

# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild



# GAZETTE

Volume 12, number 4

August 2009

**The Annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Picnic** will be held on Saturday, August 15, from noon to 4:00 P.M. at the Elsie and Harry Darbee and Matthew Vinciguerra Memorial Pavilion at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY.

Once again this year, instead of the guild supplying hot dogs and hamburgers and attendees bringing a side dish to pass, we're asking that some attendees bring a main dish—perhaps something like lasagna, baked ziti, or sloppy joes and hamburger buns. Use your imagination! Finding a gas grill or building a fire has become a chore, no one wants to give up having fun in order to cook, and it will both save the guild some money and save the innumerable hassles involved in the way we did things in the past. As before, bring your own plates and silverware and your own beverages. Guests are welcome, as long as we can plan for them.

Please let Erin Phelan know what you are bringing and how many are coming or if you want to know what we are short of and should bring. Erin's email is [jphelan@hvc.rr.com](mailto:jphelan@hvc.rr.com), or call her at (845) 754-7456. Casting-game commissioner Gary Sweet will be unable to attend this year, so if casting games are going to be held, someone will have to organize them on the spot—or contact Erin ahead of time. At least bring a rod or two—cane, glass, or graphite—so people can play with each other's toys. Also, bring two flies that are alike—one to trade and one for the guild—if possible, in separate film containers. (See Dave Brandt's discussion of the guild's archive below).

**The September meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild** will be held on Thursday, September 17, 2009, at 7:00 P.M. in the Education Building of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum on Old Route 17 in Livingston Manor, NY. David Bailey, of Hamden, New York on the West Branch of the Delaware, will be tying a Pale Evening Dun, his own creation, born of necessity. David is an auto mechanic and captures some grease on his hands, which affected the body color of his Pale Evening Duns. He solved the problem by using a domestic turkey feather and coloring it with a magic marker to get the color he needed.

### **Materials List**

Hook: Standard dry fly, size 14 to 18

Thread: Primrose yellow

Tail: Light blue dun

Body: White turkey feather colored with magic marker

Wing: Hen hackle

Hackle: Light dun

For all who wish to tie with him, David will supply the turkey body and the hen hackle wing, which he burns to shape with a wing burner.

—Paul Murphy

# The Care and Feeding of Flies for the Guild's Archives

By Dave Brandt

Recently, I had to search through a large, disheveled pile of flies to find something by a certain tyer, done at a particular event. The flies had been amassed over time, not yet having been neatly, clearly, or safely put to bed, and were in a shambles. I volunteered to house the flies owned by the guild and will happily continue to do so unless someone else feels the urge . . . but I need your help.

The flies that we have collected through our more or less monthly meeting swaps or have gathered at show's end from the various generous and talented members who serve the guild at these events may be stored and held perhaps for years before being put into frames used as fundraisers or donated as boxed collections to various nonprofit groups to use them for fishing. Those flies used at fundraising events as framed collections are usually put up by another generous and talented member of the guild, Ted Patlen.

I'd like to suggest a few do's and don'ts concerning the care and feeding of the flies destined for the guild's archives. My own tying, donating, and swapping usually involves one or a group of dry flies. This is why my first suggestion concerns them.

Do not stick a dry fly into anything or put it into an envelope, bag, or into hard, three-dimensional storage that's not quite large enough for it to fit. Just this morning, I was looking again at a nice little fan-wing Royal Coachman that had been tied and donated by yet another generous and talented member of the guild, Joe Fox. The fly had been stuck, beyond its barb, into the edge of a business card. Worse, it had then simply been allowed to float around in a big cardboard box with other larger, heavier stuff that was shucking about and free to squash and scrunch and do other unspeakable things to the defenseless little fan-wing fly. Even being stuck into a card, then put into a smaller box by itself might have allowed it to be beaten up by the card edge, trapped between the card and the box. If the fly somehow managed to escape death from card, box, or other flies, it could have been mangled in the process of freeing it from its card for presentation in a frame.

