

PHWFF Fredericksburg

Program Contacts

Richard Barnett
Program Leader (PL)

Joe Holmes
Deputy Program Leader
(DPL)

Rita Atberg
Outreach APL

Bob Betts
Fly Tying APL

Alex Colonna
Fly Tying APL

John Dix
Fishing APL

Mike Cronrath
Participant Liaison APL

Andrea Stratton
Historian / Photo APL

Mike Weiss
Equipment APL

Dom LaPore
Treasurer

Andrea Statton
Photography APL

Greg Raines
IWLA Liaison



this issue

the Ripples P.1

Fish Stories P.2-3

Fish On! P.4

the Ripples (happenings, advise, counsel and support notes)

Dick: "Program Leader"

Well perhaps winter is behind us and we can begin to enjoy some warmer spring time fishing! I'm currently getting set for some exciting shad fishing with our Project, and trying to recover from some great experiences this winter in New Zealand and Colorado!

JD: "APL Fishing"

The arrival of April means shad and stripers have begun their trip up the 'Rapp for some reproduction festivities. These fish come in large groups ("pods") and are fished at using techniques that take full advantage of their hormonal "mine mine mine" state. Their arrival also means that smallmouth fishing and bass pond largemouth fishing is not too far away. Be safe on the river, check the USGS gauges. If you can't see what you're stepping into, I'd recommend you not step into it.

Dennis: "Fishing Report"

I checked out Hunting Run Reservoir this past weekend, since our lake/pond has been unproductive. I caught 8 medium sized bass and too many sunfish. There is some shore access and a decent pier. It is free to spotsylvania senior citizens. 8 bucks for year for youngsters! Could be a spot to try. Woods & waters rates it the third best bass lake in Virginia!

Mike C: "APL Participant Liaison" *If anyone needs transportation to any of our events, or even if someone needs someone to pet sit while they fish, please contact me! We want your participation!*

Mike W: "Equipment Corner"

We are well stocked on rods, reels, waders and boots of assorted sizes, vests and pack for fly gear. Always in need of flies for various outings, I pretty good shape as far as fly tying equipment and materials. We will work on restocking and preparing needed materials for new flies. If I am correct we have materials for most of the flies in the tutorial book we have been following. Open to any needs or suggestions as far as materials and equipment.

Mike W: "IWLA status - Fishing update at lassac Walton Pond- *No trout have been seen nor caught in the last few weeks! I know they all have not been caught! Fishing pick up a little bit on Easter Sunday. I caught a few small bass and many crappie and sunfish. Used a mix of golden retriever, olive/brown wooly bugger and zebra midge. Midge caught a lot of small sunfish. I was hoping for trout, but no luck.*

Congratulations to Alex Colonna, Joe Holmes & Mike Cronrath for their selection to a National level fishing trip to Montana!



Fish(y) Stories

Anatomy of a fish trip

Steelhead are called the fish of a 1,000 casts. It is a numbers game; the most critical variables in our control are how natural the drift is and how well we respond to a potential strike. We were primarily “nymphing” egg patterns, simulating steelhead or sucker (or other critter) eggs drifting along the stream bottom. Eggs flow naturally in a current, usually at the bottom of the stream; it was our job to simulate that. IF we did, and IF we got a nice hook set, it might just be one of those 8-10 steelhead. Practice, practice, practice refines nymphing technique.

- JD



Fredericksburg VA Steelheading!

The Fredericksburg PHWFF traveled to Erie PA, March 22-25 to experience fishing an “apex predator”, the steelhead trout! Six very lucky volunteers and participants – John Dix, Rob Crum, Richard “Turkey” Stratton, Mike Cronrath and Chuck Harless, met PA native Alex Colonna in Erie, after carpooling from Fredericksburg on Thursday, and spent two days in the Conneaut, OH and Elk Creek area plying steelheads with different color egg and bead patterns, along with some droppers of nymph and streamer patterns. Most of the fishing style was dead drift from a roll cast, with some occasional high sticking and Spey fishing from Alex. To maximize the experience, Steelhead Alley Outfitters were selected to lead the way – and the group really got lucky when two of the best guides ever – Tim Hess, an Army veteran, and Bobby Fragale, quickly showed us the way!

On the first day, public water along the Conneaut was thoroughly fished – the Conneaut is a spring run creek, and it did not disappoint! Starting in slightly frigid 34 degree or less water, with air temps in the low 20’s, the entire team managed to hook up on at least one steelhead by early afternoon, in addition to some humongous suckers that were actually a lot of fun to catch. Most fish were pulled from underwater ledges in moderate water – the wading was mostly shallow, and the fish somewhat flighty depending on their mood (and temp I suspect!).

On the second day, fishing concentration went to the Elk Creek, on a private stretch of extremely scenic, high shale banks curving along a slightly low waterway. The Elk is not to be missed if fishing the area, if nothing but for its beauty, but according to our guides, is a spring fed creek better for fishing in the fall– and while several steely were indeed netted, the catching was slower than the first day. We also had a bit more of a challenge keeping the rod guides clear of ice early on, which likely slowed some drift times.

