

# FLY LINES

Official eJournal of the  
BC Federation of Fly Fishers

ISSUE N°25-1 | SPRING

## HISTORY ARTICLE

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## GUEST FEATURE

### POPPER-DROPPER SYSTEM

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## FLY TYING FEATURE

### "SMITH'S" MIKULAK

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**TODAY IN OUR MISSION**

to conserve and protect BC's sport fisheries

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Totem Fly Fishers <a href="http://www.totemflyfishers.ca">www.totemflyfishers.ca</a>	Vancouver	Lorenzo Cirillo Scott Norris	604-417-5094 778-386-3866	gunner1@shaw.ca speysscott@gmail.com



The BC Federation of Fly Fishers (BCFFF) is a registered, non-profit society whose main objective is to promote the conservation of the fishing environment in British Columbia. By networking with similarly minded clubs, organizations, businesses and individuals, the BCFFF provides a voice that reflects its members' and the public's concern for the future of BC's natural resources.



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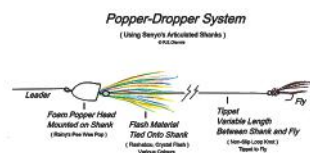
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## EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

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mylesarmstead007@gmail.com  
Michael Barr, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
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Ken Marsh, Director & Gilly Fund  
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Brian Smith, Editor  
Myles Armstead, Publisher  
Roman Riabov, Designer

## BCFF MISSION, VALUES, VISION

**Mission:** We are a federation of individual anglers and fly-fishing clubs. We advocate cooperatively with governments and other organizations throughout British Columbia for the sustainability of fish, their habitats, and quality angling  
**Values:** We believe that fly fishing increases personal well being, encourages high environmental appreciation and knowledge, and instills commitment to achieving positive conservation outcomes  
**Vision:** Ensuring a future that sustains accessible, quality angling in British Columbia

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Cover Photo: "Chasing Winter Chrome on the Bulkley"  
Photo: Kevin Rossi



*Myles Armstead*

## President's Message

**As I write this update it is early March, and I am truly excited about the work that has been done since the last issue of Fly Lines.**

The trust fund committee has been busy accepting applications and writing cheques to the Carhi High School credited fly-fishing program, Kamloops High School Fly fishing programs and the Diva on the Fly program for breast cancer survivors. If you have a project or program, please feel free to download an application at <https://flyfishers.ca>

The Polar Coachman Flyfishers of Prince George and the BCFFF were successful in pushing for regulation changes on both the Stellako and Anzac rivers, increasing angling opportunity on the former with an earlier opening of May 15th, and a fly only section regulation on the latter, with the aim to protect precious Arctic grayling populations. Also, Wicheeda Lake's bag limit of three (3) has been reduced to one (1) fish, a much-needed change required to protect this pristine wild trout fishery.

Furthermore, we have been engaged with the province in regard to the recent petition to develop a steelhead hatchery on the Cowichan River. I can confirm the province remains committed to keep the Cowichan a wild-only steelhead stream.

Once again, our directors have been hard at work representing fly fishers, conservation and quality angling at the provincial level (PAAT), the SFAB mainboard and various local regional boards. This is a time-consuming process, but it is important that our voice is heard.

During the month of April, we will be hosting our first annual "Ice-off Auction" to raise funds for the BCFFF. Don't forget we are a completely volunteer federation--your support means a lot to us! Feel free to reach out if you would like more information. Meanwhile, on behalf of the BCFFF, I thank all the clubs, individuals and companies who have offered their support with donations.

This is just a snap shot of the work we have been doing. Should you have any concerns about fishing in your region, or perhaps an interest in joining our board, please feel free to reach out to me so we can discuss our/your participation. In the meantime, I wish you all "tight lines" no matter where you are in our wonderful province.

**Myles Armstead**

President of the BC Federation of Fly Fishers





*Brian Smith*

## Editor's Message

**It is always refreshing for Myles and me to see these issues of our magazine take place in our minds and then slowly fill in on the computer. We wish to thank our volunteer contributors profusely, because we really cannot do this job alone. We are only the tools that put it together, you are the drivers that make it happen.**

My favourite fly-fishing author, John Gierach, passed away last October. I know of no other fishing writer who could leave me in stitches at the corny things fly-fishers conjure in their minds, and the eccentric relationships with friends they can form through a lifetime of fly-fishing. I quote John: "The solution to any problem — work, love, money, whatever — is to go fishing, and the worse the problem, the longer the trip should be." RIP John, your books will be remembered for a long time.

As we were driving to our favourite river, I once made a comment to my fishing buddy Henry that I have noticed that "All of my fishing partners are eccentric"; he looked at me oddly and said, "And you're not?" So be it.

This issue is usually the smallest one as we try to involve winter steelhead, which is an almost extinct resource species in our most-populated areas of BC, the Lower Mainland and Island. I got lucky this time, and dug up a new author, Kevin Rossi of Smithers. I know you are going to enjoy Kevin's article about the Bulkley River and its amazing winter steelhead fishery. Kevin is a graduate of UNBC's fisheries program, and a fisheries biologist with WLRS in Smithers.

Winter is also a time for traveling offshore, especially for us retired folks who can afford to spend some of the money we are leaving to our children. Vicki Green takes you to Tasmania for its trout fishing, and Glen Wonders to Christmas Island to flirt with all those wonderful fishes with big teeth!

No issue is complete without paying homage to the past. Art Lingren, BCFFH historian, shares with us a wonderful memory of Tommy Brayshaw, and in Back Casts I remember Dave Stewart from a reprint

of a 1969 article from Western Fish and Game about his late winter exploits on the Okanagan River, in pursuit of hungry rainbows dropping down from Vaseux Lake to feed on migrating Chinook fry.

Our second guest feature is Rory Glennie, who once again takes us to the beaches, showing us a unique popper-dropper system that is quite inventive and becoming popular on tidal waters, basically stirring up the ocean surface like a dry-fly or skater, and exciting the cutts and Coho into action.

When we pick a "fishing brain", Katy Watson takes a deserved quick break from her toddler and new infant to comment for us about her favourite gear and place. It's great to see Katy back in action on the fly-fishing front! Her steelhead pattern "The Dallas Fly" looks like it should grace every steelheader's fly box!

Lastly, conservation is a huge topic these days with the BCFFH, with our esteemed VP Michael Barr working diligently as our chair on the Steelhead and Government Relations committees. Have you ever wondered about the effect of catch-and-release tactics on your favourite fishes? UBC has recently completed a study on it, and you will be surprised at the mortality rates when/if you read the report. Perhaps it is time to think about limiting our catches to one-and-done on steelhead, Coho and Chinook salmon, and ten-and-done on trout and other species? How much is enough? How much do we care?

Enjoy your magazine! And, if you are able, please contribute to our online auction coming up in April.

**Brian Smith, Editor**

# Club News/Reports

## TOTEM FLY FISHING CLUB

### Report Spring

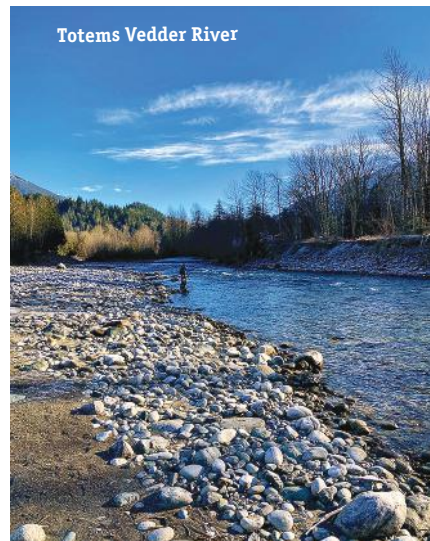
By Lorenzo Cirillo

The Totem Fly Fishing Club is looking forward to an eventful year. We are very excited that we have some new faces and energy in the club by recently adding ten new members to our roster. By nature of the Totem's affiliation with the B.C Federation of Fly Fishers, the BCFFF has also gained ten new members. The hard water season does not stop many of our

members from getting out on local rivers looking for winter run steelhead, or other members that seek out warmer climes in search of bonefish.

The club has its usual slate of outings planned to the Vedder, Harrison and Squamish rivers as well as a couple of outings in the spring once the ice comes off interior lakes. We are contemplating an outing to Thompson River in July as a new offer, provided river levels cooperate. Also, our Dean River foray will be well attended with five groups making up the effort this year. This is a very special year, as it marks 50 years that the Totems have set up camp on this fabled river, and plans are underway on how to mark this milestone.

Our club also hosts a well-attended dinner auction each year in April. It is a great opportunity for members to donate



Totems Vedder River

older, lightly used gear to be snapped up by other members or guests that attend. Always a fun night and a great way to add more to our already jammed packed fly-tying rooms!

That's it for us! The Totems wish all the other club members an adventurous and safe year on our amazing B.C. waters!



Totems Vedder River

## KALAMALKA FLY FISHERS CLUB

### Kalamalka Fly Fishers Report

By Bob Tait

Kalamalka Fly Fishers have been a bit quiet during the "winter doldrums", waiting for ice-off and the opportunity to get back on open water. Most of our activity has been centered around club nights. In late November one of our members did a presentation on the history of the Kalamalka Fly Fishers. The club was initially a group of like-minded fly fishers who organized into a non-profit group in early 1986, making 2026 our 40th anniversary. We still have four of the founding members on our membership list, with two of

them still very active members. It was a very interesting evening, with most of our newer members quite amazed at how much history was preserved by our previous club members.

In December we held our Club Christmas dinner and Awards Night with a full house, one of the few nights that spouses get together, and compare notes to hear the truth about those fishing trips we take. In January, a committee was formed to review the manual we use for our Introduction to Fly Fishing Course, and to make recommendations

for improvements and / or changes. This year the five-week course will run Tuesday evenings from April 1st to April 30th. January will also see the start of our Introduction to Fly Tying Course, a six-week event happening on Tuesdays until February 18th. We run both courses in conjunction with Vernon Parks and Recreation.

Two of our 'education nights' were very well attended by club members: "Preparedness for a day on the water or a day in the outdoors" presented by one of our members, a retired physician. It covered things like knowing what you should have in your first aid kit other than bandages etc.; knowing what medical conditions your

fishing partner may have and where he keeps any of his meds, and other things we may not have considered. The other evening was a presentation from a member who is a local fish biologist, who did a presentation on what is involved in managing fish populations in small lakes, and how provincial bodies must make stocking decisions based on current fiscal and staffing levels.

Lastly, a review is underway of our "Fly Fishing Techniques for Okanagan Lakes" book, or 101 Flies to Fish the Okanagan. The plan is to revamp the current edition by updating the selection of flies contributed by club members. Tight lines all!



## POLAR COACHMAN FLYFISHERS

# Report

By Jeff Kormos, President

Here in the north, we are well into what most of us refer to as “fly-tying season.” As many of you know, it’s an overly long period of time, especially up here, between ice-up and ice-off, when all opportunities to put a fly into open water cease, and the urge to replenish the dwindling fly supply turns into action. Members of the Polar Coachman Flyfishers are busy resuming our regular business meetings, luncheons and fly-tying demonstrations. It certainly helps make our long fly-tying season appear a little shorter, and perhaps, more productive. I somehow have the great fortune to extend my fly-fishing season, as I am writing this update from the north beach on Haida Gwaii. I do, however, miss meeting up with our members and sharing in the camaraderie of our club’s regular activities.

We resumed our club business after summer break in September, and conditions for fly-fishing in the region remained stellar. Steelhead numbers on the Skeena

improved from past seasons, and conditions were very favourable for low, clear water techniques and dry-fly fishing in most of our treasured rivers. Stillwater conditions were the same in many of our favourite trophy still waters, and our members took full advantage of the opportunities presented. October was quite different, and the precipitation we collectively prayed for during the last few seasons came in true abundance. It blew out our rivers and brought necessary cooling in temperature, and in fishing pressure. We returned to the clubhouse to discuss the summer’s wins, losses, adventures, great fortune and in some cases, misfortunes.

Our members have never been the type to sulk through the darker days of winter, consistently working together to plan activities that reflect our passions for fly-fishing, conservation efforts and instilling our passions in future generations of passionate young anglers. For example, we met with a couple of teachers from two local high schools who are teaching courses about fly-fishing and tying. This is an initiative the club is eager to support. Their current efforts have introduced over 50 students

to fly-fishing and fly-tying. We are also extremely fortunate to collaborate with our region’s local biologists, and the members are always excited to ask questions, engage with their research and partner with them when opportunities arise. For example, we supported a successful grant application to do some angler engagement next summer, and we intend to support the project with volunteer time and effort. We also met the new Omineca region small lakes biologist Lindsay Thiessen and are very excited to support her work throughout the region. Our relationship with local fish biologists is one I hold dear and do not take for granted. Our members benefit greatly from their willingness to engage with us, and the vast knowledge they share. Our December potluck brought us together with new friends and old, an amazing array of food and drink, and our treasured gift steal. It was a packed house with many laughs and good time had by all.

We started the New Year with our annual general meeting where most of our previous executive and directors were voted back in to their positions. We welcomed a couple of new directors and a new Vice-President. ►



Polar Coachman  
potluck dinner

# Club News/Reports

► I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to everyone who stepped into or out of our executive this year. Their dedication to our members is truly inspiring and each one exemplifies the honour and privilege of serving this club. Our planning for the near future includes presenting our photo and club awards ceremony in February, hosting the International Fly-Fishing Film Festival in April, hosting an open house at the clubhouse, and also planning a large gathering and fish-out in May.

Now that the days are getting brighter and longer, we are all eager to pack in as much as we can into “fly-tying” season so we can divert our attention towards the upcoming fly-fishing season, the adventures we will have and the new friends we’ll make along the way. I look forward to rejoining the club in-person and participating in its in its endeavours in April, but until then, I’ll have to settle for chasing winter steelhead in this most amazing part of our province.

Yarns forthcoming!

## LOONS FLY FISHING CLUB – VANCOUVER

### Report

By Rick Boswell

**W**inter is a slow time for our Club. The lack of winter rains has resulted in low, clear water in our local rivers. The fish are there, but we are awaiting some healthy periods of rain to raise water levels, which will hopefully entice more fish to move in. And behold! As I write this, it’s raining!