A dry fly might be much more fragile than a wet or bucktail just because it is more of a three-dimensional object and simply needs more room to be kept. When I tied flies commercially, the last thing I wanted to see, but occasionally did, was a patron placing a perky dry into an envelope or Ziploc bag. The little fan-wing Royal Coachman miraculously fared well, but please: Put a dry fly into a suitable, properly sized container.

Other flies can be slightly less demanding . . . maybe. Hair-wing wets and bucktails might stand a little more handling, but care should be taken to put long flies into long containers. Married-wing wets, like those colorful old brookie patterns, and, of course, full-dress salmon flies, require a little extra care in handling, as well as in storing. I've tied only a couple of the old full-dress classics, but I can tell you that one of the most sure-fire means of finding yourself suddenly shot, punched, or at the very least, severely admonished would be to muck up the wings on a full-dress, maybe married-wing salmon fly after having picked it up to check it out while in full view of the master who had just completed its dressing.

This might happen through careless handling or even *any* handling by the uninitiated. There are as few good hand holds on these flies as there are on someone else's fine, expensive side-by-side. Perhaps fortunately, full-dress salmon patterns fall for the most part outside of the guild's domain, but there is still more handling etiquette to contend with than most of us realize. Although thin flies, standard wets, as well as some of the more complex salmon wets are easier to store than dries because

of the space required, many classic feather-wing streamers demand the same care as the full-dress flies, so give the matter a little thought.

'Nuff said about patterns. Two other issues that we need to deal with, or better yet, avoid having to deal with, are water and bugs. A third, usually less of an issue, but one to consider, is sunlight. Water certainly has been a problem for us in recent times. We lost many flies due to the flooding that has occurred locally several times in the last few years. Even some flies that were not subjected directly to water damage from the flooding were ultimately ruined by prolonged dampness, perhaps even in a seemingly dry container. Many of these flies have been discarded, and others are even now being carefully scrutinized to determine their suitability, if any, for framing. This should be the kind of problem that should come up only rarely and one that might easily be avoided with a little luck and some forethought in storage.

Bugs, on the other hand, might be a problem that rears its ugly head periodically. An insect problem can be hard to discern and equally hard to beat once they've been discovered. For example, the guild had to deal with bugs in the materials board that we put together as a display for the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. Needless to say, there might be some heartbreak and expense between discovery and cure. This is why prevention is by far the better goal.

The chief method that I employ to keep flies safe from bugs is to keep archived flies in sealed containers. Since I can't account for any past conditions in which the fly may have been kept, nor can the guild, we have a very strong argument for individual containers. Almost everything that we, as fly tyers, purchase, comes in Ziploc bags. While these, in the myriad sizes available, can serve very nicely for two-dimensional items, film canisters or other tightly closable vials or boxes can safely house the dry flies.

The key phrase in the last sentence was "tightly closable." Most of the fly boxes that most of us carry in our vests or use to store flies in at home are *not* bugproof. This means, among other things, that the placement of a dry fly in a paper envelope is doubly a bad thing to do. When a black film canister is used, the problem of sunlight is gone, as well as the dilemma concerning the six-legged fly eaters. Further, I would suggest that you seek out some of the black canisters with the light-gray caps, because these may be easily labeled using a black Sharpie marker. There is surprising variety in film canisters out there, any of which might work nicely for you, and all of which may soon be going the way of the dodo bird.

The last of things that I'll mention simply concerns making the job of the archivist, whether it is you or me, a tiny bit easier. It starts with a thing as simple as printing your name nicely and clearly, along with the pattern and size, on the piece of paper that should attend the fly. The printed name is in addition to any signature that might be asked for later.

