



# The Fly Line

June 2011

## President's Message – May 2011

Someone coined the term “Juneary” in describing our recent weather. I have to say it’s a good reflection on what we’ve been experiencing. I don’t know that we’ve had any fishable flows. I’m sure Dave’s report will talk about lakes and ponds, but I haven’t talked to anybody who has been on streams with any success. Victor Babbitt, of Tahoe Fly Fishing, did say all this rain will make for great fall fishing. Speaking of Tahoe, there’s a fly tying desk and materials listed of Craig’s List for \$500. If you are looking to pick up a good deal, you might check it out.

Last month’s meeting at Cameron park lake was held under the threat of rain and wind, but there were a couple of fish caught nonetheless. Some members got to play with pontoon boats and float tubes of various kinds as well as fish. So that was good.

In other good news, the groundbreaking for the Finnon lake Restoration went off this past Monday without a hitch. After the presentation of \$710,000 in checks, the obligatory gold shovel ceremony and a demonstration of just how much dirt a D-9 can push around, Veerkamp construction is getting down to the business of removing and rebuilding the dam. When all is done, El Dorado County will have a first class bass fishery and recreational resource. Updates to follow.

I did not make the last Trout Unlimited chapter meeting, but this is an organization that all of us should support. They are meeting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in the back of the USFS building on Forni, just past the Midas shop.

PS I don’t know if I will be back from the Bitterroot in time to post a July article. If not I’ll try to make sure that there’s picture of a big dumb Cut for you to look at instead.

Good fishing - Karl

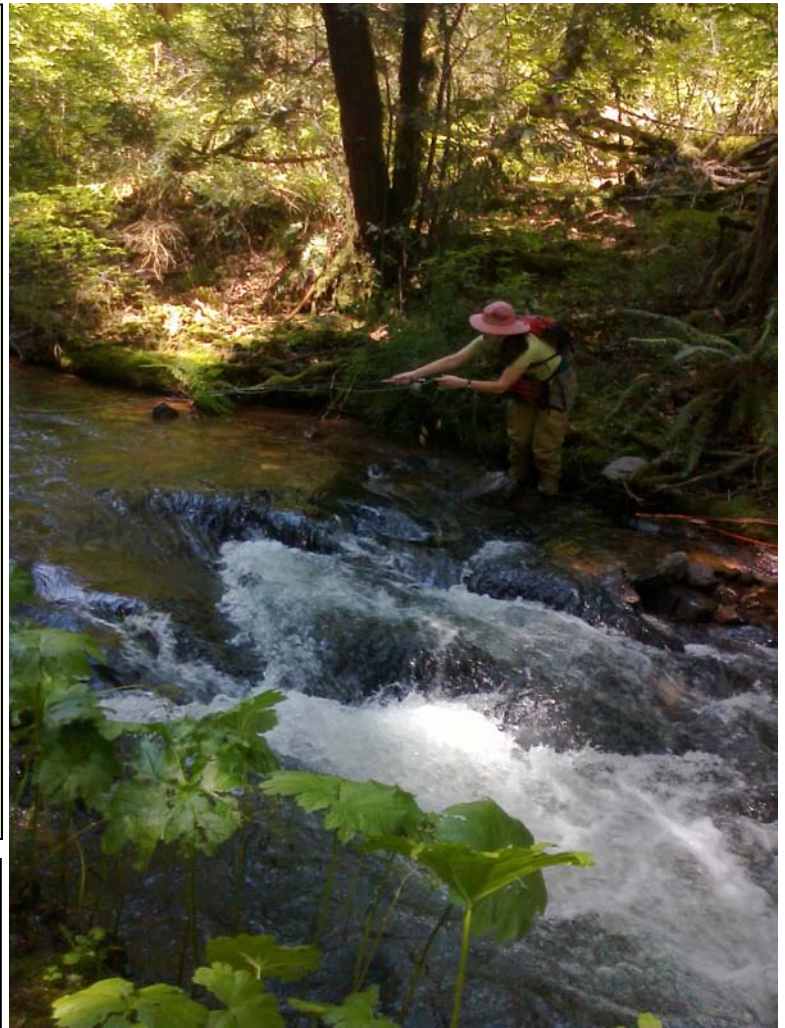
**Molly fishing a small stream north of Placerville June 10.**



