The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Gazette

Volume 26, number 5 September 2023

The next in-person gathering of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be at the guild's picnic, Saturday, September 30, from 12:00 noon to 3:00 PM, at the Darbee and Vinciguerra Pavilion on the grounds of the CFFCM. Read on in this issue for details. The next regular meeting of the guild will be on Saturday, October 21, at 10:00 AM, in the Wulff Gallery of the CFFCM. Email reminders for both events will be sent.

Ed Walsh uses his Leonard Model 40 to make a careful presentation to a fussy trout.
Photo: Chuck Coronato

President's Message
By Joe Ceballos

Greetings guild members! Fall is almost here and water levels are looking excellent. It's a good time to have your best Blue-winged Olive patterns ready, and maybe some Isonychia, too.

The guild has been gaining in membership thanks to the efforts of our new secretary, Ed Walsh. He has been working tirelessly at preparing notices for renewals and updating our old membership list. Ed deserves big thanks. We now are at 280 members and growing.

In our ongoing and developing relationship with the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, we've been scheduling Saturday weekend fly tyers at the museum for their Saturday Tyers Series. Big thanks go out to all guild members who have volunteered to tie. Thanks again go to Ed Walsh and John Apgar for reaching out and coordinating the tyers. Between Ed and John's efforts, plus the amazing response from guild members, all of the dates for September, October, and November have been filled. If you'd like to volunteer to tie at the museum, be on the lookout for another call for tyers in the future, as the success of this joint venture between the guild and the museum is likely to be an ongoing program. In addition to the joy that we all get from tying in such a special location, it's a great way to help support the CFFCM, as all tyers are asked to provide a tied fly that will eventually wind up in a shadow box for a raffle, with the money going to the museum.

I'm happy to say that the guild is bringing back our annual picnic. This year, we will meet on Saturday, September 30, at the CFFCM. This should be an excellent and fun day for all. Read on in this issue of the Gazette for details regarding the picnic.

Tight lines everyone!

The Guild Picnic is September 30

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will have a picnic on Saturday, September 30, at the Darbee and Vinciguerra Pavilion on the grounds of the CFFCM, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, New York. We'll have hamburgers and hot dogs, with some typical picnic sides, cookies for dessert, and there will be water and soda. Feel free to bring your own adult beverages if you choose to do so or any special food that you may require. The picnic is free for all current guild members and their immediate family. Others who wish to attend will be asked to make a ten-dollar cash donation to the guild to cover costs. Perhaps you're wondering if your membership is current? If you received this issue of the *Gazette* by email directly from the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, then your membership is current. Anyone who is not a current member no longer receives email from the guild.

Please let us know if you plan to attend, and the total number of people in your group. As you can imagine, it's difficult to plan the amount of food for us to buy in advance if we don't know who is coming, so it's very important that we get a decent estimate of how many people will be attending. If you plan to be there, send an email to catskillflytersguild@gmail.com. Please use "Picnic" for the subject line of your email.

We're very exited to be able to resume the guild picnic. Along with the opportunity to get together and socialize with other guild members, we plan to cast rods in the field near the pavilion: bamboo, graphite, glass—rods of all types. Bring a rod that you'd like others to try. Or, just come for the food and the chat, while relaxing just a stone's throw away from the Willowemoc. Either way, it's sure to be a fun time. A couple of reminders will be emailed to all guild members in the weeks ahead.

Craig Mazur and Mike Gaines tying flies while staffing the guild's table under the pavilion at Summerfest in early August. Thank you to all guild members who volunteered at our table and spread the word about our mission.

Happy faces in a special place of fly-fishing history: seated (left to right) are Tom Mason and John Apgar. Standing (left to right) are Heather de Assis, Peter van de Merwe, Dave Catizone, Mark Sturtevant, Diogo de Assis, and Ed Walsh.

Saturday Tyers Series at the Museum Off to a Great Start

By John Apgar

As we all know, the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild was requested to provide fly tyers for the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum on weekends. We kicked off the Saturday Tyers Series program on August 19, with tyers lined up every Saturday for the next few months. Support from guild members who have committed to tie has been terrific, with all weekends already booked.

I tied on the first Saturday of the series, and the tying and visitors were great, but the highlight of the day was when a small group of college students from Grand Canyon University, studying filmmaking and documentaries, showed up with all of their camera gear. They decided to do their project on flyfishing and the history of it in the Catskills. Being new to the sport of fly fishing, they figured the CFFCM would be a great place to film the project. It was just by luck that our guild was well represented the day that they decided to come for their project. All of the guild members present were miked up and interviewed. Discussions ranged from the actual fly tying taking place and the steps required to tie the fly, to some very detailed history of the Catskills and the legendary tyers from the past. It was all over in a few hours, with the promise of a copy of the interview to be provided to both the CFFCM and the CFTG. It truly was a special day for all of us and a great way to kick off Saturday tying at the museum.

