



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 24, number 3

May

The next meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will take place on Friday, May 21, at 7:00 P. M. Zoom links will be sent to all members prior to the event.



President's Message By Joe Ceballos

I'd like to express spring greetings to all of our guild members. It's possible that many of you have already been out to fish, but most importantly, I hope that you are all well and moving forward with good health and the anticipation of better times returning. As COVID appears to be receding, our consideration of a June meeting or get-together

seems practical. Please make suggestions. Your input is always valued.

The guild's May meeting will be via Zoom, and Ed Ostapczuk will be giving a presentation titled : "Catskill Flies Beyond the Dry," which was originally suggested by Dave Brandt to be about Catskill streamers and nymphs. Email announcements with a reminder and links to the meeting will follow. The Catskill school of fly tying is extremely diverse and inclusive of fly types, but nymphs, streamers, and wets seldom get their deserved attention. If you think back to our last Zoom meeting, which featured our members' favorite flies, we saw an extension and evolution of Catskill fly tying and the use of new materials. This continual development is what makes fly tying an endless endeavor and thus gratifying. We often get to say, "Jeez! I just caught that fish on a fly that I tied with a variation from a pattern."

In other news, we are looking for a guild member who is willing to assist in social media communications. This will entail following and responding to Facebook and Instagram postings that concern the guild and our activities. If you are interested in

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helping with this task, please respond directly to me at sajefu@aol.com. Please list the email's subject as Social Media / Communication and provide your phone number.

I've had requests for more of our guild hats with the logo patch, and our stock is running low. We will be putting in a new order for hats that will match our current style in material and color, and they'll display our beakless chicken patch, but they will feature a slightly longer and wider brim. We are hoping to have them in stock by late summer.

The Rock

By Lois Ostapczuk



I find as much enjoyment in painting as my husband does in trout fishing. And I take real pleasure in donating my paintings to nonprofit fundraisers. This gives me a double sense of accomplishment, as well as supporting worthy causes. The landscape in this issue is one that I originally painted for Trout Unlimited using oil. Recently, I did a watercolor version that was donated to a

John Burroughs Woodchuck Lodge online fund-raising auction. John Burroughs was an American naturalist and the author of many fascinating essays about the mountains that he loved to wander. He's a Catskill hero of ours. One of Burroughs's favorite trout streams was the Rondout Creek. In his essay "A Bed of Boughs" the author wrote, "If I were a trout, I should ascend every stream till I found the Rondout." He also wrote, "The finishing touch is given by the moss with which the rock is everywhere carpeted."

This landscape features a cane fly rod—built by Art Weiler using a classic Catskill taper (Leonard 39-5)—lying midstream on a moss-covered Rondout Creek rock. My husband acquired this rod in memory of his father, after his dad passed away several years ago.

View more of Catskill artist Lois Ostapczuk's paintings by visiting: <http://catskillwatersart.blogspot.com/2014/02/blog-post.html>

Emergers and a Golden Anniversary

As a young wannabe fly fisher, an ardent reader, and a faithful student of Ray Bergman's *Trout*, it seemed that flies were much simpler in the old days—or so I thought. Bergman wrote about wets, dries, nymphs, streamers, and bucktails. I don't think he ever

used the word “emerger” in his timeless thesis, but I could be wrong about that. I’m not exactly sure who it was, but I seem to recall Doug Swisher and Carl Richards discussing emergers in their groundbreaking work, *Selective Trout*. This is where I first read about emergers. In that book, the authors wrote, “Imitations of the emerging nymph are probably the most deadly and effective patterns of all.” Later in this work, they added, “Nymphal imitations are normally fished until emergence time... then... it is best to switch to an emerging pattern.” They went on to write, “This type of fly is similar to the nymph, except the wings are replaced with wing cases.” They also stated, “These patterns are more or less a combination of nymph and dun features.” Though lacking specific patterns, the authors provided guidance on how to construct emergers. That book was first published fifty years ago in 1971.

Leave it to Swisher and Richards, who, two decades later, produced a book devoted entirely to this very subject, titled *Emergers*. That book contained patterns and techniques for their use. It didn’t take Jim Schollmeyer and Ted Leeson long to follow suit, producing *Tying Emergers* in 2004. That’s not to say that other angling authors didn’t also touch upon this subject, as many did, but I think it’s fair to say that these four gentlemen initially codified the topic of emergers.

Although this is not an in-depth review of everyone who might have discussed emergers, I believe it would be a gross oversight not to mention the lasting work of Gary LaFontaine. Not only was his Emergent Sparkle Pupa a success story, he also wrote about several such imitations in *Trout Flies: Proven Patterns*. The Dutch fly tyer Hans van Klinken’s Klinkhamer Special is another proven emerger, initially created to imitate caddis pupa. I’ve also found an interesting read in Bob Wyatt’s Canadian book *Trout Hunting* and his discussion of emergers, including the Deer Hair Emerger. And I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the name and fine work of western fly fisher Rene Harrop.

It should be duly noted that snowshoe rabbit is often a material utilized to tie emerger patterns. The Fly Fisherman’s Virtual Fly Shop, dating back some two decades, included many useful patterns tied using that fur. Thus, it might be a fair assessment to include Fran Betters’s Usual, created with snowshoe rabbit, which floats *in* the film, not *on* it, as an early emerger pattern, and I’ve used the Usual as such.

