



Volume 14, number 2

April 2011

The 2011 Fly Tyers Rendezvous

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild's annual Fly Tyers Rendezvous will be held on Saturday, April 16, 2011, from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at the Rockland House on Route 206 in Roscoe, NY. Over forty tyers will be tying favorite patterns, offering advice and tips, and talking about the new angling season. Please join us for a day of camaraderie, reunion, and fly tying.

The May meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Thursday, May 19, 2011, in the Education Building of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum on Old Route 17 in Livingston Manor, NY, at 7:00 P.M. Ralph Graves will demonstrate two patterns. You shouldn't miss this one. Ralph has not tied for us in some time. His mastery of tying is as good as it gets. Plus, there is the inimitable Ralph Graves commentary.

The patterns Ralph will be tying are the Carey Special, a British Columbia stillwater pattern, and the J. C. Streamer.

Carey Special

Hook: 3XL nymph hook, size 8
Thread: Brown
Tail: Pheasant tail fibers
Body: Peacock herl
Rib: Very fine copper wire
Hackle: Pheasant tail rump,
one side stripped
(Fly may be weighted if preferred)

J. C. Streamer

Hook: Mustad 3906B, size 6
Thread: Black
Body: Flat tinsel
Throat: Red hen hackle
Wing: Jungle cock saddle
Cheeks: Jungle cock "nails"

The 2011 Guild Raffle

The 2011 Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Raffle for the benefit of our Education Fund offers the winner the choice of a Cortland Endurance 9-foot 4-piece 5-weight rod or a tying kit that includes a Thompson vise, basic tools, various fly-tying materials (including a tube of Overton's Wonder Wax), a tying station, and Helen Shaw's book *Fly-Tying*.

The drawing will be held at the Fly Tyers Rendezvous on April 16, 2011, at 3:00 P.M. Tickets are \$3.00 each or two for \$5.00. If the first name drawn is not present, a second name will be drawn and given the choice. If neither person is present, the first drawn will be contacted and given the choice. The winner must make arrangements for

pickup or delivery. Tickets will be available at the Rendezvous, or you can send a check with stamped, self-addressed envelope to Erin Phelan, CFTG Raffle, P.O. Box 586, Westbrookville, NY 12785, and your ticket stubs will be sent to you. If you have any questions, contact Erin at (845) 754-7456 or jphelan@hvc.rr.com.



Epeorus pleuralis

With the coming of the April season opener in New York, my thoughts are of high, cold water, gray, cloudy days, and *Epeorus pleuralis*—the Quill Gordon.

If ever there was a fly that was associated with our beautiful mountain streams, the Quill Gordon would be it. It was, after all, invented by Theodore Gordon and accounted for many full baskets of trout both in Gordon's day and in the seasons that have followed.

I have personally not seen many naturals during my outings in April and have yet to be standing in a stream during what I would consider a Quill Gordon "hatch," but turning over stones in the streams reveals that they are present in great numbers in both the Willowemoc and the Beaverkill and in many of the smaller waters throughout the Catskill area. For this reason, I carry both the wet and dry version in various sizes.

The nymphs require very clean water and are built for living in the fast sections of streambed. Their flattened bodies and low, wide stance keeps them safe from the violent currents of our higher-gradient streams. When the water temperatures hover around 50 degrees, the nymphs congregate at the tails of pools behind rocks and prepare for emergence. The duns crack out of their nymphal shucks and make their way to the surface, and this behavior makes them very vulnerable to the trout. At this time, a wet imitation swung deep on a dead drift and lifted at the end of the swing is just the ticket for action. Greasing the leader and drifting the same fly in the film also takes its share of trout and gives visual appeal to the take. Before today's seemingly thousands of emerger patterns were created, wet flies were what imitated



Photo: John Bonasera

emerging mayfly duns, and they still do as fine a job today as they always did.



The fact that the dun's wings are damp from underwater emergence makes the wing-drying process a slow one, and a dun imitation can work when naturals are floating on the surface. The cold, damp air of the early spring, combined with the typically cloudy days on which these mayflies hatch, keep the duns on the water longer before they can take full flight. Both

a skittered dry imitation and a dead-drifted one work well.

Tying the Quill Gordon is not difficult, but sometimes material selection can be. The body is made from a stripped peacock eye quill, and since not all peacock eyes are created equal, selecting a suitable one can sometimes be frustrating. Generally, the larger the eye, the easier it is to strip and wrap the quills, but even then, bigger isn't always better. I have found in my own experience and in the experience of others that it's a good idea to buy the eyes in bulk and sort through them for the best ones.