Our planned 2025 outings will include traditional trips to the Thompson, Skagit and Squamish rivers, while reintroducing trips to Alta Lake.

Our fund raiser this year will be an auction of fishing gear which was bequeathed to the club by Skip Young. The proceeds will be donated to the Loons BCIT Endowment Fund, which provides a bursary to deserving students.

That’s it for now. If you’re going out on a river this winter, tight lines and stay safe.

## OSPREYS FLY FISHING CLUB

### Report

By Bruce Brandhorst, President

**T**he Osprey Fly Fishers began our fall meetings with a presentation on our week-long fish-out for (mostly pink) salmon at Cluxewe Resort on Vancouver Island. Other presentations included a helicopter fishing trip for cutthroat, steelhead, and Coho out of Powell River with guide, environmental activist, and BCFFF poet Pat Demeester. Retired fisheries biologist Ken Ashley also did a presentation on the precarious situation for salmon habitat in the Fraser River estuary, including the film “Soul of the Fraser”.

Monthly methods sessions included tying flies for the Skagit River using foam, and another on DIY sinking tips.

After a weekend fish-out at Corbett Lake, the club spent a day on the Skagit River, recently reopened after a flood washed out the road out 3 years ago. We then turned our attention to fishing for coho, which showed especially good returns in numbers and size this year.

We also had our annual December holiday dinner with the Totems Fly Fishers, where Jay Rowland presented an entertaining overview of his 50 years of fly-fishing travel.

## COMOX VALLEY FLYFISHERS

### Report

by Dean Hodgson, President

**A**fter a terrific late summer season fishing the abundant pink salmon return on our beaches and local rivers, the Coho showed up in droves and they were biters! Great days were had by many of us off our local beaches until around the 1st of November, when the runs petered out. One of our members beached over one hundred fish. The monsoons that arrived in the first week of November instantly put an end to our river Coho fishing, as the storms lasted through December.

Winter steelheading continues to be a private matter amongst those whose hands can still withstand the cold, so there is nothing to report on that front.

Comox Valley Flyfishers Official Fly Pattern:



Murray's Rolled Muddler

Aside from those that can get out and chase cutthroat trout in our local rivers, our club’s first major fishing excursions will be for large, spawning lake cutthroats in Horne Lake, which occurs at the end of February, lasting into the first week of March. Several of our members also are eagerly awaiting the first warm day to hit Spider Lake, which is well stocked with trout, but in the meantime, we will continue to tie flies in preparation of what is to come.

Our club now has its own official fly pattern. Several patterns were considered that were either originated or popularized by a small group of the club’s founding members. They were: Barry Thornton’s Silver Thorn; Bob Jones’s Weigh Wester; Ralph Shaw’s Tom Thumb; Tom Murray’s Rolled Muddler; and Rory Glennie’s Pearl Mickey. Tom Murray’s Rolled Muddler won out and has now been adopted as our fly of record. We are currently in the process of having it suitably replicated to be embroidered on the side of our new club hats. Thanks to Rory Glennie for his idea and spearheading this.



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## YOUTH SECTION

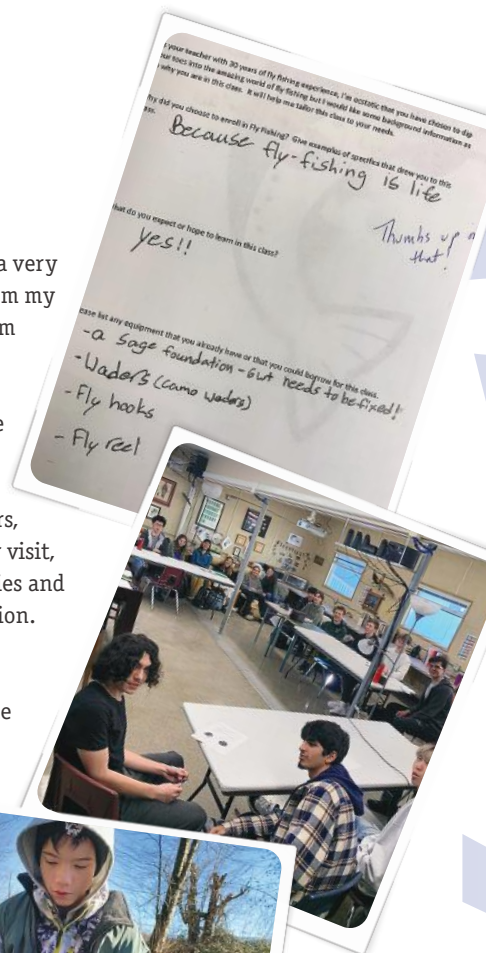
### Gleneagle Secondary School

By  
Lorenzo  
Cirillo

The Fall semester was a successful one! During this term, Gleneagle is running a fly-fishing club that meets once a week after school. Once things settled, there were about a dozen regular attendees to the meetings, several of which were international students from faraway places, like Brazil and Italy! The students were taught several different fly patterns such as wooly buggers, chironomids, Coho patterns, Clouser minnows and others. We also spent a few days on the grass field, where they learned the basics of casting a fly rod. Talk about spinning plates and trying to keep them all from falling! We ended the term with a trip to the Fraser Valley Trout Hatchery in Abbotsford. The very cold and windy day made for some difficult fishing conditions, but they persevered, and everyone managed to at least hook a fish. Some kids caught and released several. Thank you to the Freshwater Fisheries Society for this amazing program!

This week, our second semester got underway, which means I switch from my fly-fishing club to teaching my full-on accredited course. I have twenty-five students in this year's class, and they seem like a great bunch. It was serendipitous to start my first class by receiving a delivery of ten new fly rods

for them, courtesy of a very generous donation from my own fly club, the Totem Fly Fishers. The kids can't wait to get their hands on them! I have many great things planned, like fishing outings, guest speakers, a conservation officer visit, tours of local hatcheries and possibly a fish dissection. We have lots to look forward to this year, which I will update the BCFFF in the future.



## YOUTH SECTION

### Prince George Secondary School Program

By Ken Barwise,  
Teacher

The Prince George Secondary School Fly Fishing 12 class is dreaming of some liquid H<sub>2</sub>O. The solid stuff that we are currently looking at is great for skiing and snowboarding, on but not so good for casting. Even fishing of the solid water kind does not appeal to us right now since we are currently sitting at a balmy -26 C. with wind chill at -35 C!

Our class is currently working on fish identification projects and planning one of our several trips. We are planning to do one ice fishing trip, and at least three other trips around our beautiful lakes, and perhaps a spring exempt-

river trip in the Omineca country.

Working with the local Polar Coachman fly-fishing club, we are going to tie some cool, local secret flies after we learn how tie some of the classics. We are currently tying up an arsenal of flies, and hopefully by March we will be working on casting practice in the courtyard.

Students are also making a wish list of gear they would like to have if there were no budget restrictions. Presently, we are in dream mode: dreaming of better weather, equipment, and some huge fish that we hope to trick in the spring.



## Carihi Fly-fishing Program 2025

By Dr. Katherine Mulski

Winter fish outs have brought out some of our most skilled attempts at finding early winter run Steelhead and cutthroat trout.

Students are learning the virtue of patience in the months of November and December having had several postponements of fishing due to high river levels; however, January has brought some lovely cold and low days to seek out hungry cutthroat. While not fishing, students have been busy tying fly patterns with local anglers coming in to showcase their talents and share their knowledge with our students. A big heap of gratitude goes out to Rick Janzen, Chris Moller of the Campbell River Fish and Wildlife Association, and one of our very own alumni, Charley Harris, whose steelhead patterns were a big hit to try and tie in class.

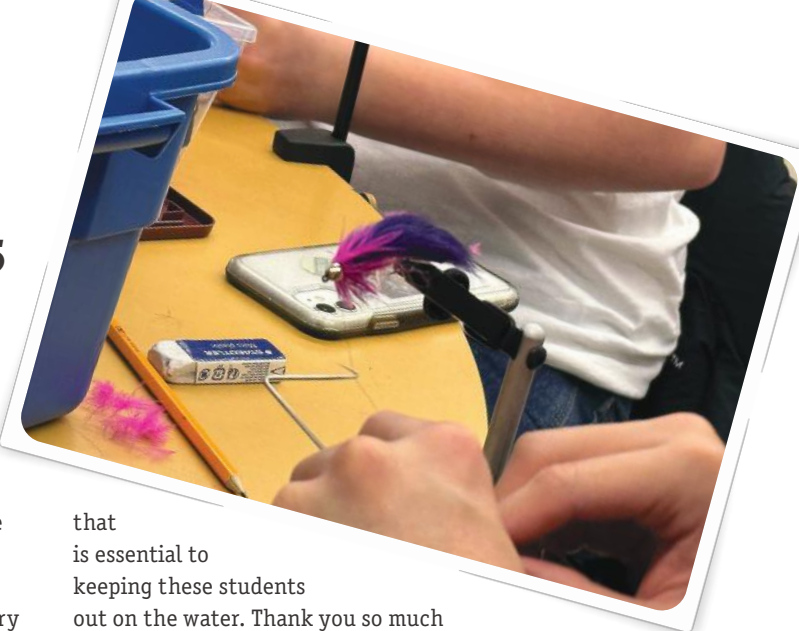
We have recently learned that our application to the BC Federation of Fly Fishers Conservation Fund has been approved, and we are so grateful for the opportunity to continue to fund equipment

that is essential to keeping these students out on the water. Thank you so much to the BCFFF membership and executive.

We would also like to thank Cecil Henley for his generous donations of ten 10-weight new salmon rods and equipment for our next salmon season. Teenagers can be tough on gear while learning the basics of fly casting and handling of rods, so we are so thankful for this generous gift.

Over the course of the months of November, December and January, our anglers have been busy learning about several

**CONTINUING TO PARTICIPATE  
IN FUN COOPERATIVE GAMES  
TO STRENGTHEN OUR  
COMMUNITY OF ANGLERS**








XO





## TEENAGERS CAN BE TOUGH ON GEAR WHILE LEARNING THE BASICS OF FLY CASTING AND HANDLING OF RODS


important concepts and skills:

- The First Peoples concept of interconnectedness as it relates to conservation and our local fisheries here in Campbell River and the importance of fly fishing as a land practice.
- Learning to understand Hydrological impacts that relate to salmon and trout habitat.
- Learning and applying how to read and interpret hydrometric graphs that can inform angling practices.

- Coho Fry Husbandry, beginning the stages of raising coho eggs for the semester 2 cohorts to release into local streams.
- Continuing to explore salmon and trout regulations, including retention and non-retention rules, and discussing general fishing ethics and developing their own ethical considerations as anglers.
- Learning how to nymph for trout, and tying basic nymphs after studying entomological contents of their local rivers.
- Continuing to participate in fun cooperative games to strengthen our community of anglers.





A large background image showing a person's arm and a fishing rod with a yellow line, positioned over a fast-flowing river. The river is surrounded by dense green and brown foliage. A dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white and orange text.

## LEARNING HOW TO NYMPH FOR TROUT, AND TYING BASIC NYMPHS AFTER STUDYING ENTOMOLOGICAL CONTENTS OF THEIR LOCAL RIVERS



- Studying the impacts of catch and release fisheries related to local rivers as well as Steelhead specific angling practices.

One of our most recent trips to visit the Haig-Brown house yielded a wonderful presentation by Dr. Celia Haig-Brown. It was wonderful to hear the stories of growing up in the house and hearing the impact of both her mother and father's legacy.

As we near to the closing of Semester 1 at the end of January, Dr. Mulski looks forward to the Spring Semester 2, which will include two cohorts of classes at the same time. Busy but rewarding times ahead here, with fry season and big sea-run cutthroat just around the corner.

We welcome anyone interested in presenting to our crew of anglers — whether it be a fly-





tying demo, fishing stories, a casting clinic, or other possibilities. Remote presentations are welcome as well!

Thank you once again for your support. For any inquiries or to express

interest in presenting, please feel free to reach out to me via email.

Tight Lines!

**Dr. Katherine Mulski**  
*Educator,*

*Carihi Fly Fishing Program Campbell River, BC*



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SOME DAVE STEWART LEGACY

## David Stewart Obituary

David (Dave) Edward Stewart has gone on to the great trout stream in the sky. We know he is thinking of us as he drops a Thompson caddis along the eddy line amid the feeding trout.

“Dave died quietly at home in his 86th year, in the early hours of November 4, 2004, with his dedicated companion Elizabeth at his side and son Gary nearby. Throughout his life, Dave lived, fished and hunted all over southern BC and Vancouver Island. His sporting trips took him everywhere in the province and into the Yukon and Alberta. Dave was a serious outdoorsman all his life and was well known for his contributions to B. C. Outdoors Magazine and the “Last Cast” column. For 30 years of his early working life, he was an operator-telegrapher and dispatcher for the Canadian Pacific Railway. In his later working life, he was involved in an astonishingly adventurous series of careers, including magazine writing, publishing four books, commercial salmon fishing, photography, purser/accountant on barges in the far Arctic and Terminal Manager for the CNR in Penticton. His travels took him to Africa, Australia, Mexico and France.”

BACK-CASTS

# Sun-struck Rainbows

By Dave Stewart

Re-printed from Western Fish & Game magazine January 1969

“Distant fields look greener...” is the theme of a trite old saying familiar to all. Trite it may be, but few will question its pertinence today, when those fields are not so distant as they were a few years ago. The fact that most of us can reach places hundreds of miles away in a few hours tends to make us more prone to look to the far-away hot spot for our weekend outdoor recreation. As a result, we often overlook some very acceptable homegrown enjoyment.

As an example, take the Okanagan River between Osoyoos and McIntyre Dam, just south of Vaseux Lake. Many local anglers, me included, often drive for hours to fish for winter steelhead in the Thompson. Others drive to the Shuswap for the big Kamloops that show up in February and March. Yet, right at our back door we have trout fishing that can be downright exciting to both fly and spin fishermen.

