

My Favorite Fly – Articles by Members of the Doc Fritchey Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Dr. Kent Crawford Favorite Fly, The Clouser Crayfish - Spring – 2018

This story starts over 50 years ago in North Carolina. My father grew up on a farm in Ashe County, which is the northwestern-most county in the State with Tennessee to the west and Virginia to the north. There was a small stream, Obids Creek, running through the family farm and the stream had a few native brook trout.

When Dad started taking me trout fishing, I was a teenager. One of the places we would fish was Obids Creek.



Occasionally, we would catch a few, usually on live bait or on artificial lures. The hot lures seemed to be a wobble lure called the Helin Flatfish and in-line spinners like a Mepps. We would save these fish for the table and of course, that involved cleaning the catch, a job for me. I would routinely dissect the gut to see what the trout had been eating. Frequently, the stomach would contain a crayfish.

Fast forward to 1988. My spouse landed a job on the faculty at Penn State Harrisburg and I transferred to the Harrisburg office of the USGS. You can imagine that our move to central Pennsylvania was not entirely circumstantial because this area is known for its quality trout fishing.

Two Clouser Crayfish flies, one right side up and one upside down.

We bought a home in Derry Township which is next door to the Middletown/Royalton area . . . and who lives in Royalton but Bob Clouser, famous smallmouth bass fisherman, guide, fly shop owner, and fly inventor.

I knew of Bob Clouser's reputation and had heard of the Clouser Deep Minnow and the Clouser Crayfish patterns. Occasionally, I would go over to the Clouser Fly Shop in Royalton to stock up on flies, browse, and chat with the legend himself, Bob Clouser. Visiting the Clouser Fly Shop was like a trip to Mecca. Bob was (and still is) a very personable fellow who would gladly share his knowledge with whoever would listen. And I was taken by the flies he tied – especially the Clouser Crayfish.

The crayfish pattern that Bob Clouser invented was made to entice smallmouth bass. Lots of fishing articles point out that a staple of the smallmouth bass diet is crayfish. But, I figured these things should work for trout as well, especially given my experience with trout stomach contents as a teenager. So, I purchased a few Clouser Crayfish and tried them out on Pennsylvania trout streams.

Admittedly, I don't catch a lot of trout. But it seemed that I caught more trout on the Clouser Crayfish than on any other fly in my arsenal. And, in general, the trout on the Clouser Crayfish were larger than the normal trout I was catching. So, I began to gain confidence in the fly and to use it more often. Essentially, it became "My Favorite Fly."

Let's take a look at the fly to see why it might be effective. First of all, it looks like a crayfish. Note the pincers and the antenna on the Clouser imitation. Also note the palmered hackle which provides a good representation of the walking legs. Second, the fly is heavily weighted. Did you ever see a crayfish on the surface? No. They are bottom dwellers. That's where they live and that's where they stay. I think the weight on the artificial is one key to its success. The fly uses furry foam for the body and this material soaks up water and retains it, making it heavier still. Third, the fly is larger than your typical trout fly. I use the crayfish in size 10 and 8. And you know the old adage: "Big fly = big fish."

The fly is not simple to tie; there are many steps. Tying instructions can be found on line. Just search for "how to tie the Clouser crayfish." So, give it a try and good luck.

Rich DiStanislao's Favorite Fly, The Hendrickson Mayfly - Summer – 2018

With the advent of snowmelt and the start of green woodland undergrowth comes the anticipation of trout season in Pennsylvania. Among the first of the classic mayfly emergences is the *Ephemerella Subvaria*, commonly referred to as the "Hendrickson".



The Hendrickson Mayfly

These beautiful mayflies are typically seen on the water from early to mid-April, peaking around mid-May. They are well-distributed throughout Pennsylvania and New York trout streams. Overcast, misty days always seem to produce the best periods for catching a hatch. At hatch time, the Hendrickson nymphs (easily imitated with a size 12 hare's ear nymph pattern) swim to the surface of the stream in mid-afternoon to shed their shucks and emerge as duns (subimagos), and the trout can turn to feeding voraciously on the surface for these, taking both the crippled emergers and the newly hatched dun.

