

# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild



# GAZETTE

Volume 11, number 3

June 2008

**The June meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild** will be held on Thursday, June 19, 2008, at 7:00 P.M. at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum's Education Building on Old Route 17 in Livingston Manor, NY.

Bob Mead will tie a lady-bug imitation and, if time permits, a mosquito. Bob's realistic flies, as those of you who have seen his work know, appear as if they could come to life and walk away. This is a chance to create a perfect imitation yourself. Bob will bring lady-bug backs, feelers, heads, and eyes for all who wish to tie along. Tyers need bring only size 16 dry-fly hooks, black thread, and a vise.

Paul Murphy, who arranges meeting programs, asks anyone interested in doing a demonstration at future meetings to contact him via e-mail at [pmurphy100@patmedia.net](mailto:pmurphy100@patmedia.net) or by phone at (518) 523-1427. Currently, the meeting of September 18, an evening meeting, is in need of a tyer to do a demo.

## Tyers Needed

We need a couple of tyers to staff a table at the Fourth of July Craft Festival in Roscoe, NY. Contact Judie DV Smith at [darbee1@juno.com](mailto:darbee1@juno.com).

## Raffles, Raffles

The 2007 Rendezvous fly plate is being framed by Ted Patlen. Raffle tickets for the fly plate will be on sale at the International Fly Tyers Symposium Show in Somerset, NJ, in November and at the other autumn shows.

Raffle tickets also are available for the framed David Footer print *Steep Bank Pool* at \$2.00 each, or three for \$5.00. Mail checks to CFTG Tickets, P.O. Box 663, Roscoe, NY 12776. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of your stubs. The drawing will be held in October. The raffle is for the benefit of the guild's Educational Fund. See page 8 for a photo of the print

## Thanks for Tying at the Pequest Open House

I would like to thank all of the tyers who made our second year at the Pequest Open House a good one. Tying at the Pequest State Fish Hatchery in Buttsville, NJ, on Saturday were Elmer Hopper, Charlie Bates, and me. On Sunday we had Chris Del Plato, John Kavanaugh, and Brian McKee, with John's son filling in for a stint at his dad's vise. Special thanks to John Kavanaugh for getting me the fly plate—it was a big hit. Also thanks to Paul Murphy for getting the patches, pins, and paperwork to

me and to Al Ampe for the guild's backdrop. It looks like New Jersey Fish and Game appreciates us participating in their open house, because we have been invited back again next year.

—John Collins

### The 2008 Rendezvous



The 2008 Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Rendezvous was held on Saturday, April 19, at the Rockland House. It was a stunning spring day, which is why most visitors stopped by on the way to or from the stream, where some of the usual participants may have been playing hooky, as well. But a gang of dedicated tyers renewed friendships, exchanged skills and tips, practiced their lies for the new trout season, enjoyed the fellowship of the guild, and even got a phone call from Jan Edman in Sweden.

Pictured above is Paul Weamer at the Rendezvous, tying one of his Truform flies. See the review of Weamer's *Fly-Fishing Guide to the Upper Delaware River* in this issue.

### The Bamboo Guys

After Opening Day celebrations, several members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild who are also know as the “Bamboo Guys” headed off to Livingston Manor High School to cast cane rods, first making a stop at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum for some of Agnes Van Put's famous Opening Day soups. This event is the brainchild of Mike Canzon (left), cane rod maker. Mike arranged for time at the high-school gym. Those who attended cast superbly crafted bamboo fly rods brought by fellow cane-rod enthusiasts—rods made by such notable makers as Leonard and Payne, as well as some made by local rod makers.



At least thirty different bamboo fly rods were available for anyone to pick up, make a few casts, and appreciate each rod's individual action. It was an opportunity to learn about and get to appreciate the suppleness and unique qualities of cane rods.

As part of this year's event, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation commissioner Alexander B. “Pete” Grannis was in attendance (right) and had a great time casting. Grannis is a fly fisher and picked up a few new skills casting the various rods.

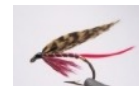
The time passed all too quickly, because only two-plus hours were allotted for the event. Next year, we hope we will be able to stay a bit longer, because a great time was had by all.

—Joe Ceballos

It was at a Catskill Fly Tyers Guild meeting on March 16, 2002, that I had the pleasure of meeting Ralph Hoffman and seeing him tie two wet flies that he originated—the Black Turkey and the Green Wisp. Two things caught my attention that day. First, Ralph said that these were the only two flies that he fished

### *The Wet-Fly Corner*

With Andy Brasko, a Genuine Wet-Fly Fisherman



with—he used the Green Wisp in the summertime, but the Black Turkey was a year-round pattern. And then, as I watched, he tied the flies the way they were tied a long time ago, by hand, without a bobbin—just glue and a hand whip finish.