There’s a slightly different approach that includes wet flies, soft-hackles, and flymphs, using techniques such as the Leisenring lift to imitate emerging insects. In the joint work of James Leisenring and Vernon Hidy, *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly & Fishing the Flymph*, the authors noted that the flymph “strives to simulate the hatching nymphs.” I think that’s what emergers are all about. In more recent times, Sylvester Nemes wrote several books along those lines, as did Allen McGee in *Tying & Fishing Soft-Hackled Nymphs*. McGee frequently referred to James Leisenring. These are all fine resources for the serious soft-hackle fly fisher.

Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

Pictured here are three emerger patterns that are simple to tie and have worked well for me fished as dry flies in the surface film: a Hendrickson Emerger, an Isonychia Emerger, and a Once and Away.



From left to right are the Hendrickson Emerger, the Isonychia Emerger, and the Once and Away. Flies tied and photographed by Ed Ostapczuk.

The Hendrickson Emerger is a product of the Virtual Fly Shop, and is a fly that I rely upon in early spring—even before Hendricksons appear.

Hendrickson Emerger

Hook: Daiichi 1130, size 14

Thread: Black

Shuck: Brown Z-lon

Body: Hendrickson nymph Spectrablend

Wingcase: Loop of white sparkle yarn



The second pattern is an Isonychia Emerger that I use on the Esopus Creek, where Isonychia reign supreme, when the first brood of springtime Isos appear. This fly is my own creation. Years ago, I was fishing Chimney Hole on the Esopus with the late Phil Chase during an Iso hatch, and neither of us had the right fly that the Esopus rainbows were devouring. Phil went on to develop an Iso Emerger featured on the introductory page of Justin Askins's *The Legendary Neversink*. I created a similar pattern described below. The main difference between our flies is Phil's use of dun CDC for wings, and his inclusion of hackle for short legs, whereas I'm using elk hair for wings, and my fly has no legs.



Isonychia Emerger

Hook: Daiichi 1130, size 14
Thread: Black
Shuck: Black Z-lon
Body: Peacock herl
Wing: Dun elk hair tied short

Finally, here's my "silver bullet" for when trout fishing gets tough on Catskill tailwaters come mid-to-late season. It was featured in Leon Links's *Tying Flies with CDC* and was developed by the aforementioned Hans van Klinken. It's called a Once and Away, and this is how I tie it.

Once and Away

Hook: Daiichi 1130, sizes 18 to 20
Thread: Black
Body: Peccary fiber
Wingcase: Dun CDC
Thorax: Peacock herl
Wing: Dun CDC, folded forward from wing case, over the thorax, and pointing beyond the hook eye.



So here's to the golden anniversary of Swisher and Richards's book, to emergers, and to the trout that feed on them. These are my favorites; I hope that you have yours, also.

Time to Unwind By Chuck Coronato

An enduring slice of Catskill fly-tying history has Walt Dette, along with Winnie Ferdon and Harry Darbee, learning the art of tying by unwinding flies purchased from Rube Cross. Accounts of this are given in Mike Valla's *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies*, and in Eric Leiser's *The Dettes-A Catskill Legend: Their Story and Their Techniques*. The story goes that in the late 1920s, Walt Dette offered fifty dollars to Rube Cross for the purpose of being shown how to tie Cross's flies. Because Cross wanted to keep his methods of tying a secret, he turned down the



offer, and the cash was instead used to purchase his flies, which were then deconstructed by Dette, Ferdon, and Darbee in a rented room above a movie theater in Roscoe, New York. That effort resulted in three legendary Catskill fly tyers learning their craft.

Many people who hear about Rube Cross's refusal to teach his methods seem to think that Cross was being foolish. Fifty dollars, after all, was a tidy sum of money in the late 1920s, and couldn't anyone have deduced the secrets of fly tying just by unwinding existing flies? I generally felt the same way, until I started wondering whether or not it is easy to learn how to tie flies by dismantling them. Perhaps Cross believed that few people had the gumption needed to put in the painstaking work of learning his secrets by unraveling their mysteries one thread wrap at a time.

I learned how to tie by reading about the subject and through face-to-face instruction. Until recently, my experiences in taking apart flies were limited to quickly snipping off materials so a sharp hook could be reused, or to salvage a costly tungsten bead from a worn-out old nymph. But now, I had a different goal, and my desire to actually learn something from unwinding flies was furthered by the words of Harry Darbee from his book *Catskill Flytier*. Regarding the dismantling of other tyer's flies, Darbee wrote: "I think this backward method of learning was one of the most valuable contributions to my career as a flytier. Try it sometime. It challenges your mind to reconstruct in reverse the way a particular fly was tied, and you can actually tell more

easily how a fly is put together than if you had watched the tier when his hands were in the way, moving at his own desired speed." The words "more easily" could be debated, but I figured that if Harry Darbee is saying that this is a good idea to try—then I should try it.



A Hendrickson awaiting its destruction

I wanted to experience what it would be like to learn how to make a Catskill-style fly by deconstructing one. It was very unlikely that anyone would give me an actual Rube Cross fly to destroy, so I put together an imitation using materials that might've been used in the 1920s when the Cross flies were being unraveled. A Hendrickson, size 12, was tied as the fly to be taken apart. I made the fly with silk thread, wood duck flank for the split wings, fox fur for the

body, and medium dun rooster for the tail and hackle. I didn't use head cement, but a homemade mixture of beeswax, rosin, and olive oil was used to adhere the dubbing to the silk. The resulting fly was, hopefully, somewhat in the ballpark of what I'm speculating would've been encountered by Walt, Winnie, and Harry. What I didn't know, and still do not know, is whether the three friends had any previous knowledge of fly-tying basics when they started their project. I approached the experiment from the perspective that they had to learn everything from scratch, and strictly from their observations.