**One of about 40 small browns landed.**

## Dave's Fishing Report

Dave is out of town this week so he recruited me (your editor) to write this month's report. Because of the prolonged winter conditions, not even Dave got in much fishing in the last month. A few trips to the local ponds and Jenkinson didn't yield much worth telling about. However, on June 10<sup>th</sup> Dave, Molly, and I fished a small stream north of Placerville. See photos... Members can ask Dave for directions. We arrived about noon and saw lots of ladybugs and other insects but no rises. The water was a bit high but clear and 54 degrees. The stream is very small so we took turns, eventually landing about 40 small browns using a #14 renegade. That evening we launched float tubes in one of the Mosquito ponds and hooked lots of bass and bluegill on small poppers. I stopped counting after 10 minutes. The bluegills were all pretty small but we landed a few largemouth bass that were big enough to tow the float tubes".



"Angling may be said to be so like the mathematics, that it can never be fully learnt."

~ by Izaak Walton, 1653 ~

A tricky cast....



The newsletter is normally published just prior to our monthly meeting. Due to an embarrassing communication lapse, this issue will appear after the June meeting.

A good time was probably had by all who attended. -j

Molly and Dave discuss strategy.

## A message from our local Trout Unlimited chapter:

### El Dorado Chapter of Trout Unlimited

An organizational meeting held on April 21<sup>st</sup> was successful in forming a new chapter of Trout Unlimited. Our new chapter (as yet unnamed) encompasses El Dorado County's entire west slope from the Pacific Crest Trail on the east to the county lines west, north and south. Membership meetings are anticipated on the third Thursday of each month. They will be held from 7pm until 8:30pm at the USFS office conference room located at 100 Forni Rd., Placerville . The doors will open at 6:30 if you want to arrive early, share a cup of coffee, some cookies and fishing stories with fellow anglers.

The next meeting on May 19<sup>th</sup> will be the perfect time for you to participate in defining your chapter. It's time to get involved in your club. Activities are unlimited but will include restoration projects, fish-outs, educational events, skills improvement, veteran out-reach, fundraising, community outreach, stream inventory, clinics for all age groups, volunteer conservation options with DFG , USFS , EID and others. Volunteers will be needed for various committees to implement your desired activity and of course NAMING YOUR CHAPTER. Suggested favorite names were Rubicon, South Fork and El Dorado . With no consensus it was decided to return in May to make a selection.

Three items of business are scheduled for the 19<sup>th</sup>; approval of the chapter bylaws, selection of a chapter name and election of a chapter president. The new board of directors has prepared a set of bylaws for submittal to Trout Unlimited National. The board approved the bylaws on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. A ratification vote by the members will be requested on the 19<sup>th</sup>. A copy of these bylaws is attached to this e-mail.

Selection of a chapter name was incomplete at the April 21<sup>st</sup> formation meeting. Favored names are Rubicon, South Fork and El Dorado . The board has considered these names and recommends "El Dorado" as being specific in identity as well as tying in with our state and county history.

All of those members present on the 19<sup>th</sup> will be asked to sign the new bylaws as charter members. Of course all other dues paying members on that date are also considered to be charter members.

If you wish to participate in this formative process but can't attend, you can e-mail your suggestions to this e-mail address. We will express your thoughts at the meeting for all to consider. We hope to see you May 19<sup>th</sup>. Remember, this is YOUR chapter and we plan to focus activities in El Dorado County where you live. See you May 19<sup>th</sup>.

