

NAT GREENE FLY FISHERS NEWS LETTER

DECEMBER 2012

HO! HO! HO! December 11th is our Christmas social/meeting. Come join us and get your fingers messy with food and feathers!

Please note that the bridge on Ballinger Rd. is still under construction, so access is by way of N. Chimney Rock Rd.

We will do a "pot luck" chips/dip, cookies or what ever goodies you want to bring. Nat Greene will provide soda's, water, ice, cups and plates.

We will also have a member fly tying session. We will have one person tying per table showing "how to", and 2-3 vises/table for the "want to". In the past members seemed to really enjoy it. Don't worry if you have never tied, we will show you how. If you are a tier please bring your vise and some materials for your flies. The club will have all our vises, materials, and tools available for use.

We will have a \$100 Great Outdoor Provision gift certificate in our year end free raffle **PLUS**, we are going to try another raffle with a different twist.

We will sell tickets and raffle off a box of Nat Greene member's favorite flies!

Please All Members donate some of your favorite flies to the club. We are asking for a set of three for each pattern (2 to fish & 1 to tie from). We will put all the flies in a box and raffle it off. Somebody will get a box of awesome flies, and the club will raise a little money.

Below is another great article by our wet fly guru **Jim Brady**.

Strike first, ask questions later by Jim Brady

Those of you who have been reading my articles know I have developed a fascination with wet flies. I have enjoyed modifying fly designs that are easier to tie and fish as well as or better than the old standards tied the traditional way. Beginning with Dave Hughes's aptly titled book, "Wet Flies," I have taken a journey back to my roots as a beginning fly fisherman. This time I'm enjoying it a lot more.

When I started fly fishing in 1964, I didn't know what I was doing. I tried to learn by watching other fishermen, who didn't seem to know much more than I did. I gleaned little practical information from my observations. Among my problems was frankly being embarrassed showing the fish what I tied. I fished too long a line, quite a trick given the narrow confines of my hometown stream. I didn't keep in good contact with my flies so I could rarely tell when a fish ate the fly except when a hard take produced an obvious tug on the line. And I never took enough notice of how deeply the flies were fished. I had a lifetime of learning ahead of me.

My favorite fly was a Hare's Ear/March Brown hybrid because I would start out tying the former and the end product looked more like the latter. Even though I caught a fish here and there I lacked

confidence to fish the flies carefully. A vital development in a fly fisherman's maturation is learning to fish your fly with confidence. You must learn to fish in your mind's eye, imagining what the fly is doing. Most importantly, you must embrace the obvious truth that trout don't read catalogues or books and don't know a Hare's Beer from a Flunky Footman. It's how the fisherman handles the artificial that counts.

Most people who do fish wet flies use the down and across approach because it's the easiest. I do that a little, and it still works, but I think fishing wets upstream, on a dead drift back to me as if I were nymph fishing, is the most productive method. This approach lets me sink the fly and better imitate an emerging or drowned insect at the mercy of the current.



Immediately I hear the outcry, "But how can you tell when you get a strike?" By paying close attention to the flies' drift, watching the line point, leader and suspected position of the flies for any deviation from "normal." What's normal, you ask? I define it as what you would observe standing in the stream without fishing. Add your cast to the scene and draw the immediate conclusion that anything deviating from the 'normal' scene is due to your act of fishing, so strike quickly. There's no penalty for striking to leaves, sticks or stones but you will miss fish if you don't react to anything unusual.

To address the situation from a logical standpoint, let's take the problem apart. The major questions are (1) how deep are the flies fished; (2) at what distance do you fish; and (3) how do I suggest you fish out a cast? Let me assure you that supernatural powers are not required and that my "system" flows out of the simple idea to maintain control of the cast without affecting the flies' drift.

First, I tie most flies on 2X heavy wire in the hope the flies will sink deeply [Dai Riki #075 hooks]. How deep? is an unanswerable question given I can't hold the rod at one end of the cast and measure fly depth at the other. I do cast a slack line upstream of the area I think a fish might be lying to give the flies a chance to sink. If the water appears to be two feet or more deep, I'll often place a weighted fly, such as a beadhead woolly worm, on the end of the tippet. As soon as the cast settles, I immediately shift my attention to the line point and suspected lie.

This is facilitated, secondly, by fishing not more than two or three lengths of my leader away (perhaps twenty feet maximum). This allows me to follow the drift closely for signs of a take, mending the line (or leader) as needed and striking back to any interruption in the drift. This close-in approach of course requires stealthy wading so noisy or sloppy waders take note. Wearing clothing that disappears against streamside foliage is a must. Contrastingly colored clothing gives the game away.

