

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild



GAZETTE

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The 2009 Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Rendezvous will be held on Saturday, April 18, at the Rockland House on Route 206 in Roscoe, NY, from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. There will be a reception following the Rendezvous at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. The Rendezvous is free and open to the public. If you are a tyer who would like to participate and have yet to sign up, please contact cochair Leslie Wrixon at lesliewrixon@yahoo.com or (508) 733-8535.

Where have all the wet flies gone? This year, as part of the Rendezvous, we will be having a tying contest to help celebrate the Bicentennial of the Town of Rockland. Tyers and attendees at the Rendezvous may participate by submitting two of the same fly at the door. One fly will go to the guild and the other to the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, where it will be displayed as part of the bicentennial festivities. The requirements are simple: Flies must be wet flies (quill wing, soft hackle, no-wing style, etc.) tied on hooks no larger than a size 8 traditional wet-fly hook. Flies must include three of the following colors: royal blue, maroon/claret, white, and gray. (These are the colors of the local high schools.) Help celebrate the bicentennial and tie something!

—Leslie Wrixon

The May meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Thursday, May 21, at 7:30 P.M. in the Education Building of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum on Old Route 17 in Livingston Manor, NY. Bill Leuszler, who has given us a number of excellent programs in the past, will do a demonstration of tying dry-fly wings in the manner of the Catskill tradition. Bill writes:

“I plan to demonstrate three ways to tie split wings with duck flank feathers, all of which are in “the Catskill style.” One of my goals is to show that there is no one way to tie a “Catskill dry fly.” I plan to use mallard flank feathers, and they will be supplied if needed. The main focus will be on tying the wing. However, I will be using one of my favorite dry flies, the Gray Fox, as the basis for the work.

“Tie along with me. The materials needed for the fly are:

Hook: Mustad 94840 or equivalent, size 12
Thread: Primrose 6/0
Wing: Mallard flank
Tail: Light ginger hackle fibers
Body: Cream fox fur
Hackle: Mixed grizzly and light ginger hackle

“I plan to bring a couple of flies tied by the Dettas in the early 1980s for comparison. If anyone wishes to bring a pattern tied by the Darbees, Rube Cross, or Art Flick, it would add greatly to the experience.”

The March Meeting: Tying for Project Healing Waters

The March meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, where members tied flies to contribute to Project Healing Waters, the program that brings fly fishing to recent veterans, was a great success. We tied a wonderful batch of flies that will be put to good use by Bob Cohen, a guild member, who is the New Jersey coordinator for this program. Project Healing Waters brings veterans to the ponds at the New Jersey Pequest Hatchery five or six times a year, where, assisted by volunteers from groups such as Trout Unlimited, Bob teaches fly fishing as an assistance to the veterans' physical and emotional rehabilitation.

We need to keep these sessions supporting Project Healing Waters and Reel Recovery on our winter calendar, when we get stronger turnouts. If you haven't attended one of these tying sessions, consider doing so. It's a pleasant experience—a bunch of people sitting around tying, talking about tying, talking about fishing, and just talking. Also, tying. If you want to send additional flies, mail them to at Bob Cohen, 120 Warren Drive, Aberdeen, NJ 07747.

As part of this program, Bob also is teaching fly tying to veterans at Lyons Hospital in Lyons, New Jersey, and is in need of vises. Should any member have an old vise in good working order, consider donating it to Project Healing Waters. You can mail your vise to Bob at the above address. Should any New Jersey Guild members be available to teach at tying sessions, give Bob a call at (732) 441-7390.

A Visit with Fran Better

I called a few buddies the other day to see if any of them would like to ride up to the Ausable with me to visit Fran Better, who is hanging on by about a fifth of a heart. Dave Brandt and the two others I asked all said yes. We drove up the Northway into the High Peaks, then motored down Route 86 to Fran's shop, The Evening Hatch, now closed for the season, and met his wife Jan in the little attached restaurant where she was baking dinner rolls that many of the fine-dining establishments in the Lake Placid area serve with meals. We left Roger, the chief baker, to tend the ovens and followed Jan farther down 86 and into the labyrinth they call Ausable Acres, eventually arriving at Fran's house.

It was the first time I have been in Fran's home, though I have known him for thirty years. He looked frailer than when I last saw him at his Catskill Fly Fishing Museum Hall of Fame induction ceremony last October and obviously more so than in the latter part of this past August, when he was still tying Ausable Wulffs, Haystacks, and Usuals in his shop, where and when he had asked me to write the foreword for his new and (according to him) "last" book, *Fran Better: An Autobiography*. I had e-mailed a few days earlier to see if he was up to visitors, and Jan had replied that it would surely cheer him up and to please come and to meet her at the shop.

