



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



Volume 19, number 3

May 2016

The May meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, May 21, 2016, at 1:00 P.M. in the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY. John Kavanaugh will be tying a Slow-Water March Brown, so bring your tools and tie along.

Slow-Water March Brown

Hook: Mustad 94831 or similar light-wire, 2X-long hook

Tail: Moose hair

Body: Wapsi March Brown turkey biot

Wing: Hen neck, brown or dun

Hackle: Barred ginger

The 2016 Fly Tyers Rendezvous



The Fifteenth Annual Fly Tyers Rendezvous, sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, was well attended by visitors to the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum during its Opening Day celebration on April 2, 2016. Thirty tyers demonstrated special techniques and patterns, the silent auction and books sale netted over \$1200, and both visitors and tyers enjoyed meeting and greeting old and new friends.

Many thanks go to John Kavanaugh for chairing the event, Nicole Seymour for making it run smoothly, and to all the other guild members who helped out during setup, cleanup, and during the day.



Looking Back Upstream



Before There Were Dry Flies

By Ed Van Put

There is no other sport that takes quite the same grip upon a man. It is a sort of tender passion that grows in strength as long as we live.

—Theodore Gordon

Theodore Gordon tied some of the first purely American dry flies, and while a great deal of Gordon's notoriety came from his experiences with the dry fly, he believed strongly that fly fishers should never abandon the wet fly and that there is a place for both—even when fishing for rising trout. His beliefs stemmed from his boyhood days and his initial introduction to fly fishing on the Letort Spring Run in Pennsylvania.

Gordon spent his early youth, between the ages of eleven and nineteen, in the Carlisle area of Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley, about midway between Harrisburg and Gettysburg. The Cumberland Valley is bounded on the north and west by the Blue Mountains and to the east and south by South Mountain, and it was here that he first learned to fish for trout. He lived within walking distance of the Letort and near other excellent brook trout streams, including Big Spring, Mountain, and Yellow Breeches Creeks.

A couple of these streams flowed directly from large springs and "gushed forth" from limestone formations, creating some of the most prolific trout streams in Pennsylvania; low-gradient, fertile waters with cold temperatures and aquatic vegetation such as watercress and water-starwort. The plants provided cover for trout as well as an abundance of aquatic insects, including scuds, cress bugs, and shrimp. At the time, these limestone streams were brook trout waters with excellent growth rates, producing many trout from one-half pound to two and one-half pounds—brook trout of approximately eleven and a half to eighteen and a half inches.

Gordon was introduced to trout fishing by a veteran fisherman who could fish with flies, but preferred to fish with bait, because he believed it was easier and that bait catches larger trout. Thus, Theodore Gordon's early fishing experiences involved using worms on the tributaries of fly-fishing waters or on the fast-flowing streams in the mountains nearby.

When Gordon was a boy, he envisioned the very name "trout" as representing a fish with superior evasive qualities, great natural beauty, and providing exquisite fare at table. Gordon viewed trout as extraordinary fish, and he believed that only anglers with inherent skills and keen observation are capable of catching them. And among his boyhood friends, the taking of that first trout was quite meaningful and elevated a lad quickly to a higher status, the first step to being recognized as a true disciple of old Izaak Walton.

Gordon caught his first trout along Bonny Brook, which he described as a "perfect trout brook" that flowed through meadows and a "swampy" area. The stream had many deep holes and cavernous undercut banks where "huge" brook trout hid from view and were difficult to catch, many of them over two pounds in weight.

Another stream on which he increased his knowledge of bait fishing was Mountain Creek, a brook trout stream of rapid descent that flowed hurriedly down South Mountain and into the Yellow Breeches Creek at Mount Holly Springs. But it was on the Letort that Gordon experienced an event that would have a profound effect on the way he would fish for trout.

It was in 1868, on a day when he had taken nine trout on bait. He met up with a "well-known sportsman" who was dressed in the finest fishing clothes and casting an "exquisite" bamboo fly rod. It was near the end of the evening rise, and trout up to three-quarters of a pound were rising steadily throughout a section of the Letort known to Gordon as the "Meadow." Here the stream flowed through an open area, wide and slow, and contained a good amount of aquatic vegetation, along with a great many "very hard to catch" trout that would never take bait.

This occurrence was the first time Gordon had seen someone fly fishing the Letort, and the angler was catching trout with ease. After he deposited one more fish in a white canvas sack that seemed to be filled with the speckled beauties, he stopped fishing. He had taken twenty-five beautiful trout, quite possibly the limit at the time, and the man and Gordon walked home together.