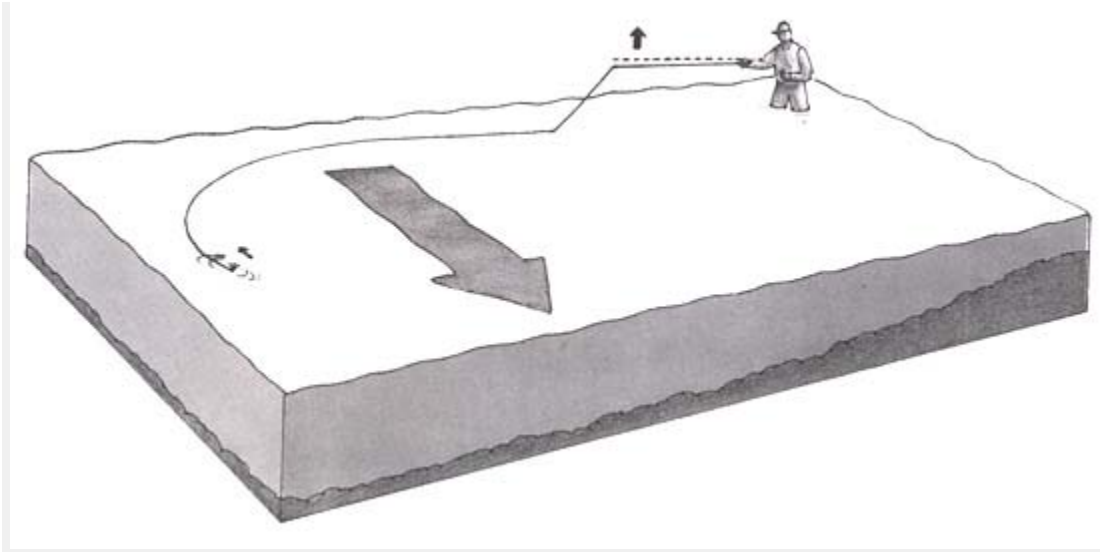
Todd Gillihan

EDTU Chapter Vice President

# When Drag is Desirable

by Tom Rosenbauer

*Imparting movement to a dry fly is one of the most effective and exciting ways to fish dry flies, but it must be done under the right circumstances with special techniques that distinguish movement given to the fly by the fisherman from ordinary drag.*



The Sudden Inch. The fly is cast with an upstream mend or reach cast, and as it drifts downstream the rod is moved upstream just until the fly moves upstream about an inch. The fly is then allowed to dead-drift and inched again if the current allows.

IMPARTING MOVEMENT TO A DRY FLY is one of the most effective and exciting ways to fish dry flies, but it must be done under the right circumstances with special techniques that distinguish movement given to the fly by the fisherman from ordinary drag. Insects on the surface of the water move, no question, but when insects move they do it without creating a V-shaped wake that drag usually creates. When you purposely give movement to a fly, it should look like a *skater gliding* across the surface rather than a swimmer doing the crawl. If this is done properly, a skated fly will draw trout from six feet away, fish that might not be induced to take any other fly. It's more an active technique that you should use like a streamer fly to provoke strikes than a passive technique where you pitch a fly to a trout's suspected position and wait for him to inhale your fly.

Sometimes you need to add just a simple twitch to a dry fly to catch a trout's attention. In our Vermont streams in the fall the same debris that causes a migration of people from hundreds of miles away for a few short, frantic weeks while it is still on the trees is quickly shed with the first autumn cold fronts, littering the surface of our rivers with the flames of red maples, pumpkin oranges of sugar maples, burnished gold of beeches and aspens, and at the end of the season, rich brown of oaks. As soon as the first leaves hit the water, trout that would move two feet for a dead-drifted Ausable Wulff seem to lose interest. I suspect this is because during the summer, when there is little vegetable matter falling into the river, there is a good chance that something floating on the surface of the water is food, and it is worth it for a trout to inspect most items in the drift. In the fall the trout have so many false alarms, rising to the surface and either turning away or inhaling a piece of inedible plant matter, that it is difficult to catch their interest. Unlike the spring and summer, where two casts to the same spot will be all that is needed to rise a trout, in the fall you might cast ten times to the same spot without results, then twitch the fly gently, then try another cast with a twitch, and finally twitch the fly steadily as soon as it lands and keep twitching almost to your feet. You need to distinguish your fly from all the inedible junk on the surface.

Aquatic insects invariably move upstream when they twitch, so you need to position yourself where you can move the fly upstream, which usually means working downstream or at least getting across from the place you want to cast, so that when you

move the fly it moves upstream. When casting downstream, cast with an upstream curve using the reach cast, and then raise your rod tip enough to move the fly an inch or so upstream; then quickly drop the rod tip so the fly drifts back downstream without drag. This is the simple but deadly Sudden Inch technique first described by Len Wright in his book *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect*. When casting across-stream to a position, try to throw an upstream hook using a curve cast or an upstream aerial mend, so that when you pull on the line, the fly moves upstream. You can also try to mend upstream after the line hits the water, letting the mending process move the fly, but I usually find that moving the rod and line enough to get a decent upstream mend makes the fly move too far, or it seems to pull the fly under the surface rather than skating it along the top.

The one exception to moving the fly upstream is when you are fishing with a hopper, as the trout are used to seeing a hopper move in almost any direction. If you get into a place where you think a twitched fly might work, but you can only cast upstream because of an obstruction, or in shallow water where you suspect you'll spook the fish by getting upstream of them, try a hopper.



