



# Kapiti Fly Fishing Club

## September 2022 Newsletter



**This month's cover photo: Greg connected to a fish! Photo taken by Krasimir on a recent club trip to Turangi**

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**Club activities**

Date	Event	Coordinator
Monday 26 September	Club Night – Peter Blaikie The secrets to fishing the Rangitikei River - Auction	Wayne
Tuesday 11 October	Fly-tying workshop – Damsel Nymph	Gordon
Monday 24 October	Club night – TBC	Wayne
Monday 14 November	Inter-club Fly Tying Competition at Stokes Valley	Gordon
19 to 20 November	Family fishing event – Otaki Lakes TBC	Malcolm
25 to 27 November	Kapiti Women of Fly Spring Workshop	Leigh

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***This month's club meeting Perter Blaikie will be our guest speaker sharing his secrets on fishing the Rangitikei River followed by the auction of Graham Waters fly fishing gear.***

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## *Presidents report*

“This is my favourite time of year as my focus is on preparation for the season opening in Rotorua ON October 1. This year has been a bit different as I have also been focused on retiring with a clear desk mid-month. I am blaming this retirement distraction for the fact that my usual impeccable planning fell apart.

My daughter asked if I could arrange to book a holiday house for a week during the school holidays to have a break with one lot of grandkids. I booked the week that was available without thinking and so I will miss the opening competition for the first time in 20 years as I will be in a holiday house for the first week of October in Taupo. Nevertheless, I have been doing my usual fly-tying, line cleaning and general gear checking etc for what I hope will be a stellar season.

Your committee are all excited by the Women on the Fly Spring Workshop that we will be hosting 25 to 27 November in Upper Hutt, Wellington Fish and Game have agreed to underwrite the event including any shortfall between funds raised for the cost of the event.

We will need to fund the event and then seek reimbursement from WF&G so there will be a cashflow window when the club will bear the cost. Your committee is satisfied that we have the funds to do so, and this will not in any way adversely affect the club or its funds. A motion authorizing this plan and funds use will need to be resolved at the September 26 meeting.

The Committee recommends to members that this resolution be carried. We all owe a very strong vote of thanks to Committee Members Leigh Johnson and Ruth McKenzie for their tireless work to date. Hoping to see you all at the meeting where we will be auctioning Graeme Waters fishing gear and also hearing from Peter Blaikie about all his dark secrets on the Rangitikei River.

Tight lines and screaming reels to you all!

Wayne”

## *Kapiti Women on the Fly by Leigh Johnson*



Kapiti Women on The Fly's next big event is the **Spring Workshop to be held in Upper Hutt on 25/27th November.**

Details are on [this flyer](#) and you can register [here](#). Places are filling up quickly.

To date:

- Wellington Fish & Game have agreed to underwrite the event and are providing excellent practical assistance.
- We have 6 registered participants and 15 expressions of interest.
- The goal is to have as many female presenters as possible to present on a range of topics.
  - Rebecca Taylor is coming from Tauranga, and Serena McDonald from Timaru. (Amazingly, Rebecca convinced the Tauranga Angling Club to give us a \$100 contribution towards the event.)
  - Rachel McNae, captain of the Fly Ferns, NZ women's competition fly fishing team, will join us for the weekend.
- We have approached our fellow Wellington clubs for a small cash contribution.
- Sponsorship is confirmed from Hunting & Fishing national office and Manic Tackle.
- We have invited Corina Jordan, the new CEO of Fish & Game, to be our keynote speaker.
- The club will host the BBQ on the Saturday evening. We will be asking your assistance with this and other activities.

Please share details of the event with your networks.

**Kapiti Women on The Fly** is on [womenonthefly.nz](http://womenonthefly.nz). Also on [www.facebook.com/WomenontheFlyKapiti](https://www.facebook.com/WomenontheFlyKapiti), [www.instagram.com/kapitiwomenonthefly/](https://www.instagram.com/kapitiwomenonthefly/) and at [www.kapitifyfishing.org/kapitiwomenonthefly](http://www.kapitifyfishing.org/kapitiwomenonthefly).

I can be contacted at [leigh.johnson@womenonthefly.nz](mailto:leigh.johnson@womenonthefly.nz)

## *Fly Casting Tuition by Gordon Baker*

Club member Gordon Baker is available for one-on-one casting tuition. Gordon is a casting instructor with Flyfishers International (USA). He is available to help beginners get off to a good start and to assist more experienced members improve their distance casting skills. Although not yet an approved two-handed casting instructor Gordon is a keen learner willing to share new skills.

Email Gordon [kiwiflyfisher@gmail.com](mailto:kiwiflyfisher@gmail.com) or phone 0274946487 to arrange a suitable time for a lesson. There is no charge.

## *Mid-Week Fishing trips by Hugh*

For those members who are lucky enough to be able to fish mid-week during the forthcoming season please confirm your desire to be included in the mid-week fishers email list to:

[hugh.driver.nz@gmail.com](mailto:hugh.driver.nz@gmail.com)

The emails are often sent out only giving very short notice to take advantage of the prevailing conditions and members availability, as an example the afternoon of day before the proposed trip.

