

WindKnots

A monthly publication of the Texas Flyfishers

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May 2005

In Pursuit of Peacock Bass with a Fly

By Frank Schlicht



Ten years ago, while living in Waco, I met Bill Saunders who operates Saunders Floating out of Ennis, Montana. Bill and I have been fishing together annually ever since for bass and other sunfish on the private water of the mutual friend who introduced us.

Four years ago, at the urging of a friend who lives there, my youngest son and I made the trip to south Florida to fish for peacock bass that inhabit the canal system in the greater Miami area. We had a great trip and caught both peacocks and some really nice largemouth bass, but unfortunately, not on flies as we had hoped.

Shortly after returning from that trip, Bill and I had our annual outing, during which I told him about my recent trip to Florida. Bill is a guy who will fish for anything that has lips and he is not the least bit bashful about telling you so. Needless to say, he immediately wanted to know when

we were going to go and asked a million and one questions. I made the mistake of giving him a book on the peacock bass in the Florida canal system. He became obsessed with the thought of making the trip. But first one thing and then another prevented us from going. My friend in Hobe Sound contacted me shortly after the first of the year and wanted to know when I was coming back down. I told him about Bill and how we had been talking about doing a trip for the past three years. Pete responded that the Quincy Motel would have the best rates in Florida during the month of April and that we should contemplate coming down then. I contacted Bill and told him about the offer and that we needed to “do it now, or quit talking about it.” So a plan was developed. *(Continued on page 4)*



President's Corner

by Jerry "Buggywhip" Loring, president, Texas Flyfishers



The annual TFF officer elections will be held at the June meeting. Any club member in good standing can be nominated for one of the four elected positions of President, Vice President-Programs, Treasurer, and Membership Secretary.

Tom Lyons is retiring from the VP position and at this point no candidates have stepped forward to fill his position. So we are searching for a replacement. The main responsibility of the Vice President is to find and schedule speakers for our monthly meetings. Other duties include coordinating the monthly meeting, securing a suitable space for the meetings, and acting as President when the President is absent. If you are interested in volunteering as Vice President, please contact one of the current officers or committee chairs.

*** TFF Meeting Update ***

Our next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, May 31st** at the Holiday Inn Select at 2712 Southwest Freeway between Kirby and Buffalo Speedway.

Rus Schwausch will present Alaska Wilderness Safari, which was recently recognized in Chris Santella's book, *Fifty Places to Fly Fish Before You Die*, as "arguably the most isolated coastal fishing camp in Alaska, and one of the best places in the world to pursue chrome-bright, ocean-fresh silver salmon." Rus has been fishing, adventuring and/or guiding in Alaska during the summers since 1995. He turned his passion with this last frontier into a career, created EPIC Angling & Adventure, and now operates this unique destination in a pristine region of the Alaska Peninsula.

My memories of Tom are many but the image of Big Bruce riding up forward in Tom's bass boat takes first place. It was quite a sight and quite a wake, too, as they blasted down the Lydia Ann Channel in Rockport. Second place would have to be the alligator (measuring at least seven feet long) in an Anahuac pond. Tom daintily landed a big deer-hair bass bug right on the alligator's nose. I swear Tom must have either known that 'gator or cast to it often because it didn't even flinch.

You could always count on Tom attending at least one outing each month. And, yes, he can catch fish. Tom is among the top list of anglers in the club. He might be considered the best overall because he excels in cold water, warm water, and saltwater. Being so versatile is a true oddity among fly fishers.

Perhaps his most important contribution was the Fishing Academy. He pushed and promoted the program until it finally got off the ground. The Academy blends in well with our other programs and we thank him for his initiative and leadership.

Tom has served the Texas Fly Fishers well and we thank him for the effort. His good work, expert advice, and wise guidance will certainly be missed. And besides, his accent gave our club an international flair. One could tell that Tom was not from Mayberry. Gay and he are not moving away, but will be keeping a low profile for a couple of years. He promises to stay in touch. ♦

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Tying Tip - Bead Chain

By Corey Rich

There are a number of patterns that use bead chain to form eyes and weight flies so that they sink faster. Bead chain eyes are often found, for example, on bonefish flies like the Crazy Charlie and Gotcha patterns.

