



Volume 15, number 2

April 2012

The Annual Fly Tyers Rendezvous

The Annual Fly Tyers Rendezvous, sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, will be held on Saturday, April 21, 2012, from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at the Rockland House on Route 206 in Roscoe, NY. Tyers can arrive earlier to set up.

More than forty of the most talented fly tyers in the Northeast will be demonstrating favorite patterns and techniques, talking about the season to come, and making new friends and renewing old friendships. Please join us for a day of camaraderie, reunion, and fly tying.

Favorite Flies for Catskill Rivers

The revision of the handout that is given to all new members, now titled *Favorite Flies for Catskill Rivers*, is being printed and will be available to existing members for \$2.00 at meetings of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and at angling shows. The revision was made by “Catskill John” Bonasera, who solicited patterns and commentary from guild members, collected and arranged the responses, and illustrated the booklet with his own drawings and artwork. The guild thanks John, as well as all those who contributed fly patterns to the project.

Book Review

The Classic Wet Fly Box

By Mike Valla. Published by The Whitefish Press, 2012; \$24.95 softbound.

The classic wet fly don't get no respect these days. It's an age of hatch matching, and of adrenaline junkies who seek the thrill of the top-water grab that comes with fishing dries, and of bobberheads who live for the coup counts of indicator nymphing. As angling historian and master fly tyer Mike Valla notes, the eclipse of the classic wet by dry flies actually has been proceeding apace for a century, since the days of Frederick Halford and Theodore Gordon. Nymphing has largely replaced swinging a “cast” of two or three wets, and why and when one would fish a particular classic pattern often isn't clear to today's anglers, because it's far from clear why they work. Some of the figures from the angling past whom Valla quotes also indulge in speculation that sounds more like puzzlement about what trout take some classic dry flies to represent and why they take them at all, and a look at the famous fly plates in Ray Bergman's *Trout*, with their rank after rank of colorful wet-fly dreams and fantasies, provokes the same question.

Actually, Valla writes, the multitude of wets that appears in *Trout* is misleading, because “writings that appeared in newspapers, magazines, and books—going back to the mid-1800s and before—indicate a striking repetition of the same wet-fly names, the

‘core’ group. . . . The top dozen would include: The Black Gnat, Brown Hackle, Coachman, Cowdung, Governor, Leadwing Coachman, Montreal, Parmachene Belle, Professor, Royal Coachman, Scarlet Ibis, and Silver Doctor.”

These were real fishing flies, in other words, and not only do they form the core of the 100 patterns covered in *The Classic Fly Box*, they form its implicit argument: that classic wet flies are not anachronisms, but flies that catch fish, and that a truly “classic” box of wet flies contains fishing flies—simple, effective ties.

Mike Valla learned to tie at the side of Walt and Winnie Dette, and since the publication of *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies* (Stackpole Books, 2009), he has emerged as a leading angling historian of the American fly-fishing traditions. Not only does he know this tradition, but he cares about its perpetuation. All the patterns offered here are shown one to a page in excellent photographs, with accompanying remarks by Valla and historical quotes, supported by fly recipes in an appendix.

You can tie and fish the flies in *The Classic Fly Box*, and they deserve your respect.

The Stonefly Creeper and Art Flick

One of my most cherished angling books is Art Flick’s *Streamside Guide*, the second impression, copyright 1947. I acquired that little pocket-sized volume in 1965 as a kid growing up in the Garden State. It has a yellow dust jacket with a trout on it. I paid \$3.95 for the book and its wealth of information.

Flick’s work was one of the first three books that seeded my angling library. The other two were Ray Bergman’s *Trout* and Ernest Schwiebert’s *Matching the Hatch*. But it was Flick’s little hardcover that I often carried with me to school and eventually to a summer job working the second shift at American Can Company, just off the Garden State Parkway in Union, New Jersey. I was in college then and studied Flick’s *Streamside Guide* on break and during dinner, like one of my engineering textbooks. Little did I know that years later, I would meet Art in person and develop a friendship with the ardent conservationist and well-known Catskill fly fisher, who had a down-to-earth and very charitable personality.

