



# The Vice



## **Newsletter of the Tasmanian Fly Tyers' Club Inc.**

**Volume 15 , Issue 14 Summer 2021**

**Inside: Penstock Weekend, Miena Trip, Cane Rods, Books *and much more...***

*Cover Shot – Searching for the Rise - Penstock 2021 – Thanks to Stephen Butler for the pic*

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	Tony Abel
	Tim Urbanc
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<http://tasmanianflytyersclub.org>

## President's Report



Summer has arrived and this means lots of fishing for most members. The hatches have been a bit sporadic throughout the Highlands with many people reporting very different fishing from

day to day.

Christmas drinks were well attended at the Lenah Valley RSL Club on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December. Most of those there were planning fishing trips all over the state. The LVRSL now has a QR scanning code for all that visit, consigning the old school sign in sheet to the dustbin. 26 members enjoyed finger food and very pleasant conversation.

As mentioned with many Club members fishing our January General Meeting was held at the Central Highlands Lodge. There was not quiet enough for a quorum, but all had a great meal. The Rack of Lamb provided the most popular choice. The Club would like to thank Mike Cousins and Helen Monks for their kind donation of \$100.

There were 2 fishing trips based at the Miena shack and I will leave it up to those who attended to fill you all in. Needless to say, a good time (and plenty of wine) was had by all. It is pleasing to see \$525.00 in shack fees, meaning the Miena shack is being well used.

As I write some intrepid walkers are out in the Western Lakes and we look forward to their reports.

The Penstock Long Table Dinner was held mid-February. This was based at Malcolm's shack and spilling over into some others for overnight accommodation. With a BYO BBQ on Friday night most people took to the water on Saturday to fish. It was a bright day with a lot of water between each fish. It was tough with the total for 12 members catching 4 fish in total. The Saturday dinner was superb with Steve and David T pulling out all the stops. Stunning food with fishing friends is hard to pass up. Thanks to Aspro for his organisation and to Malcolm for the use of his shack for this event. I was lucky enough to fish with Aspro on Friday, Tim Urbanc on Saturday and Tony Abel on Sunday. I managed one fish and witnessed Tim break a fly rod on a reasonable size brown trout!

Talbot's Lagoon and the Casting Day at Salmon Ponds are fast approaching so please register on the club web site.

The Fowler Trophy is still open; I plan to fish my day this week. Remember there is a 'Lucky Entry' prize so it's not just about winning numbers.

The Club membership remains fully subscribed and we have Martin Excel (nominated by James Mackay and seconded by David Hemmings) on the waiting list. Please make yourself known to Martin if you meet him at any club activity.

Tight Lines

**Andrew Reed**



Steve at Spot On fishing tackle has kindly provided the Club with 4 vouchers to the value of \$30 each for the coming season. Many thanks for this kind support, and continue to patronise Steve's shop. Vouchers can be picked up from the Editor at your leisure!

***This time the vouchers go to Denis Abbott, Chris Hilton and Jim Jones for their brilliant articles!***

**So...Write the best story and win a \$30 Spot On voucher!**

**Send your stories to [55dmiller@gmail.com](mailto:55dmiller@gmail.com)**



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## Editorial

As this edition goes to members I find myself hobbling around on crutches after having my left hip replaced. Everything is going really well and according to plan but it doesn't look like I will get much chance to wet a line for about 5-6 weeks. After that I might get an opportunity to poke around the fresh water for a couple of weeks before I go back in to get my left hip (which was replaced about 12 years ago) 'revised'. After recovering from that I will definitely be an authentic artificial hippie!

In this edition we have reports on the Penstock Weekend, which was once again a triumph for its organisation if not for the fishing. It seems the trout are staying down, not coming out of their homes and even socially distancing at the moment.

There is also a report on the Miena Field Trip from December last year. It was a great trip I think but so much seems to have happened it is difficult to remember with clarity. Still... it's a fishing publication so truth is never paramount!

There is a possibility for a new section this time called the Fly Fishers Bookshelf. This was inspired by the efforts of two members (Denis and Dr Chris) who submitted two very well researched and beautifully written book reviews. I'm sure there are members with some brilliant books that they might like to share or at least alert members to. If this is you then please let me know.

Jim Jones has also revealed that he has embarked on a journey repairing bamboo rods and he loves it. Jim is one of my oldest friends and is the one responsible me taking up fly-fishing in the first place! His passion for his newly found obsession makes wonderful reading.

Finally, I hope that the fish start reappearing over the next few weeks, possibly to jassids as that would make me, and a lot of others, very happy.