After that meeting, I went to the Beaverkill Angler, bought the needed materials, and when I arrived home, went straight to my desk and started tying the two patterns that Ralph had demonstrated. I tied a dozen of each and placed them in my fly box, wanting to try them in the upcoming season.

The first time I tried fishing either of these patterns was on my yearly camping trip up in Livingston Manor at the Covered Bridge Campground on the Willowemoc. The first night, when I headed out fishing, I tied on a Black Turkey, made two or three casts, and was rewarded with a beautiful brown trout. The first thing that came to mind after I landed and released the fish was a big “Thank you” to Ralph Hoffman for showing me this pattern. “How can such a simple, sparse pattern catch fish?” I thought.

The rest of the week, there was not a day that the Black Turkey failed to catch a few fish. Then, back in New Jersey, on a slow day on my home waters in the Ken Lockwood Gorge, I said to myself, “Why not try the Black Turkey?” I wondered if a Catskill pattern would work there. A few casts later, I landed a beautiful brook trout. I was amazed, thanked Ralph once again, and proceeded to fish some more. I caught three more brook trout in twenty minutes.

I decided that it was time to test the Black Turkey further. That season, I managed to catch fish on a few more well-known streams in New Jersey and had much success at Mud Run, in Pennsylvania. At the International Fly-Tying Symposium in 2003, the Black Turkey was all I tied at the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild booth. A year later, I had the pleasure of speaking with Ralph again at a guild meeting. I told him about my angling success with the Black Turkey and thanked him for showing me how to tie it. Ralph tried to hide a smile and then proceeded to tell me that the Black Turkey would catch rainbows if I added a tag of gold. As we talked about wet-fly patterns and how they are fished, I felt privileged to be schooled in the fine art of wet-fly fishing by a man who was so knowledgeable and who wanted to share all that he had learned.

I will never forget Ralph, and I want to honor him in this article in the only way I know. I tied the Black Turkey pictured below by hand, with no bobbin—just glue and a hand whip finish.



Photo: Annie Brasko

## **The Black Turkey**

Hook: Mustad 3906, size 14

Thread: Black Uni-Thread, 8/0

Tail: Black hackle fibers

Body: One peacock herl

Throat/Beard: Black hackle fibers

Wing: Cinnamon-tipped turkey tail

**Tying Notes:** Once the tail has been tied in, tie in the peacock herl with the stem side of the herl facing the eye of the hook. Next add a small portion of head cement to cover the hook and wrap the herl

forward, keeping the stem side of the herl always facing the eye of the hook. The light coat of head cement reinforces the herl so it won't break when a fish bites down on it. Ralph told me that he preferred to use the cinnamon-tipped turkey tail because it adds a little more attraction to the fly, but that brown turkey tail would work well if cinnamon is not available. The wing segment is cut larger than what is needed, tri-folded, and tied in. Tri-folding is a technique used on many wet flies from Scotland that employ teal flank for the wing: Cut one segment of turkey tail about two times the size of the normal width of the wing, take the left end of the wing and fold it into the center, take the right side of the wing and fold it into the center, then fold the entire wing in half.



*Looking Back Upstream*

## **A Memorable Moment at “La Branche’s Junction” By Eric Peper**

It was early September 1974, and through a set of remarkably fortuitous circumstances, I was scheduled to spend a weekend fishing in the Catskills with Al McClane. I was working for *Field & Stream* at the time, managing a book club, so while meeting Al was inevitable, catching the globetrotting fishing editor for a fishing weekend was nothing short of a miracle.

At the time, I was a member of the DeBruce Flyfishing Club, so our accommodations for the weekend were very “Catskill traditional,” if not luxurious. We planned to cover the DeBruce water as well as the lower Beaverkill and possibly the Delaware. I knew the Catskill area pretty well, but Al knew it better than I, so there was every expectation that we'd run into plenty of fish.

We spent Friday night at my home in Rockland County, and Al, a gourmet and a highly respected chef and cookbook author, captured my wife's affection forever by praising her steak tartare appetizer as “hands down, the best I've ever eaten.” No affront to my wife's culinary talent, but I suspect the fact we had consumed several adult beverages in company with the appetizer no doubt added to its appeal. Saturday morning we were off at dawn for the ninety-minute drive to DeBruce.

