just in case. About the only time that you won't feel cold is when you're landing a fish. The rest of the time, you may be asking yourself why you ventured out in the first place!

Seriously, though, it is very peaceful fishing in the winter. Cold hands aside, it's worth trying a time or two just to experience it. Just stay away from the tiny creeks, so that the latest generation of trout eggs has a chance.



A Rainbow Warrior tied by CJ

The Peach Fly and The Beaverkill

Kevan Best, a fly-fishing buddy, recently told me of several rewarding 2020 autumn Beaverkill River outings using the Peach Fly. That conversation piqued my interest, because I'd never heard of the Peach Fly. I decided to undertake some research. Initial clues pointed to a book authored by Eric Peper and the late Gary LaFontaine, *Fly Fishing the Beaverkill*, which mentions a September Peach Fly in about a size 16 with a creamy peach-

Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

colored body. The hatch chart mentions it again, but not with more information. Thus, I emailed Eric, and asked what he remembers about this elusive mayfly.



Photo: Joe Rist

Eric emailed back, noting that the Peach Fly’s “background is kind of amusing.” He stated that years ago, when he still lived in Rockland County, he and Larry Solomon would get together to discuss Beaverkill aquatic entomology. One year, in late September, they were musing about a peach-colored mayfly that they both encountered on the Beaverkill near Hendrickson’s Pool. They christened this mayfly the Peach Fly, thinking that it might belong to the *Ephemerella* genus of mayflies. Beyond that, Eric didn’t have much recollection, citing the passing of time for not remembering more, but he did remark that he’s never encountered this mayfly elsewhere.

Then I happened to read a newsletter of the Dave Brandt Chapter of Trout Unlimited containing an article by Dave Plummer on the Peach Fly. Since I also know Dave, I contacted him about this bug. He reported having very nice late-season success on the Beaverkill using the Peach Fly. Dave also mentioned the Peper/LaFonatine book, but said that he used a fly developed by the late Dennis Skarka, which was published on his Catskill Flies website. This sent the trail of my investigation in the direction of Trout Town Flies—the new name of the fly shop where Catskill Flies was located.

After websearching the Peach Fly, I found a recipe on the Mid Hudson Trout Unlimited Chapter website posted by Joe Rist, the proprietor of Trout Town Flies. We eventually spoke on the phone, and Joe told me that his Peach Fly was a slight variation of Dennis’s original recipe. It also closely matched the pattern that Dave Plummer emailed me.

Joe Rist’s Peach Fly

Hook: Lightning Strike SE1, size 14
Thread: Orange 8/0
Shuck: Brown Z-Ion or Antron
Body: Mix of yellow and orange fur
Wing: Cream CDC

The above version is the same fly that had Kevan Best singing its praises. The photos of the Peach Fly and the mayfly it represents, were supplied by Joe Rist, who mentioned that it has also been a successful pattern for him late in the season on the East Branch of the Delaware River.

Perhaps the only remaining question is whether the Peach Fly is an Orange Cahill/*Ephemerella*, as suggested by Dennis Skarka and Joe Rist, or an Orange Sulphur/*Epeorus vitreus*, as believed by my buddy Kevan Best, who started me on this path of discovery. To me, it doesn’t really matter: I’m no bug expert, and everyone reports that this dry fly catches late season trout.

I’d like to give special thanks to Eric Peper, Dave Plummer, and Joe Rist for lending input to this piece.



Joe Rist's Peach Fly

Looking Back Upstream



Owls on the Fly **By Pete Adams**

I have a fascination with owls. When I was just a little kid and hadn't yet begun my fly-fishing journey, I got it into my head that having a small pet owl would be pretty cool.

We had screech owls in our northern New Jersey neighborhood, and they seemed to be just the right size for a pet. I had visions of training them to sit on my arm, gently eat out of my hand, and calmly submit to being petted like a dog or a cat. I obviously didn't know much about the nature of wild owls. Fortunately, my mom intervened. She made it clear that an owl would not be welcome in the house, that owls are nocturnal, that it would be awake when we were asleep, that it would make a terrible mess, that keeping one in our home wouldn't be fair to the owl—and so on. We got a couple of dogs instead.

