FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2020 A9

OUTDOORS Build your own bug

A fiberglass fly rod. An automatic fly reel. And a scruffy fly at the end of my line. Four decades ago, that was my fly fishing repertoire. Trout eagerly snatched up the simple offering cast into the shallow pool. Such an easy day had happened before that one day. But there was something dif-



Outdoors By Joel L. Evans

ferent on that day years ago. More specifically, there was something different about the fly on that day. A fly like no other.

My fly of choice that day didn't come from under the soft fluorescent lights of a store display. You couldn't have purchased it anywhere because it came from my kitchen table. It came into being out of a fly tying kit of cheap tools and materials purchased as an experiment. And once on the river, the trout proved the experiment a success.

Want to witness some of those experiments first hand? The opportunity is now. For the next several Saturday mornings, Montrose Anglers hosts "On the Vise Fly Tying Days." Each Saturday, a different fly tyer shows off how to tie their favorite patterns. You and I get to watch and learn close up while the tyer not only competes the step by step fly, but explains how to rig it up and when and where to fish it.

As the host, Nolan Egbert, owner of Montrose Anglers, said that "outreach to the community is one of our core values". By organizing the demonstrations, both novice and experienced tyer can learn a few new tricks. Fly tying is a craft that has no one right way to tie a fly. Whatever you do may be different but is nonetheless "right."

Nolan commented that "although you can fish yearround, hosting the winter season tying days is a great way for fishermen to gather and socialize in a less-fishable time." I enjoy the gathering. I fish in the winter, sometimes one of the few local rivers free of ice such as the Uncompany River in town, or ice fishing some nearby reservoir. But gathering with like-minded fishermen on a cold winter morning is equally fun.

Although I didn't realize it when I first started learning to tie flies, the best reason to learn is that tying actually improves your fishing. Trout are motivated by several factors, not the least of which is the search for food. (Sounds like me!) A better understanding of what trout eat will make one a more effective fisherman. And fly tying, no matter how the flies themselves turn out, educates one a lot on what trout eat.

As one learns tying, one also learns about the kinds of insects trout feed on, where these insects can be found, their various colors, shapes, sizes, forms, and the multiple stages of their life cycles. And it is not just insects we imitate, but other trout food such as small fish or beetles. All of this information is useful for fishing.

Most patterns are very easy to tie and to tie well. Other patterns can be complicated, using material or techniques that make a simple craft difficult. But don't let the seeming difficulty dissuade you from getting started. Try the simple first.

Not much in the way of equipment is really needed to tie a number of effective patterns. However, fishing and fly tying are like most of our obsessions in that one can indeed buy and buy and buy and still not have it all. But one doesn't have to start with it all to tie a fly that you can catch a fish on at your next outing.

A minimum tool assortment includes a vise, scissors, bobbin, a bobbin threader, and a bodkin. As with any hobby, there is always more. There are many specialty tools that can be added to your collection as needed. You can buy these tools in a kit or individually. In general, you get what you pay for.

A vise is the largest and single most expensive tool you will need. For the beginner or occasional tyer, the less expensive models are adequate, then upgrade if you tie a lot. Scissors, good scissors are critical. Cheap scissors will work, but if there is any one tool you might spend a little more on at first, then scissors would be it. The bobbin holds a spool of thread, guiding the thread into small and precise placements.



Question – What to do on a winter Saturday morning? Answer – attend a fly tying demonstration at Montrose Anglers. On a recent Saturday, tyer Bill Frangos enthralls an audience as he demonstrates a Wally Wing mayfly. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Joel Evans)

Getting the thread placed right is often the key to durable and life-like flies.

Upcoming Saturday tying days and the presenting tyer are: Feb. 15 (tomorrow) with Gale Doudy; Feb. 22 with Tim Jacobs; Feb. 29 with me, and March 7 with Bob Churchill. Sessions are free and go from 10: a.m. to noon. Montrose Anglers is downtown Montrose at 309 E. Main, with additional parking in the rear.

Since those high-country brook trout are buried in snow right now, Saturday would be a good time to get in on the tying action. So what does it take to create such a concoction that a fish will actually believe is something to eat? Probably less than you think. Think simple at first, get some basic fly tying tools and materials, and then use your own fly to catch a fish. Call me if you want help getting started, especially for a kid.

Joel L. Evans is an avid fisherman, outdoor writer and photographer, who has explored Western Colorado for decades.

