

The FLYpaper

Carson Fly Fishing Club

P.O. Box 3163, Carson City, NV 89702

www.carsonflyfishing.club



Calendar

February 20, General Meeting,
7:00 pm

February 24, Hickson Slough
Fish-out??

March 5, Board Meeting, 6:00
pm, Pizza Factory

March 14, Tying @ Empire
Ranch 5:00 pm

April 19, Board Meeting, 6:00
pm, Pizza Factory

April 16, General Meeting,
7:00 pm

President's Letter

Hi all:

We are in the middle of winter and for me, a little fishing and a lot of skiing. I just got back from a trip to Snowbird Ski Resort in Utah. It wouldn't stop snowing. Glad I'm home for awhile. The opener happened at Hinkson Slough on the 10th. Haven't heard anything about it. I'm going to take a trip out there to see what's it like fishing the cooling ponds. I'll give a report at our first general meeting.

Don't forget we have our first general meeting on February 20th at 7 PM Carson City Sheriff's office on E Musser Street. Our guest speaker is Kris Urquhart Biologist for NDOW. His area is the Mason Valley Wildlife area and we'll hear the latest updates on Hinkson Slough. Of course, we'll have our general raffle and "fly-fyle". If you aren't familiar with it, bring two flies one for the general raffle and the other for special drawing for those who brought flies.

Our next fly tying session is March 14th at Empire Ranch GC. Fly tying begins around 5 PM. For those who would like dinner come early and support the venue. This month, I'm the tier and we'll be tying the **Griffith's Gnat** (see attachment). An easy but effective dry fly. I'll be tying it on a #16 dry fly hook for ease. I'll provide the material: hooks, peacock herl and arizv hackle. I suggest tying with Olive or Black thread

CFFC Officers & Board

President. Ken Briscoe

Vice President John Walsh

Treasure Dave Conklin

Secretary. Stan Zuber

Board Members:

Ray Achen. Carol Birchill

Ernie Walsh Jim Elie

Bill Hammons

grizzly hackle. I suggest tying with Olive or Black thread if you have it. Otherwise use whatever color you have. If you need a vise or tools Stan Zuber can help you out.

We're in a new year and for those who haven't renewed your membership for 2024, please consider it. It supports the club and is only \$30 as an individual or family. Checks may be mailed to CFFC, PO BOX 3163, Carson City, 89702 or come to our general meeting. We'll gladly accept your cash or checks. It's a great cause and keeps us going as a club.

If anyone has been fishing, please give us a report. Pyramid is in winter mood and I've heard good and average reports. River around the area are fishable. Be careful when wading, water is cold and ice may be present. I hope everyone can attend our general meeting and fly tying session. Any suggestions for guest speakers, please pass it on. Hoping to have another great line up as we did last year.

Tight lines and be safe.
Ken Briscoe, President

Fishing Reports:

www.renoflyshop.com

www.sierrabrightdot.com

Nevada Fishing

Regulations:

https://www.eregulations.com/nevada/fishing#google_vignette

CFFC Lets Go Fishing

Is a private group on Facebook for Carson Fly Fishing Club members. Members can post to members. Members will receive an invitation to join the group via email.

FLY TYING AT EMPIRE RANCH GOLF COURSE

On March 14 at 5:00 pm, we will have the monthly, fly tying session at Empire Ranch Golf Course, 1875 Fair Way, Carson City, NV. No experience necessary and materials will be provided. If you want to learn or just come and watch, you're welcome to attend. No equipment! You can use the club's equipment, just let us know so we can have it there.

Empire Ranch Restaurant is staying open for our event. If you would like to join us for dinner arrive at 4:30 pm. Contact Stan Zuber (775) 6712151 if you have any questions or need equipment. See you there.

This month's instructor is Ken Briscoe. The fly he'll be tying is a Griffith's Gnat.



Truckee River Fly Casters Annual Banquet

From: <markeraw@charter.net>
To: "Tom Smith" <Edsontiger@aol.com>
Sent: February 3, 2024 at 7:35 PM CST
Subject: Banquet
Tom - Please send this out to the club - Thanks, Mark

Our annual banquet is scheduled for Sunday, March 10 at the Tamarack Casino on South Virginia starting at 5 pm (cocktails). We are having roast pork loin, sole in lemon sauce and New York strip steak along with rice, vegetables, salad, rolls and dessert. The food has always been good there. The price of the banquet is \$52.00/person - pay at the door. I know this is a little pricey, but everything seems to have gone up. The 3 entree dinner is \$38.00, the cost of the room is \$500.00, which if 50 people show up, adds \$10.00 to the cost. We are still working on a speaker, who will get \$300.00 and there's small charges like the charge card reader from NV State Bank. It all adds up.;

One of the options I've looked at for upcoming years is a buffet lunch and no guest speaker, which would then run about \$10.00 less per person.

Anyway please drop me an email at markeraw@charter.net and let me know if you're coming and if you're bringing a guest. We need at least 40 people to guarantee the room. I hope that many of you can attend and as this is our only fund raiser for the year and were getting a little low on funds. There will again be about 40 silent auction items. Hand tied fliers by member are always a big seller, Anthony Turr has been soliciting various businesses for donations and has had a few takers, I sent out 13 letters to the various casinos and have already received generous donations from 3 of them. There will also be over 30 raffle ticket items to given away.

Hope to hear from you, Mark

Handling Trout in Cold Weather

/ POSTED ON [NOVEMBER 25, 2023](#) / BY [LOUIS CAHILL](#)



Photo by Louis Cahill

By Louis Cahill

Handling trout in cold weather requires special care.

When temperatures drop below freezing good catch-and-release practices become critical. We think of trout as needing special handling care when water temperatures are high, but fish are just as vulnerable when air temperatures are low. Mishandling fish in cold weather can easily be fatal.

Fish are, of course, cold blooded. They're bodies do not produce heat like ours do and this leaves them especially vulnerable to frostbite. The fragile tissues of

their gills can freeze in an instant when air temps are below freezing. Again, they have no body temperature to stabilize their cells, so it happens quickly.