Many years later, on my way to work in the dead of winter, a barred owl flew in front of a semi tractor-trailer that was just ahead of me, and it was immediately dispatched. I pulled over, collected the lifeless creature in a plastic bag, and continued on to the office. Back then, I was deeply into fly fishing—especially fly tying—but didn't have a lot of money for materials. Selected roadkill critters were fair game. However, possessing any bird of prey, dead or alive, was illegal without a special permit, so I called the local game warden to ask if it was OK to keep the feathers. He reminded me that I couldn't keep the bird without a permit, but noted that because I'd called him, my story was probably legitimate. He suggested that I go to a local taxidermist who could x-ray the bird, verify that no birdshot was involved, and issue the documents needed to keep the feathers. I followed those steps, and I still have a few of the beautifully mottled tan and brown marabou feathers from the breast and legs of the owl, reserved for very special flies.

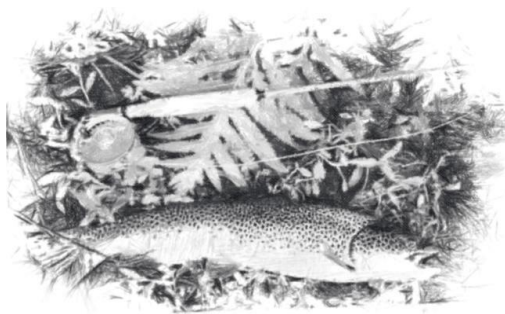


Barred Owl

Several years later, I was visiting my mom and dad at their group of summer cabins on a small lake in upstate New York. Standing on a dock, after a balmy evening of belly boating and fly fishing with a deer-hair bass bug, I made a few last casts into the darkening water. Under the light of the rising moon, I retrieved the fly with gentle splashes and an occasional “blorp,” trying to call up one of the big bass that lurk nearby. Something brushed my hat—a bat, I thought—and then the water exploded. What I first thought was a very large bass took off, not out into the lake, but up into the air. The reel was screaming. Certain that I'd hooked something unusual, I palmed the reel, and whatever it was on the end of the line crashed back into the water with a squawk. It didn't put up much of a fight until I got it in close, revealing a soggy barred owl that hissed and glared as it spread its wings on the water. The owl was hooked and not happy. I'd spent a fair amount of time tying that bass fly, and didn't want to lose it. Besides, I was feeling sorry for the doubtless embarrassed owl. I loosened the reel's drag, tied the rod to the dock, and dashed up to the cabin to get something to hold the bird, so I could remove the hook from its claws without either of us getting hurt. When I returned with a towel, the owl was gone. I assumed that it had slipped out of the tangled line, but as I reeled in I discovered that the line led high into a nearby pine tree. I gave the line a light tug, and the bird squawked: still connected. I pulled with a harder jerk, and the fly whistled over my head, the owl sailed out into the night, and we both went home with a story to tell.

I still want a pet owl. It could perch on my shoulder and watch while I fish.

Casting Catskill Cane



With Mark Sturtevant

Keepsakes

What is it about we fly fishers and tackle? No, not the combat-fishing, catch-'em-and-count-'em guys who devour the industry's advertising like gospel. I'm talking about the calmer, more seasoned among our cadre who you might find sitting on a shaded stretch of riverbank, waiting for the hatch. Many of us in the latter group will have across our knees an old bamboo rod, perhaps with an English reel clamped into its seat and a carefully tied dry fly adorning the tippet of our leader.

If you have a deep feeling about your sporting life, chances are you have an affinity for those who came before you and for traditions handed down through centuries. I felt the beginnings of that at an early age, and though my early fishing tackle and first shotgun were inexpensive, blue-collar gear, they meant something to me: something beyond the utilitarian. Since becoming a fly fisher, that feeling has grown to become a passion.

Now in retirement, I have passed on a few rods and reels I no longer use, but there are some that I could never part with, whether they still find their way onto the river these days or not. Some of these keepsakes were gifts, and most carry memories of days and nights upon bright water and trout that live forever in the deep recesses of my heart.