All in all, the experience was a once in a lifetime event. As we “debriefed” each other over some excellent dinners including one at the Elk Creek Inn, we all agree that the best part of the trip was the genuine fellowship and experiences, both fishing and military, we shared with each other and our newfound best friends Tim and Bobby while plying our trade in the water. We also had a chance to meet with some of the local PHW participants at dinner, and thoroughly enjoyed the active exchange of fishing information and ideas. A special thanks goes out to JD for all the added planning and coordination needed to make this trip a reality, and to PHW at large for making it all possible!

Some “hot” fishing stories & experiences from the past few months.





TIE IT ON! – Bob Betts

There is no doubt in my mind catching a fish on a fly you have tied greatly enhances the fly fishing experience. Besides creating a delicacy that would entice a fish to strike a hook, fly tying builds fine motor skills, focus, and concentration, which are inclusive in the mission of Project Healing Waters, which supports the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans. Fly tying also promotes creativity. Over a year ago, three of us who are experienced fly tiers, Joe Homes, Alex Colonna, and I met to build a fly tying program for our participants and volunteers. We agreed to build the program based on progressive skill-building and familiarity of materials. Instead of the laborious task of preparing tutorials, we discovered a manual with DVD was already in existence, which is written for Project Healing Waters, [Step-by-Step Beginner Fly Tying Manual & DVD](#), by Ryan Keyes. In my many years of fly tying and acquiring a considerable library on the subject, I find this manual to be the very best book I've seen for beginners of fly tying. Everything we could possibly want to teach a beginner is contained within it. The manual is loaded with techniques and includes references and charts, which would serve the fly tier well beyond the patterns given in the manual. So, we purchased a number of copies and made them available for our students and commenced classes based on this manual. We've followed the manual with its progressive instruction, but we made exceptions for those fly fishing events where we needed to tie flies for seasonal opportunities or specific patterns. Examples are the Clouser Deep Minnow for the Spring shad run, the Erie, PA steelhead trip, and the red Zebra Midge, which was remarkably effective at the Suzy Q Farm event.

Joe Homes arranged more practical venues for our classes with the second Tuesday of each month at the Fredericksburg VFW and the last Saturday morning of each month at IWLA, which combines fly tying and later fly fishing at the IWLA pond. These venues spread out distances and locations to make it easier for participation in these classes.

I've led fly tying demonstrations with our participants and volunteers at the Rapidan Trout Unlimited Fly Fishing Show and the invitational at the first anniversary celebration at Cabela's in Gainesville, VA. The Rapidan show always achieves donations, and a few sign-ups, but this year a representative from the Gainesville Cabela's at this show later contacted me to offer a grant from the store's Outdoor Fund and opportunity to demonstrate fly tying at the store. PL Dick Barnett followed up on this offer of a grant and submitted the application to National Project Healing Waters. After National's blessing, it will be sent to Gainesville Cabela's. We don't know how much the grant will be, but it is hoped to be significant.

At some point, I would hope to see our tiers participate in the Quantico Fly Tying Marathon. This event has been held annually in the rotunda at the USMC Museum during April and managed by the Quantico and Fort Belvoir programs. Experienced tiers from all over the region and beyond tie and contribute thousands of flies for Project Healing Waters programs coast-to-coast. I've been participating ever since it started five years ago. This year I contributed 18 dozen flies, which ranged from #22 midges, Zebra Midge, Disco Midge, and Mercury Blood Midge to #4 and #1/0 Clouser Deep Minnows. I usually tie flies that have been proven effective on local waters that I or my friends have fished with great success.

While at the Marathon, I ran into Julie Keene, National Project Healing Waters. She offered to teach the Rainbow Warrior for us at one of our classes. We scheduled her for the 8 May class at the Fredericksburg VFW. Essentially, it is a midge in sizes #18 - #22, but quite effective in nymph sizes #14 and #16. For those new tiers who worry about tying such a small fly, ask Mike Weiss about how such a small fly can catch a big fish. I netted and measured a 24" rainbow trout among the several he caught on the Back River. It took me months to convince him to tie the Zebra Midge much smaller than the #16 he had tied. He caught those big rainbows on a #22!

CASTING CORNER

[Fly] casting is one facet of line management, one of the critical (and most humbling) differentiators between fly fishing and conventional fishing. As we learned on our Erie, PA trip, when casting wet flies on streams, check the stream flow, depth, and believed depth of target (fish). The faster the flow, you must cast your fly up higher to the desired target. The deeper the target, again, cast higher up. Think of the space between where your flies land and the targeted fish as the prep time for 3 things - (1) prep for your flies to sink to the desired depth, (2) prep time to get your "mend" correct (allowing for a perfect drag free drift), and (3) prep time to get all excess line eliminated, allowing you to set that hook at the faintest movement of your strike indicator. If the indicator moves, set the hook by basically starting your next cast. If no fish, simply proceed with your next cast. If fish, fish on!