### Alevin Feast Begins

This trout fishing tends to be short-lived and occurs when trout move up from Osoyoos Lake to feed on sockeye alevin that hatch late in February, or as late as mid-March, depending upon water temperature. Upon emerging from the gravel where their parents deposited eggs the previous autumn, these tiny fish, half the size of a toothpick and still bearing the orange egg-sac, drift helplessly with the current until they reach the shallows of Osoyoos Lake, which will be their home for over a year. Meanwhile, the lake trout, through their acute sense of smell, become aware of the approaching feast and hurry up the river in avid anticipation.

In their hurry to gorge on the helpless alevin, these trout tend to become careless. Even the big old squaretail who has successfully eluded thousands of trolled tidbits for years in the lake tends to become over-enthusiastic here and so becomes fair game for a well-placed fly or single egg.

Last year I finally around to doing something in March that I have been meaning to do ever since I moved to Penticton five years ago. Being familiar with trout that feed on salmon alevin, I always felt that there should be a good trout run in the Okanagan coincident with the alevin movement there.

Each previous February-March had come and gone without even a try. But, last year in mid-February I remembered my alevin theory and commenced checking the river occasionally. But February was a fairly cold month, and I could see no alevin during several checks up to the twenty-fifth. Then, for one reason or another, I failed to check again for more than a week. As a result, I almost missed out again.

### First Cast Surprises

March 9th dawned bright and sunny. My No. 3 boy, Wayne, had just come home after a winter in London, and needed sunshine to clear away fog and



smog. I suggested we look over the alevin situation. Parking the truck at the bridge north of Oliver, we commenced walking along the river, peering into the shallows. I saw a trout even before I spotted any alevin! His bright sides flashing on the sunshine betrayed his passage, where he darted along a bar that angled out to mid-river, scooping up the helpless alevin tidbits as they drifted over the bar. That was enough for me! We hadn't come to catch alevin anyhow. Wayne and I scrambled back to the truck for our rods, and set up a fly rod and spin-rig in jig time. Wayne had his rod in the water first, a single egg covering a no. 6 Mustad dry-fly hook and weighted with two small split shots, which he bounced along the shallows just above the bridge.

### Giant's Brief Triumph

His first two casts received strikes; both times fish made off with the bait. I was still fiddling with cameras when he made a third cast. Neither of us was prepared for what happened next. When the line tightened, Wayne struck lightly, rather expecting that it might be hooked on bottom. But at the jab of the hook, a big rainbow streaked upstream, towing the line in a sweeping arc. Then the large fish exploded clear of the surface with a burst of white water and pink sides, ran diagonally across the river and broke off, all in a matter of a few seconds. Wayne made several unprintable comments and commenced fastening another hook with shaking hands.

"Of all the blankety-blank luck! Only blankety-blank fish in the blankety-blank river, probably!" he complained as he impaled a nice orange egg. "But what a fish..." he added, unbelieving. I felt the same way. I'd had a good enough look at that trout to guess his weight at six pounds or better. The way that he tore across the river, it was not surprising that the four-pound monofilament had parted. I was hoping for rainbows but had expected nothing that large.

Wayne flipped the new setup to midstream and let it bounce bottom in the strong current. It had barely commenced bouncing, however, when another trout hit. This one was just as active as the first, but weighed barely two pounds. Soon he had slipped the bright, fat fish onto the rocky beach.

### Chasing rainbows

Within the next thirty minutes, Wayne beached two more good trout, both within a few ounces of the first one landed. When he volunteered to man the camera to let me have a turn with the fly rod, I agreed with alacrity. In waders, I worked my way carefully over the treacherous footing to midstream and cast my fly, an Egg-N-I close to the opposite shore, where the current swept in downstream from me in a large arc.

Two casts swept through without results; floating too high, I decided, although I felt a fish mouth the feathers on the second. I pinched a small shot onto the leader next to the line and again cast to the same spot; this time the fly bounced bottom beautifully. As the line tightened, I felt an unmistakable tug and struck instantly. For a second the line stopped dead, then a big rainbow came rocketing upstream so fast I couldn't strip enough line to stay with him. Fifteen feet below where I stood the three-pounder broke water twice, then streaked off downstream, running the full length of the shallow run. It was probably ten minutes before I was able to beach the broad-sided native rainbow.

No more trout were left on the run, or at least if there were, they weren't having any of us. We commenced catching whitefish, and



This trout fishing tends to be short-lived and occurs when trout move up from Osoyoos Lake to feed on sockeye alevin that hatch late in February, or as late as mid-March, depending upon water temperatures.



although these were fine large fish and surprisingly good fighters, we had come for trout, so we moved upstream to new water.

We caught several more rainbow at various places, but they were much smaller fish, running around ten to twelve inches.

## WINTER FISHING CAN BE REALLY ENJOYABLE WHEN THE SUN IS BRIGHT. THERE ARE, IN FACT, SEVERAL ADVANTAGES: TOP-QUALITY EATING FISH, ABSENCE OF BUGS AND RATTLERS, AND SCARCITY OF COMPETITION

### Deep Pool Mysteries

Finally, about a mile above the bridge, we came to an interesting-looking deep pool, lined on one side with sunken logs, and a whole birch tree.

Several casts with egg and fly failed to raise anything from the inviting-looking depths. I switched to a Royal Coachman bucktail. On the first cast it floated high, drifting over the submerged branches like a gaudy moth. Perched on a large, slippery log well above the water, I nearly fell off when the biggest trout in the Okanagan flashed from the emerald depths, engulfed the fly, shot back under the branches, and snapped the 3x leader, all happening in a split second. Shaken, I crept back onto solid ground to nurse my wounded vanity, and to splice on a new fly.

Wayne had been fighting his way through tangled underbrush to reach the hole above when my startled shout brought him back. "What happened? You hook Ogo-pogo or something?" he demanded. I mumbled something to the effect that he wouldn't believe me if I told him. Without too much hope, I dropped the new fly where the first had fallen with such disastrous effect. Another big trout came steaking up! Not nearly so large as the first, mind you, but large enough

to keep me dancing a tango along the Teflon-coated log in a frantic effort to keep him clear of the jungle of submerged branches. Finally, I chanced a desperate leap from the end of the log into the shallows on the far side of the river. Leading the four-pound rainbow away from the sunken brush, I was soon able to beach him on the bar at the lower end of the pool.

### Winter Sun Lessons

By the time I had rejoined Wayne on the east side of the river, clouds had obscured the sun. Within minutes, it became uncomfortably chilly. But despite numbed fingers, we fished all the way downstream with the sun, and we didn't take another fish although we fished two good spots bypassed on the way upstream. I have noticed this before. Okanagan fish like the sunshine. This suits me fine, because we usually get lots of it in February and March.

### February's Call

Winter fishing can be really enjoyable when the sun is bright. There are, in fact, several advantages, such as top-quality eating fish, absence of bugs and rattlers, and scarcity of competition to name a few. Which all adds up to a valid explanation of why you may well see me around February 22nd bent over like Sherlock Holmes and peering into the shallows along Okanagan River. Sunstruck, you might say!

P. S. Editor comment:

I spoke with Tom Dellamater of our BCFFF Penticton Club, and Tom says there is still a decent early spring trout fishery in the Okanagan River where Dave whetted his teeth on big rainbows, and the Columbia River origin Chinook are also returning to this once salmon-depleted fishery. There is a God!



# Tommy Brayshaw

By Art Lingren

AJL FB Post March 27, 2024

## and The Silver Jock Scott

In 1994 I searched through Tommy Brayshaw's diaries, made lists of all the flies that he caught fish on, and made a record. His early diaries were lost, but the ones that survived started in June 1932 and ended in 1959. In the 1930s Brayshaw lived in Vernon, and fished the lakes and rivers in the area. Brayshaw, in addition to painting fish, made wooden replicas of fish.

His fishing paintings are lovely, as are his fish carvings. The carvings sell for many thousands of dollars, but they are rare. I have a note in my Brayshaw file for Easter Sunday: 1937 "Model of 17 1/4 lb. Knouff Lake trout caught June, 1932." This fish was Brayshaw's largest still-water trout. He also noted "model of 18 lb. Jewel Lake trout caught by J. H. Maller of June, 1932." Feeding on the prolific insect populations in the Interior lakes, the newly planted trout grew large.

The Jock Scott is one of the most famous flies ever used by early Pacific Northwest fly fishers. In British Columbia it was popular from early colonial days through into the 1950s. I wondered about a Jock Scott variant the Silver Jock Scott that

Brayshaw used at Jones Lake on July 20th, 1932. Some Silver bodied flies-- Silver Doctor, Silver Wilkinson, and Silver Grey-- were as popular as Jock Scott. It didn't surprise me to see a Silver Jock Scott because silver bodied flies were so effective for British Columbia, trout, steelhead and coho salmon. Years ago, I did find a reference for the Silver Jock Scott on the Internet and found some references to it. After I circulated this post Chris Lester let me that Hale had a dressing for it in the 361 patterns listed in his book. I do recall coming across a dressing for it and one reference said silver tinsel replaced the yellow silk tag and rear yellow body. This is the first time I dressed one. Even with my goofs I like it.



Tommy Brayshaw  
with a Coquihalla  
Steelhead, 1951

### Tommy Brayshaw-used Patterns

Tables Date	Tables Name	Tables Hook Size	Tables Hook Style	Tables Fish	Tables Location
22/5/32	Silver & Mallard	?	?	Trout	Adam's River
28/5/32	Silver & Mallard	6	?	Trout	Adam's River
29/5/32	Silver & Mallard	?	Tandem	Trout	Little River
11/6/32	Dry Sedge	?	?	Trout	Knouff Lake
11/6/32	Peacock & Partridge	?	?	Trout	Knouff Lake
1/7/32	Brown & Dark Olive Sedges-dry	?	?	Trout	Knouff Lake
4/7/32	Jock Scott	?	?	Trout	Knouff Lake
6/7/32	Peacock & Partridge	?	?	Trout	Knouff Lake
19/7/32	Jock Scott	8	?	Trout	Jones Lake
20/7/32	Grizzley King	?	?	Trout	Jones Lake
20/7/32	Silver Jock Scott	2	?	Trout	Jones Lake
20/7/32	Silver Doctor	4 or 5	?	Trout	Jones Lake
19/8/32	Jock Scott	?	?	Trout	Arthur Lake
10/9/32	Jock Scott	?	?	Trout	Adam's River
10/9/32	Mallard & Claret	?	?	Trout	Adam's River
10/9/32	Parmachene Belle	?	?	Trout	Adam's River
11/4/33	Stonefly Nymph	?	?	Trout & Dolly	Little River
4/6/33	Bucktail & Silver	?	?	Trout	Little River
10/6/33	The Bounder ?? see original diary			Trout	Little River
11/6/33	Big Bertha (used by others, not TB)			Trout	Little River





Brayshaw's first Coquihalla steelhead  
June 28, 1946.



The Silver Jock Scott on 4 1/2" Hardy  
Perfect fly reel backdrop.



The Silver Jock Scott  
on grey backdrop



GUEST FEATURE

# The Popper-Dropper System

By: Rory F. Glennie

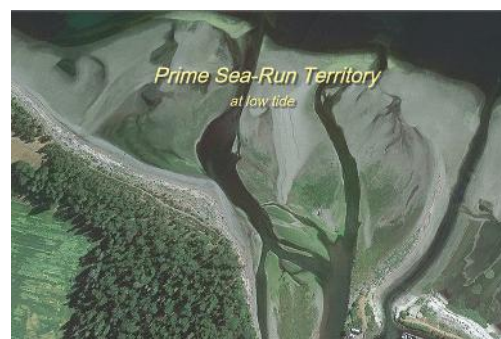
Along East-central Vancouver Island, nearshore salt waters are a veritable living bouillabaisse of small sea critters, all suitable to snack on by hungry sea-run Cutthroat trout. Salmon fry, needlefish, euphausiids, mysids, worms, sticklebacks and so many more, each in their own seasonal abundance, nourish sea-runs.

▲  
Fly Club  
Fishout

**M**y suspicion is, there are more cutthroats out there than we realize. But, our tiny offering doesn't get noticed by many of them, being lost in this melange, therefore, we surmise the area is devoid of cutt's. So, how best to have your lonely fly get noticed in this cornucopia of trout chow? One way, is to make an attractive commotion which peeks their curiosity and brings them closer. And where better to do that?... on or close to the surface so the attraction is more widely perceived.

While fishing off the beach for Sea-run Cutthroat trout, it is quite exciting and suspenseful when you see a V-wake closing in on your surface fly. The actual strike is even more exciting. The sad fact is, more often than not, a fish strikes then turns away without becoming solidly hooked. Or it simply turns away without showing further interest. A traditional remedy is to extend a hook out past the fly's tail, via a loop of monofilament line to create a "stinger" hook. This modification does increase chances of a solid hookup, marginally so. Having faced that refusal

►  
Sea-run Cutthroat  
Trout







## FOR SEA-RUNS, A GENERIC BEACH POPPER... TRAILING A SMALL BAITFISH PATTERN ABOUT TWENTY INCHES BEHIND IT WORKS A CHARM

▲  
Flat-calm water,  
perfect for employing  
the popper-dropper  
technique

scenario a number of times set me to thinking; is there a better way to generate more solid hookups?

A number of ideas were toyed with, but the one which proved the most workable was an idea borrowed from the spinner fisherman's play book. In my youth, my buddy would always use an inline spinner with a natural Abalone mother-of-pearl thumbnail size blade. Trailing from that spinner body he attached a snelled, bronze baitholder hook which extended about ten inches. His hook

was adorned with a bit of garden hackle. That rig was deadly effective for trout. Sometimes, even when the worm was gone, he would still get fish taking the bare trailing hook... that was my idea lightbulb moment for sure, it suddenly clicked on.

### Anglers

#### Sea Run Cutthroat Trout

**Hatchery Stocking Program**  
Sea-run cutthroat trout found in waters along the British Columbia coast are prized by anglers for their fighting qualities. Populations of sea-run cutthroat have steadily declined over the past decade due to overfishing, logging, agriculture, and a host of other land use problems.  
Since the spring of 1980, the Fish and Wildlife Branch have released approximately 10,000 cutthroat smolts annually into the Oyster River watershed. The objective of this program was to rebuild the wild populations of cutthroat trout, while allowing for a select harvest of mature adults. Please refer to angling regulations.  
For further information on cutthroat trout contact the Fish and Wildlife Branch, 2569 Keesworth Road, Nanaimo, B.C. V8T 4P7.