We adapt very well to cold temperatures. We have evolved to survive wide temperature swings. Fish on the other hand have evolved in a world which never drops below freezing, so taking them out in the cold air is as alien to them as dropping us on the surface of Mars.

The solution is simple. Don't take fish out of the water when air temps are below freezing.

It's a little cold on your hands but you can handle it. They can't. If you don't like the idea of putting your hands in cold water during winter, get yourself a good C&R tool. I like the **Rising Crocodile tool**. It's a great C&R tool as well as pliers and a cutter. You can easily unhook a fish without getting your hands wet.

Please, never beach fish on the snow for a photo. This is basically tossing them in the cooler. Nothing breaks my heart like seeing photos of fish lying on the snow. If you respect the fish, and practice good catch-and-release, you'll find yourself with better fishing when spring rolls around.

Louis Cahill

Gink & Gasoline

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3 Tips for Nymphing During Runoff

Author [Evan Jones](#) Posted on [June 12, 2023](#) Categories [Fly Fishing](#)

Written By: Brian McGeehan, [Montana Angler](#)



An angler landing a nice trout while surrounded by high, dirty water.

All photos by Montana Angler

Montana river flows are at their highest in late May and early June, when runoff from the rapidly-melting snow above is strongest. While many fly anglers flock to spring creeks and tailwaters this time of year, there is still some truly exceptional fishing to be had on Montana's large freestone rivers during runoff season. Not only does the high, brown water scare off the faint-of-heart and reduce angling pressure to a minimum, but it also concentrates the trout, forcing them to gather in areas with slower flows to conserve energy. Nymph fishing can be exceptionally productive under these conditions, especially as the higher water dislodges droves of aquatic insects—including large stoneflies—further heightening the trout's fervor to feed. Here are three tips for nymphing during runoff.

1. Fish Shallow

Most of the trout are going to be sheltering along the banks as the river rages by, not just to get a break from the current, but also because the stained water provides a sense of security, allowing them to sit shallower and closer to shore than usual. The prime lies, therefore, will all be within a foot or two of shore during runoff. You may also find fish huddled together along the inside edge of large bends in the river, since the current is pushed mostly toward the outside edge.

2. Use Big Flies

Since small nymphs are harder to see in the swift, off-color currents, trout are keying in on larger food sources. You can increase your catch rates by super-sizing your fly selection, using big, attention-grabbing patterns such as a **rubber-legged stonefly nymph**. Another effective nymphing strategy is to dead-drift streamer patterns—such as **zonkers**—as the point fly in a tandem rig with a **worm pattern** trailing behind.

3. Shorten Your Leader

Accuracy counts when fishing close to the banks, yet traditional pre-packaged tapered leaders (even the 7.5-footers) are just too long and too thin to accurately deliver big, heavy nymphs. Instead, our guides prefer to use a 4-foot section of 15-pound Maxima down to a tippet ring, to which they attach a foot of heavy (0x-2x) fluorocarbon tippet, since the higher abrasion resistance is useful when routinely casting flies along brush-covered banks.

*Brian McGeehan is owner and operator of **Montana Angler** in Bozeman, MT.*



FLY CASTING | TACTICS

How To Be A More Accurate Fly Caster

by Domenick Swentosky | Apr 18, 2021 |

If you have it, accuracy might be something that you take for granted. *Oh, I'll just punch the fly under those tree limbs and land the fly with an upstream curve to compensate for the swift current rolling sideways off the mossy rock.* If that's easy for you, then you've likely spent decades on the river trying to improve your craft every time your boots were wet. But if your casting is average, then you probably avoid that same spot. The limbs are too low. And

the mossy rock might look inviting, but you're sure you'll hang up under that tree. So you move on.

I don't need to tell you that you're passing on some of the best opportunities of the day — and possibly the **biggest fish**. Only a small percentage of anglers have the necessary accuracy to tackle the tough situations. And big trout seem to know where to hide from average anglers.

Set aside the greedy limbs and cross currents for a moment. Because even in wide open spaces, accuracy is paramount. In fact, it's the most important skill an angler can learn. The simple ability to throw a fly in exactly the same place, over and over, with subtle, nuanced differences in the tippet each time, is the most valuable skill for any fisherman.

One cast and drift down a lane doesn't mean much. Any trout can miss the chance or can literally be looking the other way. So in the best lanes, we must repeat the presentation. Then we adjust the cast and the drift on consecutive passes to refine the look, to improve each time, **using data gathered from the previous passes**. Maybe a side current accelerates as it merges, so we throw an upstream mend in a dry line. Or maybe the riverbed deepens into a short bucket, so we allow our tight line nymph to drop on the fifth pass. But if you can't hit the same seam over and over, if you lack the accuracy for precision placement, then you're just hoping more than fishing.

Accuracy makes the angler effective. It's more fun, more productive and puts more trout in the net — a lot more.

So the next question: How can you be an accurate caster?

I have a few ideas . . .



Photo by Bill Dell

Cradle It and Squeeze It

Controlled casting starts with the right hold. Where and how the hand connects to the rod is elementary, but it's the start to making everything else easy or hard.

Slide your hand up and down the cork to **find the balance point**. Then place the trigger finger at that point. From here, everything feels most natural.

Use a **thumb on top or an index finger on top grip**, and learn to **squeeze on the power stroke**. The hand should cradle the rod at the balance point with minimal tension. Then, at the power stroke, the thumb or index finger pushes forward and the pinky and ring fingers pull. It's a squeeze. And it is the heart of fly casting power and accuracy. The subtle squeeze puts the finishing touches on a great casting stroke.

Cast the Tip

Once the hand is comfortable on the fly rod, it's time to shift your focus. Stop thinking about the hand, and feel the rod tip. The fly line and leader go where the tip goes. The rod tip is in charge. So think not of the whole rod, but **focus instead on the last few inches at the top. Feel the tip perform**. Learn its flex. Feel the rod load and release. If you know where the rod tip is and learn to

control it, you can cast a ten foot fly rod in tight cover. The tip is in charge of everything. So master it.