Fran was genuinely happy to see us. He was on oxygen, but removed it intermittently, replacing it after every couple of stories, jokes, or tales of the old days. He looked more hunched down than usual, had a blanket on his lap, wore a shawl over one shoulder, and seemed, after I'd gotten a good look at him, impossibly thinner than in August. When he smiled, he looked almost boyish.

Jan went outside to spread some corn out on a rock that stuck through the snow not twenty feet from the wall of windows that framed the woods and river like a large, full wall mural. Then she left to return to the roll making, and twenty minutes later, a young doe appeared out of nowhere and began munching the corn. Beyond her, a twenty-foot-long, wheelchair-wide wooden bridge, complete with handrails, rested between evergreens, having been pulled from its span to a small island where Fran fished on good summer days. I couldn't help wondering if he has cast his last fly. When we were with Jan earlier at the restaurant, she said Fran told her he did not think he would make it to spring, that he

hoped the latest person to show interest in buying the shop would do so, and that he did not want to go to the hospital again, but hoped he would just go to sleep and not wake up.

I suppose—no, I know—it is inevitable, as it is with all of us. I have seen Fran in bad shape before, and he has found the strength to pull out of it each time, but now there seems no strength left in him. He looked tired, and I suggested we should be on our way. The phone rang—it was Jan. She was just leaving Lake Placid, would be there in half an hour, she wanted us to wait, because she had a dozen rolls for each of us. It was dark when she arrived and brought in four packages. We said our goodbyes, and I told Fran I would be up May 15th to tie at the evening event of the Two Fly Contest at the Hungry Trout. “I’ll see you then,” I said. Fran smiled back at me: “I’ll try,” he said.

We found our way out and headed back to friendly confines of McDougall’s Pub, where we toasted Fran, ordered burgers, and each told a couple of Fran stories that at least one of the others had not heard before, then we headed home.

—Bob Mead, via e-mail, February 2, 2009

Looking Back Upstream



What Do the Old Folks Do?

By Al Himmel

When one reaches eighty-five and is glad to be alive, his fishing adventures are no less exciting, but might well be less energetic. Long hikes in the Adirondacks or up into the wilds of the Willowemoc, though a thing of the past, are still recalled every time a wild brook trout is caught on local streams. Evening meals at the Roscoe Diner, where super strawberry shortcake may well be the specialty of the house, are recalled fondly with every springtime scent of those succulent berries in our local fields.

Yes, we do remember, and it is our sustenance that keeps us determined to return for the next banquet or used-gear sale at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center. Those of us who learned the fishing mania in New Jersey, fishing the Ken Lockwood Gorge with girlfriend attached, found that it made the fishing much less demanding and the excitement even more delightful, while trips to Big Flat Brook made wet flies a delightful preparation for later forays into the dry-fly mystique. Now that, as the sign at the center says, I’m “a convicted dry-fly purist,” only stubborn adherence to age-old convictions has relegated the wet-fly box to the attic storage shelves. The Hairwing Coachman and the Goofus Bug reign supreme, while match-the-hatch on western New York streams is purely “catch as catch can,” since hatches are few and far between.

Thus it is that this old codger has vowed to return to the origins of his evil ways for the next big event at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and once again cast over rising trout on Cemetery Pool or refind that secret spot on the West Branch where that first sixteen-inch rainbow engulfed the Royal Wulff and forever sealed the Catskills and its environs in my mind. Love is where you find it. I found it fishing in the Catskills.

April is here, there is a feel of warmth in the air, and the trees are waking up from a long winter’s nap. The flowers are in bloom, and most of all, it is fishing season. In this season of renewal, I

wanted to write about a fly that I fished in my beginning days and still do today. The fly is one that is well known to anglers all over, but is never really fished as a wet fly. The fly I want to talk about this

The Wet-Fly Corner

With Andy Brasko, a Genuine Wet-Fly Fisherman



month is none other than the Blue-Winged Olive wet fly. I was introduced to this pattern by *Flies: The Best One Thousand*, by Randle Scott Stetzer. As a beginning angler, I learned about Blue-Winged Olives and how abundant they are on all the streams that I fished. When I saw this pattern I just had to tie it up and give it a try.

In the past, and even recently, I have fished this pattern in size 14 and 16 with much success. I know what you're going to say: "Has Andy taken up midges?" Calm down. The fly I am going to fish this year is a size 8. It's just that back before I met Don Bastian, I was a normal angler who fished flies in the sizes that most of you would expect. But after taking Don's wet-fly challenge, it's been size 6 and size 8 ever since. So this season, I am going to take this old reliable pattern that I fish with in size 14 and 16 and give it a try in size 8.

