

Fish Wild

Free Fishing Magazine



Issue 4
Summer
2022



Crossing The Tekapo River
Photo; Alex Laurie

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Welcome to issue four of Fish Wild for Summer 2022!

Although we are not on a strict calendar, sorry about the slight delay in publishing this issue, we have had one or things to deal with including a mystery painful injury to my “mouse / casting arm” caused by decades of sitting in front of computers and too much fly casting (can there really be such a thing?). The excruciating pain and shaking have now subsided enough for publication to go ahead!

Anyway, here it is, issue 4. This time we welcome a few new writers on board, the excellent Tom Harland, Graham Walker and Geoff Hadley as well as a few our first rate regulars, Dave Felce and David Walker and some of my own scribblings.

We hope you enjoy the articles and photos.

If you would like to email your comments on any aspect of Fish Wild, angling, the great outdoors or conservation please get in touch by using Contact Us in the menu at <https://www.fishwild.org.uk/>. Any suitable emails will be published

Fred Carrie - Editor

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Cover photo:
Waikaia River Southland
New Zealand
Photo: Alex Laurie

Accepted Theories

David Walker examines fishing ‘facts’ that may need revisiting

For most, our fishing education would have included the traditional pillars of facts and custom that cemented both our learning and skills. Somewhere along our journey, myth and fable creep in and become entwined with accepted theory and practice.

I thought it may be worthwhile challenging some universally accepted statements that appear from time to time on forums and the written media. As these particular claims get bandied about they eventually become gospel and unchallenged with some of these being quite frankly nonsense.

Let us start with the myth that grayling love pink. Why pink? Why does almost every grayling angler have a row upon row of pink bugs and pink beaded nymphs? Is it because that this is one of these accepted claims and that means that almost every grayling angler ties these flies up and then fishes them. If almost every angler fishes a pink nymph it will stand to reason that fish will be caught further perpetuating the myth/claim.



Almost every article that is penned these days feature flies that have a pink thorax or bead, some even include the old faithful pink shrimp further accentuating that pink is the killer ingredient! It is both lazy and unimaginative. I have had grayling on pink flies or flies that incorporate pink but I have never found it to be a magic colour that takes more fish than any other colour. There are days when they both hammer fish and scare everything that swims out of the pool.

I have fished in World and European championships for

my country and have come across the boxes of some of the best comp anglers in the business after these events; I would struggle to recall seeing any pink in their boxes. I have fished in numerous different countries and the local guides never tell us pink.

On the flip side, do these pink patterns – in UK rivers especially – semi-represent salmon eggs? Those of us who frequent such rivers in search of grayling will have seen how effective proper egg patterns can be. I have even seen shoals of grayling sit below spawning salmon in the hope of an easy meal.

Dare I also mention super-normal stimulus - provoking grayling into an exaggerated response to an existing response tendency?! The scientist in me has to offer both a rationale and an opposing argument. I am content with my earlier views in that pink isn't this panacea of patterns that some of us follow blindly. A view further entrenched by both fishing these patterns and witnessing some of the finest rods in Europe not having any of these flies in their boxes. A few years ago, I attended a fly-tying masterclass in which a certain Mr Martin Droz – previous world champion/Czech superstar – passed round his competition boxes for the audience to get a better view of what was inside. I wasn't surprised to see none of his patterns had any pink on them.

This pink phenomenon reminds me of a trip down south several years ago to fish the big reservoirs like Rutland, Grafham, Eyebrook, Pitsford and Draycote. Rutland on day one had six of us on the trip head

into the shop and ask the usual questions such as what and where is fishing. We were told that the North Arm hadn't been fishing for weeks but the South Arm was bubbling with fish.

Armed with this info most of the group headed up the South Arm. My mate and I were last out and went up the North Arm by mistake. We had a cracking day catching plenty on dries and buzzers. We only realised our mistake when one of our other boats phoned us and asked where we were. I recall thinking it strange that we hadn't seen any other boats for most of that day! Stands to reason that if you're told that a particular area isn't fishing then you avoid it and further prove that statement causing it to grow and grow. It has to fish sometime.

How many times are we told that certain beats or pools aren't fishing, or that certain drifts and bays are devoid of action. Immediately you are apprehensive about wasting time on these drifts. Again, they have to start fishing sometime and perhaps the lack of attention they have received may have them full of confident feeding fish.

A debate worth sharing with friends in the pub post-fishing and coming up with your own, challenging the myriad of myths and mis-truths that our sport often throws up.

David Walker has been fishing since he was a small boy on the lochs of his local hills and further afield on the banks of Loch Shin and Merkland when visiting family. This fishing education has led to international recognition for Scotland at both World and European Championships. Equally at home drifting afloat, on the river and hill lochs, his passion is casting at rising fish which helps rebalance the stress levels the role of a senior scientist

The March Browns

Early Season In The Borders With Tom Harland



The cheerless prospect of single figure temperatures and a cold northerly were forecast for my first day's dry fly fishing of April, on the river of my childhood, the Teviot, with longstanding fishing comrade John (a.k.a. Hedge). The sun, when it tentatively peeked out, did have some warmth to it, but when it retreated behind a cloud we were plunged unmistakably back into winter. I've been reading The Chronicles of Narnia to my young daughters, and it was like the kind of day I'll try to describe to them as being one where "the White Witch and Aslan are battling in the sky", winter vying with spring for supremacy. A flighty day when the weather just can't work itself out.

Early spring is often a more capricious time of year to be on the river than any other. Your first few sessions of the season invariably seem to teeter somewhere between the sublime and the ridiculous. The wintry bit's the ridiculous part. You will question what business you have casting a dry fly into a frigid stream, encased in many layers, hoping against hope for that indisputable sign of spring: a rising brown trout. Sometimes, if you're lucky, the ethereal emergence of large, hazel-coloured river flies delivers the sublime part. The march brown hatch, appearing in a chink of sunshine around lunchtime, is the harbinger of spring and you'll be glad to be alive and on the stream when Aslan's messengers briefly materialize in the warmest part of the day.

Surveying a chilly Cottage Stream, I set up my gear for the day while I waited for Hedge to arrive. In the absence of any sign of life I opted for the "Klink & Dink", persuading myself I was fishing a dry fly via my March Brown Klinkhamer while in reality placing most of my faith in the nymph trailing a couple of feet below it. The nymph was a pheasant-tailed concoction I'd tied up with a dark starling hackle at the head. Like all fly tyers, I can't resist tinkering and hoped that by combining the strong magic of two classic patterns, Sawyer's Pheasant Tailed Nymph and W.C. Stewart's Black Spider, I'd have an even more deadly fly on my hands. In reality, I'd probably made something less than the undoubted pedigree of its constituent parts and would have been better advised to have left well alone. But where's the fun in that?

I looked up to see Hedge trudging towards me carrying a single-handed fly rod. I took this as a sign he'd elected to spend the day fishing for trout rather than salmon (Hedge has the kind of persistent, stubborn streak needed for fishing for spring salmon which I almost entirely lack).

"After the trout the day then?" I greeted him.

By way of reply he gestured to the handle of his fly-rod within which was lodged a 2-inch long, treble-hooked, hair-winged monstrosity. His search for a Teviot spring salmon was clearly set to continue; the absence of his double-handed Spey rod being accounted for by his weakened physical state following recent recovery from a viral infection. His plan for the day was to sleep on the riverbank in between rolling out a few casts for silver.

The river was flowing a fine height with a touch of colour but it was cold as I stepped into it, running with a taste of the last of the winter's snow. The familiar, storied pools passed in their immortal sequence as we fished upstream: Cottage, Kay Braes, Castle, Nick, Maisondieu. Nothing. A Kelly Kettle fed with birch bark and wind-dried flood debris revived our spirits but not our hopes of a fish. We worked further on. The bareness of the trees contrasted with the riot of bright green, pungent, wild garlic growing in profusion along the riverbank. The hours passed as did our lunch.

It was then that I saw it. In a quiet run, a few yards out. Was it just some turbulence on the surface?

I paused and I waited. I waited...There.

Unequivocally, yes, I'd just seen my first rise of the season. The sun winked out. Looking closer, march browns were coming off. Not many, yet, but enough. Another fish rose, then another. Big ones too. Hands shaking a little, I snipped off the "Klink & Dink", replacing it with a single March Brown Jangler (the received wisdom is that you should fish a Jangler to these early season risers). Hedge arrived and settled himself on a bench overlooking the run to watch my efforts, affably electing not to disturb the pool with his heavy salmon fly.

I eased myself into the water and surveyed the run upstream of me, waiting for a target. The march browns floating past my waders were inch-long, mottled collaborations of legs and sparkly upright wings, each individual resembling a couple of partridge feathers unfurling itself into an insect form before fluttering away from the river's surface. They seemed right for the amber-coloured water and sudden bursts of sunshine. Their flurries were synchronized with the brief spells of warmth when the sun emerged from the clouds.

Upstream of me an enormous trout, perhaps 3 or 4 pounds, breached the surface in the slipstream of a boulder to snaffle a dun.

