

FLY TYPES...

...and how to fish them



by Art Flick

Four years ago, the author counseled novice FFM readers against beginning with the dry fly. Now, as the Dean of the Schoharie, and points around, writes again, he has some second thoughts. But his first thoughts about fly types and their use, should have value both to the beginner and the more experienced angler.

IT IS WONDERFUL to know that each year more and more trout fishermen are turning from bait fishing and spinning to fly fishing. And too, each year finds many more people starting to fish for trout.

A large percentage of these newcomers would like to fish with a fly rod and flies rather than with bait or spinning, equipment but are reluctant to do so due to lack of information — and often, an over-supply of misinformation. Unfortunately, all too many writers make fly fishing much more

sophisticated than it really is.

Most often, the beginner doesn't know why one type of fly is used at one time, a different one at another, nor do they know which to start the season off with, wet fly, bucktail, nymph or dry fly.

Hoping to give some reason to the newcomer's plight, this article will be directed not to methods of fishing, or specific patterns of flies, but the whys and wherefores of fishing with one type or another.

BUCKTAILS & STREAMERS



More often than not, when the trout season opens the water is on the cold side and the trout's metabolism is such that the fish are comparatively inactive until the streams warm up. Not only do they eat less, but the food must be served "right up to their noses" in order for them to be tempted. This is one of the occasions when a streamer fly, or bucktail can be effective, if fished properly.

Bearing in mind that fish under such conditions do very little chasing, it pays to fish the fly deep and slowly. This is no problem, for with the weighted flies which are now available one can get some depth to his lure. However, I prefer the modern fast sinking lines now on the market to get the bucktail or streamer down to the desired depth. The fast-sinking lines are better in the larger streams; sink tip lines doing well in the smaller waters. For the benefit of the neophyte, the latter are floating weight-forward lines, but they have ten feet of sinking line at the end. Because they pick up better, they are easier to handle and should be used where there is not too much water flow.

It is a reasonable assumption that these flies represent the minnows found in all streams, but there is little doubt trout take some of them later in the season thinking they are grasshoppers; and too, some are no doubt taken for nymphs as well.

Until the water warms up, it pays to work your bucktail or streamer a minimum amount, for the baitfish they represent are also far from active at the time of the year. Early season is only one of the occasions when streamers and bucktail work. They are particularly effective after a rain in a rising stream; I'll even stick my neck out and say they work best under such conditions and will take more trout at such times than any other artificial lure.

Trout feed on minnows any time that stream temperatures are not too high, as they often are in the summer months, so it follows that these flies may take them all season long, whenever they are interested in live bait.

A pretty good rule of thumb is to use the larger sizes in the spring, when the water is cold, about a #6 hook, (larger in the big western streams); going down to #8 and #10 hooks as the stream flow drops and the water is warmer. Some fishermen prefer them tied on regular-shank hooks, but most like them better when made up on hooks with long, heavy shanks. Although both serve the same purpose and are fished substantially in the same manner, the name to some extent designates the material used in tying them.

Bucktails, as the name implies, are usually made from the tail of the white tail deer (northern preferred) — although various other hair is used, one of the best materials being hair from the polar bear, now rather difficult to obtain. Other animal sources are: skunk, squirrel, bear, fisher, wolf, etc. Even the pet pooch has been known to give up some of his or her pelage to his master (or his friends) if the color seems right and the texture suitable.

Streamers are made either of all feathers, other than the body, or of a combination of feathers and fur. They do not take the same amount of punishment as do bucktails, but I've never yet heard a fisherman complain because his flies went to pieces, so long as it was trout's teeth that did the chewing up.

Leaders for streamer and bucktail fishing can usually carry heavier tippets than those for either wet fly or dry fly fishing. Early in the season 0X or 1X tippets will do, but lighter tippets are in order for these flies in #8, #10 or smaller when fished in low, clear water.

WET FLIES



The first imitation flies used in trout fishing were wet flies. Back in the late 1400's in her *Treatise of Fishing with an Angle*, Dame Juliana Berners described a dozen wet flies that were in common use at that time. One of the earliest mentions of fishing a fly is credited to the ancient writer Aelian (170 to 230 B.C.). Some claim that two centuries before Aelian a Roman poet wrote of taking fish on "fraudful flies."

