



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

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**There is no meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild in July.** Guild president, Joe Ceballos, addresses our situation regarding future meetings in the president's message.

## **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>. The price of dues is currently only ten dollars.



## **President's Message By Joe Ceballos**

First and foremost, I hope that you and your family are healthy and well. As we start to move forward from this virus lockdown and self-quarantining, it is also hoped that you have had time for some fishing activities. As restrictions ease and the number of new infections steadily decrease in our region there is no reason not to enjoy being outdoors and streamside with proper precautions.

Summer is finally here after a cold and wet spring that was unkind with early high water and sporadic hatches. Sadly, water temperatures for some of our favorite trout waters can be too warm to fish. As some have done, fish the salt, or find early morning creeks, or try "fresh water" as we used to say by angling for panfish or smallmouth bass.

Given the current decline of new Covid cases in our area, the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum will possibly open in August. If so, I suggest a meeting, and would like a response and ideas

for the format. I work for the guild and its members, so I'll proceed based on what you would like to do in this matter. It is hoped that we can resume our regularly scheduled meetings in September. Please send your thoughts to me at [sajefu@aol.com](mailto:sajefu@aol.com) regarding meetings or any other guild-related issues.

In a future meeting, I will be recommending raising the annual dues, which has not happened since the formation of the guild, to twenty dollars per year. The increase will be used to pay for exceptional presenters who will not come for free. We all enjoyed having Matt Supinski and his very detailed presentation. We could have more presentations of that type. Even though we are primarily a fly-tying club—we also fish—and having a notable angler (suggestions of course) come to present will be beneficial to the guild's base of knowledge.

I'd like to thank Paul Dolbec for taking up the role of club historian along with help from Ed Ostapczuk and Chuck Coronato. I'm sure we all agree that there are many notable past members and events from the guild that need to be preserved. Thanks for taking on this project.

Another project to be considered is our website and how to improve it. In the age of social media a good webpage is a valuable and helpful tool when used effectively. I suggest that all members view our website and provide some feedback. Your input and valued opinions will influence how we proceed.

My latest reading leads me to suggest two books for you if you have not already read them: *The Fly and the Fish* by John Atherton, and *Practical Dry Fly Fishing* by Emlyn M. Gill. Many of you know that Atherton was an innovative fly tyer, enjoyed fishing Catskill waters, and is now regarded as one of the many tyers associated with what we've come to identify as our Catskill School of fly tying. His patterns are still valid today, and as an artist/illustrator/designer he saw colors in a different way and incorporated his color perspective into his flies.

Regarding Gill's book, it is one of the first attempts of an American to write about "this new way of fishing for trout," via the dry fly. His observations, written over 100 years ago, are still valid today, making this a great read.

At last, keep well, get out to fish somewhere, tie flies, please consider my suggestions, and let's all keep our fingers crossed that we will be able to meet face to face in August.

## ***Editors Note: Continuity*** **By Chuck Coronato**

It was a little more than a year ago that Bud Bynack suggested that I should consider being the next editor of the *Gazette*. Bud knew that I was retiring from teaching, and I would want something valuable to do with my time. After thirty-five rewarding years of instructing high school math the idea of doing anything other than teaching seemed unformed in my mind. Even when Bud invited me to come to his apartment to spend most of a day learning how to arrange the layout for the newsletter, the fact that I would be doing this still seemed unshaped, and I contacted Bud to double check that he actually expected me to be there. Bud wrote, "Yes, we're definitely on—I vacuumed!" That's when I knew that this was going to happen.

It's no secret that the guild owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Bud for making the *Gazette* what it is and for consistently setting high standards with each publication. If I'm able to maintain some of those standards, it is only because of Bud's generous sharing of his knowledge and his patient and insightful teaching of the editorial process. As Joe Ceballos noted in our last issue, Bud is, "Nothing short of the best person that someone can know." It simply cannot be expressed better.