The sight of that big trout head-and-tailing out of the Teviot after a juicy march brown seemed to over-tighten something irrevocably in my fly fishing mechanism. After my first delicate, precision cover of the seam where the trout had shown elicited no response, I found that, despite myself, I was firing off staccato bursts of erratic, blind, splashy casts into the general area, hoping for a different result. My heart was beating hard. Have you ever seen that footage of Joe Cocker singing "With a Little Help from My Friends" at Woodstock? Imagine he sang his piece clutching a fly rod while strumming his theatrical air-guitar, and you'll have a fair approximation of my performance in the minutes following the appearance of that large trout. My casting was jarring and hurried. I had three elbows and no rhythm.

Every trout in the pool had stopped rising to the march browns. I cursed out loud. I'd blown it. The trout were sulking. Hedge seemed to have fallen asleep on the bench above me, his hood pulled up over his face against the renewed, chilly, north wind. The sun had disappeared behind some sullen clouds. The only creatures who seemed pleased with proceedings were the march browns themselves, continuing to emerge and sail down the river, unmolested now from the trout below and under the reluctant benevolent protection of a bungling angler.

I slogged out of the river and slumped on the bench next to Hedge, thinking about preparing a consoling Kelly Kettle.

The sodding trout started rising again.

I wondered, not for the first time, if all the stupid trout were killed out of the Tweed catchment in W.C. Stewart's era. I longed, not for the first time, for a river where a fly dragging a ruddy great "V" is like a dinner bell for charmingly daft trout who've never known what it is to be angled for. In moments like these it feels comforting to imagine you're fishing for the descendants of those select few, crafty trout who avoided being creeled by Stewart and James Baillie in the 1800s. Their stealthy, cautious genetics passed on through the successive spawning cycles of the last 200 years. Better this than acknowledging you're a fairly bang-average fly fisher, especially on your first day out after a long close season and after being unhinged by the tantalizing prospect of a proper specimen.



Meanwhile, Hedge had woken up, grunted, mumbled something about seeing a couple of trout rising tight to an islet on the far bank and, after clipping off his salmon fly and replacing it with a CDC Comparadun, he bumbled off into the river.

Sighing, I bit off my March Brown Jangler and tied back on my original March Brown Klinkhamer, in that kind of process of circuitous logic that will be familiar only to fly-fishers clouded by desperation. In doing so I pondered that I have become ever more reliant upon the Klinkhamer and increasingly worry it is so effective I may as well never bother tying anything other than Klinks in various colours and sizes. But wouldn't that be boring?

Back in the river, upstream of Hedge, I resumed my Joe Cocker impression to a once again lifeless riffle. An exclamation from downstream of me caused my head to turn and I saw Hedge releasing a smolt.

Fluke.

A few moments later, another grunt, and Hedge was playing in a 1.5-pound grayling. As he released it, to my consternation I noticed that an unimaginably small seam of river around him, about the size of a couple of bathtubs, was simply boiling with many rising fish. Everywhere else was totally devoid of life. It was as if he'd made some sort of druidic incantation with the insertion of his fly line into the Teviot, summoning that tiny nook to consciousness. I uncharitably swore under my breath as, before my eyes, a trout of a pound or so took his fly and cartwheeled out of the water.

I shuffled sheepishly downstream towards him as he was playing that trout, putatively to help him land

it (Hedge was nonchalantly fishing without a net). In reality, I was secretly hoping he'd relinquish his wonder-spot to me. After returning his plump pounder Hedge, seemingly satisfied with his three fish within the space of three minutes, proclaimed he was tired and graciously left the run to me, despite my half-hearted protestations.

I surveyed this one, animated stitch of the Teviot which Hedge had found. The rising fish were tight to the islet and gathered in a small scour, just upstream of a fallen tree partly submerged in the river. The boughs of the tree formed just enough of a plant-pot sized hollow full of loam that an impressive bouquet of bright yellow dandelions were blooming from it, heads turned towards the reemerged sun. Two protruding boulders funneled twin feeding lanes into the scour, conveying march browns to the eager trout. I tried to almost dap the Klink over the tongues of current to avoid drag.

Two fish rose simultaneously. I was distracted by the rise closer to me, nearly missing the further rise which was to my fly. Something instinctive told me to turn my wrist and I managed to avoid fluffing the strike. After an anxious few moments my first trout of the year was in the net. Not too big, not too small, just right. One which would have been a "keeper" in the barbaric days of my angling youth. There are few finer things in the whole wide world than seeing the first trout of the season rise to your dry fly. Even if sometimes it takes a little help from your friends.

I'm always struck by how trout at this time of year have yet to ripen into the full flush of colour you associate with them when they're properly in condition. Glinting in the spring sunshine it was no less beautiful, but its colours were a little faded, like the first layers of a delicate watercolour at the point when some spots of brighter red and dark pigment have just been added.

As the trout darted back into the dark amber water a salmon rolled in the tail of the pool, perhaps 10 pounds of silver flank showing. I glanced back to the bench and clocked that Hedge had woken up and seen it too and was busy tying a Posh Tosh in place of his dry fly. Evidently, he had decided that he'd had enough of trifling with spring trout.

A few moments later he was wading back into the river, a determined look on his face, and we swapped places. I prepared the Kelly, contented, as he lengthened his line and rolled out a Spey cast.

His search went on.

Tom Harland lives within an easy walk of the "Queen of Scottish Salmon Rivers", the graceful Tweed, with his wife and two young daughters. A lifelong fly fisherman, Tom has fished throughout his local Scottish Borders, England, the Western Isles and New Zealand (a country he lived and worked in for two years), but his real passion is for the hill lochs of Assynt in the North-west Highlands. Tom's first book about fly fishing, *The Silver Invicta: Journeys with a Fly Fisher*, was published by Polaris (www.polarispublishing.com) earlier this year. *The Silver Invicta* is a light-hearted stream of impressions from a fishing life, in its varying moods, coloured with plenty of whisky and eccentric company.

Ticking Lists

Mellowness Comes With Age Says Fred Carrie

Over the past 40 years or so I had gazed upon The Headwaters many times, winter and summer, whilst heading out or returning in an exhausted state from some ridiculous marathon hill walk or inane Munro bagging trip.

For those who don't know: a "Munro" is a Scottish hill or mountain of at least 3000 feet. They are all listed neatly in a book. There were about 270, or so, of them last time I counted. Collecting them – that is climbing them then ticking them off the list – is a popular hobby these days. In my younger, fitter days I collected them enthusiastically. Well, it's no worse than collecting stamps I suppose and it does get you out into the fresh air. I laugh at it now, but I guess if it hadn't been for Munro bagging I probably would not have known of The Headwaters or indeed most of the other fine, remote burns and lochs the length and breadth of Scotland.

It's all part of the apprenticeship you have to serve to really appreciate what a wonderful place Scotland is. It teaches great respect for this environment; you have to get out there and slog the miles. There are no courses that can teach you these values and respect, no assessments by bands of so called experts, no Blue Peter badges – no shortcuts.

For me it was all the sunny days, the camaraderie, the soakings, the blizzards and blisters, the sore legs, the blood, sweat and tears that led to a greater appreciation. As it turned out ticking the list was no more than the catalyst that started the reaction.

In mid-July a few years ago, after much procrastination, I headed out to The Headwaters for a few hours fishing.

Now, to be absolutely honest, I am not sure if trout fishing would be encouraged in The Headwaters. Probably not. This is a salmon river, at least in its lower and middle reaches and one where the humble brown trout is not looked upon fondly.

It's more than just a little sad, in these so-called enlightened times, that on some salmon rivers

brown trout are still considered vermin that should be killed at every opportunity. The story goes that all of them threaten salmon by eating their eggs and the bigger ones actually – shock horror – sometimes even eat salmon parr. It really makes you wonder how salmon managed to survive at all before sporting estates began managing rivers, 'properly' and so 'successfully'.

I guess one or two must have got lucky and survived.

I don't know about you, but between ignorant, idiotic and greedy 19th century attitudes like this and hearing some anglers calling for culls of seals, and fish eating birds, I am sometimes left wondering if angling really deserves to survive at all. It's not really a great advert for our sport and really blows the argument that anglers are conservationists right out of the water.

Sometimes we appear to be striving to score own goals.

There is however an up-side to this manifesto of the deranged that might not be immediately obvious. During the environmentally disastrous 'Victorian Sporting Era' and for sometime before and afterwards, many estates, as well as exterminating anything that moved with hooked beak, tooth or claw, stocked brown trout, usually the silvery Loch Leven strain, into waters that held no salmon. Mainly into lochs but sometimes into rivers. It is thought by some that in most waters, the original native or local strains may have been lost or hybridised out years ago. There is no way The Headwaters or any other part of this river would have been stocked with trout. Even in loony sporting estate logic, stocking vermin would make no sense at all. It is pretty certain that all trout in this river are original, unadulterated, native fish.



I parked my car at the end of the public road, got the rucksack on, my back, mounted my Iron Horse

and peddled off up the (very) rough track that eventually leads to The Headwaters. The wind was against me as it always is when I am cycling. I really wish someone could come up with a non-castration saddle design for mountain bikes. To younger readers intending to take up mountain biking and also start a family I offer this advice: get the family bit sorted out first.