Removing the greenish fluff from the quills is necessary before tying them on, and there are a few methods for that also. Some cut a quill from the eye and use a pencil eraser to rub off the tiny fibers. Others use a sharp blade or the cutting edge on their tying scissors, and some bleach the whole eye and then rinse in cold water. All methods are fine, with bleaching being the fastest, but also the most risky, because leaving the quills in the caustic solution for too long makes them brittle and unwrappable. If you're going to tie just half a dozen, the eraser method works great, and you don't have to work too hard for the end result.

I like using black thread for the underbody, and when I wrap the quill, I leave just the slightest gap between wraps to let a little of the black show through to give it a segmented appearance. This serves two purposes. The segmentation is more distinct, and it helps ensure that the quill will wrap all the way to the wing. Sometimes the quills are too short on a size 10 or larger hook. Not much in fly tying is more frustrating than running out of quill two wraps from the wing.

The original dressing called for a fine-wire gold counter-rib, and if extreme longevity of your flies is a concern, by all means rib away. I don't particularly like to add metal to my dry flies and usually just coat the body with varnish for extra protection. I find that on dry flies, after taking a fish, it's better simply to change the fly anyway, because they never float quite as nicely as a fresh one after a trout slobbers all over it.

The dressing for the Quill Gordon is as follows.

Thread: Black

Hook: Size 10 to 18 dry fly, size 8 to 16 wet fly

Wings: Wood duck flank, upright and divided for the dry, rolled, bunched, or paired for the wet

Tail: Medium dun fibers—the original had wood duck fibers

Body: Stripped peacock-eye quill, wrapped and counter-ribbed with fine gold wire, if desired

Hackle: Medium dun

I have caught fish on this fly all through the beginning of the season and have seen naturals as late as June. What a nice ride home after a day on the water when you can reflect on the fish you caught on Teddy Gordon's fly!

It's well known that I fish with dry flies at least once a year. I may be a genuine wet-fly fisherman, but to me, dry-fly fishing is an art in itself and is a very graceful way to catch trout.

Back in 1993, I was looking for a pattern for a dry fly called the Sulphur Dun, known to entomologists as *Ephemerella dorothea*, and I came across a book written by Skip Morris titled *The Art of Tying the Dry Fly*. There, Morris explains and demonstrates how to tie a classic Western dry fly called

The Wet-Fly Corner

With Andy Brasko, a Genuine Wet-Fly Fisherman



the Pale Evening Dun. This was the fly I was looking for. I tied a half dozen of them in size 16 and headed out to my home waters of the South Branch of the Raritan on the section called the Ken Lockwood Gorge. This dry fly turned out to be very successful for me that day. I caught over a dozen trout, but what was really great was that I was catching fish when a lot of anglers were not.

But I am indeed a genuine wet-fly fisherman, and I thought, “Boy this pattern worked so well for me as a dry fly, why not as a wet fly?” That spawned an idea and my creation for the Sulphur Dun wet fly. Please note that I do not claim to take credit for this pattern. Back in 1993, I did not have the number of books in my library that I do now. It’s just one of those flies that you have not seen before in any books—one created when you sit down at your bench and tie a fly the way you think it will work. That’s one of the many reasons that I love fly tying.

So I was off to my vise to start tying this fly. I realized that I have seen natural Sulphur duns in two colors, yellow and orange. I also thought about the size and stayed with size 16. It was just a tad larger, but I felt it should work. After I tied numerous Sulphur Dun wets in both colors, it was off to the stream to see how my new creations worked. Upon arriving at the stream, I observed that Sulphurs were coming off in both colors, so, as any good wet-fly angler would do, I set up a classic two-wet-fly rig and decided to let the fish choose which was the better color.

I landed a few fish, and what I learned from this experiment was that with both colors of Sulphurs hatching at the same time, the color doesn’t matter. The color matters only when one predominant color of Sulphur is hatching. So fish with a yellow Sulphur Dun wet when yellow flies predominate and with an orange Sulphur Dun when orange flies are the main hatch.

I did find that a size 16 worked from mid-May through mid-June, but did not work from mid-June through July. In order to get the fish to strike, I had to drop down to a size 18. I still fish wet flies in size 6 and 8, but I learned that size actually matters for some kinds of wet flies.

