



February 2007

# *The Conservationist*

Potomac-Patuxent Chapter

www.pptu.org

## Maryland's Brook Trout – Where Are They Heading

By Nick Weber



It wasn't long ago that a conversation about Maryland's Brook Trout was a focus of a few serious fly fishers in western Maryland and biologists at Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Times are changing and so is the audience and stage for discussing our native trout. In August 2006, the DNR published a comprehensive work on brook trout titled, 2006, Maryland Brook Trout Fisheries Management Plan.

Alan Heft, research biologist for 18 years at DNR and editor of that work, will use it as a basis for his talk on Managing Brook Trout in Maryland - State and National Issues. A second talk for our program titled The Maryland Brook Trout Alliance – Citizen Action for Brook Trout Restoration will be given by Jim Gracie, former president of Trout Unlimited and now principal of Brightwater, Inc., an environmental consulting firm. Jim is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the newly formed Maryland Brook Trout Alliance. He will discuss the formation of that organization, and its goals and objectives. He will also outline some proposals for brook trout initiatives within the state.

## Maryland Brook Trout

Wednesday, February 21

7:00 PM

(see bottom of page for directions)

**\*\*Guest Speakers\*\***

*Alan Heft, Biologist with Maryland Department of Natural Resources*

*Jim Gracie, Chairman Maryland Brook Trout Alliance*

*Meeting may be cancelled due to inclement weather. Please check the PPTU listserver or contact a Board Member (pg.2) if there is any question about adverse weather.*

## 32nd Annual National Capital Angling Show

Saturday, February 24, 2007 from 10 am to 5:30 pm

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School

4301 East-West Highway, Bethesda, MD.



### Featured Speaker

LEFTY KREH



Admission is \$10.00; children 16 and under are free. Net proceeds from the Show are donated for local watershed restoration, conservation education, and conservation projects. For complete program information and other details please visit [www.ncc-tu.org](http://www.ncc-tu.org), or call 202-966-5923.

### Monthly Chapter Meetings

**Time and Day:** 7:00 PM, Third Wednesday except December, June, July, and August

**Place:** Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center, 1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, Maryland

**Directions:** From Capitol Beltway: North on Georgia Avenue (Rte. 97). First right onto Forest Glen Road. Pass Holy Cross Hospital and go across Sligo Creek Parkway. The Center is on the right.

## The Conservationist

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Contributions in the form of clip art, articles, conservation activities, trip reports, letters, fishing and conservation news, tying tips, book reviews, and essays about trout fishing should be sent to the Editor as plain text in the email body or Microsoft Word attachments. Authors should also include their phone number and a brief descriptions of the attachments. The deadline for submissions is the twelfth (12th) day of the month prior to the month of publication

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Nick Weber

**W**ith the Fly Tying meeting behind us and late winter and spring before us, there is much that we are ready to begin or begin again. There is a growing awakening with the increase in the sun's angle that nature is on track to bring those rains that replenish the soil and thus the groundwater that feed our streams and rivers. Our thoughts turn to stocking the streams and to planting riparian buffers on the Hawlings River and Bush Cabin Run near the Gunpowder River.

Our meeting program is designed to bring you up to date on the renewed efforts not only to maintain but also upgrade streams in many areas across the state in order to preserve and protect our native brook trout. This is a truly worthy goal to work for brook trout habitat retention as it is a reflection of how well we are doing to preserve high level, near native, ecosystems. The temperature of the water and its quality in streams is a direct measure of how well we are doing. An outline of the State of Maryland's Brook Trout Management Plan as well as the newly developing Maryland Brook Trout Alliance will give you a current snapshot of where we are and where we are going in the saga of brook trout in Maryland.

In other sections of this publication you will see requests for fly fishing equipment as well as notification about summer camps for high school age youngsters to have conservation and fly fishing experiences that will last a life time. Take a minute to review these worthy projects supported by our chapter and contribute what you can to their success. We also intend to extend a hand to a group of college age individuals interested in helping us with conservation, and asking in turn for the opportunity to learn something about our sport of fly fishing. Anyone interested in helping us mentor some young adults for an afternoon should contact me or Bob Dietz. See our contact information on p.2. Before and after all that, take a day or two and get out to enjoy fly fishing, catching is only an additional bonus. I would also urge you to try the new catch and release section this spring below Brighton Dam down to and just below Haviland Mill Bridge which is wadeable at 80 cfs and below – see

<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/md/nwis/uv?01591610>.