In 1970, when my wife and I moved to Kingston, New York, for employment purposes as newlyweds and recent college grads, I transferred my membership in Trout Unlimited to the local chapter, where I met Art. Many times we would attend Trout Unlimited or other conservation-related meetings together, with me serving as the driver in Art’s later years. The night that the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers honored Art Flick with their prestigious Arnold Gingrich Literary Award, I had the distinct honor of driving him to and from TGF’s annual meeting.

In those days, long since gone by, living near the Esopus Creek, I fished as early and as often as I could, most times nymph fishing as the trout season unfolded and then again as it wore down. I was always looking for useful nymph patterns and was drawn to Flick’s Stonefly Creeper. I tied a few, but just wasn’t quite sure about Art’s description of the wood

Up on the Esopus



Stonefly Creeper tied by Art Flick

duck wing case. His little *Guide* noted that it was to be “tied flat extending full length of body.” It provided a bit more description on this, but I wasn’t sure if the wood duck should be tied in on both ends or only one. Thus, at a TU meeting one evening I brought one of my Creepers along to show Art, requesting clarification of his instructions. Not only did he tell me how to tie the pattern properly, fastening both ends of the feather, but at the next monthly chapter meeting, Flick gave me a Stonefly Creeper he tied that I could use as a model for future tying. To this day I have that fly, mounted in a shadow box with his signature, along with and his classic dry flies.

Flick provided the following pattern description for his Stonefly Creeper:

Silk: Primrose

Hook: Size 8

Tail: Two barbs from a cock pheasant tail, at least half an inch long

Body: Large light ginger quill and amber seal fur

Wing case: Feather from wood duck or mandarin drake, tied flat, extending the full length of body

Legs: Grouse hackle



Photo: Ed Ostapczuk

In his *Guide*, Art noted that the quill body should be tied in at the tail, proceeding up to a slight hump where seal fur should be wound almost to the eye. For many years I didn’t have seal fur, so I substituted fox dubbing until Catskill John helped me with a source of seal. I don’t recall Art specifying what type of hook he used to tie his Creeper, but it appears to be a Mustad 3906B. I’ve always tied my nymphs on Mustad 9671 hooks, plus, I weight this pattern with lead wrapped around the hook shank, covered by yellow floss, to which I apply a liberal coat of head cement. Perhaps the hook length and extra bulk of the underbody causes me issues with the quill body; I really struggle to find quills long enough to do this pattern proper justice.

All of this duly noted, I find Flick’s Stonefly Creeper a highly effective pattern when I fish it early in the season—in April. I tend to prefer larger, weighted nymphs during the first few weeks of every new trout season, when trout streams are normally high and cold. I’m not too sure that streams will be high and cold this year when the season opens, but I’ll still fish Flick’s Stonefly Creeper anyway, if for no other reason than trout tell me that they like it.

I use the Stonefly Creeper as the bottom fly with smaller weighted dropper some 18 inches above it. And unlike guild member Ted Patlen, who thinks that using a strike

indicator is akin to using “training wheels”—his words, not mine—I always use a strike indicator early in the season, when hits are barely detectable. Mostly I’m fishing a very short line, often not much more than my leader, dapping my way upstream, always moving upriver.

This is a classic Catskill nymph pattern that should be part of every angler’s arsenal. And speaking of a trout fisher’s resources, I highly recommend Art Flick’s *Streamside Guide*. It’s truly a classic and still full of very useful information. I like it so much, I have two copies for myself, plus autographed copies for both of our sons. In addition to the second impression noted above, I have a copy of the *New Streamside Guide*, the seventh edition, published in 1972. It’s hard to believe that at the time, that copy only cost \$4.95, a buck more than my first book. Both of my autographed copies are treasures, worth their weight in gold. And, it’s interesting to note that in the later edition, Art expanded the book from eighteen short and sweet chapters to twenty, adding information on nymphs in general and Blue-Winged Olives. I often wonder if Art were still alive today how many chapters this classic would have now. The book evolved a bit with time and as Art observed more about nature. Yet his message between the covers remains simple and clear: anglers don’t need to carry an infinite number of patterns, they just needs to know how and when to fish what they have.