Cast the tip. As a full time guide who sees hundreds of anglers each year, I've learned that this is the most effective piece of advice I can give.



A Tighter Casting V

I stumbled across an article recently that suggested we should stop teaching the concept of 10:00 and 2:00. No we shouldn't. What would we replace it with? The author didn't offer any solutions but did fairly point out that 10:00 and 2:00 is variable and conditional. Well, of course it is.

Ten and two on the clock is a wonderful communication tool, and these are the baseline stopping positions for the rod tip. As we work up and down the stream, each cast and situation requires some adjustment. More speed here, and a tighter throw there. There's also a lot of room for style and preference. I stop more often at eleven and one. And that choice is **not** just a function of how

much line is being cast. The caster's line speed, rod flex, and many other things all factor in for precise casting.

In general, a tighter casting V is more accurate. When the tip moves further, there's more room for error. Less movement, less error. It's that simple.

Cast With More Speed

The trouble with fly lines is that they are so damn forgiving, practically inviting the caster to form bad habits. You can get a fly to the target with any number of horrible casting strokes — a slow, lazy, lobbing form works well enough to put the fly near the target. But such strokes do nothing good with the *tippet*. And where's the fly going next? Well, if you haven't thought about that yet, now's a good time to start, because flies follow that tippet.

Cast so you have authority over tippet placement. And the only way to do that is with speed.

Many of the great casters I've been around are amazing with a tight line. Truth is, excellent tight line and euro nymphing starts with perfect and precise casting form. Light euro lines and Mono Rigs paired with superb, crisp technique are a thing of beauty — speed between two points, with sharp stops and a tight V. And if you have a handle on a twenty pound Mono Rig butt section — throwing tight loops into narrow windows — then you surely have the skills to make a fly line dance right into the same narrow slots.

Rod Selection

I won't make strong arguments about this one, because there's a lot of room for personal style. But a rod that recovers quickly is a more accurate tool for a wider variety of styles. An extra-flexible rod can be a dreamy, accurate tool for dry flies, but it's a beast as soon as fifty centigrams and a nymph are added to the line. Then, all of the sudden, getting close is thought to be close enough. But it shouldn't be. Accuracy under the water is just as critical as it is on the surface — actually more.

I chuckle a bit when I see accuracy touted as a selling point for any fly rod. Of course, it's the angler who is accurate. It's the Indian — not the arrow. That said, a rod with poor recovery is a liability to any serious angler, because accuracy suffers if the tip won't stabilize.



Cast Closer

The worst habit on a river is fishing too far away. There's something in our human nature that wants to push everything we do to greater distance. We strive to hit a baseball over the fence, drive a golf ball across the water or chuck a cast to the opposite bank.

Stop it.

Distance and accuracy are opposing forces. With more line in the air we are less precise. At longer distances, our eyes see less detail in the water. And there is rarely a time on a trout river when casting over thirty feet is necessary.

Be disciplined. **Wade more and fish closer.** Stay behind the trout. Be stealthy, and you can approach within fifteen or twenty feet, even in clear water conditions. Then, closer to the chosen target, accuracy becomes repetitive and attainable.

Get It Together

Placing the fly, leader and line exactly where you want is a reward in itself. Forget the fish, and focus on the landings. Be an accurate caster, and the fish will certainly follow.

Accuracy on the water starts with the rod hand, cradling the rod and then squeezing at the power stroke. Then, by learning to feel the flex of the rod tip, we know the path that our line will travel by using short, crisp motions and speed.

Accurate casting requires a disciplined approach. So find a rhythm at short distances. Stay in that rhythm and keep wading to reach the next seam or slot. Then take that accuracy all the way over to the greedy bankside limbs and the mossy rock with the swirling seams. And catch all the trout you've been missing.

Fish hard, friends.

Enjoy the day.

Domenick Swentosky

TROUTBITTEN

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Interview: Montana Brothers Rodworks' Dan and Doug Daufel

