



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild

GAZETTE



Volume 19, number 1

January 2016

The January 2016 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on January 16 at 2:00 P.M. at the Rockland House on Route 206 in Roscoe, NY. We will be trying flies to donate to Casting for Recovery. Bring your vise, tools, and materials to tie flies for anglers learning to fly fish and to enjoy the rewards, physical and spiritual, of the sport. This is also the sort of meeting on which the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild was founded—members tying together and sharing stories, tips, and fun. It's a good time and for a good cause.

And there's a new feature at meetings, in addition to the fly swap: show and tell. If you've come across an interesting material, technique, piece of tackle—whatever—bring it, show it, and tell us about it.

Tyers Needed for Somerset

If you'd like to tie for the guild at the Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, NJ, January 29, 30, and 31, 2016, contact John Kavanaugh at flymank@optonline.net, call his cell at (973) 219-7696 and leave a message with your contact information, or contact him via his Facebook page.

Tyers Needed for the Fly Tyers Rendezvous

If you'd like to tie at the Fly Tyers Rendezvous, sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum on April 2, 2016, there will be signup sheets at the guild booth at the Somerset show in January, or you can contact John Kavanaugh at any of the above addresses.

Vote on Bylaws Revision

By now, you should have received your ballot for voting on the revisions to the bylaws of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. If you haven't done so yet, please mark your ballot and return it to CFTG Ballot, P.O. Box 663, Roscoe, NY 12276. The results will be announced at the annual meeting in February.

Fly-Tying Classes and Sessions

The Jerry Bartlett Memorial Angling Collection at the Phoenicia Library and the Phoenicia Fish and Game Association will be offering fly-tying workshops on the four Saturdays in February and perhaps on the first Saturday in March. All workshops will be held from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. at Phoenicia Fish and Game on Route 28 in Mount Tremper. The classes are open to all, age fourteen or above, and are free; participants must provide their own equipment. However, there are a number of vises for youngsters to use. Feathers and hooks will be supplied. Experienced tyers are also welcome to sit in and tie along. Contact Hank Rope at (845) 254-5904 or tyeflys@hvc.rr.com.

Winter Calendar

The Fly Fishing Show, January 29, 30, and 31. See the ad at the end of this issue of the *Gazette*. Stop by the guild table, say hello, and renew your membership.

Fly Fest 2016 will be held from 9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. on Saturday, February 6, 2016, at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY 12758. It's nothing formal—just a gathering of tyers from all over the area and some from not so nearby. If you want to tie, or just want to socialize or get an early peek at the year's new exhibits at the museum, this is a good excuse to get out of the house. It's sponsored by Catskill Flies of Roscoe, NY.

Guild Annual Meeting, February 20, 2016. In addition to electing officers, this is also the annual materials swap. Bring things you'd like to exchange and see what happens. And don't forget show and tell!

SGM Fest 2016, the annual Sparse Grey Matter Fest, sponsored by Dette Trout Flies and Shannon's Fly Shop, will be held on Sunday, February 28, 2016, at the Califon Firehouse in Califon, NJ, from 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Come tie flies and/or watch some of the area's finest tyers. This is an informal gathering of tyers and fly fishers and a great way to spend a cold Sunday in February. There is no charge, but donations are gladly accepted. Food and beverages are available, and there will be giveaways and door prizes.

Tie One On, sponsored by Iroquois Trout Unlimited and Dette Trout Flies, will be held on Saturday, March 19, 2016, beginning at 9:00 A.M., at the Genesee Grande Hotel, 1060 East Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY—a change of venue. There will be two very special guest speakers and many incredible tying friends from around the country returning to spend the day. This is a public event, so feel free to invite and share with your friends.

The Anglers Reunion Dinner will be held as usual on the evening before Opening Day, March 31, 2016, at the Rockland House. Cocktails at 6:00 P.M. and dinner at 7:00 P.M. Call the Rockland House to make a reservation: (607) 498-4240.

Opening Day, Friday, April 1, 2016. Meet at the Junction Pool at 7:00 A.M.

Opening Day Ceremonies hosted by the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, including the **Catskill Fly Tyers Rendezvous**, hosted by the Catskill fly Tyers Guild, Saturday, April 2, 2016. The Rendezvous will run from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Look for exciting silent-auction offerings, including a custom-built cane rod from guild member Chuck Neuner.