The Vermont Caddis: an Imprecise Conception

Up on the Esopus

With Ed Ostapczuk

The Vermont Caddis, also known as a Hare's Ear Caddis, is a dry fly that Dette's Fly Shop calls a "simple but effective pattern." Supporting this proclamation is the 1977 classic *The Caddis and the Angler*, by Larry Solomon and Eric Leiser, who set aside two

pages of photographs and tying instructions for this dry fly. Dick Talleur included his version of the fly's recipe in his *Trout Flies for the 21st Century*.

In the December 2012 *Gazette,* my article featured Bill Dorato's Dorato Hare's Ear. Prior research included a March 2010 post regarding the Dorato Hare's Ear—a silver bullet fly for me—on the Internet board Sparse Grey Matter. There were almost 30,000 views of that thread, with a bit of pushback related to the Vermont Caddis, a pattern I was not at all familiar with. Until very recently, that account was a simple matter of history, yet still unresolved.

Just a few months ago, our oldest son purchased a home within one hundred yards of the Battenkill River, with a wild brook trout spring creek running along his property line. Intrigued by his latest setting, I quickly developed interest in a new book by Doug Lyons, *Fly Fishing Guide to the Battenkill*, with a Vermont Caddis pictured on the cover. I wasn't concerned about what rock to stand on or what time of the day to fish this trout stream, but was very interested in the history of this remarkable river. Thus, curiosity in the Vermont Caddis surfaced once more.

Some folks attribute creation of this pattern to George Schlotter, proprietor of the former Angler's Nook fly shop located in Shushan, New York, on Route 313, not far from the banks of the Battenkill. Research and input from a good friend, Rich Norman, who is an excellent tyer, fly fisher, guild member, and former partner of Schlotter's, revealed that such is not the case. Threads on The Classic Fly Rod Forum support this assertion. In fact, one blogger posted, "The Vermont Caddis was originated by a bunch of fishermen at Schlotter's fly shop," as did the late John Merwin in his 1993 book *The Battenkill: An Intimate Portrait of a Great Trout River.* In his book, Merwin included nine "Special Fly Patterns" for the Battenkill, with the Vermont Caddis being one of the nine.

This is what Merwin wrote about the pattern, "The caddis style emerged from the Angler's Nook on the lower river in Shushan during the early 1970s. It can be coated with floatant and twitched in the surface in conventional fashion. Most effectively, it should be fished undressed, hanging vertically and partly awash in the surface tension like an emerging natural."

Rich Norman also dates the creation of this pattern back to the early 1970s, after the Dorato Hare's Ear origination. According to Norman, the Vermont Caddis was originally tied by an Angler's Nook regular from Hoosick Falls, whose name has been lost in the annals of time. While this flyfisher loved the Battenkill, he wasn't a very good fly tyer—sort of like me. Reportedly, this angler tried tying a Dorato Hare's Ear, created by the late Bill Dorato for this very river. However, this unnamed fisherman never tied his version with wood duck wings or any tail, plus he trimmed his wrapped hackle. I wonder if the tyer used webby hackle and tried to improve its floatability by trimming it, or was it a poor reproduction attempt? In any event, according to Norman, this pattern was created "by mistake."

There's more to this tale. George Bombria, a part-time Angler's Nook employee, whose reputation was larger than life and the self-proclaimed "King of the River," fished with the nameless angler one evening. This unknown creator of the Vermont Caddis was catching trout after trout, skittering his fly across the Battenkill, while George watched. Curious about the fly used, George asked to see it and was told it was a Dorato Hare's Ear, based upon a *Fly Fisherman* article the angler read, but it lacked wings or a tail, and it had trimmed hackle.

George quickly latched on to this idea and started fishing the pattern with great success. Soon, it was sold at the Angler's Nook. Its original name was the Hare's Ear Caddis.

Fast forward a few more years; the Orvis Company was seeking new patterns to offer in their catalog. John Merwin suggested this pattern, but a more elaborate name was required, thus it was called the Vermont Caddis.

Rich Norman ended one email to me on this subject with the following: "So when you ask me who invented the fly, nobody really; it was a mistake made by a guy from Hoosick Falls. It was really popularized by George Bombria and was named by John Merwin as a way to make a profit!"

Rich tells me he ties the pattern in sizes 14 to 20, but prefers a size 16. He also ties his with olive thread, instead of black. Also, it's very important to use undersized, or clipped hackle when tying this dry fly. The hackle should occupy about half the hook shank. I've been told that most tyers in the know clip their hackle. Whether twitched, or hung vertically and undressed like an emerger, this pattern has earned its place in the Battenkill chronicles.

I sincerely thank Rich Norman for historical background information on this pattern, which otherwise, like the creator's name, could have been lost in the annals of time.

Vermont (Hare's Ear) Caddis

Hook: Size 16, but 14 to 20 dry fly hook
Thread: Olive or black 6/0
Body: Hare's ear tied starting at bend of the hook
Hackle: Undersized or clipped brown and grizzly mixed

Vermont Caddis tied and photographed by Ed Ostapczuk

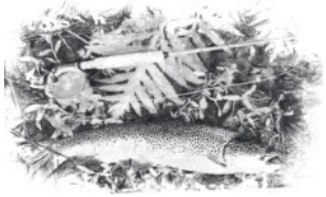
Agnes Van Put and her warm smile. Photo: Joe Ceballos

Happy Birthday Agnes Van Put

Agnes Van Put celebrated her 107th birthday last month in grand style at the CFFCM during Summerfest. Many friends were on hand to share their love for Agnes and sing Happy Birthday.