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# Tackle and Tactic Tips

BY JAY SHEPPARD

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**F**alse casting is an important part of fly casting. However, it must be kept to a minimum. Like a forward pass in football where two of the three results are not good for the passer, false casting many times during a single casting cycle vastly increase the chances of something going wrong, too.

Fishers can catch branches, their own body parts, and any number of other objects around them with a false cast. Trout can be alerted to the line flashing over them or even the droplets of water sprayed over them from the line and leader. I have never heard of anyone catching any fish of any kind while the fly was in the air. I have watched many fly fishers who spend almost as much time doing false casts as drifting the fly. Time in a day is limited, life is short. To catch fish, one must have the fly on or in the water! There are a number of ways to reduce false casting. I will discuss some of them here.

One of the first ways is to try to keep as much of the line outside the tip of the rod. Most false casts are to increase the amount of line being cast. Casting 30 feet upstream and retrieving nearly all the line while letting the fly drift all the way back to the rod or even below the fisher is not a good practice. Unless one has just entered the stream, the water immediately upstream and downstream of your position has already been exposed to your fly many many times. In my experience, it is usually a waste of time to keep fishing the same water with the same fly more than a couple of passes unless you have an ongoing hatch.

A high majority of the fish I catch are on that first good drift or pass of the fly over the trout. Maybe 80% or more are caught on the first two passes. Unless there is a hatch with steadily rising trout, move or change flies. (I will return to fishing a hatch later.) **So as a minimum**, when there is about as much line outside the tip of the rod as the rod is long, then **stop** retrieving the line and either raise the rod to keep the slack out or start the next cast's pickup. Preferably, keep much more line outside the tip of the rod at all times. This will reduce the need to extend line while false casting.

If the fly does get below you and is starting to drag, use the drag of the line to directly load the rod and start the 'back cast' that will actually go upstream. Face sideways so you can look downstream and upstream with ease. Start the pickup and the 'back cast' with the rod tip perhaps a foot above the water and pointing at the tip of the line. Then snap the rod up and towards the target. If done properly, this cast can become the next forward cast and the fly is delivered immediately back to the target upstream of your position. The rod may make a sideways delivery so that the tip does not get much higher than your head as it passes you to one side. In this case, the 'back cast' becomes the actual forward cast.

In other cases, this back cast is only a false cast to get reoriented and then a second back cast downstream is made, which, in turn, is followed by the actual final forward cast to the target. I have watched many fishers who let the fly get below them and then face downstream to first pick the line up. Then in a long series of false casts, they turn themselves and the direction of all their ensuing back casts around to be eventually facing upstream before making the final cast to their target. Learn to use the tug of the line laying downstream of you as a mechanism to immediately load the rod and fire the line upstream to the target.

When targeting a trout rising steadily to a hatch, you may need to retrieve only a few feet of line during each drift. Cast the fly several feet upstream of the trout. As soon as the fly is more than a foot or two behind the trout then pick up the fly and make the next cast. This is very fast fishing: cast, drift, pickup, cast—all in less than 15–20 seconds in many cases. Do not let the fly drift many yards below that trout—it is not going to turn and chase the offering. Do not pick up a bad cast until it has passed the trout or you will alert the trout to the fraudulent offering. The idea is to only retrieve just enough line during each of these cast-drift cycles to maintain control over the line and the hookup. This greatly diminishes the need for any false casting to extend the line.

There are many other tricks to reducing the need for false casting and to give more time to the fly being on the water. I will discuss some of them in coming issues.

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# Patuxent Report

By Jay Sheppard

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**H**unting season will continue through most of February in some sections of the Patuxent River State Park, so be careful. There should be a few holdovers and wild trout left to chase in some of the deeper pools. I have fished dries in mid-January on a few occasions on the Patuxent. Find a deep quiet pool and pick a day well into the forties with little wind.

If you have not helped stock trout in the past and want to help this year, email me ([jmsheppar@aol.com](mailto:jmsheppar@aol.com)) BEFORE the February meeting or sign up at the January or February monthly meetings. To help on this activity, you must have chest waders and be available on a weekday. Although this is strenuous work wading up or down the middle of a stream, it is very rewarding, as you may get to see 1.5–2.5 miles of that stream "up close and personal." Those already on my E-mail list need not contact me, unless they have a new E-mail address. We stock the upper Patuxent Special Area (above Rt. 97) and the Middle Patuxent Delayed Harvest section in south Columbia.