An interview with two of the world's most interesting fly rod designers

by Todd Tanner - Thursday, Feb 2nd, 2023

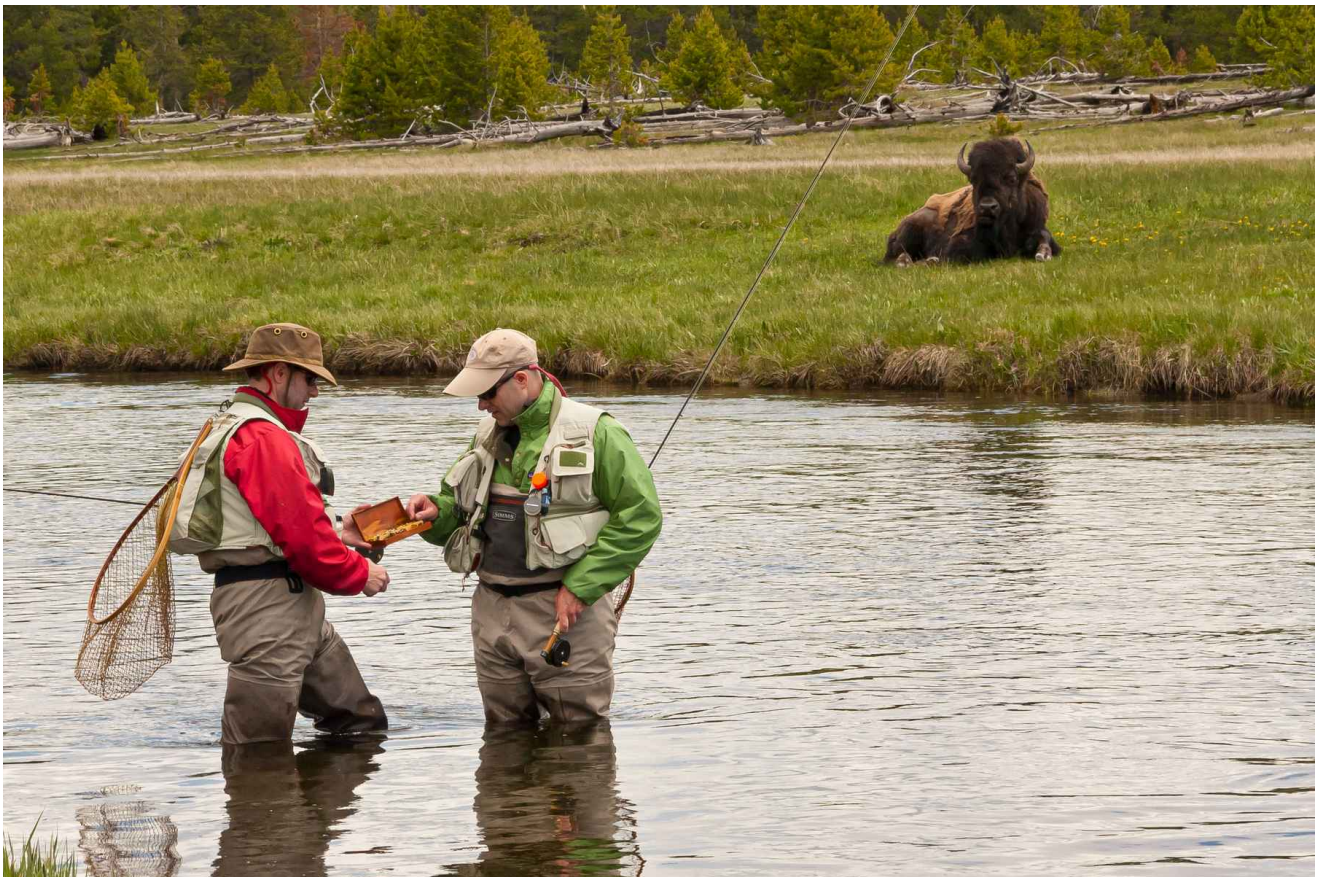


Photo: Dale Spartas

For at least the last 30 years, the majority of fly rod manufacturers have moved in the same general direction.

Fly rods have grown stiffer and faster, which means they require more force to bend and they're harder to cast. At the same time, the consensus among America's top anglers seems clear. Today's rods are not as much fun to fish.

While rod builders have occasionally veered from the 'fast action' path — softer fiberglass rods, for example, have made a comeback in certain circles — much of the fly fishing industry invariably returns to the same design parameters and the same 'faster is better' marketing slogans. Which is why the vast majority of high-end graphite fly rods are stiffer now than they used to be, and why so many fly fishers have never had the opportunity to cast moderate or slow action graphite rods.

If there's an upside to this endless array of too-stiff fly rods, it's that there's plenty of space for rod designers willing to think outside the box. Enter Dan and Doug Daufel, twin brothers who are building what are arguably the finest graphite fly rods ever created.

I reached out to Dan and Doug, who own Montana Brothers Rodworks, and asked if they would be willing to answer a few questions for Hatch Magazine.

Here, lightly edited for clarity, is our conversation.

WHERE DID THE TWO OF YOU GROW UP?

We grew up in Dayton, Ohio. It is an unlikely location for two young fly fishers. As youngsters we fished for anything that would bite: sunfish, bass, carp, even chubs. As teenagers, we spent many of our summers fishing the limestone and freestone streams of Pennsylvania.

HOW DID YOU BOTH END UP WORKING AT BLUE RIBBON FLIES IN WEST YELLOWSTONE, MONTANA?

We were very lucky. We mentioned to Barry and Cathy Beck that we wanted to go out West for our summer break from college. They suggested we send our resumes to some fly shops in the Yellowstone area. Blue Ribbon was interested in hiring us. They had a place for us to stay, which sealed the deal. Working for Craig & Jackie Mathews, and John Juracek, was probably the best job we will ever have. We really learned a lot from them and the staff while we worked there. Many of the close friendships we have today are the result of our employment at Blue Ribbon. It changed our lives.

WHO WERE THE BIGGEST INFLUENCES ON YOUR FISHING, AND YOUR CASTING?

We have been fortunate to have some very gracious teachers, mentors, and fishing friends. We are products of those relationships. We could go on and on, but we'll try to narrow it down. Early on, Barry and Cathy Beck had a great influence on us. We loved listening to Barry tell us stories about fishing the Letort with Vince Marinaro. We really idolized them. Another strong influence was the late Jake Jaeger who we met at a fly fishing club in Dayton, the Miami Valley Fly Fishers. Jake loved to fish, and we think if he had to crawl to the river, he would. We mentioned earlier that working at Blue Ribbon (Craig & Jackie Mathews and crew) had a profound impact on us, but John Juracek, in particular, has probably been our greatest single influence. We have learned so much from him about casting, rod design, fly tying, and fishing. He is such a great teacher.

And then there's the infamous Dave Shultz and the Island Park boys — Steve Mate, Bob Brooks, Tom Warren, the late Paul Brown, Dan Picaro, and Dom Traverso — all of whom we've been lucky to call friends.

Rod building and design-wise, it would be the late Jim Green and Paul Brown, Mike McFarland, Bob Giannoni, Dave Shultz, Tim Anderson, and Jim Corbin from Ohio.

We should also mention fishing friends like Dale Spartas, Ken Takata, Yuki Bando, the late Donnie Bastian, and Fran Gough. And lastly, we should credit our mother, who took us fishing when we were children, and our wives (and fishing partners) Annabel and Brandy, who have greatly encouraged our efforts. See, we told you this could be long! Again, we have been very lucky to have these friendships and we wouldn't be here today without them.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO BUILD FLY RODS?

We already have full-time jobs, so it's really a labor of love for us. Our rods are influenced by Paul Brown's original designs. Paul's rods had such a profound impact on us, and added so much enjoyment to our fishing, that we wanted to share his legacy with other anglers. That's why we do it. We have no interest in building other types of rods.

WHY DID YOU SET UP SHOP IN BOZEMAN?