By the time I reached The Headwaters, pushing the bike as often as pedalling the damned thing, my legs were like jelly. I guess I might be getting too old for this bike nonsense, but I knew it would be worth it on the return journey.

Most stretches of The Headwaters are wide and very shallow, broken by vast numbers of rocks and with few obvious fish holding areas. There is however one ravine section, perhaps ¼ mile long, consisting of tree lined cliffs, deep pools and short waterfalls that had fascinated me on my many treks into these parts. The first thing that strikes you here is the fantastic New Zealand like clarity of the water. Any fish here will spot you before you even leave your house. It's also a bit dangerous for wading being very depth-deceptive. This is the kind of trip where I might have been tempted to leave the waders at home. That would have been a big mistake. I could not have fished this ravine section without them.



The gin-clear water, although very attractive, reflects the nature of the igneous underlying rock. Hard granite and peat means acidic water, low in nutrients, low in insect numbers, few if any crustaceans and poor feeding. The prevailing cold summer temperatures don't help insect numbers either – apart from biting midges of course, they seem to thrive anywhere! In some countries headwaters have a reputation for small numbers of very big fish; here I was under no illusions; while I was sure there would be plenty of fish, I was not expecting them to be big at all.

I rigged up my good old 9 foot Bloke XL50 fly rod with a floating line, long leader and two dry

flies: these changed throughout the day but basically they were Deer Hair Sedge / Elk Hair Caddis style flies – claret, black, silver bodies etc. Sometimes using a big Stimulator style fly on the tail as a marker in the rough water

It was slow to start with but I caught plenty of fish; no glass case stuff, the best barely 9". Beautiful, real wild trout. I did rise one good fish at the foot of one of the waterfalls. Sod's law dictates that if you are going to miss a fish it will always be the best of the day. It wouldn't be real trout fishing otherwise.

I also fished the broken water above the ravines for a further ½ mile or so, picking up small fish from the pockets in the rough, shallow water between the rocks. I was getting some puzzled looks from passing hill walkers. I guess it's not every day they come across some eejit standing in a river in the middle of the nowhere, waving a stick, wearing chest waders, a floppy wide brimmed hat, Polaroids and a queer looking bulging waistcoat.

The sun was warm, the peace and tranquillity restoring. The river was mine for the day. On returning to the ravine, I found I had been joined, on the far bank, by a large picnicking family, complete with a swimming dog, who, like me, had biked up the many miles from the public road. Fair enough, they were pleasant folk and some things are far more important than fishing: like families getting out and about together. Good for them. They have as much right as



anyone else to be there enjoying the great outdoors.

Finding a quiet corner looking out towards the high hills I sat down, relaxed in the heather, took in the atmosphere and contemplated my reasons for being there at all. It certainly was not about catching fish; that's only one piece of a large mosaic. While having lunch I spied an eagle wheeling above the far ridge. Folks reckon they see lots of eagles in the hills then one day they

really see an eagle and realise that all the other eagles they have seen were buzzards. I dozed off for an hour in the warm sun.

When I awoke it was time to leave. I had fished for about 3 hours altogether and that was just about enough. In contrast to the inward trudge, the return journey down the rough track to the public road was exhilarating; freewheeling most of the way it took about 15 minutes!

Most of my days fishing on rivers are solitary affairs and none more so than my day on The Headwaters. There were no trophy fish, but the wild Scottish highlands, the flora and fauna, the clear cold waters, and the beautiful small wild trout together created an angling experience that



could not have been bettered. The sleep was pretty good too.

I know some people who would be aghast at this kind of laid-back, even lazy behaviour, when fishing. There are anglers who won't even stop for a sandwich; to them catching fish – lots of fish – and making sure everyone knows about it, is the be-all and end-all. It all depends on how you are wired and what you are looking for I suppose. Some strive for respect with long impressive casting skills, stories of big fish or big catches, others feel that matching their skills against like-minded competitors will bring them kudos.

That's just list ticking in another form I guess and the reality is it won't get you invited to many parties; not parties that are worth attending anyway.

Just as my own days of checking-off Munros were replaced by a wider appreciation of things around me, my fishing priorities have changed too.

I don't tick lists these days. Strange how this mellowness creeps up on you and you don't even

notice it.

Fred Carrie started fishing in the mid 1960's, hillwalking in the 1970's and has been combining the two on and off ever since.

Fred runs the successful Wild Fishing Forum and enjoys the hike up to the wild hill lochs as much as the fishing itself.

Fred now lives back in his native Angus, fishing the modest waters of his boyhood one of which flows a mere 10 minute walk from home.



Otters On The Aberdeenshire Don
Photos: F. Carrie

Learning On The Dee: River Partnership Hosts Trainee

A press release from the Dee Catchment Partnership



Calum Kitching is undertaking a traineeship with the James Hutton Institute and Dee Catchment Partnership this Spring

The Dee Catchment Partnership is pleased to be playing host to an Environmental Geography graduate of Stirling University this Spring. 22-year-old Calum Kitching, from Aboyne, is undertaking a three-month-long traineeship funded by the James Hutton Institute and NatureScot, which sees him lend a hand – and learn a thing or two - on river restoration projects the length and breadth of the catchment, working with Partnership Manager, Dr Susan Cooksley. He is one of 21 NatureScot River Restoration trainees working in Scotland this summer.

Keen to learn about a variety of nature conservation practices to help inform his future career choice and make some useful contacts along the way, Calum's first few weeks have provided the perfect smorgasbord of experiences, as he explains: "Susan introduced me to a range of scientists at the James Hutton Institute and I'll be working on a varied and interesting range of projects. It has been the ideal setting for exposing me to a great spectrum of specialisms and people, offering a real blend of practical projects with academic study."

"I've been working between the Hutton Institute and the River Dee Trust. Most days I'm out at various places in the catchment, meeting lots of people, taking water samples, assisting with invertebrate surveys, planting trees, deploying hydrophone receivers to detect the migration of tagged salmon smolt from the Dee out to sea, learning about river restoration... a real mix so far!"

According to NatureScot, jobs in the nature-based sector made up at least 7.5% of Scotland's workforce in 2019 and grew at more than five times the rate of all jobs in Scotland between 2015 and 2019. Furthermore, a major growth in nature-based jobs is anticipated following the expansion in activities required to meet Scotland's net zero targets. In particular, job growth in areas such as blue carbon, woodland planting and restoration, and peatland restoration between now and 2030 is expected to be significant.

Traineeships like Calum's will play a key role in meeting this demand for more nature-based jobs and are a win-win for both parties according to Susan: "These experiences provide direct, hands-on learning for trainees, and we aim to make sure Calum has experience of the many aspects of river restoration – from planning and design, construction and site management, to monitoring and communications. Here at Hutton and in the Dee Catchment Partnership we welcome the chance to inspire and encourage young people into a rewarding career in nature conservation. The linked global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss have made the need to recruit the next generation ever more urgent. We desperately need more skilled practitioners in the many aspects of river restoration if we are going to be able to get enough projects off the ground to start making a tangible difference."



Throughout May Calum has been working with the River Dee Trust, with Fishery Biologist Jamie Urquhart's team. Smolt traps, invasives control and invertebrate surveys have made for a busy month. Calum will spend the remainder of his traineeship working on a project in the upper catchment, which aims to reconnect the River Dee with its floodplain, bringing benefits for both the catchment's resilience to climate change and biodiversity. He will also be working on river restoration plans at the James Hutton Institute's climate positive farm at Glensaugh.

While his enthusiasm and optimism are tangible, Calum is under no illusions as to the challenges facing the nature sector as he reflects on the future for conservation in Scotland: "I remember learning about environmental policy during my degree, the often-conflicting priorities for people, climate and wildlife, and the variety of ways in which it's influenced by different environmental organisations.

Extinction Rebellion, for example, will tend to purposely not engage with the government and aim to influence environmental legislation from the outside, whereas government-funded organisations will always have a seat at the decision-making table. Each has its place, but I think it's pretty crucial to recognise that you can do all the research and restoration projects you like, but without an appreciation of the policy pathways and how change is realistically affected, it may all prove redundant. But COP26 in Glasgow has given Scotland an opportunity to lead the way in tackling climate change and biodiversity loss, based on what seems a fairly robust environmental policy aimed at reaching net zero by 2045 if not before.

Fishing In The Clouds

Graham Walker



could be seen extending a fair distance below the shallow waters. I decided to head up to higher ground on a heather perch for a better perspective of the loch in the hope of seeing some sign of life.

The sandy shallows soon gave way to slightly deeper boulder filled inlets and it was here I spotted the first trout. I was surprised at how easily it spooked given I was some distance from the bank when it darted for cover. Shouting on Aaren to head along to the first inlet, we began to cast. The famous fishing mantra “neglect the near water at your peril” stuck in my mind that day and it couldn’t have been truer. The wind had thankfully picked up, removing the midges and also caused a lazy wave which dimpled the loch’s surface... perfection.

