



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 22, number 2

March 2019

**The March 2019 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild** will be held on Saturday, March 16, at 1:00 P.M. in the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY.

Bring flies to the March meeting to donate to Project Healing Waters. The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild continues to support Project Healing Waters and its mission of physical and emotional rehabilitation for disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities, including education and outings.

At the meeting, Don Baylor will present the case for the Poconos as at least as important as the Catskills in the history of American trout fishing and the development of American fly-fishing techniques. He will discuss the notable Pennsylvania anglers, destinations, and literature important to the development of American trout fishing traditions in the 1800s and first half of the 1900s.

Don Baylor is a partner in Aquatic Resource Consulting (ARC), which provides baseline surveys of aquatic macroinvertebrates, fishes, and water chemistry and assesses environmental impacts on aquatic ecosystems, consults on habitat development, and advises regarding fisheries management for fishing clubs, government agencies, counties, municipalities, and engineering firms and for a variety of environmental groups, associations, private businesses, and individuals.

## **The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Annual Meeting**

Following a well-attended and well-received presentation on fly fishing on the Delaware River, the Annual Meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild was held on February 16, 2019. Joe Ceballos had completed Dave Brandt's term as president, and the Nominating Committee renominated him for reelection. John Kavanaugh was nominated from the floor. The vote ended in a tie.

Subsequently, John Kavanaugh withdrew his candidacy, and the result of the election was that Joe Ceballos was reelected for a three-year term.



## Anglers Reunion and Anglers Market, 2019

The 2019 Anglers Reunion Dinner will be held at the Rockland House on March 31. Social hour, 6:00 P.M.; dinner, 7:00 P.M.; \$27 per person, open bar.

The Anglers Market will be held at the Roscoe Community Center on Saturday, May 25, from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Tables are available at \$15 each and can be shared. Please contact Manny Zanger for table information at (607) 498-5464). Contact Judie DV Smith for other information at [darbeel@juno.com](mailto:darbeel@juno.com) or (607) 498-6024.

## The Guild at the Fly-Fishing and Wingshooting Expo, 2019

At the Fly-Fishing and Wingshooting Expo, held at the Split Rock Resort in Lake Harmony, Pennsylvania, the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild debuted its new show displays and advertising materials

and brochures.

Designed by Nicole March, they will give the guild a much-enhanced presence wherever we appear. Many thanks to Nicole, Paul Dolbec, who gave a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the guild

during the show, and tyers Alan Barley, Fred Klein, and Joe Ceballos. Several new members signed up at the show, and there were a number of renewals.



## The Guild, Kids on the Fly, and the Museum

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild is starting a Catskill Kids on the Fly chapter that will meet at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum at 10:00 A.M. before our regularly scheduled meetings. All tying equipment and tying materials will be supplied for the sessions. All sessions are open to kids of all ages, including parents regardless of tying experience.

The inaugural meeting will take place during the Opening Day festivities at the Fly Tyers Rendezvous on April 6 at the museum. The inaugural session will be open throughout the Rendezvous. This initiative reflects the guild's efforts to coordinate better its activities with those of the museum.

—Bob Hopken

## Questions

Bud—

A nonfishing friend of mine asked what is the derivation of the fly-stage name “spinner.” I wasn't sure, so told him I would ask around. Would it pay for the question to be put in the next guild newsletter?

—Mac Francis

*Got an answer? Send it to [budbynack@gmail.com](mailto:budbynack@gmail.com), and we'll run it in the next issue.*

Bud—

We've been tossing around the idea of a lifetime membership for people under a certain age, like 18 or 16. And a price of \$100, maybe. Does anyone have an opinion on the age or dollar amount? Is this something you'd like to see? Basically we're just asking for input.

—Nick Mango

*Got an opinion? Send it to [catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com](mailto:catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com).*