It's one of the closer towns to the Yellowstone area, and we absolutely fell in love with the area and the fishing.

Being from Ohio, we could hardly believe the mountains were real when we first saw them. We always wanted to live in a place where we could fish for trout after work and on the weekends.

YOU'RE BOTH SERIOUS FLY TYERS. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR FLIES DO YOU TIE YOURSELVES, AND WHAT PERCENTAGE DO YOU PURCHASE?

Yep, we were commercial fly tyers for 13 years. In the past, we would rarely buy flies. We both remember Craig Mathews giving us a hard time for tying flies while we were on a fishing trip because it cut into our fishing time.

Buying flies was so foreign to us. Tying was just part of our day after we finished fishing. But that also meant a lot of late nights. Nowadays, with our time more limited, we occasionally buy flies. We've also become very good at recycling used flies.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE FLY PATTERNS?

We would say that we are not fans of particular patterns, but fans of certain types of materials — those that

introduce life into the imitation, are durable, fish well, and, in the case of dry flies, makes the fly easier to see.

For example, we prefer dubbing to the sterility of a quill body. We like a variety of hairs like deer, elk, and caribou hair, as they float and fish well and can, in some cases, make the fly easier to see. We also like certain synthetics like Antron, Zelon, Beck's Poly Fluff, and EP fibers for winging materials and shucks. Foam can also be a great addition to emergers and floating nymphs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MEDIOCRE FLY ROD AND A GREAT FLY ROD?

Boy, we could spend a lot of time here, but in short, it would be a conformance to the design parameters. But one quality we do look for in every rod is smoothness. If there are sections of the rod that are softer or stiffer than the section preceding or after it, it can make the bend feel disjointed.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN "CONFORMANCE TO THE DESIGN PARAMETERS?"

Sure. It simply means that we have to consider what the rod designer had in mind for the rod and whether or not those objectives were achieved.

ON YOUR WEBSITE, YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RODS AS EITHER “SLOW ACTION” OR “MEDIUM ACTION.” WHY, WHEN SO MANY MANUFACTURERS ARE FOCUSED ON MARKETING FAST OR VERY FAST ACTION RODS, HAVE YOU CONCENTRATED ON THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM?

Well, these are actions we prefer to fish for the majority of fishing situations we encounter. Stiffness has been marketed as a desirable quality for fly rods. It's a shame. Paul Brown used to say it's the rod's ability to bend that gives it its power. And there is a real beauty to feeling the rod bend.

YOUR RODS ARE INCREDIBLE CASTING TOOLS. WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU LOOK AT WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO CREATE A BLANK?

It would be the amount of bend (or static deflection) under a load, the way the rod bends or accepts the load, and the smoothness of the rod. All of these factors will affect how the rod feels. It is interesting that you can take two rods with a similar static deflection, but they can feel totally different as they are bending in different areas.

Another important quality we consider is the way the rod feels in the hand.

GIVEN THAT ANGLERS BREAK RODS — AND SOMETIMES LOTS OF RODS — WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON ROD WARRANTIES?

We hate them. In some respects, it encourages anglers not to take care of their tackle. When we first started fishing, you took great care of your tackle as that was all you had. If you broke your rod, you were out of luck. The thought of someone driving down the road with one of our rods strapped to the hood of their car makes our blood pressure rise. Besides we wanted to make rods, not be in the repair business.

WHEN ARE YOUR HEAVIER RODS (5 WEIGHTS AND 8 WEIGHTS) GOING TO BE AVAILABLE?

The rod's action is our primary concern, and it has to be just right. We have been pretty picky about the actions. Best case would likely be early fall of 2023 for the 5 weights. We started with the 4 weights as it is the rod weight we fish the most, and we thought it would be easier to transition to the 3 weights and the 5 weights from what we learned from the 4 weights. For the 8 weights, probably years away. We spent 10 years on the 4 weights, we hope it does not take that long.

YOU HAVE A MONTHS-LONG WAIT TIME FOR YOUR MONTANA BROTHERS RODS, WHICH MEANS THAT I CAN'T JUST WALK INTO A STORE AND BUY ONE OF YOUR RODS. IF I NEEDED A NEW TROUT ROD TODAY, WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?

Off the shelf from the local shop, we would suggest the budget-friendly Redington Classic Trout. We actually prefer them over many of our old treasured Winstons and Orvis Superfines. They are nice rods.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE CLASSIC REELS AND YOUR FAVORITE MODERN REELS?

We are big fans of old Hardy reels. In addition, their current lineup of traditional reels are very, very nice. For large arbor, our favorite reels are from Lamson and Sage. You might argue that you don't need a disc drag for trout fishing, but the sealed disc drags are certainly easier to maintain. We used to spend a morning or two each year cleaning and greasing our reels, but we just don't have that kind of time anymore. The offerings from Sage and Lamson are also some of the lightest large arbor reels on the market. For a long time we avoided large arbor reels as many were too heavy. Many graphite rods will feel better in hand with a lighter reel. In some cases, the rod can also feel a little tippier than it actually is with a heavier reel. We also like the numbering system on the

drag knob with some of the Sage reels. It makes it very easy to tell where the drag is set.

WHEN IT COMES TO TROUT, DO YOU PREFER WF OR DT FLY LINES?

Our favorite trout lines are the Rio Technical Trout and the Rio LightLine in double taper. Both are true to weight. We prefer double tapers for trout fishing for a variety of reasons. John Juracek wrote a great article about double taper lines, [Whither the Double Taper?](#). It's worth reading.

IF YOU COULD ONLY FISH THREE DIFFERENT RIVERS IN 2023, WHICH ONES WOULD YOU PICK?

Well, we could probably spend every day fishing the Ranch section of the Henry's Fork. But given that there are three choices, it would be the Firehole, the Madison, and the Henry's Fork. We would be perfectly happy just fishing those three rivers for the rest of our lives.