But tier beware. Not all bead chain is good for tying. Bead chain comes in two primary colors, silver and gold. The stuff you want is made from stainless steel or brass. Either material may also be used to make colored chain. Not all bead chain is made from stainless steel or brass, however. In fact, most is not. It is made from plain steel, which rusts easily.

When I run low on bead chain I head for the hardware store with a magnet in hand. I've found that most of the material on bulk spools, whether silver or gold, is

made of plain steel. The gold color is just a coating over the steel. Look for packaged bead chain, and test it by holding the magnet up to the packaging. If it is attracted to the magnet, it is plain steel; if it is not, it is either stainless or brass. The packaged stuff costs a bit more than the bulk chain, but it's worth it. Expect to pay a buck and a half to two bucks for a three foot length of the good stuff.

Stores dealing in better-quality lamps and lighting fixtures will also carry stainless and brass chain, and probably in a good assortment of sizes and colors. Other sources, for those of us who are scavengers, include used toilet parts (the chain that connects the handle to the flapper valve) and pull-chains from discarded outdoor light fixtures.

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You MUST Give the Devil's River Its Due!

By Bud Turner

The Scorecard...

Bud Turner and fishing buddy, Wade West	The Devil's River
<i>200+ smallmouth bass caught in 1½ days of fishing</i>	<i>4 fly rods, our entire inventory, either lost or broken in the rapids</i>
<i>2+ hour session of catching a smallmouth on every cast</i>	<i>1 digital camera</i>
	<i>1 GPS</i>
	<i>2 pairs of prescription sunglasses</i>
	<i>1 weather radio</i>
	<i>Many scrapes, cuts, and bruises</i>

The Devil's River is everything you have heard about in terms of beauty, smallmouth fishing, remoteness, and toughness. The wind blew up-river the entire two days we were there and we did not see the sun until we were leaving. Water levels are currently the best they have been in years and there was still a lot of portaging through the shallows. The rapids were plentiful and overwhelming for the average sit-on-top kayak loaded with a 220 pound 50 year-old angler and all of his camping and fishing gear. Portaging these rapids was not much of a bargain either.

Even though we did not catch any sizeable smallmouth, the action on five and six-weight rods was spectacular. Our total fishing time was limited by the long distances between public campgrounds which demanded a pretty brisk pace. By noon of our second day, we had lost or broken four fly rods trying to negotiate the white-water.

We thought we had done a thorough job planning this first trip, but it turned out to be mainly a learning process. I would be happy to answer questions for anyone interested in fishing the Devil's River. You may reach me via e-mail me at sbturner@ix.netcom.com. ♦

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Count your blessings we fish in America

By Jerry Loring

During my recent trip to Europe, I came upon Bury Hill Fisheries located in Dorking, Surrey, which is in the south of England. The main attractions in this managed fishery are carp, tench (a big carp with smooth skin), perch (a gaspergoo), pike, and zander. Don't ask me what a zander is. Anyway, I jotted down the list of rules for your consideration:

1. Strictly no access to the fishers before the arrival of the bailiff.
2. Bookings and courses reserved in advance.
3. Dip all nets when entering the fishery.
4. No keepnets or sacks to be used (except for organised matches).
5. Barbless hooks only.
6. Particle baits are banned with the exception of sweetcorn, hemp, and carp pellets. Absolutely no boillies or bottom can feeders.
7. Method feeders and all forms of fixed lead are banned.
8. Anyone fishing for carp, pike or zander must have a large unhooking mat and landing net.
9. Pike and zander fishing is only permitted between October 1st and March 31st.
10. Anglers under the age of 16 fishing without an adult will not be allowed to fish for predators unless they have been to the 'Predator Clinic.' ♦

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(Peacock bass, cont'd from page 1)

The canals around Miami where the peacock bass live are "box cut" meaning that the walls are basically vertical and the bottoms are flat. They are 50-60 feet wide and about 15 feet deep. They were dug in the early 1900s in an effort to drain the Everglades and to provide storm water runoff for the greater Miami area. There are in excess of 1,000 miles of freshwater canals from Ft. Lauderdale to the Homestead area. The canals empty into the Intracoastal Waterway and Biscayne Bay as well as other coastal waters. There is a lock at the end of each discharge point to prevent saltwater intrusion. These may be periodically opened, at which time manatees sometimes enter the canal system. The water is basically clear but tea-colored due to the tannic acid caused by decaying vegetation both on the shorelines and in the water.