## Eric Leiser: An Appreciation

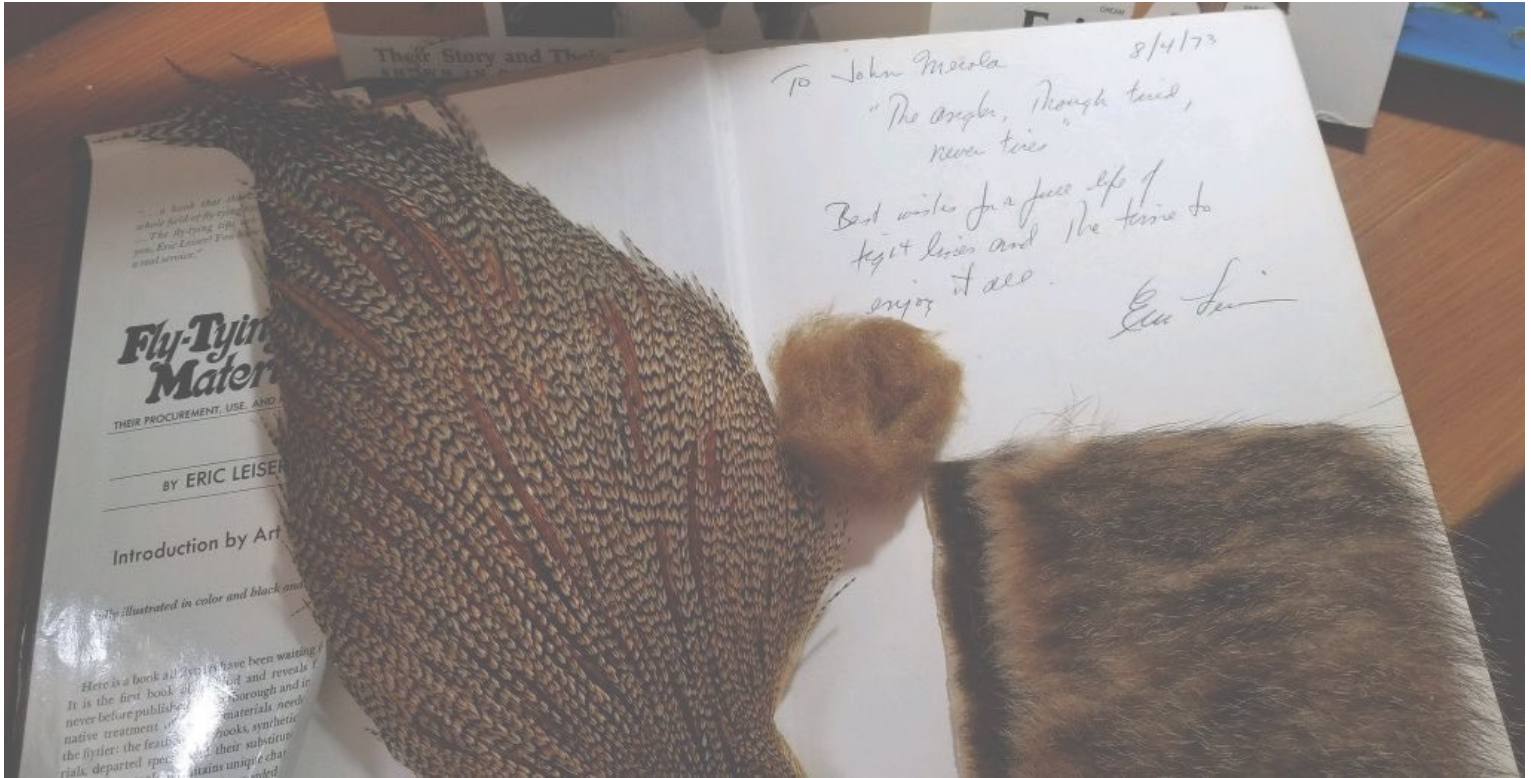
By John Merola

As many of you know, Eric Leiser passed away on January 21, 2019. In Mike Valla's article “Eric Leiser: Master of Materials” (part of the Heritage series that was in *Eastern Fly Fishing* back in 2011), he recalls discovering the advertisement in the back of *Field and Stream* for the Fireside Angler catalog. It was through this catalog that many of us back in the early 1970s first got to correspond with Eric for fly-tying materials. I took it a step further and started visiting Eric as a young teenager, first at the Fireside Angler in Melville, NY, and then at the Fly Fisherman's Bookcase and Tackle Service in Croton-on-Hudson. What I recall most from those days was his soft-spoken, kind manner in providing advice and constructive criticism to me as an aspiring young fly tyer.

The fly-tying quest for me over the years has contained five main parts: acquiring fly-tying knowledge for the improvement of my technique, obtaining materials and protecting those materials, developing enduring friendships through participation in the craft of fly tying, learning the traditions of the craft by studying the written works of those who have come before me, and experiencing the evolution of the craft and appreciating new developments in technique and materials.

Eric really helped me on the first four parts. I wonder what he might have said about the Internet explosion of today. I could see him writing an article that might have been entitled “Fly Tying: From Trade Secret to Internet Explosion.” One thing for sure in my mind is that he would have calmly negotiated the waters of the very fast-changing





fly-tying and fly-fishing world and would have tried to bring all generations together through the common goals of good sportsmanship and the protection of our fishing environments.