There is a seven-foot Orvis graphite rod that was my constant companion in the Pennsylvania limestone country, a gift from the lady who long ago won my heart. Though the rod weighs but an ounce, it is heavy with memories of fishing those classic spring creeks. With that wisp of a rod, I cast to a dimpling brown in an impossible lie on the fair Letort. For two hours, I crouched in a meadow, offering every fly I could imagine that trout might take. At last, I retrieved the same Sulphur Dun that I first cast to him, then hooked, battled, and landed my best Letort brown on the dry fly. On Falling Spring, I once flicked a Shenk Sculpin into a foaming chute of current with that rod, twitching it gently as the fly disappeared beneath an undercut tree root, only to reappear in the mouth of a gorgeous twenty-three-inch brown.

When I first traveled to fly-fishing Mecca and angled the Beaverkill, I owned one suitable fly rod—an eight-and-a-half-foot Orvis graphite. There are several bright spots in my recollections of that trip: the beauty and history of the Catskills at last revealed, tying Gary LaFontaine's Emergent Sparkle Pupa on the porch of a bed-and-breakfast that shelters travelers no more, and catching trout after trout from the Acid Factory run with those flies—wondering why I had tied only two. Impatience!

On the last morning of that trip, I used the old Orvis rod to land a pair of sixteen-inch brown trout, the best two fish of the trip, by fishing water that other fly fishers had been standing in. I was proud as I drove along Route 30 on my way to Vermont and a meeting with the Orvis Company, which led to the founding of my fly shop. That old wand has called my rod rack its home for too many years, but I took it back to the Beaverkill this fall: and remembered.



The Sturtevant Dry Fly with an unusually colored brown trout

I am fortunate to have several beautiful cane rods, carefully made by my friend Wyatt Dietrich. He called his line Dream Catcher Fly Rods, and they have an uncanny ability to demonstrate how appropriate that name is. In recent years, I have landed my three largest Catskill brown trout, each stretching the tape past twenty-five inches, all taken on a Dream Catcher fly rod. The last two of those marvelous fish were landed with the very first rod that Wyatt built for me, seventeen years ago. Dubbed the “Sturtevant Dry Fly,” it also brought my largest limestone trout to net: a leviathan weighing more than ten pounds.

The Sturtevant Dry Fly was the first bamboo rod that I spent time with on Catskill rivers. We challenged the lovely Neversink and both branches of the Delaware together, reaping rewards and memories. The rod was conceived with the Catskills in mind—hand planed to a classic F. E. Thomas taper—wearing a nickel silver and cocobolo reel seat, hand made here by Bob Venneri. I recall casting several of Wyatt's rods along a Falling Spring meadow when we first met and choosing this taper: seven-and-one-half feet of darkly flamed elegance, perfect for fishing the dry fly on any water.

Each bamboo rod has its own magic. A vintage piece makes me wonder about its history, the hands that made it, and the hands that cast it on another riverine dreamscape. Some of the best memories are born with rods made by great rod makers I am proud to call friends: Wyatt’s Dream Catchers, beautiful hollow-built wands from the bench of Dennis Menscer, and some special shorter rods crafted by Tom Smithwick, the man I call “the taper wizard.” With each rod that I am blessed to cast upon bright waters, my mind fills with images.

Part of the passion is a need to pair the perfect reel with each lithe shaft of bamboo. I prefer old Hardy reels and recently have developed a fascination for their St. George model. I have two of those reels from the 1950s, and they grace some of my favorite rods. I dream of the rivers they might have angled each time that I lock one of them into a reel seat, and I thrill at the grand music of the classic Hardy check when a good trout dashes to escape the arc of my rod.

Learning to fly fish, I was attracted to the environs of difficult trout, and Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley called me to its bright spring creeks. There I met the great Ed Shenk, the master of the Letort, and sought his insights and techniques. A mentor and friend, Ed has always been a tremendous influence on me as I strive to grow as an angler. His passing this spring left me stunned, because he seemed as if he might go on forever. I have a diminutive 2-weight rod he built for me that I treasure, along with the memories of time spent on the water and our talks in the fly shop when he stopped by for a visit.