All hatchery origin fish have been clipped in either of these places.

**Sea-Run Cutthroat Trout Fishing Regulations**  
Effective immediately, new tidal boundaries in the Oyster River estuary have been posted at the river mouth. Upstream of the tidal boundary markers, the freshwater sport fishing regulations will apply. For cutthroat trout in freshwater streams, the following rules apply:  
**In Freshwater Streams**  
1. Catch limit ..... Daily - 2 Possession - 4  
2. Minimum size limit (fork length) ..... 30 cm (12")  
3. Cutthroat trout release - October 1 to May 31  
Specific rules in the Oyster River will also apply.  
4. Bait Ban - "No person, while angling, shall use foodstuff as bait or use natural bait of any kind" e.g., worms or roe.  
5. Single Barbless Hook - "No person shall use more than one hook, and that hook shall have no barb."  
Downstream of the tidal boundary signs, tidal sportfishing regulations are enforced. For cutthroat trout in tidal water, the following applies:  
**In Tidal Waters**  
1. Catch limit ..... Daily - 2 Possession - 4  
2. Minimum size limit (fork length) ..... 30 cm (12")  
These measures are being enforced to protect wild stocks of sea-run cutthroat trout migrating into the Oyster River.

Province of British Columbia Ministry of Environment

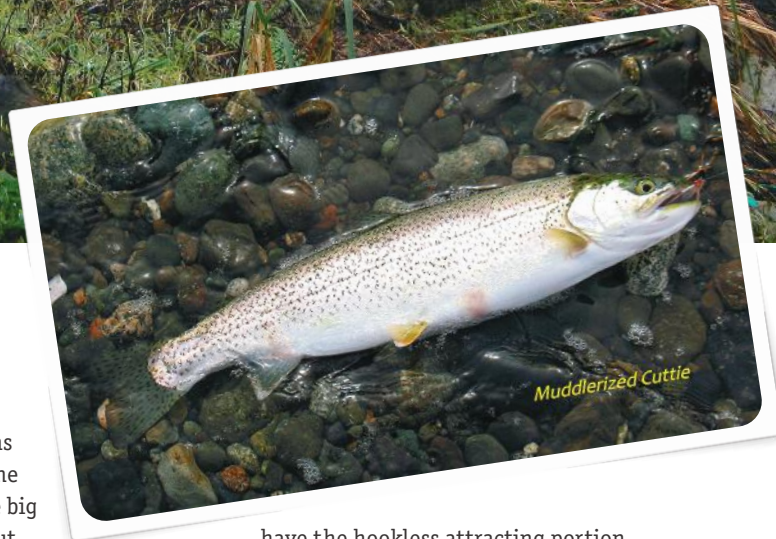




▲ Nile Creek estuary on a calm morning

Come to think of it, the current enthusiasm over a “hopper-dropper” rig, used with considerable effect in the US and many other enlightened jurisdictions which allow multiple flies attached to one line, was closer to what I needed. i.e. the big dry fly would stimulate interest in a trout but the sunken fly below, trailing on a length of tippet tied to the bend of the first hook, would get the bite. A solution to my problem was near to hand.

Being well aware that saltwater sportfishing regulations for British Columbia allow only using a single lure, no matter how many hooks it has attached directly to it, presented another hurdle to jump. Therefore, an extended two-part solution could only incorporate one hook. So, how to construct a castable fly fishing rig which would attract and catch fish within the limits of the law? The answer,



have the hookless attracting portion well ahead of the dressed single hook portion. The mechanics of it was simple. My first iteration was to dress the attractor on a short plastic WD40 tube. This tube popper was slid up the leader above the tippet connecting knot. That knot kept the tube from sliding down during casting and retrieving. But changing colour or style combinations was a chore. Alternatively, dressing the attracting portion on a double-looped articulated shank cured that problem. As shown in the accompanying sketch, the leader is tied to the front loop of the articulated shank. To

◀ Vintage Oyster River Sea-run Sign



From: Fisheries & Oceans Tidal Waters Sport Fishing Regulations:

#### Hooks

##### It is illegal to:

- ◇ use barbed hooks when fishing for salmon, cutthroat trout or steelhead in tidal waters, including in tidal portions of streams (such as the Fraser River and Skeena River)
- ◇ use more than one hook, an artificial lure or an artificial fly attached except in:
  - the tidal waters of the Fraser River where 2 hooks, artificial lures or artificial flies attached to a bar rig are allowed
  - tidal waters if multiple hooks are used in combination to hold a single piece of bait or if fishing for herring, mackerel, northern anchovy, Pacific sand lance, Pacific sardine or squid
- ◇ use gaff hooks while fishing except as an aid to landing a fish

the rear loop of the shank attach some tippet mono, of whatever length/strength desired, with a fly tied to the end of this tippet; hence, the popper-dropper rig. This easy change system allows a limitless combination of attractor styles and fly types. For sea-runs, a generic beach popper with its surface disturbing foam head and subtle glinting sheen, trailing a small baitfish pattern about twenty inches

behind it works a charm. For this, my go-to fly is a Rolled Muddler. Should a changeup be desired, a radical switch from a baitfish pattern to a pure attractor like Jim Kilburn's American Coachman often sparks interest. Again, the popper draws their attention, the trailing fly gets them to commit.

One other thing gleaned from my buddy's spinner method; simulating the heartbeat vibrations given off by the whirling blade as a secondary attractor. Can that factor be realized within the parameters of what constitutes fly fishing? — i.e. no spinner blades. With some ingenuity, it can. With a foam popper head, not only does it produce a highly visible surface disturbance, there are also fish alerting vibrations pulsing through the water column as it chugs along. This factor may well be more important than simple visual attraction, as it surely reaches

**OTHER THING GLEANED FROM MY BUDDY'S SPINNER METHOD; SIMULATING THE HEARTBEAT VIBRATIONS GIVEN OFF BY THE WHIRLING BLADE AS A SECONDARY ATTRACTOR**



out farther than the immediate vicinity.

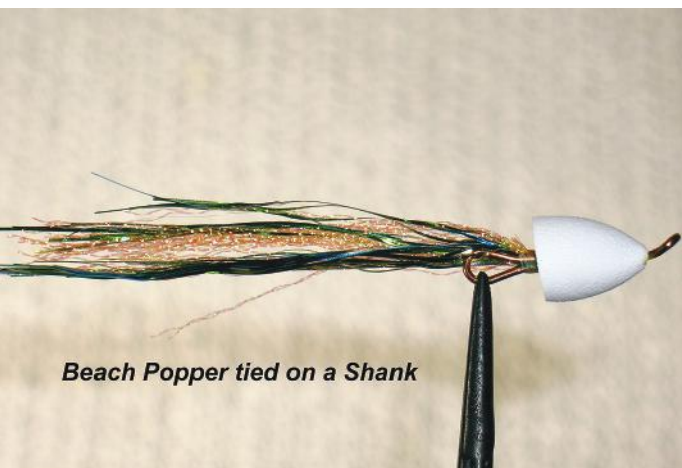
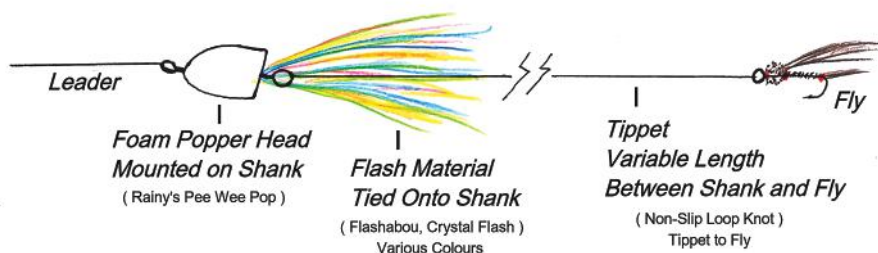
As with any sea-run fly fishing technique it has its moments to shine. Employed on relatively calm waters, a hand-over-hand roly-poly retrieve sends out a tantalizing V-wake and subtle pulsations which is surely noticed by fish swimming below or well off to the side. Its trailing fly may even suggest an interested little fish which has come in to see what the commotion is all about. A little fish in that situation would be easy pickin's for a sea-run. And, since that ersatz baitfish has a hook in it, you got 'im.

To see this popper-dropper system in action have a gander at this short video made by a fellow sea-run Cutthroat nut Timothy Bird,

## Popper-Dropper System

( Using Senyo's Articulated Shanks )

© R.E. Glennie



Beach Popper tied on a Shank

## Popper-Dropper System for Sea-Runs

By Rory E. Glennie

The popper-dropper arrangement is a surface presentation system for luring sea-run Cutthroat trout in from a distance and to help lessen short takes, and improve hookup-to-strike ratio. Although this is an innovative technique for catching sea-runs, most fly fishers already have the tackle required to implement it effectively.

Fly fishing gear suitable for effectively fishing the popper-dropper system for sea-run Cutthroat trout include:

- Fly rods in the five, six, or seven weight range.
- Fly rod length from nine to ten feet long.
- Floating fly lines to match weight of fly rod.
- Corrosion resistant fly reels capable of holding fly line and 100 meters backing.
- Nine foot long monofilament leaders testing 10 to 12 lbs. from fly line to popper.
- 18 to 20 inches of 6 or 8 lb. test mono tippet between popper and fly.

Hookless poppers are not commercially available but are DIY, hand-assembled from components readily available through fly fishing shops, and some outdoor stores with a fishing section. Overall look of the hookless popper should be on the flashy side, as it is only there to attract fish close enough to take the trailing fly. The popper should be about two and a half inches in overall length.

Tying your own flies adds to the experience, although, useable flies can be had through most fly shops or outdoor stores. Fly patterns to use with this popper-dropper system include:

- Murray's Rolled Muddler in size 10 or 12.
- Art's Wizard Fly in size 8 or 10.
- Kilburn's American Coachman in size 8 or 10.
- Or, your favourite baitfish imitation in sizes 8 or 10.

from the Puget Sound area: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXOTPeB2834&t=2s>  
I contacted Tim a while back and passed along my ideas, to see if this system would work on sea-runs in his locale. Tim modified it slightly but the essence of this system is still there. Apparently, it works just fine South of the border, too. Proving, I suppose, that sea-run Cutthroat trout share certain idiosyncrasies no matter where they may be found.

► DFO Hook Regulation

◄ Casting at the Beach



A man wearing a dark beanie, glasses, a dark scarf, and a dark puffy jacket is smiling and holding a large rainbow trout. He is standing in a shallow, clear stream with snow-covered banks and trees in the background. The fish has vibrant red, orange, and yellow scales with dark spots. The scene is set in a winter environment with snow on the ground and trees.

GUEST FEATURE

# CHASING CHROME: THE ALLURE OF WINTER STEELHEADING

By Kevin Rossi



# THE ALLURE OF WINTER STEELHEADING

For those who don't mind numb hands, frosted beards, and frozen guides, the Skeena Watershed in Northern British Columbia offers an unrivaled steelheading experience.

## Kevin Rossi Bio

Kevin is a 29-year-old fly-fishing fanatic, with over a decade of fly-fishing experience in the wilderness of BC and Alberta. Kevin has been writing about fly-fishing for 10 years and has taught many friends, family, and clients to fly-fish; there is nothing Kevin loves more than sharing his passion for this sport with others. Kevin is a graduate of the Wildlife and Fisheries program at the University of Northern British Columbia and currently works as a fisheries biologist based in Smithers, BC. Kevin's focus as a writer is to capture the magic of fly-fishing and inspire respect and appreciation for all of nature, while promoting conservation of native fish and wild places. More of Kevin's work can be found on his website, [www.bushwhackersflyfish.com](http://www.bushwhackersflyfish.com).

**I**t was a week before Christmas, and despite the freshly fallen snow and beckoning mountain peaks, I found myself knee deep in the Bulkey River in search of steelhead, not powder. I couldn't feel my feet or hands, and my glasses fogged up with each frosty breath. The world sparkled, sun radiating off a million suspended snowflakes, as if in a dream... Cast... Swing... Retrieve... Repeat. The steady, cathartic rhythm of casting eased my mind, as if only half conscious...

Then I felt a heavy jerk on the end of my line, and my rod bent over with the heavy weight of large, powerful fish. I snapped out of my cold induced daze, suddenly ignorant to the winter chill as my reel sang through the silence. My heart raced, and as the fish took off towards the other bank, I chased it down the river, frantically hanging

was very little that could convince me to fly-fish once winter hit. As someone whose hands don't function in cold weather, fly-fishing in the frigid months was about the last thing on my mind; that was until I moved to Smithers, and finally immersed myself in the world of steelhead fishing. As the days grew shorter and my steelhead season neared its conclusion, I found myself standing in the crisp river more days than not, seeking refuge in the silent world offered by the river in winters clutches, anticipating the moment when the stillness would unravel into the exhilarating, powerful chaos of fighting and landing a steelhead.

As it turns out, in my eagerness to shake hands with these creatures, the lack of feeling in my extremities was no more than a minor inconvenience. *What's a few more casts?*

**THE IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW AS AN ANGLER IS THERE IS AN AMAZING AMOUNT OF DIVERSITY IN THE TIMING OF STEELHEAD MIGRATIONS, DESPITE OUR ONGOING NEED TO CLASSIFY STEELHEAD AS EITHER "WINTER" OR "SUMMER"**

on, praying the hook was firmly set. I was lucky—after a time, the chrome rocket on the end of my line resigned itself to capture, and I tailed the fish. I savoured every moment, admiring the beauty, power, and magnificence of the animal in my hands. In this moment, I realized I finally understood—fly-fishing was a winter activity, and one that would likely dominate my thoughts, and winters, for a long, long time.

This view on winter fishing was a new revelation. Until quite recently, there

## Winter Steelhead?

Steelhead are the anadromous form of rainbow trout, meaning they migrate to the ocean to feed and grow large before returning to spawn in freshwater. They are renowned for their size, strength and stamina. They are commonly referred to as either "winter" or "summer" steelhead, but I am here to assure you that it is not quite so simple.