Watching the fisherman's skills with a fly rod had been a revelation to the boy, and the experienced fly fisher was "kind and patient" while answering Gordon's questions. Along the way, he gave Gordon his first artificial fly, a fly just like the one on which he had taken all those trout. It was a popular wet-fly pattern used in southern Pennsylvania at the time and was said to resemble a March Brown. It was known as the Patton or Dr. Patton. The Patton was undoubtedly an early American wet fly. Its wings were tied with guinea fowl, the body was of brown silk ribbed with fine flat gold tinsel, and the hackle was from a brown rooster.



Gordon's first fly pattern, the Patton

Photo and fly by Ed Van Put

Prior to the use of dry flies, skillful wet-fly fishermen would cast upstream to rising trout with a single small wet fly that imitated, as nearly as possible, the natural on the water. The cast needed to be gentle and was most successful by using as short a line as possible, placing the fly, tied on the finest tippet, lightly, directly in front of where a fish was rising. Experienced wet-fly fishermen were keen on the color of the flies riding on the water and which pattern to use as an imitation. Special flies such as the Patton were tied by two or three shops in Philadelphia for the limestone streams found in and around the Cumberland Valley.

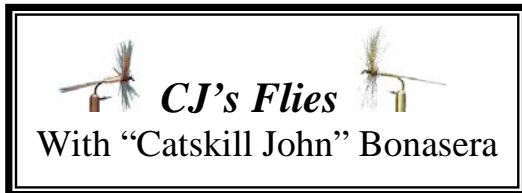
The event on the Letort was pivotal to Gordon's angling experiences, and he would remember "very well" this fly-fishing introduction that he had witnessed. He was filled with anxiety, eager to try fishing with the fly that was given to him by the "gentleman" fly fisher, and he quickly assembled a light fly rod out of the remains of several sections of rods that were in disrepair.

He was clever enough to try his skills on the less-experienced, smaller trout in the riffle sections of the Letort, where they would not be able to get a long look at his imitation, and he succeeded in catching twenty-two trout on the Patton. Theodore Gordon was thirteen years old at the time, and while the size of the trout may have been disappointing to others, it didn't matter to Gordon, because he had taken them on an artificial fly and was on his way to becoming a talented fly fisherman.

One of his next steps was to learn how to make his own flies, and this he did by studying the pages of Thaddeus Norris's *American Angler's Book*. It took Gordon all morning to tie five flies, after which he went to the nearby stream and took thirteen trout of up to one-half pound. He believed he

would have caught more had his flies not come apart. This he blamed on tying the flies off with a Half Hitch instead of a whip finish.

Throughout his life, Gordon believed that when trout are rising and looking to the surface, conditions for the dry fly are good, but he claimed that a good wet-fly fisherman could also do well. He referred to this “old style” of wet-fly fishing as the “drop fly” method, and he claimed that a wet fly handled properly is very effective, since it imitates the movements of a natural fly depositing eggs on the water or the fluttering motions of caddisflies. He also maintained that trout feed on larvae and nymphs when they are rising to the surface and changing into winged flies (emergers), and this, too, can be imitated by wet flies. When Theodore Gordon declared that “there is no other sport that takes quite the same grip upon a man. It is a sort of tender passion that grows in strength as long as we live,” he was speaking from experience.



Callicoon Creepers

The 2016 season is here, and it's been a mild start to date—the first opener in a while that didn't include ice forming in the rod guides. Streams are already warming up, and the

Hendricksons have come and nearly gone away. Where I used to be able to guesstimate bugs hatching by dates, those hatch charts are becoming more like *Farmer's Almanacs*, just something to read, knowing you won't know what's really going to happen till it does.

I was all geared up for the opener weekend by forecasts of decent temperatures and sunshine and the possibility of some dry-fly fishing. As usual during the first week in April, the dry-fly fishing didn't happen, but we did have nice weather. I found myself knee-deep in some pretty frigid water that swelled the mercury all the way to 38 degrees, and I cast a size 16 Blue Quill to some pretty fishy water. Half an hour of this proved to be futile, and I didn't get the vibe that this plan was going to net me much success. Going in a totally different direction, I nipped off the dry and knotted on a size 6 black stonefly nymph, big and ugly, with lots of weight, and three casts later, a beautiful wild brown took the nymph, bulldogged me through the run, and finally came to the net.