The male and the female duns are somewhat easy to distinguish, as the males are a bit larger and dark reddish in color, with dark smoke-colored wings, easily imitated on a size 12 hook, while the female is a pinkish tan color with the same dark wings, best presented on a size 14 hook. As if this wonderful event can't seem to get any better, it gathers a repeat surface eruption performance in the evening with the spinner fall. The spinners are a reddish-brown body with clear wings, on a size 12 or 14 light wire hook.

My favorite pattern for the Hendrickson is the parachute dun. Here is the pattern I prefer to tie:

Hook: Dry fly hook, size 12, barbless (Tiemco model 900 or Mustad 94845 or similar hook)

Thread: Rusty orange 8/0 unitthread or 12/0 Veevus

Tails: 3 or 4 fibers from a brownish-gray Coq de Leon feather, each tail fiber slightly longer than the hook shank. Before tying in the tail fibers, first build up a small ball of superfine reddish-brown poly at the bend of the hook.

Then tie the coq de leon fibers on the top of the hook shank, wrapping your tying thread into the ball, pressing the tail fibers into the ball. This will cause the tail fibers to separate a bit and angle upwards slightly

Body: For the abdomen, use a turkey biot, rusty colored, soaked for a few minutes in water to make it pliable. Tie the biot in by the tip, with the darker flue pointing up and away from the tyer, so as you wrap, the flue will create a segmented body appearance. Wrap the biot from the tail toward the eye, about 2/3 the length of the hook shank and tie off.

Wing: Dark dun colored poly yarn (I like Hi-Viz fibers) for a parachute post

Hackle: Medium dun-grizzly dry fly hackle. Tie in at the base of the parachute post, but don't wrap until after dubbing the thorax

Thorax: Reddish brown superfine poly, same as the ball tied in at the tail. Build the thorax around the parachute post, dub forward up toward the eye, leaving enough hook shank to anchor the hackle. Now wind the hackle around the parachute post, making about 4 turns. Tie off the hackle feather near the eye of the hook, leaving enough room to build a small head at the eye.

When finished, trim the parachute wing to length, roughly as long as the hook shank.

Stephan Vegoe's Favorite Fly, Ron K's Palmered Cricket - Fall 2018

A new job brought me to Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1981. Suddenly, I was no longer in lake country. I was in trout stream country. Ninety miles east from Saint Paul, Minnesota where I had been living brought a huge change in geology. Where Minnesota is filled with lakes, that's not the case in western Wisconsin. It's dairy country with spring creeks, and those small streams hold native brook trout and stocked browns. Better yet, the streams are home to mayflies.

However, I was not then and never had been a fly fisherman. I was a walleye fisherman. I grew up on a big lake out on the prairie in Lake Wobegon, Minnesota and had only caught a few brook trout in a local stream you could easily step across from bank to bank. And those brookies were all caught on worms and fried in butter.



During that first summer in western Wisconsin I met a lot of people while playing golf, including Dr. Skip Van Gordon, who asked if I fly fished. "No," I said, "but I have always wanted to." Skip volunteered to teach me. He took me to Elk Creek, twenty minutes west of Eau Claire and loaned me a fly rod and reel and stood next to me to teach me to cast to the brown trout that were rising to caddis flies against the bank. That's all it took. When I caught my first brown on an elk hair caddis, like that small trout, I was hooked.

Ron K's Palmered Cricket

That same summer I learned about a fly-fishing clinic weekend hosted by Gary Borger in northern Wisconsin, just two hours north of Eau Claire. I registered and Gary and his teenage son, Jason taught me about fly fishing for trout. Indeed, Jason Borger, probably fourteen at the time, took me from a novice to a "pretty good" fly caster in two days. I still cast a fly rod the way Jason Borger taught me to cast in the summer of 1981.