Miami has been the center of the tropical fish importing and farming business for over a hundred years. Needless to say, during this time, many different tropical species either escaped from the farms or were intentionally "dumped" into the canals. Consequently, the canals were full of large tropical fish. Many species, particularly the cichlids (of which family the peacocks are a member), have prospered in the canal system. State fisheries biologists became concerned that these fish would displace the native bass and sunfish populations. In the early 1980's, Paul Shafland of the state game and fish agency proposed that the South American peacocks might be introduced as a predator to control these other species. After a couple of years spent researching the various species of peacocks native to South America, two were selected for further study. They were the largest of the peacocks, sometimes referred to as the speckled, or grande peacock, and the much smaller butterfly peacock. The speckled can exceed 30 pounds in their native habitat while the butterfly rarely exceeds 10 pounds. Both species were ultimately stocked, but to the dismay of many, the larger speckled peacock turned out to be more sensitive to cold weather than the butterfly and died out. Since the canals are all connected, the butterfly peacocks have spread to all sections that have water warm enough to sustain them during the coldest winters. A substantial peacock bass sport fishery has developed.

We arrived safely in Hobe Sound after an eleven hundred mile drive from Katy, and began to string our rods to fish for sunfish that were aggressively surface feeding in the pond across the street from Pete's house. Bill can string a fly rod faster than anyone else I have ever seen. We both got off to a good start. Nothing big but all the fish were very aggressive. The following day, Pete took us into the Atlantic where we each had a hookup but both were lost. We became preoccupied looking for sea turtles and saw one leatherback, a loggerhead, and several green sea turtles. They were coming near shore preparatory to egg laying.

Bill and I went to west Miami late the following day and spent the night there, as our peacock guide wanted to pick us up at 6:30 in the morning and it is a one-and-a-half hour drive from Pete's to the meeting place. The guide was right on time and we drove to the launch site. Guess where it was. For those of you who have flown in or out of Miami, perhaps you noticed the small lakes next to the

south side of the airport. These lakes are prime areas for peacocks. The largest is known as Blue Lagoon and was where we launched. The boat was a standard bass boat—nothing special. After running to a point in the lake and finding that someone else was already fishing it, we went to explore the canals.

We passed under several bridges rife with Miami's morning rush hour traffic. These bridges were also "residences" of the local homeless population. We proceeded through a couple of metal culverts just wide and deep enough for a boat and our guide slowed the boat after emerging from under another bridge and began intently scanning the water. He pointed at a peacock holding close to shore among the branches of a downed tree. After a couple of casts, Bill caught and boated the fish, a male. Next it was my turn. This fish was building a nest and was very territorial. It took close to twenty (yes, twenty) casts to get this fish to take my fly. It would chase the fly, mouth it, and spit it out in a nanosecond, and then lash it with its tail, before becoming irritated enough to finally striking in an attempt to kill it. Then the fight was on. Pound for pound, peacock bass are at least twice as strong as largemouth. Like largemouth and redbass, they have a tendency to go to the bottom in deeper water and fight like a bulldog. They put on quite an aerial display when you get them to the surface. I successfully landed this fish, a very nice female.

Bill and I continued taking turns casting at fish while the guide pointed them out. We successfully caught and boated each fish that he pointed out to us for a total of fifteen peacocks. We probably would have gone fishless without the guide, who was incredibly able at spotting these fish on or near the bottom. They ranged from two to four pounds.

The fish were getting ready to spawn and were holding against the bank in two to four feet of water. You had to be very precise in casting and had to use sinking flies that would get down to their level because they would not come up for a fly. I used a gold Rattle Rouser and Bill used a chartreuse Woolly Bugger casting floating lines with short leaders. Mine was about seven feet with a six pound tippet. We both used seven weight rods. It was strictly sight-casting, as the bass were establishing nesting territories and would not venture from their spots. According to our guide, by June they are through with the spawn and begin to travel in groups, at which time they will take top-water flies as well as those in the water column. They also seem to prefer flies with a lot of color or flash.

It is very easy to tell the males from the females. Males have a large hump above the head and females do not. This difference can easily be seen in the photo of Bill (the bearded one) with his largest fish, a male, and me with mine, a female.

The highlight of the trip was catching a 61 inch (shell length) leatherback turtle on a size 42 turtle fly using a 10X tippet! She was estimated to weigh 700-800 pounds and considered to be quite small for the area as most are nine to ten feet long.