We lucked into a perfect early September day, warm, with sparkingly clear skies and the merest hint of autumn in the air. After stowing our gear in the clubhouse, Al broke out a couple of rods that he said he wanted to show me. They were among the first commercial graphite fly rods to be seen in the United States. Both were Shakespeare rods, and by today's standards pretty crude looking. One was an eight-footer for a five line, the other an eight-and-a-half foot for an eight. We went to the ponds adjacent to the clubhouse, and Al strung them up.

As an aside, I must mention that at this particular point in my angling evolution, I was a “bamboo snob,” believing that if God had meant for man to fish with graphite, he would have grown graphite trees. I said as much to Al, and his only comment was, “Watch and try them. Then pass judgment.”

Now, I knew that Al could cast an entire fly line using nothing but his arm, but to watch him cast a rod was to experience perfection. The line sang from the rod with tight loops, carrying to surreal distances. There was no perceptible difference in the smoothness and delicacy of the cast between the eight and the five. At Al's request, I tried the five-weight and had to admit that it made casting awfully easy.

But then Al did something that I still have trouble comprehending to this day. He mentioned that graphite made for a very “forgiving” rod that would adapt itself to casting motions that were not necessarily smooth or consistent. To demonstrate, he held both rods in one hand and began casting them in perfect harmony, throwing perfect loops of perhaps fifty feet of line from each rod, the leaders landing with gossamer lightness as he completed each cast. “Do you think I could do this with

bamboo?" he asked. My response was, "Yes, I'm pretty sure *you* could, but I know damned well I couldn't do it with bamboo, or glass, or graphite, or a magic wand!"

We laughed, had a beer and went fishin'. It is interesting to note that when we decided to "go fishin'," Al's weapon of choice was a Paul Young Martha Marie with a Hardy LRH snugged into its reel seat. Needless to say, I had to make mention of this apparent anomaly, and Al's response was, "Could I fish anything else in the Catskills? This is still my favorite trout rod, no matter where I go." And as he said that, I noted, much to my amazement, that this world-renowned angler, this man who had fished anywhere that game fish are to be found, this man who had written about every technique of fishing for every fish imaginable, was as excited about the prospects of fishing for trout in a little Catskill stream as a kid with a new toy.

We elected to fish the stretch of the upper Willowemoc from what is known as "Big Rock" up to the junction of the Willowemoc with the Mongaup, where it is said George M. L. La Branche first fished the dry fly in the United States. In a gracious gesture that I came to know was typical of Al, he said, "I'm going to take a while getting set up. You go on ahead, and I'll follow you upstream in a few minutes."

Based on prior experience, I tied on an 18 Dun Variant and began picking up a fish here and there as I worked up the stream. Arriving at "The Rhododendron Run," I landed a nice sixteen-inch fish and broke off another good fish at the head of the pool. I continued up around the bend to the Junction Pool and sat down on the right bank to wait for Al. I'd landed and released about eight fish in the course of my walk.

About twenty minutes later, I heard Al wading the bank opposite me, then watched as he picked a nice fish from a pocket I'd bypassed. After he'd landed and released the fish. I asked how he'd done, and was nonplussed when he answered, "Oh a couple dozen, I guess."

Now, I thought of myself as being a fairly proficient angler, particularly on the DeBruce Club water, which I fished quite regularly. To think that anyone could fish directly behind me and take even a few fish after I'd covered the water was, I thought, unimaginable. For someone to have taken two dozen was, shall we say, an introduction to a level of expertise that I would understand and appreciate more fully by the end of the weekend.

My amazement was compounded when I asked Al what fly he'd been using. "A number 12 Adams," he said, "I've always found they like something big at this time of year." Now, it's likely a number 12 Adams would have been my choice for that water at that time of year about as quickly as a number four Jock Scott . . . but then I realized I was learning.

Al walked up to the bank on the Mongaup side of the Junction and sat down, while I was still "prospecting" on the opposite side. As I glanced upstream, I saw a good-sized head bulge the water just above where the Mongaup bubbles into the Willowemoc. I told Al to watch the spot, and soon the head appeared again. I told Al to give the fish a try, and he remarked, "No. I want to see you catch it." This was kind of like Vladimir Horowitz asking you to take his turn playing Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto for a packed house at Carnegie Hall. I felt a tad numb.

Nonetheless, I shook out some line and measured the distance with false casts well away from the fish's hidey hole, which was tucked under a branch hard against the opposite bank from where I stood. The distance was comfortable, but the location in which the fly had to be placed was about the size of a dinner plate.

The ghost of George La Branche had to have been perched on my shoulder, because the first cast was dead on the mark, and the fish responded, sucking in the—guess what?—number 12 Adams as if it had been wired.