Articulated Nymphs: Giggles from Wiggles

Articulated streamers have become more popular over the past few years. That's not to say they are anything new or "trending now," because the design of articulated lures is very old, but I see a lot more of them lately than I have in past years. The idea is sound, enabling the construction of very large flies that move freely and naturally in the water while eliminating the leveraging effect of a long-shank hook. I know a few guys who relish high-water events on big rivers and who sling big articulated streamers at the bank edges to bring the biggest browns out of hiding.

I have never tied a fly longer than five inches, articulated or not, but I sometimes enjoy making much smaller flies with the jointed design and feel that they offer the fish something different and give me something different to dabble with at the vise.

Many creatures twist and hinge while drifting helplessly in moving water, so tying a fly to do the same gives it the impression of life and possibly makes it more attractive to our finned friends. Tying small articulated minnow imitations is most tyers' first thought, but stonefly and *Isonychia* nymphs are good options, as well. In particular, Isos are the Olympic swimmers of the nymph community, so a jointed nymph in Iso dress makes a lot of sense.

When making jointed flies, it's important to consider what you want them to do and how much you want them to do it. By using different methods in the construction of the fly, you can achieve different results.

One way to make jointed flies is by attaching the sections together with flexible wire or monofilament lashed directly to the shank of the hook and to the added hookless "shank." While both materials make a strong connection, which is imperative if you have the hook on the rear section, this



type of connection makes for a slightly less flexible offering. If a really loosely jointed body is what you desire, using the eye of the hook or the shank and a small wire shaped like a hook eye that's lashed to the other component, connecting the two, makes a very flexible fly that hinges effortlessly. For nymphs, this is what I like, because their small size and weight don't really allow freely moving parts using mono as the connector. (See the photo.)

Photo by "Catskill John" Bonasera

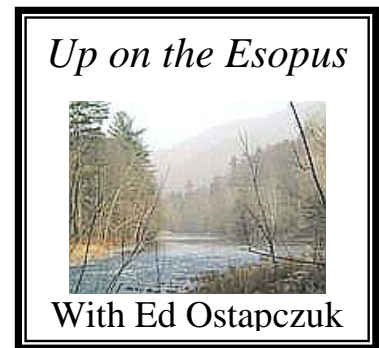
Another consideration is where to put the business end of the fly, on the front or rear section. This is more of a personal choice, although I like mine to have the hook on the rear section and use the shank as the front. My reasoning is that the rear section, being heavier, would move more. But if the hook is to be the rear section of the fly, a solid connection is really important. By contrast, tying an articulated nymph on a normal hook with a rear section that is simply a hookless tag that moves doesn't require anything sturdy to retain it—even a small section of 7X mono would be enough.

While I don't make these flies by the dozen, they are fun to try and even better to experiment with, because a little creativity can yield some pretty neat patterns. The little Iso I carry has caught more than a few trout, even when Isos were not around in great numbers. Sometimes it just the wiggle that gets them, I suppose.

The Female Beaverkill, a Catskill Wet Fly

Long before most Catskill fly fishers ever tossed a dry fly, they fished wet flies, often three at a time. Wets have a rich Catskill tradition, and one of the better-known wet flies associated with that tradition is the Female Beaverkill.

In *The Beaverkill*, Ed Van Put states the pattern was the creation of George W. Cooper, a fly tyer and blacksmith from DeBruce. Van Put notes that the fly was also tied as a dry, "considered an early American pattern created to imitate the female Hendrickson spinner, *Ephemerella invaria*." He writes that it is not definite when the fly was first tied, but it was "used as early as 1913." Van Put's recently released second edition of *The Beaverkill* was revised, updated, and issued in color containing many photos of trout flies with Beaverkill connections, including this one. Readers can obtain copies of the book directly from Ed and have it personalized, if so desired, by contacting him at edvanput@hvc.rr.com.



Guild member and good friend Tim Didas informs me that he has fished the Female Beaverkill on his home Cohocton River since he was a young lad. Tim reports having seen tremendous Hendrickson hatches on this river when his dad took him to the special-regulations section, where "all the local experts fished." Sometime thereafter, his eighth-grade science teacher and still his outdoor companion, Bill Messner, taught Didas how to tie flies. Tim relied upon the *Noll Guide to Trout Flies*, as many of us old-timers probably did, for information on this pattern.