DM



## The Penstock Weekend 2021

The Penstock Weekend is one of the events of the season and is eagerly anticipated by many members. It ranks alongside the Tiger Hut Tying trip, the Casting Day and the Bothwell dams weekend as highlights of the fly-fishing calendar. This year's event was organised by Malcolm Crosse, Mark 'Aspro' Aspinall, Stephen Butler and David Travalia and was centered on Malcolm's wonderful shack in the posh part of Penstock.



People started arriving on the Friday and were greeted by tough fishing conditions with cool weather and not much activity on the top. A BYO barbecue at Malcolm's provided the opportunity for everyone to get together and plan the next days fishing.



Saturday was misty early and looked promising. I fished early with Zuie and we covered all the usual spots without luck. It was cool and there didn't seem to be any more than a trickle of duns and no fish anywhere to be seen. After hearing that Aspro had caught a nice fish we tried again after

lunch and fished well into the afternoon without luck before returning for the much-anticipated Long Table meal.



The main feature of the weekend is the Long Table meal on the Saturday night at Malcolm's place. This year the culinary dream team of Butler and Travalia once again conceived the menu. Kitchen boy Aspro who seemed to be everywhere ably supported them. The teamwork was exceptional but the meal was even better!





During the meal I asked the 14 gun anglers present to disclose the number of fish caught for the day. Surely with such an illustrious and experienced group, which included the crown prince of Penstock Tim Urbanc, the numbers would be quite impressive. The reality was that we managed a combined total of 4 fish and Murray Proctor, who used an interesting approach which involved getting as close to the fish as possible, caught two of those!



The meal was brilliant and the night was beautiful. A perfect opportunity to wander to the lagoons edge to search for late night rises. It was a photographers dream. Stephen Butler even felt compelled to try out his yoga poses sans basic clothing!



People trickled of on the Sunday, some fished Penstock and others tried the Pine. I fished with Zuie again and he managed to boat two beautiful fish that were in magnificent condition and close to 5lbs. I caught nothing. Apparently I don't catch trout any more! I found it really rude of the Penstock fish to ignore all the effort that others and I put in. We tied magnificent flies, cast elegantly with great skill and presentation. Placed flies in every conceivable spot and still they ignored us. Selfish bastards...



A great big thank you to Malcolm, Aspro, Steve and David for all their efforts in making the weekend a resounding success.

DM

## The Appeal of Bamboo Fishing Rods



Bamboo has been used as the primary material for making fishing rods up until the 1960s, when its popularity faded with the advent of fibreglass and later, graphite materials, both of which are lighter, supposedly more durable, and easier to manufacture. But the obituaries for split bamboo were as premature as those for vinyl records and CD's. Fast forward 60 years and split-bamboo fly rods are better than they've ever been. Today's rod makers have more than 150 years' worth of collective experience to draw upon, plus the advantages of 21st century glues and varnishes. For once, tradition meets high tech with a happy outcome<sup>1</sup> - from Dickerson, Garrison, Hardy, Leonard, Orvis, Payne, Southam, Thomas, Turville, Walker, Winston<sup>2</sup> - to - Bannister, Barder, Brandin, Cattanch, Chapman, Clemes, Cook, Davis, McKean, Morgan, Nakamura, Nunley, Sao-Naka, Shibuya, Schroeder, Taransky, Wagner and Young<sup>3</sup> (to name a few).

Bamboo is a species of grass - more like a reed than a piece of timber - and it has a natural sensitivity that more modern materials lack. Bamboo fans say that their rods cast more fluidly, that their slight extra weight does more of the work, and that they're better at cushioning light leaders. Where a graphite caster would talk about power and efficiency, one who uses bamboo might invoke terms such as "warmth" and "friendliness." There's also the matter of uniqueness. As a fly fisher, there are also the basic decisions to make when assembling the arsenal of approach - stream/lake, wet/dry - floating/sinking - graphite/cane, wade/boat, etc.

Part of the character of every split-cane rod is imparted by the particular culm of bamboo from which it was made - its size, age, density, moisture content, whether or not it was heat-treated, and if so, how - so that even among identical rods by the same maker, there can be discernible differences. Bamboo rods, like violins, are said to evolve with use, so even if a rod doesn't have a personality the first time you string it up, it will after you've fished with it for a few seasons.

The perception that bamboo rods are too slow and very heavy is owed to old, heavy, long, mass produced rods, incorrect line weights and the size and spacing of rod guides. Early rods had much smaller guides for casting silk lines, whereas the contemporary lines of today require a larger rod guide diameter and correctly sized tip tops. Guide spacing is also critical - some fly rods whether cane, glass or graphite, have poor guide set outs, contributing to inefficient casting and the inability to shoot the line out to maximum effect. At the end of the day a fly rod is a fly rod.