The situation on the main Patuxent below Brighton Dam is not good. The W.S.S.C. tried to work on the dam all last summer, and the trout got nothing but hot water after early June. Both the repairs and the water management of the dam were abysmal. The water levels were kept low after mid-May in anticipation of delivery of the new parts, which did not actually arrive until well after Labor Day. There is some additional work to be done on the dam when the weather warms this coming spring. Although we intend to ask DNR to provide some trout for the Flies-Only section below the dam, we are not, at this time, optimistic that we will have any cold water for the coming summer. We will keep you posted.

## PPTU MENTOR PROGRAM

One-on-one stream side fly fishing instruction is available to PPTU members. Participants must show commitment by having waders or hipsters, a rod and reel outfit, and leader. Discussions will include equipment, knots, casting, flies, dry fly and nymphing techniques, entomology, reading water, conservation, etc. at nearby streams. Instruction will be tailored to individual needs. Members who have not made an Annual Supporting Contribution will be asked to contribute \$15. Contact Ken Bowyer at 301-627-7154 or e-mail [kenbowyer@comcast.net](mailto:kenbowyer@comcast.net).

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# Winter Midge Fishing

By Jim Greco

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**I**t is mid-February on a dreary day with the air temperature hovering around 45 degrees. Overhead there is a nice cloud cover with just a hint of a breeze. A few minutes after noon you are standing waist deep in the Yellow Breeches, just above the Allenberry, looking at the flat water. Fish are dimpling the surface against the far bank where the warmer water from *The Run* adds just a few critical degrees to the water temperature. Importantly, as the day progresses the water temperature is slightly rising. On your fourth cast to the closest riser, you see the dimple from a sip near where you think your fly is floating. You lift your 9 foot 3 wt., and it begins to throb in your hand while you say a quiet prayer to the river gods asking them to let your 7x tippet hold long enough for you to land the 17 inch brown that is bulldogging its way downstream. Are you ready to try some winter midge fishing?

This type of fishing is technical and challenging. Some of us shudder at the thought of using fine tippets and flies as small as #24 or #26. Most of us love it, because it is also some of the most rewarding fly fishing we will ever do. You have to be lucky enough to be on the water when the midges start hatching with enough frequency to entice the somewhat winter sluggish trout to rise. You have to do it right, or you won't catch many fish. So what is right, you ask? Well, as long as we are dreaming, let's start with the type of set up you might use if you could have exactly what you want.

The rod ought to be 8½ feet to 9 feet long, and a 3 wt. or 4 wt. is ideal. It should have a soft tip with enough power in the butt section to lift a heavy brown. I'd say a moderately slow to moderately fast action would work well enough. I have pretty fast action rods, and they work, but we are dreaming here. Your reel should have a silky smooth drag, either a click type or really smooth disc drag. Start up drag is the important issue. It must be smooth. 7x and 8x tippet don't take much abuse before they break.

Even though my usual set up is a 7-1/2 foot 3x tapered leader with a minimum of 30 inches of 6x tippet, this day I choose to use a more typical

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midge rig which would be a 9 foot 5x tapered leader with 36 inches of 7x tippet.

This day, I am going midge fishing.

But how do you determine which flies to use? Ahhh! The 64 dollar question. My midge boxes contain so many patterns I would hate to try to count them. However, there are four flies I use most often. For now, though, I'm going to recommend you answer the question for yourself.

Look at the water. What do you see? Use a small seine. Hold it in a feeding lane for a few minutes and take a look. What color are the larvae or pupae? Are there adults floating by? What size are they? What color? Are there more than one type? – groan! It happens a lot. Are the fish taking just below the surface or are they just dimpling the surface with noses coming out first? Are they splashing a bit? Seeing only the backs of the fish may indicate they are taking pupa floating just below the surface. Noses sticking out of a dimple may mean they are taking emerging midges. A bit of a splash might signal they are taking the adult midges.

Size is the most important. Match it to what the fish are taking. If you get refusals on good drifts, drop down a size. Shape is probably next on the list of importance, but it is a very close second. Emerger, pupa, or adult? Color is important, but it ranks below the other two. Solving this puzzle is the rewarding part. Solve it, and you catch fish.