Didas fondly recalls, “I was told to fish a pair of them, cast across and downstream, and hold on tight!” Tim still fishes this pattern today, but sometimes with minor modifications to create a soft-hackle version.

Per Ed Van Put’s new second edition of *The Beaverkill*, the pattern is:

Hook: Mustad 3906B, size 10 or 12
Thread: Black
Wings: Gray mallard quill
Tail: Mallard flank fibers
Egg sac: One turn of fine yellow chenille
Body: Muskrat dubbing
Hackle: Medium red-brown



Fly tied by Ray Smith. Photo by Ed Ostapczuk

Mike Valla’s *Classic Wet Fly Box*, also includes the Female Beaverkill and credits Ed Van Put for what we know about this fly. However, there’s a Ray Smith connection, too. In his day, Smith taught many an Esopus angler how to tie flies, and he often provided his students with a typewritten handout of trout patterns in which the Female Beaverkill was included, with the dressing as listed above. However, Smith had a custom of dabbing the tips of his wet-fly wings with head cement to hold their shape, as seen in the photograph of a Female Beaverkill that Smith tied, here mounted under glass. It’s a minor fly-tying nuance employed by one noted Catskill tyer, but it shouldn’t be lost with the passage of time.

Book Review

Simple Flies: 52 Easy-to-Tie Patterns that Catch Fish

By Morgan Lyle. Published by Headwater Books/Stackpole, 2015; \$19.95 softbound.

One of the appeals of fly fishing is the simplicity it makes possible. I used to fish the Deschutes with a guy who carried a small box of nymphs in the pocket of a cheap, drip-dry short-sleeved business shirt, along with a spool of tippet material and a drug-store nail clipper. He waded wet in cut-off jeans and could work down a run catching fish after fish, doing it righteously, without a strike indicator. He also had a wicked side. At the boat ramps, he liked to sidle up to sports who were wadered and vested

in the latest catalogue's gear and who were decked out with every conceivable accessory gadget, their fly boxes bulging with all the latest patterns. He'd ask, in his best faux-hillbilly voice, "What're y'all usin' fer bait? Some kinda *bug*?"

There are a lot of reasons to embrace simplicity when tying and fishing flies. One is necessity. For example, when Frank Sawyer came up with the original Pheasant Tail Nymph and Killer Bug, two of the patterns included in Morgan Lyle's *Simple Flies: 52 Easy-to-Tie Patterns that Catch Fish*, he just used materials ready to hand—pheasant tail feathers and copper wire and sweater wool. Another reason is the self-knowledge that comes with maturity. At some point, some anglers realize that they fish only a few patterns, catch enough fish with them, and don't want anything more, because they don't need anything more to enjoy themselves. Yet another reason is the sense of unexpected pleasure that can come from refinement by self-limitation. Just as some poets value the process of creation forced by working within the formal confines of the sestina or the sonnet, some anglers delight in producing pleasing results from self-chosen limited means.

In such cases, simplicity either is engendered by necessity or embraced by choice among the great variety of approaches and enticements that fly fishing offers. But in American culture, especially, there is a way of thinking that insists that not only can we embrace simplicity, if we so choose, but that we should do so. My friend on the Deschutes was happy with his own minimalist approach, but his needling of those who don't share it shows him playing both sides of the can/should divide.

Simple Flies takes sides in the tension between can and should. One place where this comes out is in the basic terms the book uses for the approach to fly tying and fishing that it advocates: "minimalist" and "essentialist." They aren't synonymous, and the difference between them is the difference between what is sufficient to catch fish on a fly and what is essential to doing so and even to the sport itself. Lyle tends to use "minimalist," as a synonym, but he's actually an avowed "essentialist," as the term is employed by the author of *What Trout Want*, Bob Wyatt. "It's not just that simple flies work *well enough*, or even that they work *just as well* as detailed flies," Lyle writes. "Over the decades, some very serious fly fishers have concluded that simple flies work *better* than detailed ones."

That's in part because it is not the fly, but the angler that catches fish.