One more thing that I would very much like to see noted is the date. This would be the date of the meeting, swap, or event where or when the fly was tied, or two dates, if the fly was tied at a time considerably different from when it was given. All these little details will become an immense aid later. Just assume that the person to whom you hand a fly now will not convey all the pertinent data to the next recipient. Since it's not automatically known, the person admiring your work twenty-nine years from now, who may not know you from Adam, may never know the name of the creator of that nifty little fly. It's bad enough when it's because some word or name isn't quite legible, but worse if there just isn't enough information with the fly.

Look at it this way: You buy, in an auction, some small fly book with a few faded old trout flies stuck in the felt pages, slowly rusting away, maybe even a few old snelled wets. (What heavy gut they used, eh?) We've all found some neat little treasure like this and happily paid thirty dollars for it, but just imagine if the flies weren't faded, weren't beat up by fish or by handling or by the very pages of the fly book and weren't stuck in anything from which you'd have to dislodge them. What if all the patterns were clearly labeled, and, to boot, the names of those who had tied them were there, along

with the dates they were dressed! All this for thirty dollars. . . . What a find! Treasures like that are what the guild tries to accumulate at every meeting. Help us make our collection of your flies what it needs to be.

## Living Within Your Means; Or, How to Avoid the Book Bubble

By Bill Leuzsler

With the recent changes in our economy, I thought it would be a good time to reflect on a subject possibly of interest to guild members: good, low-priced books related to Catskill fly tying. I thought the best way to discuss this subject would be to answer a question that is often put to me at tying demonstrations. It is usually asked by an individual who is just getting into fly tying and who wants to learn more about tying in the Catskill tradition: “What books would you recommend?”

Naturally, I could suggest some real greats: Eric Leiser’s *The Dettas—A Catskill Legend: Their Story and Their Techniques* (1992) or Harry Darbee’s *Catskill Flytier: My Life, Times, and Techniques* (1977). That would be easy. But right now, a copy of the Dette book in decent condition is going for anywhere between \$60.00 and over \$250.00 used, and used copies of the Darbee book are in the same range. That’s just too much for a beginner. So I decided to try to identify what book or collection of books could be bought used for under \$25.00 total.

I used an Internet used-book site to establish the present prices for the books. This is ABE Books: [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com). ABE Books once was a paper-and-ink publication by a collective of used-book sellers, and until about twenty-five years ago, it was a monthly publication available by subscription through the mail. It is now an on-line source for selling and buying used books. I assume that all these books also can be purchased for roughly the same price used through Amazon. Naturally, given the price constraints I’ve set, they are all paperbacks. And all prices given here include shipping.

There were four distinct subject areas that I hoped to capture in the book selections. The first and most important was tying instruction. The second was pattern selection. The third was something to give a beginner a basic sense of entomology that is specific to the Catskill region. And the fourth is what I refer to as “Catskill culture,” which puts it all together.

At this time, I’m not aware of any single book that captures all four of these subject areas and that is available for less than \$25.00. Leiser’s book on the Dettas captures three of the four (it doesn’t deal with entomology) and does so better than any other book that I know. But it’s too pricey for a beginner. So a combination of four books does the best job of covering all four subject areas. I would want to add *Catskill Rivers: Birthplace of American Fly Fishing*, by Austin Francis, which would add a lot under the “Catskill culture” topic, but it wouldn’t make anybody a better fly tyer. I can be gotten used in a reprint paperback for around \$10.00, shipping included.

Here are the books that I chose, which would cost about \$25.00 used.

*The Practical Fly Fisherman*, by A. J. McClane (Stoeger, 1978). This book combines two of the categories noted above. It is a “how to fly fish” book, but covers patterns and has four colored plates of noted Catskill flies popular in the 1950s. The flies pictured in the plates are reportedly all tied by Walt Dette. Used, \$4.00.