Although somewhat neglected in recent years, possibly due to the growing popularity of the nymph fishing, wet flies are still an important and successful lure with which to take trout.

There can be little doubt that the wet fly represents natural flies that either were crippled when they were emerging from the stream or were washed under while resting on the surface to dry their wings in fast water.

Without question the artificials are sometimes taken because they are mistaken for terrestrial insects that fall or are blown into the stream and drown.

And too, there are certain mayflies that emerge sub-surface, leaving their nymphal cases and working their way to the top as a sub-imago, or dun. Two flies that emerge that way for example, are the famed Quill Gordon, and the Blue-Winged Olive (*Ephemerella attenuata*) of the east. Both of these flies, along with many others, are fed on heavily as emerging duns, for they are almost completely helpless at the time.

Some years ago, wet fly fishermen almost always fished a tail fly and two droppers, but the newer breed of wet-fly men usually use one fly only — occasionally two. Two work better when fishing upstream in pocket water, a method incidentally that is deadly at times.

Most effective sizes of wet flies run from #10's down to

#16's, except for fishing after dark, when flies tied on #6 and #8 hooks work better. Some of the most interesting and productive wet fly fishing I have ever experienced has been at night. Large trout do most of their feeding nocturnally, so one is apt to get into some really good fish then. In the larger pools good trout will come out of the depths to feed in the shallows where they are not to be found in the daylight hours. Just be sure you know your water.

In the larger western streams such as the Yellowstone, the Missouri, or the Snake, flies on #6 and 8 hooks are in order — in very high water even #4 is not too large.

For wet-fly fishing, leaders need not be heavier than 2X (6-pound test), going to 1X (8-pound test) for after-dark fishing with the larger flies.

In low-water wet-fly fishing, one would normally use smaller flies, at which time lighter leaders are called for, preferably down to 3X or 4X.

For most daytime fishing, leaders 9 feet long — even longer should be used. For fishing upstream in pocket water, leaders 7½ feet long will handle better, giving you more control of your flies, as they should be worked on a short line. The 7½-foot length is ample for night fishing.

It is not necessary to load up on a large number of patterns. Standard ties such as the Quill Gordon, Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear, Blue Dun, Coachman, Black Gnat, Cowdung, Cahill, and March Brown make a good assortment for browns and rainbows. For brook trout, gaudier patterns, such as: Parmachene Belle, Royal Coachman, Montréal, and McGinty seem to work better in all waters. These and other flashy patterns are hopefully called "attractor" flies.

NYMPHS



In recent years, nymph fishing has really come into its own. When the flies are properly handled, there is no question but what this is by far the most effective way to take trout, although it does require more skill than any other method of trout fishing. That is, to be really proficient, it is a much more difficult manner of angling to master.

To become a really good nymph fisherman takes skill, patience and know-how, but it really pays off. One need not wait for a hatch, for unlike emerging duns that show just now and then, nymphs are more or less active around the clock. In their natural state, they are the immature stages of all aquatic

insects, including midges, mayflies, damsel flies, stone flies, caddis flies, dragon flies, dobson flies (hellgramites), fish flies and last but not least, mosquitoes.

From the time the eggs are laid and hatched to the emergence of the fly, these insects are in the stream for periods of several months to three years, feeding, outgrowing their shucks, until ready to leave the water to start a new generation. Many of course are taken by fish when moving around in their search for food, but many more wind up in a trout's stomach in periods of high water, when stones are rolled and the crawlers are swept into the current. Only a small percentage of all

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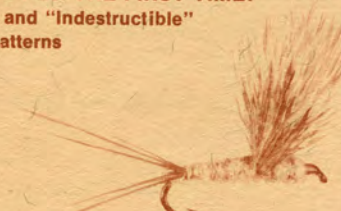
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nymphs are good swimmers; the balance when dislodged from their stones are extremely vulnerable. The more fortunate species, such as those in the genus *Ephemera* (the Green Drake for one), burrow into the stream bottom where they are comparatively safe until they begin emerging.

