

Hickory NC Trout Unlimited May 2020 Newsletter



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A LINE FROM THE LEADER

It seems like such a long time since we had our last meeting. I know that we have all been sheltering in place and enjoying family and such, however I have been up on the creek without television or internet and it has been hard. I have gotten to fish some so that is a plus.

I know that my last article was about the creek and the illegal activity up here. As I have talked to people across North Carolina it seems that the illegal poaching is widespread across the mountains and happening everywhere abundantly. No one can stop it. My fear is that once people get away with it then it becomes easier for them to do it again and again.

I have thought about this and I realize that we're not going to be able to stop it so the only thing I can think of is that Trout Unlimited chapters across Western North Carolina should band together and lobby to get the illegal poaching fine raised to an amount that people maybe may think twice about what they're doing.

One problem is that NC Wildlife does not realize the sport a fly fishing is growing and our numbers are getting stronger. That is good because we have people to share our love of the sport with. However, the waters that we have to fish are becoming less and less. I want to urge you to take the time to do the Wildlife survey that is out there right now so that we can have a voice about what's happening on these waters.

It is ridiculous to me that one of the questions being asked is about changing the sign designation from fly fishing lures to add spin fishing lures also. What would that mean for the Davidson? I understand why they want to do that because it would mean much less work for them to monitor those Waters. Taking water away from fly fishers is not the way to save a river. We as Fly Fishers who really just want water to fish are not being represented.

Every River across the Country that is designated Wild and Scenic as Wilson Creek is, should automatically have special designation when it comes to the use of the River. We should not have to fight so hard for protection from the abuse of the public. It has rules and regulations when it comes to building and septs and such but none that can be informed properly where it comes to public abuse of the water, no restrooms and illegal activity, illegal camping, illegal fires and illegal poaching.

If there are rules they are not being enforced. I know that it is not as easy as it sounds but we are losing our

water. Just because people have done it for years doesn't mean it's the right thing to do and we should just turn our heads and walk away.

We need more than the NC Wildlife can give us. Trout Unlimited Chapters need to band together and make our voice heard. Changing the designation sign is a serious step backward.

Take the survey! Speak out!

https://ncwildlife.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4SGNhF4z3yPkR25?fbclid=IwAR2zMTQ9yT_bipW7Z5A6RITiXekjBYBaR009UIRH_hvf_JMbJnFxmstsNM

As Reba McIntire would say " Here's your one chance Fancy".

By the way, please write back to our editor with your ideas and comments. We would love to have them.

I hope to see you all soon, stay safe.

The tug is the drug,
Jackie Greene

CHAPTER MEETINGS

The May chapter meeting has been cancelled.

Fly Fishing: Social Distancing in its Purest Form



By [Owen Rossi](#) April 14, 2020

Unless you've been living under a rock for the past several months, you know about the COVID-19 pandemic that the world is experiencing. Fly shops are closing, restaurants are offering curbside pickup, and many areas are issuing stay at home orders for their residents. With these orders in place, the tasks of everyday life are currently on hold, which makes this a perfect time to get into fly fishing.

Life Has Slowed Down



Photo by Rob Morgan

With life moving at a slower pace, many people are looking for new activities to try. This is an excellent time to get someone on the water who otherwise wouldn't. The beauty in fly fishing is that there is so much more to it than the fishing itself. It serves as an excellent way

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to spend time with a family member, and appreciate the outdoors.

What Should I Do If the Fishing is Slow?



The quality of fishing is one thing that cannot be controlled. That being said, it is important to have some other activities planned to keep your first timer's experience positive. We recommend bringing a cooler full of their favorite snacks and beverages. This way you can always say, "At least we have food!"

Pick the Fishing Day Wisely

Picking your fishing day wisely is perhaps the most important rule to keep in mind. Since you are introducing someone to the sport, it is your job to make sure they have the best possible first experience. That means checking the weather! The last thing you want is your first timer's experience to be a cold, wet, and fishless one!

Get Them on Some Fish



We understand that this is much easier said than done, but you should really do your best to get your first-timer on some fish. Although this is not a guarantee, there are some useful methods to

increase a newbies chance at catching a fish. This means nymphing! Although nymphing is not nearly as glorious as fishing dries, it is a lot easier and at times more effective. Nymphing is also an easier concept to understand. "Just watch the bobber, and when it goes under, lift!"