Going simple with your tying shifts the emphasis of your fishing in a very important way: You no longer rely on pattern to fool fish. You rely instead on good fishing. You no longer anxiously try fly after fly; you trust the fly you have and present it properly. You take care not to reveal your presence or to spook the fish with a sloppy, splashy cast. You think about where you should be in order to make a cast that will drift your fly naturally down to the feeding trout. You make sure that you have a leader that's the right length and strength.

That sounds like a good way to think about angling with the long rod. However, if an angler's skill and mindfulness are what are essential to the sport, then it should not matter all that much whether the fly is an exact, hatch-matching imitation or a minimalist gesture toward "insectness," a term that Lyle endorses and that was employed by longtime *Field and Stream* writer and editor Ted Trueblood. But the claim here is that the fly does matter and that simpler flies are essentially better.

The argument for the superiority of radically simple flies is not just that too much emphasis on the details that produce exact imitations is counterproductive, but that what's productive in a trout fly is the opposite of exact imitation. Chapter 1 begins with an epigraph from Datus Proper's classic *What the Trout Said*: "Mixtures of science and art have produced ten thousand pretty flies we don't need," and Lyle, narrating the history of fly tying in terms of the pursuit of ever-increasing complexity, concludes that "the tying is overtaking the fishing." By contrast, he writes in the introduction, "minimalist fly design relies on including only those features that serve as 'triggers' that cause a fish to bite, and having the confidence to restrain the age-old urge to add more detail to a fly." What is striking about, *essentialist* fly tying, beyond such mere minimalism, however, is that it seems to

involve *removing* as many details as possible in the interest of creating a sort of Rorschach test for evoking piscine desires. Explaining what Trueblood meant by achieving “insectness” in a fly, Lyle writes:

If I read Trueblood correctly, he’s saying that the more detail you give a fly, the more chance you have of getting it wrong. “The trout, which could easily see the defects in one of my hard-bodied ‘exact imitation’ nymphs, cannot see them in this [fly] because it has no detail. . . . In the absence of anything to create suspicion—and since the trout is a creature of impulse—he takes.”

In a sidebar on Bob Wyatt, Lyle quotes Wyatt making a similar claim: “leaving out the insignificant details actually makes for a stronger stimulus. . . . The fly looks like a bug and acts like a bug, but the trout isn’t ‘sure’ until it eats the fly. The same thing happens when you look at an impressionistic painting; it provides plenty of stimulus but keeps the brain engaged longer.”

Essentialist fly tying, in short, involves reducing a fly to what is claimed to be its essential qualities. Ironically, removing the “insignificant details” on a fly, the details that risk “getting it wrong,” tends to make much more important getting *right* the details that remain. Sawyer’s Killer Bug is just Shetland yarn wound on a hook, secured with copper wire instead of thread, but the yarn he used, Chadwick’s 477, hasn’t been made for over fifty years, and Internet bulletin boards often feature discussions in which devotees search for and suggest substitutes, none of which ever seem quite right, while cards of the original yarn go for big bucks on eBay. Likewise, devotees of the “flymph” flies originated by James Leisenring and Vernon “Pete” Hidy” tend to follow Hidy’s emphasis on the importance of blending different subtly colored dubbing for the flies’ dubbing-loop bodies. And the choice of materials and how they behave can be crucial, when there is only one or two materials in a fly, as with Hans Weilenmann’s CDC and Elk or the simple marabou streamers that Lyle presents.

Any claim to having knowledge of what is essential tends to produce a certain amount of attitude toward those benighted souls who lack that knowledge, as happened with my Deschutes fishing buddy’s goofing on more conventional fly fishers. That’s also the case here. “I haven’t become a fan of essentialist fly tying . . . simply because simple flies are effective,” Lyle writes. “I have to confess that getting away with a pinch of fur and a puff of hair when everyone else relies on complex designs gives me a certain smug satisfaction. It appeals to my rebellious streak. I think I like simple flies for the same reason I like the Ramones.”

What all this means is that what you think about such claims and the attitude they encourage will have a lot to do with how convincing you find *Simple Flies*. Fishing radically simple flies is certainly something that we all can do. If fish really do look at flies the way that we look at a Cézanne painting, maybe it’s something we should do, too.