In many ways, the Montana Brothers Rodworks story is a classic American tale. Two exceptional anglers decided that the industry wasn't meeting their needs, so they spent a decade perfecting their own rod designs. To the best of my knowledge, their 904 and 904L rods are unique. They don't cast, or fish, like any other rods I've ever used.

And while rod action and rod design are inherently subjective — we all view our fly rods through our own unique lens — it's hard to argue with the Montana Brothers Rodworks results. The Daufel brothers have created the finest fly rods I've ever fished, and it will be fascinating to find out if their future models continue that trend.

Todd Tanner has been writing about fly fishing for almost 30 years. He owns and runs the School of Trout.

Ty One On

Dude, Where's My Hatch?

**Stephen Sautner / 10 Min Read / Fly
Fishing**

The decline of aquatic insects should bug everyone.



The cinematic light of a late-summer evening illuminates a cloud of caddis flies above the ripples of the Missouri River, known for its blizzard-like insect hatches and chunky trout. Photo: Jessica McGlothlin

Trout anglers speak reverently of the “evening rise,” an almost mystical phenomenon when a cold-water river shares its living bounty of aquatic insects with the rest of the natural world. Witnessing one unfold like acts in a play, complete with drama, beauty, sex and death, is one of fly fishing’s greatest spectacles.

It begins when the sun lowers and the sky turns golden. Crepuscular rays catch the transparent wings of mayfly spinners—sulfurs, drakes, March browns—as they dance in courtship overhead. A few golden stoneflies lumber around, splaying their wings before belly flopping onto the stream to force egg sacks below the surface. Squalls of caddis whirl just above the water.

Swallows weave and barrel roll, mouths hang agape like humpback whales on krill.

Warblers, waxwings and catbirds pick out individual targets. They fly from their perches to intercept the slow and the unlucky.

Dragonflies, too, patrol. They move laterally into the scrum, grab a mayfly and leave behind a pair of wings that helicopter downward minus a body.

Cue the trout. The first rises are tentative, but slowly build in number and enthusiasm as spent insects hit the water to lay their eggs and die. Casts are made. Flies sucked down. Fish leap. Reels sing. The light dims. Bigger fish enter the stage. Reels soar into arias. Splashes sound more like livestock than trout. Headlamps click on and off as trout are released. Then full darkness sets in and, finally, it ends. Roll credits.



Millie Paini squeezes a few more casts from the day on Idaho's Henry's Fork. Long after most anglers have left the water, rivers often see robust emergences of aquatic insects—and recklessly feeding trout. Photo: Bryan Gregson

Last June, I sat on a favorite rock on my home water, the East Branch of the Delaware River, awaiting this performance. The setting was perfect; the light softened, the river cool and flowing. Warblers and thrushes sang in anticipation behind me. Except there was one

thing missing: bugs. Sure, I saw a few scattered mayflies and some black caddis ghosting just above the surface. But what should have been a cumulonimbus of insect activity was barely a wisp. Yes, a trout rose here and there, and I even managed a regulation East Branch 16-inch wild brown on a sparkle dun. But something was definitely off.

And this was not the first time. Far from it. For the past several seasons, on a stretch of river that I have fished for nearly 20 years, I have noticed a steady decline of hatching aquatic insects. There are days when bugs still come off and trout rise. And when that happens, all seems right in the world. But more times than not, the consistency and duration of hatches are way down. The three-week Hendrickson emergence has dwindled to a spotty week and a half. March browns, never overly

abundant but predictable and steady, now come off one here, one there. Blizzards of caddis have downgraded to a dusting. Nowadays, I often sit and wait, shoulders slumped, until I eventually sulk back to my car in the darkness, a jilted lover.

There are other streams, too, I have noticed. The sulfur hatch on Pennsylvania's Brodhead Creek was once so thick it was nearly impossible to compete with the living, moving mat coming down the river. It is now sporadic at best, with entire stretches seemingly devoid of once ubiquitous mayflies.

But maybe it was me, not the bugs. Perhaps I hit several years of bad luck and bad timing on my local streams. The tired fishing cliché is, "You should have been here yesterday." Maybe I should have been here yesterday since 2015. So I posed the question on social

media, asking whether other anglers had witnessed a dearth of insect activity. The replies I received were telling.

“Mayfly hatches seem to be way down. When I fished in the '80s with my dad in the Upper Delaware watershed, hatches were like snow ... Anecdotal, but I don't see that anymore.”

“The anxiously awaited Hendrickson hatch on the Housatonic seems to have faded to near nothing.”

Then others seemed to contradict what I was observing, but with caveats: “Solid hatches on Penns Creek all season, but old-timers tell me they're not like before ...”

And finally, a reply from an EPA scientist's personal account summed it up best: "Seems a continent-wide observation, undoubtedly borne out in many waters but coupled with blurry exceptions in others. We don't monitor with precision for these ecologically and culturally important flies to answer basic questions, unfortunately."

The science on the global decline of insects confirms this blurriness. In 2017, a team of German scientists published a jaw-dropping study documenting a 75 percent population crash of insects in local nature reserves. This prompted *The New York Times* to declare: "The Insect Apocalypse Is Here." The story goes on to note a shortage of past evidence that would serve as a baseline to compare the 27-year-decline found in Germany. But it describes efforts being made to piece together long-forgotten data that might offer

clues, and it shows that scientists elsewhere also have noticed far fewer insects. Almost three years later, a study in the journal *Science* revealed a 9 percent drop in terrestrial insects per decade—but an 11 percent increase in aquatic insects. Yet this was a “meta-analysis” that reviewed existing studies from around the world rather than conducting its own original field research. The authors said that the growth in aquatic bugs could have been from general trends of cleaner lakes and rivers—or increased nutrient loads related to climate change. Other studies were more definitive, though equally broad in scope. A 2019 paper said that 40 percent of the world’s insects could vanish over the next few decades, but it looked at mostly butterflies, moths, bees, dragonflies and beetles to draw its dire conclusion. Some scientists challenged the results, citing an overall lack of evidence. Then two years ago, a more specific study in

the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) used radar observations to determine that annual *Hexagenia* mayfly swarms in the upper Mississippi and Western Lake Erie basins had plummeted by half.