Sulphurs can be found in abundance in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but for some reason are forgotten by a lot of wet-fly anglers. Why, I simply do not know. When Sulphurs are present, I have seen other wet-fly anglers fishing with a Hare’s Ear wet or a Partridge and Yellow soft hackle. But the yellow and orange Sulphur Dun wet flies are both effective and simple and fun to tie. Give this pattern a try, and remember that this fly is best fished in sizes 16 and 18. Have a great spring, with hopes of tight lines for all.

Sulphur Dun Wet Fly



Hook: Mustad 3906, size 16
Thread: Danville 6/0, orange or yellow
Tail: Herbert Miner dark gray dun hen cape
Body: Orange or yellow Sulphur dubbing
Full collar hackle: Herbert Miner dark gray dun hen cape
Wing: Paired slate/natural duck quills

Tying Notes

The fly pictured is an actual size 16. The color for dubbing Sulphurs varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. I find that a brighter orange best represents the orange variety of Sulphurs that I encounter on the stream. I find the yellows in the naturals are just a tad more subdued in color. You should note the color of the insects that you encounter on the stream. I have found that minor differences in color improve the fly's performance. At times, I also vary the shades of dun used for the tail and full collar hackle, depending on the flies encountered on-stream. Although this fly is simple and easy to tie, the coloration changes exhibited by the naturals throughout the season make it one of the trickier patterns to fish successfully. Matching the color changes that occur throughout the Sulphur hatch is what allows me to catch fish on this pattern consistently.



The Day Bob Osburn Didn't Make It to Church By Joe Watts

My first year of fly fishing in the Catskills was great. Because I read one or two magazines that deal with the New York region, I was introduced to places and rivers that I still visit time and time again as if it were my first time, in awe of what I found as a complete fly-fishing virgin, thanks to the generous authors in those publications.

One of those places is the beautiful wildlife preserve surrounding the rugged Mongaup River. I am referring to the lower section of the Mongaup, which flows over three miles from the Rio Reservoir into the Delaware River. This is a tough river to wade, which is obvious to anyone who has ever been there, and because it's quite dangerous, it's lightly fished. This river, along with the beautiful surrounding thickly wooded area, is one of my favorite places, my little sanctuary. The fact that I have never caught many of the wild brown trout that are abundant there has never bothered me, because the beauty of my favorite little spot always lures me back.

There are no stocked fish there, only wild brown trout, with a natural menu that parallels that of the main stem of the Delaware River, which just so happens to have the best menu for fish east of the Mississippi. It's a good thing that fish here aren't easy pickings, never have been, and hopefully never will be.

A few years back, after putting off learning how to tie my own flies for the previous ten years, I really began to buckle down and got my wheels turning. I found a good class held in Middletown run by Bob Osburn. It was a great place to go for a couple hours on Sunday afternoon, and I was gaining all the confidence I would ever need to

pursue this new “hobby within a sport” successfully and have fun while I was at it. I ended up attending this class over the past three winters.

Over the last few years, I got to know Bob enough to realize that not only is he one of the best fly tyers around, but something else: when Bob speaks, it means he has something to say, and you should be listening, because he knows a thing or two. Bob is a native of Goshen, Orange County, who’s been fishing the fly since the 1940s. Bob says he must have been about eight when he came to the realization that, compared with one of his fishing buddies, he just wasn’t a good worm fisherman, so he decided to pick up the fly rod.

Bob’s fly-tying area—or I should I say “region”—located in his basement is beyond anything I would have ever conjured up in my imagination. His organization of his collection of materials and tools is impeccable. Though Nancy, Bob’s wife and high-school sweetheart, certainly knows Bob’s organizational ways, many of us who see only that full-time smile would not know how intense he is. Guys like Bob are essential to the sport of fly fishing. He makes the whole thing fun for anybody attempting to get into it. He also has one heck of a cast.

If Bob tells you something about the Mongaup with that world-class smile, well, he’s been fishing it for sixty-plus years and yes, he knows what he’s talking about. With typical modesty, he told me that actually, the fishing is easy there and most certainly always was: after we were fishing together one day, he pulled out a picture from his wallet and proceeded to show me a younger version of himself with a monster brown trout—and yes, he was smiling. It turned out that he had wrestled with an eleven-pound brown trout for nearly four hours with half the town of Goshen watching, no more than a few feet away from where I had fished many times.

Norman Maclean begins *A River Runs Through It* with the declaration that “in our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing.” In Bob’s case, if there was a line, it got crossed from both sides. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, Bob was such a successful trout fisherman that a local priest, Father Frey, who happened to like trout, would always seem to be in a bind. The bishop always seemed to be visiting the parish in Goshen, and of course, the good priest needed trout for the table for this occasion, and who better to go to than Bob? (Who was this bishop that always wanted trout? Bob doesn’t know, and I don’t think Father Frey did, either.) When all was said and done, though, Bob let Father Frey know—with that smile, of course—that it was his brown trout that had made him a monsignor.