The first take was subtle but once hooked the fish felt strong. Whilst stripping in, the fish breached the surface and the line went slack. After some aerial acrobatics the trout plunged to its natural habitat and the line was taught once again. The trout I landed was dark in colour and around 6 inches long. Prominent spots which were perfectly cylindrical made the trout look almost artificial.

As soon as its gills submerged into the water, it shot off for cover, not a bad start to the day.

Aaren’s line went tight; another fish on. We moved along the bank inlet to inlet and casting roughly 20 feet out we mixed up the retrieve with slow teases or short sharp pulls. For

Rucksacks always feel lighter when they are not yet on your back. Given that the only fishing tackle I’d packed was a rod, a couple of boxes of flies, spare tippet and my camping kit you’d have thought I’d have coped better with the heavy load. My friend and I were heading to Dubh Loch, perched at around 2000 feet, it feeds into the better known Loch Muick below.

A 6 mile trek from the car park to where we would pitch our tents for the night was ahead of us and luckily the rain, which was threatening all day, held off until we had erected the tents. A slight breeze kept the midges at bay and the stars were out on show; a perfect escape after a week behind the desk!

We were camped on the sandy shore at the West end of Dubh Loch. The Loch itself is flanked by the massive rock face of Broad Cairn to the South and the grassy banks of the Munro, Carn a’choire Bhoidheach to the North. Roughly 1.5 miles long, the loch is not large by any account but there was a strange intimate feeling of being able to see the opposite shore whilst being corralled by the giant granite faces.

With its Royal history and being just a stone’s throw away from Queen Victoria’s old escape of Glas allt Shiel on the banks of Loch Muick I’d be very surprised if a Royal hadn’t taken the opportunity to throw a fly in at some point in time.

We awoke early to set up the fly rods. The breeze had died away and the cloud base was at touching distance above, the loch hardly showed a ripple. Heading along the South side of the loch the sandy bay

nearly every third cast we had a fish. None were large but some extremely strong for their relatively small size. The biggest fish being around 11 inches but slim in build. Along the deeper central seam of the loch, trout could be seen continuously rising and looking to be slightly larger. Unfortunately the steep rising banks behind put a stop to our casts landing anywhere near them (not that our casting ability would have allowed us to reach them).

The wind had died and the waves and troughs once again became seamless. With the change in conditions the fish had switched off. This was our cue to stop for a spot of lunch. We couldn’t believe the enjoyment we had encountered catching albeit small mountain trout. A red deer could be heard calling from the opposite bank towards its fellows on the higher slopes and a golden eagle circled briefly before returning to its nest high upon the steep rock face. Scenery like this makes it easy to detach from the stresses of work, which for me is an integral part of fishing. We finished





up our sandwiches and readied the rods for another cast.

As if by demand the wind picked up again and the fish returned. With the healthy number of trout and their strong attraction for the fly, it allowed us to experiment with different flies and tactics; something I feel is missed during the months of salmon fishing on the river due to their depleting numbers. The name of my most effective fly for the day is one which annoyingly I do not know! It was similar to a



wet black gnat but with a flash of yellow on the tail. Fished on a floating line with roughly a rods length of leader and retrieving with a few short jerky pulls followed by a pause proved to be incredibly successful. A Peter Ross fished in a similar manner by my friend was equally effective. Reaching the west end of the loch where the water falls steeply on its way to Loch Muick, the heavy clouds above finally breached and the downpour began so we decided to call it a day.

We had around 20 fish each, nothing trophy sized; pan sized at best, however this didn't take away

from the enjoyment we had endured. Beautiful remote scenery, the wildlife, the company, the dram at night and not to forget the fishing, made this overnight trip one of the best days fishing I have had. If you have never escaped to the mountain lochs in search of some of these hardy brown trout then definitely put it on the to do list.

One piece of advice: pack a midge net and a nice malt for the evening!



Graham Walker lives just south of Aberdeen with his girlfriend and cocker spaniel. Having first picked up a fishing rod at the age of 6 when his Uncle took him fishing in the River Don he's always been a keen enthusiast for all things fishing.

Worth A Watch?

A selection of online resources you might find useful or interesting

Dave Felce's page on "The Floating Fly"

<https://www.thefloatingfly.com/dace-felce?fbclid=IwAR3ulkHUfSAOP3hNC27CpxBE6T2sEb0Nt8OKhuhIocWAAcjBPCgXVQ59rcY>

If you are thinking about chasing wild carp on the fly this is well worth a look. Advice on gear, tactics, reading the water etc. Fly fishing for coarse fish should be more popular than it is; start here!

Wildfisher Youtube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC78zV3mlbF2vn566g2a1Ifw>

Mainly short, small stream fishing videos with a sprinkling of wildlife and photography. No shouting, loud rock music, no whoopin' and hollerin'. Peaceful, introspective fly fishing with a crusty old codger with lots of time on his hands.

Chris Matthews' Youtube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyO4pLVBKLA2bKE9gc6O-LQ>

Chris fishes several rivers and small streams in Devon. Once again, no raucous stuff, Chris just takes you fishing with him and shares his experience, the highs and the lows.

Caorach Youtube Channel

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHclad9VIQW_rbGA8Oi6XyA

Run by Philip Blair from Northern Ireland and mainly features fly fishing for trout and salmon on Lewis and Harris. Delivered in a quiet, laid back style with much emphasis on drinking tea as well as catching some fine fish.

Jensen Fly Fishing

<https://www.youtube.com/user/jensenflyfishing>

Dave and Amelia Jensen are based in Alberta, Canada and fish all over the world. Highly informative, well shot and edited videos. Quality stuff.

The Tatooded Angler

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqZEzfGCTpRHa6idGPZujZw>

A new Scottish based channel deserving of a watch. Fishing on The Water Of Leith and the river Almond in The Lothians.

Piscator UK Fishing

<https://www.youtube.com/c/PiscatorUK-Fishing>

Douglas Heron's excellent UK fishing channel. All kinds of fishing is featured here, fly, bait, coarse and sea. Douglas is a genuine all rounder with an easy going presentation style. Don't miss it!

Publications

A quick look at a few printed books, e-books and magazines

Dumb Luck and the Kindness of Strangers

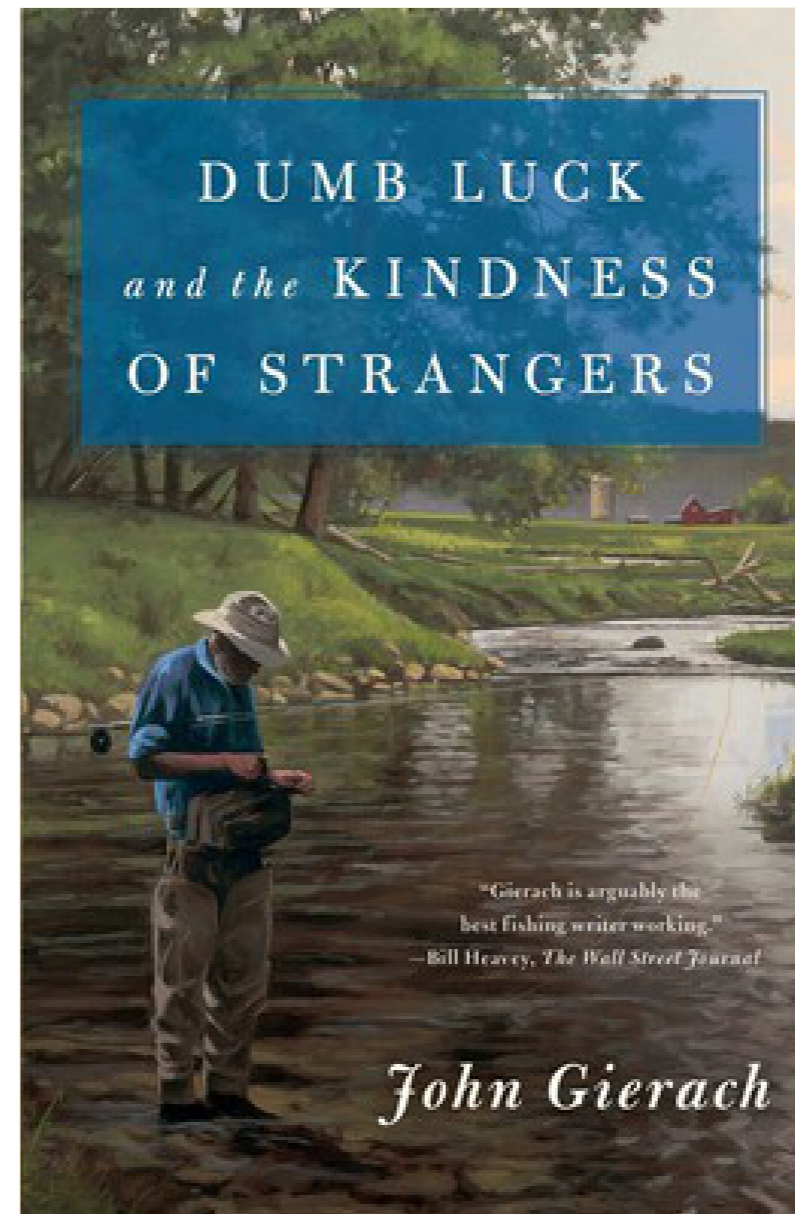
It's been a few years (2020) since this, John Gierach's most recent offering, was published, but I can't recall reading many reviews.