Use stealth as a tool. When fishing below the surface, high stick it, or use the smallest indicator you can. Use as light a weight as you can. Tungsten sticky weight is ideal for this type of fishing. Try to develop the knack of knowing where your fly is without actually seeing it. Use clues like where your tippet is drifting to place your unseen fly. If you just have to see your fly, try using the deadly technique of a #16, or #14 caddis, or another high floating dry fly as an indicator from which to hang your midge. Attach 12 to 18 inches of 7x tippet to the bend of the bigger fly with an improved clinch knot and tie your midge to the bitter end of the 7x. At the first sign of a close rise, lift your rod. Watch out for that evil witch, micro drag. If you get refusals on the right fly, presented without drag, consider dropping down to 8x tippet. It just might be what it takes on this day to get really educated fish in flat water to take your offering.

As far as the four most used patterns in my midge box – well, here they are. I'm sure you have favorites, but these are my go to flies and work most of the time. If they don't, I carry many, many more to help me solve the puzzle. They are: Griffith gnat #20 to #26, traditional adult midges (color to match natural) #20 to #28, vertical midge pupa emergers #20 to #28, and the plain and simple midge pupa (in colors to match natural) #20 to #28.

If you haven't done this yet, give it a try. Midge fishing is one of a fly fishing angler's greatest thrills. By the way, did I mention that getting them into the net once they are hooked on a #26 midge can be a thrill all by itself?

## *Help Plant A Tree to Start Out the New Year*

*By Jim Keil*

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**Get your shovels, boots, and gloves out for another planting on the Hawlings!**

On March 3rd (Rain Date March 10), beginning at 9:00 a.m., we plan to install another bunch of trees upstream of Brighton Dam Road. You may recall that in fall 2005 we did a planting of native trees and shrubs in cooperation with the County, Parks & Planning, Izaak Walton League, some local school organizations, and several other groups. The digging was easy and we were finished by 10:30. This year the same groups will join again to replace some of what we lost to flooding, deer, and mile-a-minute, and we will expand our footprint, planting more mature trees.

Mark your calendars, clear the morning of March 3rd, and plan to bring kids old enough to dig a hole. We plan to park at St. Luke's Church on New Hampshire Avenue and shuttle to the river nearby. For more information contact Jim Keil at [jkeil@starpower.net](mailto:jkeil@starpower.net).

If that is not enough, and you want to venture further afield, The Maryland Chapter TU is planning a planting at Bush Cabin Run, a Gunpowder River tributary on Masemore Road at the parking lot at 9:30 a.m., on March 17. Contact Martin Eisman [meisman@comcast.net](mailto:meisman@comcast.net) or 410-377-0522 for particulars.

## Upcoming PPTU Outings

By Dennis Covert

### February

Don't miss the first outing of the year to Big Hunting Creek on February 10. Expected hatches are the little black winter stone in #20-#16, and possibly some larger brown stones in #16-#14. Midges should also be present, and nymphs such as the prince, copper John, bead heads and San Juan can also be effective. We will meet at the Camp Peniel parking lot at 9 a.m.

### March

On March 31, we will gather once again on the Gunpowder at the Masemore parking lot at 10:00 am for the second annual *Gunpowder one fly contest* to see who can claim *braggin' rights* for 2007. Last year's champ, Ken Bowyer, caught 45 inches of trout on his #14 bead head brassie to clinch the right to brag. We plan to fish till 3 pm, then meet back at Masemore to declare a winner, have snacks, and maybe tell a few new fish stories.

Sign up at the monthly meeting or call me at 410-740-8337, or email me at [denniscovert@hotmail.com](mailto:denniscovert@hotmail.com).

## TYING BENCH & ANGLER'S CORNER

*You will want to check out this month's regular monthly features "Tying Bench" and "Angler's Corner during the chapter meeting on February 21st. These sessions occur concurrently beginning at 7 p.m.*

### TYING BENCH

This month's pattern will be the Wood Special, a great streamer that has some resemblance to a brook trout minnow and therefore is a particularly delectable repast for the adults of the species and other trout as well. **Dave Wittman** will tie this neat little streamer for you and see if you would like to try it on some of our Maryland trout or take it with you to Labrador where he knows it is king!

### ANGLER'S CORNER

Stationed at this month's Angler's Corner will be our outings leader **Dennis Covert**. He will share the excitement of our February outing to Big Hunting Creek on February 10. He will also offer some hints about our One Fly outing to the Gunpowder River in March.



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