Joan Wulff, Agnes, and Ali Abate. Photo: Todd Spire

Casting Catskill Cane



With Mark Sturtevant

Considering A Tactical Approach

How do you fish? Are you one of those anglers who wades in upon arrival at the river and begins looking for rising trout, or do you dive right in and begin casting? I have seen a lot of people over the years who do just that: wade in, stand in the most heavily trod piece of streambed, and cast over and over again to the same spot, whether they see any activity or not. Perhaps that has become a symptom of fishing heavily stocked water. I mean, one can do that at say, the head of Cairns Pool on the BeaverKill and probably catch some trout. But when they approach the haunts of our wild Catskill brownies in that way, they are generally doomed to failure.

To me, fly fishing has always been special. Years before I actually had the chance to try it, I had this vision of beauty and mysticism in my head from reading the works of some of the great old writers of the outdoors. I thought of fly fishing for trout as the bowhunting equivalent of fishing: the most refined, difficult, and sporting way to catch a fish. Wild trout, stalked carefully and surreptitiously, and then gently presented with a fly designed to deceive—that is about as magical as the outdoor life can get! With those ideas framing my forays unto trout water, I developed a tactical approach.

I begin before I ever leave the confines of my tackle room each day. I check river gauges to assess flows and water temperatures, run down the weather report to consider sky conditions and wind speed and direction (though I know it will blow harder than the forecast). Working through this information helps me decide where I will fish for the day, what kind of casting conditions I will face, and determine which rod, reel, and line will be my companions on the stream. If there are a few flies that need to be tied and added to my vest, I take care of that during those early morning hours. Often, it is the fly tied that morning that takes the best fish of the day.

By the time I reach the river, I have a plan of attack. I string my rod on the riverbank and watch the flow for rises, movements, wildlife, and insects. Is there another angler about? If I see something that causes me to modify my plan, I do so on the spot. If not, I begin a stealthy approach to the area I planned to begin fishing. That sounds like a lot of preparation, and it may be for some, but to me it has become second nature. It isn't work when it is your passion.

When conditions are tough, we often find time to sit back on the riverbank and reflect. Human nature is such that we easily repeat actions that bring us pleasure and success, and we do that without really thinking about it. During one of those tough days this summer, I had a realization. All of my careful preparation and disciplined stalking had a flaw, and I wondered if that flaw resided at the root of my difficult fishing. Like a typical human robot, I repeated patterns of approach and presentation. In some cases, I always approached a certain reach of water in the same manner and fished it the same way. Were the trout patterning me?

Despite my efforts to wade with as little disturbance as possible, I know better than to fool myself into believing that the trout don't know I am there. Their instincts and senses are simply too marvelously adapted and refined to believe that they are blissfully unaware of an angler. Subtlety of movement and patience can usually get one into position to fish effectively. There is a marked difference between alarming and spooking trout, versus their being aware of your presence. I have written before of learned behavior on the part of the trout. Is patterning the angler another example of learned avoidance behavior?

On the day in question, I had observed a trout rise once or twice as I approached. I moved into position stealthily and fished that piece of cover as I always did, from the most advantageous casting angle. No response was forthcoming from the fish that had risen, nor any of the trout in residence. When the thought arose that the trout might be patterning me, I stopped casting and moved away as carefully as I had approached. I fished another reach of water, took a little break, and when I returned, I took a completely different approach.

I routinely fished this cover from the side and slightly downstream, just as I had earlier that morning. This time, I sneaked into a casting position upstream, fishing down at an extreme angle with long, delicate casts and extended drifts. I fished my way *into* that piece of water, in and around each piece of cover. I refused to allow any drifts of my fly to invade the space where the trout had risen earlier, saving that fish for last due to its position. When I had dissected every other part of that cover, I adjusted my position for the perfect angle, and let my Sweetgrass pent gently deliver my Baby Cricket ten feet above that trout's lie, flipping additional slack via subtle micro-mends. The fly floated down, right on target, passing the lie by a couple of feet until it was enveloped in a soft, little ring. I paused, then tightened, and the water exploded!

There were a few tense moments, the lithe shaft of bamboo arching heavily as that brown frantically tried to force its way around a submerged log. I kept its head away from the wood and swung the rod downstream and back, winning the battle as the reel began to sing with the fish's first long run. That brownie taped twenty-one inches, and as I released it, I envisioned the trout dropping down with its nose beneath the Baby Cricket, considering…

The author's rod and a freshly caught brown lie in shallow water

I have no doubt that the brown I caught was the same fish that had risen earlier that morning, sitting in the same lie, and this time unconcerned that one of those big, clumsy, looming anglers was fishing for it. I do believe that fish and its kin had adapted to being fished from the old familiar position. They weren't spooked by my presence, but they were aware of me, enough so that they were not inclined to feed, no matter how choice a morsel drifted by. I am not saying that such a scenario occurs every time we fail to raise a trout at a familiar spot, but there is evidence that they have learned to be more careful when they detect a recurring approach.