Document the Trip



Make sure you bring some kind of camera on your trip. Catching your first fish on a fly is a very special moment that deserves to be documented. To the extent your newbie becomes increasingly interested in fly fishing after their first experience, they'll want to be able to look back at their first fish years down the road. It's also a great time to make fun of the way they used to

hold fish!

Article and photos by content team member, Owen Rossi. See some of his past work [@nativerelease](#) on Instagram!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The greatest gift you can give to another fisherman is to put a good fish back [alive]."

.....Lee Wulff

PROTECT THAT FISH

The stocked trout in our Delayed Harvest streams are a treasure we need to treat with care. We lose a number of these fish to poaching, herons and otters so we need to be careful not to kill them during our catch and release. If handled carefully a trout can be caught many times during the season. There are things we must do to assure they are there to last the season.

Don't Use Scented Baits



One thing many people may not be aware of is that it is illegal to use scented baits on a Delayed Harvest stream. The reason for this is trout will be more aggressive in attacking a scented bait and often will swallow it before the hookset. Once the hook gets into the gills, it often causes death. If you do gill hook a fish, do not try to remove the hook. Attempting to remove the hook will frequently cause damage to the gills that will result in the fish bleeding to death. Cut the line as near the hook as you can and release the fish. The hook may work its way out or rust out naturally.

Protect The Slime Coat

We all know that trout are slippery and most of us know that it is due to a coat of slime on the skin of the fish. This slime coat is a form of protein that protects the fish from disease and parasites. Any touching of the slime coat can cause damage to it and that damage can be caused by our handling of the fish when we land it. There are several things we can do to reduce the harm to the slime coat.

I'm sure you've heard that you should wet your hands before handling the fish. Dry skin is more abrasive to the slime coat than wet skin. Wetting your hands before handling the fish will avoid some of that damage.

In the past most nets were made from nylon mesh. Rub that net across your own skin and it will be obvious just how abrasive it is. The newer nets are being made from rubber material which is much less abrasive and therefore does much less harm to the slime coat.

Last, do not drag your fish onto the shore to land it. The rocks and gravel are going to do a lot of harm. Use a rubber net to land the fish or land it by hand in the water. Better yet land it in the water and without touching the fish remove the hook with a pair of forceps. That will avoid any touching of that slime coat.

Land the fish as quickly as possibly

It is important to land your fish as quickly as reasonable as the longer you fight it, the more exhausted it becomes. That exhaustion can weaken the fish to the point where it is not able to survive. This is particularly true as the water gets warmer as the oxygen level in the water is lower. Once you have the fish in hand, be sure to observe it to assure it is able to keep itself upright and swim. If the fish is having difficulty, hold it until it recovers and is able to swim away under its own power.

Keep the fish wet

Trout can only get oxygen to their body by passing water over their gills. When you see the fish working its mouth and gill plates while you hold it out of the water, it is gasping for breath. Like you that fish will not survive long without oxygen.



If you are planning to take photos of your fish, it is smart to take along a net. With the net you can remove the hook and keep the fish in the water until you are ready for the photo. When the photographer is ready, take the fish out of the net and pose for one or two quick pictures and then put the fish back into the net in the water. Have the photographer check to see if the photo is OK. If it, release the fish. If not repeat.

There are two times in the year that it is especially important to get the fish back into the water quickly. In summer, the oxygen levels in the stream drop significantly as the water temperature approaches 70. The fish will already be stressed from the fight and will die quickly when out of the water. At times like this it would be smart to keep the fish in the net for the hook removal and photos. A pair of forceps makes it easier to remove the hook without taking the fish out of the water.

The other time it is dangerous to take the fish out of water for any length of time is in the winter when temperatures are below freezing. Fish are cold blooded and their body temperatures are already low from the water temperature. Holding the fish out of water for even a short time can cause the gills to freeze and destroy the tissue. It is best again to keep the fish in the net as above.