Every spring, I pump myself up for pursuing trout, and looking back, I always end up having the best success with big flies fished deep. With the absence of hatchery fish so early in the season, the fishing is not very easy, but a big fly can lead to some action.

Stoneflies are my first choice when imitating a larger bug on my local freestone streams. They are plentiful, they live among the trout all season long, and best of all, they are easy to recognize, with their large bulk and distinct features. The old literature referred to them as “creepers,” and if you hold one in your hand, you know why—they are both creepy and they creep!

The imitations I like fall into the suggestive category. I like to keep them simple, with a few triggers that the fish can identify, such as antennas and tails, and sometimes I like a little pop in the form of an eye-catching rib or wing case. A typical generic stonefly nymph would have either biot or rubber tails and antennas, a thick rib of tinsel or D-rib, and a thick body with a fuzzy thorax of natural



Photo by "Catskill John" Bonasera

hair picked out. That's how I tie my Callicoon Creepers. I like to tie these on long-shank hooks, barbless, preferably, but the Mustad 79580 or equivalent works, too. Weighting them with lead substitute gets them deep.

I know this kind of fishing isn't for everyone, but tough trout call for tough measures, and those lethargic browns need a little coaxing in the form of a lot of fly.

William H. Kelly III and the White Bucktail

I initially met William H. Kelly III (1927–2000) back in the mid-1970s. He was a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation fisheries biologist responsible for trout fisheries throughout a large part of the Catskills. At the time, I was the young and impetuous president of the local chapter of Trout Unlimited. I'm sure that on more than one occasion, Kelly and I didn't see eye to eye, because he was constrained by governmental politics, and I was bullheaded when it came to the Esopus. Over time, our responsibilities changed, but our friendship blossomed. I learned a lot about wild trout and these mountains from the man many knew as Catskill Bill Kelly.

Born in Albany, New York, Bill worked for a good portion of his DEC career in the New Paltz office. For a time, he oversaw the Esopus Creek fishery. Later, he was instrumental in DEC's introduction of landlocked salmon into New York City's Neversink Reservoir, following in the footsteps of Edward R. Hewitt, who attempted to introduce salmon into the river and failed. Interesting enough, Kelly's last place of residence was along the Neversink, not far from the remnants of Hewitt's Big Bend Club waters. Bill also had a fondness for brook trout. He was a major force in reclaiming Crystal Lake and helped create White Pond, both premier Catskill wild brook trout fisheries at one time.

Not only was Bill Kelly a caretaker of Catskill trout, he was one of the best fly fishers I ever met. He taught me that a twelve-inch wild trout caught in highly pressured public waters is a trophy fish, one that should not be taken for granted. He gave me a sense of history about our streams and angling past, sometimes using the phrase "You are treading in the footsteps of giants." And he willingly shared his wealth of knowledge.

We had mutual interests in the Neversink River and Rondout Reservoir. When I first began fishing the Rondout, I would use two spinning rods—one for bait and one to chuck hardware. Kelly converted me to fly fishing only in New York City's impoundment. We discussed various fly patterns. Often he would drop me a postcard or an e-mail, telling me the "Trout are biting, better get over here." Typically, he'd end his communication with some eccentric moniker, so I'd know it was him.

During his lifetime, Bill was a member of many organizations, including the Anglers' Club, the American Fisheries Society, the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, and the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, where in 2003 he was inducted into the Hall of Fame. On September 10, 1992, Kelly caught a thirty-inch, fifteen-and-a-half pound Seeforellen brown trout in Rondout Reservoir on a size 6 Rio Grande King wet fly. He later wrote, "I'd like to tell you where it was hooked, but the hook was in the net. Whew!" His comment about landing the fish reflected his dry sense of humor. And to this day, that brown is probably still the largest Catskill trout ever caught on a fly. Decked out in his floppy red hat, Kelly was quite the Catskill character.

One evening, Bill was a guest speaker at our local TU chapter, where he discussed fly fishing New York City's reservoirs. He had developed a few of his own patterns and said he liked them simple. One particular streamer I recall from that evening was a white bucktail, but I really don't remember much about it. I wish I had been more inquisitive.

After Bill passed away, I lamented the fact I didn't have a fly tied by him. A mutual friend graciously gave me a white bucktail that was still attached to the leader of one of Kelly's fly rods when he died. I have it and a photo of Bill fishing the Rondout Reservoir, mounted together in a shadow box. This is the recipe, a "white bucktail," which may or may not be one of Kelly's own patterns.

