

Gordon's Quill

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South Andros in the Bahamas
Photos: Ed Meyer

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South Andros in the Bahamas

Ed Meyer

If you have ever dreamed about catching a large bonefish on a fly, you would be well advised to put South Andros in the Bahamas on your list of fly-fishing destinations. On a recent trip in January, I got my first glimpse of a spot that is well worth a visit.

Andros Island in the Bahamas is a coral limestone archipelago that is located 154 miles southeast of Miami. Sparsely populated, it contains one of the most pristine ocean ecosystems in the Caribbean region. The Bahamas offer a wide variety of saltwater fishing experiences. On the eastern side of the island lies the second-largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere. This reef is a true natural wonder, with abundant populations of snappers, groupers, spiny lobsters, and conches. Just beyond this reef, the ocean plummets to a depth of six thousand feet in the "tongue of the ocean," where pelagic species such as wahoos, tuna, sailfish, dorados, and marlin abound.

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**President's Message
Spring 2017**



Spring is finally here, and our rivers and water supplies are at much better levels than they have been for quite a while. Most of the New York City reservoirs were filled to over 100 percent capacity and have been spilling into the rivers below them. Although this has prevented wade fishing in some cases, it is good to know that there should be water available to keep them at levels that will sustain those fisheries. It will be interesting to see if there was an impact from last year's drought on our Catskill Rivers.

At our Annual Dinner and meeting in March at the Anglers' Club, we elected two new directors to our board. They are Avram Schlesinger and Julian Antebi. Both are welcome additions and have volunteered to chair very important committees.

Avram Schlesinger has been in charge of the TGF Facebook page and has been doing a terrific job with that. He will now take over the very important position as chair of membership for TGF. Pat Key had done this job for many years and stepped off the board. We thank her for all she's done for TGF. It is wonderful that Avram will do both of these jobs, because communicating through social media is becoming the best way to attract new members for our organization. Avram's outgoing personality will be great for combining these two responsibilities.

Julian Antebi will also be performing two functions for TGF as a new board member. First, he will be the chair of the Outings Committee. If you have an idea about an outing that you would like to propose for TGF members, please get in touch with Julian via outings@tgf.org to discuss your idea and the information that you will need to provide to make the outing a fun time and a success. We already have the possibility for two different trips. Also, because of Julian's background as an environmental consultant, he will serve on the Conservation Committee. The board looks forward to working with our two new members, and I would like to thank them for volunteering to fill important positions.

Finally, I would suggest that if possible, try to get out and enjoy our rivers with some fly fishing. The major spring hatches are occurring in good numbers on the Catskill rivers. 🦈

Bert Darrow, President
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers

South Andros in the Bahamas

Ed Meyer

Continued from Page 1

The island is divided by a series of estuaries called “bights” that supply a continual flow of tidal water to a vast expanse of mangrove flats that lie on the western side of the island. That side of the island is a true fly-fishing Mecca, where some of the largest bonefish in the world thrive on an abundance of crabs and shrimp.

On our trip in January, we took a direct flight from Newark to Nassau on United Airlines, but due to icing conditions in Newark, we missed our short hop to South Andros and had to spend the first night in Nassau. In the morning, the twenty-five-minute flight to the Congo Town airport gave us our first glimpse of life on the island. To my surprise, South Andros is an impoverished community that has suffered a population exodus during the last ten years. A third of the houses lie abandoned, and there are no restaurants that you would expect at a tourist destination. After speaking with the caretaker of the house that we rented, we learned that upon graduating from high school, most of the young people migrate to Nassau for employment. The primary sources of income on the island are government employment, a few small businesses, and service jobs at the bonefish lodges that cater to well-heeled fly fishers. Many of the people on the island lead a subsistence lifestyle supplemented with part-time seasonal employment. While I was visiting

a local artist, he told me the advice his grandfather had given him: “If you keep your freezer full of conch, spiny lobster, fish, and land crab and you have a few banana trees in the backyard, you will get by just fine.”

My initial plan for our trip was to spend time fishing for a variety of different species. In the month prior to our trip, I contacted two guides, and I scheduled two bonefish charters and one offshore trip to fish for wahoos. The house that we rented came with two ocean kayaks, so we also brought spinning gear to fish the reef. On the first day of our visit, our plans for a full week of fishing were quickly dashed. On the day of our arrival, the winds were howling at thirty miles per hour, five-foot waves were pounding the beach, and the weather reports predicted that the cold front would be with us for the entire week. With these conditions, we were forced to cancel the offshore trip, and snorkeling and fishing the reef were no longer options. In the Bahamas during the winter months, you can have beautiful, sunny weather with gentle breezes, and you can also expect an occasional front to move through. We were told, “You should have been here last week.” When I asked our guide what he recommended as the best time to schedule a trip, he told me that March, April, and May offer the best weather to fish for bonefish in the Bahamas.