Think of your own backyard growing up, or maybe a place where you camped each summer. Imagine the porch light at your grandmother's house. Remember moths, lightning bugs or katydids? Do you see fewer than you once did? One criterion cited in the *Times* story was the “splatter effect” on windshields from collisions with bugs and how this seems to be lessening. Speaking for myself, and using the porch-light metric, what once was a maelstrom of bugs swirling around the light at my cabin in the woods of upstate New York has become an anemic whimper in recent years. Large moths—*luna*, *cecropia* and *polyphemus*—once a

delightful, several-times-a-summer spectacle, now show up maybe once every other year. Is this peer reviewed science? No, but it certainly jibes with what entomologists are observing.

No other outdoor pursuit, except maybe amateur beekeeping or butterfly collecting, directly depends upon, reveres and celebrates insects like fly fishing. Anglers joyfully geek out on Latin bug names, even creating their own slang: *Isonychia bicolor*, or slate drakes, are “Isos”; the genus *Tricorythodes* become “Tricos,” or if you’re really cool, “Trikes.” The aforementioned *Hexagenia* is shortened to the badass-sounding “Hex.” I once saw a vanity license plate that read “BAETIS”—the genus for the blue-winged olive mayfly. We tie painstaking imitations of specific life stages of particular aquatic bugs: egg-laying caddis,

March brown and sulfur dun emergers. We time vacations around certain hatches on certain rivers. Good luck booking a motel room in the Catskills during “Bug Week” around the end of May when the green drakes are out or having a pool to yourself on the Madison during the salmonfly hatch. Without healthy, vibrant aquatic insect populations, fly fishers—particularly trout anglers—might as well take up golf.



Eye to eye with a mayfly. Winged mayflies have large compound eyes and short antennae. Once they emerge from their nymphal stage, mayflies cannot feed. Instead, they're often a favorite snack of hungry trout. Photo: Trey Wardlaw

Let's put fly fishing aside. If you start to pull on the thread of what else relies on aquatic insects, things get downright scary. Look around most North American trout rivers during the spring, and the foliage drips with migratory birds hunting and pecking molting

mayflies, resting caddis or stone flies—not to mention caterpillars, inchworms, aphids and more. Some migrants have traveled from as far away as the Andes to take advantage of this seasonal bounty. Remove the birds and you have lost a key cog—a natural pest manager and seed disperser. So expect a compromised forest, one subject to disease and invasive species, and less able to sequester carbon and protect watersheds. Include bees in the decline and you also lose other ecosystem services like pollination. In other words, a crappy Hendrickson hatch could be the foretelling of something much worse.



So what can we do about it? The truth is, no one really knows precisely what is causing the decline. Still, the widespread use of pesticides is often implicated, along with other factors. The PNAS study's authors link the *Hexagenia* disappearance to lower dissolved oxygen levels from warming water due to climate change, plus fertilizer runoff from farms that spawn toxic algae blooms.

You can and should blame big agriculture for pesticides and fertilizers, but also consider your own backyard. In my suburban neighborhood in New Jersey, lawn services lord over the land. Every spring, they dump fertilizers and broadcast spray to control “pests,” whether weeds or insects (many of which are beneficial). Throw in carbon-spewing two-cycle leaf blowers and military-grade mowers and you have a full-on assault on the habitat. Ironically, many homeowners who hire lawn-servicing companies also drive EVs and have installed solar panels, so there is clearly a disconnect here. By the way, the porch light metric at my suburban house is truly dismal, with just a moth or two and a few errant midges circling even on the muggiest—and presumably buggiest—nights. Not all of us have lawns, but those who do should ditch the lawn service and grab a rake or battery-powered push mower. Or seed (and cede) that lawn with native plants and become more

weed tolerant. Dandelion flowers are an early-season food and pollen source for bees and butterflies.

For urban dwellers, buying organic or pesticide-free food would be one way to vote pro-bug with your wallet. And, of course, any chance to reduce one's carbon footprint, including voting for a green agenda, would make a mayfly smile if they had a mouth (adult mayflies do not).



Dinner is served. A mouthful of unlucky damsel flies fail to escape a voracious rainbow trout on Idaho's Silver Creek. Photo: Nick Price

Speaking of lights, a 2020 study in the journal *Biological Conservation* noted how artificial lights—everything from streetlights to the flaring of gas wells at night—could be laying waste to untold numbers of insects. It's possible that the array of high-powered fluorescent lighting we see around every gas

station and strip mall and increasing illumination outside suburban homes are taking their toll. The ones near trout streams suck insects away from more important duties: mating and laying eggs (a *Smithsonian* article about the *Biological Conservation* study mentioned light reflection on roads tricking mayflies into laying eggs on asphalt instead of water). The next morning, dead bugs pile around the light fixtures, the end result of exhausted energy reserves squandered by endlessly circling a 7-Eleven sign. You may not own a convenience store, but how about flipping those light switches off at home before you go to bed?

Is all of this just alarmism from a few fly fishers crying in their floatant, pining for the good old days? Consider the Neversink. The storied trout river rises in the shadow of Slide Mountain, the Catskills' tallest peak, then

wends its way to the Delaware some 60 miles away. Dry-fly pioneers Theodore Gordon and Edward Hewitt made their first casts here more than a century ago. It purportedly once supported a green drake hatch, the floppy, jumbo-sized mayfly that famously brings up every trout in the river. But dams, deforestation and development have apparently taken their toll. Fish the Neversink in late May or early June and you might see a handful of green drake spinners, sometimes called coffin flies, making their way upriver at dusk, their long white abdomens seeming to glow in the twilight. But it no longer seems to be a true “hatch” with birds, bats, trout, fallfish, spiders and dragonflies gorging on a healthy river’s bounty. The remaining drakes are mere ghosts of what was. Dead bugs flying.