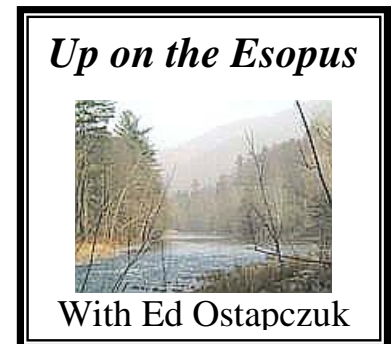




Photo by Ed Ostapczuk

Hook: Standard size 6 streamer hook

Thread: Black

Tail: Amherst pheasant tippet or emu fibers

Body: Silver Mylar

Wing: White bucktail underwing, thin lavender bucktail overwing, four or five strands of peacock herl

Throat: Short red hackle fibers

The fly I have shows a little bit of wear and tear, but as I noted, it was attached to a leader on Kelly's fly rod, so more than a few trout probably felt the sting of its barb.

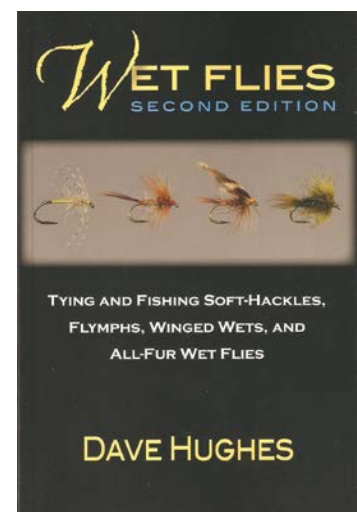
Book Review

Wet Flies, 2nd edition

By Dave Hughes. Published by Stackpole Books, 2015; \$24.95 softbound.

Nothing ever really changes in fly tying and fly fishing; everything is always changing in fly tying and fly fishing. That paradox explains a lot about both the role of tradition in the sport (including the vociferousness of some of its proponents) and the role of innovators who keep trying to improve flies, tackle, and tactics, modifying or even abandoning what tradition has preserved.

Nowhere is the paradox more apparent than in the domain of tying and fishing wet flies. As Dave Hughes points out in this new edition of *Wet Flies*, revised twenty years after its initial publication, the dressings in Dame Juliana Berner's 1496 *Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle* are basically wets: "Some have only bodies and hackles: soft hackles, Others have tails, bodies, and primary feather section wings: winged wets without hackles. Many have tails, bodies, wings, and hackle: the same traditional wet-fly form we tie to this day." And yet, after what is by comparison only a fairly short interval since its initial publication, Hughes thought it necessary to update this book.



That's because, as he writes in the foreword, "some things have a changed a little," such as innovations in synthetic dubbing materials, and "a few things have changed a lot" as a result of ongoing experimentation and innovation, including, among other things, "incorporating beads—glass, brass, and horrors, even tungsten."

That's where writing about something with as hoary a tradition as tying and fishing wet flies gets sticky. Confronted with change, purists who value traditional flies and methods will utter the time-worn phrase, heard constantly at least since the disputes between Frederic Halford and G. E. M. Skues over fishing the dry fly and the nymph and probably spoken by someone as early as 1497: "That's not really fly fishing."

One of the wonderful things about Dave Hughes is that he's not dogmatic about either tradition or innovation, finding a place for both in his treatment of wet-fly fishing and acknowledging the passions of traditionalists while embracing change where he finds it appropriate, useful, or even fun. As Hughes puts it in a sentence that balances both sides of the tradition/innovation paradox by fixing the point from which change departs, "To experiment with wet flies, it's necessary to define them."

So what is a wet fly, "really"? Well, it's not a dry fly, nymph, or streamer. So, after surveying the literature, he proposes this definition. "Wet fly: an artificial fly tied on an short, standard length, 1X or 2X long hook that is unweighted, hackled, and designed to be fished just subsurface or in the upper layers of the water column." Tungsten beadhead soft hackles don't make the cut—by these lights, they're nymphs. But Hughes is cool with the fact that I tie and fish them as soft hackles, even as soft-hackle purists recoil in horror. As he repeatedly points out, we're the ones who care about making such distinctions and about defining what a fly "really" is: "To a trout, there are no definitions, and if it looks good to eat, they simply eat it."