Even though the conditions were difficult, we did manage to make two trips to the mangrove flats on the leeward side of the island. On Day One, clouds with a spattering of light rain periodically gave way to bursts of sunlight, and the winds continued to blow. In the morning, I hooked one large bonefish, and despite a 16-pound-test fluorocarbon tippet and a tight drag, the fish ran straight into the mangroves and quickly broke off. Another fish broke off at the hook set, and in the afternoon, I landed one fish that



was about three pounds. Our guide, Bonefish Doug, informed me that I lined and spooked about a half dozen fish that I cast toward, but never saw.

On Day Two, the weather improved, the sun stayed out, and the wind dropped to about fifteen miles per hour. It was on this day that I got a sense of how good the fishing can be on Andros Island. Throughout the day, we had numerous shots at cruising fish, but missed many of these opportunities due to poor presentations. I thought that I had decent casting skills until I attempted to put sixty feet of line accurately into a gusting fifteen-mile-per-hour wind. Before venturing to the Bahamas, be sure to practice your double haul. Most of the

time, bonefish are moving targets, and the guide on his elevated platform is the first person to spot the fish. Following the guide's instructions, you need to present your fly ten to fifteen feet in front of the fish and then strip the fly away from the fish. It was a humbling experience, but I did manage to land seven fish that ranged from two to five pounds. When you hook a bonefish, the explosive runs will leave an indelible impression on your psyche. According to our guide, bonefish up to ten to twelve pounds are fairly common on Andros. If you are lucky enough to hook a fish like that, you better hope that you are in open water, just far enough from the mangroves.

On a flats trip in the Bahamas, there are a variety of other species of fish that can round out your day of fishing. While we were planning our trip, the guide told me about the secret "Tarpon Hole" where clients have caught tarpon up to 175 pounds. He warned me that hookups at this spot often lead to "very long and painful struggles that test both man and tackle." Since I do not own a 14-weight fly rod, I bought along a stiff spinning rod loaded with 60-pound-test braid with a 60-pound fluorocarbon leader. The guide recommended two-ounce white bucktail jigs for the deep hole, where the main channel out of the mangroves meets the ocean. When we arrived early in the morning, a number of tarpon were rolling on the surface, but none showed any interest in the white jig. As I dug through my tackle bag looking for other options, I happened upon a fresh bag of five-inch white-and-pink Gulp! Minnows from a previous striper trip. When I added this to the jig, the lure sprang to life with an enticing flutter. On the first cast, I had a hit that nearly took the rod from my hands. On the next cast, I had another solid strike, and this time I was able to set the hook. After two head-shaking leaps and a long, drawn-out fight, the fish came to the boat, and I landed a fifty-pound silver beauty.

The barracuda is another game species that prowls the flats, looking for unsuspecting prey. After sighting a number of large cruising specimens, I rigged my back-up fly rod with a steel leader haywire-twisted to a chartreuse Half-and-Half. I had a number of fish chase and snap at the fly, but a solid hookup eluded me on this trip.

I will be going back. As you probably know, if you put in the time in, the reward eventually will be yours. 🦞

Trout Management

Charles Neuner

Moose River Plains is an area northeast of the town of Indian Lake in the Adirondack Mountains. That such sizeable tracts of wilderness still exist in the contiguous forty-eight states is a small miracle, let alone that it is not even the largest wilderness area in New York State.

There are many ponds and rivers in the Moose River Plains wilderness area that contain native and heritage-strain brook trout. I have fished many of these waters over the years, and one thing that stands out is that the trout there, although plentiful, are relatively small, of relatively uniform size, and that the occasional larger trout, although present, are the exception.

The first time that I fished the remote trout ponds of Moose River Plains, I was surprised that I had not seen larger trout, considering the inaccessibility of the places that I was fishing. Later that week, I spoke to a local New York Department of Environmental Conservation fisheries biologist who explained that the size of the trout that I encountered was the normal distribution curve of such undisturbed water. With little or no fishing pressure, either the trout become progressively plentiful and smaller, or a few dominant trout become disproportionately larger than the rest and cannibalize the smaller trout. He pointed out that catch-and-release fishing alone would not remedy such a situation, that it could in fact exacerbate it, and that to achieve a more uniform distribution of trout size in a given fishery requires managed and balanced predation.