According to Nick Taransky<sup>4</sup>, one of Australia's finest contemporary rod makers, "bamboo is best suited to line weights between #3 & #6 and lengths between 6 & 8 feet. Within this range the weight and flex of bamboo is at its best. These shorter length rods have many advantages in tight, bushy surrounds. For those technically minded, the modulus of bamboo lies between that of fibreglass (S-glass) and graphite."

Jim Morris<sup>5</sup> also reflected his thoughts to me recently, on the appeal and qualities of bamboo, after many years of fishing and building split cane fly rods; "a good cane rod presents your fly far more accurately and delicately than most alternatives and I personally find that once you hook a fish, cane's deeper flex cushions the fight more effectively and you lose far fewer fish. I'm constantly amazed how many good anglers tell me how many fish they have 'dropped' on their stiffer graphite rods. I find losing a fish is a rarity on cane. Possibly on the downside, some anglers complain that the cane's softness doesn't allow them to set the hook as effectively when fishing dry flies. I actually find that is an advantage, as I've always been a hard striker, so a hard strike is offset by a softer rod."

Relatively few older split-cane rods are, in monetary terms, worth a full 'restoration' by a professional rod builder. Many old rods are long and heavy, have fittings which are not original, have been rebound

<sup>1</sup> John Gierach, Bloomberg, 2019

<sup>2</sup> <https://antiquerodandreels.com/rodmanufacturers>

<sup>3</sup> [https://splitcaneinfo.com/?page\\_id=26](https://splitcaneinfo.com/?page_id=26)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.taranskybamboo.com.au>

<sup>5</sup> <https://antiquerodandreels.com/rodmanufacturers>

<sup>6</sup> [https://splitcaneinfo.com/?page\\_id=26](https://splitcaneinfo.com/?page_id=26) Split-cane fly rod is made from strips of bamboo, called "solines," that are cut from a stalk, or "culm," of bamboo. (The joints themselves

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.taranskybamboo.com.au>

<sup>5</sup> Jim Morris is a local split cane rod builder

poorly and the cost and effort of a full restoration is not warranted, unless the rod is a very rare rod with high collector value - or there is another reason. The alternative to restoration is to simply repair the rod to use - restoration versus repair is a key decision to make when an assessing the path to take.



My late friend Rory Spence, kindly gave me his Hardy Wanless 7' split-cane fishing rod a few years ago. Rory spent his early years in Northumberland, with the closest town Alnwick, which includes the House of Hardy. The Wanless had been idle for 10 years in its rod bag in my study and just like the lexicon of split-cane rods, this bamboo rod remained a mystery to me until June this year, when I embarked on its research, including type and design, age, material qualities and proper methods of repair. What I didn't realise was that this branch of fishing rod knowledge was wide and deep, much the same as the knowledge of fly tying and all that it entails - so studying the instrument that we all hold in our hands, to cast the fly, seemed very worthwhile.

Luckily, Hardy stamped identification numbers on all their rods, usually on the reel seat, which dated the Wanless at 1954, and it had seen a fair bit of fishing since then. While there was no evidence of cane delamination, after some casting and hearing some 'creaks and groans' as it flexed, I found two small splits in the cane shaft, across the grain, both on the top spline<sup>6</sup>. The cork grip was very grimy and had a damaged mid-section where the reel flange had been cut into the cork. The agate rod guides were all intact, however there was inconsistency in the condition and colour of the dark green silk whippings, tipped in what looked like red felt-pen ink?

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<sup>6</sup> As the name implies, a split-bamboo rod is made from strips of bamboo, called "splines," that are cut from a stalk, or "culm," of bamboo. (The joints themselves are called nodes.) The strips are then tapered, using either a milling machine or, if you want it to take longer, a hand plane and an adjustable form. Afterward, the segments are glued together into a four, five, or more traditionally six-sided shaft.

This method was developed in the mid-1800s and gives the rod maker control over the rod's taper, which determines the way the rod imparts energy to the fly line during the cast - and in fly-casting, that action is everything. Rod makers work to tolerances of a few thousandths of an inch on each spline, and a few thousandths one way or the other can mean the difference between a magnificent casting instrument and a broomstick or expensive garden stake.

While I have some basic wood working tools and skills and have fly fished for 25 years, I had never repaired, nor cast a cane rod. Inexplicably, I felt like I needed to give Rory's Wanless a dignified repair. I used the web as a starting point, first of all 'discovering' Cressy Cane and a link to 'bamboo' Dave Hemmings (I had been living in Victoria during the time the Cressy Cane phenomenon emerged). Next, I googled --' *how to fix a cane rod*' -- maybe I'm stating the obvious, however there are a lot of 'how to fix a fishing rod' videos on the web, however most don't teach anything and many don't actually show you how to do it - a lot of talk and mostly hot air in man caves.