### The “Secrets” Are Out: *Fly-Tying Materials*, 1973

I do not believe in “secrets,” since what I know I have only learned from some other source and have then put it to use. What I know, I now wish to share, and I only ask you to do the same and share with other members of our fraternity any knowledge you may have obtained from another source.

—Eric Leiser, preface to *Fly-Tying Materials: Their Procurement, Use, and Protection*

It was in 1973 that Eric gave us his first, book *Fly-Tying Materials*. In the past, much of the knowledge of fly-tying techniques and materials was not freely shared. I received my copy of the book on August 4, 1973, with a nice inscription from him. (See the accompanying photo). Eric directly acknowledged Harold Campbell as his mentor in tying materials and Ted Niemeyer as his mentor in how to use them. “I stumbled along on the fly-tying trail,” he writes. “In the beginning, even as now, these two friends gave me my education.” This is classic self effacing Eric speaking here. I, too, was stumbling in 1973, and Eric helped catch my fall. Over time, this was true in more than one way in my fly-tying career.

As Art Flick says in his introduction to the book, “It’s doubtful that anyone reading Eric Leiser’s *Fly-Tying Materials* would guess that his business is supplying materials to flytiers. It is most unusual for a man to give away his hard-earned trade secrets; and when he does, it’s definitely something new.” *Fly-Tying Materials* is very strong in the information it provides on the acquisition and preservation of natural materials. A lot of new things have come down the pike in forty-six years, but I can attest to the fact that following Eric’s storage instructions will keep you from having to experience what Art Flick called the “all gone” feeling when your materials get destroyed by some insect or rodent.

In the acknowledgments in the book, Eric makes one of the most beautiful statements I have seen on the ownership of knowledge in fly tying:

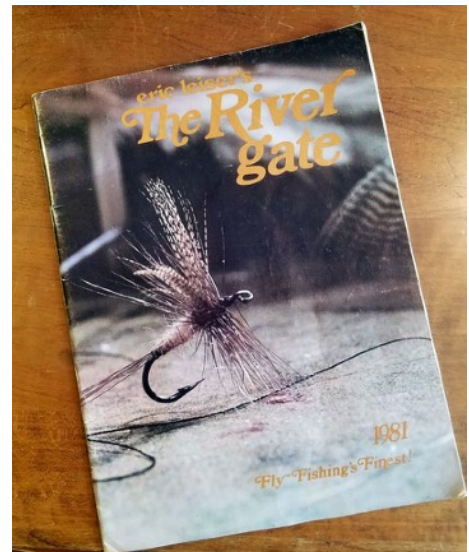
In the art of fly tying, I doubt if one of us has not first obtained his knowledge or instruction from another tier or author. Though we’d all like to believe we are completely creative, we are only so in the minutest degree. All I have learned has come from or evolved from someone else. There is really very little new, yet it is always new to us individually as we progress within this art.

Amen to that, Eric.

### At the 'Gate

Eric had been faithfully supplying the fly-tying community with materials at the Fireside Angler up to 1973, then at the Fly Fisherman’s Bookcase and Tackle Service until 1977. Unfortunately, things were not going well at the Bookcase, so it became necessary for Eric to disassociate himself from any connection to it, and in 1978, he opened the Rivergate in Cold Spring, New York. All of this is chronicled by Mike Valla in his Heritage piece on Eric. Prior to this, Eric came out with his second book, *The Complete Book of Fly Tying*, which has sold over one hundred thousand copies over the years. This book has helped so many people learn how tie flies of all kinds. He would then write several other books, which Ed Ostapczuk mentions in his column on the Chuck Caddis.

The loss of Eric is another plank gone from the bridge of the individuals who brought forward the tying traditions from the Darbees and the Detttes. Commenting on the passing of Dick Talleur, Bob Mead noted, “Talleur was part of the generation that inherited fly fishing from its pioneers, the guides and fly tyers of the Catskills between the world wars, and established the sport in the second of the 20th century.” He noted Eric as one of the remaining keepers of the tradition, along with several other tyers. And in fact, Eric’s final contribution to the fly tying literature paid homage to the Detttes when he wrote *The Detttes: A Catskill Legend*.



That's Eric: always giving credit where credit is due.

As I look back at fifty years or so of fly tying and friendships, I realize it was Eric who properly started me along on my fly-tying quest. I can only hope that he is enjoying tying flies with all of his friends at the celestial tying table.