I have been convinced for more than twenty years that trout are getting harder to catch, and today,

scientists not only accept that fact, but have determined that the fish pass along learned behavior traits to their offspring genetically. We need better flies, better presentations, and yes, perhaps we need to be more aware of our own habits when it comes to how we approach the river and fish it.

Mark Sturtevant can be followed on his blog, *Bright Waters Catskills*: https://brightwatercatskill.art.blog

Cane Rod Builders and Collectors: Tom Mason

By Ed Walsh

Bamboo collector Tom Mason

Tom Mason never thought about collecting cane rods when he began fly fishing more than fifty years ago. His first two purchases were a 7.5-foot Orvis Midge cane rod and an inexpensive 8-foot fiberglass product. But it only took him a few months to fall in love with his cane rod and put that fiberglass model on the shelf, never to be used again.

As time went on, he purchased another rod of cane, and before long there were a number of these rods in his inventory. Wanting to learn more, he found himself researching the history of the builders of these fine fishing instruments. He was fascinated by the craftsmen who spent their time developing these fine fishing tools.

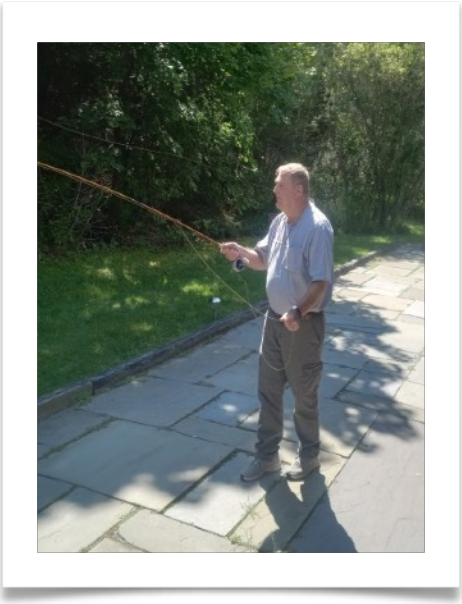
In the mid 1970s, Tom and his wife, Martha, started visiting the Catskills to fish and enjoy the wonderful surroundings. Being in the place where dry-fly fishing originated in our country had an impact. His passion was growing.

It wasn't long before Tom found himself spending more and more time with cane rod builders and collectors at local and regional fly-fishing shows. This was during the early stages of the Internet, so face-to-face conversation with the experts, and magazine articles and books were almost the only way to learn about this wonderful craft. Tom found another way to get answers to some of his questions: ask people who he saw fishing with cane rods. Although there may not have been that many, the ones he did talk to were more than anxious to discuss the feeling of fishing a cane rod.

As the Internet grew, more and more information about "all things fly fishing" was available. Cane rods and their makers, new and old, became accessible at a finger's touch, and Tom took full advantage of that option.

Online, he met like-minded people who shared his love for not only bamboo but also for vintage reels and heritage flies that were used in a bygone era. The Classic Fly Rod Forum became his go-to site to gain information and exchange ideas.

With so much more information at his disposal, Tom started to realize the value of the rods he had in his possession. Looking at sites that bought and sold the old master pieces (Bob Selb Rods, Spinoza Fly Rods) made him think not only about collecting but also selling a rod or two for profit. One interesting point Tom has emphasized is that cane rods will often increase in value, while glass or graphite rods will lose value. Another point is that Tom doesn't sell any of his possessions online. All



Tom with a favorite Payne rod

sales, or exchanges, are made with folks he knows or people he's met at trade shows and the attendees he's been exposed to at events such as the Catskill Rod Builders Gathering.

Tom will tell you he's never been in this to make money, but whenever the opportunity arises to sell a rod or reel, make a profit, then use that money to purchase another rod that is more valuable—he takes full advantage of that situation.

At present, Tom has more than fifty vintage rods, and as many reels in his possession. Rods built by the following craftsmen are in his collection: Leonard, Payne, Phillipson, Granger, Dickerson, Bob Taylor, the Edwards Brothers, Orvis, and John Gallas. He also told me—with a big smile—that he has the largest collection of Mike Canazon rods (two). One of his Leonard models was built in 1915, and his favorite is a Payne Model 200. Neither of these will ever be available for sale. Tom emphasizes that he will fish these rods when the opportunity arises, and there is no better feeling than to have that Leonard or Payne in his hand coupled with a Hardy Perfect reel. In this situation, catching fish is icing on the cake, but never mandatory. Enjoyment is experienced either way.

Tom and Martha (also a cane enthusiast) have traveled from coast to coast twice over the years, and rarely, if ever, pass up a good-looking trout stream. They've fished in Montana, Colorado, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Texas, and they're regulars on our New York and Pennsylvania rivers and streams.

I encourage anyone who has an interest in vintage cane rods or reels to spend time with Tom. It will be time well spent and an education to be remembered.