With the Hendrickson secured in a vise, I was able to use my fingers and a bodkin to unravel the thread after a bit of picking at the head of the fly. Questions arose immediately. Would I have known the exact number of turns that were in the whip finish if I hadn't tied it myself, or how to actually perform a whip finish if I didn't already know

how to make one? It was becoming clear that understanding the intricacies of thread manipulation would require a great deal of focus and careful observation. I'll spare you the blow-by-blow description of each step in the unwinding process, but I'd like to note a couple of observations. I don't think that it would be very difficult to figure out how to dub thread (though it could be tricky to know the origin of the specific fur used), and the attachment of the tail seemed pretty straightforward. Even the act of winding hackle seemed understandable—once the existing hackle was unwound from the fly—but the wing is a completely different story. I noticed that the wing refused to budge, even though thread passed it as I unwound the fly from the head to the tail. The conclusion that would hopefully be drawn is that the wing was put on first—because it came off last when taking apart the fly. Still, it was difficult to unwrap thread at the wing; it seemed tangled in a strange way. I actually know how the wing was tied in (since I'm the one who tied this fly), and yet, I was still finding it difficult to loosen wraps that seemed overlapped in strange ways. I can only imagine how puzzling this would be to someone who has no concept of how upright wood duck wings are tied on a Catskill-style fly. Deciphering the construction of an upright wing would clearly be the hardest part of the puzzle for a person who doesn't have previous experience in fly tying.

Seeing the individual bits of that Hendrickson lying side by side reminded me that there isn't all that much material on a sparsely tied fly—and that's a good lesson in fly tying that was reinforced by this process. I also measured the strand of removed silk thread and found it to be eleven inches long. I made a mental note to use fewer wraps of thread the next time that I tie a fly. It was clear that this little experiment was teaching me something about my own fly tying (Harry Darbee's words about challenging your mind were ringing true), but I was disappointed that I wasn't getting more of a sense of what a true beginner would experience. I couldn't undo the fly-tying knowledge that I'd already acquired over the years.

I enlisted the help of my cousin Sam. She's a blank slate when it comes to previous experience with fly tying, but she's curious about things and doesn't quit easily when faced with a challenge. She would bring a youthful vision and few preconceived notions to the exercise, and I also liked the fact that at seventeen years old, she's close to the ages that Walt Dette, Winnie Dette, and Harry Darbee were in the late 1920s. I handed Sam a



The scattered bits of my former Hendrickson

freshly tied Hendrickson that matched the one that I'd dismantled—warned her to keep it away from her dog—and asked her to take it apart with the goal of learning how she could make the same fly. Because it was important to see what she could learn on her own by unwinding the fly, I instructed her not to go online to find information about fly tying. I was hoping that Sam's thirteen-year-old sister would assist her in the project, but I made my request at noon, forgetting that early afternoon is still the crack of dawn to a newly minted teenager. I'm told that when she finally awoke, she took one look at Sam tinkering with the fly and asked, "What sort of buffoonery is this?" Despite my admiration for her use of the word "buffoonery," she clearly lacked the proper attitude and was cut from the team.

Sam worked diligently on the fly and reported that she used tweezers to yank at the thread loops. She said that the fly was difficult to take apart (I do like to tie a fly that can take some punishment) and that it was all wound in one direction and had some knots in it. Her other observations were that a small piece of bird feather was tied to the hook with the yellow thread, and that the fuzzy stuff coming off of the thread looked to be some kind of wool. She added that the wool was annoying, because it made it more difficult to get to the thread. It was her opinion that the wing was made from a rooster feather.

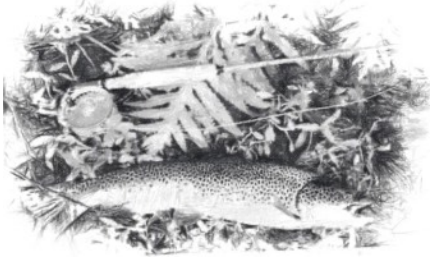
I was impressed with Sam's thoughts. Her observations were quite good for someone who had never before encountered an artificial fly. It's understandable that she perceived the fox fur to be wool, and she correctly believed the wing and hackle to be made from bird feathers. I can't expect her to know the difference between wood duck flank and rooster feathers. She observed the one-direction nature of the thread wraps and seemed to get a pretty good sense of the fact that materials are *tied* to the hook shank, as opposed to using some sort of adhesive, such as Crazy Glue, to adhere them. I sent her a link to a video that showed the construction from start to finish of a Catskill-style Hendrickson, and I'm looking forward to the day when I can put a vise in front of her and watch her tie a fly.

Our joint efforts led me to conclude that Harry Darbee was correct about being able to learn a lot by using the "backward method," but learning it all from scratch—thread handling, proportions, identifying materials—to the point where you could actually tie your own flies from start to finish would be a great accomplishment. Walt Dette, Winnie Ferdon, and Harry Darbee not only learned how to tie that way, but they became some of the best fly tyers in world. I was glad that I had the opportunity to take a few brief steps in their footprints, and I gained a heightened appreciation for their fortitude, grit, and powers of deduction.

One thing still bothered me. I didn't like seeing my nice (for me at least) fly reduced to a bare hook and a pile of fluff. It just didn't seem right to leave it that way, so I put the hook back in the vise and carefully used all of the same materials—including the same strand of silk thread—to reconstruct that Hendrickson. I thought about the rhyme "Humpty Dumpty." Poor Humpty couldn't be put back together again, but all he had to help him were all of the king's horses and all of the king's men. If only a fly tyer had been available.