Making an Impression

Since I first started tying flies, I have been a replicator of known patterns. In my whole life I may have tied only ten flies that I conjured up on my own, and I probably fished only two of them. Like many of you, I love the old patterns, and I love getting them just right with the actual materials and tying them the way they “should be” tied. They fish well, too, and it’s a great feeling taking a trout on an old classic pattern.

What I have to keep in mind, though, is that all these standard patterns were at one time new designs, just designed to catch fish. In this day of tyers making perfect examples of these patterns, I sometimes lose sight of that original intention. Having all the tail barbs the exact length and wings with matching barb counts isn’t what’s important. What’s important is the *impression* of the fly on or in the water—and the impression of life that it makes on the fish.

Many times you hear of an angler having good luck with a fly, and the more ragged it gets, the better it seems to work. This could be attributed to just a good day on the water when the fish are in a taking mood. However, it also could be that as the fly unravels, it starts presenting a more impressionistic appearance.

Now that the 2012 trout season is upon us, I have been giving more thought to incorporating some different techniques into my flies, creating something that looks more buglike for floating flies and, for subsurface flies, creating something incorporating more movement.



Photo: “Catskill John” Bonasera

We all love the look of a crisply hackled Catskill dry, with its collar of stiff hackle sticking out exactly 90 degrees from the hook. We take pains to ensure the base that the hackle sits on is level, so we don't have any stray fibers poking out at odd angles when we wrap the feather. But what if the hackle was roughed up a bit? Wouldn't the footprint on the water surface look more lifelike?

I remember reading the hackle-wrapping steps that A. K. Best uses, crossing in front of the wing, then back behind it, splaying the fibers, even pinning some down. While this looks like something I usually try to avoid doing on purpose, it likely also looks to a trout much more lifelike than a perfectly wrapped collar. Mayflies, after all, have legs spread out on the water in front of, next to, and behind their abdomens, and having the hackle points going different directions would certainly mimic that more closely. An added bonus is that the more surface area the hackle has to the surface of the water, the higher and longer it will ride there. When tying dry-fly tails, the same theory applies. A splayed tail keeps the back end of the fly atop the water, while a tightly bunched roll of fibers turns into a wet stick of hackle and sooner rather than later will sink.

As for the subsurface offerings, I have been focusing on the gills of mayfly nymphs as a predominant trigger area that I have been neglecting. Looking at nymphs in their underwater environment, it's hard not to notice the ever-moving gills undulating to extract oxygen from the water.

I have always simply used a dubbing needle to pick out the fur dubbed as an abdomen, but lately, I have been experimenting with ostrich herl in the gill areas to simulate movement better. Overwrapping the thorax with a complementing ostrich herl breathes new life into my plain old nymphs. A little CDC spun in a dubbing loop for gills can also liven up a fly.

I came up with some slight variations of some old standards, and since the Hendricksons will be on the water around the time you are reading this, I thought I would present them here: a "classic" Hendrickson tied with splayed hackle and a Hendrickson nymph with ostrich herl gills.

Its hard for me to break from tradition, but these flies look so appealing from a fishing standpoint, it's worth trying.

Obituaries

Mark J. Romero passed away on March 18, 2012, felled by lung cancer. Mark retired from the music industry, where he traveled as a sound engineer, a road manager, and a stage manager with many famous musicians and their bands, including Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. In an on-line biography, Mark wrote: "My first experiences with fly fishing started in 1989 on my wife's birthday. A friend of ours took us to the Beaverkill in upstate New York, (the Catskills) and the rest is history." Soon taking up the art of fly tying, he tied at fly-fishing events all across the country.

Mark Romero was a life member of Trout Unlimited, the Federation of Fly Fishers, and the Theodore Gordon Fly Fishers, and he devoted a large portion of his time to issues related to conservation and fly-fishing education. He also was a dedicated member of Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and Fly Fishing Center and Museum. He served on the Conservation Committee of Theodore Gordon Fly Fishers from 1994 to 2008 and worked with Project Access for the Handicapped and with the Trout in the Classroom Committee that developed programs in over 200 classrooms in New York schools prior to turning the project over to Trout Unlimited. He also served on his TU chapter's Conservation Committee. He was involved with tributary openings for the passage of

spawning trout and with planting trees in riparian areas to improve trout habitat. Mark retired to Lakeview, Arkansas, with his wife, Misako Ishimura, in 2006.