The Davidson Special: Revisited

CJ's Flies
With "Catskill John" Bonasera

In 2010, I did a story for the *Gazette* https://catskillflytyersguild.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Gazette-12-2010.pdf on the Davidson Special and its origin. Something keeps bringing me back to this fly—a few things actually. My attraction to small water is the first one, as this fly was developed in the Mongaup Creek area in DeBruce. The upper Willowemoc flows through there, close to Davidson's General Store where Mahlon Davidson sold solid wood fly rods, local fly patterns, and general wares for the folks living near his store.

I am constantly drawn to this area for the fishing, the scenery, and the people.
A few of my fellow guild friends are also interested in this fly, and we often talk about the dying process involved to achieve the pale-green body color.

Recent acquisitions of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum included much of Mahlon's fishing gear: nets, creels, waders, and assorted old-time fishing related items, including some of his actual flies that were tagged and in remarkably good preservation after sitting in a dark barn for about

sixty years. Last year, a few of us got to see the flies when Davidson's General Store had their grand opening.

While it's cool to see all the things lined up in one place, I was most interested in the flies and the materials that Davidson used to tie them. This "dyed willow bark" thing really stuck to me, and while in the past I had replicated the color using his instructions, I never really got to see an actual Davidson Special that was made from Mahlon's hands.

A few weeks ago, after a bunch of phone calls, emails, and face-to-face begging, I got an appointment to go through the museum's archived flies that Mahlon tyed, so that we could take them out of the dark and see exactly what color the body is. Tom Mason and Dave Catizone led the way. We found the box containing the flies and took it upstairs to finally get to the bottom of this thing that's been on my mind for years.

The two flies on the left are Davidson Specials tied by Mahlon Davidson. Photo: John Bonasera

There were two flies, and both were in absolutely beautiful condition. Curiously enough, one was labeled as a Light Cahill, but since there was an actual Light Cahill along side it, we knew right away that it was simply mislabeled.

In the meantime, another guild buddy of mine, Seth Cavaretta, and I had been dying fox belly fur for a week, comparing the colors we were getting from using different methods of dye baths. Seth got a fantastic green that looked almost too dark, then changed some stuff and nailed it on the second attempt. Mine were coming out too yellow, though I did get one small piece that looked exactly like the body on the actual fly.

There was some discussion about the area where we were harvesting the willow branches. Perhaps that area didn't have the right soil or didn't get the proper water, and that could give us less than satisfactory results. Then, I got an invitation to harvest some willow right on the property where the general store is located, possibly the same area from where Mahlon took his willow bark! It just doesn't get any better than that.

The entire project has been really fun, mostly because of all the help I've been getting from like-minded individuals who are as excited to see this through as much as I am. But it made me think about something else, too. The original dressing for this fly first came from Harry Darbee's book *Catskill Fly Tier*. Ed Van Put also has it in a few of his books, as well as Mike Valla and Austin Francis. While Harry's words are fairly descriptive, it's written more like he's telling you in conversation than an actual fly dressing. The thing that gets me, though—after all the fuss my friends and I have made over a single fly pattern—is that none of this would even be a thought in anyone's mind had it not been for Harry adding this to his book. This is the most important thing about our hobby: keeping these old patterns alive by recording them somewhere. At the time Harry Darbee dictated that book to Austin Francis, had he not mentioned the Davidson Special, it would never have been published, and the

Davidson Special tied by John Bonasera using his willow-dyed fox fur. Photo: John Bonasera

knowledge of the pattern would've ended right there. I mean, yeah, we have the archived flies to look at, but to really get it right—historically accurate—this stuff needs to be written down.

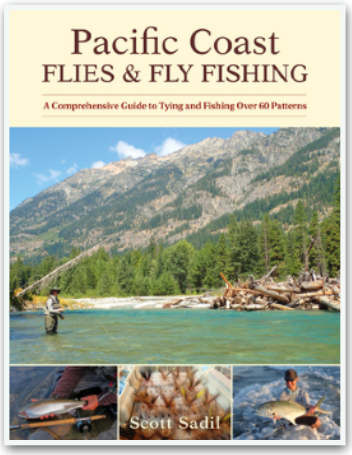
My latest project has been making a solid-wood fly rod, similar to what Mahlon made in his store. It's coming along well, but it would have been nice if I could find some written instructions on the process he used to whittle down the blanks.

At least we got his Davidson Special dressing right.

Book Review:

Pacific Coast Flies and Fly Fishing: A Comprehensive Guide to Tying and Fishing Over 60 Patterns

By Scott Sadil. Published by Stackpole Books, 2023; $39.95 softbound.



It's said there are two kinds of people: those who believe there are two kinds of people and those who don't. In today's fly-fishing world, there also are two kinds of books. One is written by guides and fly tyers and social-media influencers. The books are how-tos and where-tos, and they have useful information, often derived from long experience on the water, but they are written by people who probably were dreaming of rising trout while sitting in Mr. Thistlebottom's English class. They are not written by writers—by people for whom the art of written prose is a calling.