**If you are interested in participating on any mid-week fishing trips, please email Hugh Driver with your contact details and you will be added to the email list.**



**Otaki Rive Upstream State Highway 1**

## *Fly Pattern of the Month Damsel Nymph*



**Damsel nymph**

This is an essential pattern for lakes and the slower parts of rivers and backwaters where weed beds develop. There is a range of designs that work. Some are very simple to tie. Most are olive, green or brown. Usually allowed to sink and then retrieved with a strip followed by a pause. Takes can be aggressive. The pattern below is a Dave Whitlock design from The Flyshop

- Hook:** TMC 5262 size 10-14
- Thread:** Black
- Tail:** Olive marabou
- Rib:** Copper or gold wire
- Body:** Olive dubbing
- Wing case:** Pearl Flashabou (or similar)
- Eyes:** Ex small mono
- Thorax:** Olive dubbing
- Legs:** Partridge or similar speckled

**Please note** that if the next fly-tying meeting is held at the **Waikanae Boating Club at 7.30pm Tuesday 11 October**, you will need to bring your club membership card. If you haven't received yours yet you may do so at either the club or fly-tying meeting.

*Feather Merchants (NZ) sponsor our fly-tying group. Go to their website [www.flyshop.co.nz](http://www.flyshop.co.nz) to see their wide range of top-quality tying materials, tools and flyfishing accessories.*



## **September Auction items**

At our Club meeting on 26 September, we will be auctioning off Graham Waters fly fishing gear including his boat, the proceeds from the auction will go back to Gloria and family.

The items listed below will be on display prior to the start of the meeting from 7:00pm, if you wish to review the boat prior to the meeting please contact Ralph Lane.

<b>Number</b>	<b>Item Description</b>
1	Body waders-Sierra stocking feet Large
2	Body Waders- lightweight size 8
3	Thigh waders
4	Boot leg warm- size 11ers
5	Hand net- new
6	Fishing jacket- XL
7	Fishing jacket- River Works medium
8	Fishing backpack- River Works as new
9	Mini spinning rod, reel, silver spool, line
10	Fly rod 9ft '10'
11	Jigging rod, Shimano reel, line
12	Fly rod 'Down Under', 9ft, 7/8
13	Spinning rod 'master' reel, line
14	Cane rod- 3 piece
15	Spinning rod, Shimano reel, line
16	Spinning rod, 'Strike', reel, line
17	Spinning rod, 'Okuma', reel, line
18	Fly rod 'Down Under', 9ft 5/6
19	Fly rod, Genesis, 5/6
21	Fly rod Trent 9ft
22	Surfcasting rod 'Monsoon'
23	Spinning rod and reel - old
24	Spinning rod 'Strike'
25	Boat rod, reel, line - Heavy 550
26	Reel, nylon line, 'aurora. Sea use
27	Reel, nylon line, 'Strike' surf reel
28	Trout reel, line, 'norstream'8/10
29	Trolling reel, line, 'Kilwell 200L
30	Fly reel and line- Taimer TL 6-8
31	Fly reel, line 'Taimer'- Performance 7/8
32	Fly reel, line 'Olympic 460
33	Fly rod 'Okuma 9ft 6/7 Steelhead in Tube
34	Spinning rod, reel Strike
35	Box fishing gear, lures, line
36	Fibreglass fly rod



## Graham Waters boat needs a new owner and home

The boat is 4m long and 1.4m beam in size. Two splits have been professional welded and sealed, the boat is registered.

The motor is an old 15HP Evinrude that has been regularly checked.



If any member is interested in having a look at the boat, please email Ralph Lane at [ralph.jill@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ralph.jill@xtra.co.nz) to arrange a day and time to view the boat.



## Club trip to Turangi in August by Krasimir Angelov



Looking downstream from Bridge Pool

Three of us headed to Turangi on Friday for a weekends fishing and it was not the best weekend for a club trip though due to rain and more rain.

Tongariro peaked at 600m<sup>3</sup>/s, so it was not an option, so we went straight to Hinemaiaia which was nice and clear, and three of us caught a few fish.



Next day even Hinemaiaia was a bit high and dirty, I still managed to catch 2 browns and a rainbow, unfortunately all were the size of my palm. Hooked a few proper fish too but lost them.

We were hoping Tongariro would be good for swinging some streamers on Sunday, but it started rising again.

On our last day, Sunday, we fished Hinemaiaia again, which had cleared since the day before. It wasn't my day, but the others managed to catch a few fish each. Being the only fishable river in the region, it was very busy, with anglers everywhere. Given the conditions, which were awful, I'll count this as a pretty successful trip, with fish caught on each of the days, and some new waters explored.



Waiotaka Steam spills over the State Highway 1

## ***Celebration of women in angling this Saturday - Fish and Game NZ***



Fish & Game NZ chief executive Corina Jordan is encouraging Kiwi women to get out on the water this Saturday (September 9, 2022) and celebrate International Women's Fly-Fishing Day.

This is the third year the event has been held. It is growing globally as women from around the world, and here in Aotearoa New Zealand, appreciate the multitude of benefits associated with fly fishing.

Jordan, who was recently appointed Fish & Game CEO (the first woman to hold the position), says only 10 per cent of the 100,000 licensed freshwater anglers in New Zealand are female.

"I want to see that demographic change," she says. "As an angler myself, I understand the positive impact trout fishing can have on your health and mental wellbeing. The act of casting a fly line is very therapeutic. "It is also incredibly rewarding to be able to go out and harvest healthy free-range food for your whanau. It'd be great for more women to experience that.