Hold the fish properly

There is a lot more to be said about this than I can cover in a couple paragraphs, so I have included below an article from Troutbitten that covers it all in detail. I will just mention a few key points here. Never put your fingers into the gills and don't squeeze the fish. If you're not using a barbless hook, (tsk, tsk) it can be very difficult sometimes to hold the fish and remove the hook. Using forceps makes it a lot easier.

Use Barbless Hooks



Of course barbless hooks are best for the fish, but I admit, after losing a few fish I have sometimes not crushed the barb before fishing. As mentioned above there is an

occasional hook up that you have to hold the fish tight to get the hook out and I have probably damaged a few fish that way. The other advantage is that if the hook gets down into the gills, you can cut the line just above the hook and it is very likely to slip out of the gills in time.

If we all practice safe catch and release, it will help preserve the fish and promote good fishing until the end of

the Delayed Harvest season. Thank you in advance for doing your best to help preserve the lives of our fish.

HOW TO HOLD A TROUT

by [Domenick Swentosky](#)

You can't stop fishermen from holding their trout. All of the [Keep 'Em Wet](#) campaigns and the [Ketchum Release](#) tools will not stop anglers from reaching into the water and lifting their prize. It's a desire to complete the act, to finish the catch, an instinct to hold the creature that we set out to capture.

And why wouldn't we want to hold a wild trout — to touch the majesty of Mother Nature — to feel a fleeting, darting, irrefutably gorgeous animal and admire it, and to look upon that which eludes us so often and for so long? No, you're not going to stop fishermen from holding their trout.

Instead, let's spread the word about how to safely handle trout without harming them. And after thirty-some years of trout fishing, I can promise you, first hand, it is possible. You can hook a trout, land it, hold it, and even take a picture before letting it go. And if you do all of that right — if you truly respect the trout and are cautious with its health, it will swim off into the deep dark with nothing more than a new education about what it shouldn't eat.

I know what a trout looks like when it's released, no worse for wear. And I know what a trout looks like when it's been hurt — because I've made my share of mistakes. I fear that most of us must learn these lessons the hard way, because that's human nature. I've played trout too long, accidentally dropped them on rocks, held them up to the lens for a few extra snapped shutters, and damaged trout in other ways. And always, something inside me knew it was wrong. When the trout swam away lethargic, I took it as a lesson and did my best to learn from those mistakes.

So I'd like to share my experience here. I encourage you to also seek out scientific research on trout handling, on exposure times and water temps. I believe that most of what I've discovered first-hand corresponds with that research. What follows is a real world, riverside understanding of how to hold a trout, all from a fisherman who's held a few trout, large and small.

The Other Articles

Real quick, these paragraphs are *not* meant to be a comprehensive take on the subject of ethical catch and release. This article is about the literal handling of trout. For more perspective on the process of safely catching and releasing trout, here are a few other Troutbitten articles.

Fishing for trout in warming water:

[READ: Troutbitten | PSA — It's Hot Out There](#)

Fighting trout the right way — It matters just as much as how we hold them:

[READ: Troutbitten | Fly Fishing Tip: #9 — Fight Fish Fast](#)

[Not the best. If this trout starts struggling, your next instinct here is to squeeze](#)

Realize where the heart of a trout is. Always avoid squeezing in that vital area:

READ: Troutbitten | Their Heart in Your Hands

And lastly, if you choose to take a picture, here's the best way to do it . . .

READ: Troutbitten | Taking the Solo Shot



Looking back, I realize that within all these articles, there's a lot more to be said about *holding* a trout. So here we go .

A Calming Hold

Trout like to know that you aren't trying to kill them. Think about it. Predators grab, spear or squeeze a trout. And if you do that, every trout will fear you as a predator. But if you handle a

trout without squeezing, by cradling it and supporting its weight, you might be amazed how often they match your calmness.

Never squeeze. It does no good. The amount of pressure you'd have to apply to actually keep a trout from escaping is sure to damage the fish. Instead, take the opposite approach. Work with the trout to support it. Allow it to feel comfortable, laying in your hands. Such an approach does wonders.

Lift the trout from underneath, don't squeeze from over the top. If it wriggles or flops as you try to lift the fish, that's okay. Keep waiting for the chance to cradle it from underneath. It will happen, as long as you don't squeeze.