The other, more rare books, are written by people who are writers for whom fly fishing simply is part of who they are and what they do—writers such as Tom McGuane, Jim Harrison, and John Gierach. Scott Sadil is a writer who is a fly fisher, not a fly fisher who has tried to be a writer. The result is *Pacific Coast Flies and Fly Fishing*, a book ostensibly about fly tying and fly fishing that is much more than that—a nuanced exploration of the sport and its relation to the things we do in life that engage us. I review a lot of fly-tying books. This is the first one I ever have recommended as literature. Yes, the title begins with "Pacific Coast," but the flies he ties will work pretty much anywhere in the world, and more importantly, the sensibility that informs his tying and the results it produces emerge from an engagement with issues that every fly fisher and fly tyer faces.

For the past decade, Sadil was the author of the "At the Vise" column in *California Fly Fisher*, a magazine I've helped edit. He also is the author of the short-story collections *Goodnews River: Wild Fish, Wild Waters, and the Stories We Find There* (2020), *Fly Tales: Lessons in Fly Fishing Like the Real Guys* (2010), and *Lost in Wyoming: Stories* (2009), the novel *Cast from the Edge: Tales of an Uncommon Fly Fisher* (1999), and *Angling Baja: One Man's Fly Fishing Journey Through the Surf* (1996), one of the early books on fly fishing the surf zone and the beaches of Mexico. Most of the essays here appeared in his "At the Vise" column in the magazine, tweaked and updated where necessary. I edited versions of them every other month as they appeared, but reading them together is a totally different experience.

I called them "essays," and I meant the word as a verb, as well as a noun—an attempt to get at something. We do that when things don't quite make sense, even seem paradoxical, a compound, as happens sometimes in life, of two things that can't both be true, but are. Living with contradictions—actually embracing them—is something fly fishers do all the time.

Fishing for steelhead is an extreme example of this—a "spiritual paradox," Sadil calls it, upon realizing that "the more I knew, the less the knowledge seemed to matter": however great your experience and skill, you cast and cast and cast and either catch a fish or don't. With steelhead, you usually don't, and you don't ever know why. Yet steelheaders still do everything they can to improve their odds, learning all they can about the sport and the fish and the latest gear and techniques. So do the rest of us, whatever we fish for, whether it's indulging in the magical thinking involved in the notion that a thousand-dollar fly rod just has to improve our casting or actually taking casting lessons to do so. It's why we read fly-fishing magazines and even the *Gazette*.

The paradox that Sadil uses to frame *Pacific Coast Flies and Fly Fishing* is established by setting the book in the Tyer's Roost, a fictional fly shop where fly tyers congregate under a sign that says, "Your flies don't matter." Like most accomplished fly fishers, Sadil firmly believes it is how a fly is presented, not the fly itself, that determines whether a fish takes it or not. The fly doesn't matter, but "still, you have to knot *something* to your tippet," as Sadil puts it. And while we know that some flies work better than others, we don't really know why. As he says while pondering why the Zug Bug works so well, even though it resembles nothing particular in nature, "you forego certainty, accepting outcomes you can't legitimately explain. From a personal standpoint, I've long believed that's one of the appeals of the sport: Things happen for mysterious reasons."

That sense that there are mysteries to be explored is one way to describe the entrance to the rabbit hole down which fly fishers who become committed to the sport, and fly tyers, in particular, inevitably end up falling. As he writes, again about steelheading,

> It's hard to say . . . what we're really after. That may be part of the appeal of a genuine steelheading career: if you're unclear what you're looking for, chances are you'll never claim to have found anything that leaves you with a sense of having arrived, of completing some finite goal, the sort of popular bucket list mentality that prompts so many of us to wipe our hands of one thing and move on to the next, as though what we were doing, in the past, was somehow not good enough, too shallow or, worse, not really what we wanted to do in the first place.

As he says repeatedly, "We catch fish with the flies we fish with. Beyond that, who's to say where the truth lies?" And yet, we don't just tie "something" to our tippets. It's a maxim that we fish better and catch more fish with flies we believe in. Your fly doesn't matter, but you still care deeply about the flies you fish, because a kind of magic happens over the course of a fly-fishing life: "There's nearly always a story, if not many stories, behind our likes and dislikes, the flies we choose to tie and use and those we reject or refuse to give even a fair chance. Rarely are we offered such an opportunity to see, if we pay attention, how our beliefs can create the reality we experience."

Pacific Coast Flies and Fly Fishing consists of such stories. The typical fly-fishing magazine article with a new fly pattern to present to the world, the latest thing since the previous latest thing, commonly begins with what I think of as a "There I was" scene: the day, the river, the fly, the drift—fish on! Sadil's stories aren't like that. In the spirit of the exploration of paradoxes, they're springboards for reflections on why, given that we don't really know why a fly works—a fly works. The answers have more to do with "simulation," not imitation, especially the attitude and action of the fly in the water. Rather than mimicking any particular food item that a fish could care about, successful flies, Sadil believes, elicit a "could be food" response from a fish eager to eat and curious about what might be

edible. This amounts to acknowledging that "the heart of the game" is simply fooling fish, and more radically, as happens especially in steelheading, doing so with flies "that make little or no pretense of replicating anything that inhabits the real world as we know it, but that are somehow intended to fool fish by power of an alchemy we can, at best, only intuit." A classic Catskill dry fly, after all, is more like an abstract sculpture than a mayfly. In the end, Sadil claims, if indeed your fly doesn't matter, and if it's confidence in a fly that brings success, all other things being equal, you might just as well choose to tie and fish flies that are beautiful.