My tackle room contains old vests, far too many ball caps, and countless odds and ends that call to mind some moment in my own angling history.



Fledermaus tied by Ed Shenk, 1995

Searching for tying material the other day, I encountered a small plastic hook box with a single fly inside and a note on top. It was a Fledermaus streamer, one of the first of the “chewy flies” that Ed tied with his pioneering fur-chenille technique. I had asked about the fly during one of our talks, and he promptly sat down to the vise and tied one.

Among my papers, I have Ed's handwritten manuscript of an article he wrote more than twenty years ago. Writing an outdoor column for the local newspaper in those days, I had a small word processor in the fly shop to make it easier to produce and store my columns. Ed asked if I might help him out by typing his articles, and I told him that it would be my sincere honor. “Terrestrials Top to Bottom” began: “One mid-July morning three years ago, I was working my way upstream on my home water, the LeTort. Since there was no surface activity I was using one of my favorite terrestrials, a size



14 LeTort Cricket.” Ed went on to tell the story of landing another of the legendary LeTort leviathans, a brown of nearly nine pounds, on that little black cricket. Imagine holding those pages in your hand.

Ed showed me the pool where that battle occurred, a deep tangle of branches, roots, and aquatic weeds. Standing there, years later, I tried to imagine the contortions he described, playing that great fish while wading through the wood and debris to clear the line. Once, I even saw a monster trout lurking there in the shade of an old willow. Alas, he would not come to my fly.

Recently, I was able to acquire a vintage Hardy Featherweight fly reel from Ed's estate. It looks to be the reel that he used the day he landed “Old George,” the legendary Letort brown that he chased for three years, though I will never know for certain. Come summertime, that reel will help me bring my friend to angle beside me on the rivers of my heart. It will snug up just right under the cap and ring of a seven-foot bamboo rod made down on Pennsylvania's Spring Creek. I believe that Ed would approve, though he would likely tell me that it was a foot too long! Keepsakes.

Mark Sturtevant’s blog is at <https://brightwatercatskill.art.blog>.

Some Fly Musings By Tom Mason

This dressing for the Light Cahill comes from *A Book of Trout Flies*, by Preston Jennings, and uses Mandarin duck instead of wood duck for the wing. At the time of the writing of Jennings’s book, wood ducks were a protected species, and possession of their feathers was illegal. Wood duck and Mandarin feathers are quite similar, and only a slightly different barring pattern is discernible when they are compared side by side. I do find wood duck easier to manipulate, because it seems to have a slightly harder texture. Times have changed, though. I hear people complaining about the scarcity of wood duck in today's



Photo: Tom Mason

market. Although wood duck numbers are substantially up, hunters are declining in number, which may explain the shortage. Mandarin, on the other hand, is as scarce as hen's teeth.



Photo: Tom Mason

During the guild's December Zoom meeting, there was quite a bit of serious interest concerning North Country flies. I believe that the roots of Catskill-style flies are derived from the North Country school of fly tying. The fly that you see here came about when I was tidying up my desk and ran across a couple of feathers, but I wasn't sure where they may have come from. Perhaps they came from a golden plover skin that I had out recently. I took notice of how soft and downy they were and thought of owl. I found a pattern, the Cinnamon No. 55, from T. E. Pritt's book *North Country Flies* and proceeded to tie with the feathers. The fly in the photo is tied on an Alec Jackson North Country hook, size 13. The head is peacock herl, the

silk is yellow Pearsall's Gossamer, and the body is dubbed with water rat over the yellow silk. I substituted a wisp of pine squirrel for the water rat, and I was pleased with the overall results.