I often joke that brown trout have more self-respect than rainbows. Brookies fall somewhere in the middle. Provided the calm approach

described above, most brown trout seem to get over it and say, *Alright, fair enough, you got me. Now let's just get this over with, and you put me right back, alright?*

Rainbows, on the other hand, often keep wriggling and flopping

like a melodramatic school girl. *Ahhhh! This is the end of the world!* Nevertheless, treating rainbow trout as calm as possible is the only way to have a chance at relaxing them.

Upside Down



"Why do you turn him over like that, Dad?" Joey asked me when he was five. The habit was so ingrained that I hadn't given it any thought in years. (And this is

the pleasure of having kids — a renewed perspective.)

I explained to Joey that a wiggling or panicked trout often calms down by inverting him. Cradled and belly up is the way I hold trout to remove most hooks from a trout's lip. *I don't know why. All I know is that turning trout upside down usually relaxes them. And this is how I remove a stubborn hook.*

The Net

Can we talk about that net for just a minute? For most of my trout fishing life, I walked without a net. And if you have no intention of admiring your trout for very long or taking a picture, then you might do just fine without one too, assuming your fish fighting and trout handling skills are already excellent.

But when my sons were born, I started carrying the hoop. My boys needed a few extra moments to observe the trout in a watery holding pen. The rubber mesh live-well also gave me a chance to get the camera ready while keeping trout safe in the water. I later realized that there's no fair argument against the following fact: You can land more trout faster and safer by using a net. Full stop. So I carry it always. Buy one with a rubber mesh bag and a hoop that floats, and there's your live-well — suitable for holding a trout for a few extra seconds before the release.

And if you take a picture . . .

The hero shots won't end. It's the grand compromise of catch and release. When C&R took over as the expected normal, that didn't change the angler's propensity to brag a little about his catch.

Do you need to long arm every trout that comes to your net? Probably not. But if we truly want the next generation to enjoy this sport, to become guardians of our waters and the trout themselves, then we must allow for some pride in the success of catching a fish — especially the bigger ones. Because most new (and old) anglers want to show off a trout now and then.

One of my favorite catches ever, not because it was the biggest, but because of all the things I went through to catch it. And I'm glad I have the picture for the memory. This trout was out of the water for about five seconds. No more.

The fish selfie has replaced the stringer for bragging rights.

— Troutbitten, 2016

Holding a trout to quickly remove the hook is one thing. But holding them for a picture is a little different.

— Keep them close to the river. Fish pictures look better with water in the frame anyway. Think about it.

— No fingers in the gills. This should be a given, but I'll mention it. The gills are delicate and easily damaged. There's no need to involve yourself with a trout's gills.

Please, no. Photo from IG.



I Why are we doing this? Photo from Instagram.

— Support the fish. Again, this is a guiding principle. Trout calm down when they don't feel threatened. By cradling them, by

supporting their weight and not squeezing, trout are more likely to cooperate.

— Front hand at the fins. You probably take hero shots of large fish, not small ones, and the big boys have heavy heads. So support them. Extend a finger under the jaw bone. Then allow the fin to rest between your two middle fingers, while the palm of your hand supports most of the trout's weight from underneath.

— Rear hand at the tail. On larger trout, grab the wrist — the bony part at the base of the tail. This is one place you can squeeze a trout without scaring or hurting it. A good firm hold at the wrist, overhand or underhand, provides a lot of control and support.

— The long-arming hero shots have been overdone. Try some new angles, and don't worry so much about your pretty face in the picture.

Truth is, holding large trout takes some practice before you feel comfortable. But after a dozen or so large fish at the net, safe handling becomes natural if you keep the above points in mind.

It takes practice to find the places where your fingers and hands should go. And it takes some repetition to understand how to avoid squeezing — to work with the fish and let them feel comfortable. You can tell a lot about the experience of an angler by how he holds a trout.

What's up with the Knuckle Thing?

I'm not sure how this hold became so popular. But I see it gaining momentum. It's an effort to hide the fingers, I suppose, but it just looks barbaric, to my eyes.



Assorted pics from Instagram, with the popular knuckles grip. I don't get it. Doesn't that look terribly uncomfortable for the trout?