The stories also lead to reflections on what we can do to catch more fish, even if in the end, we're not sure why we catch the fish we catch—reflections on the gear appropriate to particular situations and the approaches that seem to work when a particular fly is fished. Just as his preference is for flies that are beautiful, though, he favors techniques that bring pleasure in their own right—swinging wet flies and nymphs for trout and steelhead and tight-line nymphing without an indicator, staying in touch with your fly. He's no fan of indicator nymphing, especially for steelhead, when these more enjoyable methods are so much more engaging and bring so much pleasure.

Sometimes, also, as I've suggested, the stories lead to reflections on the meaning of the sport as he sees it. In the course of them, we get personal vignettes that add up to a kind of pointillist autobiography, from his adolescent surfer and surf-fishing days in Southern California and Baja, through moves to Oregon and a return to Baja, through work as a carpenter and school teacher and boat builder, through divorce and skin cancer and fishing with one's kids. One of the most affecting of these comes near the end of the book and also near the end of that larger story thus far:

> Say what I might—and I've said plenty—about all the wisdom and wonder available through fly fishing, I've reached some strange new territory in my life where I'm about to concede what so many have learned before me. That is, the best reason to indulge one's passions in this all-consuming silly game is the people one meets along the way, the friends one makes, the characters one discovers, the stories lived, told, and shared.

Sometimes, too, the stories—about a hatch of Little Black Caddis on a famous river with big trout, say, or about the creation of a friend's bizarre egglike steelhead fly—are just good stories, told by a writer who knows his art.

"Wait a minute," you say. "This a book about *fly tying*—right?" Yes, that, too, but again, it's about fly tying as Scott Sadil sees it. If not a paradox, there's at least a creative tension in his approach to tying flies, or rather, to thinking about how to go about it.

One the one hand, the history of the sport provides an ample number of patterns that have been proven for decades and, in the case of the soft hackles he especially likes, even centuries. On the other, because we don't really know why anything works, we're always trying to invent the new latest thing—what he calls the Miracle Fly.

What that means here is that a lot of the patterns in the book are classics that he or one of his friends has tweaked in some way, either to meet some specific angling situation or just because the tweak rectified something that bothered them in the original and made the fly look right. These run the gamut from a Pheasant Tail Nymph with starling hackle legs and a version of the Woolly Bugger tied to imitate a baitfish to waking versions of Muddlers for steelhead and from Clouser Minnows to generic

baitfish flies. As that range suggests, the patterns in the book cover the spectrum of Sadil's experience: trout flies, steelhead flies, and saltwater flies.

But on the other hand, there are also flies created by Sadil and his friends in response to specific angling problems. In fact, he encourages tying flies when you have just arrived home from a trip, so you'll have flies ready when the situation you encountered occurs again. That's how it's possible to believe your fly doesn't matter and still end up carrying boxes and boxes and boxes of different flies. Many of the flies created in this way, like most of the flies in the book, are pretty simple ties. There's nothing particularly challenging in the way of tying technique in the book. A couple of Intruder-style steelhead flies, included to scratch the itch of curiosity, more than anything else, are about as complicated as any pattern gets.

That brings us to one final paradox: this *is* a book about fly tying, but a book you're likely to spend at least as much time with in an easy chair with a drink by your side as you do with it propped up next to your vise. If you don't tie, this may pitch you into that rabbit hole or at least give you plenty to think about on the stream. If you do tie, you'll find plenty to think about, as well. If it is a book about flies and fly tying, it's because these have been part of a writer's engagement with the paradoxes, contradictions, and rewards of an angling life.

—Bud Bynack

In the Glass, and at the Vise
By Chuck Coronato

A simple cup of coffee sometimes leads you in interesting directions. Coming home from the museum's Summerfest, I drove upstream alongside the Willowemoc and visited Davidson's General Store in DeBruce to grab a cup of coffee. Taking a look at the local beers on display, one brew's name jumped out at me—Ratface Macdougall. I grabbed a four-pack, reasoning that a beer named after a storied Catskill fly pattern associated with Harry Darbee can't be bad.

The beer style listed on the can lets you know that it's a hazy IPA (India Pale Ale). I'm not generally a fan of IPAs, but the Catskill fly connection kept me in the game. The original IPA style was developed by British brewers in the 1800s. For beer to survive the long sea journey from England to India, a special pale ale was brewed with more hops and alcohol. Hops and alcohol deter spoilage and extend the life of the beer. Most American versions of IPA take the hop and alcohol increases to extremes, particularly in the flavor and aroma components of the hops. American strains of hops tend to be higher in alpha acids than British strains, and more aromatically aggressive with aromas of pine and citrus. Some beer drinkers really like the huge blast of hops from an IPA; I have to be in the occasional mood for it.