Creels were once ubiquitous on trout streams, but today, with the exception of Opening Day, one rarely sees a creel anymore. I do see people keeping trout, and although I wish that they would put them back, over the years, keeping them appears to be increasingly the exception to the rule. I have also observed that the larger trout in a given river are generally located in the stretches that are open to all tackle and to keeping fish, and ironically, this is likely the result of the increasing popularity of fly fishing.

Fly fishers generally practice catch and release, and they tend to prefer to fish in river sections

designated as such. As a result, the no-kill areas of most rivers tend to concentrate the largest number of anglers, who today are predominantly fly fishers, which leaves the open-water sections between no-kill sections comparatively unfished. These open-water sections are available to fly fishers, of course, but it is often the culture of fly fishing and its connection with the ethics of catch and release that today draws fly fishers to no-kill sections. This is the case as much as concern for environmental issues. Among its conclusions, a recent NYDEC study of the effects of no-kill sections on trout size and distribution suggested that no-kill sections might be considered simply on the basis that they appear to be an increasing social norm, conservation advantages notwithstanding.

Also, when fly fishing in no-kill sections, I probably see as many trout floating downstream belly-up from poorly executed releases and overplaying in any given year as I see on stringers. This does not justify poaching, the use of bait where it's prohibited, or otherwise illegally taking trout, but I believe that it does put into question the effect of some of our decisions as anglers, however well-intentioned.

This is by no means intended to disparage the successful establishment of catch and release as a central tenet of fly-fishing ethics and etiquette, but it does suggest that no-kill sections by themselves are not a panacea for maintaining large populations of large trout, especially when nature on its own tends to produce either many small or a few large ones. Fisheries management is an evolving and inexact science, and no two rivers or sections of rivers will benefit from a single management approach to improving trout size, or quantity, or both. To balance the needs of the trout and their environment with the expectations of those who enjoy them, biologists who manage trout fisheries need all the tools available to them, from no-kill sections to tackle restrictions, size limits, slot limits, and the whole armamentarium of similar fisheries management techniques. And likewise, to enjoy all the resources that a river has to offer, anglers practicing the ethics of catch and release need to explore the whole stream. The results can be surprising. 

The 2017 TGF Annual Dinner

Bud Bynack

On March 23, TGF hosted its Annual Dinner and the annual election of members of the board of directors at the Anglers' Club in Manhattan. The speaker was noted angler, author, filmmaker, and rod builder Hoagy Carmichael, Jr. His presentation focused on the role played by Americans in preserving the Atlantic salmon fishery on the Grand Cascapédia River on the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec and especially on the spirited actions of Amy Phipps Guest, who took over the lease on the waters of the Cascapédia Club after the stock market crash of 1929 had left its other wealthy members unable to keep it up. Guest was a suffragette and aviation enthusiast who declared, "I could do that," following Charles Lindberg's initial transatlantic flight and who, after her family talked her out of making the flight herself, leased the plane used by Amelia Earhart when Earhart became the first female transatlantic pilot. In addition to illuminating the character of this fascinating person, Carmichael also told a series of amusing big-fish stories set on the Grand Cascapédia.

In a brief meeting before the presentation, board members for the term expiring in 2020 were elected: Karen Kaplan, Steve Lieb, Chuck Neuner, and two

new members, Julian Antebi and Avram Schlesinger. A passionate fly fisher, Julian Antebi is president of Phoenix Environmental Management, Inc., an environmental consulting firm that provides private and public entities technical expertise in addressing legacy brownfield sites. Avram Schlesinger also is an avid fly fisher who teaches art history and is director of independent study at Horace Mann School in the Bronx. He brings some much-needed media and tech expertise to the board.

The silent and open auctions were a great success, and Luc Jansen won the raffle for the Winston Boron IIIx Rod, Sage 4250 series reel, and Rio Gold line. TGF is grateful to UpCountry Sportfishing, in New Hartford, CT, and Thruway Sporting Goods, in Walden, NY, for their continued support in supplying items for the auctions and raffle.



Hoagy Carmichael, Jr. (L) and TGF president Bert Darrow (R).