Why force the trout to rest on top of your hard knuckles? It pushes the belly out unnaturally

and looks really uncomfortable for the trout. I swear you can see the trout struggling in these pics above. Is it worth that, just to keep your fingers out of the pic? To me, an easy cradling of the trout looks a lot more natural. We know your fingers are in your fist, man.

Trying to hide the fingers ends up in squeezing the trout all too often.



The Fragile Swimmer

Trout are not bass. And they are far more delicate than most of their swimming counterparts. Trout are a fragile species. So make every effort to

limit their time out of the water.

No, really. Put them back *quickly*.

How long should they be out of the water? Just a few seconds, really.

I've often heard the anecdote to hold your own breath, and that's how long a trout can stay out of the water. But it seems like somebody just made that up, with no science behind it. So let's cut it in half. Now cut it in half again. And from my experience, that's probably more right. Keep a trout out of the water for just a few seconds, and then put it back. If you don't, you'll notice that trout struggle to swim away when released. And that shouldn't happen.

Here's an easier way to gauge the time a trout may safely be out of the water, without holding your breath or counting sheep: When the water stops rolling and dripping off a trout's body, put it back in the river. That's usually just a handful of seconds.

Likewise, trout are easily hurt through contact with non-watery things, like dry hands, dirt and gravel banks. So wet yer digits before touching a trout. And don't lay trout anywhere but back in the water.

Let 'em go

Of course, all of this handling — any handling — adds risk to the trout. But so does dragging it through the water with a hook in its face. And when the fish comes to the net, even barbless hooks sometimes require some fish handling to remove the steel without damage. Likewise, since anglers will never stop admiring trout, taking their picture and sharing those images with friends, the best we can do is learn to hold a trout with caution. And then spread the word.

Sometimes, it's best to release the hook and allow the trout to swim away. In fact, that's probably always the best option. But when you want to admire the trout for a moment, handle with care.

Enjoy the day.

Domenick Swentosky

TROUTBITTEN

domenick@troutbitten.com

ADVICE FROM THE VISE

I said to my wife that I feel like spring has been stolen away this year. Trips have been canceled and the real world has been keeping me busy this year. But it's somehow May already, and the bugs are hatching nicely here on the Jacobs Fork. This month's pattern is a super easy tie and very effective pattern that was gifted to me when I was fishing in the Sierra Nevada's a few years ago. It's so generic I don't know that it has a name, but it has never failed to produce.

You know, I fish a lot of nymphs, but there is very little that is as much fun as a dry fly. It's where I started and watching a trout sip that dry off the surface or just smash it has no compare. This fly just performed out there for me and I tied up a pile and have used them in many other streams and they usually get a look. Again, nothing fancy, but in an 18 or 16, it gets looks every time. I have tied these up to a 12 and fished it successfully, up to yourself.

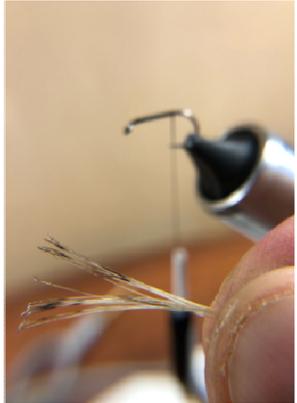
Going to start out with a dry fly hook of your choice, some black thread (I love the 14/0 for dry flies), some superfine dubbing in olive or green, Coc De Leon fibers for tailing and a grizzly genetic hackle in the size of your hook. You could avoid the dubbing all together and use a thread body on this fly if you wanted.



Start the thread base to the bend of the hook. Pull off 8-12 fibers from the CDL feather and measure them to the length of the shank and tie in.



Wrap the thread rib to give it some segmentation and contrast. Strip of the barbs from the end of the hackle feather for a tie in point. Keep the hackle fibers out of the initial tie in point. Tie in the hackle tip.



Trim off the butt ends and tie in a piece of black thread for your rib. Very sparingly, wax and dub the thread to a very compact noodle. With touching turns, dub the body up to the front of the hook.



Wrap the hackle feather forward, being careful to not trap fibers under the previous wrap. Form a bit of a head and whip finish the fly. A touch of head cement and you have a an super easy, high floating dry fly that will get noticed by both the wild blue liner and the stocker. Tie a #18 Prince off the bend and you have a superb dry/dropper combo.