Rainbow trout in BC's coastal streams can take up to 36 different life-history patterns. Some may stay near their natal





stream for their entire life and mature at a small body size, while another might live in the ocean for many years and return as a 30-pound behemoth. The amazing thing is that this small, 6-inch stream resident may eventually mate with the large, 30-pound behemoth, and their offspring

could take on either form. Long story short: it's complicated. The important thing to know as an angler is there is an amazing amount of diversity in the timing of steelhead migrations, despite our ongoing need to classify steelhead as either "winter" or "summer". Nature

doesn't create such divides; in reality, what I describe in this article is steelheading in winter. Not fishing for "winter" steelhead.

However, understanding steelhead migrations will help you catch them. What people commonly refer to as summer steelhead are those fish that



**Belief** is more  
important than **ability**

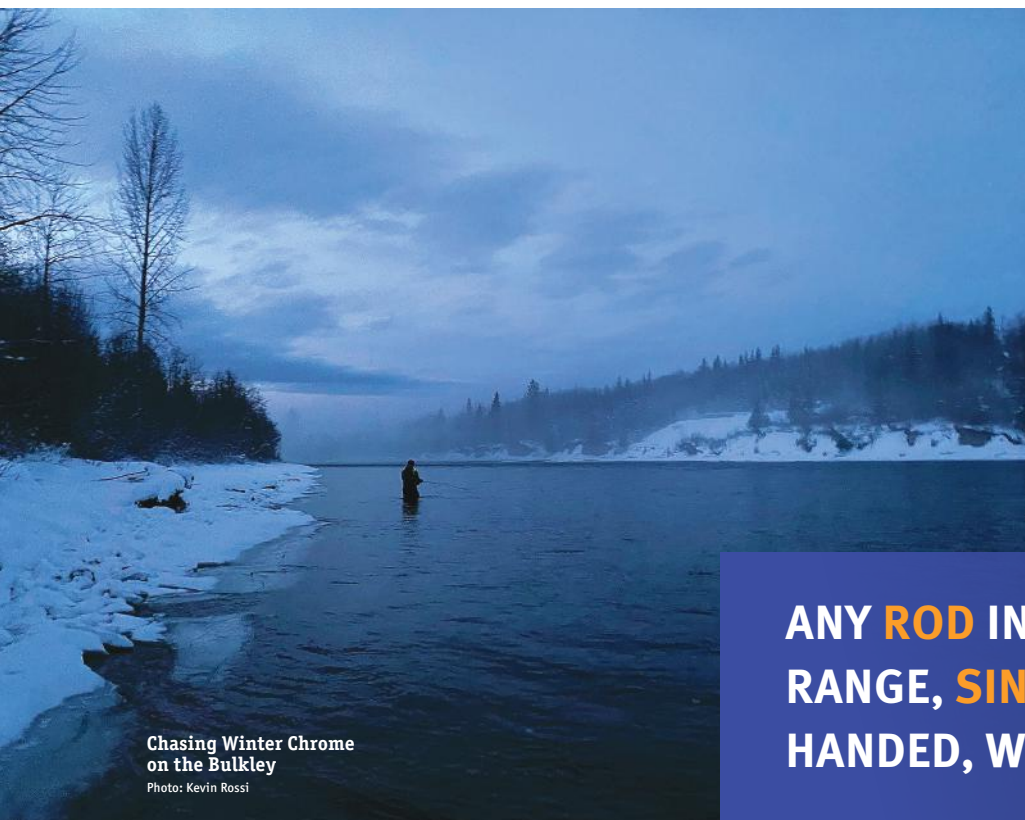




enter freshwater during summer, migrate to suitable overwintering habitats, and then spend the ensuing months in freshwater before spawning. Fish using this strategy will enter the river throughout summer and fall, therefore

but there are fish entering throughout winter spending varied amounts of time in freshwater. When considering these variations, what is important is that steelhead (of either form) can be caught in freshwater for most of the year, anytime

currently. Most steelhead will only reproduce once in their life, but there is a small percentage of fish that will survive to reproduce a second time- these fish are the ones immortalized in the minds of anglers lucky enough to have hooked one.



Chasing Winter Chrome  
on the Bulkley  
Photo: Kevin Rossi

**ANY ROD IN THE 7-10 WEIGHT  
RANGE, SINGLE OR DOUBLE  
HANDED, WILL SUFFICE**

### How to Catch Skeena Steelhead

This year was only my second year of steelhead and salmon fishing, so by no means am I an expert. Take my advice with some caution—there are many people with far more experience than me. I recommend learning and accumulating knowledge at every chance you have. I did manage to catch my fair share of steelhead in 2024, benefitting from one of the best Skeena River steelhead runs in recent memory. This meant I got to validate my tactics and approach with some exhilarating positive reinforcement. I probably got lucky a bunch too— that’s a crucial element to all steelheading. So,

will be less numerous early in the summer, and most numerous at the end of the fishing season in November and December. Therefore, when fishing the Skeena River and its tributaries in November and December, you are catching summer steelhead that are preparing to overwinter. The fishing remains excellent this time of year, because that is when the most fish are holding in freshwater.

A more accurate description of a “winter” steelhead is one that enters the river in winter (typically February- April) and spends much less time in freshwater. Instead of overwintering in freshwater, these fish remain in the ocean and benefit from the stable, nutrient rich waters which help them grow even larger. March and April are probably the peak months,

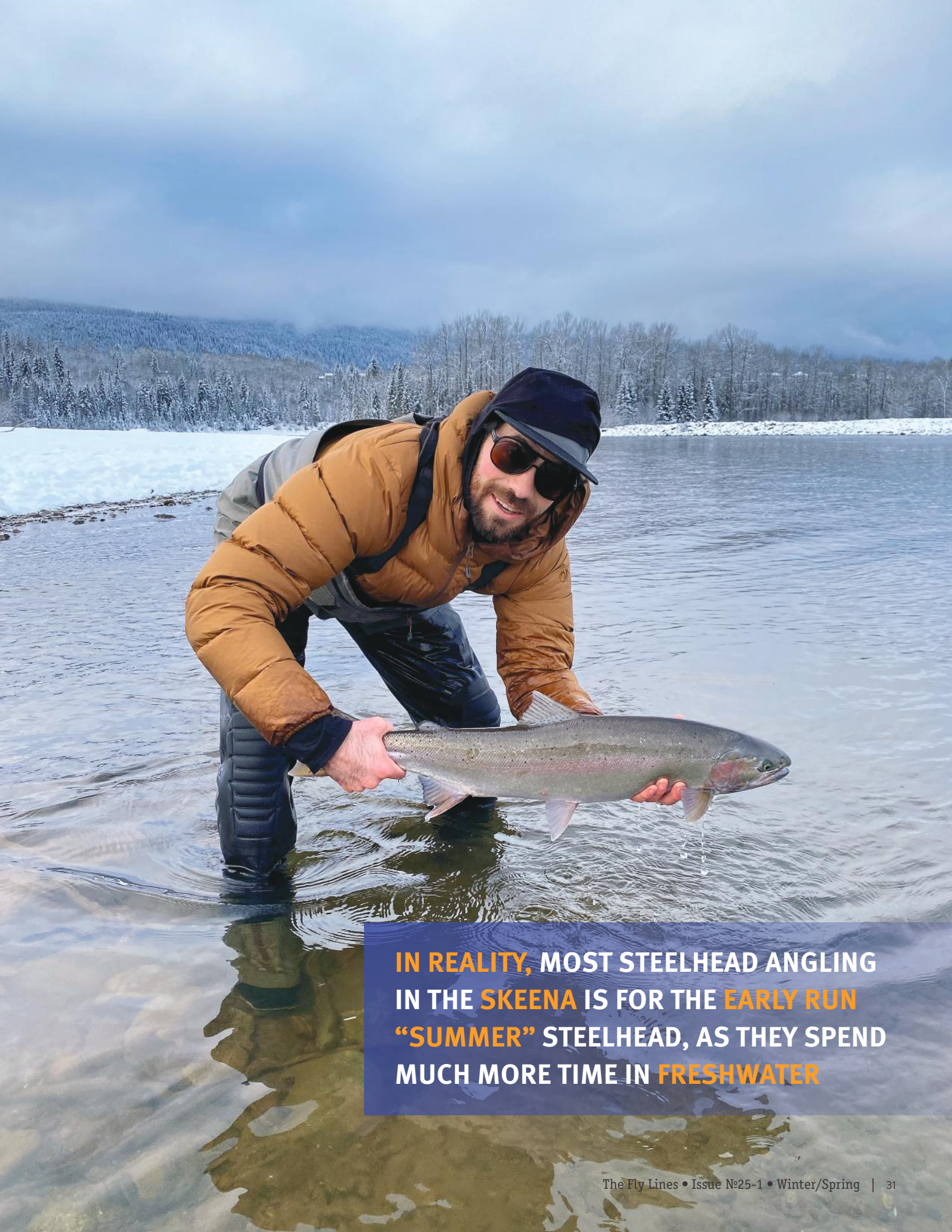
from July through April. Regardless of their chosen life pattern, almost all rainbow trout spawning occurs at a similar time throughout the month of May, and rainbow trout of all different life patterns can mate together in the same locations.

In reality, most steelhead angling in the Skeena is for the early run “summer” steelhead, as they spend much more time in freshwater. Many streams, including the mainstem Skeena, do remain open throughout winter, and there are excellent opportunities for the late run “winter” steelhead in the Skeena River near Terrace as well, with the best fishing occurring in March and April. These late run fishes are often more elusive since they are in the river for such a brief window and are focused primarily on reproduction

with that in mind, I want to share parts of my approach that really helped me gain confidence and breakthrough on the Skeena River and its tributaries.

Catching Skeena steelhead, whether in summer, fall, or winter, requires skill and patience. A Spey-casting rod may offer you an advantage in larger rivers such as the Bulkley or Skeena but is certainly not a requirement. Any rod in the 7-10 weight range, single or double handed, will suffice. Most steelhead are quite close to shore, in water that may not be fished as effectively using a large two-handed rod. Where you are fishing is far more important than how you are fishing, in my opinion. In general, you are looking for riffles or runs that are near walking speed, not too deep or too shallow, and have some





**IN REALITY, MOST STEELHEAD ANGLING  
IN THE SKEENA IS FOR THE EARLY RUN  
“SUMMER” STEELHEAD, AS THEY SPEND  
MUCH MORE TIME IN FRESHWATER**



A full-page photograph of a fly fisherman standing in a river, casting a line. The fisherman is wearing a dark wetsuit and a hood. The river is surrounded by a dense forest of bare trees, and in the background, there are large, rugged mountains covered in snow under a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent blue box with white and orange text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN  
BRING TO THE RIVER THAT WILL HELP  
YOUR CHANCES IS OPTIMISM**





when standing in the river. Dress in layers, starting with moisture-wicking base layers to keep dry, followed by thick insulating layers like a puffy or a wool sweater. If it is windy, an outer shell is essential. Keeping your hands warm and dry is important. Wool is warm even when wet, so wool gloves that offer some dexterity can be a good call. Small hand warmer packs can come in handy and are nice to keep in your wader pockets to bring your hands back to life if needed. It's essential to keep your body fueled with high-energy snacks and warm drinks, which can go a long way for maintaining morale. Lastly, always stay aware of the weather conditions and be prepared to adjust your plans for safety.

A common issue faced by anglers in the winter is the guides on their rod freezing. I have found that stripping in line is usually the reason this happens. For this reason, I typically adjust my cast so that I do not have to strip line through the guides at the end. This means not casting as far and instead focusing on water closer to shore. This will slow down the build-up of ice on your guides and hopefully eliminate the need to stop

and clear out your guides so often.

My winter fishing sessions are usually short and sweet, typically less than 3 hours. At this point, I am usually so deeply frozen that a warm-up is necessary. I usually go with the goal of catching one fish, and if I can stay warm long enough to catch two, that's just a bonus!

### **Belief is More Important than Ability**

One of the most important things you can bring to the river that will help your chances is optimism. I am a big believer that you will be more successful fishing if you truly believe you might catch a fish at any given moment. You are more likely to focus on each cast, be more thorough in your approach, and make those extra few casts at each spot. Cling to this optimism with all your might—it is truly the essence of steelheading.

I am grateful I get to live somewhere that offers me amazing angling opportunities well into winter. On the same day, I can ski powder laps, catch the fish of a lifetime, and still be back at the bar before it gets dark. If you



**Ben Blanchard**

Photo: Will Blanchard

have the right attitude, preparation, and perseverance, you might just catch the best fish of your life. Just remember that cold, stinging hands are temporary—the memories of world-class steelhead are forever. Hopefully this article has convinced you that fly-fishing is a winter sport and has provided some insight on how to make the most of your winter steelheading experience.

**Just make sure to bring your puffiest puffy jacket and a hot coffee!**



# “Smith’s” Mikulak

By Brian Smith

## Origins

I wish to share with you a pattern which, if you have become a look-first dry-fly fisher like me, is probably the best that you will ever tie for trout-fishing our Cariboo-Interior lakes, and is also very effective in streams. As a searching pattern for shoals on those listless days of no hatch activity which lakes are famous for, or as an attention-getting design during any hatch, this fly is second to none for raising trout, or catching ones that are “looking-up” and happily cruising the shoals. I bring the reader this pattern in our winter issue because I consider this a “must tie” for your spring/summer reason. You really must tie and fish this fly!

The late Walter Mikulak designed his famous standby “Mikulak Sedge” pattern in the 1980’s. It was a simple thought: stack sections of elk hair on top of a hook to create caddis-looking wings that will float, and

give it a head to cause the commotion that only a sedge hatch can bring.

In the mid-90’s, using Walter’s “stacking” idea, I adapted his pattern by subbing mule deer hair for elk and, unlike the original

Mikulak, by creating a continuous stack of hair along the shank to better outline the wings of the caddis fly. I also tie an elk hair version, but find that the colour of grey mule deer is better suited for caddis, easier to work with than elk, and presents a more realistic sedge colour by using grey mule deer. Instead of olive dubbing on the original Mikulak, I sub to a dark hare’s ear grey from Hareline, which I find is a better colour for the North Cariboo lakes that I fish; however, olive is more common in BC Region 3 lakes, and can be subbed for grey. Over each of the past thirty seasons I have brought hundreds of trout to the net using this fly.