Fishing out a cast sounds a lot more complex than it is. When the cast settles, I strip in nearly all of the slack. I want to remove as much as slack as possible without affecting the flies' drift. I strip the line in under my rod hand index finger, holding the line lightly. If I need to strike, I can clamp the line against the grip instantly. As the line comes back to me, I raise the rod and strip in additional slack as needed, always pointing the rod tip towards the leader. I maintain focus on the line point and glance occasionally at where the leader disappears into the water. I mend the line or leader as needed and always, always pay attention. When the hint of a take comes, I'm ready.

I want to return to detecting strikes for a moment because this is the crux of matter for most of us. My first few casts in a new spot tell me what a 'normal,' uninterrupted drift looks like. They tell me how the currents work and whether I need to adjust my cast. I focus intently on the line point and the water where I suppose the flies to be. Sometimes an obvious swirl occurs so I immediately tighten. Rarely, the line point jumps upstream; this is a blatant sign a fish has taken the fly, the fly fishing equivalent of "a slap aside the head." Almost always, the only thing you will ever see is a brief, halting stop of the line point in the course of its normal drift downstream. Simply put, ***strike back to any deviation from a "normal" drift***. Perhaps I could squeeze a book out of it, but there it is: ***THE GREAT SECRET***.

Many, many volumes of pure crap have been written about detecting strikes to nymphs by observing "the line point darting upstream." I've seen the line point jump upstream about four or five times in the past forty-eight years (which tells you I haven't been nymph fishing the entire time). The take-home message is that "darting/jumping line points" are such a rarity that to rely on such signals is to practically guarantee a fishless day. Just ***STRIKE BACK TO ANY INTERRUPTION IN THE DRIFT***. If this advice could be summarized in a "Far Side" cartoon, the caption might read: "Strike first, ask questions later." A friend from central Pennsylvania, who is among the finest fisherman I have ever known, once told me, "Nine times out of ten you get sticks and stones, the other ten percent of the time you get scales." My experience confirms his assessment that nymphing, or in this case, fishing wets as if they were nymphs, is a probability game. Striking quickly and often brings fish to the net.

I've developed a few tricks to increase my chances of hooking fish. I almost always fish two flies at once and sometimes three. This allows me to experiment with different colors at varied depths. I'll tie a heavy fly to the tippet in deeper water, as I stated above. If I find the fish have a preference for one pattern, I'll fish multiple copies of that one fly. Adding a very visible fly as a dropper helps a lot. Lately I've used a Coachman wet fly on the dropper and the fish really like it. I originally decided to try it because it has the same color scheme as a Prince nymph but is easier to tie. Against a light background (the sky, for example), the peacock herl body and brown hackle stand out. Against a dark background (the stream bottom), the white wing stands out. Unusual movement of the bright wing signals it or another fly has been taken.



Take special care of your hooks because they are the literal business ends of the operation. Use needle-sharp hooks and check the points often. Carry a hook hone and use it. I know I've taken some fish simply because they couldn't dislodge a sharp hook hanging up in their mouths before I finally got around to responding. And always flatten the barbs. Barbless hooks penetrate deeper than barbed ones. They also can be removed with less effort from the fish or you.

My favorite wet fly is my corrupted version of the venerable Black Gnat. I think the fish view it as some generic black insect that met a watery demise. I recall when gutting some trout in preparation for the frying pan (my father loved eating trout), I always slit open the stomach to see what the fish were eating. Invariably some small, generic black flies would be present, usually as a gangly,

tangled mass of legs and wings. Through a stroke of pleasant serendipity, that's exactly the appearance of my Black Gnats as they come out of the vise. Not pretty by any means (they most certainly wouldn't be a commercial success), they are actually a very good imitation of Nature's handiwork. I also fish it on a dropper off a dry fly. It's so effective I estimate 90% of my takes on the dry/wet combination come to the gnat, a truly killing fly on mountain trout.

The downside of fishing wets is that it's hard to buy them any more. I have looked in many catalogs and few offer any but a meager selection. In fact, I haven't found any catalogs offering Black Gnats or Coachmen. So you'll have to find alternate sources. If you can't tie your own, you can buy them from me, only \$9.95 each. Minimum order of two dozen, of course.

Seriously, give fishing wet flies upstream on a slack line a try. It will take some practice but it pays off, especially since no one else is doing it. You'll be showing the fish something different. People watching you will wonder what the heck you're doing. Let 'em scratch their heads. Spend your time pleasantly seeking out the best lies and probing them sight unseen. Just remember to wash the fish slime off your hands.

Tight lines everyone.