The interesting thing about fishing these canals is that with few exceptions, we were always between back yards. Our guide was on a first-name-basis with many of the local dogs.

On a closing note, the price of the trip was a whole lot less than one to Venezuela. We saw two different species of iguanas, several species of tropical lizards,

numerous tropical fish, and myriad exotic plants including orchids that one would expect to see only in South America.



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Brown & Root Outing Report – May 14, 2005

By Ralph G. Adams, Jr.

The trip was advertised as a Brown & Root saltwater outing, but club members spread out and also fished the Lighthouse side of the causeway. The day turned out to be one of the nicest of the year. Winds were light and mostly out of the southeast. The skies were clear all day except for part of the morning. The deep channels filled with green Gulf water and we had high hopes hitched on tides falling one week into a waxing moon. The south side of the causeway proved scarce of redfish but the anglers who went there had a high and sophisticated purpose steeped in the aesthetic. These anglers wanted it to happen on one of the most beautiful flats around. Theirs were visions of reds riding head to the current and crossing uniform bottoms of eel grass and testifying to Walt Whitman's "insouciance of animals."

The kayakers who took the paddle-trail-more-traveled caught trout in various cuts enlivened by the tide. A trout with a Buddhist sense of suffering jumped at the end of the line and attracted the interest of a bottlenose dolphin which surfaced and accelerated towards the trout, throwing a torpedo wake. The angler saw the set-up and tried to pull the trout out of the way but it was no use and the dolphin gobbled the fish. For good reason, the inshore, light-tackle mammal fishery remains an unexplored frontier and so the line was cinched tight allowing the leader to pop with one lost trout and no broken gear.

Over the course of the day, hundreds of redfish were cast to and caught in the angler's collective imaginations. Three were actually landed. Two frigate-bird hens with black and white throats and hooked beaks took the mid-afternoon sun crouched on the remnants of a duck blind. A brand new Maverick flats boat labored with its prop tucked several inches deep in the mud. Three or four slow motion spins and adjustments to ballast failed to help the boat up and the pretty flat seethed with black mud and grass clippings. Newfound questions must have risen in the mind of the captain as he and his companion finally chose to idle the short distance to deeper water. It recalls remarks made by a professional with almost fifty years of boats to his name. He quipped about having never gotten stuck in the shallows until just a couple of years ago when he bought a Hell's Bay boat.

That evening, the Stranahans compromised their otherwise excellent reputations and kindly hosted the group

for a barbecue dinner at their beautiful new home in Fulton. Aside from fishing, the primary topic of discussion was fishing. Yet the engineers could not resist asking about the superlative design and construction features of Phil's new home. This, too, related to fishing, since many observant anglers have something of a morbid streak and they may sit uneasy mulling over such things as the longevity of the fishery, their inability to recall when they last caught a flounder, whether it's best to forsake Saturday fishing during the Summer months, and the implications of shifting balances between shark and stingray populations. Once you get to know them, many anglers betray dark fears that it will all come to an end. Not quite tomorrow, but maybe not so long from now. So there was understandably much interest in Phil's new home which is really a fortress of sorts, thick-walled and built to last and able to withstand the strongest Gulf Coast hurricane.

Eight hours in a kayak is just not enough for the likes of Jeremy Cottrell, Eduardo Davis, and Aaron Hammer. After dinner, they prepared to fish the lights around Rockport. Others went back to stuffy tents at Goose Island State Park where the evening revels of campers and extended families carried into the wee hours of the morning.

The next day they woke well before dawn. The camp fires gave off traces of smoke. A raccoon trolled for scraps unfazed by the ardor of one man's snoring or that of a couple hidden somewhere in the darkness giving each other a very happy excuse to be late for the day's fishing.