## Thoughts and tips for tying the Smith’s Mikulak

- Some fly tiers find deer or elk hair difficult to work with. I admit it takes a little practice, but find that you need to get into the habit of controlling the hair, and not let the hair control you. Some tips are useful:
- This is a 20-minute tie even if you are a Master, so if you are in a hurry, don’t bother until you can set some time aside to tie at least a half-dozen. It will take a few hours to get the recipe and sections procedures down-pat.
- Choose the correct skin of hair for the pattern you are tying. For this Mikulak, use a skin of mule deer or elk of medium coarseness hairs about 1-inch or 2.5 cm length. With a good skin, you may not need your hair stacker; just clean with a nit brush, trim to length and stack on the shank.
- Don’t use too much hair per stack. A pencil-





width of 3/8 inch or 1 cm is about correct.

- Use fine wire hooks in 2x length: Mustad R43, Tiemco 5212. They will float any dry fly better than a standard wire hook.
- Use UTC 140 denier thread. You can reef on this without breaking it.
- You will be stacking 4 sections of hair, dubbing the body between the stacks. Before stacking a section, rub the stack between your thumb and fore-finger to “flatten” and “spread” it.
- When stacking, do not over-tighten your first 3 wraps of thread on the hair. Use firm but gentle pressure for the first 3 turns to keep the hair in place on top of the hook, continue holding the hair upright, then reef hard on it and continue to wrap the thread along the shank for about 10 compact turns, advancing about 1/4-inch along the shank. This action done correctly will prevent your hair from spinning around the shank, and give you the correct proportions.
- When dubbing the sections, you only need 3 turns; the first 2 on top of the clipped stack directly in front it, the next on the shank to create a sloping bevel for the next stack.
- The fourth stack of hair also forms the upright collar butt. Trimmed to the correct length before mounting the last wing, you won't have to touch it after tightening.
- After tying, spray your dry flies with silicone boot spray. It will absolutely not change their colour, and give your flies twice the allotted float time.

### Giving the fly its' action

“Action” is what makes this fly work, and startles aggressive trout into slamming it. I will typically anchor in water that a 60-foot cast can reach both the shoreline and drop-off, if available. I like to work in a circle around my anchored boat, breaking the ring into 8 sections, casting to each section, dropping my rod tip into the water, and stripping in hard one-foot pulls so that the fly wakes and gurgles when retrieved. Once I have strip-retrieved one-half of my cast, I pick up the line, throw it to the next section, and repeat. Strikes are vicious with this fly and its' action, rarely a slurp.

I have enjoyed many “first-light” dark, cold, foggy and still October mornings on my favourite lake with this pattern. Anchored on my chosen shoals in 8–10 feet of water, I can usually get into 15 to 25 hefty rainbows before 8:30 a.m. and then come in to greet my friends after a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs and hash browns. My day's enjoyment is mostly over!





# «Smith's» Mikulak

By Brian Smith

## Recipe

<b>Hook:</b>	2x fine wire # 8-10
<b>Thread:</b>	UTC 140 tan
<b>Tail:</b>	deer hairs, stacked, length of hook gape
<b>Body:</b>	3 turns of dubbing, Hareline HET-2 dark hare's ear
<b>Last Wing:</b>	post the butt over the eye of the hook
<b>Wing:</b>	stacked mule deer hair, length to meet end of previous section
<b>Hackle:</b>	4-5 turns medium dun (or brown) behind the butt
<b>Final:</b>	spray the fly with a silicone boot spray. It will shed water like a duck!



### Step 1



START HERE

### Steps to tie the Smith's Mikulak

- 1 Attach the tail length of the gape and trim butts. Make your final thread turn behind the tail and then forward.

### Step 2



- 2 Attach first section of body dubbing. Note the slight bevel and slope toward the shank.

### Step 3



- 3 Attach first wing section and trim butts. Note length to the end of the tail.

### Step 4



- 4 Repeat steps 2 and 3 for second wing section.



5

Repeat steps 2 and 3 for third wing section. Note how much shank should be remaining for the fourth wing section.

Step 5



Step 6



6

repeat steps 2 and 3 for fourth wing section; leave enough length on the wing trimming to form the butt section.

Step 7



Step 8



8

To finish the fly, use a Velcro brush to smooth out the dubbed body, and spray it with silicone boot spray.

7

To hackle the fly, take 4–6 turns of dun or brown hackle in front of the wing and behind the butts. Trim the bottom of the hackle to the hook gape so the fly rides upright on the surface of the water. Add head cement.

Bottom View



Top View



"SMITH'S"  
MIKULAK HAIR  
VERSION





by Katy Watson

# Picking a Fishing Brain

## Katy's 4 Answers

### 1. ONE PLACE to fish & fish to target:

British Columbia is home to some of the most undeniably beautiful watersheds in the world: watersheds that ribbon through interior desert plateaus, dense rainforests and mountainous alpine, but my favourite place I have ever fished is a tea-stained tributary in the coastal fjords of the Douglas Channel.

Perhaps it was the journey, but I would be lying if I didn't admit that it was one of the most spectacular steelhead experiences which I ever had. We began by leaving the main marina in very early morning and jetted off as far as we could

by boat. Being tidal and not wishing to be trapped ashore, we threw the pontoon overboard and rowed to shore, leaving the boat well-anchored. Hiking several kilometers in, we came to a beautiful, small tributary that looked as if it should have been on Haida Gwaii. Lush trees encroached overhead, forcing our D-loops to remain shallow. Moss covered the forest floor, and it felt as if we were wading through tawny pools of good scotch (alas, that which we could not drink!) We fished our way downstream, making our way to a deep pool. Boulders dotted along the bottom, naked to the eye without polarized glasses, but perfect coverage for elusive

steelhead. We casted foam-bodied flies, watching them rise one after the other. It may not make sense to some, but at that point I didn't even watch to catch one; I just wanted to cast and watch them strike. It was like seeing magic unfold, or perhaps dozens of great fishing days combined into one. Sight fishing is the most exhilarating feeling, but sight fishing for steelhead is utter alchemy. While not all the coastal tributaries in the Douglas Channel are tea-stained with a dozen rising steelhead, they are some of the most beautiful rivers I have ever fished, with waters that range from iconic emerald to sea-green turquoise. I've rarely met another angler





#### KATY'S RECIPE FOR:

### The Dallas Fly: George Kelson, The Salmon Fly, 1895

This particular fly has a small variation from the original recipe regarding turkey wing colour.

<b>Body:</b>	Three turns yellow Berlin wool or yellow Uni-yarn, followed by black Berlin wool
<b>Ribs:</b>	Silver oval tinsel, oval gold tinsel, red and blue silk thread all running an equal distance apart
<b>Hackle:</b>	Died black heron wound the reverse way crossing over the ribs
<b>Throat:</b>	Golden pheasant red breast hackle
<b>Wing:</b>	Two strips of plain cinnamon turkey (although I used two strips from a black tail)
<b>Head:</b>	Orange wool picked out

#### 2. Having ONE ROD to fish that place with, what would you choose?

I love to fish long lines, so my favourite rod is a custom Bruce and Walker 14'6" #9/10. Although a 13' 6" #8 Bruce and Walker is a beautiful set up for dry fly steelhead, the 14'6" is a great rod for both salmon and steelhead, and makes casting long heads a breeze as you can feel everything through to the handle. It's hard to find a poor performing rod on the market today with all the technology rod makers have acquired, but I believe their attention to detail is unsurpassed from their hand-rolled blanks to personally wrapped guides. For such a big casting rod, it's surprisingly light for how powerful it feels.

#### 3. Having ONE REEL to put on that rod, which one would you choose, and what line?

I have two favourite reels which I change intermittently on my Bruce and Walker 14'6" simply because I love them both. One is the classic Hardy Perfect and the other, Hardy Cascapedia. Both pay homage to the traditional feel of the rod and balance it perfectly, and both sing beautifully with that classic sound only a Hardy can make.

#### 4. Having ONE FLY to use, which one would it be?

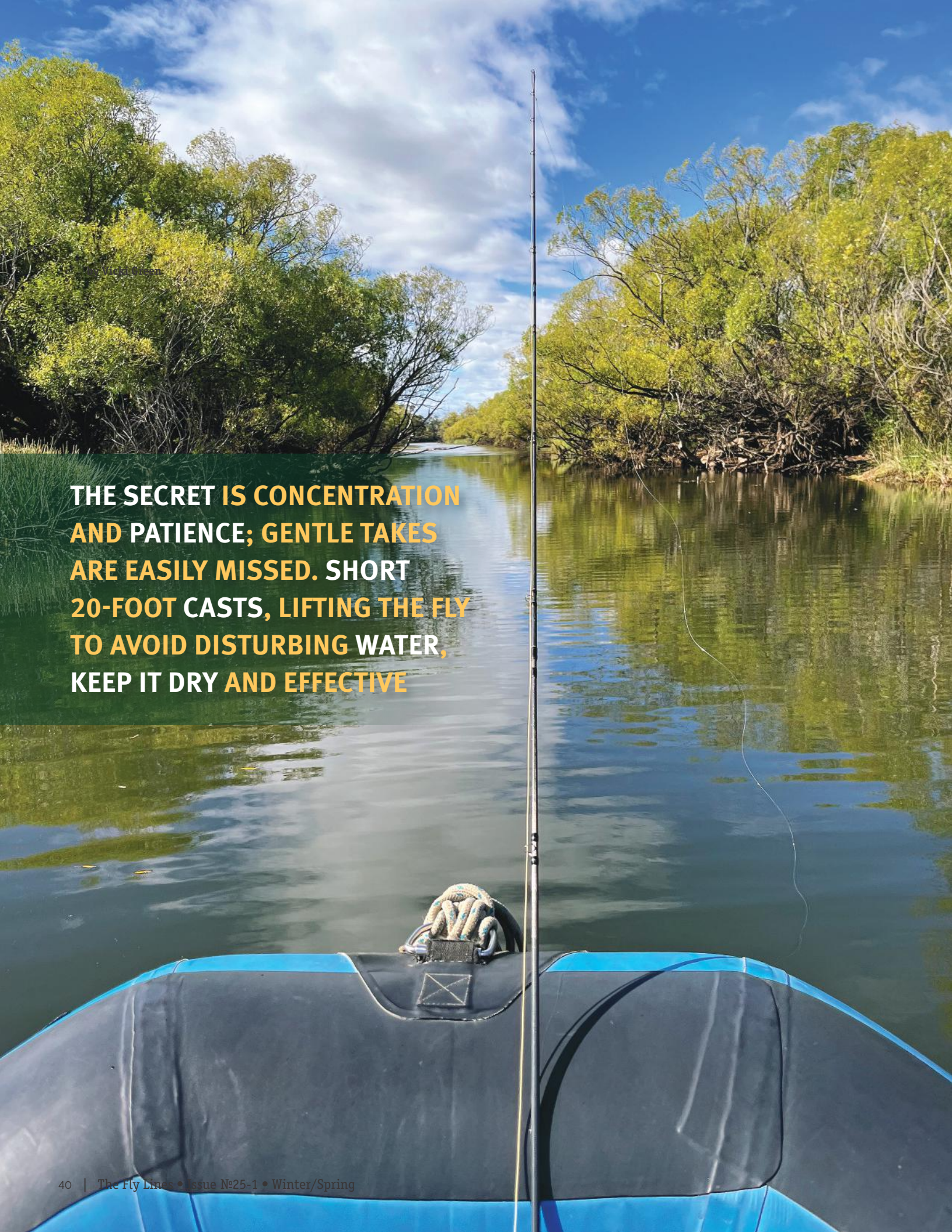
Given the perfect day with clear pools full of underwater structure and riffles, skating a moose hair fly such as a variant of David Lambroughton's Skater would be spectacular, but my favourite fly to fish is The Dallas. It is a fascinating fly really as it is simply so characteristically different from traditional Spey flies, with two turkey slips in place of tented bronze mallard, a large woolen head, and bright silk ribbing. The Dallas is certainly indigenous to the River Spey, being one of the few true Spey flies with a turkey wing. I've swapped the cinnamon turkey slip for a dark centre as a variant and have been fishing this fly religiously since doing so. Fishing classic patterns tends to go together with fishing long lines, although not exclusive, but it feels like a gentle nod to ghillies past by honouring their heritages.

on this water. The adventure level is always what you make of it; a bonus afterwards is that you can visit some hot springs on your way home if you can find them!

I think steelhead are some of the most beautiful fish we can target. There is a reason they're called a fish of a thousand casts, because they are elusive. The beauty of steelhead lies beyond their chromed lateral lines; however, their loveliness is where they take you and who you chance to meet along the way. You could argue all fly-anglers are good people, but there is certain romance Steelheaders get caught up in, and in turn they become stewards to the water and the community. I think they are so much more than just a fish.

**MY FAVOURITE ROD  
A CUSTOM BRUCE  
AND WALKER  
14'6" #9/10**





**THE SECRET IS CONCENTRATION  
AND PATIENCE; GENTLE TAKES  
ARE EASILY MISSED. SHORT  
20-FOOT CASTS, LIFTING THE FLY  
TO AVOID DISTURBING WATER,  
KEEP IT DRY AND EFFECTIVE**





#### DESTINATION

# Fly-fishing in Tasmania

By Vicki Green

**Tasmania holds a wide range of fisheries and waterways for fly-fishers. For our Tasmanian trip, I contacted Scott Murphy, owner of Tasmania Fly Fishers who arranged for Peter Donati to guide us on Penstock Lagoon, Arthur's Lagoon and Four Springs Lake. Daniel Hackett, owner and guide of Riverfly, also took us to South Esk River and Brumbys Creek, so for over a month, we fished lakes for four days and rivers for six days.**

Tasmania holds a wide range of fisheries and waterways for fly-fishers. For our Tasmanian trip, I contacted Scott Murphy, owner of Tasmania Fly Fishers who arranged for Peter Donati to guide us on Penstock Lagoon, Arthur's Lagoon and Four Springs Lake. Daniel Hackett, owner and guide of Riverfly, also took us to South Esk River and Brumbys Creek, so for over a month, we fished lakes for four days and rivers for six days.