"Throw into the mix the stunning scenic rivers and lakes we have in New Zealand, where you can readily find trout, and it is truly an incredibly relaxing and rewarding pursuit."

Around the world, fly fishing is recognised for its rejuvenating qualities.

Casting for Recovery, a US initiative also going in New Zealand, helps women with breast cancer receive emotional, physical, and social support through fly fishing. In the US and UK, fly fishing programmes have been set up for veterans following studies that show the pursuit helps with recovery from injury as well as the mental and emotional trauma many suffer after experiencing armed conflict.

Leigh Johnson, a keen fly angler, says women's lives have become increasingly stressful given the challenges associated with juggling careers and families.

"Women need to give themselves time to decompress and destress. When I was running my business in Wellington it was an incredibly hectic period in my life. I wish I had been introduced to fly fishing sooner, rather than in my retirement, as it would certainly have helped me unwind and re-centre at a time when I needed balance."

Johnson is actively engaged in passing on the pursuit and what she's learned from it to other women. Supported by Fish & Game and the Kapiti Fly Fishing Club, Women On The Fly (WOTF)

is an initiative she helped set up recently to bring female anglers together to support each other and mentor new participants. They are holding their first fly fishing workshop for women in late November, in the Hutt Valley.

Meanwhile, both Leigh Johnson and Corina Jordan encourage women to get out on a local waterway this weekend.

"New Zealand has the greatest trout fishing resource in the world, in really beautiful locations. Most rivers and lakes in the country hold excellent populations of fish, including, for the majority of Kiwis, some easily accessible waterways very close to home," says Jordan.

"Those women who want to give it a go can find a wealth of tips and helpful getting started info on our website. All you need is a day licence and some basic gear to enjoy this wonderful pursuit on International Women's Fly-Fishing Day."

*For more information search 'Kapiti Women On The Fly' on Facebook, or visit the Fish & Game website: [www.fishandgame.org.nz](http://www.fishandgame.org.nz)*

## ***Exciting Season on the cards in Wellington Region! by Hamish Carnachan***



**Fish & Game officer Hamish Carnachan with a beautifully conditioned lower North Island rainbow trout**

### **Welcome to the first Lower North Lowdown fishing report for the 2022-23 season.**

Time to put last season behind us and focus on the cracker that lies ahead. There are a number of reasons we're excited about this coming season and why anglers should be to ...

While the 'big wet' last summer was challenging for anglers throughout the country, there's a silver lining in that it has set up this one superbly!

The low flows and warm water that can often take a toll on trout populations never eventuated last summer, resulting in elevated survival rates. Also, frequent fresh flush last summer

prevented water temperatures reaching the threshold where trout will stop feeding and, resultantly, drop condition. This meant most fish were super fit heading into the gruelling winter period.

Those of us who indulged in winter fishing will attest to how healthy the trout were... it takes months to put condition back on after spawning but the trout we've been catching are top notch. So, with more fish making it through summer, and more fish in healthy condition for the rigorous spawning period, recruitment will almost certainly be higher than normal in many catchments which bodes well for future years.

### **Grab Your Licence and Get Amongst it**

**The countdown to Opening Day is well and truly on, with only six days 'til the season starts on Saturday, October 1, 2022.**

Seldom does the season kick off on a Saturday, so this year there's a really great excuse to make a special occasion out of the start of the season - team up with family and mates, hit some water you might not otherwise get to so early on, plan an overnigher ...

However, you choose to make the most of the new season, don't leave it to the last minute to [get your licence](#).

#### **Here's a checklist to help get you set for Opening**

- 2022-23 Whole season licence.
- Clean fly-line and check for cracks – replace if required.
- Replace lost flies, nymphs, and lures from last season.
- Check hooks and sharpen if required.
- Test your waders for leaks.
- PRACTICE your casting, get out on the lawn, and throw a few loops!
- Plan your opening day.
- Stay safe out there on the water.

**[There were some standout fisheries last season and we're picking these to fire again for 2022-23.](#)**

#### **Here are a few Top picks and some potential options for Opening weekend.**

The **Manawatu River**: It fished superbly last season, particularly above the gorge. While the fish aren't generally huge, there are plenty of browns and rainbows in the 2-4lb range and they were super healthy.

The **Rangitikei River**: This fished well throughout its length in 2021-22 but the middle reaches upstream of Vinegar Hill are scenically stunning and have excellent fish numbers. Our trout counts up around Springvale and Mangaohane were very good again.

**Lower Ruamahanga River**: This highly modified stretch of water isn't the prettiest trout fishing spot but in terms of sheer numbers and variability of catch it would be in the top 10 in the country.

The **Otaki and Ohau** rivers: The trout populations in these neighbouring rivers have really bounced back after a couple of lean years which is great to see! Our drift dives last summer revealed the section below SH1 on the Otaki holding excellent numbers of large trout.

### *Allowing for serendipity – Sometimes it pays to ignore experience by John Juracek*



I'm a firm believer that experience and knowledge play key roles in our angling success. They give us a leg up on, say, the rank beginner, whose experience and knowledge by definition are limited, shallow. But I also believe there are times when experience and knowledge can work against us, when they conspire to hamstring success instead of promulgate it.