*Superior Flies*, by Leonard Wright (Lyons & Burford Cortland Library Series, 1989). Without a doubt, this is a must-have for any beginning or intermediate tyer. The purpose of the book is to give a sense of what a good fly will look like. In addition, Wright offers advice on what selections to carry in your fly box. Many of the suggestions reflect the several years of the author’s fishing experiences in the Catskills. The pen-and-ink drawings add a great deal. Used, \$6.00.

*A Book of Trout Flies*, by Preston Jennings (Crown, 1972). This was one of the first true “Catskill” books that I bought. It deals with two of the subject areas very well. The patterns described are many of the traditionals, and it covers basic entomology. There are also some sparse tying instructions. I spent a lot of time deciding whether Art Flick’s *Streamside Guide to Naturals and Their Imitations* would be a better choice here, and I finally decided it wouldn’t. Jennings’s book offers a much more balanced coverage of all trout foods, including ants, caddisflies, and minnows. Used, \$10.00.

*Flick’s Master Guide*, edited and with a contribution by Art Flick (Crown, 1975). This is a good all-around instruction book with chapters by many well-known fly tyers of the 1970s, including Helen Shaw, Dave Whitlock, and Carl Richards. The chapter by Art Flick on tying dry flies is worth the price of the whole book. Even though many of the patterns detailed have little to do with the Catskill style, technique is technique, and this is probably the closest I can find to a low-priced instruction book. I would imagine that the *Orvis Guide to Beginning Fly Tying*, by Eris Leiser and Matthew Vinciguerra (Lyons, 1995, about \$5.00, used) would be another option, but I am not familiar enough with that book to suggest it. Flick’s book is \$5.00, used.

There you have it! I had a great time figuring all this out. Give it a try yourself—I might have missed something. It sure would make for a good discussion.

*Editor’s note:* Guild member Mike Valla has just published *Tying Catskill Dry Flies* (Headwater Books, \$49.95 hardbound), covering “the history of the region’s rivers, fly fishers, and fly tiers and blending their colorful histories with precise step-by-step tying methods.” Early responses have been enthusiastic. Check it out—and write a review for the *Gazette*.

This month’s fly is a pattern that you probably have never seen or fished. It’s a fly that during Bug Week in June 2009 had me running off stream singing “I’ve Got a Golden Ticket,” like Charlie


Bucket in the movie *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. I find great joy when I fish with flies that I never fished before and they turn out to be true fish catchers right from the start.

The fly is called the Romaine. About two years ago, I was looking for some new wet flies to tie from Ray Bergman’s *Trout*, and I stumbled upon this pattern. I thought to myself “Hmmm: Simple, easy, and a dash of the exotic with guinea hen for the wing and tail.” I sat down at my tying bench to bring this pattern to life, and when I saw the fly fully completed, I just knew this forgotten pattern would catch fish.

I first fished this fly in late April on my home waters in the Ken Lockwood Gorge, a pristine section on the South Branch of the Raritan River. It took only ten minutes for this fly to produce its first fish, and I went on to have a great morning of fishing. The reason I say “morning” is because I broke one of my golden rules and didn’t have at least half a dozen of the same pattern in my fly box. Instead, I only had two of these flies with me. One caught about eight fish and the other caught a huge tree.

For the past three years, I have been experimenting with a lot of new wet-fly patterns and did not try this pattern again until this past June—as I said, during Bug Week. I started on the Beaverkill with a two-wet-fly rig that had a Greenwell’s Glory as an anchor and a dropper with the Romaine. At first, the Greenwell’s Glory was catching fish, as it normally does, and I felt that I should cut the Romaine off. I left it on, though, and a while later caught my first fish on it. Then I made a few more casts and landed another fish on the Romaine, so I decided to see what this pattern really could do. I

***The Wet-Fly Corner***  
With Andy Brasko, a Genuine Wet-Fly Fisherman



switched from the two-wet-fly rig and fished with the Romaine exclusively, landing four fish in about twenty-five minutes.