Many thanks also are due to David Berman for organizing the dinner event, to TGF board members for helping to make it a success, and to Carolyn Chadwick of the Anglers' Club of New York for all her help. 🐟

The 16th Annual Theodore Gordon Flyfishers **FARMINGTON RIVER OUTING** Saturday, June 24th, 2017

The Outings Committee would like to invite TGF members to our first outing of the 2017 fishing season. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet other TGF members and share the day's experiences in a beautiful setting.

For this outing, TGF travels to Connecticut to fish the upper section of the West Branch of the Farmington River, a beautiful fishery that holds brown, rainbow, and brook trout and salmon. The Farmington, Connecticut's only "Wild and Scenic River," is a tailwater fishery with water temperatures cool enough for quality fishing even in the summer. The water is easily accessible and offers various types of fishing spots, from long pools, to quick riffles, to heavy water.

Make a day of it by fishing in the morning, gathering for a streamside lunch, and fishing the late hatches in the afternoon and evening. If you stay overnight, join us for dinner.

TGF president Bert Darrow will lead this popular trip, providing tips on where and how to fish this river as well as organizing our midday picnic. I encourage anyone with an idea for another outing, fishing or otherwise, to contact me at the address below to start the conversation.

—Julian Antebi, Outings Committee chair

THE TGF FARMINGTON RIVER OUTING RSVP

Please RSVP to Julian Antebi at outings@tgf.org no later than June 19 if you plan to attend so that we can accommodate everyone.

ORIENTATION

Bert Darrow will give a short introduction to the river and its pools at 9:30 A.M. on Saturday morning at Mathies Grove Recreation Area on East River Road in Barkhamsted. From Route 44, take Route 318 east, go across the steel bridge, and take your first left onto

East River Road. Mathies Grove Recreation Area is the first recreation area you will find going north. Park in the anglers' parking lot or inside the park with a car fee. Note that if you pay to park here, get a receipt so that you can return at lunchtime if you fish elsewhere during the day. If you get lost or expect to be late, call Bert Darrow on his cell phone at (845) 235-4557.

LUNCH

Meet again at Mathies Grove Recreation Area at 12:30 P.M. for lunch, provided by TGF. (See Orientation above for directions.) There will be a \$20 charge per person for the picnic lunch. Pay online on the TGF Web site at <http://tgf.org/product/16th-annual-farmington-river-outing>. (We prefer advance payment for a head count.)

LICENSES

Either three-day (\$22 out-of-state) or annual fishing (\$28 CT resident or \$55 out-of-state) licenses may be obtained at UpCountry Sportfishing, at any town hall in Connecticut, or online at: <https://www.ct.wildlifelicense.com/internetsales>.

LOCAL FLY SHOP

UpCountry Sportfishing, 352 Main Street, Pleasant Meadow, (860) 379-1952, www.farmingtonriver.com. (Fishing licenses are available here.) Directions to the area will be found on the fly shop Web site.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Hillside Motel, Route 44, Canton, <http://www.hillsidemotel44.com>, (860) 693-4951.

Old Riverton Inn, Riverton, <http://www.rivertoninn.com>, (860) 379-8678. (Tell Pauline you are with TGF.)

Pine Meadow B&B, 398 Main Street, Pine Meadow, (860) 379-8745.

Legends on the Farmington, <http://legendsbnb.com>, (203) 650 8767. 📍

A Commitment to Conservation

Jessica Steinberg Albin

In 2006, I received the first TGF Founders Fund Scholarship. I now serve on the Founders Fund Scholarship Committee as a member of the TGF board of directors. Although I have fly fished, more than a decade ago, what drew me to TGF was the organization's mission. Through protection, advocacy, and education, TGF teaches its members and the general public the importance of fisheries and habitat preservation.

Even though I do not consider myself a fly fisher, I have supported and remained involved in TGF because of what the organization represents—a commitment to conservation. TGF's steadfast desire to preserve and enhance natural resources is what I strive to accomplish in both my professional and personal endeavors.

I currently enforce New York State's wetlands laws, both tidal and freshwater. I know firsthand how degradation of a wetland resource can have far-reaching impacts and not just affect the immediate

water body. As an attorney, I am able to use the law to preserve and protect these resources on a daily basis and ensure that the state's wetlands can be enjoyed for current and future generations. I am also an adjunct professor at Pace University Law School. I hope to instill in my students a respect for the law and an understanding of how the law is a critical component of conservation.