If we are alert and attentive when we're fishing, the accumulation of our experience over time equips us with an understanding of fish behaviour, insect activity patterns, seasonal rhythms, and the influences of various kinds of weather. It becomes possible to predict—often with uncanny accuracy—where and when to find the best fishing.

As these predictions come to pass time and again, the lines of thinking that begat them can become reinforced and rigid. A certain narrowing of thought takes place. Tunnel vision of the mind if you will. I've watched friends succumb to the effects of this phenomena many times. They end



up going fishing only under a set of conditions considered to be “optimal” or “peak”. Lacking those conditions, they deign never to leave the house. Whither then the chance for serendipity? I mean, as far as I can tell, not going fishing pretty much guarantees not catching anything.

I fall into this trap now and then myself. Here’s an instance where I dodged it—barely. It was a mid-June day, and after arriving home from the morning shift at the fly shop, I felt the urge to go fishing. My kitchen clock read 1:00 p.m. Now, the afternoon was already hot and sunny—exactly the kind of afternoon that, when it comes to fishing, my experience says to dismiss outright.

But the season was still young, and I was antsy, so into the car went my gear. Fighting my better judgement, the whole way, I drove to the Madison River north of town. I figured my afternoon would likely amount to nothing more than a nice walk along the river but, hey, at least I’d be fishing. And for two long hours under a sun-shot sky, that’s exactly what I got—a nice walk. Upriver. Quite a long way.

Then, while rounding an undistinguished bend, I spied what appeared to be the remnants of a riseform. I stared the spot down. Five minutes passed; nothing showed. Knowing I had nothing to lose by making a few casts, I worked my way into position and offered up a Pale Morning Dun. As my second cast curled downstream, a rather large trout rose up and summarily inhaled my fly. A spirited fight ensued, culminating in the netting of a beautiful female brown trout.

For the remainder of the afternoon, I never saw another fish, never caught another fish. My intuition had essentially been correct—this was not an afternoon for hatches, there would be no feeding fish. But by intentionally disregarding what experience and knowledge were telling me, I remained open to the possibility of serendipity.

A serendipity manifested in shades of copper, yellow and red—none of which I’ll soon forget. Indeed, that lone trout was a powerful, telling reminder that sometimes experience and knowledge can take you only so far.

### ***3 Tips to Improve your Streamer Fly Fishing by Sean McCormick***



As an Older Fly-Fishing Guide and Fly Tyer, I Am Always Interested in a “Better Way to Build a Mouse Trap.”

Sometimes I make small changes to fly patterns I have used for years, sometimes I go for the start-from-scratch model and create something unlike anything I have seen before.

Fly tyers tend to have a unique way of looking at fly construction, and it is often a merger of the past and present that gives us exciting next-generation patterns and techniques for using them.



These innovations keep things interesting and often result in a new pattern or technique that performs better on the water.

Here are a few thoughts that might spur you to try something just a little different to improve your fly designs.

### **1. Innovate to Make an Effective Streamer Pattern Great**

Growing up in Maine during the 1970s was an interesting time. Good dry fly anglers were limited as were the feathers and hooks to tie them. There were none of the great floating lines and leaders we have available today. Nymph anglers were virtually non-existent. Most anglers would still swing wet flies, which remain an effective tool for trout and landlocked salmon anglers, but by far streamers were and had been the most popular method for fly anglers targeting trout and landlocked salmon.

Gray Ghosts, Black Ghosts, Nine-Three Streamers, and Muddler minnows were all popular and were easy to purchase at fly shops, hardware stores, or even a local drug store. It was also easy to get the materials to tie feather wing streamers for an average angler. While still effective, we have much better choices today in materials and equipment that allow anglers to use streamers more successfully than ever before

#### [Blasts From the Past: Adding a Modern Touch to Classic Fly Patterns](#)

Early in my guiding career I was exposed to a new pattern that gave a lot of lifelike movement in the water. The Gartside Soft Hackle has three materials: a Flashabou tail, palmered marabou body, and a collar of mallard flank that allows the fly to keep a minnow profile in the water. It was a great pattern but was limited because it contained very little weight to sink the fly. Anglers had to live with this limitation by changing fly lines often if water depth varied by more than a couple feet. Guiding out of a drift boat on a big river meant that I might be okay with a rig for a while but would soon be in water that was too deep for the streamer and line sink rate to be fished effectively.

A change came about with the advent of brass and tungsten coneheads. The fly, when tied with a conehead, had a better sink rate, and added a jiggling up and down motion when clients fished it. The change made the fly much more effective for both cold water and warm water species. It still had a flaw though: The fly had to have dubbing against the rear of the cone to hide the wraps at the rear of the cone. The cone also eliminated effectively placing eyes on the streamer. Eyes are extremely important for me when tying my streamers. [Eyes](#) are a target for a predator and trout often slam a minnow's head to disable it, then turn to finish the job.

Upon the advent of the innovative [Fish-Skull Baitfish Head](#), I incorporated the [Baitfish Head](#) into many of my streamers. The Baitfish Head is keel weighted to ensure my streamer stays upright and the included [Living Eyes](#) add that additional lifelike touch for my streamer patterns.

The Baitfish Head / Living Eyes combo allowed all the problems of the coneheads to go away and made an effective, attractive fly that is simple to tie. Made with different colour schemes, this single pattern is my go-to streamer when with clients on the river. We have caught everything from large browns. landlocked salmon, rainbow trout and brook trout.