My intention is that you shouldn't notice anything different about this issue of the *Gazette*, and it should be that way for some time. If any changes are planned for the format, those changes will now,

and always, take a backseat to the quality writing that you've come to expect. This publication has always depended on high-quality submissions from the guild's members, and it will continue to do so. I'm grateful for the steady and continuing contributions from Ed Ostapczuk and John Bonasera. Up on the Esopus and CJ's Flies have anchored issues of the Gazette stretching back many years. This issue and previous issues wouldn't get to our members without the continued efforts of guild secretary Nicole March. It's clear that our organization functions as a team, and in addition to our steady contributors we are looking for more voices to be heard. You aren't reading this unless you are passionate about fly fishing, fly tying, history, and all of the wonderful threads that weave through our sport. Everyone has a story of value to tell, and I encourage you to put your thoughts on paper and share them. It is my privilege to serve the guild in this capacity, and I'm here to help in any way that I can.

## **Tradition and Innovation: Keeping Up With Mother Nature By Mark Sturtevant**

I retired to the Catskills after twenty-seven seasons of traveling to fish the rivers: ribbons of bright water that I've come to refer to as the rivers of my heart. I was drawn here nearly thirty years ago by my love for the history and tradition of fly fishing, just as I had been drawn to Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley and the fair Letort.

I love the beauty and simplicity of the Catskill dry fly, and I love to tie and fish them. Like any good fly, each pattern has its place, and certain conditions where it is most likely to succeed.

Somewhere over twenty years ago I presented a paper at the Fly Fishers Club of Harrisburg luncheon, relating my experiences and opinions regarding learned behavior in wild trout. To my knowledge, no ichthyologists were present, so it was well received. Pennsylvania has a wealth of small streams, and it has a wealth of anglers. In the south-central region, the trout are fished over every day by fly fishers, spin fishers, and bait fishers. In the fly-fishing-only waters, particularly, they are bombarded almost nonstop, by well-presented flies and poorly presented ones, and they learn not to take.

Our Catskill rivers are larger, but the crowds they draw are commensurate with their fame, and I have observed the same behaviors I observed on crowded Pennsylvania streams three decades ago. Wild trout have adjusted to the tremendous fishing pressure by learning not to eat bugs that do not move and appear alive. I have witnessed it time and time again, even during heavy hatches: a targeted fish rises only for the naturals that move in its window, letting dozens of static flies, and anglers' flies, pass by without so much as a closer look. To try to solve this evolving puzzle, I believe we must learn from tradition, and use all of our knowledge and experience to innovate.

The late great Ed Sherk was a friend and mentor, and he impressed upon me the importance of movement in the fly itself. It has been a guiding principle in my own development as an angler and fly tier.

I first used CDC feathers thirty years ago, and they have been a staple in many of my own fly designs ever since those initial experiments. As with many effective dry flies, certain designs become popular, then common, and the trout continue to learn. Eventually, our hot new favorites are no longer as effective as they once were, and we must strive to improve them, and to fashion new designs.

I consider myself a devout member of the "cult of the Green Drake." It is more than my favorite hatch. It is nearly a religion. There was a time when a straight, CDC Comparadun worked magic for

me on the drake hatch on all of our Catskill rivers, but my joy has been tempered over time. There are more fish that simply won't fall for them anymore. Science tells us that trout pass on their traits genetically, and I have no doubt that this includes learned experiences, an idea more scientists have begun to embrace.

A great part of the joy of fly tying is solving puzzles. This pursuit has always been about both science and art. I love to experiment, to work with new and classic materials, often combining them to achieve the desired effect. Observation, and many fine works by past angler-authors moved to study their quarry lead us to new ideas, and possibly success!

In an ongoing quest for movement—the imitation of life—I have tried many ways to create movement itself, and to reflect the natural light bouncing off of flies to create the impression of motion. My current focus involves enhancing translucency, and the experiments have proved entertaining. The subtleties of design can be intriguing.

My most recent variation of a March Brown emerger is offered as an example. The brown trailing shuck has been a proven feature, as has the ridged, turkey biot body. I sought to enhance translucency by tying the thorax with pure silk dubbing, and by adding a small amount of Enrico Puglisi's Trigger Point Fibers to the tan CDC wing, gaining a more natural impression of the variegated wings of the mayfly along with that translucence.



March Brown Emerger

After the Hendricksons waned, I spent far too many bugless hours on the water, waiting. I took this new fly to the Delaware River upon receiving a trusted report that March Browns had been on the water in good numbers. I was limited to fishing further upriver than recommended, and while I saw a few flies drifting by at wide intervals, only two trout rose sporadically, effectively ignoring my standard sparkle Comparaduns, deer-hair emergers, and other proven patterns.