You’ve probably noticed that I’ve concentrated on the conceptual framework of the book and haven’t yet said much about its actual contents. That’s in part because from a fly-tying point of view, these flies are *really* simple: a hook and one or two materials, with only basic techniques required to tie them. The most complicated pattern, and the one requiring something slightly beyond the most rudimentary of tying skills, is Lyle’s own High-Tie Streamer, which uses that technique to build the head of the fly. Ultimately, *Simple Flies* is about having fun fishing, not having fun tying.

Lyle envisions a double audience for *Simple Flies*, first, “experienced fly fishers and fly tiers,” for whom the claims that I’ve been discussing will be of most interest, not the patterns themselves, which are almost all well known to such tyers, and second, “newcomers to this fun and absorbing hobby,” for whom he includes a chapter on basic tying tools, materials, and techniques, but who, unless they become dedicated essentialists, probably will want to move on to more complicated patterns and techniques.

There are chapters on simple wet flies, nymphs, dry flies, and streamers, and there also are sidebars profiling devotees of and advocates for simplicity. Notable among these are Tenkara USA’s Daniel Galhardo and “tenkara bum” Chris Stewart, and both the burgeoning tenkara movement and

tenkara *kebari* flies find a place within the overall framework that Lyle establishes here, as do “Euro” competition nymphs. In the streamer chapter, where you might have expected to find Bob Clouser profiled and the Clouser Minnow offered as a simple fly, Lyle profiles Chico Fernandez and presents Bob Popovics’s Jiggy, on the grounds that compared with the Clouser, “it’s easier to make and more durable.”

Clearly, it’s easy to be too complicated for essentialist tastes. Lyle is well aware that there are those who enjoy tying and fishing more complicated flies—he’s been among that number himself. If that describes you, *Simple Flies* will give you plenty to think about as winter sets in.

—Bud Bynack



Glenn Overton Looks Back . . .

I sure appreciate the DVD on Mary Dette. It brought back memories of those wonderful days with the folks of Roscoe and the open and giving hearts that these people had. That is why so many learn this beautiful style of fly tying. . . . Being here in the

Montana mountains since 1979, to review what I miss seeing was such a treat.

. . . On silk threads, some would heat their wax and paint it on the spooled thread. Silk allowed the wax to soak in, but with these new threads, you have to run the thread several times through the fly-tying wax. The fly-tying wax the Dettes and Darbees used had more of a medium-hard taffy feel. When you make homemade molasses taffy, you’ll understand what I mean. My wax may have been good, but really, the wax those two families made was much better. It was almost impossible to untie their flies. . . .

I know that by watching Mary, I notice the mistakes I have made over the years. When Mary tied in her wood-duck wings, there were adjustments gauging the material. Where the feather is to be attached to the hook, the width of the feather was three times the gape of the hook for each wing. To be right, keep an eye on her next time when you get a chance to watch Mary tie again.

When I watched Elsie Darbee, she had large flank wood duck feathers, and she would take sections out, both left and right, out of two different feathers, and Mary said she did that, too, at one time. For these, the width was equal to two times the gape of the hook. Again, you need to make adjustments, because some flank feathers are finer than others. Mallard flank is very fine, so you need much more. By watching a tyer, you can gauge the material they are using, and that can help a new tyer get the correct proportions without guessing.

Now for tails, that is easy. On the DVD, I heard someone ask Mary how many barbs were used for the tail. In my teaching, the amount of barbs you strip off one side of a quill is equal to the gape of the hook. That’s what makes it easy. If you add two or three barbs more, that’s fine also, especially when tying smaller flies. And the eye diameter of the hook can gauge the length of the head of the fly. A good example to give you an idea where to stop your hackle is on a streamer 1-1/2 or 2 times the diameter of the eye of the hook.

—From an e-mail



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@verizon.net or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.



The Fly Fishing Show

The Garden State Convention
Center

Somerset, New Jersey

January 29, 30, 31, 2016

Show Hours

Friday: 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.
Saturday: 8:30 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.
Sunday: 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Admission

Adults: \$18 for one day
\$28 for two-day pass
\$38 for three-day pass

Children under 5 free, under 12: \$2

Scouts under 16 in uniform: free

Active Military with ID: \$10

Cash only at the gate

Regardless of the weather, the show will go on!