Skip Van Gordon introduced me to a bunch of fly fishermen, and I joined TU and became actively involved in the local chapter, which owned a small log cabin on Elk Creek. That small stream, smaller than Clarks Creek, became my go-to stream. If I was not playing golf, I was teaching myself to fly fish to rising brown trout in the evening on Elk Creek. It helped a lot that I was single and unattached.

I did not then tie flies (and still don't). Like now, I was then dependent on the kindness of friends (and strangers) for my trout flies. I paid for many but mostly I begged for flies (still do, in fact), and my friends were happy to help. Thirty-plus years ago, those friends in western Wisconsin were exceptional fly tiers, as are my friends in the Doc Fritchey chapter.

My main supplier was Ron Koscichek (and that's an approximation of how to spell his last name). Ron K. was a renowned bamboo rod builder, a superb fly fisherman, and an extraordinary tier. He gave and sold me dozens of what he called his "palmered cricket," and I mostly fished those when I was not using elk hair caddis flies. When I was getting ready to move to Lebanon County in 1987, Ron K. told me all I had to do to get more flies was to mail him a check and he would put his palmered crickets (size 14 to 20) in the mail to me, and I did that for four or five years. Those thirty-year-old flies are still in my fly boxes and still catching fish. I think I have a lifetime supply of those tiny fish catchers.

Although he invented this fly and named it in the late 70s, Ron K's palmered cricket is really a Griffith's Gnat. Side by side, Ron K's fly is almost identical to the legendary Griffith's Gnat. (For a closeup look at this renowned fly, see the article on George Griffith, one of the founders of *Trout Unlimited*, in the summer issue of *Trout Magazine*.)

My favorite memory of using My Favorite Fly was one spring evening on the Fox River in Northeastern Wisconsin. Four of us, including Ron K., were sitting on the bank watching for rising trout when a fish started to rise about forty yards straight out from us. Ron K. looked at me and said, "Your turn, rookie. Go get him." I asked what to use and he smiled and said, "Your favorite fly." I slowly worked my way into casting range, which then with my limited casting ability was not all that far and put Ron K's palmered cricket in front of that rising brown trout. He took it on the first presentation, and I landed him in front my three new best fishing friends. Thirty plus years later and I remember that evening like it was yesterday.

Bob Pennel's Favorite Fly, The Green Weenie – Winter 2019

My introduction to the Green Weenie came one day in the mid-1990s as I was finishing up what was not a very productive day of fishing on Clarks Creek. As I was stowing my tackle in the car, I got to talking with another angler from Lancaster who told me he had just had a great day fishing the Green Weenie. Since at that time I had only been into fly fishing for a few years and was still in need of a lot of help, I of course had to ask him to see this "fly" that I had never heard of before.



Well, that was the start of my love affair with the Weenie, and soon thereafter I found myself at a local fly shop buying the materials needed to tie this pattern. Initially, I used a straight shank hook and no bead head, but as I fished it more and more and talked with other anglers, eventually my version of the Weenie incorporated a curved pupa hook and tungsten bead head. The Weenie was most likely created to imitate the green inchworms that suspend themselves from overhanging tree branches on a very fine thread, often times falling into the water when the thread breaks. Or, as some have observed, it might also be mistaken for a green caddis larva.

Bob Pennell's Green Weenie

I don't know who was the first to create this pattern, or whether its name originated from the green hot dogs that Pittsburgh Pirate fans waved to jinx opponents and bring luck to their baseball team in the late 1960s, or possibly from the term used to denote that a Marine had been "screwed over" by the Marine Corps. . . but what I do know is that the Weenie is an incredibly effective "fly" that should have a place in every trout angler's fly box. And it works equally well to entice bluegills, and sometimes even bass.