It's a great book, buy it. I hope this review was helpful!

Just kidding of course, but after 20 or so books it's remarkable this author is still producing work to this high standard. That said it should not be critically compared to his early, seminal works like Trout Bum.

Trout Bum was written by a younger, fitter and less experienced fly fisher, driving 1000s of miles in his old pick-up searching out good fishing, hiking up to mountain lakes and streams, and with most of his fly fishing life still in front of him. Many of us who have been at the game a while can relate to that. Dumb Luck and the Kindness of Strangers is more introspective, more mature. Written by a more travelled and apparently much better resourced man, but no less interesting. I have to say I preferred his old stuff, his forays across The Rockies with his friend A.K. Best, but don't we all look back at good times?

Anyhow, this is a great book and one that



Gierach fans will enjoy. His wry, often self-deprecating humour is still there. John Gierach is arguably the best living fishing writer, he offers witty, trenchant observations not just on fly-fishing but also about how fly-fishing has shaped his world and his attitude to life.

Fishing books can be boring, dull, even to old guys like me who have fished almost as long as J.G. But Gierach's books are not about fishing, they are about a life to which fly fishing has been the essential back drop. He writes around fly fishing, not about fly fishing. That's what makes them so unique, so good. His style has been copied but never equalled.

I bought an "e" version this book (Kindle), but whatever format you choose you will enjoy it.

Publisher: Simon & Schuster (June 2020)
240 pages
ISBN13: 9781501168598

What Have You Tied Today?

Flies tied by readers and Wild Fishing Forum Members



These superb loch flies were tied by Wild Fishing Forum member Allan Hutton. Allan consistently ties excellent and very neat flies. Can you imagine drifting down the loch and offering these beauties to the eager trout?



Four exceptionally well tied and varied flies by Wild Fishing Forum member Robert MacDonald-Lewis. Right to left : Bibio Sedgemoor, Cow Dung Hopper, Claret Kate, Picric Hare's Ear Buzzer

Gallery

Fishing, nature and outdoor images sent in by readers



The Grey River
West Coast South Island
New Zealand

Photo: Fred Carrie

If you would like your fishing, nature or outdoor images published here please get in touch via the Contact Us page on www.fishwild.org.uk



Fish On!
Tekapo River, New Zealand
Photo: Alex Laurie



A Nice Brown Trout 4½ lb
Caught on a size 16 brown wire nymph, New Zealand Spring Creek
Photo: Alex Laurie



Little Ringed Plover, Angus, Scotland
Photo: Ron Mitchell



The Frandy Tree, Glen Devon
Photo: Adam Caird



Water Rail, Montrose, Scotland
Photo: Ron Mitchell



Patient Frogs
Photo: Adam Caird



Male Cuckoo and Male Goshawk, Scotland
Photos: Charlie Davidson

Photographers In This Issue

Adam Caird lives in Arbroath, Scotland and is a lifelong angler who has recently returned to the sport after a hiatus that is familiar to many of us. Adam is an enthusiastic and talented amateur photographer with interests ranging from wildlife through landscapes to aviation. Adam is a Canon Shooter. His Flickr page can be viewed here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/53926777@N03>

Charlie Davidson lives in Peterhead, Scotland. Charlie is a well travelled and skilled photographer whose main interests are landscape and wildlife work. Charlie is a Nikon shooter and his work can be viewed on his Instagram page here: https://www.instagram.com/charlie_davidson_photography/

Ron Mitchell lives in Montrose Scotland and travels all over the country in pursuit of his hobby. His main focus, not unexpectantly, is the Montrose Basin Wildlife Reserve a mere stone's throw from home. Ron has produced many photos and videos for the Scottish Wildlife Trust and is a Canon shooter. His work can be viewed on his Flickr page here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/137319226@N03>



In which our heroes, Bassed-Hard & Bar-Belle roam the urban wastelands of the Polderosa and nearly get skunked (but don't get skunked, if you know what I mean)

This was definitely one of those trips where the warmth of the memory improves with the passing of time.....

As usual Colin (Bar-Belle) was the catalyst for this trip. We'd been looking at Holland as a possible destination for some sea bass fishing, having seen some impressive photos on a Dutch fishing shop site. Well, one thing led to another and we found ourselves looking at apparently big & plentiful pike fishing in a relatively unknown part of Holland. The unknown bit is definitely relative; there's not a lot of unpopulated space in Holland! Colin had made contact with Johan, a member of a blogging crew who have had some seriously exciting trips to an area of polders that are not widely advertised, and he very kindly offered to give us some and tips & hot-spots; provided we kept the information to ourselves!

Right, ffw to Holland; pretty hectic. Probably too hectic, although that could be because it was the first time. Hindsight's always 20:20.

Flight was at seven, which meant me leaving the house at 0200. So by the time we arrived we'd been on the go a while. Baggage, hire car etc all hunky dory. Thing is, we are a bit driven; it's all "let's get fishing". Which is fair enough, but, especially when it's cold & damp, you need to take care of the inner man. I could've done with a coffee at least. By 11:30 I'd got my first fish on the bank and missed another belter. We'd pulled in on the forecourt of a tree nursery in the town centre of ***** (sorry, we're sworn to secrecy!), just to get changed into fishing kit & get tackled up. There was a channel (polder) down either side of the car park and another along the street in front. It's the most bizarre set up.

So whilst Colin was getting his waders on, I dived out and did a (even tho' I say it myself) pretty nifty backhand cast up the channel alongside the offices, tight to the wall. Second cast BANG! Nice pike, probably nudging double figures. Got tight to it, got the camera out; then it threw the hook just as Colin appeared from the car about 10 yards away. Damn. That camera became the kiss of death, to be honest!



Anyway, talk about an encouraging start!

10 minutes or so later, I'd got a little one from the main polder along the street and Colin had a follow from another one.

We weren't entirely sure of this wander along the street malarkey, so we drove off and found another, slightly less urban, spot.



Nothing doing there, so on to another town, and so on, and so on. I had another good fish on under a bridge in the middle of another town, but that threw the hook as soon as the camera came out.... By this time it's getting gloomy and damned chilly. A bit later, Colin finally managed to get one to stick, on the outskirts of another town.



We press on until dark. Then go in search of the B&B in *****. Now, having done a lot of this sort of thing on my mountain travels, I should've learned my lesson. It's absolutely fatal to not locate your camp or digs before dark. Sure enough, even with sat nav, we fannied around for a good 40 minutes or so, during which time we discovered that the handy bar/hotel down the road from the B&B had closed down about 6 months previously. So that was food & drink out of the window... at which point we've been on the bounce for nearly 16 hours with only breakfast at Edinburgh airport. Lady at B&B confirmed that nearest food was at a restaurant about 4k away. We drove past it and headed to a small town, found a supermarket, bought some beers to take back to digs, then returned to the restaurant. Very, very nice; like e40+ a head nice. Couldn't fault it, and definitely worth the money, but I could tell this was going to add severely to the cost of a cheap weekend away. Plus Colin was going to have to drive, so it's not as if you could kick back with a few beers.

Room was clean but basic, superb WC/ shower. But that was it. e40 a night + e10 breakfast.... Sounds like I'm moaning a lot, doesn't it? But this was fast becoming a massively expensive weekend away, with not a lot to show for it.

Johan, the guy Colin had been in touch with, turned up at 0700, having driven for two hours from Belgium. Very nice of him of course, but FFS 0700? Still dark, Baltic cold and that was a nice relaxed breakfast fecked up; as Johan was all tackled up and ready to go! At this point I was feeling less than impressed, to be honest, as I could see this being another day with no food & drink. And I wasn't wrong... However, we were very conscious of the fact that Johan had taken a lot of time & trouble to get here and look after us; I can just imagine telling my wife I was going to be driving for two hours each way to go fishing with two guys I'd never met before.... It was very kind of him.

Colin hooked and lost a decent fish in the polders alongside the farmhouse. I had a few casts, thought I got a hit, then sneaked back inside for another coffee on the pretext of needing the loo, and put a spare Danish pastry in my bag for later. It was to be the last I got that day, but alien hunting beckoned! Johan claimed he'd already had two good fish (I'm not at all sure about this; he's very keen on his self-photos and I didn't see any...)



Then Johan drove us up the road to a nature reserve, the place with the reeds in the photos. Absolutely idyllic and just screamed fish. Unfortunately it was not to be. I didn't see a damned thing. Johan got this horse in a very similar spot to where I took the photo. (title photo)

Then it was off to a very pretty street on the outskirts of a small town. Once again, idyllic. Quite surreal wandering along in front of

people's houses with them looking out and waving; trying to avoid dog-walkers, lamp posts & cyclists with your back cast...!! I really enjoyed this, despite the lack of fish. This was the nearest I came all day, funnily enough; I saw a huge shoal of silver fish leaping to avoid an unseen predator. Well, I couldn't miss, could I? wrong! Even with the little fish still jumping, the pike wasn't interested in anything I dropped in the middle. Ho hum... still, a bit of excitement on a very grey & gloomy day and actually something I've not seen very often. Shoals of bait fish are a bit thin on the ground back home.