Dinner is not served. A lucky brown drake mayfly reaches escape velocity on Idaho's Henry's Fork of the Snake. Photo: Jeremiah Watt

Conservation biologists refer to the “Allee effect” where the health of individuals is directly dependent on the size of the population. Passenger pigeons needed massive numbers—literally billions of individual birds—to survive as a species. When overhunting and clearing of old-growth

forests drove numbers below a certain threshold, they went into a decades-long death spiral. The last passenger pigeon, once the most abundant bird in North America and perhaps on the planet, died in a zoo in 1914. Whether some insect hatches, whose strategy also seems to be strength in overwhelming numbers, have already reached that tipping point remains to be seen.

Can humanity turn the insect decline around? Fly anglers are optimistic by nature. Each cast we make is a physical manifestation of hope. We believe that every new fly we tie will be “The One” to surely crack the code. That optimism needs to translate into advocacy or at least personal action to reduce one’s own bug-stomping footprint. The same way steelheaders need to be anti-dam, trout anglers should be pro-bug. Let’s make “save the tricos” a trend. As for myself, come next

spring, I plan to be back on my rock on the East Branch, ever hopeful the bugs will return. As I said, when the hatches come off, warblers sing, dragonflies buzz and trout rise, the world is a beautiful place—one worth fighting to protect.

Author Profile



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Stephen Sautner is a self-taught fly fisher, surf caster, birder, conservationist and amateur naturalist. He is the author of three books on fishing, and his stories have

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Q&A: Barbless Hooks or Barbed? Does It Matter?

by Domenick Swentosky | Jan 31, 2024 |
COMMENTARY | QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



This Q&A series is an effort to answer some of the most common questions I receive. Here's the latest . . .

Question

This one comes from Mike Roberts, in North Carolina

Hello Domenick,

Thanks for all that you guys do with Troutbitten. We follow your stuff religiously down here.

Hey, I never hear you talk much about hook choice for your patterns. Do you go with barbed or barbless hooks? Do you think it matters for keeping trout from coming off during the fight? And do you believe in the studies that show a higher mortality rate with barbed hooks?

I was just curious to hear your thoughts.

Keep doing what you're doing with the channels.

*Tight lines,
Mike*

Answer

Hey thanks, Mike.

I do use barbless hooks, almost always.

I also think it's not our choice to believe or disbelieve the data of a scientific study. How can we put our own musings or opinions ahead of multiple studies that show a higher mortality rate from barbed hooks? That side of the question has been proven as fact, as I understand it. So yes, barbless hooks damage or kill fewer trout.

That seems like a pretty good thing to me.

But can I tell you the main reason I use barbless hooks?

Anyone who spends much time on the water has stories about hooks buried deep into the flesh of their finger. Maybe the hook was caught in your palm, wrist or ear instead. Barbs also grab your glove, your jacket, the anchor rope, and they won't let go. Wherever a hook is stuck, a barbless hook makes for easier extraction.

I see barbed hooks as a holdover from bait angling or a catch-and-keep mentality. When I fish for panfish with worms and bobbers, when I intend to keep Crappie, to bread them and fry them, I like the barb on a hook.

But fish ***eat*** bait, right? And we're taught to let the fish take and even swallow bait, then set the hook. Fly fishing requires the opposite. Because as soon as a trout feels the artificial fly, it's trying to eject it. So we set quickly — almost as fast as possible, because trout rarely swallow our flies.

Set quick. Fight quick. Release quick.

So the only time a barb makes much sense to me is when you're planning to keep the fish. We choose catch and release, because we enjoy the sport — the activity of fooling a fish. So the occasional loss of our quarry because it slips the hook doesn't take food off the table and away from our family. It's just a fish that didn't make it to the net.

That's an acceptable consequence, isn't it?



Photo by Bill Dell

What percentage of fish are we surrendering when we go barbless? If we're good at fighting fish, almost none. A barbed hook is built to keep the fish

buttoned up, even when slack is introduced. That's when a barbless hook may slip. But if we're good at keeping tension, the barbless hook never has a chance to back out, and there's no difference in landing rate — absolutely none. It's only when slack is accidentally introduced that the hook has a chance to slip. Again, we do this for sport, right? So let's welcome the extra challenge of fighting a fish with enough skill that we never give it slack.

I choose barbless. And to me, that means either manufactured barbless hooks or barbed hooks that are pinched down. Either is fine. If we pinch barbs down with sturdy pliers or with the jaws of a vise, it's the same effect as manufactured barbless.

But what about the rest of the hook? What really damages trout? Some studies aren't specific enough about what they test. And there's a big difference between standard barbs and micro barbs. I have #12 dry fly hooks with bigger barbs than #6 streamer hooks with micro barbs. And what about a #20 Griffith's Gnat with a micro barb? Does that really do any damage to a trout? I'd say no. That said, I still pinch them down.

Before anyone gets self-righteous about going barbless, maybe we should consider hook gap and hook size. I have a friend who has seen mid-sized trout get brained (killed) by a wide-gap streamer hook that pierced the roof of the trout's mouth and passed through its pea-sized brain, killing the trout instantly.

Many articulated streamers feature double-wide-gap hooks, and if that gap isn't filled with some material, like chenille, fur or feathers, there's an awful lot of hook in the mix to cause damage to a trout while hooking and fighting.

I'm not suggesting that articulated streamers are bad. I love them. And most of mine have two hooks. But I try to keep the hook gaps reasonable, knowing that more damage is done by barbless streamers than barbed dry flies any day.

Last point here . . .

What matters most is proper fish handling. Education about safely hooking, fighting and releasing is far more important than the debate on barbless vs barbed flies.

So fight trout fast, and unhook them carefully. There is not a single way. A one-handed release that keeps the trout in the water may not be the best thing for it, if the hook is lodged at a tough angle. Two hands on the trout with the use of forceps might just be the best way. The goal is to cause no damage, right? So do whatever it takes.

A tool like a Ketchum release or similar is another way to release a trout unharmed. The point is, a box full of barbless hooks is only the beginning of the equation. And the rest takes more effort to get it right.

Fish hard, friends.

Enjoy the day.

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