Fishing with this pattern couldn't be any easier. Anytime Blue-Winged Olives have been present on the water, this pattern has worked for me. When I can see Blue-Winged Olives on the water, I've generally fished this pattern by itself in size 14 or 16 with a normal wet-fly swing. When I feel that Blue-Winged Olives *should* be present, but don't actually see them, I've fished this fly as part of a two-fly or three-fly wet-fly rig. The difference has been that the dropper fly is a size 16 and the anchor fly at the end of the tippet is size 14. As all anglers know, Blue-Winged Olives vary in size, and this is why I vary the size of the flies on the rig and let the trout tell me which is best. When trout hit one size more than the other, I simply cut off the one that the trout did not like and replace it with the size they preferred. This fly has worked for me in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, fished this way. One interesting experience I've had fishing this fly in the smaller sizes was on Fishing Creek in Pennsylvania. Neither my size 14 or my size 16 Blue-Winged Olive would work. Coming off the stream skunked really had me thinking what was wrong. Was it the size? Was it my presentation? While walking up the path in the woods, I saw a few naturals on a bush. I captured one in my hand and showed it to my wife, Annie. We observed that the wings on these Blue-Winged Olives were a shade darker than the wings on my flies. I thought, "It can't be this simple." Well, that night at Fishing Creek Angler, I tied up half a dozen with the wings a little darker than before. Natural duck quills vary in color. Some are a shade of pale whitish gray, while others are a darker and richer slate gray. All I did to fix this issue at the vise was to select a pair of natural duck quills that were darker and richer in color. The next day, I caught two beautiful brown trout on the modified fly. Now, when I tie these flies, I make one set with wings of slate gray and the other set with wings of dark slate.

It will be interesting this year to see what the trout will do with a size 8 Blue-Winged Olives when the actual hatch is between sizes 14 and 18.



Background: cover of Ray Ovington, *The Trout and the Fly*. Photo: Annie Brasko

Blue-Winged Olive

Hook: Mustad 3906, Size 8

Thread: Gray Danville 6/0

Tail: Paired duck quills (three quill segments per side)

Body: Olive rabbit dubbing

Wings: Slate gray or dark slate paired duck quills

Full Collar: Natural medium dun hen cape

Head: One coat of Griff's Thin, Two coats of Griff's Thick

Tying Notes

The tail in the pattern actually calls for dark dun hackle fibers. I have substituted paired duck quills. I use three quill segments on each side of the pair. I feel the duck quills make a nicer-looking fly. The collar is two or three turns of hen cape. I have found that the full-collar hackle on this fly has been more effective than the traditional beard/false hackle. The full-collar hackle moves in the current underwater, adding life to the fly and enticing strikes.

The Governor

By Pat Hellekson

For the last ten years, my fly-fishing obsession has brought me to many bays, lakes, streams, and rivers, but for me, none has provoked as much passion and provided as much spiritual sustenance as the Kootenai River in Montana. This mighty river runs through a national forest that encircles the city of Libby, in northwest Montana. The Kootenai is a magnificent and isolated river whose forested banks harbor strange aboriginal legends, abundant wildlife, and the distinction of producing some of the best wild redband rainbow trout that can be enticed by a fly. My husband, Terry, and I were fortunate to have fished this mighty old river on many occasions—yet not enough times, as far as I am concerned.



The Kootenai River, Libby, MT

To this day, my adrenaline gets running every time I think about casting my favorite fly, the Governor, into the Kootenai's many changing and challenging stretches of water, looking upriver to the imposing Libby Dam, aware that this is probably one of Earth's finest tailwater fisheries, and it surely must have been one of God's ideas of Heaven on Earth for fly fishers.

Early on, when I first started fly fishing, I was confronted with the decision of what fly would work best. As I went through the selection we had, I was attracted to the Wilson's Trout Fly, and to this day, I am still teased about the fact that I allegedly exclaimed, "That is a pretty one! It should work."

And it did work, and I took many fish on that fly. Then the day of reckoning came when I lost the last one we had, snagged in the top of a tree. Since it's tied with teal breast feathers (see the recipe below), and our supply was exhausted, there was no hope of seeing any more of that pattern anytime soon. In our family, Terry is the tyer, and I am fortunate enough to have him stock my fly boxes.