So, my first cane rod repair project was sparked by 'Bamboo' Dave and Matt Draft. Dave, who has been instrumental in the augmentation of the Cressy Cane event (<http://www.cressycane.org>), connected me with Jim Morris, a very fine rod builder who has been very generous with his unswerving, detailed, sage advice.

Matt Draft has developed a specialist fly rod building outlet in the USA called Proof Fly fishing - <https://www.proofflyfishing.com>, which includes free access to a number of erudite tutorials, along with reasonably priced rod building and finishing components. The main points of difference with Matt's videos are that he explains the nature of the problem and takes a practical approach to the solution, demonstrated by his method of object-based teaching which has clarity and embedded insight.

Since then, I decided to have a go at repairing the *Wanless*. I removed some old dirty, plastic/rubber film that was glued to the cork with a heat gun. I then cut out the damaged cork section with a Stanley knife, revealing a string binding as packing on the cane 'blank'.

I had purchased a slightly oversized section of a new cork grip. I cut this to length to fit in tightly between the existing cork laminate dimensions - then I sliced the new cork section longitudinally in half, and glued it into position. After 24 hours, I removed the rubber bands and string binding, then slowly sanded the oversized section by hand, reducing it to closely match the existing cork - a job normally and more

easily done on a lathe as you would understand, however I don't have one. I decided to lightly sand off all the grime on the balance of the grip, built up since C1954.

The project is a repair, not a 'restoration' - repair to use, not a wall hanger! Next step, once the Kimono silk thread arrived, was to glue and string, then over-wrap the cane splits with white silk, which turns invisible after varnishing - one of the 'tricks-of-the-trade'. I also proceeded to learn how to silk-wrap all the rod guides that I had removed to clean up the rod shaft and gently straighten a 'set' in the tip end with a heat gun (on low heat).



Since I began this journey in May 2020, I now have 5 cane fly rods under repair and have fully rebuilt a Japanese split-cane fly rod, removing the 60 years of varnish and all components back to the blank. For this re-build, I commissioned new ferrules that have been finely crafted by Tony Young, (<http://avyoung.com/>) sourced new guides, reel seat and cork grip and researched the best set-out for line guides relative to rod length and weight. Books, silk, rod guides, reel seats, cork grips and winding checks are on order and my work bench is littered with Spar varnish, Tru-Oil, pale French polish, colour preserver, darning needles, brushes, razor blades, cups, vials, rotten stone, sand paper, steel wool, rod jigs, a rod drying rotisserie, pieces of cork and a little Herters rod winder.

I'm not going to the extent of building a split-cane rod from scratch - however - the process and methodology of repairing these fine instruments, working out how to make practical adjustments to a vintage cane rod to allow it to cast properly, or building a new rod from a ready-made blank, I find meaningful and very rewarding. It's a long way from the throw away culture of our time, to revalue something considered redundant, old or useless. Split-cane fishing rods have already outlasted their younger, fibreglass and graphite cousins, which are almost impossible to repair once broken, or very hard to re-surface once they start to decay.

After completing my first few rod repairs and a full re-build, I stand in awe of all split-cane rod makers and builders. There seems to be a type of unwritten camaraderie and unswerving willingness to assist, exemplified by the generosity of Jim Morris, Tim Munro, Dave Hemmings and Tony Young in Australia, along with specialist suppliers and sellers like John and Louise at Thomas Turner, Russ at Golden Witch, Matt at Proof Fly Fishing, Ross at The Rodworks, Ryan at REC, Susan at Pipers Silk and from the UK; John Chapman (R Chapman & Co.), Luke Bannister, Andrew Davis and Paul Cook.

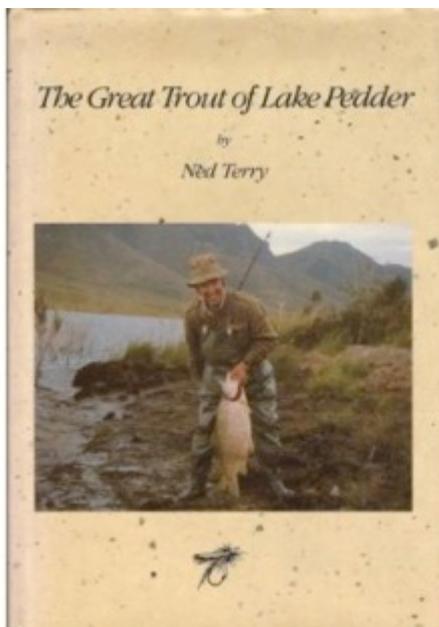
I've decided to gift the rebuilt Japanese rod to my nephew, who is interested in taking up fly-fishing. My next project is to start with a flamed blank made by R Chapman & Co, a Payne 96 #3 weight, 6'6" 2-piece (with 2 tips), which will be a very handy little rod for some of our fine mountain streams and smaller tarns of the Western Lakes.