The Reluctance of Spring

Casting Catskill Cane



With Mark Sturtevant

This past winter was a very, very long, cold grind for those of us who come to life only when we're in the outdoors. The relentless weather defeated all fishing attempts. Coupled with the isolation demanded by the resurgence of COVID-19, the period from mid-December through February was dark and formidable. A truly marvelous thing happened a week into March, when sunshine and warmer air returned unexpectedly to the Catskills. I tried to remain skeptical, but the warmth kept coming back. I was out

on the rivers and alive again!

My spirit leapt at the opportunities, and I began to believe that an early spring was to be a reality. The warm days seemed to outnumber the cold ones, and I spent as many hours as I could alongside the rivers. I lounged in the late sunshine come evening, with meat on the fire and the sweet white ale of springtime upon my lips. The only thing missing was the trout.

I am not a fan of hardcore nymph fishing, which is something that I had quite enough of as hatches declined during my years in the Cumberland Valley. Desperate to taste the energy of the river, I went out with my old stealth-nymphing rig a time or two, though my heart wasn't in it. I simply wanted to feel a tug at the end of my line—a tangible bit of the life of the river—to complete my transformation. It was not to be. The sunshine did me a world of good, but that rare jewel, early spring, continued to elude me.

Spring, at least the fly-fisher's spring, is dictated by the hatches. The rivers are our church, and mayflies are the angels; they're magical, glorious beings aloft on gossamer wings. We anglers are called to the noble mission of drawing swords and defending the angels from the marauding legions of bright water: the trout.

At last, April arrived and more rivers became available. Something else arrived as well—a classic Thomas & Thomas Hendrickson rod from the seventies! Eight-foot cane for a number-five line finds its way to my hand more than any other rod, and the lovely medium action of the Hendrickson found a home there immediately. Finally, everything was ready for the glorious beginning of the new season, and hatches were clearly on the doorstep.



The author's Thomas & Thomas Hendrickson

I walked various riverbanks for three and a half beautiful spring days with the new cane rod at my side. The sunshine burned its energy into my winterized bones, and I felt wonderful. I greeted each new day with a smile and the thought that the first Quill Gordons would surely appear today. River levels were perfect, and the water

temperatures warmed to the magical fifty-degree mark, but still, the flies did not come. A few stoneflies buzzed the surface, but not one trout deigned to rise to any of them.

The burden of the long winter, and my own anticipation overcame me. I could wait no longer. I knotted a big, heavily feathered soft-hackle monstrosity to my tippet and began to cast it into an achingly beautiful reach of dry-fly water. A weighted wet fly was being lobbed with my perfect Hendrickson! My composure returned after a handful of casts and fruitless swings through the gradually abating current. I had weathered the fit of insanity. I felt better. I made one last cast, farther upstream, and stack-mended a great deal of line behind the cast. The fly sunk, swung, drifted slower, and ticked a boulder. In an instant, my vision of dry-fly perfection exploded like stained glass, as my cherished rod was bucking with a strong pull.

I'll admit that the energy of that fish ignited sensations in me—sensations not felt since December—back before the snows drove them into memory. I led the fish to the net. It was a full-bodied, gorgeously colored brown trout that was eighteen inches long. The elation lasted only a moment, until I twisted that hideous feathered thing gently and removed it from its jaw. I heard my thoughts saying: “Sorry about that old fellow. You deserved better.”

I cut the fly off, dropped it into my vest in disgust, and secured a small dry fly in its place. I bowed my head in disgrace at my own weakness, and begged forgiveness from Mr. Dorsey and his late partner, Mr. Maxwell, who long ago embellished the golden strip of cane that I was using with a simple script: *8/5 Hendrickson*.

Punishment for my sin was quick to follow on an even more glorious day at that same reach of river. The crystalline flow warmed to fifty-two degrees under brilliant sunshine, and flies began taking wing not long past noon. I stood ready with “sword drawn” as Hendricksons issued forth—angels of spring seeking the heavens—but no battle would be joined. The legions below remained silent—their heads bowed beneath the wavelets—unseen.

Winter returned after that day, and I had no one to blame but myself. There I stood at the gateway of Valhalla, and I failed the test. A fly fisher's first trout of the season deserves to be taken on the dry fly. I am a wretched, wretched man.

I have suffered for my crime, and I've logged cold hours along once bright rivers waiting for the sun to return and for the mayflies to take flight. There have been no flies, no rises—only clouds and rain and wind.



The Red Gods finally offered a taste of forgiveness at midmonth. I had walked the wide Delaware River, only to find a favorite haunt unwelcoming, so I walked farther, to a new reach with fitful hope for new possibilities.

I was standing on a grassy stretch of riverbank when a miraculous vision appeared: one small, gentle ring upon the surface. I cast from my standing position, an automatic response, and a gesture of hope. My hope was rewarded. Another ring appeared where my Blue-Winged Olive had been floating, and the old brown rod assumed a glorious arc. Splashing, jumping, and bringing the first sweet note of springtime from the throat of my vintage St. George reel, that handsome wild brown trout was purely a gift from the river—the Delaware telling me that I was forgiven.

The energy and life of the river sustains me. It is tangible, and it's golden as sunlight and as quick as the air. Winter is slowly leaving my body and mind, for at last I have tasted the gifts that I have longed for. The taste is sweet, and it's as sweet as honeysuckle in the air of a spring meadow. I savor it even now.