So we return to our heroes (?) being whizzed around the Dutch "countryside" by a visiting Belgian guru.

As I said, fishing down the pretty street was an absolute pleasure. It actually brightened up for a bit and the overhanging trees and marginal plants gave you a feeling of confidence. If you were a pike, you would! We saw our only other fly fisher at this point too; he'd driven up, made a few casts further down the street, then walked back for a quick chat with me. Nice guy, local. Hadn't had anything anywhere else this morning and was doing the rounds, so to speak. This seems to be the way forwards. With the benefit of hindsight we should've done more of this and that would be my plan of action if I ever did it

again. I wandered back and chucked a floating deerhair perch out where I'd seen the chasing fish, just in case it was still around & mopping up; but nothing moved.



Into the car and off down another suburban street.

I should try and describe these, but I thought a picture (stolen from the net) did it best. As you can see you're basically wandering down a street in front of quite nice suburban houses, interspersed with nurseries/small factory units. Some of the houses obviously belong to the business owners, some are offices, others are just normal, family houses. All lumped in together. Just as a matter of interest, there are no corner shops, cafes or bars. Presumably these are all down the main street in the town, hence lack of provisions!!

It was pretty gloomy & bleak now and I have to say I was beginning to lose interest. Even the most pikey looking spots yielded nothing. Eventually we moved on to a far more urban location, somewhere on the outskirts of *****.

Now, given a half decent day and full of enthusiasm I'd find something like this great fun. But I have to say in rapidly fading light, foggy, with cars whizzing behind you, dodgy characters walking past and being cold, tired and hungry, this really wasn't much fun at all. Johan & Colin both wandered off in search of their own private versions of urban hell and I did my best but just couldn't summon up any enthusiasm. Then, right on last light with the street



lights on, I started seeing fish moving on the surface! They could only have been carp. Needless to say, all my carpy looking flies were locked away safely in Johan's car.... Then another flurry of activity showed something predatory clearly chasing smaller fish. The carp seemed completely unconcerned by this. It was so dark at this point I wonder whether this could've been zander? Anyway, I had a cast or two and pretty much worked my way through the fly box to no avail. At which point Colin & Johan re-appeared to put me out of my misery; flicking flies into a channel alongside an office car-park under a



dim street light.

Johan said the polders have good numbers of carp (!) especially during the summer; but he'd never gone for them or even considered them as suitable for fly fishing. Amazing, eh? Just shows how focussed/blinkered folks can get. I reckon a little pre-baiting and suitable flies would've had those fish, despite the near freezing temperatures. They were certainly schlooping away

happily!

So, back to the digs for a quick shower, then out to find food again. We'd already agreed that we were buying Johan dinner (which seemed the decent thing to do, considering how kind he'd been), but I must admit we were dreading the bill! We ended up in a little town called *****. This is stunningly beautiful, almost mediaeval architecture. Great meal here but once again we were e40+ a head.. gulp.



Next morning we'd arranged breakfast for a more reasonable 0830. So we tackled up at 0700 and had a wander around the village in a beautiful deep frost. Nothing doing, of course, but at least we came back to a welcome and more relaxed breakfast. We then headed off to the nature reserve, but there were sheets of ice everywhere so after twenty minutes or so whizzed off to a series of polders down the road from ***** which Johan had said was a banker area. Well, maybe. But not today!

After a couple of hours we headed back to the nature reserve (via a couple of other roadside venues), which had thawed out a bit. I headed straight for one of the reed fringed channels that I posted the photo of. These are quite deep; you certainly wouldn't wade them. They also drop sharply immediately beyond the reeds, so they're potentially quite dangerous. Anyway, I started flicking out my favourite 3d dodger fly and twitching it back, no more than 3 or 4 rod lengths down the channel (they're only about two red lengths wide), having threaded my rod through the reeds. Must've been second cast I realised

the polder wasn't nearly as deep as I thought, as I could clearly see my fly outlined against the sandy bottom. Strange.

Nope, not strange at all; it wasn't the bottom. It was simply the biggest pike I've ever seen in my puff, seen through the brown water and tracking my fly!! That fish was easily 4 foot plus and so broad across the back it'd looked like a bank of shingle. Awesome. Well, it damned nearly took that fly, dropped a bit deeper, jerked forward again as I twitched the fly, then surfaced right behind it. I was genuinely shaking at this point. Then it just hung back. I flicked the fly out again, virtually dragged it across its nose (can you imagine how exciting this was?) but no response. I still had enough of my wits about me to change the fly, so I tried it with that red & white jointed one. same response; came within a gnat's chuff of



snapping at it, then just hung there, sank down a bit and leisurely drifted forwards down the polder.

I hurriedly worked my way twenty yards down the bank with the monster in full sight all the way, then tried to intercept it. It wasn't up for it. My third cast, as it cruised towards me, a bit too keen, landed squarely on its nose and with one flick of its tail, that was that...

Colin came round the corner to find me just sitting at the edge of the reed fringe gazing into space. If I was a smoker, I'd have sparked one up! And I could *really* have used a good coffee at this point.

We saw nothing else and time was pressing, so we headed back to ***** and the polders near the village. Still Baltically cold at this point, and not likely to warm up, of course.... Nothing doing. So, for our final throw of the dice we decided to have a last chuck in the ponds/polders behind the farm, then get changed for the journey home. Colin headed one way round the cow shed, I went the other and was in position for a cast just as he hove into view.

It was perfect timing. My jointed red & white special plopped into the pond right next to a linking channel and a tell-tale hump of water appeared behind it. "Ooh, here we go!" I said to Colin. And sure

enough, BANG, there was a pike on the end! It gave a good account of itself with a few jumps and runs, so once it was calming down a bit I handed Colin my camera. We had no net, and the sides of the pond were a bit steep, but I'd got it lying at the edge so knelt down to chin it. Got my hands on the trace, and the fly fell out.... So no photo of that one! as I said to Colin, "Saves all the palaver with pliers, I suppose..." Would've gone 10 pounds or so, possibly a wee bit more.



And that, pretty much, was that!



Dave Felce, aka "Corsican Dave", has been fishing since childhood; now a very, very long time ago. Cutting his teeth on the canals & clay pits of Milton Keynes, he first picked up a fly rod around 40 years ago. He promptly attached his trusty spinning reel & wondered why it didn't work very well...

Things have moved on a bit since then & Dave has been actively pushing the boundaries of fly-fishing for many years with wide experience in SWFF, kayak fishing, pike on fly and, most importantly, carp. Living in the carp desert of the Scottish highlands he has mostly concentrated his efforts in the wilds of Spain, primarily using imitations of natural food items & basing his approach on observation & experimentation.

Brimming over with passion & enthusiasm for his subject he has set up the popular "Carp Champions" group on Facebook which has attracted active participation by successful exponents of fly fishing for carp from around the world. He has been published in a number of magazines and online media, and is currently compiling a history of fly fishing for carp; which he has presented as a lecture at the prestigious British Fly Fair International

An Applied Biologist (somewhat lapsed) and a qualified outdoors instructor, he has said some very rude things about the UK's carp scene and claims to have never visited a commercial carp fishery in his life. He is the Brand Ambassador for Gouldfish Custom Rods, a member of IGFA and the American Carp Society, and an enthusiastic patron of the Wild Carp Trust.

Our Boys' Own Mayfly Adventure

Geoff Hadley shares one of life's great experiences with his sons



It just might be, living in England's middle lands as I do, that I am rather spoiled for my fishing. Not only do I have three delightful mixed species rivers practically on my doorstep and innumerable coarse and trout, still and moving water venues just a short car ride away but, and this is probably the jewel in the crown, I am also in the very fortunate position to hold a season ticket on the world famous Peacock Fly Fishing Club waters of the Haddon Estate in Derbyshire.

I came later to angling than most of the fisherfolk I know. I was twelve or thirteen before a neighbour took me under his wing, having seen me perched at the side of his pond with a makeshift fishing rod

fashioned from a garden cane and a piece of string, and began to teach me the ways of the angle. Most of my friends who fished were introduced to the sport by a close relative at a much earlier age, but my immediate family were all golfers and nobody in my extended family fished regularly, though my Gramps, Roy Pearce (known to all as "Pops") dabbled from time to time.

But why do I mention this here? Well, having not had the opportunity to experience angling at an early age myself, I became determined that my own children (when they came along) would be able to have experiences that had never been on the cards for me. Don't get me wrong; my childhood was as close to idyllic as it gets, but I can't help wondering about all the days on the river or lake-side that I might have had if my interest in angling had been picked up on earlier. You might say I've been making up for lost time ever since.

Now... there's a lot of fuss made every year about Mayfly Time on the UK's trout streams and rivers. It's not very often that I've been in a position to take advantage of it, what with work and family commitments, however this year I not only had the opportunity to get involved with some mayfly action myself but it also fell at just the right time for my two sons to experience it as well. Spring half-term.