**James Jones**

## Fly Tyers Bookshelf

There are so many books surrounding fly fishing and fly tying you could fill a library so it seems appropriate that The Vice has a section for book reviews. The impetus for this has arisen from two members, Denis Abbott and Chris Hilton who have written the following reviews of two of their favourite books. (Denis actually sent me his review in September last year but I managed to delete it in the great email restructuring debacle' of early October. Thanks for re-sending it Denis!)  
Enjoy!

### The Great Trout of lake Pedder - by Ned Terry



I was privileged to be lent a first edition of this remarkable book by a fisherman client. It relates to an approximately ten to fifteen year period between the early seventies and mid-eighties when remarkable fishing opportunities occurred. Sometimes one hears folk talk about the ' Good old days' and it often seems as though they are looking through rose tinted glasses. This book however is about a fantastic period in Tasmania's past that was very real and is highly unlikely to be repeated.

The writer of the foreword describes how far Pedder's fame had reached. ' In 1980 I was shopping at Hardy's in London and an elderly sales assistant discovered I was from Tasmania. He exclaimed instantly " Oh Lake Pedder ! if I could only fish there once I would die happy". '

Indeed as a young teenage angler I can vaguely remember seeing a news item in England of skilled fisherfolk in a far off mysterious place called Tasmania, fishing on heavily bushed shores in the evening light, catching trout larger than existed in my wildest dreams.

As you read the book the extraordinary competence, skill and inventiveness of the anglers fishing at that time becomes clear. Abilities to analyse deeply, learn rapidly and think laterally were required. From understanding the topography of the new lake, its extreme weather variations, developing appropriate boat handling skills to managing tree and shrub filled steep margins extending down into the water and up behind you. The puzzle of why these fish were growing so fast and exactly what they were feeding on. That's even before beginning to consider exactly how you might fool a ten to twenty pound wild brown trout and then the not insignificant management problems in landing them. It is also a book about the value of angling companionship, dealing with adversity and the humour that inevitably arises along the way.

The story starts with the well known flooding of the original lake Pedder leading to a stable flooding of a vast area of button grass plain and natural shrubs. The three main characters Lindsay Cameron, Ned and Jim Terry were all skilled anglers who had learnt their skills on the Great Lake and various rivers around the state. Initial trips were not productive despite using standard wet flies, mostly from a boat due to the difficult terrain. Camping often was tricky, the wind necessitating disturbed nights weighing the tent down with stones and sometimes retreating into the only fixed shelter at the campsite. Aside from the difficulties of trying to fish from the shore through quantities of vegetation, the tannin coloured water lead to the idea of developing 'exciters' to bring the fish up from below. One answer was the 'Pedder Parrot' tied on a number eight hook with a mixture of brightly coloured materials including red and yellow, body made of seals fur with a peacock herl and possum wing. Being more effective it rapidly replaced Matuka's, the initial favourite fly. As skills increased, the steadily increasing size and numbers of fish caught lead to the development of a 'fish safe' in which to keep the day's trophies . Word spread fast such that tourist buses would stop and open the flaps leading to much frustration of their captors but joy of the local blowfly population. A sign soon appeared ' Leave this bloody safe alone ' and that was the end of that.

A key moment came with the use of what we know now as a familiar technique, the use of a 'wonkie' or

nymph on a dropper using the dry as a 'float' [this raises the interesting question that perhaps Tasmanians invented what is otherwise known as the NZ or Duo technique ? ]. On the first trial up came the fish for the dry, refused ... and on its way down took the wonkie. The fish set off at high speed parallel to the bank followed by the happy angler until, perhaps inevitably, up popped one of our slithery friends ... five feet in length, head flattened out and scales sticking up all around his neck. Further progress being impossible he could only watch as the fish went around every bush available [ of which there were many and varied in the water close to the bank ]. However the point had been made and even the avowed dry fly purist in the party then changed to using the wonkie. It wasn't long before three fine fish were landed including a beautiful eleven pound female fish.

By the mid seventies confidence was increasing though they had not settled to a particular technique. However there was an increasing awareness that understanding the Mudeye behaviour was key, given analysis of the average stomach contents. Fish would generally not take the floating fly but were often seen boiling just under the surface. Difficult blank days occurred sometimes worsened by the inevitable disasters all seasoned anglers have experienced, including broken or forgotten rods, car or trailer breakdowns and occasional dropped outboards. But these were tempered by good food and drink even if the fish were not forthcoming. Meeting up with other anglers at the end of the day to hold post mortems and make notes on what had worked that day gradually enabled the building of a store of knowledge. Particularly about the importance of not leaving your gum boots out at night that you had used when cleaning the fish. Devils will even eat rubber !