I have learned a lot from my fellow TGF members. I have learned about the hidden gems of fly fishing and about some of the best spots to cast a fly. Most importantly, I have learned that we have a common goal—to ensure that our precious natural resources can be enjoyed now as well as by generations to come. I hope that one day soon I will go out on the river with my fellow TGF members and experience the thrill of casting a fly and catching a trout—and then the bigger thrill of telling everyone about it. Until then, I will continue to help protect New York's natural resources. 🐟



"Waiting for the Hatch". Photo by Bruce Corwin

Sharks in the Water

Fred Lowenfels



Photo by Captain Quintin Hall

If you don't believe this story, I don't blame you. I can still hardly believe it.

Have you ever sat on the beach on South Florida's Treasure Coast facing the beautiful Atlantic Ocean and seen a shape launch out of the water, spin around, and crash back onto the waves? It's a rather startling apparition that is easy to discount as a mirage, induced by too much glare or too many strawberry daiquiris. But it does happen with surprising frequency and within a surprisingly close distance to the shore. Populations of spinner sharks (*Carcharhinus brevipinna*) and blacktip sharks (*Carcharhinus limbatus*) cruise up and down the coastline. Most people think they are searching for food, but in fact, they are searching for a mate. A scientist observing the phenomenon with a hi-def camera from a small plane counted over fifteen thousand sharks on a flight from the Boca Raton Inlet to the Jupiter Inlet within 200 yards of shore in March 2013. "That's 1000 sharks per square kilometer," Stephen Kajiura, an associate professor of biology at Florida Atlantic University, said in the *Palm Beach Daily News*.

If you are a swimmer, such a sight might send you to the swimming pool instead of out into the surf. But if you are an angler, especially a fly fisher, all you want to know is whether they can be caught and how to do it.

THE GUIDE

In March, while I was staying in Palm Beach, my fishing buddy, Guy Ortmann, recounted an excellent day of fly fishing for snook in the Intracoastal Waterway in Boynton Beach with a local guide, Captain Quintin Hall. Quintin is a South African native and a telecommunications professional whose passion for fishing and guiding takes him out weekday nights and weekends. He fishes for all species, but when asked, is happy to hunt for sharks, as well as for the myriad other species inhabiting coastal Florida waters. He told me he knows the technique, and if the weather was favorable, we would go for sharks offshore on his flats boat.

South Florida is notoriously windy in early spring, as everyone who has had a grandmother who went south can tell you. "It's so windy in Florida," all grandmas say. And in fact it is. The week of my Saturday trip, it was howling twenty to thirty knots, with crashing surf—great for the kite surfers, not so great for a fly rodder.

But that Saturday, the sea was calm. Not glassy, but calm. We left the dock ramp at the Boynton Inlet at about 7:30 A.M. and headed north, toward Singer Island, where spinner sharks had been sighted by one of the captain's friends. I was skeptical, because

for the previous ten days, I had been scouting the water diligently, with no shark sightings at all. And none of my friends along the waterfront had seen any sign of them, either.

THE GEAR

With Quintin's 200-horsepower Yamie full throttle, we reach the beach off the northern part of Singer Island in about forty-five minutes, passing by a succession of luxury ocean-front developments of various degrees of ugliness, including the over-the-top Mar-a-Lago. But the northern end of Singer Island is undeveloped, with palm trees and vegetation leeward of a lovely white sandy beach. We spot a crew of local Good Samaritans in bright-colored shirts carefully combing the beach to clean up the ever-present debris. They are oblivious to what lies offshore.

The water is calm and clear. Soon, Quintin starts to point out large, dark shapes cruising off the beach, maybe two hundred feet out. They are hard to spot at first, looking like dark splotches over the sand. But they are moving! Soon I spot a shape in the cusp of a breaker not fifty feet off the beach. As the wave breaks, the outline of the shark is unmistakable. Soon the shapes are cruising by with some regularity. The flats boat is equipped with a small electric trolling motor on the bow, which Quintin uses to line up a drift parallel to the shore about one hundred yards out. He takes from his cooler a bag of dead, smelly fish and proceeds to put them in a mesh bag that he hangs over the side. It's pretty ugly chum, but he says it creates a slick behind the boat as we slowly cruise along with the light wind and current, and the sharks find it enormously appealing to their acute sense of smell. Then he ties on an eight-inch-long, bright-orange creation he made from dyed hackle feathers and an orange-and-white piece of foam for a head, with a size 7/0 hook. He grinds it into a slab of bluefish meat and lubes up the fly with the scent. We're using a 14-weight 9-foot fly rod. I never knew they made 14-weights. It feels like a broomstick, but Quintin assures me we need its power to stand a chance of landing our quarry. Quintin's gear is very high end:

the rod is a Temple Fork TiCr2, and the reel is a Tibor Signature Series.