This Vermont Hare's Ear is a great fly for skating. It's made from hare's ear dubbing and brown-and-grizzly mixed hackle, trimmed with scissors. These aren't easy to find commercially, but in a pinch you can trim any fly with bushy hackle.

Other than hoppers or big foam flies, the flies you use with an active dry-fly presentation should be those that will skate across the surface without throwing a wake or splashing, and this means a fly with stiff, long hackles, or trimmed hackle, and also a pattern that keeps the point and bend of the hook above the surface. If your hook penetrates the surface film, the fly will resist the skating action, the hook digging into the water like an anchor, and the fly will hesitate and jerk, throwing tiny plumes of spray, rather than slipping across the top of the water like an insect. Trimming the hackle flat on the underside of a long-hackled fly like a Wulff or variant is one way to create a good skater. Trimming the hackle creates a wide base of blunt, stiff fibers that keep the fly above the surface film. I know this idea is repulsive to fly tyers, who spend their winters haunting the fly-tying materials sections of fly shops for expensive hackle capes with a combination of stiff, long fibers and just the right color, but even the best-tied dry fly, made from the finest hackles, will have a variation in fiber length underneath the fly, with some of the fibers resting on the surface but others penetrating the surface film. Take a heavily dressed fly like an Ausable Wulff, one with hackle that is twice the hook gap in length, and with a sharp pair of scissors trim the hackle flat across the bottom. Make sure that the cut you make leaves enough hackle to extend beyond the point of the hook — you should be left with hackle that is about one and a half times the gap.

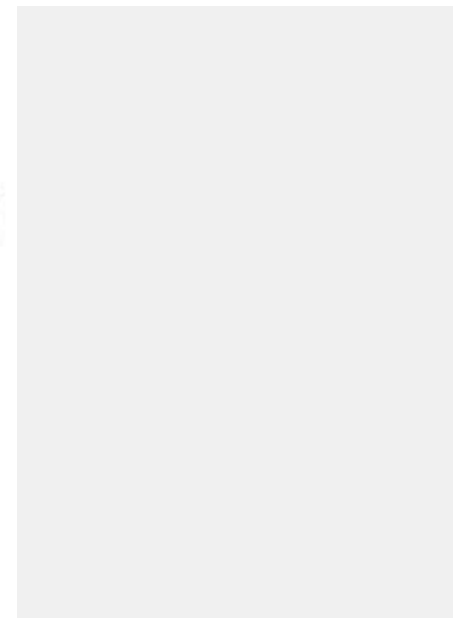
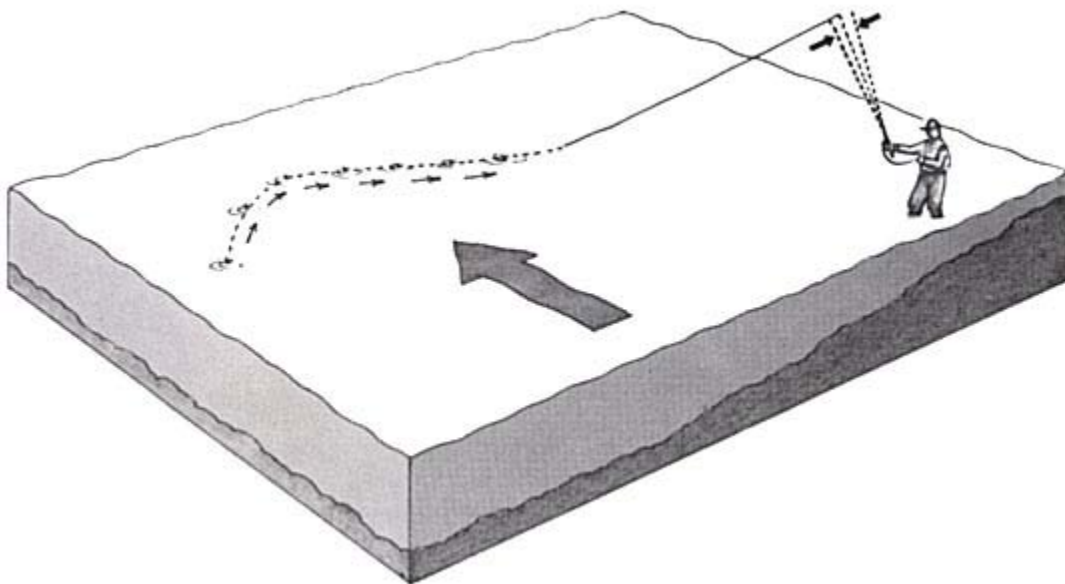
Other good skating flies are ones that are palmer-hackled, like an Elk Hair Caddis or a Stimulator. If the palmer hackle is stiff, is uniform in length, and extends beyond the gap, you can often get away without trimming the hackle flat across the bottom, but if