I'd love to hear your feedback and I'm always happy to answer any and all questions, give a lesson, or just talk fly tying

and fishing. Don't hesitate to contact me at jacobsforkflytying@gmail.com or check out some of my current ties on Facebook and Instagram at Jacobs Fork Fly Tying.

WILSON CREEK IS OPEN FOR FISHING

Brown Mountain Beach road has an entrance barrier that says road closed except for local traffic. That has caused questions on whether that means Wilson Creek is closed to access for fishing. The list of forest road closures did not mention Brown Mountain Beach Road, but did reference that Brown Mountain Road is closed. We made contact with the US Forest Service to find out the details and received the following response: "Brown Mountain Road is the road in the OHV area. Brown Mountain Beach Road remains open (it is a state road and we do not have authority to close it). It is my understanding there is a sign blocking part of the road that says open to local traffic only, but as long as you are not stopping within the 2.2 mile USFS "Gorge" day use you should be fine." In a follow up email we learned that OHV means Off Highway Vehicle area and only refers to the parking along the gorge. That means that access is open to Wilson Creek and you are allowed to drive around the barricade and head up there, just don't park along the gorge.

We also contacted the WRC and they confirmed they will be stocking Wilson Creek as planned on Monday, May 4th. As with last month, volunteers will not be allowed to help with the stocking. For information on stocking other rivers you can visit:

<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Fishing/documents/Delaware-Harvest-Trout-Waters-Stocking-Dates-Map.pdf>

CASTING CAROLINAS 2020 EVENTS

May 22-24 NC Spring Retreat, Lake Logan Center

CANCELLED

October 9-11 NC Fall Retreat, Lake Logan Center
October 24 Tie One On Tournament in Cherokee

Casting Carolinas is a free program for women cancer survivors. To apply for a future retreat or to volunteer to help out, sign up at www.castingcarolinas.com.

RIVERCOURSE YOUTH CAMP 2020

CANCELLED



SCHOOL CLOSING TIC PROGRAM

The Trout in the Classroom program requires a great deal of effort on the part of the teacher and the students. The tanks need cleaning, water needs testing, and chemicals

need to be added to keep the pH in balance. So when schools were shut down due to the Corona virus, most of the classrooms released the fish. That was not the case at West Alexander Middle School. Science teacher Ryan Rowe began last year developing an aquaponics system into the trout aquarium with his students and this year has fine tuned it. When the school was shut down, Ryan left the system operational and received permission to visit the classroom periodically just to feed the fish.



After about a month of self-operation, the tank's chemical balance has remained acceptable and the tank is still clean. He visits about once a week to feed the trout. Ryan reports that to his knowledge they haven't lost a fish in this time.

Ryan's hope is that he can keep the tank operational until the stay at home order is lifted and that he will be allowed to take a few students to the river to release the fish.

We would like to congratulate Ryan for the job he and his students have done with this program. Putting a system like this into operation and then fine tuning it to operate in balance is an amazing feat. You can view an update from Ryan at this site:

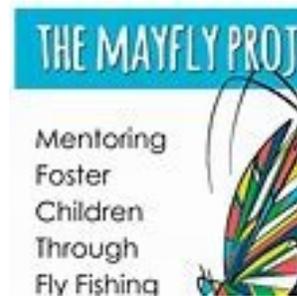


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZuuVRZKI8g&feature=youtu.be>

What is the Mayfly Project?

The Mayfly Project is a 501(c)(3) organization that uses fly fishing as a catalyst to mentor children in foster care. Our mission is to support children in foster care through fly fishing and introduce them to their local water ecosystems, with a hope that connecting them to a rewarding hobby will provide an opportunity for foster children to have fun, feel supported, and develop a meaningful connection with the outdoors. Over the course of 5 outings, children learn how to become self-sufficient anglers and also about conservation of natural resources. At the end of the project each child is given their own fly rod and necessary gear to go fishing on their own.

The Boone NC Project has been running for 3 years with the help and support of community members and fishing guides. To date we have mentored 7 children from a local group home. In 2020 we hope to mentor 7-8 children.



How Can Trout Unlimited help?