The stunning lakes of the Central Highlands includes Penstock Lagoon. This fly-only lagoon is a popular fishery; the fish were strong, and the conditions perfect for fly-fishing. The secret of these waters is to concentrate, and be patient, as their gentle takes can easily be missed. Peter recommended 20-foot short casts, using the same amount of line with each cast, lifting the line

and then the fly when close to the boat, so as to not disturb your productive fishing water. In this way, more water is covered, your fly remains dry, you don't tire and it is easier to raise fish.

We used a drogue, which slowed us down as we traversed the lagoon, closely watching our flies. We chose not to fish the common local's technique of a hopper-dropper, as we are more used to using a single barbless hook. I actually don't like throwing a necklace into the water, as it seems to tangle with ease! Also, there is always one hook waiting to catch a log or some weeds. Our day held overcast weather and a slight swell on the lake, which gave the flies the needed action to attract fish. I caught one and lost two, and all others on the water that day were skunked. I used Peter's road kill possum emerger pattern, which Peter ties himself.



Arthurs Lagoon also holds trout eager to take a fly. It offers nearly everything for a fly-fisher, but it was not to be for us on a cold, windy day, and Peter was quick to suggest Four Springs Lake for our next outings.

Four Springs Lake is much lower than the highland lakes, thus much warmer than the other lakes we fished. A marsh was flooded to create this lowland lake, where bugs and aquatic life is plentiful, and then stocked with brown and rainbow trout by the Inland Fisheries Service.

A boat is a definite advantage on lakes for chasing fish. For our excursions, Peter Donati used his 16-foot double-walled, fiberglass boat with a central console,

a Yamaha motor, a drogue and comfortable seating for two anglers. You need to calm yourself down as you wait for fish to push through the weeds, only a short cast away. A quick presentation right on the money results in a hefty brown trout between 3-and-5lb. Peter made sure we perfected short, accurate casts, which helped keep our flies buoyant. Fish could not refuse the sparkle green stick caddis, and both of us did well catching rainbow and brown trout. Richard also caught a couple of fish using a mud eye, also called a dragon fly nymph. Four Springs kept us coming back for further sight-fishing action.

Peter Donati kindly provided me with a sample of the flies we successfully used on our lake

**USING A DROGUES SLOWED OUR DRIFT,  
ALLOWING FOCUSED FLY-WATCHING.  
OVERCAST SKIES AND SUBTLE SWELLS  
GAVE FLIES NATURAL ACTION—KEY  
TO ATTRACTING FISH AMID PENSTOCK  
LAGOON'S CHALLENGING TAKES**



adventures. The flies used over four weeks was a sparkle green stick caddis, a mud eye, a road kill possum emerger and a CDC mayfly.

I contacted Daniel Hackett, Riverfly Guiding, for our river fly-fishing. Daniel has been a full-time fly-fishing guide for more than twenty years, and he is intimate with Tasmania's trout streams. He drifts Brumbys Creek, South Esk and the Macquarie River in his three-person raft, and is also a Fulbright Scholar and PhD researcher studying the management of wild places and soundscapes as wilderness.


The South Esk river flows through meadows with sand and weed bottoms, producing red spinners which trout cannot refuse. We launched the raft on

the Clarendon Estate, near convict housing which sheltered labourers and their police overseers more than a century ago. For us, the South Esk was very productive, and encouraged us to take the necessary time to catch these small but lively brown trout. Anyone can cast a fly rod with ease until a brown trout is sighted, then your cast seems to go to hell. Mistakes multiply as your back-casts lengthen, or you don't pause before your forward cast. You quickly learn to settle your timing down with feeding fish so close!

The Meander River joins with the South Esk River near the town of Hadspen, where we stayed in VRBO accommodation provided by Ross and







Annie Gadsby. I encourage anyone fly fishing Tasmania to contact the Gadsbys, as their accommodation is central to many lakes and rivers. Further, they are a terrific couple and will ensure that you have everything you need.

Brumbys Creek is a tail-out fishery created from the Great Lake and the Poatina Power project. Prior to this hydro-electric system, Brumbys was a small stream flowing through tranquil pastures. Today it features a blend of lazy and quick-moving currents over flooded flat lands. The water flows over tangled plants mixed with different patterns

of sand, which produces perfect conditions for sight-fishing your trout. Like Four Springs, the milder climate also provided us with bright sunny days necessary for stalking 1–2 lb brown trout.

Over the course of our stay, we fished two sections of Brumbys and found that our casts and placement of our flies improved with practice. It is so much fun casting to sighted fish! It is easy to scare brown trout by false- casting your line, rather than lifting it off the water and casting it. It is really easy to line trout too, so quiet and slow concentration is most productive. Brown trout try to dive into the

**BRUMBYS CREEK DEMANDS STEALTH:**  
**FALSE CASTS SPOOK TROUT. QUIET**  
**RETRIEVES AND SIDE PRESSURE PREVENT**  
**ESCAPES INTO WEEDS, WHILE SUNNY**  
**DAYS AID SIGHT-FISHING FOR 1–2LB**  
**BROWNS IN TANGLED CURRENTS**



tangled weed beds when caught, and can be hard to retrieve unless side pressure is used to stop them. The main flies used with Daniel included a blue damsel, a red Mayfly spinner, an orange -beaded damsel nymph, and one very exciting experience on a day when ants hatched everywhere and the trout went nuts!

We enjoyed our days in the raft discussing many topics with Daniel. We heard and saw so many birds in the willow trees surrounding the creek. What a comforting racket! Notably, we saw five Nankeen Night Heron in the trees, uncommon in Tasmania, as they were blown off their migration course in strong winds coming from the State of Victoria. More surprising was watching shy Platypus, which quietly followed our raft.

Daniel Hackett is very knowledgeable and an entertaining guide who freely shares his expertise. He was quick to point out errors in our casts and helped us to rectify them. Further, his rafting skills placed us close to fish to ensure two casts netted some beautiful brown trout. One cast for distance and one cast for placement to the right of the fish became our chief objective after sighting these beautiful fish, all the while enjoying the shade of the endless willows. Most memorable for me was a 3-pounder caught on a #16 ant amid an amazing ant hatch.

Tasmania has a population of more than half a million who share stunning scenery, wonderful food, efficient highways and friendly, helpful people. Yes, we met the huntsman spider. No, we didn't meet any snakes.



**ROPODKILL**



**MUDEYE**



**CDC MAYPLY**



**SRICK CADDIS**

Scott Murphy, Tasmania Fly Fishing —  
<https://tasmaniaflyfishing.com.au>  
 Daniel Hackett, RiverFly —  
<https://riverfly.com.au>  
 Ross and Annie Gadsby —  
[agadsby@iinet.au](mailto:agadsby@iinet.au)

## Brumbys Creek Fisheries Lane day use area

Hydro Tasmania manages Brumbys Creek Fisheries Lane day use area in collaboration with Inland Fisheries Service. We welcome visitors and request that you please adhere to these requirements to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all. Further information about access, safety and enjoying outdoor activities on our land is available on [www.hydro.com.au](http://www.hydro.com.au)

**Please enjoy**

Picnic area
 Fishing
 Toilets

Boating
 Dogs on leads or under effective control

**Please observe**

No camping
 Protect the environment
 No water sports
 No firearms (Hydro Tasmania licence holders excepted)

No campfires
 No littering
 No swimming
 Exclusion zones - entry prohibited on land and water

**Warnings**

Uneven ground and eroding levee banks
 Rapidly changing water levels
 Fast flows
 Submerged hazards and floating debris
 Check the latest weather forecast
 Hunting area (permit required)

This site is managed by Hydro Tasmania. Warnings are in place to ensure the safety of the community and Hydro Tasmania personnel, and to provide sustainable management of the land and waterways. Any person who does not comply with Hydro Tasmania's conditions of entry will be trespassing and will be prosecuted. For questions or feedback please contact Hydro Tasmania by telephone 1300 360 441 or email [contactus@hydro.com.au](mailto:contactus@hydro.com.au). In case of an emergency please dial 000. To report a crime in the bush please contact BushWatch on 131 444. To report littering please contact the Tasmanian Litter Hotline on 1300 135 513. Stay safe and enjoy your visit.

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DESTINATION

# A Christmas Return

By Glen Wonders

**"There will be days when the fishing is better than one's most optimistic forecast, others when it is far worse. Either is a gain over just staying home."**

*~by Roderick Haig-Brown, Fisherman's Spring, 1951~*

▲  
**Flying into Kirimati**  
Photo: Mike Henry

**T**he title of this article is a play on words, and I hope readers will appreciate this attempt at fishing wit. This is about a journey and fishing experience that I was privileged to have in October/November of 2024 on a trip to Christmas Island (Kirimati in the Republic of Kiribati). I am calling it a return because I have had the good fortune to go to Christmas Island previously in 2014. The fishing experiences in both instances were outstanding, and this is a trip I would recommend to anyone interested in pursuing tropical gamefish opportunities on the fly rod. Christmas Island is situated 1200 miles south of Hawaii and 110 miles north of the equator in the centre of the Pacific Ocean.

The first question that may be asked is "why go there"? Firstly, Christmas Island offers excellent

tropical fly-fishing experiences for anglers. The fish species that you might encounter include Bonefish, a number of species of Trevally (Grand, Blue, Golden and Barred), Triggerfish (several species), Queenfish and others including Bluewater species such as Tuna and Wahoo. Secondly, getting to Christmas Island is relatively easy via a once-a-week flight from Honolulu, other than noting that if you miss the weekly flight via Fiji Air you will be out of luck, as no other Hawaiian connections are available. Thirdly, once on Christmas Island you will go to a lodge that caters to fishing, predominantly fly-fishing anglers. I believe there are (at least) 3 lodges now operating on the Island, which is a major change from earlier years, when I think there was one well established lodge and others



which were just starting. The lodges and guides are very familiar with the fishing opportunities, and have an excellent understanding of fly-fishing. The lodge staff and guides pride themselves on

## THE FIRST QUESTION THAT MAY BE ASKED IS "WHY GO THERE"? **FIRSTLY**, CHRISTMAS ISLAND OFFERS **EXCELLENT TROPICAL FLY-FISHING EXPERIENCES FOR ANGLERS**

ensuring a quality fishing experience for all.

One of the questions that may be asked is if the quality of the fly-fishing is being affected by more lodges and fisherman that are constantly on the island. This is a difficult question for me to answer given how long it has been for me between visits from my original trip in 2014

versus what I just enjoyed in 2024. I cannot say that I found the fishing to be significantly different; some days were simply better than others (especially for Bonefish), but this is partially explainable by factors such as wind and cloudy conditions. In the more recent trip, I never really saw schools of Bonefish; it was a single fish or a small group. Having stated that, I don't remember seeing large schools of Bonefish in 2014, so I don't think this has changed significantly.

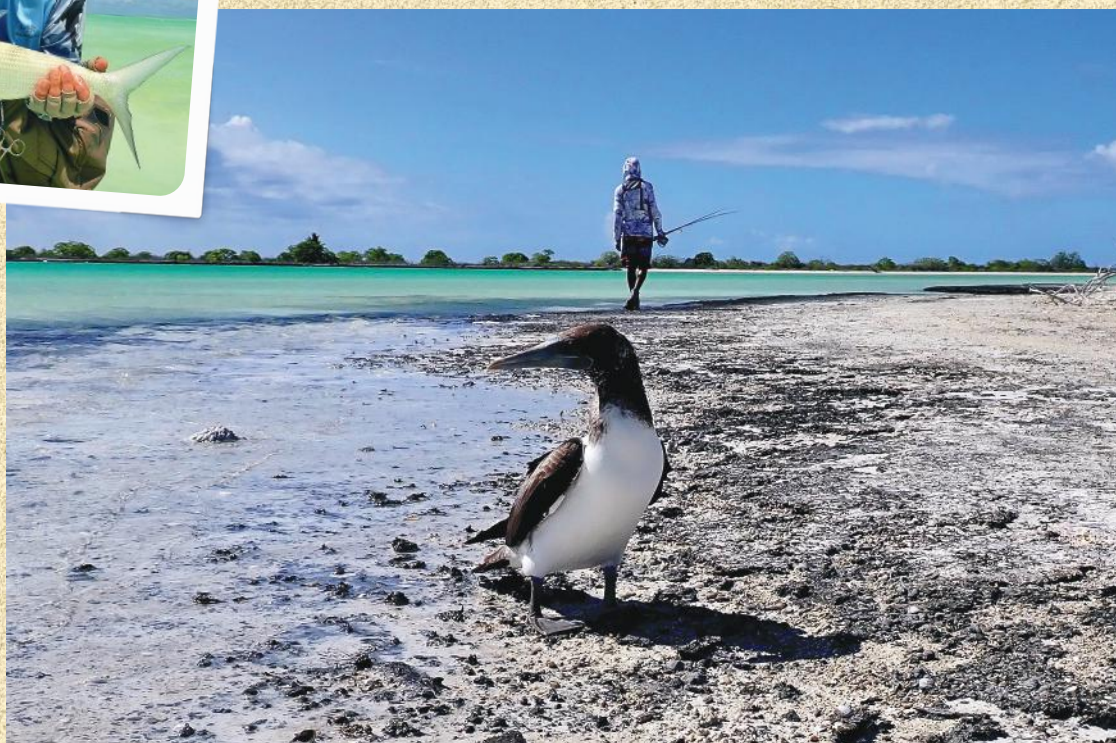
One of the best things about Christmas Island is that the wading on the flats is consistently superior to anywhere that I have flats-fished, as the footing is generally very firm and secure. Most of the other places where I have pursued Bonefish have been areas of very soft sand and silts, making quiet walking (stalking) much more difficult, and in some areas of deeper silts virtually impossible. One of the challenges that can present, however, is that due to the crushed coral sands on Christmas Island, seeing where Bonefish have been feeding is often not as evident as on the flats, where silts show areas of feeding activity (usually areas of concentrated small depressions or divots). Nonetheless, the superior walking is worth it, and guides have excellent knowledge about where to look for active Bonefish.