the fibers show some variation in length, or if you see that the fly does not skate without making some commotion on the water, get out the scissors. One of the deadliest skating flies is also the simplest, and the dressing calls for tying in a full hackle of brown and grizzly and trimming the hackle. Called the Vermont Hare's Ear, it is simply a body of rough hare's ear dubbing tied down around the bend, with a clipped collar of hackle. Gary LaFontaine, in his incredibly thorough book *Caddisflies*, introduced one of the premier skating flies. The Dancing Caddis, an appropriate name, features a wing of elk hair that is tied upside down, so that not only does the wing cradle the point and bend of the hook to keep them out of the water, but also, because of the wing position, the fly lands with the hook pointed up every time. To add to the fly's skating properties, the hackle is also trimmed flat on the opposite side of the wing.

To keep your fly on top of the water, make sure that every part of your terminal tackle floats high on the water. If you don't pay attention to this, you'll make the fly dive underwater, ruining the effect. First, clean your fly line and apply a good line dressing. This is something I don't pay much attention to under most conditions, because with modern floating fly lines you don't have to dress them more than every dozen or so trips to the river for acceptable performance. But when skating a dry fly, you need every edge you can get. Next, dress your entire leader with either a paste fly floatant or line dressing, so the leader skims on top of the water as well. Don't worry about leader shadow spooking the fish, because trout will be chasing your moving fly and won't be bothered in the slightest by the shadow of a leader.

## Conditions for Moving a Dry

Two conditions make skating a dry fly most effective: big mayfly duns or caddis hatching within the past week or so. Both of these kinds of insects skate and flutter across the surface of the water, and a trout's memory of seeing this seems to last for at least a week. Luckily there are few weeks during the regular trout season from April through September that you can't find at least one of these kinds of insects hatching. On the Battenkill, a river that resists the best efforts of a blind-fished dry fly with conventional approaches, I had poor luck for years blind-fishing a dry until one day in June, during a sporadic March Brown hatch that was not bringing the fish to the surface. My Ausable Wulff started to drag at the tail of a big pool on the lower river near Shushan, New York. As the fly started to swing, a large brown trout pounced on it by whirling around, clearing the water, and taking the fly in a downstream dive. I had not seen a trout rise all day. Of course I hauled back on the rod so hard that I immediately popped the tippet.



Skating a dry fly. The fly is cast slightly downstream and then skated across the water with a very high rod, wiggling the rod as the fly is moved.

Over the next couple of seasons I refined my technique so that as soon as I saw the first March Browns hatching in the spring, I would clip a bunch of Ausable Wulffs or Gray Fox Variants flat on the bottom and would fish a skated fly from sunrise to dark, not caring if there were any flies on the water during any given hour or day. The trout would respond to the big skated flies as long as the March Brown hatch lasted, and then a week or so after I stopped seeing March Browns hatching, the fun would be over. And it is fun to see big trout fall all over themselves trying to catch a bushy dry fly careening across the surface. I have had similar success on New York's Ausable with either a White Wulff or a Gray Fox Variant when the Green Drakes were on, and on western rivers during the times Western Green Drakes were hatching — again, regardless of whether or not I actually saw flies hatching. This technique seems to work best if the water is a little above normal and slightly colored, as I suspect it spooks the trout when the water is low and clear.

## Skating a Caddis

About the same time I was playing with skating the big Wulffs and variants, my friend John Harder was refining a technique that he feels is his most effective for catching trout on a dry fly when nothing is rising — the skating caddis. John has used this method on the Battenkill, on the Beaverkill, on Rhode Island's rivers like the Wood, throughout the Yellowstone area, and even on coastal cutthroat rivers near his home in Seattle. He can work magic with it, and as long as there have been caddis hatching recently, he can make a river that looks barren of trout come alive, as if the fish have been waiting for him to skitter his flies across the tail of a pool all day. John relies heavily on a Vermont Hare's Ear for this kind of fishing, but he has also been known to use a Henryville or Elk Hair Caddis if he has given away all his Vermont Hare's Ears.