Yetties, tied with a thick olive or sometimes yellow body [similar to mudeye], were the staple in various shades and sizes, the average size using a number eight hook. Larger on rough days, some tied with a red tail as an ' exciter' mostly fished along deeper shores and retrieved slowly in the line of froth which drifted along with the current. The idea being to imitate the very slowly moving mudeyes. Sometimes at the end of a drift the fly was left to sink for a while before lifting off. If the imitation was near the surface a 'boil' would be seen, if deeper the only sign would be the line drawing away.

The weather was a constant worry, partly alleviated by having a bigger boat and engine. Waterspouts up to a hundred feet high were occasionally seen and even on calm days sometimes an eerie roar was heard

sometimes for hours. Suddenly the wind would arrive and with it waves up to four feet high. Other days later in the season a dense fog would appear leading to close shaves with dam walls despite apparently correct use of a compass. Rain was often plentiful, sometimes more than... Clearly frightening stuff.

Despite the ever present threat of difficult weather, the lure of ' mountains [ that ] just kept unfolding as far as the eye could see ' tempted our anglers to travel up to eighteen kilometres from their camp on beautiful calm days extending into 'balmy clear evenings' watching the range of colours changing on the Frankland Ranges Mt Anne, the Eliza Plateau and round to the Western Arthurs.

A key milestone in understanding the fishery occurred on a day when Jim Terry's Greenwell Glories kept sinking. Two fish were taken in a short time and then the penny dropped ! They were of course now imitating a Mudeye, just in the skin of the surface rather than on it. Mudeye hatches, by this time, were becoming massive and occurred best during calm conditions in the late day but also the next morning. Somehow the insects could predict the night before that such conditions would be available on the following morning. They would then swim to the shore in droves, crawl out onto a stick, rockface or bush then slowly change into the dragonfly form. Optimum conditions began around Christmas time and peaked through January and February. The key moment of excitement appeared once emergence had started and the mudeyes started their race for the shore. The migration lasting about half an hour and one needed to face into the sunset to make the most of the fading light. The book describes the thrill of it starting...and the feeding frenzy that followed. However it was not until the team developed the ' Banana ' that they became fully confident. Keeping well back from the edge was crucial as was pin point casting accuracy. In tying the Banana the key attributes required were spinning the deer hair tightly such that it wouldn't sink, having the correct mudeye silhouette and achieving enough clearance between the body and barb [ to assist hooking ]. Technique involved leaving the Banana once cast out, keeping just enough tension to keep the line straight whilst avoiding bow waves. Use of a deer hair and chenille dropper tied close to the main fly line rather than close to the Banana tempted some difficult fish on calm days as the fish would not break the surface in these conditions. It was crucial though to ensure it sank very slowly so as not to pull the Banana. Complete concentration was required looking for the slightest line movement...

The Daddy of them all ... fish over twenty pounds were uncommon but one hot still day Ned was quietly watching his flies slowly drift closer to the bank. Just before recasting a gigantic shape swam past absorbing the dropper on the way. Approximately thirty-six inches long and a hand span across the back ... perhaps 25 pounds. He struck but the fish hardly seemed to notice initially and then swam steadily out and down into the lake. A change of strategy by the leviathan saw it steadily swimming in towards the bank. Ned then felt the dreaded feel of the line stopping moving - the banana had caught in a bush. When the line came back minus the flies can you imagine the feeling of loss?

Further developments lead to the production of a frog imitation made from deer hair which proved successful and there is an interesting colour photograph of a range of Poppa's [which I mistakenly had thought were a more recent idea ] in a range of colours but mostly that classic combination of black and yellow with a little bit of red. Poppa's, whilst said to be a bit difficult to cast with the rods and fly lines available at the time, seemed to be most successful at night although of course they are widely used today especially in salt water fishing.

A sad chapter is the passing of Lindsay Cameron, the senior member of the group in 1981 and seemingly, a source of much merriment in the group and a bit of a poet although you'll need to find the book to read his works. His ashes were respectfully scattered at Production Point. It is remarkable, when looking at a photograph of his flies, how many are standards or forerunners of those we use today.

Later there is a chapter about distinguished visitors to the lake who in true Tasmanian tradition were well looked after. Hospitality was returned in the form of a few days fishing on the Scottish Dee near Balmoral Castle even catching three Salmon, and to the famous river Test on another occasion.