It is still cold and still more like unending winter than fair spring. Though forgiven, my penance continues. I sit on rainy, windswept riverbanks, watching eagles play upon the air currents. I walk until my legs ache with the twin challenge of the current and the cold. I carry an old cane fly rod, with a proper dry fly resting in its hook-keeper, but I do not cast. There are no mayflies, no rises, no trace of life upon the gray, ever-changing surface of the river. But I am smiling!

Mark Sturtevant can be followed on his blog, Bright Waters Catskills: <https://brightwatercatskill.art.blog>



To Bead or Not to Bead

I hear it all the time. In a small group, when guys are talking about a recent fishing outing and the story inevitably gets around to “how big” or “how many,” the next question is always, “What did you get them on?” If it was a dry fly, then there are

smiles all around, maybe a little shoulder nudge, and an “attaboy!” If the fish were caught on nymphs, there’s the head shaking, the muffled groan, and in the worst cases you hear, “It doesn’t really count, then.”

Our sport has gone through some changes—or maybe more to the point—an evolution. With available and fishable water shrinking in size, due to posted signs or overcrowding, the methods for how we target trout have changed for many anglers.

Many fly fishers stick to the “dry or die” philosophy, stating that it’s the “gentlemen’s way” to fish, but I’m seeing that method lose ground to the newer idea of versatility. Even seasoned dry-fly fishers know that they’re not likely to have a good outing in high water, the early season, or when the trout aren’t visibly rising. For those conditions, a different approach is needed, and anglers of all abilities are going to the “dark side” and fishing heavy flies subsurface.

I’m not exactly sure when beadhead nymphs first started seeing service in the Catskills—not that weighting a fly wasn’t done way before beads were used for weight. It

was common to wrap lead around a hook and tie the fly over the heavy shank. It's just that the bead is out there for everyone to see, and it's as if you're not even a little ashamed to show that you bounce flies off of rocks to catch unassuming trout in spots where you shouldn't.

I also notice that there are quite a few closet nymphers—guys who claim to always fish dry flies—but when no one's looking, they rig up the old anchor and give 'em hell! This is done out of necessity, because nobody enjoys a day on the water without touching a trout, no matter how beautiful the weather or scenery is.

So is nymphing really an awful thing? Does the same attitude apply to using unweighted nymphs fished in or right under the film? Is that still nymphing, even though you see the take on top?

Right now, with the Hendricksons past their mid-way point, and with a whole lot of dry-fly fishing still ahead, it's the top-water fisher's dream to be out there. I actually can't wait to get out there myself. But you know that if during "bug week" we get a good drenching, causing all the streams to swell and cloud up, you can reach way down to the little nymph box that you have hidden under all of your aluminum Wheatleys, plunk a thick Hares Ear or Pheasant Tail on the edges, and make the best of what would have been an otherwise futile trip. And there's no shame in that.



John Bonasera's Catskill Cannonball and a classic Hendrickson. The author believes that there's a time and a place for each.

In Remembrance of Ken Kobayashi **By Tom Mason**

On March 1st, we lost a dear friend and member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, Ken Kobayashi. I met Ken about twenty years ago fishing the Beaverkill, and I invited him back to my cabin for a beer and to meet my wife, Martha. That was the start of what became a close, lasting friendship. Around the same time, I met Mike Canazon, and our fishing party was complete.

Ken was born in Chicago, on March 31, 1953, and grew up in southern California, surfing, playing high school football, and motorcycling. He was a brilliant photographer, accomplished fly fisherman, music aficionado, and world traveler. His career was spent as a professional photographer after graduating from the Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, California. He worked in Detroit doing photo shoots for the car industry, had his



own studio in San Francisco for a time, and traveled extensively across Europe. One of his most ambitious trips was a trek across Siberia, which he documented with amazing black and white photography. He eventually settled in New York City, and served as the executive director of ROOT Studios, where he came out from behind the camera to use his expertise to manage studio space and equipment supply for the photography and video industry.

His interests were broad—music, shotguns, bird hunting, and Formula 1 racing—but it was our common interest in fly fishing and our love of bamboo rods and the Catskills and its rivers that brought us together. We spent many days in the river, and many hours just talking about all things fly fishing.

As a guild member, in the early days of the Rendezvous gathering at the Rockland House, he donated professional lighting equipment and his time to install it to brighten the room for the fly tyers. He also had a part in producing the guild videos of tyers by converting recordings to DVD, such as *Volume 1: Mary Dette* and *Volume 2: A Guild Sampler*, which showcased twelve members of the guild, including Dave Brandt and Ralph Graves.

Ken leaves his wife, Motoko, who he met in 2010 at a jazz concert in NYC, where his friend and famous Czech musician George Mraz was playing. Motoko is also an avid fly fisher and will continue to fish with us in the Catskills.

Ken was a kind, thoughtful, intelligent, dignified, generous, and gentle soul, and his depth of character and unassuming nature were obvious to anyone who met him. He had many, many friends, and we were privileged to be in the ranks. He brought so much to my, Martha's, and Mike's lives, and we feel so fortunate to have met him and to have had the past twenty years with him. It is difficult to speak of Ken in the past tense. We wanted this party to keep going. We think about him and miss him every day, and when we return to the rivers this spring and fish our mutually favorite spots, the memories will be bittersweet.