It's important to note that the skating dry fly does not work in all kinds of water. Luckily, though, this method works best in water types that are difficult to blind-fish in a normal dead-drift manner — tails of pools and other places where you find fast, slick water. Because smooth, fast water gives you such fits when trying to get a drag-free float, the skating technique rounds out your bag of tricks for prospecting with a dry. I've tried to skate dries on riffled water, and I feel that if you could get the right presentation in the riffles, it would work — but when you try to skate a fly through the riffles, the fly spits water into the air as it moves through the tiny hills and valleys. In order to fool the fish, a skated fly must slide over the surface without any added commotion.

Skating a dry fly, as opposed to just making it flutter an inch or two here and there, is a much more active, aggressive technique that you can use to cover a lot of water in just a few casts. Because you might be skating the fly twenty feet or more, then letting it dead-drift another ten, and then maybe skating it again, you can see why it is more useful on water that does not have any obvious places for trout, like the smooth tail of a hundred-foot-wide pool. In John Harder's skating technique you cast across and downstream, preferably with a rod not under nine feet long, matched with a light fly line-5-weight or lighter. As soon as the fly hits the water, begin to raise the rod tip smoothly while pulling with your line hand, almost as if you were going to single-haul. Twitch with both the rod tip and your line hand, so the fly dances across the surface, always moving upstream. When your rod almost reaches the vertical, drop the rod tip quickly to the water, throwing slack into the line; let the fly drift for a couple of feet, then try another skate. You can usually get two or three skates before the fly gets too close to you. The difference between this technique and the Sudden Inch is that with the Sudden Inch you use a small twitch in between long dead-drift floats, and with a skating fly you fish relatively long, broad twitches in between short dead-drift floats.

With a skated fly, it seems as though the less chance you give the fish of seeing your fly the better your chances of connecting. If, for any reason, the fly starts to dive underwater as it skates, and especially if it throws any water, it's poison. You might as well pick up the cast and try somewhere else. Once the fish have seen this business, they get wise to you instantly. Also, you seldom rise a

trout on the tenth cast to the same spot when using this skating technique. I have seen trout respond to the Sudden Inch after a dozen casts, but the Sudden Inch is subtle, where the skated fly is nothing short of obnoxious. My friend Jim Lepage uses a skated Elk Hair Caddis on Maine rivers like the Penobscot, Kennebago, and Kennebec, and he has found that he can get a fish that has made a pass at a skated fly but not connected to rise again if he changes the color of the fly. Everything else that Jim has discovered about skating a caddis agrees with what we have found out in other parts of the country — it's best in the tails of pools, greasing the leader, the same skittering upstream motion — so I don't doubt it will work wherever trout are found.

## Skating a Nymph/Dry Combo

When caddisflies or stoneflies are dipping on the water, I've often combined a big, heavy nymph and the appropriate dry fly to create a dapping rig. Tie on a dry that imitates what you've seen dipping on the water as usual, then attach a second piece of tippet to the bend of the hook on the dry fly. Fifteen inches to two feet is a good place to start for a length on this lower piece. Then tie a heavily weighted nymph or even a streamer to this piece of tippet — something like a Beadhead Woolly Bugger, Tunghead Hare's Ear Nymph, or Golden Stonefly. Now make a relatively short cast upstream and across. Let the nymph or streamer sink a little, and then raise the rod tip enough to lift the dry fly off the water. Now, as the whole rig comes even with your position, raise and lower the dry fly so that it just barely touches the surface and then takes off after a quick dip. Keep doing this until too much drag sets in and the flies swing behind you. Sometimes this drives fish crazy, even when they aren't rising. It's a very lifelike suggestion of a flying insect bouncing on the surface.



Writer Kirk Deeter skating a dry fly on the Rio Negro in Chile.