There are Several Ways your Trout Unlimited Chapter can help:

- Sponsor a child through the program. It costs about \$780.00 to send one child through our program. This covers the cost of all the teaching gear we use, insurance, and the gear that the children receive at the end of the project. We are asking many area chapters to sponsor one child.
- Make an individual donation - you can donate online and your money will stay with our project in NC - <https://themayflyproject.com/boone-north-carolina-project/>
- Fly tying - you can tie flies for our outings. While we do purchase flies for our projects, there's nothing like tying on a fly that has been made by someone who cares about what we are doing. We fish and teach kids about all kinds of patterns, from naturals to mop flies, the kids learn it all. In other words we won't turn any pattern down. Your chapter could sponsor a tying night and donate the flies from the night to our project.
- Donate Used Gear - if you are upgrading any gear, we would gladly take it off your hands. (Provided that the gear is functioning)
- Become a mentor. You might think that you live too far away to be a mentor in our program. That is not



the case. For the past two years we have had a mentor drive 3 hours to help with our project. If you are interested in mentoring please visit our website: <https://themayflyproject.com/mentoring/> Mentoring is just as rewarding for the mentor as it is for the mentee.

We would like to hear from you! If you have any questions or would like to know more about what we are doing please contact our Lead Mentor, Nils Peterson at 828-964-8581 or via email at browndogcww@gmail.com.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS INVITED

If you have a great day on the river, please send us a photo to share at HkyNCTU@gmail.com

If you have success on your trip, please share it with us.

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Editor's note: Charlie Walker is very busy this month at work and unable to submit his monthly fly fishing tale. In its place we've included an idea for some nearby fun for once you get released from your home. Hopefully Charlie will be back next month with another great tale.



Fly Fishing for North Carolina's Giant Red Drum

A sound new technique let's fly anglers tangle with bull redfish in the North Carolina's inshore waters.
By [George Beckwith](#) Saltwater Sportsman Magazine August 15, 2019

Bragging size redfish have become a top inshore target for fly anglers in North Carolina. [George Beckwith](#)

In North Carolina, where redfish are called puppy drum until they mature and attain the large proportions that earn them the label of red drum (bull reds in most other places), a consistent fishery for truly giant specimens has made the waters of the Outer Banks famous.

Locating schools of menhaden or other baitfish bodes well for fly anglers targeting giant red drum in North Carolina waters.

Persistent anglers spend countless hours in the surf waiting for these jumbo reds to blitz the beach. Others pound hundreds of miles on their boats, scanning the horizon for explosions in the water or the sight of large schools of red drum — appropriately dubbed pumpkin patches — that roam the coast from fall through spring, the same fish that fly rodders found more catchable in the shallow waters of Pamlico Sound and the Neuse River, where they spend their summers.



Drifting near baitfish aggregations and fishing the outskirts of the schools greatly increases chances for success.

Reports of vast concentrations of giant reds in the Tarheel State's inshore waters first spread in the 90s, as local guides hosted outdoor writers and TV show crews, which promptly told the story of this great fishery easily accessed by small boats. As popularity grew, concerns over protection of spawning stocks prompted North Carolina Sea Grant to fund a variety of studies. I had the privilege to participate in this early research, and the hours I spent following and observing these fish proved invaluable.

North Carolina's Pamlico Sound and Neuse River harbor a number of giant red drum hot spots.

As a guide, I put the gained knowledge to good use, anticipating prime feeding periods in the afternoons and evenings, and knowing the shoals of the lower Neuse, which go by the names like Maw Point, Gum



Thicket, Swan Island and Lighthouse, were reliable spots to locate giant reds on the prowl. The tops of these shoals are four to 12 feet deep and their edges drop sharply into the Neuse River bottom, never deeper than 20 feet. This main dropoff gets most of the giant red drum traffic. During tracking with a hydrophone or an underwater directional microphone, we observed tagged fish cruising these drop offs, often sliding up on a shoal, then down to deeper water, feeding on anything that got stirred up along the way, often responding to chum lines from boating anglers in the area.



Adapting a proven technique from conventional-gear anglers, fly rodders consistently partake of North Carolina's inshore red drum fishery. *George Beckwith*

But it wasn't until a decade later that local guides figured out what those "laid up" red drum were doing and how to catch them. It was Capt. Gary Dubiel who fine-tuned techniques that include consistently catching them on the fly.