Meet Our Local Catskill Guides **By Ed Walsh**

The same as many of our members, I do most of my fishing wading, but there are times—equally enjoyable—when I am with a guide and floating one of our Catskill rivers. When I'm drifting with a guide, I often spend the day learning more about the river system and where and when to find fish. There are many interesting folks who make

their living servicing our wonderful sport, and I feel that their stories might be worth sharing. After watching Bruce Concors's documentary, *Land of Little Rivers*, I knew the first person that I wanted to interview would be Ben Rinker.

Ben comes from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. His dad, a college science professor, exposed him to fly fishing at a young age, and explained to Ben the importance of the insects that feed trout. Although the path to his present day career had many twists and turns, an educational pursuit wasn't a priority to young Ben.

Being a very hands-on individual, he started a general contracting company, and with the help of his wife, Cindy, the business was quite successful until a serious injury made him reconsider his future direction. Realizing that an education was the key, Ben enrolled in Delaware Valley College and majored in aquatic ecology. After his BS was completed in 1990, he continued his educational path, attending Westchester State University, where he received his MS in environmental science in 1992.

Upon graduation, Ben found few opportunities in his academic field, and he accepted a position with a large publishing company. Although the job had little to do with his educational background, he found the opportunity challenging and rewarding, and it allowed him time to follow his real passion—fly fishing.

As an avid fly fisherman, Ben found his way to the Catskills, spending many weekends fishing its wonderful river system. In the early 1980s, he was introduced to Al Caucci, which began a long-lasting friendship. Al realized that Ben was a talented fly fisherman and offered him a weekend position at his Delaware River Club fly-fishing school. It wasn't long before Ben starting guiding and became one the DRC's most sought-after guides.

During his weekend stays, Ben lived in a trailer on the DRC's property, but with a growing family (four daughters) and some disposable income, he and Cindy purchased a home in 2006 on the lower East Branch of the Delaware River in the town of Hancock.

Life threw Ben a curveball when his biggest client at the publishing company went into bankruptcy. Although Ben was able to increase his guide trips at the DRC, that arrangement changed when the business was sold in 2008. Even though his services were still in demand, the new owner's guide rotation reduced Ben's time on the water, leading he and Cindy to make the decision to open East Branch Outfitters in 2010. Although he was legally restricted from contacting his regular clients from the DRC, many of his previous clients made a point of finding Ben on their own at East Branch Outfitters.



Ben and Cindy Rinker

As are many of the guides who make their living in this area, Ben is committed to monitoring and improving the environment in which he lives and works. With assistance from the Friends of the Upper Delaware River, the US Geological Survey, the New York

State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, he was involved in a fish tagging and monitoring program from 2016 to 2019. Ben is extremely passionate about this work, and I will cover his involvement and the present status of the fish-monitoring program in an upcoming article.

Ben is an exceptional fly tyer. One of his own creations, the Wunder Bug, has become a go-to pattern during many of his more than 100 days each year on the river.



Ben Rinker's Wunder Bug

Hook: Dry fly, sizes 12 to 16

Thread: Dark brown

Tail and Underwing: Antron or Z-lon

Body: Dubbing to match hatch

Throat: A few barbules of wood duck

Wing: Deer hair

As the name implies, this fly is truly a wonder bug. Thanks to a versatile profile, it can imitate anything from a caddis to a mayfly. When you can't figure out what to tie on—try this pattern. Here's a link to a video of Ben tying the fly: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ32DZHR28c>

I asked Ben to provide an essential tip that he would normally share with clients during a day on the river. Ben's tip: "The best tool on the river is the power of observation." That's sage advice from a man who knows.

Ben Rinker can be contacted at: www.eastbranchoutfitters.com

A Couple of Interesting Flies **By Tom Mason**

The fly on the left is the Beamis Stream, tied on a Mustad 3906B, and the fly on the right is the Beaverkill, tied on an Allcocks 04991, Model Perfect, size 12.

From a fly-tying perspective, the two flies are noteworthy due to their use of body hackles to create the illusion of life. The Beamis



Photo: Tom Mason

Stream sports hen to create movement in the water column, and the Beaverkill uses rooster to raise the fly above the surface and create an impression in the film.

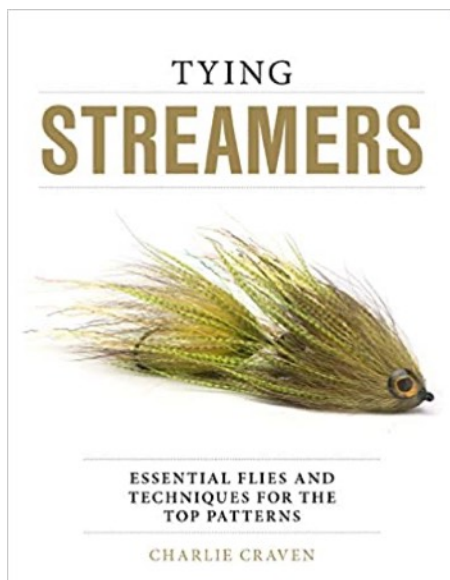
The Beamis Stream would make a fine imitation of an *Isonychia* swimming up from the bottom and hatching in a run, or of an Iso swimming toward shore to find a rock to climb. With its brown coloration in the wing and tailing, it is also a very reasonable representation of an October Caddis. Both of those bugs hatch at the same time of year, making the Beamis Stream a good choice in the fall.