It was our ten year old, Will's turn to get involved first. His school broke up earlier than his older brother's and, on a Wednesday morning near the end of May, he helped me pack my van with fly rods and assorted accoutrements, waterproofs, wellies, and snacks galore in preparation for the hour and a bit's drive to Bakewell and Rowsley in Derbyshire.

Our excitement and anticipation were high. We had been planning this trip for a couple of weeks. We had tied flies over the last couple of evenings and I had checked the river conditions and chatted to friends who had been on the river Wye on the last few days. The mayfly were hatching and the trout, including the Derbyshire Wye's famous wild rainbows, were on the fin and looking up!

We left home in bright sunshine, but the skies darkened the closer we got to our goal and, as we dropped down towards Lathkill dale, the rain began to fall; nothing too serious, just a lightish drizzle, but if it kept it up it had the potential to make us very wet indeed...

That said, the forecast was for showers and sunny intervals, and that usually means good insect hatches on the Wye. My optimism remained high though Will's face betrayed his uncertainty in spite of my reassurances.

Pulling up at the Haddon Road car park the rain, if anything had increased, and we sat in the van for a



while and topped our breakfast up with snacks before donning our waterproofs and setting up our rods. Will's 8ft #4 weight Wychwood Flow, with a #5 weight line (to help with his casting) and 12ft 8lb tapered leader and my favourite Wychwood Drift XL #4 weight in its 9ft 6in configuration and a lighter, longer leader in case we found fish that were more choosy than just smashing mayfly.

Will had a few practice casts in the car park before we approached the river. It had been several months since our last fishing trip together, but I was pleasantly surprised to see him put out a decent line without any intervention or instruction from me. Perhaps things were shaping up nicely in spite of the weather...?

I gave Will the choice of upstream or downstream, confident that could find us some fish to cast to whichever way we went, and Will chose the downstream option. We approached the river and it became apparent straight away that mayfly were coming off, but we walked a good hundred yards

before we spotted a rise and that turned out to be an out of season grayling. Trekking down below the old black barn we happened upon a deeper pool below a fast, shallow run and there we spied a group of half a dozen really good fish, feeding hard on nymphs; but again they were grayling. I noted their position for a revisit after June 16th and we moved on.

As we got further downstream we began to notice the odd rise here and there, and we stopped a couple of times so that Will could flex his rod, but each time it seemed that the fish were "oncercs" and Will's casts drew no interest. What we needed were fish that were rising consistently and, after wandering past another few pools, we finally found what we were looking for in a couple of pools below a sweeping right hand bend.

The river here runs, at first, shallow on the nearside with a deeper run from around three quarters of the way across. It then drops into a sort of pot that stretches the width of the river and is overhung by alders on both sides at the lower part of the run. The top of the run looked reasonably easy for us to fish. The bank was clear behind and three or four fish were sipping in that run between the far bank and a tress of streamer weed a little over two thirds of the way across. The lower end, however, looked like jungle warfare and it was here that a consistent rise form at the back of an overhanging tree caught my eye. The fish was sipping away, taking olives or midge rather than the enthusiastic splashy rises of a mayfly eater, but I could see from the water it pushed that it was a good fish.

Will declared himself in need of another snack. "But I've already had a few casts, Daddy. Why don't you have a go?" I didn't need any more urging than that and, swiftly and stealthily, I worked my way

into position opposite the downstream riser. Several large dark olives fluttered or sailed downstream on the current and those that found themselves on the edge of the crease at the back of the overhanging alder were taken down in short order by my target fish.

My fly was a size 14 olive pattern with an olive thread body, coq-de-leon tail, grizzle hackle, cdc wing and a touch of hare's ear at the thorax. I was confident in my choice and, as I worked a little line off my



reel in order to make the roll cast that was needed (another alder at my back and slightly downstream meant a conventional cast was out of the question here), I was sure that if I could just get my fly onto that crease the fish would take it.

My first three casts fell short, but the fish continued to rise. Will, his interest piqued by my heightened state of tension and concentration, left his snacks and came closer, setting up the camera on the phone as he did.

My next cast fell perfectly! The fly sat for half a moment then began to glide with the flow. A movement from below. A bulge of water and a flash of white. My fly disappeared. I struck and all hell broke loose in that little patch of water in front of me! A good fish threw itself into the air, then bored deep and downstream toward the sanctuary of roots. I held hard and clamped down on the reel. The fish flashed and twisted deep down, bucking my rod into an alarming curve. Will shouted! I shouted! The fish changed its tack and bolted upstream. I dipped the rod low into the river to clear the line of the upstream snags, and ran up the bank in an effort to keep up with the powerful run. The trout came to the surface again and thrashed its displeasure, but I was in control now, forcing it to come further upstream. Will passed me the net and, as the fish came to the surface again, it slipped into the waiting folds. The prize was mine!

Gleaming bronze and gold, with red, black and orange spots, and white tips to the fins, it was a perfect

example of the Derbyshire Wye's wild brown trout. I couldn't have been more pleased. We unhooked and rested it in the net before Will took a couple of photos and then released it. At perhaps a little under two pounds it was the perfect start and a third of our mission was complete. Now it was Will's turn.



After the commotion of the fight and return of my fish I had expected the area to be blown, but the two or three fish in the upstream run were still rising as though nothing had happened. More than this there was now the odd big splashy rise that gives away the presence of fish feeding on mayfly. Will took up his rod and cast across the current. His fly settled on the water, drifted a yard and then began to drag horribly. He lifted off and tried again with the same result. He tried a third time, a little upstream but the same thing happened. To make matters worse the fish continued to rise, taking in flies as they came down on the current, and completely ignoring Will's imitation. The leader just couldn't cope with the converging currents and his presentation was ruined...

"Don't worry, mate," I said. "Try this instead." And I handed him my rod with the longer leader and smaller fly. Two more casts and the olive was taken in again. Will struck smartly and another good fish tried to make off upstream!

Will gave line as the fish ran, then began to reel furiously as it turned suddenly and carted off downstream towards the snags that had harboured my fish. For half a moment the line went slack as the fish drew level, then tightened again as Will held hard against the downstream rush! The rod bucked, then flattened as he held on, the taut line dragging the trout to the surface just inches from sanctuary. It swirled angrily, dived against the pressure which forced it up again, and swirled once more. The rod unbent a touch as the trout gave ground, inch by inch Will's pressure told, and the trout grudgingly came back upstream.



Just as it looked like the fight was won and the trout had given up to the waiting net, it suddenly found its second wind and dived into a midstream weedbed. There was nothing Will or I could do. Everything had gone solid. Will's face, a picture of excitement and joy just a moment before, dropped like a stone. "Keep the pressure on," I instructed. "If he's still there he'll come out!" Will did as he was bid and, after a couple of minutes or so (which felt like an hour to me, so the gods only know how it felt for Will!), the rod began to kick with life again.

The trout suddenly burst free and the line cut out of the weed towards the near bank. Will clamped down again, lifted the rod, and his fish came to the surface just in front of me! I stretched out as far as I could from the bank and just managed to get the rim under the thrashing trout and in. There was a moment of silence and stillness, followed by a great roar as we both cheered in victory! Will dropped the rod and ran down the bank to me to get a proper look at his prize. A glistening, almost silver sided, fish with a dark back and yellow bellow. It had more black spots than red or orange, and a very pronounced lateral line. It was only his second ever wild brown trout and it could not have been more perfect!

As with our first fish, this one was rested, unhooked, a couple of photographs were taken and it was returned. It shot off at a rocket's pace, back to the weedbed it had tried to find safety in just a few

minutes before.

“Daddy, I’m hungry!” declared Will. Looking at my watch I was amazed to discover it was 12:55 so, to be fair he had a point. We hitched up our rods and headed back across the fields to the van, Will chivvying me along whenever I stopped to look into a swim or at a rising fish. Ten or fifteen minutes later we were sitting at a table in The Grouse and Claret, awaiting a “Posh fish finger butt” and sausage and mash. I’ll let you guess who ordered what...

With our stomachs filled after a hearty lunch, we returned to the Wye below Bakewell and continued our quest. Having beaten his PB brown trout by some considerable margin in the morning, Will was very keen to make the acquaintance of a wild rainbow or two in the afternoon.

The morning's rain had eased off considerably, the sun was doing its best to make a rather more sustained appearance, thus raising the temperature, and the river's insect life reacted in kind. As soon as we approached the river again it was clear that all sorts of bugs and flies had reacted to nature's call (not that one!) and were visible in the air and on the water's surface, including hoards of mayfly.

We didn't have to walk far before we spotted rising fish, and those tell-tale big, splashy rises that give away the mayfly feeders. The first couple of fish we covered turned out to be grayling, so we quickly moved on. The next rise came from a small 'bow who was just too quick for us; but the delight on Will's face as he saw the fish come up for his fly more than made up for his (brief) disappointment at missing the take.