Their manner of emergence varies. The most important to the angler are those that emerge as do the eastern *E. subvaria* (Hendrickson), *S. vicarium* (American March Brown), *E. dorothea* (Pale Evening Dun). When these nymphs are "ripe" they slowly work their way to the surface of the stream, wiggle until their cases open and then ride either the cast-off shucks or the water surface until their wings are dry and then take off. Obviously, they are very tempting to trout at that time, to say nothing of being vulnerable. On such occasions, nymph fishing is fairly simple — so long as one uses a good imitation of the fly of the moment. Most of the imitations are tied to simulate the mayfly nymphs.

Second in importance are the nymphs of the stone flies. They occur in all streams, emerge throughout the season (some even in the winter on mild days), and afford fair to good fishing — although not so available to trout at all times as are the mayfly nymphs. Being comparatively poor swimmers (except in fairly still water), they spend almost all of their lives under the stones and about the only time the fish get a crack at them is when the streams have raised a lot, washing the stones over, or when they leave their hiding places to emerge.

In the eastern streams, effective imitations run from #18 to #10. Although there are some large species, such as *Perla capitata*, their emergence patterns make them of questionable value to the fisherman. This species for example crawls up on a stone, and leaves its shuck. Also, it emerges after dark, so except for using an imitation of the nymph for spring fishing in high water, it is hardly worth bothering with.

The western streams have the real king-size specimens, the so called "salmon flies", which furnish their best nymph fishing. Being such juicy morsels and supplying the trout with what apparently is a gourmet's meal, they attract the larger fish and one is indeed fortunate to be on those streams when this hatch occurs.

Of somewhat lesser importance to the nymph fisherman are the caddis flies (the opposite is true for the dry-fly man), probably because of the fact that, unlike the former species, the nymph of the caddis pupates, as does a caterpillar.

In the main, it will pay the fisherman to concentrate on the

imitations of the mayflies and stone flies.

The variation in the sizes of the various naturals really runs the gamut, from small midge pupae and tricorythodes in size #26 to the previously mentioned "salmon flies" of the west, a monster-size stone fly that calls for imitations tied as large as #2.

As an example of the small sizes, on the famed Armstrong Creek this last fall, I witnessed a terrific feed of trout on midge pupae that could not have been imitated by a fly larger than a #32. Need I say, I didn't raise a trout, although they were feeding all over the stream. Not only couldn't I catch one, but I couldn't get one to even reward me with an "investigation rise."

Far be it from me to attempt to discourage anyone from mastering this kind of fishing — the opposite is the case, and although most of my own fishing is done with a dry fly, I'll be the first to admit that nymph fishing is the most deadly way to take trout, especially the larger fish. I have, so often, regretted spending most of my time on the floaters and so little on nymphs.

I will go so far as to say that if one were restricted to only one method of fishing, a person proficient in the use of these imitations could probably take as many or more trout than any other two equally good fishermen, one using wet flies, the other dries, in a given period of time!

There are several effective ways to fish nymphs. Early in the season, the same applies to these as to bucktails. Those that are weighted seem to work better, bouncing them off the bottom. They should be fished with a sinking or sink tip line and fished as slowly as possible.

Later, as the water warms a bit and fish become active, they can be fished dead drift, singly or in pairs. Some fishermen fish a combination wet fly and nymph together with success.

The most effective method, is to fish them upstream as you would a dry fly, and on a floating line. Admittedly, this is a more difficult way to fish, but when mastered it is nymph fishing at its best and produces when other methods fail.

Generally, leaders should be lighter when fishing with nymph, especially when fishing them upstream. At such times, the tippet should be no heavier than 4X or 5X. This of course does not apply to fishing the brawling western streams with the big imitations. When you rare back on those large fish in heavy water, you are living dangerously if you fish with a tippet lighter or as light as 1X.

DRY FLIES



The dry fly, in its various forms, represents either the recently emerged mayfly, caddis fly, midge or stone fly, as well as the terrestrial insects, including grasshoppers, and is probably the most popular method of trout fishing. The dry fly, of course, represents a floating insect.