I've judged many beer competitions (long story there), so I know that you have to judge the beer in front of you based on its trueness to style, not based on whether it's your favorite brew to

sip. With that in mind, I can say that Catskill Brewery's Ratface Macdougall is a fine example of a hazy IPA. It's a full-bodied beer that pours a hazy, deep straw color with orange hues. It has a huge blast of hop aroma and hop flavor, tasting quite a bit like grapefruit. As previously noted, there are several strains of hops that impart citrus aroma and flavor, and that's what's going on here. A good deal of restraint was shown in the bittering hops. The beer is bitter compared with American lagers (of course), but pretty much in the bitterness range of a typical pale ale (such as Sierra Nevada Pale Ale). Hazy IPAs as a style tend to hold back on bitterness, but emphasize hop aroma and hop flavor. They're more "juicy" in flavor than a dry beer, and ale yeasts produce fruity esters during the fermentation process—strongly present and nicely done in this beer—that keep the hops from running away with the show. As we often say when judging big beers, "There's a lot going on in this glass."

Tasting all of that grapefruit flavor got me thinking about one of my favorite summer drinks—Compari and grapefruit juice. I poured a few ounces of Ratface Macdougall into a smaller glass, then drizzled in a bit of Compari. I've never before gone in the direction of beer cocktails, and some purists may accuse me of beer heresy, but this one worked! And I guess this ale could even be mixed with Aperol for those who prefer training-wheels Compari.

If hazy IPAs are to your liking, then I think you'll be very pleased with this beer that has a Catskill fly connection (in name at least) and is brewed locally in Livingston Manor.

About now you're probably saying, "Enough of the beer and booze talk. This is the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. What about the fly?" I'd never before tied a Rat-faced McDougall (yes, that's the proper spelling of the fly pattern, as opposed to the beer's spelling), but I was now determined to do so and take one for a river swim.

The book *Catskill Flytier*, by Harry Darbee with Mac Francis, explains how this fly came to be and how it got its name. The Darbees originally tied a fly called the Beaverkill Bastard on 3xl hooks. One night, Harry Darbee was tying an order of Beaverkill Bastards, and an amateur fly tyer named Percy Jennings was there and asked why he didn't tie the same pattern on a smaller hook. Harry suggested that Percy should give it a try, and while Jennings was tying, a young girl named Mary Dimock saw the fly and said, "Boy, that's got personality." Percy challenged Mary to name the fly, and she said, "I think it's a Rat-faced McDougall."

Here's the original pattern as it is listed in *Catskill Flytier*:

Rat-faced McDougall

Tail: Ginger cock hackle fibers
Body: Clipped tannish-gray deer hair
Wings: Cream grizzly hackle tips
Hackle: Ginger cock

A Rat-faced McDougall, tied and photographed by Chuck Coronato

That's the pattern that I followed, tying the fly on a standard size 14 hook. At first, I had reservations about tying this fly, because outside of tying the occasional Muddler Minnow more than two decades ago, I've had very little experience spinning and clipping deer hair. Tying this fly, I made sure to not put too much deer hair on at a time, and just packed each spun bunch as closely as possible. You

have to be extra careful not to cut off the tail of the fly when trimming the hair to shape, but I got through it all on the first try. That first tie is the one that I'm showing here in the photo. I'm sure that it's a poor tie by the standards of tyers who have mastered spinning deer hair, but I put my hand on a big rock and declared, "This fly is good enough to fish!"

How did it work? The tailwater where I frequently fish was running a bit high and surprisingly off color, so I thought it a good opportunity to fish this buoyant fly. I know that this is the part in a fishing story where I'm supposed to report how the fly caught a passel of large trout that couldn't resist it, but the truth is that I got several splashy refusals, and didn't land a single fish. But I enjoyed fishing this fly. There's always something special about drifting an old, classic pattern over trout that have probably never seen one, and I'm looking forward to the day when I can say, "I caught that fish on a Rat-faced McDougall." Having gotten over my reluctance to spin deer hair, I'll tie more of them. Perhaps I'll try one next time with a drizzle of Compari.

 **Please write for the *Gazette*!** This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Our many and continued thanks go to our regular contributors who faithfully write, and there is also plenty of space for additional members to add their musings to these pages. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. **Your articles, cartoons, paintings, photographs, reports of information, and bits of whatever else is interesting and fun are vital to this newsletter.**

There was a lot of positive feedback from people who enjoyed the Members Sharing Photos that was on the last page of the July *Gazette*. Why isn't that repeated in this issue? Because members didn't share photos! Do you see all of the blank space at the bottom of this issue? That doesn't have to be there if you share some photos. (Please, no pictures of fish on the ground). Send submissions to Chuck Coronato, coronato3@verizon.net or 412 Highland Avenue, Wyckoff, New Jersey 07481 (201) 723-6230

Be sure to check out the guild on our website: www.catskillflytyersguild.org, and pass the website along to friends who aren't yet members of the guild. The *Gazette* page in the menu takes you to more than 100 archived issues of the *Gazette* stretching back to 1998.