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While we have landed loads of big fish on this fly, strangely some of the smallest trout and bass I have netted while guiding over the past 26 years have eaten this fly; at times the fish was smaller than the fly itself. I always wonder what such a small fish is thinking when it attacks a fly that is bigger than itself.

## 2. . Explore New Ways to Fish Streamer Fly Patterns

One of my favourite streamer fishing tactics I use often is one I stumbled onto a few years ago when fishing with my son Michael and my good friend Dean. While sitting in the boat anchored, both Michael and Dean were getting follows on almost every cast by brown trout and landlocked salmon. The fish would rarely take the fly but were extremely interested in it! I put a dropper tied to the bend of Michael's streamer on about 24 inches of 5X tippet and attached a #20 shop vac nymph (a small #20 [Pheasant Tail Nymph](#) with a [Nymph-Head Evolution Mayfly Swimme & Burrower](#) head works well). We had a fantastic day with those two flies with each angler netting around 30 fish. It might be counterintuitive to us for a predator to eat a nymph that is swimming quickly behind a streamer, but it is often very productive here in the late autumn

### [Fly Selection: How to Choose the Right Streamer Colour for Any Fishing Situation](#)

We have all had a good fish that we missed because we did not have control of our fly line. Occasionally a big fish will pounce on the streamer almost as soon as it touches the water. I like to be prepared for that by making an extra stripping guide with my thumb and forefinger on my line hand. This method allows an angler to have the fly line in hand, fully in control to always allow for a quick hookset. This practice can also allow the caster to make an abrupt change to a cast when fishing the bank by suddenly stopping the cast before it lands in a bush, simply by closing your fingers. It is often a small detail such as this that can pay big dividends for an angler.

It's a lot of fun to experiment with different techniques while fishing with streamers, so get out and give it a try but remember to use all your senses to keep track of what's going on. It's not unusual for a fish to take your streamer fly without you feeling it. A flash or strange line movement can alert you to strike. This is especially common with smallmouth bass. Their takes, even on streamers, can be quite subtle.

If your fly is in the water, always be alert to everything happening around your fly. You might be surprised at the growth in your fly-fishing game.

### 3. Think Like Prey for Better Streamer Fly Fishing



I get clients of all skill levels when guiding for trout and salmon here in Maine. Some of them do not have much experience fly fishing or fish mostly ponds for trout and bass. When fishing a streamer fly in the river, I like to tell anglers to think like a “crippled” minnow. That means changing you retrieve pattern often to give the fly a chance to sink deeply and jump up unexpectedly, much like a wounded fish might do.

A [Fish-Skull Baitfish Head](#) incorporated in my streamers make giving a fly the action of a wounded minnow easy. Simple rod tip movements and changing the speed of retrieve help an angler make their fly swim like the real thing.

I often have anglers mend their lines, which can help slow their fly in the strong river currents, allowing it to settle deep in a hole. The opposite holds true when banging a bank or fishing the steamer in shallow riffle water. In this case, you need to retrieve your fly quickly or it will be hung on the bottom. With a quick retrieve you can often incite a reaction strike from a predator. The fish must react immediately and eat your fly, or it will quickly lose out on that meal. That same effect can be accomplished by tucking the rod under one arm and stripping with both hands as fast as you can. Remember, no matter how quickly you think you are stripping your fly line, predatory fish can easily swim much faster.

#### [The Art of Stripping Streamers: Fly Fishing Tactics](#)

For me, one of the biggest improvements for streamer fishing came with the advent of fluorocarbon leaders. When fluorocarbon first came out there were problems with tying secure knots and the cost for a spool of tippet was high. After numerous trips to different parts of the country on spring creeks fishing for trout, I quickly became aware of its value when fishing subsurface patterns. Fluorocarbon allows the use of strong tippet that is abrasion resistant, low stretch, and nearly invisible under the water surface, which really helps you convince a predator that your fly is something that needs to be eaten. I believe it accounts for a high number of additional hook-ups above using regular nylon leader material.

## *A Question of rods: Is Old and Slow the Way to Go? By Todd Tanner*



What would you say if you turned on the 2022 Winter Olympics and the majority of the men and women competing in the slalom were using skis designed in the '70s and '80s? How would you react if most of the world's top skiers eschewed modern skis, boots, and bindings, and relied on equipment that most of us would consider either dated or irrelevant?

Okay, hold that thought for just a minute.

A decade ago, I wrote a story on the world's best overall trout rods. As part of my research for that piece, I recorded a whole bunch of detailed casting measurements. I wanted to find out how short a line I could throw accurately with each particular rod, and how long a line, as well as each rod's sweet spot for my personal casting stroke.

At the time, I was struck by how similar those high-end rods were when I compared them to each other, and how the measurements didn't vary all that much. There were differences from rod to rod, of course, but those differences were relatively small. I remember thinking that our trout rods — I was comparing top-of-the-line 9' 5 weights — had reached a new pinnacle of design and performance. In fact, I held that view right up until the very end of the rod trials ... at which point I did something that wasn't part of my original plan.