The Beaverkill is obviously from the Catskills, and the pattern is quite old. It was sold by Rube Cross, the Dettas, and probably by the drugstore and hardware store in town. My thoughts are that it was developed as a fly to fish in the early part of the century for the more sophisticated brown trout—when dry-fly fishing was first becoming popular. Anglers got off the O&W railroad in Livingston Manor, Roscoe, or Cooks Falls, and just as we do now, they would ask anyone who'd been fishing to tell them which flies the trout were taking. They were told that the Beaverkill is what they wanted, just as we might be told today to fish the Usual. Back then, the same as now, I imagine that fisherman were a bunch of exaggerating and misleading con artists. I chuckle when I realize how that description still fits most of my fly-fishing friends.

Book Review

Tying Streamers: Essential Flies and Techniques for the Top Patterns

By Charlie Craven. Published by Stackpole Books, 2020; \$49.95 hardbound.



“Pinch the butt ends of the feathers together and stick them right into your yapper,” Charlie Craven instructs his reader in the step-by-step descriptions of how to tie the Platte River Special streamer. “Slobber on them a little bit (don’t get all gross, just wet them against your tongue) so they stick together. . . . Stop being squeamish — I know that’s not the worst thing you’ve ever put in your mouth.” Mounting matched pairs of feathers for streamer wings atop a hook shank is indeed a tricky operation, but that technique is not one you’ll usually find in a fly-tying manual. (A friend says that people who buy flies wouldn’t touch them if they knew how much spit there is in them

That’s an extreme example of Craven’s teaching style, but teaching technique, rather than tying the specific patterns presented in the book, is one of the principal foci of *Tying Streamers*. The other is fly design.

“We live in the good old days of fly tying,” Craven writes, and “streamer fishing and tying is at a zenith right now.” “Early streamer fishermen pretty much had their choice of feather-winged patterns like the Black or Grey Ghost or the option of hair-

winged flies like the Mickey Finn. Not much in the way of articulations or stinger hooks and nary a whisper of cones and premade heads.” Since the advent of Intruder-style steelhead flies, though, all of those innovations have transformed streamer tying, especially articulation, which is appearing on everything from trout flies — the subject of this book — to honking big pike streamers, though Craven says of pike anglers, “they just ain’t right in the head.”

However, even among trout anglers, Craven writes, “there is an awful lot of overdoing it these days,” because “the current trend leans toward piling every available material onto a hook . . . with no regard to the design, castability, or even, in some cases, good taste.” People are designing trout flies that “cast like a piece of firewood.” Instead, the patterns he presents were chosen not just as ways to discuss particular techniques, but as examples of good fly design. In addition, because function is important, he discusses material selection as central to both good design and effective technique. In that sense, *Tying Streamers* isn’t just about tying streamers, but about how to be a better fly tyer. And since form follows function, there are discussions of the angling circumstances they are designed to address and how he fishes them.

As a way to teach tying techniques, the book is superbly thought out, progressing from an initial pattern, the Thin Mint, which is essentially a beadhead Woolly Bugger with a couple of tying wrinkles, to seriously complicated articulated streamers such as Blane Chocklett’s Game Changer. A few “classic” streamer patterns are covered — the Black Ghost, Mickey Finn, and Muddler Minnow — because they allow him to focus on specific techniques, including the “slobber” method of mounting feather wings, but this book is really about the modern articulated streamer.

There are of course plenty of online videos that deal with these flies, whether their dressings are overdone or not, but a book is an appropriate medium for learning the techniques necessary to tie them, because to say that they can be “seriously complicated” is an understatement. The photos and texts that accompany the step-by-step tying instructions are excellent, but for the Sculpzilla pattern, there are 88 of them, and for Craven’s Double Dirty Hippy streamer, there are 109. For flies such as these, you are essentially tying two quite complex flies at once, weighting the rear hook, coning it, wrapping marabou, veiling with synthetic fibers, wiring the articulation, beading it to prevent the articulation from fouling, then repeating it all and more on the front hook, which adds up to quite a process. Full-dress Atlantic salmon flies can be simpler. And if one of these creations snags a submerged tree limb, I imagine you’d think twice about breaking it off.

However, you’d definitely have been fishing the pattern, because it was indeed well designed — castable, appropriate for the conditions in which you’re fishing and the way you’re fishing it, seductive in the water, not just in the vise or shop bin, and a proven fish catcher. At several points for flies he’s designed, in the texts that introduce the pattern, Craven walks you through the process by which he designed it.

Sudden inspiration at the vise is not part of that process. Thought is. As he says, “From a fly design standpoint, try to remember that just because you own it, that doesn’t mean that you have to tie it to the hook. While rabbit strips and chenille and hackle

feathers and rubber legs and lead eyes and wool all make for great patterns, combining them all together makes for an incredibly bulky fly that sinks slowly for its weight.” What he says of the complicated Double Dirty Hippy he repeats for most of his flies: “I played with the idea in my head for several long car trips before I ever sat down to tie it. . . . When I finally sat down at the vise, I had a great idea about what I didn’t want, but it took some tinkering to get around that and end up with the right result.” And tinkering is not the same thing as trying something to see if it works. As he says of his Swim Coach pattern, which he at one point abandoned as unworkable, “I really like to take each piece of a fly and justify to myself why it’s there.”