Book Review

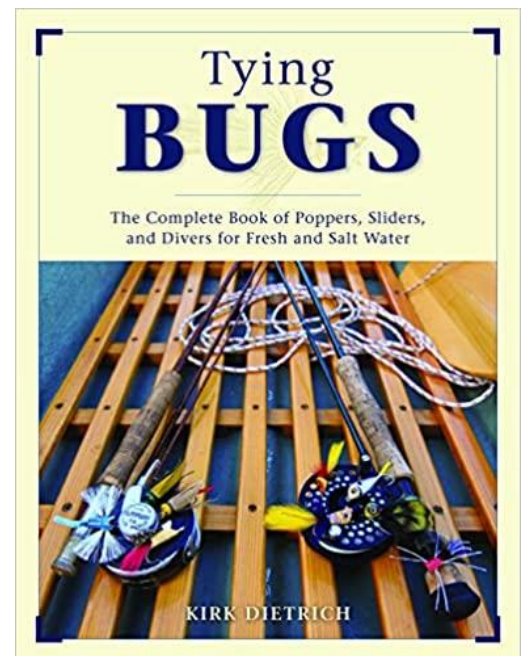
Tying Bugs: The Complete Book of Poppers, Sliders, and Divers for Fresh and Salt Water

By Kirk Dietrich. Published by Stackpole Books, 2019; \$39.95 softbound.

"If I worked my hands in wood, would you still love me?" The line from Tim Hardin's "If I Were a Carpenter" from the 1960s was an earworm as I read Kirk Dietrich's *Tying Bugs*. I review a lot of fly-tying books, and their intended audience is pretty straightforward: it's fly tyers (duh)—that is, people who want to bend and lash materials onto hooks, intending to fool fish, from tiny brook trout to big pelagic species, working in a tradition that extends back at least to 1496 and Dame Juliana Berners's *Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle*. Kirk Dietrich's *Tying Bugs* wants the love of fly tyers, but it sits athwart that tradition at an odd angle.

Fly fishers who fish poppers, sliders, and divers, especially for stillwater and saltwater species, certainly are interested in creating their own flies. Within the fly-tying tradition, spinning deer-hair heads and bodies has been one of the principal ways that's been done, at least for freshwater flies. But this book explicitly excludes deer-hair flies from its purview. It's about building solid-body bugs from various kinds of wood and synthetic materials. Therefore, the short title actually isn't really accurate. The phrase that Dietrich uses throughout to describe what he does is "making bugs," and as he says at one point, the book sometimes reads like "a syllabus for a carpentry class."

Yet at the same time, fly fishing for bass can claim to be the one truly American fly-fishing tradition, stretching back well into the nineteenth century, especially in the South, and forming a part



of the canon of American angling literature—in the writings of Thaddeus Norris, among others, it antedates the focus on trout and the dry fly that arrived after 1900 with Theodore Gordon and George M. L. LaBranche. The top-water bass bug is America’s dry fly, as Tom Jindra points out in the foreword to this book, and like other aspects of fly fishing, it has a history.

Dietrich attributes the development of the modern, commercially available hard-body bass popper to Earnest H. Peckinpaugh of Chattanooga, Tennessee, around 1910, and one of the interesting aspects of *Tying Bugs* is Dietrich’s attention to the history of his craft: from the development of the hump-shank hook to prevent bodies from spinning, which is attributed to Cal McCarthy, a Chicago fly tyer, in the 1920s—to Peckinpaugh and his Peck’s Bugs, including the crude, original Night Bug—to Peckinpaugh’s successors, and to others who designed bugs at the behest of the likes of Joe Brooks and Lefty Kreh. Still, the ambiguous relation of making bass bugs to tying flies appears in the sources for such a history, which can be found more in the writing about American fishing lures than in the abundant literature of American fly fishing.

And in a book of twelve chapters, the final one a how-to about actually fishing these bugs, it’s not until you get to chapter 11, “Dressing It Up: The Fly-Tying Part,” that what fly tyers do becomes the topic. But the book is thoughtfully structured, leading even those familiar only with hare’s masks and CDC puffs, through what it takes to build a hard-body bass popper, a process more like building a model airplane from scratch than tying a Parachute Adams.