I was about to call it a day when I tied on the new emerger and offered it to the sporadic riser that I had worked for the past hour. Two casts and he had it, a strong, broad shouldered brown that measured nineteen inches in the net. One trout certainly does not make a fly pattern, but in this situation this new fly was the difference between one trout and none. I have already tied emergers following this design formula for Gray Foxes (pale yellow March Browns if you prefer) and Green Drakes. They will be offered to difficult fish that ignore my typical patterns, as was the case with March Browns. I'm excited to see if the formula proves consistently effective.

The CDC Comparadun is still an effective pattern, though I find it more consistent for smaller mayflies than for the large drakes. My patterns evolve, and I think that continuing to experiment is an asset to any fly tyer. Capturing a Green Drake dun years ago gave me a fine example for choosing the material to add a trailing shuck to my flies. Light brown spooled Antron yarn matched perfectly, and I have used it for sparkle-dun-style flies with both deer hair and CDC wings.

A high water year led me to design an emerger combining both deer hair and CDC for movement on a fly that would ride partially in and partially out of the water after the trout had refused to rise for my floaters. The fly was remarkably effective and has been a staple in my drake boxes ever since. Some problems seem to require more detailed solutions, though simplicity can still be a wonderful trait in a trout fly.

The first period of specific hatch matching I encountered this season occurred in early June. The big wild browns were on the rise and sulphurs were the mayflies they selected, not the larger March Browns and Gray Foxes that shared the water. Noticing a trace of yellow coloration in the wings of the size-16 mayflies, I tied a handful of simple CDC Sparkle Duns. I chose a reddish-tan Z-Yarn for a sparse trailing shuck, a blend of pale yellow and yellow Kreinik pure silk dubbing for the body, and a pair of Trout Hunter CDC puffs for the wing: one light natural dun and one pale yellow. That little fly accounted for five wild browns from twenty to twenty-four inches in length during three days fishing to the sulphur hatch. Some other nice fish also found the fly to their liking, and two or three large fish were hooked and lost. Other sulphurs mostly failed when tried.

Will this sulphur pattern become the be-all and end-all of fishing this hatch? Certainly not. It could remain effective in the future, or never tempt a trout again. The point is: observation and a willingness to innovate a bit compared to one's own normal selection of flies.

I have noted color variations in many mayflies, particularly the common sulphurs, from stream to stream and from season to season. I do not believe that these flies are all different species, particularly when dealing with recurring hatches on the same river at the same time of year. I consider, rather, that changes in habitat, aquatic vegetation, light penetration, water temperature and chemistry, and other factors can alter the relative size and coloration of aquatic insects from time to time.

We don't need to know the science to adapt and profit from such events: we need to observe, copy, and fish!

Last year, my best friend, Mike, visited from Maryland, and we spent an afternoon on the Beaverkill. We were both blanked during a nice March Brown hatch, using a variety of flies in various shades of amber, tan, and pale yellow. Trout eagerly ate the natural mayflies but ignored every fly we offered. The hatch and the rise had ended, and we were walking out when Mike was finally able to lay hands on a bug. I called its color road sign yellow, and even joked that Mother Nature was throwing a psychedelic curve to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Woodstock. But those trout were highly selective to the garish, bright yellow color of those mayflies.



I tied some flies with bright yellow biots and dubbing, admittedly laughing while I did it, and returned an evening or two later. I found just a few flies in the drift, and one good fish taking from time to time. The “Woodstock” March Brown put that twenty-one-inch brownie in the net. Sometimes, you just have to go with the flow.

We can all appreciate and learn from tradition, and also from our own observations on the river. When trout are active and you're not catching them, invest some of that precious time to really focus and observe what they are doing. Notice which insects they are targeting, in what form, and how do those insects appear? Take photos, keep notes, and whatever else helps you to use your observations later on at the tying desk. Rather than spend time in fruitless flailing when we don't have the answer—something we all do from time to time—watch, think, and learn what the answer may be. You might just solve that puzzle with the fly that you tied from your observations.

*Editor's note:* Mark Sturtevant is the former owner of Falling Spring Outfitters fly shop located in Scotland, Pennsylvania. Now a resident of Hancock, New York, Mark can be followed on his blog Bright Waters Catskills, at <https://brightwatercatskill.art.blog/>



## Summer *Isonychias*

About two weeks ago, the last Coffin Fly dropped her eggs and landed in a mainstem back eddy, fulfilling her only purpose, and ending a short but important lifecycle, ensuring that Green Drakes will hatch next year. Mayflies are the reason that we have success when trout fishing, and their scheduled appearances allow us to be on the stream at the approximate time to take advantage of them when fish key in on particular bugs.