It is only fitting that we end this appreciation at the beginning of Eric's writing career with the beautiful words he wrote at the end of his preface to *Fly-Tying Materials*:

The cascading river is our song—  
Our reminiscences at dusk our entertainment—  
A tired day's sleep our tranquilizer;  
And when the naked trees stand guard at the river's edge, the fly-tying vise becomes our companion.

Rest in peace, old friend. My condolences to the Leiser family.



## Hooks . . . and Another Season

It's the beginning of March as I write this, and like everyone else, I anxiously await another start of the fishing season. With every passing year, it seems that the wait for the opener is longer in coming. The winters, however mild, seem to extend beyond my threshold of patience. But it's close now, less than a month away, and as in previous years, I have new things to try, new gear to test, and I hope a little more time to do both. With the season just around the corner, it's time to oil the reels, finish filling the empty slots in the fly boxes, and patch those water leaks in the waders that you neglected last fall. They aren't sealing themselves up.

Over the winter, one of the changes I started to come to terms with involved hooks. There are so many different styles and companies offering hooks now, it's almost getting to be ridiculous. Early on in my fly-tying hook collecting, I would just buy Mustads. They were popular, affordable, and had enough variety that you could cover all your patterns with a handful of styles and could need or want nothing more. But now it seems there are a handful of different hooks you could use for each pattern.

Like, many, I have tried the barbless "comp" hooks, and I have embraced these for a number of reasons. They are now offered in so many styles, wire diameters, shapes, and colors it's mind-boggling. The one thing that is consistent across the board, though, is the fact that they really are safer for the trout, and the ease of extraction is a definite plus when you are getting trout back in the water fast. I find that once the fish is netted, the fly is already out of its mouth. "Self-ejecting," I like to call it. This also holds true if you stumble a little while moving around with a fish on—introducing a little slack in the line allows you to release them before you even see them. But I really think these are among



the best catch-and-release tools we have today, since you don't have to touch a fish anymore.

My early season go-to fly is a big black stonefly nymph, heavy, and ugly, and well suited to the swollen streams and dirty water common during the first few weeks in April. Through the years, I have been tinkering with different hooks to use as a platform for this fly, and lo and behold, someone came out with yet *another* version of the 3X-long, medium-wire, barbless configuration . . . now with a jig-style eye! I can't wait to see how this one works, because now it rides point up.



**Fly-Tying Books:  
The Movement of Thought  
*A Review Essay, Part 2*  
Bud Bynack**

*Part 1 discussed creative thinking about patterns, materials, and techniques and intelligent and useful accounts of the origins and development of the craft. But fly tyers need reference works for more than just historical background. We need how-to books that teach new skills or refresh old ones and that carry forward innovations in fly patterns and design. In addition, beyond these, there are a few books in which the movement of thought occurs at the “meta” level of the “philosophy” of fly design.*

Whether beginner, intermediate, or expert tyer, all at some point need some way to learn or remember techniques, methods, and approaches to particular tying needs and problems. Today, Internet videos supply some of this kind of information, but time has proven that books have their place. Fly tying, like fly casting, may still be best learned and taught via in-person instruction, but because physical books are small and portable

resources that fit both the fly-tying desk and the ethos of an enterprise that has a long history, they always will be valued.

Virtually all tying books begin with some perfunctory instructions on materials and techniques, but as anyone who has tried to describe a seemingly simple action in prose will know, writing lucid how-to instructions for tying techniques and procedures is not easy to do. The best examples are books that clearly illuminate this important topic.

For beginners, I've contended that the best-thought-out introduction to fly tying is Ted Leeson and Jim Schollmeyer's *Benchside Introduction to Fly Tying* (Frank Amato, 2006), a companion for newbies to their massive and now somewhat aging *Fly Tiers Benchside Reference* (Frank Amato, 1998). The book is spiral bound, and between the covers, the pages are split horizontally, with one part covering basic techniques and the other representative patterns tied using those techniques. Since most patterns require multiple techniques, the format allows the beginning tyer working on a particular fly to flip around the book to find how to tie each step, as needed — a really neat idea.

A more conventional approach to an introductory tying book, one that also takes the tyer from the bench to the water to fish what's been created, is Dave Hughes's *Essential Trout Flies, Second Edition: 50 Indispensable Patterns with Step-by-Step Instructions for 300 Most Useful Variations* (Stackpole, 2017). Simply put, Dave Hughes writes the clearest, simplest tying instructions available, and even experienced tyers will be reminded of techniques that they have forgotten or learn things they never knew.