It really is quite a process. It’s all about the body. After a chapter surveying the parts of a popper, with emphasis on body materials and weed guards, Dietrich starts out with a chapter on some of the basic tools you’ll need to create the a basic body and to shape it. I say “some,” because these are just the saws, knives, drill bits, glues, and drying racks you’ll need to get going. As the process progresses, there will be more tools that seem almost essential, if you want a classy finished product, including a rotary tool such as a Dremel, and an airbrush setup, complete with an air compressor. And you’ll still need a fly-tying vise for the fly-tying part.

Almost all poppers, divers, and sliders are more or less cylindrical, but they have been tweaked into more complex tapers and shapes, and while excellent preformed bodies are commercially available from purveyors such as Wapsi, shaping raw materials is the basic task of the craft, and Dietrich prefers to modify even the preshaped bodies that are available. For a classic bass bug, shaping the body means shaping wood, and one of the many things I learned from *Tying Bugs* is that in addition to the cork and balsa that I expected to see discussed, a number of other woods—Tupelo gum, paulownia, and basswood, as well as grades of balsa not found in hobby shops—can be used and even are preferred in some uses.

These woods come in rectangular pieces, and before you can go further, they need to be converted to cylinders, as do blocks of foam, even if they’re just the soles of flip-flops. For wood, this can be done by carving and sanding by hand, though it’s easier if you have a lathe (you have a lathe, right?), and for foam, you can fabricate plug cutters from copper pipe. Despite the use of some pretty serious shop machinery, there’s actually a fair amount of tool making that goes on throughout the process, including making jigs and sanding blocks.

And of course, how you shape poppers, divers, and sliders is a little different for each kind of bug, as is fabricating the head of a frog imitation. In fact, there are numerous basic shapes that have developed over the years, just as have types of dry flies—Catskill style, parachutes, foam bodies, and so on—and there’s plenty here about each, including the classic Gerbubble Bug, developed by Tom Loving of Baltimore in the 1920s; Tony Accardo’s Round Dinny diver, with its spherical head; and Dietrich’s own Rabid Dog slider, which dips subsurface and “walks the dog” like a Zara Spook conventional lure.

Shaping a body is the basis for making any bug, and placing it correctly on the correct hook to get the desired action matters (there's plenty about that here, too), but the bug is not close to complete until you apply some kind of finish, including eyes. As Dietrich says, you probably could catch plenty of bass with an unpainted popper, but you wouldn't catch the eye of many bass anglers, and anyway, you'd still have to seal it and coat it, to keep it afloat and for durability.

As when painting your living room, a lot of what goes into painting a bug is prep work. First, the body needs to be sealed. Breathes there a wine-drinking fly fisher with soul so dead who never to himself, or herself, or themselves has said, "I could make a popper out of those corks!" And you can, though Dietrich prefers the composite corks with no voids that have become prevalent since cork became in short supply. But cork is porous, as are the softer woods. The wine-cork poppers I once tried to make just sucked up the paint. Sealing is essential.

Once a bug is sealed, there are a lot of ways to apply color, including markers, brush-on paints, or even nail polish, but the really professional-looking results come from airbrushing with one of the available airbrush systems and a variety of homemade spray masks and stencils to get all kinds of imitative and attractive effects. This is when a mere three-dimensional object turns into a work of art. The effects that Dietrich achieves with an airbrush, masks, and markers are stunning. They obviously take a lot of practice to master, but so does tying off a parachute hackle without screwing it up, and very few people have "ooh'd" and "aah'd" over that, while the results that Dietrich gets have a serious wow factor. If the book has a hook, this is it. You'll say, "I'd *really* like to be able to do that."

After a chapter on applying eyes and a final sealer for durability, you finally come to the chapter on things you probably can do now, even if you're a novice fly tyer: apply tails, add a skirt between the tail and the body of the bug, and add rubber legs, though that can involve drilling into a painted and sealed body—which can be scary. He also covers making articulated tails, with articulated flies being a thing now, and there's an interesting section on how to make bucktail legs for frog poppers. That chapter ends with directions for finishing a number of specific designs, including an original Peckinpaugh popper and the interesting Gerbubble Bug.