The lodges operate on a relatively similar concept of sending anglers out early in the morning either by boat or truck and dispersing anglers



▲ Author with a Bonefish on one of many beautiful Christmas Island flats.  
Photo: Glen Wonders

► Heading out to walk a flat with a Booby offering a nice pose  
Photo: Mike Henry







▲  
**Anglers loading up  
onto outrigger style  
boats for a day on the  
flats**

Photo: Glen Wonders

and guides on the many quality flats found on the Island. The guides regularly move anglers around during the day. Those anglers opting to try fishing on the outer areas of the island do so by a relatively bumpy ride in trucks to reach outlying reefs and flats. Most of the operating lodges offer a one-guide-to-one-fisherman experience, and at least one is now offering a ‘semi-DIY’

fishing experience of one guide to two anglers. In both the previous trip and the recent one, I selected a lodge offering one guide to one angler every day, as the principal challenge in this type of fishing is seeing fish, a skill that the local guides have down to an art form.

After a boat ride of approximately 25 to 40 minutes (or a longer truck ride), anglers hop out onto a ‘flat’ with their guide and begin wading, with the intent of spotting some gamefish that is within casting range. Usually this does not take too long, as there are many bonefish cruising within the lagoons of Christmas Island; however, the spotting of Trevally is far less frequent (especially larger Grand Trevally). There are often Triggerfish on the myriads of flats, and you may get chances to cast to them, although they can be very spooky and choosey about the fly presented to them. Anglers are presented with

different options about where they might want to fish depending on their desire of what they are wanting to pursue to each day, and this is usually facilitated by the lodges and guides. Broadly speaking, the weather conditions are generally very good with some cloudy and/or windy periods that can make spotting fish or upwind casts difficult. In the time that I was there we only had one partial day of rain, and most of the time the wind was manageable, although mornings were often better.

To maximize opportunities, most fly anglers who are wading the flats carry at least 2 and sometimes 3 rods with them as part of their fishing experience. Again, one of the advantages of having a personal guide with you is that besides their excellent fish spotting abilities, they carry the other rod(s) that you are not casting with at that exact moment.

Precision casting is required, as the guide will direct you on the direction and length of the cast based on the fish spotted. Commonly 8-weights for Bonefish were used often with a size 6 Gottcha or similar pattern, although there were times when the Bonefish were better caught on smaller size 8 or 10 flies, simply tied with latex wrap and small, weighted eyes. Leaders needed are dependent on the fishing conditions, but generally for Bonefish I used a 10-foot

►  
**Author with Yellow  
Margin Triggerfish –  
note the teeth!**

Photo: Glen Wonders

►  
**Peter Quitzau with  
a Bluefin Trevally  
(right)**

Photo: Paul Radoslovich





▲  
**Paul Radoslovich  
with a nice Christmas  
Bonefish.**

Photo: Paul Radoslovich

mono leader usually with 3 or 4 feet of fluorocarbon down to a 12-lb. tippet.

Triggerfish can also be caught on 8-weights, but I set up a 9-weight with a weighted crab pattern (shrimp patterns can work well for Triggerfish too). The fly that was most successful for me was a 'mesh crab' that was weighted to sink when being retrieved. With Triggerfish, I used a 12-foot

leader with 16-to-20-pound breaking strength. Triggerfish hang out around their 'dens' and are surrounded by heavy coral outcrops, so having leverage in the leader is important. Added to this is that the teeth and jaws on the Triggerfish are designed to crush coral, and this means that both the leaders and hooks are put to extremes in the attempt to land them if hooked. Any Triggerfish I hooked

destroyed the fly, so also having an ample supply of flies is a good idea. Triggerfish can be difficult to catch as they spook easily if your cast is too close; at the same time, if the cast is too far away, they simply don't see the fly. Despite seeing Triggerfish regularly each day, I casted to numerous fish before I was successful in landing one. I consider myself fortunate in that I was able to land two Triggers and had two others on during my stay at Christmas Island.

Trevally fishing is a matter of being in the right place at the right time, and more importantly, being able to cast quickly to the normally fast-moving fish. I never was able to hook into a larger Grand or Bluefin Trevally, although some of the anglers in the groups I fished with had better success than I. I was able to land a few chunky Striped (or Barred) Trevally, and, as mentioned, anglers in the groups I fished with were rewarded with landed Grand and Blue Trevally's of respectable size. For smaller to midsize Trevally, a 10-weight is probably an optimum choice (and much easier to cast than a 12-weight) although a large Grand Trevally may need a 12-weight. For Trevally





► A selection of flies commonly used on Christmas Island: top row are Bonefish patterns, middle row Bonefish and common Triggerfish patterns, bottom row Trevally patterns. The purple and black baitfish pattern was tied by Paul Radoslovich

Photo: Glen Wonders



► Glen Wonders with a Barred Trevally

Photo: Glen Wonders

► Author with a fly rod caught Yellowfin Tuna. Note this fish was harvested to provide meals for guides and boat operators

Photo: Glen Wonders

► Dave O'Brien with a Grand Trevally

Photo: Dave O'Brien

leaders and flies, most were using about 6 to 8 feet of 80-lb. breaking strength mono tied onto a 3/0 or greater big fly (6 to 8 inches in length) tied in purple and black being a favoured pattern.

Another option that can be offered to anglers is to try a bit of 'Bluewater' fishing that may

be of interest. The Bluewater experience is also a good option for those periods of time when clouds or wind are making flats fishing more difficult. Bluewater means going outside of the lagoon area to where the waters fall away into deep water surrounding Christmas Island, and fishing from one of the outrigger boats. At this point the guides and boat captain begin looking for groups of birds (Boobies, Frigatebirds and others) that are actively feeding on baitfish, which usually indicates they are being attacked by any one of several species of Tuna, Wahoo, Barracuda or other predators. The boat will attempt to cut through the area of concentrated bird/fish activity, and by skipping a large fly (like what is described for Trevally fishing) and hanging onto your 10-12 weight rod diligently. If you are fortunate enough to hook onto a Tuna (Yellowfin, Albacore) or other large predatory fish you can

expect a vigorous fight, and it is a great experience.

Fishing at Christmas Island is a memorable experience due to its remote and beautiful location, wonderful local people, and the numerous different types of tropical game fish that are available on the Island. The accommodations at the lodge I stayed at were basic but always clean, and made fishing that much more enjoyable. The food was very good, and occasionally you may be treated with fresh seafood such as a meal of lobster, mantis shrimp and fresh tuna sashimi.

Staff at the lodges work very hard to provide high quality visits and angling experiences.







THERE WILL BE **DAYS** WHEN  
THE **FISHING** IS BETTER THAN  
ONE'S MOST **OPTIMISTIC**  
**FORECAST**, OTHERS WHEN IT IS  
FAR WORSE. EITHER IS A **GAIN**  
OVER JUST **STAYING** HOME





In addition, all the guides I fished with were very good, and several I would rate as outstanding. If you choose to wander around the scattered communities on the island, you will be greeted by people who appreciate visitors and are truly friendly. Kirimati people are very proud of their culture and, at the lodge I was at, commonly shared some traditional music and dances, which is part of the enriched experience of being on the Island.

Until next time...



**Kirimati people sharing a traditional dance with visitors; note flag of Kiribati above dancers**  
 Photo: Glen Wonders

**Justin Young holding a healthy Mantis Shrimp**  
 Photo: Mike Young

### Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges Michael and Young Fly Shop for organizing the terrific second week of my trip. Big thanks to my BC fly fishing friends including Dave O'Brien, Justin Young, Paul Radoslovich, Peter Quitzau, and especially Mike Young for some sharing great photos for this article.

Also, thanks to 'Fishing with Larry' and Brad Staples for a great first week of my Kirimati visit.



# Catch and Release:

## New Insight to Minimize Harm to the Creatures We Love



By Michael Barr

We fly anglers like to think of ourselves as having the least impact while fishing of any within the angling community. We catch fewer fish (or at least I do) by our chosen methods, so that in itself is a good conservation measure. But when it comes to fish handling, are we really any different? We're all quick to quote low catch and release mortality rates overheard from reliable sources in coffee shops, but few can cite the source of that science, the nuances of those studies, or how current they are. Enter the University of British Columbia and its recent release of a marine-based study that shines new light on our perceptions about catch and release.

Entitled *Enhancing the sustainability of capture and release marine recreational Pacific salmon fisheries using new tools and novel technologies*, this six-year study 'revealed injuries from hooks, nets and handling as key factors behind post-release mortality'. While acknowledging the study occurred in a marine setting, it reasonable to assume that many findings are transferrable to a freshwater environment, be it lakes or moving water. A landmark feature of this study was the ability to monitor long term mortality effects (i.e. 40 days+), which was determined from telemetered freely migrating fish and a companion holding study.

Highlights featuring Chinook and Coho salmon included:

- Types of injuries were variable: among fins, scales (loss), and/or eyes were on average 15–20% mortality (10 days). Any type of eye injuries, caused by hooks piercing the ocular cavity from the mouth, demonstrated an additional 15–20% mortality (40 days)
- Size matters: larger fish fared better overall (< 62cm endured ~36% mortality, 10 days)
- Air exposure up to 300 seconds (5 mins) exhibited significant but

variable post-release mortality (10–50%, 5–10 days). Carry-over effect to freshwater environments was documented after marine capture and air exposure

- Use of nets mattered: there was a direct relationship between the use of nets and fin injuries which led to high mortality in our companion holding study
  - Warmer ocean temperatures above 18 °C further heightened mortality risks
- What should we do about this?

**"This research shows how simple changes in fishing practices and gear can make a big difference"**

says the research author. Using smaller hooks, avoiding landing nets, and de-hooking and measuring fish in water are three of 15 solutions UBC researchers recommend. Begin by accessing more information through the links provided below, but also rethink your own practices, talk with others, and take the initiative to help our fly angling community recognize, understand and appropriately adopt these insights. Our angling future and the fish we cherish, depend on it.

Conservation Funds Chairman



To view the full report, visit <https://psf.ca/blog/catch-and-release/> or <https://www.sportfishing.bc.ca/release-them-right> (with videos)



# Steelhead

By John Beaton

**Steelhead face formidable obstacles in their incredible lifecycle. In this poem I try to imagine what it's like to walk in their shoes or, more accurately, to swim on their fins.**

The steelhead flex, flash copper and flame,  
as they mate in the green-tinged glow.  
She tail-scoops gravel, their cradle and grave,  
and they spill their life in what passes for love  
among fish, then succumb to the flow.

Washouts are avalanche paths for the slides  
of spates. Uprooted trees sled.  
Though eggs from the spawning-bed flutter away,  
tumble and whiten in colloids of clay,  
new heartbeats stir in the redd.

Under the gravel, the alevins burst  
from roe that were squeezed from the skeins.  
With yesterday's instincts innate in each brain  
and plenitude primed for their numbers to wane,  
a new generation convenes.

Ingesting their yolk-sacs, they flutter. The trout  
enshadow them; herons' quick beaks  
chopstick them out as fry and as parr;  
some choke — a derailment, a chemicals car—  
and drift, belly-up, as it leaks.

Harbour seals sentry the river-mouth pools  
and ambush them. Smolts in the tide,  
they dart, leaving blizzards of scales, then steal  
round herring-spawn frenzies of seabird and seal  
to where the Pacific spreads wide.

They linger, adapt to the salt in their gills,  
and, concealed in eelgrass and dulse,  
swoop on the ghost shrimp that crawl from the sand  
and grow as they wheel in this swift saraband  
till wanderlust quickens their pulse.

They sense low pressure zones scarping the waves  
and the throbs of the freighters that churn  
east with their lumber. But humpbacks sing,  
and pilot them north on the bow of the spring.  
They follow, and latitudes turn.

**Bio:** John Beaton is a lifelong fly fisher who was raised on the banks of the River Beaulieu in the Scottish Highlands and now lives on Vancouver Island near the Little Qualicum River. He writes and recites metrical poetry and is author of a collection titled "Leaving Camustianavaig." He is a spoken word member of a Celtic band and, as a keen conservationist, was a speaker at the Earth Charter International 2024 Conference in Florida.

**Acknowledgement:** This poem was first published in John's book, "Leaving Camustianavaig."

The Kodiak Seamount where shearwaters glide  
and geese descend to the floes—  
they thrive in its waters where bait-fish abound,  
and flesh out fully by scale-ring and pound  
in silver, with flanks of faint rose.

A wave, like nostalgia, seems laced with the tang  
of natal creek-water, still fresh,  
so, shoaling, the cohort's survivors swim home  
and weave up the coast through a seine catacomb:  
fish waft, gills flared in the mesh.

A downpour is slanting and slashing across  
the sullen grey board of the sky.  
They battle the gauntlets of fishers who cast  
before them from jet-boats with tackle that's passed  
by guides who have learned where they lie.

The last one living from all of his brood  
arrives at a grand entrance hall  
of canyon, then launches through air, spray, and haze,  
and flies, his eyes an obsidian blaze,  
scaling each waterfall's wall.

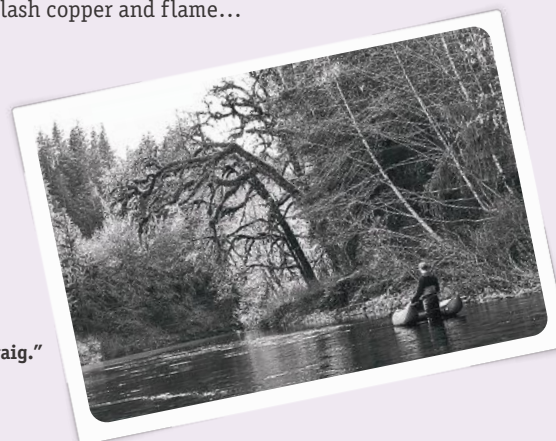
His brain is a diamond that channels the dead.  
He drives as a tuning-fork struck  
on the steel of a will as relentless as tide;  
his muscles pulsate up each torrent and glide,  
propulsions of effort and luck.

In olivine light he crests the last lip,  
the top of the flood's terraced stair;  
through headwater bends he fins to that place  
of tribulation and trembling and grace;  
a mate of his kind hovers there.

The steelhead flex, flash copper and flame...



Photos taken by  
Michael Barr







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