How fortunate we are that while some mayflies hatch simultaneously, many have “windows” where when one species ends, another starts.

The *Isonychia* starts late, but continues to emerge from summer to fall, filling a space when mayflies are few, and during a time when good fishing pretty much slows down.

Isos start their season as a big bug, and as the months pass, they get smaller. The familiar white legs and reddish-brown body stays the same, they just shrink in size.

In my travels, I see *Isonychias* everywhere. I’m not aware of any stream in the Catskills that doesn’t host them, and from around late June to the end of the season you can find their nymphal shucks on rocks at the edges of the water.

Preston Jennings was quite fond of them, and his nymph imitation swung wet-fly style still takes trout, especially on the Esopus where it was invented.

Art Flick, though, really hit it out of the park. Flick was a practical tyer, tying many of his patterns wingless, and his Dun Variant is one of my favorite flies hands down. As far as dry-fly fishing goes, I have lost more big trout on Flick’s Dun Variant than any dry fly that I’ve ever used, and the memories of those fish just make me love that fly even more.

In true Variant style, a short-shank hook, oversized hackle and tailing, and Flick’s trademark stripped-quill body form a light fly that leaves a hefty imprint on the water, and I believe this is the reason trout will sometimes move four feet to take one. They just look so good.

I make most of mine on a size-12 hook, and later in the year go down in size to a size-16. For hackle, I like using old Metz capes, for the same reason that I like using old Mustad hooks: it’s a classic fly and deserves classic materials!

Now that the Green Drakes are over, and March Browns are slowing to a halt, we can still have some good, big dry-fly fishing.



### Dun Variant

Thread: Olive 6/0

Hook: Mustad 94836

Tail: Dun spade hackle, 3X shank length

Body: Rhode Island Red hackle quill, stripped

Hackle: Three feathers, medium dun, 3X hook size

## The Irresistible and First Trout on a Fly

While reading an article titled “Perfecting Deer Hair Dry Flies” in the Summer 2020 issue of *Fly Tyer*, warm memories of the first trout that I ever caught on a fly—the White Irresistible—permeated my thoughts. That incident happened almost sixty years ago, but its recollection still burns bright.

I was a young teenager at the time, striving to become a wannabe fly fisher. Our parents took my twin sisters and me to Hacklebarney State Park in Chester, New Jersey. While my parents read in shaded lawn chairs, and my younger sisters played, I wandered the hilly terrain in search of cooperative fish in Trout Brook, a tributary to the Black River.

I came upon a small pool, where I noticed a fish’s dimple. However, I didn’t see any bugs, leaving me in a quandary. Fortunately, I had studied books by Bergman, Schwiebert, and Art Flick, so I shook nearby bushes searching for evidence of insects. Several white moths took to the air. I combed my fly box’s meager contents and chose a White Irresistible from its slim pickings.

I don’t remember how many casts it took, but I fondly recall a small trout darting to the surface from beneath a large rock and grabbing that dry fly. Ultimately, I caught a brook trout about six inches in length. I admired its elegance, then released it and marked a momentous milestone in my piscatorial beginnings. At the time, I might have thought that trout to have been a hatchery fish, but in 2018, over a half-century later, I returned to Hacklebarney catching small—now protected—wild brook trout in the same creek. For those who are unaware, New Jersey’s Division of Fish and Wildlife recently developed a progressive plan to safeguard the Garden State’s native brook trout population, and Trout Brook is one of the streams included.

Depending upon the reference utilized, there are various recipes for the Irresistible and for the White Irresistible. Perhaps the Irresistible might be thought of like a Wulff pattern: a mini-series of variations centered about a central tying theme. In the case of the Irresistible, the central theme is the use of a deer-hair body. The recipe below is based upon Eric Leiser’s *The Book of Fly Patterns*, which has long been a favorite source of tying information for me. Leiser set aside a few pages of instructions, along with illustrations, on how to tie this dry fly noting the importance of trimming the body before tying in wings. In his *Complete Book of Fly Tying*, Eric wrote, “One of the most popular clipped deer-bodied flies in the country is the Irresistible.” He also provides several pages of tying instruction in this book. Several authors have noted—plus I’ve noticed from personal experience—that when tying this dry fly, the hardest part is insuring that one does not cut the tail off while trimming the body.