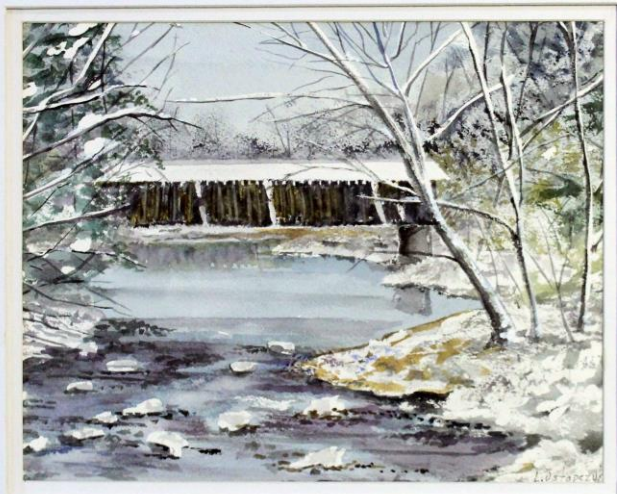
As a carpenter, I am what my grandfather used to call a "wood butcher," and I recall being told by the shop teacher during the semester that I took his required class in high school, "It's a good thing you're going to college." Shaping and painting wood, or even working with more forgiving materials, such as preshaped foam, are not among my skill sets. However, Dietrich convinces me that if I applied myself, this book could teach me how to make a decent top-water bass lure, even if my bookcases never come out exactly square. For fly tyers who fish for bass, it should be all you need to learn to build your own bugs, if you're willing to commit to acquiring the skills and the appropriate tools.

Kirk Dieter is from New Orleans, and just as the South was the cradle of American bass-bug fly fishing, Louisiana has been its playpen, with local tyers such as Tom Nixon applying what they have learned from fishing the bayous, to the development of effective bass patterns, including his Calcasieu Pig Boat. Nixon's *Fly Tying and Fly Fishing for Bass and Panfish*, originally published in 1968, is still one of the basic modern works on bass angling in the United States. Following in his footsteps, Kirk Dietrich has gone about as deeply into the process of bug making as you can go today, working out the relationship between how a bug is made and how it performs in the only way that matters—by fishing his creations in his local Louisiana waters. And as I noted, he also is aware that much like the Darbees and the Dettas were in the Catskills, he is working in an American tradition, both keeping the past alive and carrying it forward into the future. *Tying Bugs* could well be the definitive work on tying hard-body bass bugs for our time, and a resource for future fly tyers—or at least for future bug makers.

—Bud Bynack

Halls Mill Covered Bridge

By Lois Ostapczuk



My husband, Ed, very often asks me to render a painting of some scene that he loves. On a cold winter day, he took a photo of the Halls Mill Covered Bridge over the Neversink River. The Neversink is a Catskill river that he loves to fish.

For the snow featured in the landscape, I used a masking fluid that is applied in the first step. The rest of the scene is then painted in watercolor. Finally, the masking fluid is rubbed off, like rubber cement, leaving the paper white to represent snow.

According to Ed's research, this historic covered bridge, located along Hunter Road in the Town of Neversink, is a single-span 119-foot Town lattice truss construction and was completed in 1912 by David Benton, John Knight, and George Horbeck. The late "Catskill Bill" Kelly lived near this landmark, and the remnants of Edward R. Hewitt's Big Bend Club are located downriver. The bridge remains a symbol of the Catskill Mountains dating back to early settlers in the upper Neversink River valley.

Lois Ostapczuk's paintings can be viewed at <http://catskillwatersart.blogspot.com/2014/02/blog-post.html>

Do You See What I See?

This brown trout has a "lucky horseshoe." Are you having trouble finding it? Look closely at the pattern of spots between the fish's eyes. Of course, you have to look above and to the sides of that bright smile to find the actual eyes of the trout.

—Tom Mason



Photo: Martha Mason



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Your articles, cartoons, photographs, reports of information, and bits of whatever else is interesting and fun are vital to this newsletter. Send submissions to Chuck Coronato, coronato3@verizon.net or 412 Highland Avenue, Wyckoff, NJ 07481 (201) 723-6230.