Shortly after that we spotted a rise, in fact a series of rises, in a slow back eddy, under the near bank. From the amount of water this fish moved as it hit the mayfly, I could tell straight away that it was a big one. Not only that, but I knew from previous experience that this swim was home to a particularly big and wily brown trout. I, and a couple of friends, had tried to stalk it out on a few occasions previously, and each time we had come away firmly defeated. Could it be that this time the tables would be turned?

Will and I crept up along the bank, practically on our hands and knees, well away from the water's edge, and Will put in a short cast with a touch of slack in it. With the way the water moves here we were effectively using a downstream presentation. The fly sat for a few moments, and then a huge white mouth opened up from below and engulfed our offering (a fly Will had tied the previous evening)! The leader slid away, the line went tight and Will's little Wychwood Flow rod hooped over even before he'd had a chance to



strike! The huge brown, easily three times as big as the ones we'd caught in the morning, tanked off out into the river, downstream and across, line pouring from the reel as it made for the snags on the far side!

It was just then that I remembered I'd set Will up with an 8lb tapered leader, as opposed to my usual delicate gear, and I shouted, "Hold him, Will! Hold him!" Will did as instructed, laughing and shouting, and the rod bent alarmingly, right through its length! The fish came up to the surface and thrashed, just shy of the far side branches! A huge male with a fearsome kype! Bright gold and yellow with black, orange and red spots on its flanks! By the gods it was angry!

Just as I thought we might have the measure of the fish it changed tack and dived back across the river towards us. Will just couldn't reel fast enough to keep up, such was the speed of its charge, and the line went slack as the fly dropped from its jaw...

Now, I would've been biting chunks out of the rod butt, but Will? Not a bit of it! His disappointment was obvious, for a moment, but was replaced almost instantly by a big excited grin! "That was amazing! Let's get another one!" And so we tried again...

We roved up and down the river, casting to risers or into likely looking spots. Will lost another four fish, including a good sized rainbow, but never once did his head droop or his enthusiasm wane; and he did, in the end, get his wild rainbow. In fact he got two! Both little ones, and both attacked his mayfly with the greatest of gusto. Their size didn't matter. The beauty of these fish is incredible and we had exactly what we came for. It was only as Will released his second little 'bow that I realised I had barely cast a line all afternoon!

Our mission accomplished, we finished the tea in our flask and stowed our gear in the van. Will gave his verdict, "This is the best fishing trip I've ever been on! I didn't get bored even for a second!" And with that we headed for home.

A day short of a week later I found myself finishing work early and haring back to home along the roads of rural Shropshire and Staffordshire to pick up Will's older brother, Jack, in order to head off once again and make the journey over to Bakewell, or near about, in the hope of experiencing a mayfly spinner fall on the Derbyshire Wye...

Sadly, it wasn't to be this time. We only saw three or four danica all evening, and only one of those was taken (though a mate of mine and fellow Peacock Club member messaged me the following evening to tell me that the spinner fall was, "Insane!" Sometimes you catch it right and sometimes you don't). We covered that fish several times but it wasn't interested in our imitation, so we turned away in search, and



hope, of more willing adversaries. Our evening started poorly. After failing to rise that first fish Jack snagged a mid-river branch and, as I pulled to try to retrieve his fly, the leader parted and so did the top section of his Wychwood Flow rod! It speared out into the flow, and I daresay it's never to be seen again...

All was not lost, however. I had a spare rod in the van, a Wychwood Drift XL, and, as we trekked back to the side road where I'd parked up, we could see that the air was filled with olives, midges and small sedge, and the river's surface was broken by rises, almost everywhere we cast our eyes!

I soon had the spare rod rigged up with a lighter leader than our mayfly gear and a small olive tied to the tippet. We made our way across the meadow to Scott's Garden, and once there we began to cast in earnest, covering the rising fish with growing hope and expectation. After a good many casts, and several periods of resting the swim, we were still biteless. By this time it was after 7pm, and our stomachs were grumbling. Jack called a halt to our endeavours and declared that a trip to the chippy



was called for! (You will note a certain recurring theme here with children and food). I couldn't disagree.

It is a hard thing to leave readily feeding fish, but I was pretty sure our risers and sippers would wait a half an hour or so for us to return, and so we made our way to Catch 32 on the main road through town, having first found The Riverside Chippy closed. The wait for our fish and chips and sausage and a "battered bread cake" (a bread roll to most of the rest of us. I suspect it's a Derbyshire thing) seemed to take an eternity; the thought of those feeding fish going round and round in my mind. What were they feeding on? What fly should I try next? And so on and so on...

As I waited for our food and Jack guarded our rods and bits and pieces outside, a rain squall came in and I began to worry that the sudden change in the weather might knock off the hatches and shut down the feeding fish.

As it turned out I needn't have worried. Having found a dryish bench to sit on and devour our chippy tea, it became obvious that the insect hatches had continued unabated, if anything only increasing in their intensity.

Having finished our food in double quick time, aided slightly by the water fowl and other denizens of the Bakewell aquarium, we returned to Scott's Garden and began to cast in earnest again. Our mayflies were roundly ignored (well, it had to be worth another try!) as were a large dark olive, a

couple of sedge patterns and a cdc iron blue. We were becoming more and more frustrated. Our casts were accurate (Jack's had come on in leaps and bounds as the evening had progressed), our drifts looked good, and yet we could not even buy a rise.

I finally cracked the code, after more than a dozen changes of fly, with a tiny spinner pattern, recommended to me by Sir Peter Arfield a few years ago.

The fish that Jack had been casting to ceased their rising, either their appetites had been sated or they'd got fed up of his repeated casts, and he came along the bank to see if he could try for the fish that still rose in front of me. I gladly gave up my swim and tried to issue instruction and encouragement as he took on the challenge.

As the minutes passed it became obvious that the fish had moved across the river and just a touch out of his casting range. After another few casts he turned to me and, with the great reluctance that only a thirteen year old can properly convey, asked, "Dad, can you get me out to them?" I must admit I struggled to suppress a chuckle, but I took the rod and did as he'd asked.

Casting a little further across the river I was in the act of passing the rod to Jack when a fish popped its head up and took in the fly. We struck together, instinct taking over both of us for just that one moment, and a good sized wild rainbow went absolutely berserk!

Jack could do nothing but hold on and hope at first as the fish ran yards and yards of line off the RS2 reel, greyhounding across the surface for all the world like a baby marlin! I'm not sure how, but at some point I managed to shoot a few seconds of video and take a few photos as the trout charged around the river. Jack managed to maintain his cool and his connection to the fish, his feet planted wide on the bankside, his arms and shoulders taking the strain on the rod, reel and line in the classic pose of a boy giving battle to a piscine adversary and, after several minutes, and a good few fraught moments of losing and regaining line and changing the angle of the rod as the trout leapt into the air time and time again, he finally drew it upstream towards my waiting landing net.

I lifted the mesh around the fish and a cheer went up, both from Father and Son and from a passing couple on the bridge who had stopped to watch! The fish was an immaculate wild rainbow, something a little over 2lbs in weight. A truly wonderful fish. There really is nothing like them in British freshwater.

We rested the fish and got set up for a photo, but the 'bow had no intention of posing for the camera and leapt away to freedom as Jack held it up, and before I could hit the button! It didn't really matter at all. We had got what we came for, and though we fished on until dark, I'm not convinced Jack's heart was really in it after that. We headed for home, across the meadows to the van, and, on the almost deserted Derbyshire and Staffordshire roads between Bakewell and home, looking out for owls as we went.

My boys may not take to angling in the same way I have. They have other interests; athletics, rugby, netball, football, horse riding, running around with their friends. Girls and/or boys will enter the equation at some point, nights out, I daresay. Parties and booze and all that... But I, we, in fact, my wife Beth and I, have given them opportunities that I, or we, never had when I was their age and, by the gods, I hope... No. I believe that they'll remember these times for the rest of their lives

Geoff Hadley is a borderline obsessive-compulsive angler who lives in the middle-lands of England and would cast into a muddy puddle in the road if he thought there might be a chance of a fish. He tries to combine his loves of angling, nature and the outdoors with family life and, just occasionally, he gets it right; or near enough.

Having grown up coarse/bait fishing in rural Shropshire, Geoff took up fly fishing two decades ago, after moving to Staffordshire, and now targets both coarse fish and trout on fly tackle.

In 2021 he joined Wychwood Game's Team Wychwood and now works to promote family fly fishing and fly fishing for coarse and alternative fish species to trout and salmon through his social media accounts, writing, and other media.



So that's it for the fourth edition of the new Fish Wild. Hope you enjoyed it!

As was said at the off we are still experimenting with layouts etc and nothing has been set in stone.

The 'magazine-like' facing page layout used in this issue has allowed the use of larger images that can be printed across two facing pages. We hope you like it. There are bound to be mistakes, typos etc that have been missed, we don't have a team of proof readers, so please be understanding about this.

If you have any suggestions please get in touch using the Contact Us menu on the Fish Wild website and please remember contributions of articles, photos etc are always welcome.

<https://www.fishwild.org.uk/contact-us/>

Tight Lines



Man In Tights Approaches The Tekapo River
Photo: F. Carrie