Alabama the cure for seasonal gloom



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

If there were a particular time of year I absolutely detest, it would be February and March. I have always had a special loathing for those two months. February is the cruelest month, lasting forever plus two weeks. As a school kid, serving out a sentence, we are just coming off a nice break for Christmas, only to realize there are still many more months of prison time left before the summer parole. February can be a tease, giving you a couple nice spring-like days, followed by a foot of wet and heavy snow. If you get to feeling spring here in town, take a ride 20 minutes west and see what you think. About 30 years ago, I started making a trip to visit friends in Alabama. The trip was to break up my seasonal gloom, and I always try and go in February when the whitetail rut is in full bore. I have been going there so long, it has become more of a homecoming rather than a hunting trip. The two brothers who own the farm are fourth generation there. Albert and Jim Cravey were both born on this farm some 70 years ago. The Cravey family has been here in Covington County since just

after the Civil War. This farm consists of 4000 acres of hayfields and woods, lakes, a river, and a number of Greenfields.

Following the Civil War, many people migrated to this area of Alabama because of the inexpensive land, untapped forestry resources, cotton, and the subsequent need for railroads.

In time, the forest industry became less lucrative and the stands of timber depleted.

The Great Depression took hold and global forces eventually weakened the textile industry. Many of the youth left the area to join the war effort and to work in the shipyards. Very little evidence of the heyday for this area remains. Most people, who remained, stayed in the agriculture business. Abandoned storefronts and grown-over farms are visible everywhere. Currently, the Cravey family raises certified Black Angus beef, much of which is sold to restaurants around the area. In years gone by the farm raised hogs, grew corn, and once had a huge grove of 100-year old pecan trees. Hurricane Donna mostly destroyed the pecan trees in 1960. Albert, the younger brother raises bird dogs and offers plantation style hunts for bobwhite quail. At midday, he brings his hunters back to a small lodge where they fry up the quail from the morning hunt and serve them to their guests. I am not much of a bird hunter, but I sure enjoy watching those dogs work a covey of quail. With a sense of smell thousands of times more sensitive than ours, the dog can point out birds in the thickest of cover,



would rather have a hurricane than to be hit by these destructive, field-wrecking rooting hogs. Just a handful of feral hogs can tear up 5 acres of hay ground in a matter of hours.

Alabama is well known for their largemouth bass fishing. There is a 400-acre lake on the farm and 5 to 7 pound bass are fairly common. The lake is full of bream (the southern version of a bluegill) in that 1-pound or better size.

Admittedly, one of the best reasons to make the trek back to Alabama each year is for the food. The local people fry everything, and I mean every thing. Fried biscuits are my favorite. Every meal features a side of fried biscuits or fried cornbread. The general rule is to not have your cholesterol checked for a couple weeks after you get home. I always enjoy my time in Alabama, but I'm really glad to be back in Montrose. Soon, the weather will warm up and the snowmelt, and I will be back in those mountains having a good time. Until then, I have to survive February, the forever lasting, cruelest month. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

Eastern turkey in large numbers are frequent visitors to my tree stands. These birds are enjoyable to see and listen to as they are quite vocal. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

and flush them upon command from Albert. I might also add, they are delicious as anyone who has ever had fried quail would attest.

The farm is also home to many large flocks of eastern turkey. I have had as many as 50 at a time in a field while I was hunting deer. The only natural predators these local birds have would be coyotes, and all the local farmers keep them under close control, so the turkeys do well here.

Whitetail deer make this area home. The local deer are much smaller than our deer in Colorado, with large bucks seldom exceeding 150 pounds. These deer move mostly at night, so they can be difficult to find.

The weather in Alabama can be a gamble. About every ten years, they get a snowstorm. A couple inches of the white stuff and everything shuts down. Most of the time during February, the overnight lows hang around 35 to 40 degrees. I might add that 35 there is much colder than here, probably because of the humidity.

If you decide to visit Alabama, you are probably not going to want to be there during the summer months. The southern heat can be unbearable, especially to someone who hails from the dry climate of Colorado. Add to the heat humidity so thick that fish swim in it and you will see why I visit in February, not July.

In recent years, the feral hog population has become a problem. Hogs are very problematic in Florida, the neighboring state to the south. As these wild pigs become more populated, they also become more tolerant of the cold weather, and are spreading north. Most farmers

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com