After a few 'Odds and Ends' stories the book finishes with a comparison of the fish caught at the height of Lake Pedder's success and those from the Great Lake in the early 1900's. Slightly hidden inside the back cover is a useful map of the lake with the key shores referred to in the text.

This book is a magnificent resource of angling knowledge, ethics and humour for all, but particularly young anglers starting out on their flyfishing journey in Tasmania. I highly recommend it.

To those anglers reading this review who were actually there I apologise for my inevitable inaccuracies and misinterpretations. Reading this book has been a fascinating education, learning about this crucial period in the history of the Tasmanian fly fishing community of which I am now privileged to be a member.

Chris Hilton

refer to -

The Great Trout of Lake Pedder

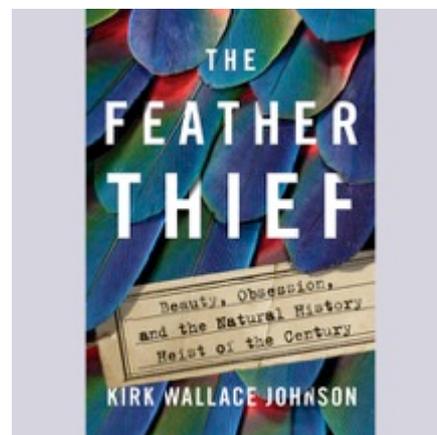
by Ned Perry

Artemis Publishing, 106, Hampden Rd, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia 7000

ISBN 0 646 19234 5

Chris Hilton

## The Feather Thief – Kirk Wallace Johnson



*The Feather Thief: beauty, obsession, and the natural history heist of the century*, by Kirk Wallace Johnson. London, Hutchinson, 2018.

This is a book I thought would intrigue members even though it's not a fishing book. No fishing involved, but it has a strong connection with fly tying, a highly refined form of fly tying which is also disreputable and downright illegal in its pursuit of materials. The flies are not for fishing.

Malcolm Crosse mentioned this book to me last year but I've only followed it up this past June. Malcolm says: "It was an exciting read, a book I couldn't put down." Tony Dell has read it, Andrew Hood has it as an audio book and John O'Halloran has a copy to read.

You could compare notes with these members. There's no difficulty getting a free copy to read for the State Library system has three copies, usually on the shelf, which you can borrow.

The "natural history heist of the century" was made by Edwin Rist, an American from New York State and talented music student, a flautist, at the Royal Academy of Music, London. He broke into the Natural History Museum at Tring, north of London and stole 299 skins of tropical birds, including 37 skins of Birds of Paradise, 39 of Resplendent Quetzals and 83 of four species of Cotingas. These are all birds which are listed under CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), as well as national protection. He managed to stuff them all into a suitcase.

As he developed as a musician in America, to the point he won entry to the Royal Academy, he became highly proficient as a fly tyer, concentrating solely on tying the classic salmon flies of the nineteenth century. He desired to tie all the classic patterns according to their original recipes, including the same materials specified in George M. Kelson's book *The Salmon Fly*. These patterns developed as fly fishing for salmon became a pursuit of the landed gentry. It also coincided with a widespread millinery fashion of using bird feathers on women's hats, even a whole skin on a hat. The burgeoning trade in millinery feathers saw auction houses in London sell 155,000 Birds of Paradise skins in a four year period, part of a \$2.8 billion industry that imported 40 million pounds of plumage in the same period. For the salmon fly-tyer there was a bountiful source of highly colourful feathers where patterns needed to flash and aggravate salmon, not imitate food items, since migrating salmon returning from the ocean to spawn are not feeding.

Edwin Rist became completely absorbed in what the blurb of *The Feather Thief*, refers to as a "fiercely secretive underground community obsessed with the Victorian art of salmon fly-tying." He developed the skills, spending as much as 12 hours tying one fly, but was frustrated in being unable to afford the scarce and expensive feathers of the original patterns. The appearance of dyed substitute feathers he had to use meant his flies could never look the best. The best tyers vied in producing meticulous flies to photograph and post on a Web gallery page, or mount in a glass case to display at fly-tying meetings. There's no mention of being anglers.