Because, as William F. Blades once said, "Fly tying is a school from which we never graduate," experienced tyers look for books that will help them advance their skills. To that end, it's hard to beat Oliver Edwards's *Flytyers Masterclass: A Step-by-Step Guide to 20 Essential Patterns for the Flyfisher* (Stroger, 1995). Contrary to the subtitle, it's not the patterns themselves, but the techniques that Edwards thought out for tying them, illustrated by his own lucid drawings, that make the book a valuable resource. And while I'd discourage anyone from becoming a production fly tyer who's not willing to take a vow of poverty (vows of chastity and obedience are unlikely among fly tyers), A. K. Best's *Production Fly Tying, Third Edition* (Stackpole, 2015) is full of ideas that will make even the occasional twiddler with fur and feathers a better tyer. As you might expect from someone who at has tied as many as 3,000 dozen flies in one year, Best has experienced major "Aha!" moments, has thought long and hard about very particular aspects of tying technique, materials, and fly design, and has strong opinions about all of them. As I wrote in reviewing the book, "It's the reasoning behind Best's frequently strong and strongly expressed opinions that's most helpful in deciding whether you find his methods palm-to-the-forehead, why-didn't-I-think-of-that brilliant, or just useful, or not really for you. Whatever your response, they are always interesting."

However, the real domain of strong opinions and disagreements in fly tying occurs at the "meta" level of the philosophy of fly design, and there are tying books that have defined that domain. Fly tyers can be obsessive about minute details (A. K. Best is), and what feeds that obsession, in many cases, is the supposed imperative to match the hatch by tying close imitations of the natural bugs in order to entice "selective trout," to use the term employed by Doug Swisher and Carl Richards in *Selective Trout: A*



*Dramatically New and Scientific Approach to Trout Fishing on Eastern and Western Rivers* (Lyons and Burford, 1971).

I say “supposed imperative,” because although it may seem inconceivable to younger anglers today, for much of fly-tying history, the scrupulous matching of hatching insects was not much of a consideration, and most classic trout flies don’t look much like any particular actual insect—many don’t resemble any identifiable insect at all. For anglers of an earlier generation, the origin of the imperative to match the hatch was Ernest Schweibert’s, *Matching the Hatch: A Practical Guide to Imitation of Insects Found on Eastern and Western Trout Waters* (Macmillan, 1962), a work he followed up with his massive and massively detailed two-volume *Nymphs: A Complete Guide to Naturals and Imitations* (Winchester Press, 1973). Al Caucci and Bob Nastasi’s, *Hatches: A Complete Guide to Fishing the Hatches of North American Trout Streams* (Comparahatch, 1975) helped promote the idea. Following that imperative while fishing the notoriously reticent trout of the Henrys Fork in Idaho, René Harrop has said that at the height of the season, he carries as many as eighteen fully stocked fly boxes covering the variations in all the hatches he will encounter.

But that design philosophy spawned disagreement, most notably articulated by Datus Proper in *What the Trout Said: About the Design of Trout Flies and Other Mysteries* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1982). In the introduction to the second edition (Lyons and Burford, 1989), he declared, “Mixtures of science and art have produced ten thousand flies we don’t need.” Proper agreed that imitating the size, shape, and color of the bugs that fish are eating is important, but what he stressed is what he called “behavior.” Reductively put, in contesting the match-the-hatch emphasis on the literal imitation of the bug itself, Proper and others following him have argued that what matters (or what matters when the bug looks just more or less right to the fish and the fly fisher) is presentation—avoiding unnatural behavior and presenting the fly in the same way that the natural behaves.

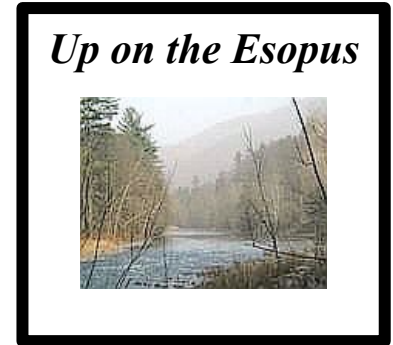
That’s more of a both/and position than an either/or opposition, though, and as tends to happen, some have taken the difference in stress to its logical conclusion: that hatch matching is irrelevant in fly design and that all a properly presented fly needs to do is contain a few elements that will induce a fish to try to eat it. That’s the argument of Bob Wyatt’s *What Trout Want: The Educated Trout and Other Myths* (Stackpole, 2013). Instead of attempting to replicate salient physical elements of the natural insect, Wyatt and those who find him persuasive, such as Morgan Lyle in *Simple Flies: 52 Easy-to-Tie Patterns that Catch Fish* (Headwater Books, 2015), actually advocate “removing as many details as possible in the interest of creating a sort of Rorschach test for evoking piscine desires,” as I put it in reviewing Lyle’s book. They simplify flies—although not necessarily the number of fly patterns, as Lyle’s subtitle reveals. Some will find that appealing, and some will ask, “Where’s the fun in that?”