I have never been able to understand why so many writers and dry fly fishermen try to convey the impression it is a difficult method of fishing and so hard to learn — unless it is to feed on their own ego.

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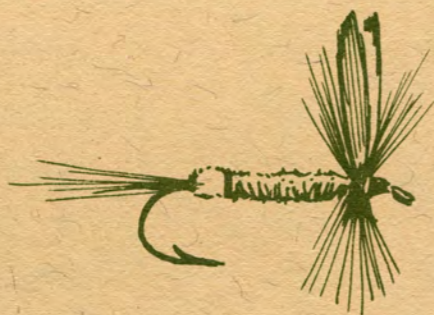
on this statement, but it is my considered judgment that excluding bucktailing, it is the easiest method for a beginner to become proficient in. I gave my older boy a tapered line back in 1940 when he was only 12 and had been fishing dry flies for some time before, just as soon as he graduated from worm-dunking.

After all, when fishing the floating fly, one can see the mistakes he is making, as well as being able to see the insects upon which the trout are feeding, their movement in the current, and the area where the fish are taking them.

Years ago when I started fishing, there was a definite reason for not fishing with dry flies. The only leaders available were made of gut — had to be kept wet — and were unsatisfactory at

best when compared to the synthetics we now have, to say nothing of their cost. A good gut leader of average length cost a dollar and those were in the days when a buck was real money. Good fly rods were not to be found at low cost. Because most of the fly fishermen used wet flies and fished with a comparatively slow rod, they could not switch over to the floaters and do a decent job; this required a faster stick. Today one need not go for the expensive, though delightful, Tonkin cane rod, for there are available any number of good glass rods at low-to-medium cost that will do the job for the dry fly man. Another thing — little was known about dry flies in those days, and fly tiers were far from plentiful. The opposite is true today.

**DO NOT LET ANYONE DISCOURAGE YOU
FROM STARTING TROUT FISHING WITH A DRY FLY!**



Until recent years, very little was known about the proper dry flies to use in this country, for most of the available literature was concerned with English streams and flies, which are quite different from ours.

Since the late 1940's, numerous books have been published that aid the beginner in learning what flies imitate which insects and which he should use at a given time to match specific insects. Today it is not necessary to flounder around trying to figure what pattern is called for; others have done this for him. All that is needed is a rudimentary knowledge of stream insects.

You now have a choice of types of dry flies to imitate the natural mayflies — the regular hackled and winged flies that formerly were the only kind available; hair flies and paraduns; the new no-hackles. Also available now are good imitations of caddis flies which were not to be found years ago. And, of course, there are good copies of the terrestrials, such as jassids, ants and beetles, as well as grasshoppers.

For some reason, probably due to pollution, recent years have brought changes in the sizes of mayflies, as well as the quantities of them compared to the number of caddis flies.

Where years ago imitations of some of the important mayflies were properly tied on #10 and #12 hooks — today the naturals are averaging smaller and, more often than not, imitations on #14 hooks work better than those tied larger. This is especially true in eastern waters; much larger flies are used on western streams.

Another strange thing is the increase in the importance of caddis imitations. These interesting insects have always been present, but I vividly recall that, years ago, hatches of mayflies were sufficiently abundant so that on the streams I fish here, in New York's Catskill Mountains, I never worried about or tried to imitate caddis flies. On some of the better known eastern streams, such as the famous Beaverkill, good caddis imitations are now more important over the season than are the dry flies imitating the mayflies.

One other type of dry-fly fishing that is much more practiced than in the past is that of matching the minutae. Artificials tied on #22 to #26 hooks are accounting for many more successful hours than in the past. Until one has witnessed it, it is hard to believe that trout, including the larger fish, will feed so extensively on the small naturals such as the tricorythodes. In the later months of the open season, these tiny flies spell the difference between no fishing and reasonably good fishing.

A few paragraphs back, I said dry fly fishing was not difficult. I'll have to qualify that statement to some extent, for when using these very small flies, it is really tough fishing, though interesting and rewarding. Not only are they extremely difficult to see, but the terminal tackle must go down to 6X, 7X and sometimes 8X. It takes a very delicate touch to take fish on such small flies without breaking off the fly, both on the strike and when playing the trout. Nevertheless, the amount of satisfaction one derives is sufficient reward for the difficulties involved.