In a final message to the 2012 TU banquet, Mark wrote: “Just please know that all my love is being sent your way, and that I thank you for all your kindness. I’m nothing more than a messenger who cares for all of you, and the fact that you all care so much for the rivers and the fish.”

His wife, Misa, writes: “We have established a bank account, the Memory Fund for Mark Romero, at Bank of America, to support fly-fishing conservation and education activities, for which Mark tied his flies. You can mail a personal check, payable to Memory Fund for Mark Romero, to Misako Ishimura, P.O. Box 54, Lakeview AR 72642 USA or e-mail me at misakoflyfish@gmail.com for an account number and bank routing number if you’d prefer to make deposit by ACH (automated clearing house) transfer.

“I am thinking about to have an informal gathering for the friends of Mark at the house in the Catskills, 94 Yorktown Road (West end of Yorktown Spur), Roscoe, NY, from 1:00 P.M. to 2:00 P.M. on Saturday, May 12, 2012.”

Gardner L. Grant of Purchase, NY, and Jupiter, FL, , passed away on March 28, 2012, after a long battle with cancer. He was eighty-five years old. Born in Boston, MA, Gardner spent his early years in Providence RI. He was a graduate of Yale College and Harvard Business School and led a family-owned company in the invention and development of equipment for the automatic collection of tolls on tunnels, bridges, and turnpikes. Following the sale of the company to a publicly held corporation, he moved his family to Scarsdale, NY, and continued to serve as president for over a decade. Later, Gardner became active in real-estate development and management. A lifelong, passionate fly fisher, Gardner was active in numerous environmental and angling-related organizations. He served as president of New York’s Theodore Gordon Fly Fishers, the Federation of Fly Fishers, and the American Museum of Fly Fishing and as a board member of Trout Unlimited, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research, and Yale’s Peabody Museum of Natural History.

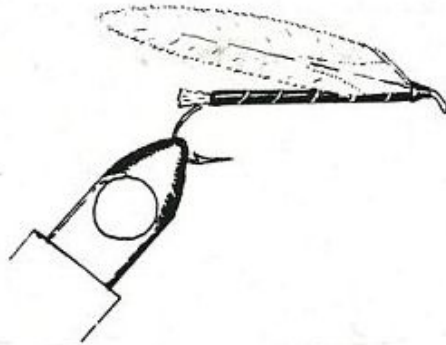
Looking Back Upstream

The Phoenicia Bucktail

Courtesy of Ralph Graves, reproduced here is the handout that accompanied the program presented at the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild meeting on Thursday, October 17, 1996. John Jacobson, illustrator of the first version of the guild pamphlet for new members, *Favorites Flies and Favorite Rivers*, gave a talk on the Esopus and demonstrated tying the Phoenicia Bucktail. The meeting notice and newsletter, by codirector Judie Darbee Vinceguerra, mentions Bill Leuszler as angling show coordinator, Floyd Franke as program chair, and

a raffle for a Harry Darbee salmon fly, framed by Poul Jorgensen.

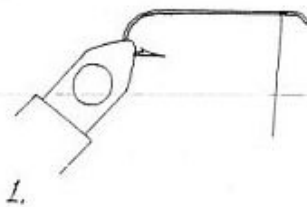
THE PHOENICIA BUCKTAIL



The Catskills do not seem to have produced a large number of streamer patterns. The Phoenicia Bucktail is in a rarity among rarities. Joseph D. Bates Jr., in his book Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing (1950), identifies it as "...formerly popular among Catskill anglers who fished the Esopus River in New York State between the portal and Ashokan Dam." The Phoenicia Bucktail is not really a bucktail at all, but is a variation of the Black Ghost originated by Herbert Welch of Maine. The Black Ghost remains popular today, while the Phoenicia Bucktail is nearly forgotten.