But as I said, the line got crossed from both sides. Bob caught that monster brown on a Sunday morning in midsummer 1976. As always, he left to get a quick session of trout fishing in before church. His last words to Nancy were “I’ll be right back.” Bob was fishing with a 7-foot glass Wright-McGill rod, a 4-weight line, and a 4X tippet. He had on one of his trademark flies: his Woolly Worm, with an olive body tied with brown hackle. It was almost time to head home. Nancy would be waiting to go to Mass, and fishing was kind of slow: one last cast, and if a fish didn’t hit the Woolly Worm, it would be time to call it quits.

Suddenly, some kind of creature that was as strong as a beaver—an otter, perhaps even something larger—took Bob’s fly. Bob held on to for dear life as his 4-weight absorbed the initial shock. It was a huge brown trout, and for long periods, the monster would bog down on the bottom and test Bob’s patience. During the runs, which did indeed take place, Bob’s right arm got a workout no man will ever experience in a gym.

That Sunday, Bob never made it to church. Nancy was furious: “I was madder than a hornet,” she recalls. “He always came back,” she told me, “but not this time.” She drove past and hollered something to Bob like “What in God’s name is keeping you?”

and Bob said something like “Can you go home and get my net please!” Nancy: “Why?” Bob: “I can’t leave!”

Before going to church, Nancy did drive home and get the net, which, toward the end of the four-hour battle of wits, turned out to be a crucial factor. Nancy then went to church alone.

Between Nancy and other witnesses, the word was out of the classic “man versus fish” real-life drama being played out down on the creek near the trailer by the Rio Dam. Soon thereafter, people began coming down, and they came in flocks. When all was said and done, about 130 people showed up for the event. Some even brought lunch. By the time Nancy got back from church and passed by Bob again, there was a huge crowd surrounding him, most of them mesmerized by what was transpiring. Bob demonstrated patience far beyond what normal circumstances may call for. The slightest twitch and his 4X tippet would be broken. However, Bob hung in there through those long, grueling periods when that gargantuan trout would muscle his head down on the bottom and say “No mister! This is not happening—not today!” Bob won the battle, and when it was all over, he had himself a brown trout that was 10 pounds, 14 ounces. Ironically, Father Frey wasn’t around that day, and the priest who held Mass did get on Bob’s case for missing church.

That monster brown trout would have been an annual state record in New York. This record is usually won by a dedicated reservoir angler on the New York City reservoirs or the Great Lakes who has a boat and a bucket full of sowbellies or deep-water fishing lures, along with some real heavy tackle. It’s a genuine accomplishment to catch an eleven-pound brown trout in the Mongaup River right above the Rio Reservoir.

As a late-starting fly fisher who gravitated to the Mongaup River, rather than to such better-known hot spots as the Willowemoc and Beaverkill, I’m grateful that I ended up getting to know Bob. Many of the members in The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild have known Bob Osburn for many years, some dating back to when he started in the 1940s. Just about everyone has good stories about Bob, the man who always smiles. This is mine.

P.S. Want another? Ask Bob about the taxidermist.

More on the Extended-Body Dry Fly

By Ted Sypher

Methods for tying the extended-body fly are numerous. In “The Two-Feather Fly and Riffle Dun,” in the February 2011 *Gazette*, Dave Plummer elaborates on one approach, but all types of materials have been used—quill, foam, feathers, and even hooks with bent parts. Here, I’ll present another method using the Green Drake as an example.

Put a hook in your vise. I use a Mustad 94831, size 10. Wind a Cahill-colored thread to the middle of the hook. At this point, tie in a bunch of light tan calf tail. This is to be the abdomen. Coat the lower two-thirds with head cement (nail polish works), working it in with a bodkin. Now twist the hair, shaping the abdomen. You can even mold a realistic upward curve. Tie down the waste calf tail from the tie-in point, tapering it toward the hook eye. Tie in a large grizzly hackle, then dub a thorax using light-colored dubbing to a point just shy of the hook eye. Wind the hackle forward over the thorax and tie it off. Make a neat head and cement it.

Turn the fly over and clip the bottom hackle barbs at an arc of approximately 160 degrees. Then turn the fly right-side up again. We’ll make it a Green Drake by lightly coloring the hackle with a green marking pen. The Hendrickson, March Brown, Grey

Fox, *Isonychia*, and Coffin Fly can be tied in a similar manner using appropriate materials. Dimensions for the body parts can be found in Ernest Schweibert's *Matching the Hatch*.