And that’s where the movement of thought on the topic of fly design carries across to the reader’s own mind—as it does, in different ways, in all these books and the various topics they address. Where you place yourself on the imitation/presentation spectrum requires reflection, but in many different ways, good books on approaches to

the craft of tying, its history, and its techniques all should do the same: carry forward both how you think about lashing fur and feathers and other materials to hooks and how you do it. That's what any good book does—it moves thought forward from others through you.

## Eric Leiser and Woodchuck

Since the last *Gazette*, we sadly learned of the passing of Eric E. Leiser (July 9 1929—January 21, 2019), one of fly fishing's cornerstones and a 2002 inductee into the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum Hall of Fame. I had the pleasure of knowing Eric and possess several of his well-written works. Among his books are *Fly-Tying Materials: Their Procurement, Use, and Protection*; *The Complete Book of Fly Tying*; *The Caddis and the Angler*, with Larry Solomon; *Stoneflies for the Angler*, with Robert H. Boyle; *The Book of Fly Patterns*; *The Metz Book of Hackle*; *The Dettas: A Catskill Legend*; and *The Orvis Guide to Beginning Fly Tying*, with Matthew Vinciguerra and Tom Rosenbauer.



There are folks better qualified than I am to write about Eric, but I'll take a shot at adding a few of my observations. His *Fly-Tying Materials* was one of the first standalone references of its kind, and *The Book of Fly Patterns* was my source for patterns before the Internet explosion. I often still refer to it for tying information. Additionally, his joint works on caddisflies and stoneflies were landmark books for all anglers to enjoy. Leiser also authored many articles for magazines, including *Fly Fisherman*. He was a great source of information and well respected by tyers and anglers alike.

Leiser was born in Brooklyn, but eventually found his way to the Mid-Hudson Valley before retiring to Florida. In his early years, he worked as a songwriter before pursuing a career consistent with his love of the outdoors. In addition to running fly shops, the Fireside Angler and the Rivergate, he was involved with United Fly Tyers, the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, and the Federation of Fly Fishers and was a past president of the Mid-Hudson Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

Leiser was fascinated with woodchuck as a tying material. In *The Founding Flies*, Mike Valla notes that the planned title of Leiser's never-published memoir was *Woodchucks and Windknots*. In *The Book of Fly Patterns*, Leiser declared, "The hide from this animal may be the most underrated and underused of all furs." In *The Complete Book of Fly Tying*, he wrote that woodchuck is "one of the finest materials for wing and tailing of both dry flies and bucktail patterns." In *Fly-Tying Materials*, he described how he secured woodchuck hides from roadkill. He also wrote, "Since I enjoy eating groundhog meat, I keep my animal as clean as possible; the meat is tender, delicious, and all the other adjectives you would use in describing a prime piece of beef."

He may be best remembered for two fly patterns that he promoted using woodchuck, the Llama and the Chuck Caddis. The recipes below are from *The Book of Fly Patterns*.

## Llama

Hook: Mustad 9575, size 6 to 12  
Thread: Black  
Tail: Grizzly hackle fibers  
Rib: Flat gold tinsel  
Body: Red floss  
Wing: Woodchuck guard hair fibers  
with color bands showing head to tail  
Hackle: Grizzly  
Head: Painted black with white eye and black pupil

Rest in well-deserved peace, Eric Leiser. May those of us still tying fondly embrace the use of woodchuck, as you did.

*Posed on the first page of Leiser's The Dettles are a Llama, on the left, tied by guild member Tim Didas, and a Chuck Caddis, on the right, tied by Ed Ostapczuk.*

## Chuck Caddis

Hook: Mustad 94840, size 12 to 18  
Thread: Orange, gray, or brown  
Body: Dirty orange dubbing  
Wing: Woodchuck guard hairs  
Hackle: brown and grizzly, mixed



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, [budbynack@gmail.com](mailto:budbynack@gmail.com) or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.