One of the changes in the second edition of the book is increased attention to what Hughes calls "all-fur wets," flies tied in the style developed by Polly Rosborough and popularized in Rosborough's *Tying and Fishing the Fuzzy Nymphs*. (Rosborough tied his nymphs without weight and fished them on a sink-tip line, so they sneak in under the wire of Hughes's definition.) In addition to chapters on tying them, on tying soft hackles, and on tying traditional winged wets, he also devotes a chapter to tying flymphs, the flies developed by James Leisenring and Vernon "Pete" Hidy, where the soft hackles are palmered over the front third of a body composed of a mixture of different-colored dubbing spun in a loop with the tying thread visible, a body that captures the air bubbles of an emerger. Flymphs are something of a new tradition, to keep up the language of paradox here, with their own passionate purists who cherish the tying methods developed by the fly's originators. (Check out the Flymph Forum, <http://www.flymphforum.com>.)

Tying any of these flies is pretty straightforward, with the exception of spinning the fur hackles on all-fur wets and properly setting traditional quill wet-fly wings, a process that can prompt curses from the most saintly fly tyer. And ever open to change, Hughes suggests that quill wings can be replaced by bundles of hen hackle fibers: "The wing will be far less showy, and also less pretty, but it will be more active when worked by currents. It will never have the rudder effect that can be caused by stiff quills," either. Traditionalists will recoil in horror again, but again, the trout don't care and might even like this variation better.

In a further dance with the tradition/innovation paradox, there's a whole chapter devoted to what Hughes calls "experiments with wet flies," tweaks to traditional flies that nevertheless stay within the boundaries of his definition. These include using clear Sparkle Yarn in dubbing to imitate air bubbles, tying wets with beads (just glass, though, and for sparkle, not for weight), adding flash, constructing bodies of wire, winging wets with Medallion sheeting or some such synthetic, and even lightly weighting them—he fishes an underweighted LaFontaine Deep Sparkle Pupa high in the water column and calls it a wet fly. "According to my loose definition of wet flies, they would then clearly be nymphs," he writes. "That wouldn't keep trout from eating them." As I said, he's anything but dogmatic.

But this is more than just a tying book, and what I found most enlightening were the chapters on actually fishing wet flies. For as long as I've been fly fishing—longer, in fact, because I was reading

about it before I finally waded in—I've read about "the traditional down-and across wet-fly swing." I thought I knew what that is and thought I was using it when I fished soft hackles, even if they sometimes did have tungsten beads. I was wrong.

What had escaped me is obvious, once it's said. You don't cast down and across at any old angle, but instead need to vary the angle rather precisely to take into account the speed of the current so that your offering, as you mend line, swings at just the current's speed. You need to cast more across than down for slower currents, more down than across for faster flows that will quickly belly the line.

There are several other methods and techniques offered here to consider and master, as well, not just the famous Leisenring Lift to emulate an emerging fly headed for the surface, which Hughes points out was developed for and works best only in water two to three feet deep with visible lies and few conflicting currents. I'd always viewed it as a sort of universal panacea. And as Hughes writes, that was "just one of many methods that Leisenring used." For me, the real strength of the book as a how-to is found in these chapters.

But the book's strength exceeds any mere how-to that it can offer. Here, as in Hughes's other writing, what carries the book is the character of the voice speaking in the text. I've called him undogmatic about the relation of tradition to innovation, but it's more than that, although his lack of prejudices contributes a lot. He's someone you can trust—tolerant of foibles, curious, funny in a self-deprecating way, a companion, not a lecturer. Years ago, when I first started out, his book *Reading the Water* taught me how to fish. He's still doing that.

—Bud Bynack

Bob Osburn

I have not been to a guild meeting in several years—perhaps a telltale sign that age might be slowing me down, and driving five hours in a day isn't quite as easy or as relaxing as it used to be. I say the above, in relation to Bob Osburn's passing, because among the acquaintances I made in the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and the tyers I enjoyed talking with and watching tie flies, Bob was among those at the top of the list. When I first started attending guild meetings, he and Bill Leuszler refused to talk with me about the Neversink River—that is, until they knew that I almost grew up on that river and did not keep trout. Then he and Bill shared *some* of their experiences—with the emphasis on "some." I really enjoyed Bob's tying demonstrations and was amazed at the exactness and uniformity of his snowshoe-rabbit emerger patterns.

Bob was also extremely generous with materials and shared almost anything he might have brought to a fly swap or materials swap. At a meetings such as the materials swap or at the Rendezvous, he would bring huge cones of poly yarn and would offer long lengths of the material to anyone who wanted a piece. I still have some of what he gave me, and it is one of my favorite materials for spinner wings. My sincere condolences to his family.

—Allan Podell



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.