When the day arrives, and with patience it will, that you land an 18-inch trout on a size #22 to #26 dry fly, you will know you have arrived. I guarantee it will make you forget the frustrations you may have experienced when you first started fishing the floating fly. ■

Art Flick doesn't need an introduction to most fly fishermen — but he deserves one! Many prospective or beginning fly fishermen will be reading this issue, and we want them to know a bit about Art, one of our sport's nobler creations. Art lives along the Schoharie River in the Catskills, and is a consummate angler. He stopped fishing for a year many seasons ago and researched the insect hatches on the Catskill streams, designed naturals to match them, then published this information in a classic book, *The Streamside Guide*, recently revised and re-published by Crown Publishers, and available from angling booksellers. Art talked sense in that book, as he does in this article.

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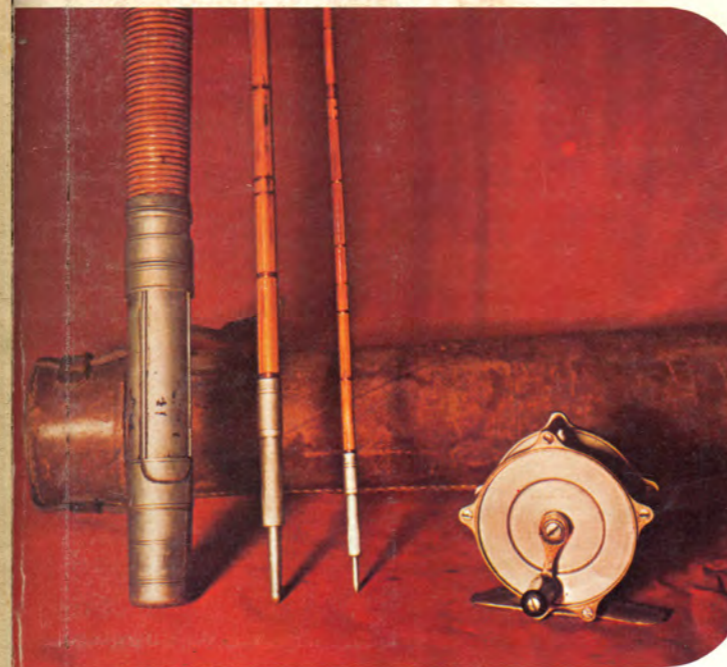


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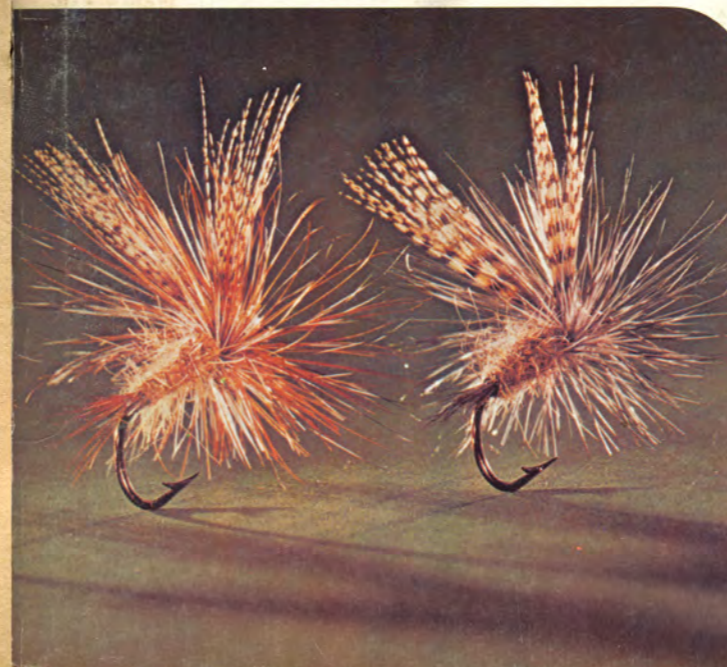
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