"Nice job!" Al cheered, "Bring it over here and let's see if it's a boy or a girl." I played the fish down into the deeper water of the Junction and crossed in the shallow water of the tail as the fish

slugged it out in the center of the pool. I walked up to where Al was sitting and led the fish in to the bank. He slid a hand under the fish and lifted it. "Great! It's a girl."

Now this is where the whole scene gets a little weird. Al extracted a small, elegant knife from a sheath clipped to his vest and slapped the brown smartly on the top of its head, killing it instantly. In one motion, the razor-sharp knife slit the trout's belly from vent to gills, while with his other hand, Al dipped two fingers into the trout's innards and scooped out about a teaspoon of fresh roe, which he popped directly into his mouth.

I think he may have noticed my jaw hanging open. "Haven't you ever tried this?" I recall shaking my head in the negative. "Fresh brown trout roe goes for about seventy-five dollars an ounce in Tokyo, and they can't get enough of it. Wanna try some?" he said, offering the fish to me.

My only thoughts at that point were that Al's not a sleight-of-hand magician, and he doesn't appear suicidal. "Sure, uh, I guess so" I stammered, whereupon I had the good fortune to taste what I still recall as one of the finest delicacies I ever hope to experience. I was absolutely amazed, as I would continue to be amazed for the rest of our weekend together by this Renaissance man of angling. I learned more about trout and trout fishing and the Catskills in those three days than I had learned in the previous twenty years of bumbling about on my own. I was also quite certain that Al and I were the first anglers ever to have eaten fresh brown trout roe on the banks of the Junction Pool, and I am equally certain that even if George La Branche were not impressed by that, Edward Hewitt surely would have been.

*Eric Peper grew up fishing the Catskill rivers and was the editor of the Field & Stream Book Club. He is the author of Fly Fishing the Beaverkill, with Gary LaFontaine. He now lives in Austin, TX, and Island Park, ID.*

## Book Review

### *Fly-Fishing Guide to the Upper Delaware River*

*By Paul Weamer. Published by Stackpole Books, 2007; \$24.95 softbound.*

"Had any death threats yet?" somebody asked Paul Weamer at the 2008 Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Rendezvous. He was referring to the imagined reaction of anglers angry over the disclosure of hard-won information about how, when, and where to fish "their" river in Weamer's *Fly-Fishing Guide to the Upper Delaware River*. "Actually, no," Weamer smiled. That may be because, as someone else noted, rather than increasing pressure on the river by betraying its secrets, Weamer's book is more likely to refocus angling pressure on a wider variety of locations. It does what a good guidebook ought to do: It makes its subject accessible to all. That means that if it betrays *your* secret spot, it also betrays some other angler's secret spot to you. It will broaden everyone's horizons.

*Fly-Fishing Guide to the Upper Delaware River* both recognizes the multiple contingencies that affect angling on a complex tailwater fishery like the upper Delaware and provides clear and comprehensive information on access points, river structure, hatches, fly patterns, and, perhaps most significantly, the myriad issues affecting the health of the river and its fish. In fact, that last topic is most likely the book's real contribution to the fishery. Throughout and also in a separate chapter titled "Understanding the Resource" at the end, Weamer educates readers in the ways in which human interventions, from control of water releases by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (an ironic appellation, in this context) to agricultural runoff have affected and continue to affect the East Branch, West Branch, and Main Stem of the Delaware. As has often been recognized, anglers are the best and sometimes the only advocates for rivers and the life that depends on them. Weamer makes clear that if you fish the upper Delaware, you cannot shirk that role.

Also, I speak from experience when I say that there has been a real need for a guidebook to the upper Delaware system. When I returned to the East after twenty-five years in California and Oregon, I followed the time-honored advice that when you move to a new area, you should pick one river and try to learn it, rather than scatter your efforts and learn nothing well. As it happened, I fell in love with the Willowemoc, because it reminded me of the Little Truckee. It also has a bit more of a gradient than most other Catskill rivers. I started fly fishing on the Deschutes and fished the upper Sacramento and Truckee a lot, and the low-gradient rivers of the East seemed like a closed book to me.

That was certainly the case when, finally ready to branch out, I drove up Route 206 to Pepacton Reservoir and down Route 30 to check out the East Branch. Thought balloons full of question marks exploded over my head. The river looked to be about two feet deep and seemed to have no fish-holding structure at all. And how could you access it? Private property can be a problem in the West, but on the rivers I fished, it really wasn't. On the East Branch, the access issue had me completely flummoxed.