There are just 4 materials needed to tie my version of the Weenie; size 10 or 12 curved pupa hook, gold tungsten bead head corresponding to the hook size, medium size chartreuse chenille, and matching color tying thread. Start by slipping the bead over the hook. Cut a piece of chenille about 1-1/2 inches long and tie one end in at the bend of the hook. Form a loop with the chenille about 1/4 to 5/16 inch in diameter and tie down with several wraps at the point where you first tied on. Wrap your thread up to the bead and let it hang there. Take the free end of the chenille and wrap it tightly around the hook up to the bead, making sure that you work it into the back of the bead. Secure the chenille with several wraps of thread, then do a couple of whip finishes to finish it off at the back of the bead and trim off any excess chenille.

That's all there is to it...now go catch some fish!

Rich DiStanislao's Second Favorite Fly – The Sulfur – Spring 2019

Growing up in a steel manufacturing town in western PA, I had little exposure to fishing, period. Monaca is an industrial town on the Ohio River, part of the "Steel Corridor" that stretched from the Mon Valley and continued well past the Ohio border. Every man I knew was a steelworker; including my father, all my uncles, all my neighbors. These were hardworking men, and any extra time off was spent either with family or in attending sporting events. To them, "outdoor sports" meant football and baseball. Many professional athletes played their high school sport in this area. My first career job landed me in Kittanning in rural western Pennsylvania. I was astonished that the town businesses and schools shut down during the start of deer season, and the kickoff of spring trout fishing infected the locals with wild-eyed "trout fever." I realized I had to get involved with this stuff or die a lonely death during these times. It was my good fortune that I connected with a group of guys who were all fly fishermen, and they accepted me as a dumb bunny who didn't know how to put on a pair of waders. I learned to fly fish as they were doing it, swinging a cast of three wet flies on a sinking line. To them, the season ended shortly after the final regular in-season stream stocking. During the second year of my newfound fly-fishing sport, I was fishing toward evening when I spied several fish coming up to the water's surface and taking some light-colored bugs. I didn't know what the bugs were, but I tied on a cream-colored fly that I had found in a tree branch earlier that day and cast it around. A couple of fish came up to look, but I didn't catch anything. Downstream I saw another fisherman catch 4 or 5 trout in rather quick succession, using a similar colored fly that floated. When things quieted down, I approached him and asked him what he was using. He recognized me as a "newbie", and he showed me what he had tied on and how he had fished it. He gave me one of his light-colored flies that he said

would catch fish during the next week or so, and he advised me to buy a book about "hatches". The rest is history.



The "Sulfur" Mayfly

Almost any evening toward dusk in late spring and early summer, you can experience light-colored mayflies triggering a surface feeding activity on most of our Pennsylvania trout streams. Overcast, cloudy days, particularly with intermittent periods of light drizzle, can also trigger sporadic hatches. These insects represent several species of ephemerella mayflies that we loosely refer to as "sulfurs" due to their body color. They range in color from pale cream, to light orange, to an intense sulfury yellow, to almost chartreuse green, and mostly in sizes from 14 to 18. To me, the "sulfur" hatch signifies the real start of the dry-fly fishing season. (Nymph fishermen love these, too, as the subsurface pheasant tails work very well, but this is another story and fly pattern in and of itself).

My favorite sulfur pattern is an emerger tied parachute style, fished as a dry fly:

Hook: Klinkhamer, size 16 – 18

Thread: Lightweight thread, 8/0 – 12/0, pale yellow color

Trailing shuck: a few white sparkle emerger fibers, about half the length of the fly body

Tail: about 6 fibers from a pale dun wet fly hackle feather, tied on top of the trailing shuck

Abdomen: Sulfur colored turkey quill fiber, wrapped from the tail toward the front of hook, up to the sharp shank bend

Wing: pale dun colored Hi-Viz fibers, tied as a parachute post

Hackle: high-quality pale dun colored dry fly hackle, tied parachute style

Thorax: Sulfur colored superfine synthetic dubbing