"Now, just let out the entire line and take one turn around the reel," he instructs. "What, don't I cast it out?" "No need. Just pull it off the reel and let our motion straighten out the line—and don't move the fly at all, no matter what." This seems a bit like cheating. But if you don't obey your guide, you are wasting all his talent and experience and your money!

THE FISH

By now, it's about 9:00 A.M., and sharks are cruising all around us. "Wait until the shark attacks the fly, then strip in hard. Don't move the fly before the strike!" A dark shape approaches from behind, inhales the fly, and goes berserk, jumping, diving, leaping, swirling, going crazy with anger and surprise. He runs and jumps some more. I am way, way into my backing. My heart is in my throat. It's the largest fish I have ever had on a fly rod. Quinton puts it at six feet long and ninety pounds.

The fight is on. The fish sounds and stops moving. I am sure he has wrapped around a rock, the fly is stuck, and the fish is gone. Quintin uses the trolling motor to ease away from the beach and any obstructions underwater. I think I have hooked bottom. I can't move it at all. The 14-weight is bent like a 1-weight with a six-inch brookie on it. But the bottom starts swimming toward us as the boat moves out. The bottom is the fish, and my arm is already aching, trying to gain any line against the beast. The battle continues for eighteen minutes, timed on my watch. I am getting tired, pumping when possible and gaining a few feet of line at a time. Finally, the fish is near the surface and swimming around the boat. I think it is possible that we will get it alongside and maybe get a photo, if my arm doesn't fall off first. Quintin is wearing a Kevlar glove.

I hear Quintin say, "I hope that hammerhead that cruises around here doesn't see your fish." I am trying to process this while still pumping as the fish comes within twenty feet of the bow of the boat. Suddenly, "Let your fish swim away!" he yells. "Give

out line!" I look down in the water and see a huge, tan shape coming up from the deep. Before I know what is happening, its mouth is on the spinner shark, and the hammerhead is swimming away with my fish. "Quick, give me the rod. We can't deal with this." Quintin grabs the 14-weight and points the rod at the monsters swimming away, holds on, and the fly line snaps. Silence. Both are gone.

A hammerhead shark—Quintin puts it in the range of sixteen to eighteen feet and pushing one thousand pounds—has either ruined or made my day. I say it made my day. It's one thrill to land a ninety-pound spinner. It's another thrill altogether to watch one of nature's astounding rituals play out right before your face. Big fish eats little fish. Who could imagine seeing that within a hundred yards of the beautiful Florida coast?

THE TRUTH

You don't believe it? The action was too tense and furious for any videos, so I can't prove that it happened. But if you want to ask Quintin, he can be reached at 1-561-543-4011, www.TKFCharters.com. 🐟



Photo by Captain Quintin Hall

The “Deconstructed Mayfly”: Tying the DM Coffin Fly

Charles Neuner

The coloration of many animals, predators and prey alike, is generally not an exact replication of their surroundings, but rather a composite of key factors of their environment, composed in a manner that has evolved either to confuse or to conceal. The same principle applies when it is a matter of attraction, not camouflage: it is the overall synergy of a few essential elements that matters in producing the impression that something is real, not the specific details. Verisimilitude is the product of general patterns, not the sum of discrete particulars. That's why digital camouflage has largely replaced more “realistic” depictions of leaves and other natural forms in military and sporting applications.

That principle also helps explain my observation that the more exacting an imitation that a fly pattern is, the more likely it is to be rejected by the trout. This does not appear to be true in all cases, but more often than not, I have seen detailed imitations fail where suggestive patterns were effective. It has also been my experience that shape, color, and size appear to matter, but not necessarily in the way that we might anticipate. We can never perfectly imitate a natural insect to the minutest detail, but trout will take a fly that might be a real insect because it conforms to the elemental pattern of shape, color, and size that real insects present, whereas too many details interfere with, rather than promote, the impression of realism.

The Deconstructed Mayfly dry fly is a pattern that I designed to present a “collage” of what I believe to be the key attributes of a given mayfly. In the case of ovipositing mayflies, I believe these attributes to be the body and fluttering wing, with the tail and distinct wings less important to imitate until the spent spinner stage.

As with most of my patterns, this is a general recipe that can be adjusted in terms of color and size. This is a pattern that I use for ovipositing Coffin Flies—spinners just before they are spent.