I was camping that week at the Covered Bridge Campground on the upper Willowemoc and decided to fish the evening hours on this section of stream. That was when I really learned about this fly. I fished for about an hour and a half and caught seven trout, one a fifteen-inch brown. I made it up to the bridge at dusk, planning to finish the night off there before returning to camp, made a cast, and was rewarded with an eight-inch brookie. I made another cast, let the line fully straighten, waited a few seconds, and received a violent strike and landed a nine-inch brown. Then I made another cast and landed another brown about the same size. I moved two feet farther downstream, cast again, and was rewarded with another brown. I caught fourteen fish in less than thirty minutes before I quit fishing and went back to my campsite with a grin the size of Texas.

The next day, I decided to fish the Willowemoc at Covered Bridge Park, and again the only fly I used was the Romaine. I first fished up the stream all the way around the bend to the bridge where Route 17 crosses the river. Wherever there was a riffle or strong current, I would either get a hit or land a fish. I caught five fish in that section and lost three others. Then I hiked back down to the covered bridge and gave it a go underneath it. I made about five casts, then received a violent strike. The fly line was pulled straight down, and a lot of tugging was going on. It took me about two minutes of fighting to land my biggest fish of the week, which was a seventeen-and-a-half-inch brown. I continued fishing and about three casts later picked up another brown of about nine inches. I continued fishing and about fifteen casts later, I allowed my line to straighten out fully, left it sitting there for ten seconds, and received a strong tug. It was a thirteen-inch brown. I called it a day and went back to the camp site, tired and happy from a good day's fishing.

This fly worked in cloudy, sunny, and rainy conditions. It caught browns, brookies, and even a rainbow trout during the week. It definitely pleasantly surprised me, and I hope I have inspired you to tie this fly and give it a try, too.

One more thing: The fly was—yes, you guessed it—a size 8.



### **The Romaine**

Hook: Mustad 3906, size 8

Thread: White Danville 6/0 (underbody) and black Danville 6/0 (head)

Tag: Size 16/18 gold Mylar tinsel

Tail: Paired guinea hen wings (three quill segments)

Body: Green wool, one strand

Rib: None



Wings: Guinea hen wings  
Beard/false hackle: Black hen saddle  
Head: One coat of Griff's Thin, two coats of Griff's Thick

### Tying Notes

The fly is from Plate 7 in Bergman's *Trout*. The pattern for this fly can be found on page 443. This is one fly on which I prefer to use a beard/false hackle, instead of a full-collar hackle. I have also discovered that hen saddle makes a nicer-looking beard/false hackle than schlappen. The fly pictured is a fishing fly. If you want to make a show fly, use a wider width of guinea hen for the wing and use just a tad wider slip of hen saddle for the beard/false hackle.



### Opening Day

*In the heat of August, a cool breeze from the beginning of the 2009 season, when all was still an uncertain promise. The names of the small streams and ponds in this e-mail have been redacted to protect their innocence.*

**From:** Ed Ostapczuk  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 01, 2009 7:23 PM  
**Subject:** Another campaign under way

**April 1—Catskills:** The day started with a conflict of emotions: dull, dark, and dreary outside, excited expectations within as the birth of a new trout season was about to unfold. I no longer take part in any predawn rituals, because my hackle has turned grizzly. Instead, I had breakfast with my wife—and then made ready to fish.

For a short time, it drizzled lightly as I set up my little 7½-foot, highly polished Battenkill 5-weight at my first stop. I had the feeling I had left something at home on this first outing of the new year, though. Sure enough, I had misplaced/forgotten my book of premade tippets, so I built a tippet on the spot, then without any thought to the matter attached a size 12 weighted *Epeorus* nymph and a size 14 weighted Hare's Ear Nymph dropper to the end of my leader. As for the choice of flies, these two patterns have served me well too many Opening Days to give anything else even slight consideration beginning a new season.