For years, I had been fishing mainly with wet flies such as Prince Nymphs, and on a rare occasion a with few dry flies, with which, if luck saw fit, I would get a few small trout here and there. I was beginning to have way too many days without catching any fish, though. One day, in frustration, I asked Terry to let me check out his fly box. There was an unfamiliar fly that looked very similar to the Wilson Trout Fly. Terry said it was a Governor, so I tied one on, and the rest is history.

After I tied the Governor on my tippet, I began casting to what earlier that day had seemed like a river empty of trout. "Where had they all gone?" I wondered. About a minute after I had first presented my fly and it had progressed downriver, I felt a tug. I figured it was a whitefish, but my adrenaline peaked when I saw a beautiful trout jump high out of the water and then dive down deep, taking with it yards of my fly line.

Yes, the Governor did the trick. My first trout on the fly in over five hours was worth the wait. It was a fourteen-inch rainbow. The next was a cutthroat, and the remaining fish were all rainbows—and of course a few insignificant whitefish.

Several anglers will tell you that it is not the number of fish you catch that matters, but the gratification you get from fishing. I agree, except that to be honest, after a long dry spell not catching a single trout or a fish of any kind, catching matters, too.

On one of my more productive days, an angler upstream from me could no longer bear up under the suspense, so he sauntered down to where I was fishing and, after watching me for some time, asked, "What are you using? I can't get them to look at anything that I throw at them." When I told him that it was a Governor, he just shook his head and let me know that it was a new one to him. I reeled in my line, showed him this special fly, and apologized that I didn't have any to share. He said he would look up the recipe on the Internet and then think about tying his own. He complimented me on my casting and said whatever I was doing, keep it up.

I have never been skunked with this fly, except for one day, and that was through no fault of the fly. It was such a windy day, I shouldn't have tried to fish, but being the fanatic I am, I don't believe in wasting any opportunity. That day, on my fourth cast, this beautiful size 10 mottled Governor hooked my ear, with the barb serving its intended purpose, from what I could feel. I yelled for Terry to come down the river and give me a hand trying to remove the fly. My husband is not a surgeon, even with all his claims to fame, and I am not a martyr, so our surgery efforts abruptly halted, and we cut the leader leading to the fly in my ear, reeled in our lines, and decided it was time to head into town to the doctor and have the fly removed. To make a long story short, I now preserve this fly in a little keepsake tin. It is labeled my Special Badge of Courage. Still to this day, the Governor is my favorite and most productive fly.

Try as I may, I have no idea why this unassuming fly attracts trout. I know that I have fished this same fly at different times of the day, at different times of the season, at different temperatures, and in different rivers, lakes, and streams, and it has always been productive. Even the Wilson Trout Fly, which has some similarities to the Governor, had been a good trout attractor. The whitefish certainly would give these flies an A-plus. My only guess is that possibly the way it behaves in the water might attract more fish, but I have used many similar-looking wet flies, and there is no rhyme or reason that I can comprehend why the fish prefer this particular fly. Terry just winks and smiles at me when I ask him why he thinks the Governor produces so well.

Now, after writing this, I am definitely having adrenaline surges, and since I don't tie flies, I will either have to beg Terry to tie a few more Governors or get out my well-used Special Badge of Courage, make a trek up to the Wisconsin streams near where we now live, and give it a try in the late spring. Yes, we moved our main residence from Montana to Illinois (Can you believe what some grandparents will do to be closer to their grandchildren?) Believe me, there are very few trout waters here in Illinois, and I might have to rethink my passion for trout fishing and start fly fishing once in a while for bluegills and muskies. (I can't believe I just said that.) So stay tuned, and I will advise you how this fly produces for me in Midwest waters. Wherever you fish, remember: When fly fishing, *cast thy worries upon the waters.*

The Governor

Hook: Mustad R70 or comparable, sizes 10 to 14

Thread: Brown

Tip: Red floss

Body: Peacock herl, reverse wrapped with fine gold wire

Hackle: Brown, tied on as a collar and tied back and down.

Wings: Hen pheasant quill sections tied on edge over the body.



This is a variation of the British pattern we know as the Coachman. It was first known in this country as the Governor Alvord, named after Thomas Gold Alvord, a lieutenant governor of New York. The lieutenant governor was an ardent member of the New York State Sportsmen's Association. A September 19, 1879, Syracuse news article read:

Governor Alvord, who has returned to Syracuse from his summer St. Lawrence home, thus triumphantly sums up his season's catch of fish: Black bass, 2,309; rock bass, 1,762; perch, 366; pickerel, 373; chub, 179; all other kinds 35; total, 5,024. Greatest day's fish, July 1 (fly) 333.