Just to satisfy my curiosity, I grabbed an old 9' 5 weight Winston IM6 — my long-time 5 weight of choice for my personal fishing — and ran it through its paces out on the lawn. Amazingly, I found that my old fly rod not only cast a short line more effectively than any of the newer models, but it also threw a longer line. And it had a wider sweet spot — the range of distances where I could feel the rod load and unload, and where the rod eventually seemed to disappear in my hand.

How could that be, I wondered? How could a rod designed decades ago outperform the very best modern rods?

I thought about it, and thought about it some more, and chalked it up to familiarity. I decided that I'd fished that rod so much, and so often, that my muscles and my style had meshed perfectly with that one model. That was the only explanation that made any sense, and I was convinced that my experience with that Winston must be an anomaly.

Then, just a few days ago, I had a conversation with Pat McCabe. Pat is a beautiful caster — he learned to cast decades ago from fly fishing luminaries Mel Krierger and Andy Puyans — and he'd just entered his very first casting competition near his home in the Bay Area. Pat walked me through the entire experience, and I found his descriptions of the event fascinating. Then, when he eventually finished up, I asked him the one question that immediately popped into my head.

“What rods,” I wanted to know, “were all those excellent competition casters using? Were they casting the latest Sage models, or new Scotts, or new Winstons? Were they relying on Orvis rods, or Loomis rods, or Thomas & Thomas rods, or Hardy rods, or any other major brand? Or were they all using custom models?”

Pat's answer literally blew me away. He told me that most of the competition casters at the tournament seemed to prefer old Fenwick rods. Based on what he saw, the most popular rod at the event was an ancient Fenwick HMG.

Wow!

It immediately struck me that nobody at a fly-casting competition is going to choose a rod because of marketing hype, or looks, or reputation. Not in a million years. They're going to be laser focused on whichever rod will give them the best chance to win the competition.

Then I thought back ten years to that old Winston IM6 outperforming those newer, pricier rods and I asked myself what was really going on.

Long story short, I called John Juracek and filled him in on Pat's experience. For those of you who don't know John, he is one of the finest casters on the planet. He may also be the single finest fly-casting instructor alive today. Then I asked him for his thoughts. Here, in his own words, is how John responded:

“Pretty interesting, isn't it, Todd? You're not alone in being surprised about the rod preferences of serious tournament casters. Most people are.

I think a big reason for the 'surprise' factor stems from the implicit cultural assumption that anything 'new' is always superior to something 'old.' Now truth be told that assumption rests on pretty sound footing — a list of current products that function better than their 45-year-old counterparts would be beyond extensive, to say the least. But fly rods are a different animal. Most of the qualities that make a fly rod 'great' flow not from the materials used in its construction or any particular method of construction, but from the design of the rod itself—that is, the rod's action, the shape of its bend.

Here lies the crux of the matter: There hasn't been a whole lot new in rod design for a long, long time. And really, how could there be? There are only so many practical shapes in which to make a fly rod bend, and so many degrees of flex, and the builders of old explored all of them. Indeed, rod action exists independent of material — any action rod, from slow to fast, can be made out of any rod material — and over the last, say, hundred years, has been. So, every generation of anglers since at least the start of the 20th century has always had the full gamut of rod actions to choose from. Modern day rod designers continue to experiment with and put to use new materials and methods, but when it comes to rod design itself, they move over well-trodden ground.

So, to your question of why many tournament casters — champions Chris Korich and Maxine McCormick, among them — end up competing with 1970s era Fenwick fly rods,

it's simple. Because design trumps material and construction. In other words, rod action matters, and it matters deeply. Their chosen Fenwick's meet a set of criteria that today's rods largely don't.

For anglers unfamiliar with these Fenwick rods, they're 8.5 foot, full-flexing rods, bending deep into the butt. This slow action allows the rod to load smoothly and easily at all distances, but especially in close. This communication with the caster is important for accuracy. The 8.5-foot length is preferred over 9-foot models for better accuracy (errors in stroke plane aren't magnified as much as they would be with a longer rod). Slower rods can also be cast with a slow stroke, which for many casters allows for greater accuracy. Those are a few of the reasons for why these rods are popular among tournament casters. Hope this explanation helps.

In retrospect, John's response made a ton of sense. Tournament casters are always going to pick rods that excel at accuracy and distance. It just never occurred to me that slower action rods from a bygone era would outperform the newer, stiffer, hi-tech models that are ubiquitous today.

In light of this reality, it seems as if there are two questions every single fly fisher should ask themselves right now. If today's fly rod manufacturers are truly focused on producing high performance rods, why aren't the world's finest casters using them when they compete? And if slower action rods — rods like the old Fenwick HMG — are outperforming modern rods, why aren't we seeing more manufacturers building rods that replicate those slower actions?

I don't claim to know the answer to either question, but I'm hoping that some of the major rod manufacturers will read this piece and take the time to share their thoughts on the subject. I'd love to hear what they have to say.

In the meantime, I really do feel like I just flipped on the upcoming Winter Olympics only to learn that the world's finest skiers are coming out of the gate using vintage 1970s equipment. So, what's next? Are cassette tapes and disco balls about to make a comeback?

## ***What's the Right Length for a Trout Rod? By Philip Monahan***

**Question:** *I understand that you might want a really short rod for small streams and a 10-footer for float-tube fishing or steel heading, but when you're buying a trout-weight rod (say 4 through 7), how do you decided whether you want an 8-1/2-footer or a 9-footer? Most companies offer the rods in both lengths. Does the slight difference in length really make a difference? If so, what?*



**Answer:** Well, as is my wont in these situations, I've thrown the question to experts around the globe to see what they think about the relative merits of these very common rod lengths.