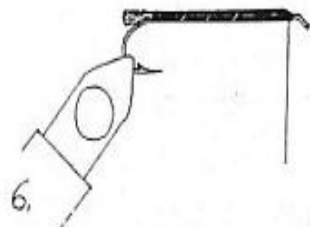
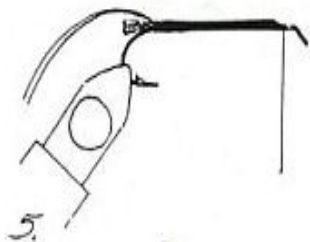
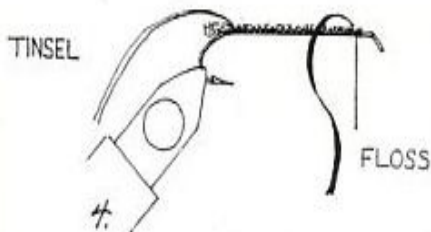
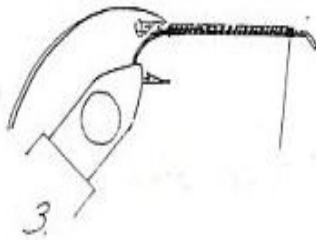
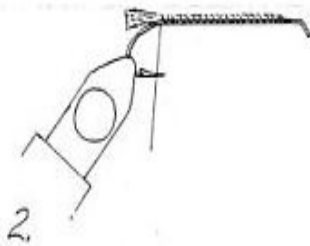
TYING THE PHOENICIA BUCKTAIL

Hook: Mustad #9575 size 6-10 or equivalent
Thread: Black 6/0
Tail: Dark Yellow Wool'
Body: Black Floss
Rib: Flat Gold Tinsel, Medium
Wing: Four White Saddle Hackles



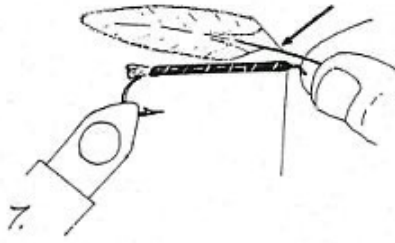
1. Tie in thread at eye of hook.

THE PHOENICIA BUCKTAIL

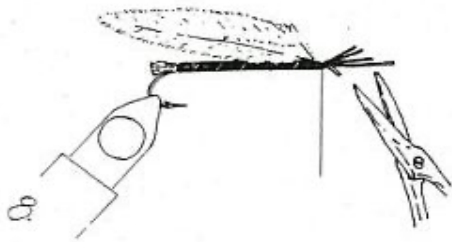


2. Tie in a length of dark yellow wool just behind the end of the tag end of the loop eye. Secure along the top of the shank to the point halfway between the point and barb, as shown. Trim tail to about $\frac{1}{4}$ ".
3. Tie in a length of tinsel, gold side up, on top of the wool. Wrap thread back to the end of the loop eye.
4. Attach one strand of floss about $\frac{1}{16}$ " back from the eye. Now make a few wraps of thread forward. Reserve most of the loop eye for attaching the wing.
5. Wrap the floss back to where the tinsel is tied in, then wrap it forward again continuing one or two turns past the floss tie in point. This should be just on the loop eye. Secure with three or four wraps of thread. Trim excess.
6. Spiral tinsel forward, gold side up, in evenly spaced, open spirals. Secure and trim excess.

THE PHOENICIA BUCKTAIL



7. Size up four white saddle hackles. Check picture for proportions. Strip fibers from stems at the base of the wing. The two inside feathers should be matched with cupped sides facing each other. The two outside feathers should also be cupped toward the center and be slightly shorter than the center two. Note that a few more fibers are removed from the bottom side of the stem. This will help prevent the wing from twisting when it is attached to the fly.



8. Align all four feathers carefully. Attach them to the hook as a unit with three or four wraps of thread. Adjust if needed by rocking back and forth. The objective is to make the wing appear as if it were one feather standing vertical on edge and in line with the hook. Wrap a few more times to secure and trim the excess stems. Form a neat, tapered head and whip finish. A coat of black head cement adds a nice finishing touch.

Asked and Answered

An Occasional Feature, with Al Himmel

Q: Is matching the hatch effective when nothing is hatching?

A: Matching the hatch is *always* effective if it makes the angler feel better.

☞ The Rockland House ☞

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild wants to express its appreciation and thanks to Tom and Marea Roseo, proprietors of the Rockland House, for making the facilities at that establishment available for the guild meetings and for their continued support. Please reciprocate with your patronage.



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.