These flies have worked well for me, and I hope you have a pleasant experience using them. Let me know.

Green Drake

Hook: Mustad 94831, size 10
Extended body: Light tan calf tail, tail, molded with cement
Thorax: Light tan dubbing
Hackle: Large grizzly, lightly colored with green marking pen and trimmed in a 160-degree arc

Coffin Fly

Hook: Mustad 94831, size 10
Extended body: White calf molded with cement
Thorax: White dubbing
Hackle, Large grizzly, bottom trimmed in a 160-degree arc

Note: Dave Plummer writes that in "The Two-Feather Fly and Riffle Dun" in the February Gazette, it should say, "The butt end of the feather is turned upright to provide a post for tying the third feather, the hackle, with barbs parallel to the hook shank, parachute style," not "parallel to the post." We apologize for the error.

Book Review

The Classic Dry Fly Box

By Mike Valla. Published by The Whitefish Press, 2010; \$24.94, softbound.

What makes a fly pattern a "classic"? Having been around for a while is one obvious criterion—no matter how effective it might be, the latest creation hot from the vise doesn't qualify. With age comes the likelihood that it's tied with natural materials—not because tyers in years past wouldn't have embraced synthetics (they would), but because that's what was available then. And pedigree matters. "Classic" flies tend to have been originated by major figures in the history of the sport (although attribution is always a tricky business) or at least associated with them in some way.

Flies that meet these criteria are what you'll find in guild member Mike Valla's *Classic Dry Fly Box*. The book surveys 100 dry-fly patterns, with examples all tied by Valla and with brief historical vignettes that help place them in the traditions of American fly tying and angling.

Short of a medium who could channel the spirits of Theodore Gordon, Reuben Cross, Art Flick, and Harry Darbee, it would be hard to find a person better qualified for writing a book like this than Mike Valla. Valla learned fly tying as a teenager at the bench of Walt and Winnie Dette in Roscoe, New York, and he has since become something of a custodian of the heritage of fly-tying in the Northeast. His *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies* (Stackpole/Headwater Books, 2009) is the most accessible introduction to both the techniques involved in tying the Catskill-style dry fly correctly and to the history of fly fishing as it developed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the region.

Constant innovation has put some of these flies "on the endangered species list," as Valla puts it, but while his intention in writing the book is partly archival, it's more accurate to say that it's remedial—to introduce today's anglers to patterns that were the go-to flies in their day, but that have been eclipsed by the go-to flies of the present. The book shows the continuities, as well as the differences, in how dry flies have been thought of, tied, and used.

Of course, the classics still work. Some, such as the Variants, Skaters, Bivisibles, and Spiders, are also designed for angling techniques such as dancing a dry fly across the surface on a short line (in effect, the dry-fly equivalent of short-line nymphing) that could be used more often today.

However, beyond the criteria outlined above, all these flies have one other attribute that makes them classics. They're flat-out gorgeous. Because the Catskill dry has so few elements, it's the variations that stand out from pattern to pattern in a manner that suggests Bach or jazz. John Atherton's experiments with blending shades and colors, others' experiments with different kinds of quill bodies, hackles palmered over floss bodies (some of these flies were created as caddis imitations), and variations played on winging materials not only bespeak a fervent inventiveness that rivals anything going on today, but produced a kaleidoscope of fishing flies that are also simply beautiful objects.

Mike Valla's magisterial tying skills and expert macro photography, which can relentlessly expose any lapses in tying technique, have done full justice to the ideas of the originators of these patterns and to the beauty and balanced proportions of the flies. This is the first in a heavy vest full of "classic fly boxes" (wets, steamers . . . you get the idea), so stay tuned: *The Classic Wet Fly Box* is due out in May. Even if — or especially because — you've never heard of a Killer Diller, a Lady Benson, or the Spirit of Pittsford Mills, it's well worth taking a look into *The Classic Dry Fly Box*.

—Bud Bynack

For Sale

One 7½-foot Orvis Madison bamboo rod, 6-weight, 2-piece (1 tip), earlier 53XXX serial number. Shows normal fishing wear, VG to VG+ condition. Everything correct length, tight, and ready to fish. \$275 firm. Contact Dick Smith, (607) 498-6024

Late Note: Stanley Bogdan, perhaps the finest reel maker the world of fly fishing has ever known, passed away March 27, 2011, at the age of ninety-two.

☞ 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.