**Tom Rosenbauer**, author of the *Orvis Guide to Fly Fishing* and *Orvis Guide to Small-Stream Fly Fishing*:

I think it makes a difference if you plan on doing a lot of nymphing or fishing dries across tricky currents. I can cast as far as needed with an 8½-foot rod, but it's the mending and line control



where I sometimes feel hindered with the shorter rod. If in doubt, I'd say always go with the 9-footer. The weight difference these days is minimal, and if you are choosing between an 8½-foot and a 9-foot rod, chances are you are not worried about tight casting spots. Even for smaller Eastern rivers like the Battenkill or Willowemoc, I use a 9-footer.

**Jim Bartschi**, *president of Scott Fly Rod Company:*

Yes, 6 inches do make a difference, most notably in the swing weight, or *perceived* weight, of the rod. The shorter rod will feel substantially lighter in the hand and through the casting stroke. Even 3 or 4 inches make a difference.

We tend to view rods between 8½ and 9 feet as “dry-fly style” rods that are very comfortable and easy to cast. They generate high line speed and are very accurate. They aren't our first choice for fishing applications that require lots of roll casting and mending, or for casting some of the bigger trout rigs seen on rivers today—like double streamers or large indicators with multi-fly rigs underneath them—but for more “typical” applications, like fishing a hatch or hopper-dropper fishing, a trout rod under 9 feet but at least 8.5 feet is ideal.

**Dave Kumlien**, *Guide and outfitter and head of Trout Unlimited's Aquatic Nuisance Species program:*

Good question! Having sold fly rods for over 25 years, it is a question I was often asked. My response is that from a fishing and casting standpoint, I don't think there is that much difference between the 8½ and 9 feet. To me, the key decision is the choice of line weight. Choosing the line weight appropriate for the size of flies one fishes, the average size of fish one is pursuing, and the conditions under which one fishes i.e., lots of wind, long casts with big flies on big water or smaller flies under more delicate conditions, is to me the most important choice. I suppose the physicist could calculate the advantages of 6 more inches, but I can't say that I've ever really attached that much significance to the difference.

I've always told folks to cast the rods they were considering buying, and to purchase the one that felt the best to them, and which best seemed to fit the fishing they most often liked to do. In other words, if a customer owned a drift boat and liked to float our big Montana rivers like the Madison and the Yellowstone throwing larger dries, nymphs, and streamers, I'd generally recommend the 9- to 9½-foot rods. If the angler did a lot of wading, liked fishing the smaller streams, I'd generally recommend the 8- to 8½-footers.

**Larry Kenney**, *fiberglass-rod builder, and co-founder of Scott Fly Rod Company:*

Rod length choices seem to be governed as much by fashion and a pack-mentality as by anything else. A 9-foot 5-weight rod is the current default choice for most trout fishing because that's what everyone recommends, what's frequently stocked, and what therefore sells the most—particularly to folks who aren't really confident about what they need. That configuration wasn't always the case. From the 1960s to early 1970s, the fly-fishing world was fixated on short rods, a reaction, I imagine, to the long and rather heavy rods of the pre-WWII era and to an emerging dry-fly culture. Line-weight choices were different forty years ago, too, with more anglers fishing the equivalent of 6- and 7-weights for trout. Did folks fishing 7½-foot 6-weights take fewer trout? I doubt it.

Graphite made long rods for light lines lighter and more practical, and the pendulum swung back again. We sold them as offering better line control and for the opportunity to fish a more delicate

light line, but they also sold because they were new. The American angler loves “new”—it’s a promise of success and a great excuse for not practicing with what you already have while still hoping for better results. Long graphite rods also sold because more Eastern anglers were coming West to fish larger western rivers; there’s something about big water that makes you feel positively under gunned if you’ve got a little rod, despite the fact that the fish may be right in front of you.

In any event, the question isn’t whether you should buy an 8½-foot or a 9-foot trout rod, but rather what rod will best handle a reasonable sample of the situations your fishing presents and do so in a manner that you enjoy. I’d weight both those criteria equally, by the way. If you spend a lot of time high-sticking or fishing an indicator, a 9-foot rod might make sense simply because the length offers easy mending and line control, regardless of distance. But if you’re fishing dries at normal distances—which generally don’t exceed 40 feet—you might be happier with an 8-foot rod, which can be quicker to put in play when a fish takes. You might also choose to limit the size of fly and the distance you can effectively fish it and use your 7-foot 4-weight rod everywhere you go. The fashion police will be annoyed, but why should you care.

Another solution, of course, is to own a bunch of rods, so you can pick and choose, and fret endlessly over what to use. Or both. Rod manufacturers will love you, and it’s all grist for the outdoor writer’s mill.

**Brian Grossenbacher**, *Montana-based guide, and photographer:*

If you plan to fish out of a drift boat, I highly recommend going with the longer rod. Surprisingly, the difference between an 8½- and a 9- foot rod is monumental when fishing out of a drift boat. Not only does the longer rod aid in mending line, but it also helps keep the flies above the anglers’ and guide’s head. Another benefit of the longer rod for the fisherman in the back of the boat is that it keeps the fly line clear of the oars much better than an 8½-foot rod.