As well as his obsession in getting the feathers Edwin wanted money to be able to buy a gold flute and although no monetary value is given in the book, when I searched the Web I found one available in

Australia at \$43,000, well below the value of selling the feathers. The stolen birds were worth about a million dollars and Rist had proceeded to market them over the Web to a network of tyers, selling some as skins but mainly in packages of feathers, plucked from the skins into Ziplock bags. A salmon fly-tyer Rist contacted early on regarding rare feathers before he left for London was Luc Coutourier, a much revered salmon fly-tyer from Quebec. He tied a Traherne pattern known as the Chatterer which "... called for an astonishing 159 to 200 Chatterer feathers – which, if anyone could locate such a quantity, would cost nearly \$2000." Chatterer is the name the tyers gave to all the Cotinga species. Astonishing is hardly the word, for even though the Cotinga feathers may be small as a finger nail, tying much more than ten feathers seems impossible, but the cost for one fly is utterly profligate. They are all bright turquoise blue, only 19-20cm, smaller than the feral blackbird here at c 25cm. A skin was on the Web for \$1670, although plucking the feathers and selling them in packets of only 10 feathers would gain more, as Rist did. Rist stole 83 Cotinga skins. On his sale, Web page he described the Plum-throated Cotinga as: "... the most colourful species of blue chatterer. It is very rare, but is exceptionally bright." As an aside, on my "trip of a life time", or "the trip to end all trips", more so now, to Ecuador, including the Galapagos in 2015, I saw this and another Cotinga species in the Ecuadorian Amazon at Sacha Lodge.

<https://www.sachalodge.com/birding-in-the-amazon/>  
The photos on this page include a photo of the Plum-throated Cotinga.

Kirk Johnson heard of the theft from his guide when fly fishing in New Mexico, including that the thief had evaded prison and many of the birds were never recovered. Johnson then set off on an amateur investigation over five years, revealing the strange world of salmon fly-tyers and seeking the unrecovered birds. Since Rist pleaded guilty the police had no reason to continue their investigation.

For a general review:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/books/review/kirk-wallace-johnson-feather-thief.html>

**Denis Abbott**

## Advice Tips and Tricks

*Gadgets, gear and good ideas are always close to the surface whenever fly tyers get together. This section of The Vice features recommendations, quick reviews and tips to make the fishing experience even richer. Please feel free to send in any tips you might like to share.*



One of the best dry flies I have in my armory (until I stopped catching fish) is the Matcham's Claret Dun, which Laurie taught me to tie. It is one of those flies that swallows won't leave alone and the fish take with enthusiasm. It is a relatively simple tie except for one bit where you wind a chocolate partridge hackle on at the front, then tie a slightly oversized ginger hackle through it and then use your scissors to trim the partridge the same size as the ginger. Laurie has excellent scissor skills and I struggle a bit.

I thought that if I trimmed the partridge to the right size first it would be easier than trimming it afterwards. The idea was ok but the partridge was tricky to trim as it kept sliding away from the scissors.



A flash of inspiration made me try sticking the partridge feather to a bit of blue painters masking tape and then trimming it. This was much easier and the feather came off the tape really easily.



This made the job of getting a thick neat hackle much easier.

Matcham's Claret Dun

Hook – Mustad up eye 3904A #12 - #14

Thread - Black

Tail - ginger hackle

Body - claret mohair, possum or seals fur (original)

Hackles - Ginger hackle one size over hook size and Chocolate partridge (tied in by the stem not the tip. This allows thickness to be closer to the shank

Clip partridge to the same size as the ginger hackle, tie on and hang on!

This fly is fantastic and there are many little variations like putting in a madeira thread rib as I sometimes do or use Coq de Leon instead of partridge as Tim Urbanc sometimes does. Probably the best thing is to try the original version though as that is genuinely awesome!

Thanks to Laurie for sending me the photo of the Claret Dun and reminding me of the extra details in the tie. You're a legend Laurie!

DM

## Miena Field Trip

I think it was early December when Club Treasure Andrew Blackwood organised the Miena Field Trip. I say 'I think' because, as I sit down to write this I realise that I actually can't remember much about it at all so I'm going to reconstruct the report via the photos I took.

The Treasure (pictured) has organised a number of terrific events recently and seems to really enjoy it. He took me up and generally put up with me for a number of days. I think we even managed to catch a number of fish!



We ate very well over the time and everybody pitched in. We may have even had some beer and some really nice wine! The fire was lit most nights and the talk was of the days events and plans of where to fish the next day. The most common places were, unsurprisingly Penstock, Pine, Woods and Arthurs. From gradually re-emerging memory Woods was disappointing and Arthurs was surprisingly good!



December 2019 was when the World Championships were held here in ferocious weather. Whilst we didn't get things as tough as that we did manage to get some very cold nights and mornings. The turnout of members was quite good really!



After a long day fishing it was great to get back to the club shack to celebrate, commiserate and anticipate the wonders that fly-fishing involves. We even managed a mini version of a long table!



Well done Treasure and well done to all members who made this a great trip. If you didn't get there you missed a good trip and you should really try to get along next time!

DM

## Index of Vice Articles

I have compiled a list of contents from previous editions of the Vice as some members have asked about various stories and the like. All these can be accessed directly from the club website under the link to The Vice. I will include it in all future editions and add to it where possible.

<http://tasmanianflytyersclub.org>

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