Materials

Hook: Size 10 down-eye dry-fly hook (I like a Gamakatsu 08405-25 for this pattern).

Thread: 8/0 dark chocolate brown (essentially a Jacobean brown) nylon.

Tails: Dark dun Microfibrils (sold under various names; I use Orvis SKU #15660064).

Body: Light cream micro chenille (various brands; use the type that cannot be unraveled).

Hackle: Chocolate dun blended with bronze-dyed grizzly (use hackles one hook size larger).

Wing: None.

Tying Instructions

Step 1: Mount the thread 3/16 of an inch behind the hook eye. Use one layer of thread. Do not build it up.

Step 2: Tie in Microfibril tails at the same point, 3/16 of an inch from the hook eye, extending back beyond the bend of the hook.

Step 3: Tie in a length of micro chenille at the same point, extending back above the tails for a length equal to the mayfly body.

Step 4: Tie in the two hackles at the same point and wind one through the other so that they cover the tie-in point.

Step 5: Whip finish, trim a 45-degree V in the hackle under the hook, and lacquer the head.

The net effect is quite remarkable, considering how simple it is to tie, and the unobstructed hook provides enhanced hooking qualities, as well,

The Deconstructed Mayfly can be tied to match most mayfly hatches. There are limits to the possible sizes of this pattern due to the diameter of the micro chenille, but the most common diameter works for most mayfly imitations tied on size 16 through size 10 hooks. 🦋

Bud Bynack

Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier: The Way to Rapid Improvement

By Jim Cramer. Published by No Nonsense Fly Fishing Guidebooks, 2013; \$27.95 softbound.

“Try thinking,” the professor wrote on my physics midterm exam when I was a freshman in college. He was right. I had done OK in science and math in high school simply by recognizing that a problem was of a certain kind (a genre, really) and applying the method I’d been taught to solve that kind of problem. However, that was just a sophisticated version of rote learning—a swell way to ace standardized tests, but not actually what should be called “thinking.” I nearly flunked the college freshman physics course because nobody had taught me how scientists actually go about thinking.

Fly tiers are a lot like I was back then. We learn there are certain kinds of problems (getting materials to stay on top of the hook, for example), and we learn established ways to deal with them. If we learn new techniques, it’s because they’re handed down by others—we just apply them. And if we veer into “creative” thinking, it usually involves dreaming up some new fly, which, as it usually turns out, is a version of a fly someone else already has thought up. Most fly tiers just apply established protocols to well-defined problems—problems that have been defined for them by others.

Years later, as a professor myself, albeit in a discipline about as far from physics as you can get, I finally understood what my old physics professor had meant and why he was tempted to write such a comment. The comment itself bothered me, though, and still does: it was his job to teach me *how* to think like a physicist, and that hadn’t happened. But faced with the same issue in my own discipline, I realized how challenging an undertaking it is to try to teach someone how to “try thinking.”

That challenge is what Jim Cramer takes on in *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier*. When trying to meet it

myself, I realized there are two possible ways to go. In *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier*, Jim Cramer follows both of them.

The first and most important way is to make a distinction between “rules” and “principles.” That’s my claim, not Cramer’s. However, he tacitly employs it throughout the book.

“Rules” are what every student *wants* to learn: “How should I do this?” they ask. If it’s been done before, there will be an answer for that. It can be communicated, learned, tested for, validated by the imprimatur of authority, and perpetuated in that manner. One of the many pressures that teachers face is the understandable, but pernicious insistence by students that they be told the “how” of things—to be told how to follow the rules.

“Principles,” by contrast, are what every student *needs* to learn: the general ways in which things work—the energies and resistances of things and of people that underlie the way in which this “this,” whatever it may be, comes into being as a problem or issue and therefore the ways in which it can and can’t be dealt with. Principles involve what is going on and why, and when posed as questions, those words—“What?” and “Why?”—lead to knowledge of the conditions that help determine possible answers to any simply instrumental questions—to the “How?” questions.

“You will see these simple questions repeated in different forms throughout this book,” Cramer writes. “Regardless of how you ask these questions, if you take the time to ask *and* answer them, your tying will improve and you will be on your way to becoming a thinking fly tier.”

The important thing here is that unlike the answers to “How should I do this?” there are no predetermined answers to the “What?” and “Why?” questions. They’re open-ended. They lead to surprising places. They lead to insights. They lead to

what is called “thinking.”