### White Irresistible

Hook: Mustad 94840, size 10 to 16

Thread: White

Tail: White deer hair or white calf tail

Body: Spun white deer hair, clipped

Wing: White calf tail

Hackle: Badger

### *Up on the Esopus*



With Ed Ostapczuk



As a footnote, Harry Darbee, in his book *Catskill Flytier*, credits Joe Messinger Sr. of West Virginia with creating this pattern. Messinger is perhaps best known for his Bucktail Frog, among other deer-hair flies. Apparently, Messinger gave outdoor columnist Ken Lockwood an Irresistible, who eventually called that nameless dry fly “irresistible,” given the success he experienced while fishing it. In Mike Valla’s book *The Founding Flies*, chapter eleven is dedicated to Joe Messinger Sr., including a complete history of the Irresistible.

Darbee is credited with his own deer-body dry fly, a signature pattern called the Rat-faced McDougall—an outgrowth of his Beaverkill Bastard. It’s very similar in style to the Irresistible, with minor variations in the materials utilized. In *Catskill Flytier*, Darbee included both patterns in his Darbee’s Deadly Dozen list of flies. Darbee also wrote, “The flies with clipped deer-hair bodies were tremendously successful, often in rivers far from home. Their all-round capability brought us many friends and considerable business.”

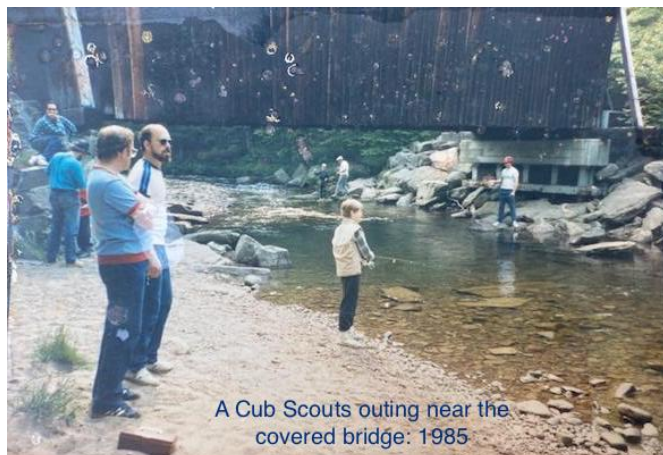


## Leo, Paul, and the Covered Bridge By George Wilkinson

In 1984, I purchased a well-used Holiday Traveler trailer that had been built in 1965, paying \$1000 for a shelter that would become the epicenter of memorable family gatherings and outdoor excursions. The trailer was part of a grand plan of mine, and my wife, Fran, to replace the popup camper that was our lodging at the Covered Bridge Campsite located on the upper Willowemoc. There had been much discussion between us concerning which campsite to select, but Fran just spoke up and said, “I know the one you’re going to pick. The one that’s right next to that trout stream!” She knows me very well.

Fewer than twenty short steps from the flow of the Willowemoc was the place that you’d find me with Fran and our children, Michele and David, almost every weekend for the next ten years. We had a lovely view of the old covered bridge that is half of the span that previously crossed the river in Livingston Manor before it was relocated in the early 1900s to its current spot on Conklin Hill Road. David and the other children at the campground loved frogging near that bridge. On one occasion, he and a friend caught a great number of frogs and took the time to carefully place them on little floating blocks of wood in the camp owner’s aboveground pool. But, as kids do, they got distracted and left the frogs unattended. The adults watched as the frogs all floated one by one to the pool’s edges, leaped to freedom, and made a beeline to the river.

During the campground’s heyday, the main building was the spot to gather for coffee and camaraderie amongst the campers—including the dogs. On Sunday afternoons, before leaving for home and another week of work, I’d sneak off to fish a nearby small stream that fed the Willow, getting me in the right frame of mind to endure another week of work where my thoughts continually drifted to images of the camp. That little tributary is nameless, but its soothing qualities led me to refer to it as Therapy Brook. My Therapy Brook shows



A Cub Scouts outing near the covered bridge: 1985