Program Lead flies around the world to CATCH HUGE TROUT.

Drive to Dulles, fly to LA, Fly to Auckland North Island NZ, fly to Nelson South Island NZ, drive to Owen River Lodge. After 24 hours in the air and on the road, I stepped out of the bus into a palm tree gated lodge and was greeted by the owner who showed me to my room. The next six days were filled with the rhythm of dinner, sleep, breakfast, FISH, dinner, sleep. Dinner included visiting with guests from such far away places as Singapore and Yorkshire, England.

Each day my young guide and I fished a different stretch of the Owen River - known for BIG but hard to catch brown trout. Fishing was technically difficult and physically demanding - much like hunting. Walk 100 yards, see a fish, take a shot, spook him and walk another 100 yards or more for the next opportunity. Typically I staggered slip sliding along some two to three miles a day over land and water with the help of the guide. I was pleased at being able to make the walk and seemed to adapt pretty quickly to the casting demands - as difficult as I have encountered, I must say.

My first big guy was on an #18 pheasant tail with 4x leader - no weight, no indicator, just the guide yelling 'SET!' A wouser of a fight to keep the monster from running downstream and finally to the net - my largest brown ever at 5.75 lbs...until later that special day. My young guide was so excited for me that he was jumping up and down - or was that me? Casts were typically 30 to 40 feet of fly line compounded by 20 feet of leader and tippet. Yes, I said 20 feet of leader and tippet. Water was gin clear and fish were spooky - any hint of line and they were gone. I lost count of the fish we located, approached, then made a couple casts and poof - gone. What success I had met a unique profile - faster water, nervous water, and aggressively feeding fish. Key was being able to make enough accurate casts to discover what they were feeding on. Guide explained early that the Browns feed at night on the teeming schools of tiny fish along the



shore then move into deeper water resting spots during the day - only feeding on nymphs and surface flies when they feel like it. Hence the need to hit the feeding lane with the right fly - from 50 feet away...

As I mentioned, later that day we came upon a pool in a narrow of fast water below a riffle that held the BIG GUY - lurking below ripply water. My guide was across the river watching lobo as I cast a series of nymphs - no luck, no luck, no luck. (Ask me how we changed flies) Finally my guide said let's put on a San Juan worm and try one more cast. I took my shot, the guide said 'perfect' then 'SET!'. Bent rod, upstream run, downstream run, turn, circle and to net. BIG guy, Lobo - largest ever at 7.25 lbs, why I traveled to NZ and Lord willing - why I will go back!

- **Blessed Memories Indeed!! Dick**

Which steely is BIGGER? (the world may never know)





Upcoming Focus

So, what's ahead ? On April 10th at the VFW we'll continue to focus on the shad run. The president of Falmouth Flats Fly Fishers will provide us a one-hour presentation of shad fishing and we'll attempt in the time remaining to tie more shad flies in preparation of our shad fly fishing in April. Don't miss this presentation! In May, Julie Keene will demonstrate the Rainbow Warrior on May 8 and smallmouth fishing on May 19th. On May 26th, we'll resume tying with the Rubber legged beetle, a terrestrial dry fly. Then on June 12, tie the Elk Hair Caddis. To those that have been tying – BRAVO! And keep practicing at home. To those yet to join us, we offer a sincere welcome to participate. Our program will provide you all that you would need to tie!

Upcoming Events

April

10 Fly tying, VFW – with special presentation, **Falmouth Flats Fly Fishing presentation** on shad fishing the Rappahannock, session starts at 1800 with presentation and moving into fly tying about 7.

11 *Leadership planning meeting, 1900 Intelliware*

14 **Shad fishing w/ FALMOUTH FLATS FLY FISHING, 0600, MEETING LOCATION & DETAILS TO FOLLOW**

21 Monthly Fishing Outing – **SHAD!** On the Rapp below Falmouth Bridge, 0600 -1200, more details soon!!

28 Fly tying and fish, IWLA pond, 0900

May

8 Fly Tying, VFW, 1900 – **special guest tyer, Julie Keene from National, will tie a Rainbow Warrior.** Includes pizza/soda social starting at 1800, VFW Fredericksburg

19 Monthly fishing trip – stay tuned for details!

26 Fly tying and fish, IWLA pond, 0900

June

2 **Rock the River! 2018 Outreach Drive** – tying table, casting demos and finding new participants! (while rocking out !)

5 *Leadership planning meeting, 1900 Intelliware*

12 Fly tying, VFW, 1900

16 **Monthly Fishing Outing!** – mmm, what could it be?

23 Fly Tie & Fish @ IWLA pond, 0900

**STAY TUNED FOR REGIONAL &
NATIONAL FISHING TRIP
ANNOUNCEMENTS AS WELL !!**

Mark your Calendars!!