In *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier*, the distinction between “rules” and “principles” appears as the contrast between “habit” and “critical thinking.” Cramer writes: “Habit is simply the repetition of doing the same thing over and over in the same manner,” and “because habit allows us to tie without thought, it is the enemy of critical thinking, and without critical thinking our tying will not improve. Even those habits that you consider to be good habits,” he writes, “should be reviewed occasionally” and subjected to critical thought.

This is not necessarily a comfortable process. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, more radically, “The terror of reform is the discovery that we must cast away our virtues, or what we have always esteemed such, into the same pit that has consumed our grosser vices.”

However, the benefits of critical thinking, of seeking to understand and apply principles, rather than to learn rules, make the whole process worthwhile, and most of *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier* consists of examples of the kind of insights that becoming a thinking fly tier can yield.

That’s the second way to encourage thought: perform the process of critical thinking as an ethical example, hoping that it’s the process itself and the sorts of results that it yields, not just the specific results themselves, that others will focus on and emulate.

Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier just sparkles with interesting ideas. In the chapter on hackling wet flies, for example, Cramer analyzes what goes on in the hackling process in terms of the physical properties of feathers and hooks. Nothing is more common for a tier than having hackles go kablooey in some way—splaying out, slanting the wrong way, just getting out of control. Cramer figures out why this happens and what to do about it. He’s got some great ideas about parachute hackling, too. And in an amazing chapter on adding weight to flies, he measures the actual weight and analyzes the relative effectiveness of beads, eyes, cones, and lead wire. It’s always been a mystery how much weight actually gets added to a fly using these various methods, and now it’s not. That chapter alone is worth the price of the book.

There’s more: a new technique that Cramer calls “thatching”—attaching bunches of material in the manner of a thatched roof to form the body of a fly. There’s a “hook rant” about the ways in which the designations of hook sizes don’t really tell you what you need to know about them. There’s a chapter on what he calls “fast food flies,” quickly tied nymphs using a couple of pieces of marabou that accomplish for subsurface flies what Harry Darbee, another thinking fly tier, accomplished for dries with his Two-Feather Fly. And there are little *lagniappes* in the form of sidebar “Fly Notions” that suggest a whole raft of interesting ideas, such as using organza tape for nymph gills.

There’s a lot more than that, actually. I could go on, but to do so would misrepresent the emphasis of the book. In fact, although Cramer flushes ideas from the underbrush of fly-tying traditions like a bird dog flushes grouse, the appeal of such ideas points to the tension between these two ways to encourage people to “try thinking”: the more dazzling the results, the more likely they will get in the way of asking the kinds of questions that produced them. The natural interest in “How?” can detract from the focus on “What?” and “Why?” You certainly can buy this book for the results of Jim Cramer’s critical thinking, but you should buy it because it encourages you to think for yourself.

Jim Cramer is an engineer who used to work at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where nuclear weapons were once designed, which currently is tasked with “ensuring the safety, security and reliability of the nation’s nuclear deterrent.” The habits of thought that he advocates here are particularly characteristic of an engineer’s approach to materials and their applications. Actually, many of the best fly tiers I know have a background in engineering and mechanics. (They also tend to be left-handed, but that’s just weird.) At fly-tying demonstrations and angling shows, they can and will tell you exactly why they make every move they make when tying a particular fly, why they use the materials they use, and why they put *this* wrap right *there*. Jim Cramer wants you to aspire to be like them: “Once you seriously become a thinking fly tier, you should be able to explain to a student or even another more advanced tier why you perform

a tying step the way that you do. You should be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of alternate approaches.” The way you arrive at that point is by striving to be able to make those same explanations to yourself.

In the acknowledgments of the book, I’m thanked in embarrassingly profuse terms, having been involved at a very early stage in the shaping of the manuscript, but as an editor, I don’t actually have to like the material on which I work—my job is just to try to make it better. Obviously, I like this book a lot, but I like it because I now try thinking every time I sit down at the vise. I like it because it’s made me a better fly tier. If you tie, it will make you one, too.

Editor’s Note: A version of this review first appeared in the May/June 2013 issue of California Fly Fisher magazine. On April 11, 2017, Jim Cramer died while fly fishing for bass in the Sierra foothills near Merced, California. . His aluminum pram was found upside down with two fly rods neatly placed on top. His body was found by divers the next day. He was not wearing a personal floatation device, which was found nearby. Accidents happen, even to thinking fly fishers: PFDs save lives. 🐟



Photo by Bruce Corwin