What this tells us is that if you are both a politician and a fisherman, you can come up with a very good fish story. It also says that there was an interest in fly-fishing, and not for just trout and salmon.

Wilson's Trout Fly

Hook: Mustad R70 or comparable, sizes 8 to 14

Thread: Black

Tip: Red floss

Ribbing: Heavy red thread, reverse wrapped

Body: Peacock herl

Hackle: Dark ginger tied on as a collar and tied back

Wing: One green-wing teal breast feather with a single dot on it, tied upright with concave side forward.



The Wilson Trout Fly became a legend among many seasoned fly fishers, and it is just as effective today as it was decades ago, when the fly was first tied. A fly tyer by the name of Wilson, from North Ogden, Utah, originated this pattern. This fly is as remarkable in its design as its originator, who had but one arm. In addition to tying the flies, he shot the teal ducks over the Great Salt Lake for

their feathers. The wings on these flies give them an unusual vibrating action when worked through the water.

—From Terry Hellekson, *Fish Flies: The Encyclopedia Of The Fly Tier's Art* (Gibbs Smith, 2005)

Pat Hellekson has a Web site, *Cast Thy Worries upon the Waters: Reflections in Trout Time*, at <http://www.pathellekson.com>, which makes available a wealth of information in easily accessible form for those, especially women, who are interested in becoming fly fishers.

Guild Members Tying in Cyberspace (and Almost Everywhere Else): Our Far-Flung Correspondents

Mark Romero writes, via e-mail: So far this year, Misa and I have done shows in Indianapolis, Indiana, in England, and in Texas—twice—and we just had the Sowbug Roundup here in Arkansas. We've got a show in Missouri next month and after that another one in Washington State. On our travels, we've met lots of folks, taken lots of pics, and come across lots of on-line networks of fly tyers that guild members who don't shun the Devil Box . . . that's the computer . . . might find interesting. (*For members who receive the Gazette by e-mail, the URLs below are all live hyperlinks—ed.*)

Here's a new site I started a couple months ago . . . pretty self-explanatory . . . and a lotta fun. Lots of fly pics and even a video of me tying at the FFF Southern Council Conclave. Our 2009 schedule is there, as well as many other topics of interest: <http://www.pureartflytying.ning.com>.

Here is the official site of a show we did in England back on February 28 and March 1 for Steve Thornton and his gang over there. . . . Big fun: <http://www.thespringflyfishingshow.com>.

This is the site of the local Federation of Fly Fishers—affiliated club of which we are members. The same club puts on the Sowbug Roundup. The show this month was *terrific!* Go to the site and click on Sowbug for more info: <http://www.northarkansasflyfisher.org>.

This is the national Federation of Fly Fishers Web site . . . we will be at the International Conclave again this year in Loveland, Colorado. There's a new on-line forum at the Web site, and it is extremely underutilized, so any help we can be to promote it is, in my estimation, a good thing: <http://www.fedflyfishers.org>.

Misa's club Web site is <http://www.WFFJ.org>. That's the club from which she finds members for both Team Japan, for which members are required to be Japanese citizens with a valid Japanese passport, and Team WFFJ, for which members are only required to be members of WFFJ. Misa has been a member of Team Japan since 1997 and the captain since 2000. It is Team Japan that goes to the World Fly Fishing Championship and Conservation Symposium in whatever country it is being held in any given year. Team WFFJ, of which she is also captain, was formed last year for this event: <http://www.theamericacup.com>.

Finally, this one is an “albums” site . . . all kinds of albums of pics of the different events we've been doing for the last 3/4/5 years. Check out one titled “Swallows Nest Fly Tyers Room” . . . it's pics of our tying room here in Arkansas. The room actually has evolved a lot since those pics were taken, but you'll get the idea: <http://www.kodakgallery.com/misakoishimura>.

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette* is issued six times a year to members. Membership is only \$10.00 per year. For membership renewals, send a check, your current address and phone number, and, if you wish to receive the *Gazette* by e-mail, your current e-mail address, to:

Bob Osburn, 3 Good Time Court, Goshen, NY 10924

➤➤➤➤➤ Remember, memberships renew in *February* <<<<<<

When you sit down to tie a fly, you take a seat at a very large, very old table. As you go through the magazines, books, and videos—taking and ignoring advice, learning tricks and shortcuts, discerning and taking sides in old debates, then picking and choosing a pattern, a style, eventually even an aesthetic stance—you participate in a long, complicated, and apparently endless conversation over those and many other matters. You join not merely a club, but a guild.

—Paul Schullery, *Cowboy Trout*