On a trip to coastal Chile, where trout take dry flies more readily when skated than just dead-drifted because of the abundance of dragonflies, damselflies, and big *Colihuacho* flies, I accidentally came up with a technique that often works wonders when nothing else works. I had been fishing a Parachute Adams with a small Prince Nymph dropper, just dead-drifting this rig, when I stopped to swat a *Colihuacho*. While I was preoccupied, the flies swung across the current below me and a nice rainbow grabbed the dry. I then began to actively skate the dry/nymph combination across the current, and found that with the nymph acting as an anchor, the parachute could skate more freely because I could lift the dry off the water and just barely skim it across the surface. I also found that, although not many fish took the skating nymph, if I stopped moving the flies and quickly dropped my rod tip to get a dead-drift, they would slam the nymph as often as they took the dry. The previously slow fishing day turned into a circus, and when I got into a good run I could often hook a fish on every cast.

## Skating Spiders

Before there were fluttering caddis imitations, back in the thirties and forties, fishermen like Edward Hewitt and George LaBranche were skating spider flies on Catskill rivers with great success, particularly for large brown trout that would not respond to any other fly. Skating spiders are tied with stiff, oversized hackles, usually spade hackles, and have no bodies, wings, or tails. I know of no place where they can be purchased commercially today, but they are deadly flies. If you have hackle capes with stiff spade hackles along the side of the neck, regardless of color, tie some up by starting at the middle of the shank of a short-shanked size 16 hook, tying in two hackles with the dull, concave sides pointing forward, and finishing off with two more hackles with concave sides pointing to the rear, so that the tips of all the hackles meet at a point. Try to choose the hackles so that all the fibers are the same length. The diameter of the hackle should be around one and a half to two inches.



A spider is just hackle on a hook — but long, stiff hackle that allows the fly to skim across the surface. You don't always hook the fish that move for this fly — but it sure is fun.

I have seen rare movie footage of Hewitt and LaBranche, fishing side by side on the Neversink, casting these oversized flies to the base of one of Hewitt's famous log cribbing dams, retrieving these flies like a modern streamer, with steady, fast pulls, the fly skimming over the water high on its tiptoes, with tremendous rises that shatter the surface. John Atherton, the famous commercial and fine artist who lived on the Battenkill in the forties and early fifties before his untimely death on a salmon river, once spent an entire season fishing nothing but variants and spiders. In *The Fly and the Fish*, his only book, he wrote that although it was an experiment he would not like to repeat, he caught as many fish that season as in any other season, and most of the larger trout that took the spiders cleared the water after chasing the fly across the pool. Atherton also noticed, as I have, that these flies most often land flat, the bend of the hook pointing down into the water, and the most deadly point is just after the fisherman begins to put tension on the line, as this makes the fly lift onto the tips of its hackles. There are few manipulations a fly fisherman can do that are as lifelike as this moment.

When fishing a skating spider, get upstream and across from where you think a trout might be and cast just upstream and to the far side of the spot. As the fly drifts even with the spot, lift your rod tip enough to raise the fly onto its hackles and let it drift over

the trout's head. If you aren't rewarded with a smashing rise, draw the fly back to you, keeping as much line as you can off the water, never stopping its motion until you're ready to pick up for another cast. Trout don't have the ability to stop and start easily once they begin to chase a fly like this, and stopping and starting the fly usually isn't as effective. If, at this point, you're still not convinced that a dry fly can be as much a lure as a streamer, wait until you see a large brown trout streak across a pool chasing a spider — something you'll almost never see a trout do after a natural insect.

Another approach with a spider, or for that matter any other skating fly, is to let the fly hang below you on a tight line in one spot, as you would a wet fly. It doesn't work as often as skating the fly, but it sometimes is effective in getting into tight spots you couldn't fish any other way, like just above an impenetrable deadfall.

Creating a hatch is a topic I introduce with reluctance, because although I don't believe in the technique, some fishermen I know, experienced ones at that, believe you can make a trout think there is a hatch occurring by repeatedly throwing a fly with perfect drag-free floats to the same spot. Hewitt believed it could be done, and he wrote about it frequently. I have tried this technique time and again, in places where I was certain there was a trout, and I've seldom been able to rise a trout after two-dozen casts in the exact same spot. If a trout doesn't take on the first cast or the fifth but rises to the sixth, I prefer to think that he just wasn't looking up on the first few casts, or that he was chewing on a mouthful of nymphs, or that the first five casts had some microscopic drag that I couldn't see but the trout could. I have such poor luck blind-fishing by being persistent in a single spot that I prefer to spend my limited time on the water fishing over fresh places that haven't been spoiled by my thrashing and splashing. I think trout can be alerted by our presence even if they don't stop feeding, and the old saying about your first cast being the most important is nowhere more important than in prospecting.

## **CLUB STUFF**

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