**Brant Oswald**, *Livingston-based guide, and writer:*

First of all, let’s agree that the fate of the world is not resting on the decision between an 8½- and a 9-foot trout rod. (And you haven’t even mentioned the issue of 8-foot, 8-inch, and 8-foot, 9-inch rods.) But there are differences, and anglers with even a modicum of casting experience will be able to notice some of them. The first is that casters often find shorter rods to be more accurate, especially at shorter casting ranges. (For a more detailed discussion of this issue, take a look my article on [casting accuracy](#).)

The shorter rod is also a bit lighter—the actual weight difference between an 8½- and a 9-foot rod (comparing similar designs and hardware, as with different lengths of the same model of rod) is minimal, but casters often find the shorter rod “feels” noticeably lighter and quicker. Part of this is physics, but part of it is also a reflection of a rod designer’s desire to make a certain rod perform in a particular way. It is not at all unusual for different lengths of rod—in the same product line by the same manufacturer—to differ slightly in terms of both rod action and stiffness. My advice for the buyer: compare the different lengths side-by-side if possible and cast each one to make sure it has the casting performance and feel that you’re after.

Of course, there is an argument for the 9-foot rod: 6 inches of extra rod length offers a slight advantage in mending and line control, especially at longer fishing distances (and the weight difference and accuracy issues, says the 9-foot rod fan, are not that big a deal.)

What do I do personally? I base my decision on the size of water I am fishing. I fish 8½-foot 3- and 4-weight rods on smaller spring creeks but switch to a 9-foot 4-weight for fishing bigger tailwaters like the Missouri or Bighorn, where longer casts (and longer mends) are more typical. I think an 8½-foot 5-weight is perfect for wade fishing on medium-sized freestone streams, as the angler usually wades reasonably close to the target, but I almost always fish a 9-foot rod out of a drift boat.

**Carl McNeil**, *New Zealand-based casting instructor and filmmaker:*

Keeping in mind that a fly rod is simply a flexible lever, a longer lever will do a more effective job of throwing a longer line, all things being equal. The extra length also offers some advantages when mending and roll casting. However, longer rods make things a little more difficult when it comes to netting fish, presenting casts in and around overhanging vegetation, and fishing smaller streams. So, in a nutshell, if distance, mending, and reach were important to me, I'd go for the longer rod. If I was fishing smaller streams with lots of overhanging trees and vegetation, the shorter rod would prove far more versatile.

**Steve Hemkens**, *Orvis Rod & Tackle:*

To know is to love. 8½-foot rods tend to be really sweet... whether it's a 4-weight or a 5. There is something about that extra 6 inches to trade up to a 9-footer that changes the character of a rod. In most series, regardless of manufacturer, it's usually the 8½-foot 5-weight that's the sweetest of the lot. Supremely balanced, smooth, great feel, plenty of power.

The reason for this is pretty straightforward. To get a 9-foot rod that performs from tip to butt, you need a wider flag, and more material along the whole length of the rod than you would for the same rod that's 6 inches shorter, so the resulting tool is heavier in the hand. This is easy to see when you cast a 8½-, a 9-, a 9½-, and a 10-foot rod all of the same family (assuming they all follow the same design criteria). Invariably each 6-inch increment adds weight and clumsiness—to extent that if it were just a question of casting performance, weight in hand, and pure joy to fish, the 8½-rod would win every time. The trade-off is that when you're wading deep, nymphing bigger water, or fishing out of a drift boat, that extra "reach" and additional power that a 9-footer (or more) affords is worth the extra weight in hand. So, if you wade-fish small to medium rivers and want one rod that can cast dries, nymphs and streamers, and that you'll love more than any rod you've ever owned, a 8½-foot 5-weight is hard to beat.

**Matthew Long**, *guide based in Livingston, Montana:*

I am astounded by the number of people who think that a shorter rod is more effective than a longer rod, regardless of the size of the water you are fishing. I grew up in central Pennsylvania, where a longer rod meant spooking fewer brook trout. After working as an outfitter/guide in the Paradise Valley area of Montana for the last 18 years, I still have the same opinion—9 feet is always better than 8½ feet. Tom Miner Creek, a small tributary of the Yellowstone, is as brushy as any little brook-trout stream on the East Coast that is covered with mountain laurel. If you learn how to sling-shot cast or be a dapper or jigger effectively while staying away from the creek you are fishing, you can catch a lot more fish. Bar none though, the most important reason for having a longer rod in your hand is to be in control of your drift. Reach casting and mending are the two of the most important fly-fishing skills that longer rods can help to improve.

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**Purpose:**

**To promote the art and sport of Fly Fishing.**

**To respect the ownership of land adjoining waterways.**

**To promote the protection of fish and wildlife habitat.**

**To promote friendship and goodwill between members.**

**To promote and encourage the exchange of information between members.**

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You are invited to attend our club meetings that are held on the **Fourth Monday** of each month.

The venue is the **Turf Pavilion Sport Grounds**, Scaife Street, Paraparaumu,

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Club Committee meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month and the meetings are held at the Waikanae Boating Club and start at 7:30pm.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

*Please remember that the club has two Five Weight 8'6" fly rods that members are welcome to use, just contact Malcolm Francis*

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