Weamer's book solved that problem, plus a lot of others that I didn't even know I had. Maps and text comprehensively document access points and the pools and riffles upriver and downriver from them, pointing out where fish are likely to hold under various flow regimes and temperature conditions and discussing drift-boat launches and take-outs, along with where canoes and pontoon boats can be launched, private-property closures as of the book's writing, and a host of other details. Access points come complete with both driving instructions and GPS coordinates, which, along with Weamer's detailed notes on drifting the rivers, are helpful to boating and wading anglers alike.

And I'm not kidding when I say that Weamer's text is comprehensive. Except for the publisher's seeming inability to find space for the "the" in "the Upper Delaware River" on the cover, nothing gets left out. It's hard to think of any topic or issue of interest to either wading or boating anglers that Weamer doesn't discuss—in depth.

Following chapters on the West Branch, East Branch, and Main Stem, there is, first, a detailed chapter, "Fish and How to Catch Them," that covers not just browns, rainbows, and brook trout, but shad, stripers, and even walleyes, plus equipment, tips for dry-fly and wet-fly fishing, fly patterns (including Weamer's own innovative Truform flies and Comparachutes, with their parachute hackle tied on the bottom of the hook), night fishing, and wading and boating etiquette. Subsequent chapters follow the hatches through the seasons, including the winter, with general fly recipes for each bug—nymph, dun and spinners for mayflies, larva, pupa, and adults for caddisflies, and nymph and adult for stoneflies. Weamer claims that his discussions "don't include every hatch that can occur on the rivers," because "nearly every mayfly, caddisfly, and stonefly species that exists in the eastern United States lives in the Upper Delaware system." Nevertheless, I've been reading about fly fishing, editing books and articles about fly fishing, and even occasionally writing about fly fishing for more years than it is comfortable to remember, and there are species of aquatic insect covered here that I've never seen discussed before in an angling book or article. If you're the sort of person who is convinced that a fly box with some Royal Wulffs, Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear Nymphs, and maybe an Adams or two is all anyone should ever need on a trout stream, you may not find this section as much of a revelation as I did, but if you care about hatch matching—and there are times when the fish force you to do so—the chapters on hatches are a must-read.

As I said, the book ends by returning to the issues with which it began—the state of the rivers as tailwaters at the mercy of releases from the dams in the New York City water system. To understand these rivers, it is not enough to know where to fish and when, or what hatch to match. Their very existence as angling venues is imbricated in a series of overlapping political, legal, economic, and demographic issues and cannot be disengaged from them. Despite their complicated and sometimes technical nature, Weamer does a great job of clearly articulating both the issues at stake for the fishery (including an illuminating section on how the laws to trespass apply—or are unclear—on the three rivers) and the positions that he believes responsible anglers should take on those issues. As he says in

the Introduction, "The river has no voice. It is up to those of us who love the Delaware to ensure that it continues to flow cold, clean, and full of trout."

—Bud Bynack

## Obituaries

**Dr. George Webster Taggart**, ophthalmologist, passed away at the age of eighty-three on April 30, 2008, at Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, after a brief illness. After retirement, Dr. Taggart spent more time with his family and grandchildren, enjoying his many varied hobbies: jazz and country music, fly tying, fly fishing, camping, and raising game fowl and Blue Dun chickens.

He leaves behind his wife of fifty-six years, Liela Kirpalni Taggart; children and their spouses, Dr. Nina Taggart and Mark Ungvarsky, of Sugarloaf, PA; Dr. Tina Taggart and Dr. Michael Geiss III, of Syracuse, NY; attorney Pia Taggart and Stephen Boyd; of Sugarloaf, PA; and Ian and Sandra (Skeeba) Taggart, of Etters, PA.

**John Edward McCullough**, of Honesdale, PA, passed away at age seventy-two on Wednesday, May 14, 2008. He is survived by his wife Gloria McCullough. John McCullough was born in Paterson, NJ, and for many years was a commercial arborist in Sussex City, NJ. He also owned the Beaverkill Angler in Roscoe, NY, for several years. He had a love of nature, particularly maple trees, and he enjoyed fly fishing and his two pets, Emma and Buddy.

He is survived by three daughters, Lauren McArdle of Ireland, Rachel McCullough of New Jersey, Rebecca Giamanco of Staten Island, a son, John McCullough of California, and granddaughters Erin and Nicole Berman of New Jersey. Memorial contributions can be made to the Hospice St. John, 416 Main Street, Suite D, Honesdale, Pa 18431.

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 <<<<<<<**



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.

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*



*Steep Bank Pool*, by David Footer