

Hooked on a Different Bait

Flytiers hook fish with their own creations.

Bob Guard guarantees this fly will catch steelhead.

"It looks like a bug. It looks like a minnow," he says. "A lot of fish like it."

Guard, who owns The Caddis Fly Angling Shop in Eugene, clamps a hook into his tying vise and begins tying the "Boss," a beady-eyed, orange-plumed creation that will lull the cold, satiated fish into action — or possibly incite its ire.

He yanks a piece of black calves' hair from a tail he's dug out of a supply drawer and wraps a line around it, attaching it to the hook. Next he adds a piece of black chenille yarn that will absorb moisture and cause the fly to sink. He adds a piece of bright orange feather and two sections of bead chain.

The creature attracts the attention of everyone in the room —

Guard's fly-tying students who include University pre-med student Rob Rosborough.

The students begin constructing the Boss according to Guard's instructions. They agree there's a fine line between "attracting 'em and spooking 'em," a line Guard assures them the Boss won't cross.

Rosborough received a rod and reel for his birthday in January and enrolled in the six-week class so he could tie his own flies.

"I got hooked on it right away," he says.

He anxiously awaits April 25 when trout season officially opens in Oregon and says he will try his flies out somewhere on the McKenzie River "for sure."

Rosborough previously has tried his luck on a bass pond behind his parents' house in



Photo by James Marks

The fly pictured is an Umpqua Special, which is used primarily for steelhead. The fly is moderately difficult to tie.

Philomath. He had luck with one of his own flies and looks forward to the thrill of similar victories.

Rosborough, by the way, is no relation to master flytier E.H. (Polly) Rosborough, who spent April 17-18 at The Caddis Fly dispensing advice, tying flies and spinning yarns.

Polly Rosborough began tying flies more than six decades ago. He moved to Chiloquin near Klamath Falls in the late 1930s and continued to tie flies, eventually quitting his job to support himself tying flies and fur trapping. He estimates he's tied 750,000 flies.

Polly Rosborough still ties a few dozen flies each day and tours the West Coast making appearances at sports shows and fishing shops. Thousands of flies designed by Polly Rosborough are tied currently by women in India and Sri Lanka and marketed by a Douglas County company.

Will Holbert, a University journalism major, tied flies for several years before he began college and had to concentrate on his studies.

He says tying his own flies doesn't really save money, but it is "more of an aesthetic thing" and speaks of the thrill of outsmarting a fish with one of his own creations.

"It's tremendously gratifying to catch a fish with a fly you've tied," says Caddis Fly Manager Jeff Carr.

"We teach procedures," says Carr, who teaches the class with Guard. This sometimes means procedures for specific flies but also for specific parts of flies like wings, tail, body and hackle "so a person can pick up a fly-tying book with a recipe" and reproduce the fly, he says.

Carr says he and Guard also teach the students to judge materials. "Some are good for some things, some for others."

And the tied fly must have the right balance "so it fishes right in (or under) the water." If fish are hungry for a live insect, they won't be likely to go for a submerged fly that simulates a drowned insect.

The factors that determine what type of fly to use in a given situation are water clarity, water height and water temperature, according to Carr.

Using steelhead as an example, if the water temperature is below 40 degrees, one would need to use a brightly colored fly to attract the cold fish who's only there to spawn anyway and isn't interested in delectable insects served up by nature, much less by human beings, he says.

On the other hand, Carr says, using a brightly colored fly when the water temperature is above 50 degrees is likely to scare the fish, so a small dark fly would be more appropriate.

When choosing a fly pattern to work with water clarity, Carr says if the water is off-color or green, a brightly colored fly might show up well. If you want your fly to show up in the sky's bright reflection in the water, you might choose a dark pattern.

If they start out in the morning with a fly that's working, Carr says they stick with it.

If a fly fisher isn't having any luck with the fly he or she has tried, catching some of what the fish are biting in a net and studying the critters often will turn the fly fisher's luck around. Toward this end, fly fishers occasionally examine the contents of a fish's stomach to learn more about its eating habits.

Knowing what growth stages an insect goes through and when these stages are likely to happen might increase a day's catch. The fish might be feeding on larvae or nymphs, which Terry Hellejron estimates make up "85 to 90 percent of a trout's diet" in his book "Popular Fly Patterns."

So a flytier's knowledge might encompass entomology (the study of insects) and limnology (the study of life found in water or fresh water).

When a person begins to fly fish, he or she "generally buys a half a dozen flies" and tries

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