Dubiel realized that these fish are extremely bait oriented, patient and stealthy, preferring to quietly stalk schooling baitfish — menhaden, most often — to pick off any stragglers injured by attacks from slashing bluefish, Spanish mackerel or jacks, and frequently excited and urged to feed by the foraging activities of or said predators or other red drum.

To take advantage of said predatory response, conventional anglers use large popping corks with big concave faces that, jerked vigorously, produce the kind of loud noise and splash that mimic surface feeding. Dubiel took note, and adapted said technique for fly fishing.

The rig is simple, a fly suspended under a popper head that will create noise and splash to draw attention from bull reds.

In the search of a popper that move lots of water and was easy to rig and cast, he developed the Pop N Fly, a foam popper with in-line wire and a loop on both ends. The leader's butt section is attached to one, two feet of 20-pound fluorocarbon plus two feet of class tippet and the fly are affixed to the other.

A 10-weight fly line can handle Dubiel's rig. He prefers Scientific Anglers' Titan Taper line, which he claims will throw the popper and a weighted Lil Haden, a fly pattern he concocted, with ease. The Lil Haden is a simple fly that incorporates some lead wire and a 4/0 or 5/0 hook. White and about any other color combination works in the usually clear, but tannic-stained water of the Neuse River.



A weighted baitfish pattern, like Gary Dubiel's Lil Haden, are the ticket for North Carolina's giant inshore redbfish.

Whatever your choice of fly, it should be weighted, but not so heavy that it sinks your popper. Aside from the Lil Haden and popper that Dubiel uses, I've had good results with a white, 5-inch Half-and-Half fly on 50-pound leader suspended 12 inches below a large Cam Sigler popper head pegged with a toothpick just above the knot connecting the bite tippet.

You need to be drifting and casting across or into the wind, so you won't need to cast very far. Don't waste time with lots of false casts trying to get a few extra feet of distance, just get the fly in the water and let it drift away from the boat. Once the drift takes all the slack out of the fly line, give it a good jerk, pause to again let the line straighten out,

and give it another jerk. Unless specifically casting to a pod of bait, leave the fly and popper in the water and keep repeating the procedure to draw in any nearby bull reds.



Keep the fly in the water, repeat the pop-and-stop retrieve, and stay alert. Strikes happen even close to the boat.

Don't worry about keeping the fly moving. The fish will find it and smack it, even if only 20 or 30 feet from the boat. The bite often happens a few seconds after the pop, either as the fly flutters down or even when it's sitting still. The key is simply to keep the fly in the water. For this technique, patience is actually more important than long, accurate fly casting.

When you do get the bite, keep stripping until you come tight and you're able to set the hook. Then focus on clearing the loose line and fight the fish from the reel. Always keep quiet and stay on your toes, many bites come right at your rod tip from fish you just drifted over.

The Neuse River is not much deeper than a swimming pool, and these fish can be extremely sensitive to boat traffic and noise. Use a trolling motor at the lowest possible speed to help control your drift. When approaching bait balls, get well upwind of the school, shut off the outboard, and quietly drift into the area. A good shoal will often have dozens of bait balls with fish scattered in between. A good drift could be well over a mile long, and once you get past the productive water, slowly idle away and go around. Don't ever idle back through the area you want to fish again.



Stealth is key when targeting North Carolina's giant reds in secluded inshore stretches.

There is also no reason to fish on top of someone. If you see someone hooked up, start your drift well upwind of them. You are in the right spot, you don't need to be right next to them. If within 300 yards of other boats, idle very slowly, steering well clear of everyone else, until you reach the point where you will start your drift.

A little breeze helps the drift, but too much wave action decreases productivity. If the wind picks up or shifts, and you find yourself fishing white caps, hop over to the other side of the river and explore calmer waters. Should you decide to try another location, be mindful of other boats and keep a wide berth and avoid, if possible, running over shoals or schooling bait.

From June until the first big moon in October, wherever there is nervous water and flipping baitfish in the lower Neuse River and Pamlico Sound, giant red drum are likely to be lurking. Try the technique discussed and hang on tight!