
CADD

New Hampshire's go-to
trout fly takes center stage

by
Scott A. **Biron**



ISFLY



A week does not go by without a confused angler asking me how to choose the correct fly. Which works better – old standbys or new patterns? Figuring it out can be a challenge.

As an avid fly tyer and New Hampshire fly angler, I've always found that "less is more" when choosing which flies to fish. Although many of the newer patterns will catch fish, these flies tend to stay in my fly box. It is the caddis patterns that get used, day in and day out, on New Hampshire waters.

Life Stages

The caddisfly is very important, as it makes up about half of a trout's diet. Any of the four life stages of caddis – eggs, larva, emerging pupa and adult

– can become food for trout. To succeed as an angler, you need to identify the flies' size, color, action and the stage on which the fish are feeding.

Life for a caddis begins when the egg turns into a grub-like larva. Most caddis larvae get to work right away by building cases out of materials found in the streambed. As the larva grows, it must expand the case. It then attaches the case to the stream bottom, seals off both ends, and forms a pupa in which it changes from larva to adult. Ready to emerge, it cuts open the case, swims to the surface and sheds the skin of the pupa.

Unlike mayflies, which often gracefully float on the water's surface before becoming a fish's meal, once caddisflies reach the surface, they don't hang around long. They dry their wings and fly off the water. Notice that the caddis has a tent-like wing that differs from the upright wing of the mayfly. You can usually identify the erratic flight pattern of caddisflies; anglers often mistake them for moths.

Streamside Lesson

One memorable day, I pulled up to one of my favorite Androscoggin River spots and began watching an angler who was fishing with flies. I could see fish breaking the surface all around him, but he was having no luck. Each cast of his fly landed upstream, and he allowed it to drift seductively over where the fish were rising. But they just weren't interested. After a while he got out of the water, discouraged.

I entered the water near where he had been fishing and began to catch trout of various sizes and the occasional small landlocked salmon. After watching awhile, the stymied angler came down and asked what fly I was using. "A caddis emerger," I replied.

He shook his head, mystified: "But the trout are rising for flies, see the splashes!"

"Look carefully," I said. "You're seeing the fish racing after the hatching pupa, and they are getting them just below the surface. The splash is the fish breaking the water and heading back down to get the next emerger, not sipping a surface fly off the water."

"The splash is the fish breaking the water and heading back down to get the next emerger..."



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Favorite Flies

Countless flies will imitate the stages of a caddis. Here are three that have worked well for me in New Hampshire:

The **Tabou Caddis Emerger** is a great fly to have in your fly box. It's very "buggy" looking when completed and can be tied in a variety of colors to match the emerging caddis. Fishing this fly is simple; it's an emerger, so there is no need to weight it. I use sinking tip fly line and swing it by casting upstream and allowing it to drift downstream and sink toward the streambed. As it drifts, I make a series of small twitches to the line, making it appear to be moving up the water column. Sometimes the fish strike it after the twitch. If not, once the line straightens out, I like to leave it for a second and then raise the tip of my rod a few inches and then lower it, followed by a twitch. This is when most of the fish get hooked.

Last spring I came across the recipe for a **Deer Wing Alder** (a fly that imitates the Zebra Caddis, which hatches on the Androscoggin River in June.) The pattern looked vaguely familiar from my youth, and, after some research, I found that Paul Maruca was the originator. Paul had a fly-tying area in the Errol General Store, and I had seen this fly tied on one of my visits there with my grandfather. The pattern was a family favorite, fished in small sizes (12-16) to imitate adult caddis and in larger sizes (10-12) for the alder hatch.

The fun comes when you fish the Deer Wing Alder correctly. Fish attack it, knowing the caddis does not spend much time on the water once it emerges. If you watch caddisflies closely, they hop a few times once emerged and then fly off. The technique I use is to twitch the tip of my rod just before my fly lands on the water. This makes the fly hop or skitter just after it lands on the surface. It's all in the timing of the twitch, but once you get it down, the fish will often attack the fly, thinking it is about to take flight.



Case caddisfly larva

Adult caddisfly



The Androscoggin river is one of the most coveted waterways for avid New Hampshire anglers looking for that perfect fly fishing getaway.

TABOU CADDIS EMERGER



ORIGINATOR: Steve Schweitzer
HOOK: FullingMill Living Larva 31270, size 14
THREAD: 6/0 Olive Danville
TAIL/BODY: Whiting Farms Brahma Hen Chickabou Feather
RIBBING: Craft store small clear round elastic bracelet-making material
WING: Whiting Farms Brahma Hen Soft Hackle
HEAD: Trimmed fluff from excess Soft Hackle

DEER WING ALDER



ORIGINATOR: Rick Maruca
HOOK: FullingMill Ultimate Dry Fly 35050, size 12-16 for caddis; 10-12 for alder flies
THREAD: 6/0 Black or Olive Danville
TAIL: Brown Hackle tailing fibers
BODY: Peacock Herl – 3 herls wound over wet head cement
WING: Small clump of mottled deer hair (mottled comparadun hair works well)
HACKLE: Brown hackle, sized to hook

USUAL



ORIGINATOR: Fran Betters
HOOK: FullingMill Ultimate Dry Fly 35050, size 10-22
THREAD: 6/0 Orange Danville
TAIL: Short bunch of hair from snowshoe rabbit's foot
BODY: Blending of the grey (close to the bone) and fine tan fur with some guard hairs
WING: Hair from snowshoe rabbit's foot, tied in at 1/3 shank position and angling toward the eye at 15 degrees forward
HEAD: Small amount of dubbing from the body

The durable *Usual* is an in-between fly – you can fish it as an emerger or an adult. It's not a difficult fly to tie, once you practice a few times. The entire fly is tied with fur from a snowshoe hare's foot, material that allows it to float. For this fly to fish properly, the wing is not tied upright; it needs to lean a bit forward toward the eye of the hook.

The Usual can be fished as an adult by allowing it to float on the surface. Because of its waterproof properties, you can skitter the fly while it's floating, creating the sense it is trying to come off the water, much like the Deer Wing Alder. The Usual is a very visible fly and can be seen even in fast water and when light is poor. The most effective method is to skitter this fly a bit as you float it downstream. I cast it at a downstream angle, minimizing the time the fly floats, and keep it skittering as it swings my line straight, allowing it to look as natural as possible on the water. Once my line straightens out and the current pops the fly under the surface, I give it a twitch to make it appear as if the insect is emerging. That's when most of my fish are caught on this pattern.

Simple Delights

Fellow Let's Go Fishing instructor Mark Parmenter and I were fishing on the Androscoggin River one evening. I was downstream a bit, catching trout. I checked on my friend and asked how it was going. "Not good," was the response. I had him drift his line to me, tied on a Usual and reminded him how to fish it. Each time I checked back after that, Mark was onto a fish. On our ride home that night, he commented on catching so many fish on that simple pattern. My response was as unadorned as a caddisfly – "less is more."



Outdoor writer Scott A. Biron is a volunteer Let's Go Fishing Instructor. At Barry Conservation Camp's fishing week, he teaches kids fly fishing on the waters he once fished as a youngster.

My grandfather, pictured below with a rainbow trout caught on a caddisfly pattern, had one of the first fishing camps at the base of Braggs Bay on the Androscoggin River in Errol. ~ Scott Biron



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