I wandered [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] for just about an hour and a half, with my first order of business regaining use of my "sea legs." Afterward, I tended to discarding the rust that covered my fishing armor. Twice, my little fluorescent strike indicator darted forward, and I never attempted to set the hook. Then I lost a small trout almost at my feet that I didn't even know was holding on to one of my nymphs. However, eventually, I landed the hardest trout for me to catch every season, my first—in this case a 13¼-inch brown with my *Epeorus* nymph buried in the corner of its jaw.

My next stop found me at [REDACTED], which was very low, gin clear, and cold. I never experienced a single hit in half an hour's time, and the weather grew chilly and windy. I also noticed a distinct lack of any insect life. At my first stop, wet rocks held numerous caddis pupae, which must have been stranded as flows receded. Then my Subaru and I climbed the mountain, heading toward

██████, but first stopping at ████████████████████. This stream was also extremely low, clear, and cold, with my favorite pools filled with new woody deadfall. And the exposed iron-red sedimentary streambed caused the little brook to appear as if it was bleeding. In another half hour's time, I had several hits while catching two small brook trout before reaching the waterfalls and quitting.

Winnisook Lake was approximately 50 percent ice free, while the forest along U.C. Route 47 held numerous patches of deep snow. Winter has not fully retreated from this piece of the Catskills. Then I checked out ██████████, which is still a few days away from ice-out. So I walked along some low, clear no-name rivulets looking for any signs of life. I didn't see any. In fact, the thing I saw was winter staring back at me.

Undaunted, I took out my new Weiler 7-foot 4-weight Garrison taper and continued my search, only this time with a fly rod in hand. I wandered for about an hour and a half, probably too long a stay, given the conditions. Campers wore winter coats, hats, and gloves; snow lay along the edge of the streams in many places; the air temperature never got over 39 degrees; and I could see my breath. But I loved casting that new cane rod, so I was content for the time being. I did observe two small trout. One rose in ██████████, and the other was stranded in a low flow, so I picked it up and released it in deeper water. Driving back down the mountain, I enjoyed listening to Moya Brennan, a St. Patrick's Day present from my bride. I'll be back, and the fishing will only get better.

Today's outing ended in the vicinity of ██████████ on some favorite early season water. I fished for an hour and a half while the weather turned nasty. It got really cold as a wind-driven rain fell, causing me to retreat once to add extra layers of warmth. But the nastier the weather got, the better the fishing got. I picked up eleven more brook trout. Most were small, three six to nine inches, plus one behemoth, which deserves its own e-mail musing. The entire time I braved the elements at this last location I watched treetops on a distant ridge grow white and that new white stuff slowly work its way down the mountainside.

By 3:30 P.M., I was done for the day, having fished some five and a half hours while enjoying Opening Day in my normal, traditional fashion—touring the Catskills. And I'm here to report that it appears we—forests, rivers, and anglers alike—survived yet another Catskill winter. By any measure that I use, it was a good day, and I even caught a few trout besides.

So that's it, another opener is in the books, as the '09 campaign is now officially under way.

—Ed

## Letters

Bob Mead's sensitive update on Fran Betters's health reminded me of the last time I visited Fran's shop, a few years ago. I walked in wearing one of my many fishing caps, and after visiting with him for a few minutes, I mentioned that I had one of my own Ausable Wulffs impaled on the hat's brim. Fran said, "May I see it?" and held out his hand. He examined the fly carefully for quite a while, and then he handed the cap back to me. He quietly said, "Nice tie." That pretty well made my day.

In fact, that terse approval from one of the most innovative tyers our avocation has ever seen meant more to me than if I had won the recent two-fly tying contest that got so much publicity. Actually, I placed almost exactly in the middle of that contest. I would like to have done better, but that wasn't so bad for an octogenarian, I think.

—Alan M. Fletcher, Ithaca, New York, via e-mail



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](mailto:budbynack@verizon.net) or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY, 10708, (914) 961-3521.