The same goes for material selection. The classic feather-wing, hair-wing, and spun deer-hair patterns are included not just because they involve techniques that apply to modern streamers and that any competent fly tyer should know. (“Throw out the idea that you’ll never fish a simple-looking old-school fly like this,” he says of the Mickey Finn, “and first see if you can actually tie the dang thing before you go running your mouth.”) They let him stress what is also a basic principle throughout: you can’t design and tie a good fly with materials averse to its use and construction. Not all bucktail works on a Mickey Finn; “selecting the right materials for a Muddler is at least half the battle”; hackle fibers long enough for the throat of a Black Ghost are hard to find, but UNI-Stretch is a great substitute for floss on the body. Craven’s prose is easy-going and broad-speak colloquial, as you can see from the quotes, but as with fly design, what Craven explicitly emphasizes and what he implicitly performs in the conception and structure of the book is that intelligence and thought matter a lot in fly fishing.

The result here is not so much a book of fly patterns as a catalogue of fly types, sorted not just from simpler to more complex, but in terms of application and intended use: heavy, deep sinkers (Barr’s Slumbuster) versus skinny-water attractors (Tequeely), for instance. That’s probably more important to know about the book than the names of the specific patterns — and the names that he and other tyers come up with are something else again, anyway: Heifer Groomer? Baby Gongga? Drunk and Disorderly?

It’s also the case that Craven fishes streamers in a particular part of the country and in a way adapted to that situation: “mainly in Colorado on medium-sized rivers” and banging the banks from a boat. Many of these patterns are tied on size 1 hooks, and you’re unlikely to be throwing them on a 3-weight to brook trout in a small Catskill tributary where the fish are smaller than the fly, though the classic streamers are an exception, and the Baby Gongga (103 steps) is tied on two size 8 TMC 5262s, which still makes it the size of some of those brookies.

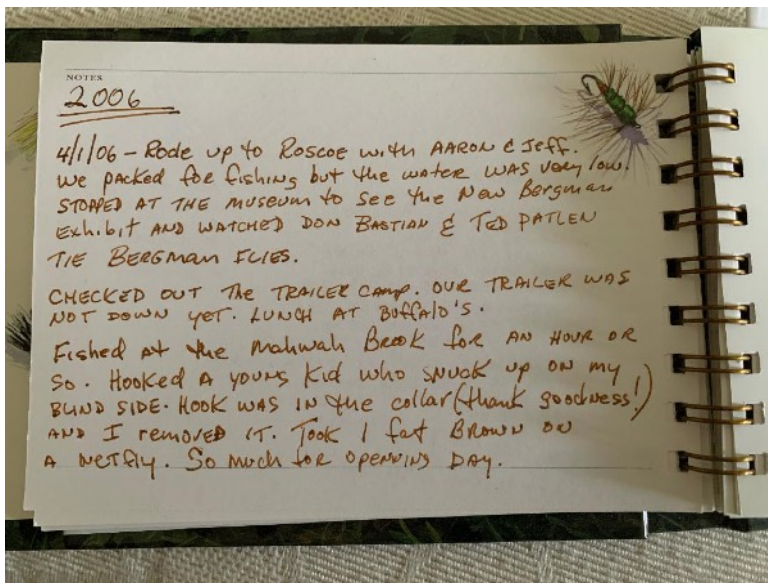
What’s interesting about how Craven fishes these big flies in that context is that he uses 0X fluorocarbon tippet. He’s thought this out, as well. “First, the larger-diameter wire used in the larger streamer hooks prevents a standard clinch knot from tightening down properly, with smaller-diameter tippet material, and the fly will almost always break off right at the knot on the lighter tippet.” (Yes, he uses a loop knot at the fly, but if the fishing is hot and heavy and he loses a fly, he just resorts to the quick and dirty [unimproved] Clinch to get back in the game.) The heavier tippet and the fluorocarbon

also make the rig more durable. He doesn't say so, but I imagine that the 0X also means he can haul a snag in with the fly instead of losing it.

He bangs the banks with a 9-foot fast-action 6-weight and either a floating line and 9-foot leader or a sink-tip line with a short tip and a few feet of 0X fluoro tippet. In other words, this is a specialized kind of fly fishing, and the flies are explicitly designed for it. That doesn't mean that they can't be adapted to other pursuits — steelheading, or Delta strippers, or salt water, for example — but viewed simply as fly patterns, most of the flies in *Tying Streamers* are specialized tools, not Swiss Army knives.

However, Craven makes clear from the start that the book is intended as a “toolkit” of fly-tying techniques, applicable to any tying problem. That and the thoughtful approach to fly design and material selection are the real topics of the book, and that's why it's a valuable addition to any tyer's library.

—Bud Bynack



Opening Day By Bruce Corwin

As April 1st approached, I wistfully remembered my opening day exploits and the mounting anticipation as opening day neared. I read with envy the posts on FaceBook showing full fly boxes and tiny black stoneflies while perusing my fishing journals for opening days passed. So, to ease the pain of not seeing everyone, and secondarily, not fishing for trout in cold, moving water, I dragged out my traditional Opening Day box,

closed my eyes, and pulled out the first fly I touched. I tied it on and offered a nicely tied Early Black Stonefly to an eager sunfish that chewed it to hell. That will have to work for now. I toasted my current and lost fishing buds on April 1st, and thought of Schwiebert's book *Remembrances of Rivers Past*, and I tried to be in the moment...

New Members and Sharing the *Gazette*

It's fun to share, and the *Gazette* is often shared by forwarding copies to friends who are nonmembers of the guild. If you do this, please encourage those readers to join our mission and become members. Joining the guild is as simple as clicking on this link: <https://cftg.limitedrun.com>.



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.



Here's guild member George Wilkinson stalking wild brook trout at the base of a multitiered waterfall.

Photo: Chuck Coronato



Keep aware that trout are not the only things that we encounter when tiptoeing around the edges of beautiful streams.

Photo: Chuck Coronato