Editor's Note: The club Ethics Committee heard about the "dolphin caper" and, in another proof that your dues are managed in a suitably grave and judicious manner, a team of investigators along with boats was dispatched to Port Aransas. The investigation concluded by condemning the dolphin act and cited a dire need for stiffer penalties in the face of what they called a "widespread and disturbing erosion of sporting standards among that portion of the membership that actually pays its dues." The investigation was scuttled, however, when rumors surfaced about the highest levels of the leadership doping flies with synthetic bait and fish oils. In the waning hours of the investigation, they claimed the public interest to have a full account of (i) the fly used, (ii) best times to fish the cut, and (iii) whether a 12-weight is enough stick for the inshore bottlenose. ◆

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OUTINGS SCHEDULE

Our outings schedule is an ongoing work-in-progress. Here are the trips we have currently scheduled for 2005. Sometimes dates and places change, so check here regularly. **Blue font indicates a change has been made since the last issue of *Wind Knots*.**

To volunteer as a trip leader, contact fresh water outings chairman Clarke Thornton or salt water outings chairman Scott Fossum. Their telephone numbers and email addresses are on the Executive Committee listing later in this issue. Fresh water trips are designated [F], salt water [S] in the listings below.



June 11-12, 2005. Llano River, Junction, Texas. Bass & Panfish [F].

June 2005. Louisiana Madness, Lake Charles, LA [S]. Leader needed.

June 18, 2005. Lighthouse Lakes or Brown & Root kayaking, Aransas Pass, TX [S]. Aaron Hammer (thehammer@houston.rr.com), leader. Lefty Ray Chapa will guide us on whichever area is fishing best. Attendees will be charged \$30-40 per person depending on the number of participants to cover Lefty's guide fee. Kayak rental available nearby.

July 9-10, 2005. Frio River, Uvalde, Texas. Bass & Panfish [F].

*Clarke Thornton
- fresh*

July 23-24, 2005. Port Aransas jetties, Port Aransas, TX [S] Guided trip by Lefty Ray Chapa [www.leftyray.com see his web sight for pictures].

We will take the last ferry over on Saturday afternoon at 6:00 PM. Fish all night and return on Sunday morning's ferry. This is 2 days from a full moon and tarpon, jacks, bull reds and trout are expected. This trip will cost an estimated \$85 per person. No boat or kayak required.

July 30, 2005. "Port O'Connor One Fly" Tournament, Port O'Connor, TX [S]. Scott Fossum, leader. Rotating crystal trophy up for grabs. Most inches of fish caught on the first fly you tie on wins. Boat or kayak needed.



Scott Fossum - salt

August 13, 2005. San Marcos River Float Trip, San Marcos, Texas. Bass & Panfish [F].

August 27, 2005. "Redfish Rodeo," Rockport, TX [S]. Jerry Loring, leader.

September 10, 2005. Location to be determined. Bass & Panfish [F].

September 24-25, 2005. "Padre Island Surf Fest" [S]. Fish Padre Island National Seashore guided by Billy Sandifer for tarpon and jack crevalle. Optional camping on beach. Estimated \$125 cost for one day of guided fishing, the 2nd day is on your own. \$50 non-refundable deposit required to reserve space. Scott Fossum, leader.

October 1-2, 2005 – South Padre Island, TX [S]. Rick Rawls, leader.

October 8, 2005. Seven Lakes at Damon, Damon, Texas. Bass & Panfish [F].

October – Nighthawk Bay (Bird Island Basin) in the Padre Island National Seashore in/near Corpus Christi/Port Aransas. Kayak, boat and walk-in opportunities abound both on the flats and in the surf. Leader needed.

November 6, 2005. Guadalupe River, Sattler, Texas. Trout [F]

December 2005. No outings.

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About Wind Knots

Wind Knots is your monthly newsletter, and it needs your help – otherwise we'll run out of things to print. E-mail your articles, photos, artwork, graphics, fishing news, tall tales, lies, and letters to the editor to ralphnchristineadams@earthlink.net not later than the 10th of the month for that month's issue. **Be sure to put the words *Wind Knots* in the subject line of your e-mail.** If you don't, I might think it's spam or worse and delete it before opening.

If you have digital photos, please send them via e-mail in .JPG format. If you have paper photos, mail them to Corey Rich, 1900 N. Memorial Way, Houston, TX 77007. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return.

The preferred form for text – stories, letters, and so forth – is in Microsoft Word. Please try to keep your offerings in the 800 to 1,000 word range, or less. If you send photos along with an article, proposed captions are appreciated.

Wind Knots is posted on the club's Web site as soon as it becomes available. Check www.texasflyfishers.org regularly for the latest newsletter and other news of interest.

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WIND KNOTS CLASSIFIEDS

Space permitting, we'll run "Wanted" and "For Sale" ads for members of Texas Flyfishers. On a case-by-case basis, we may also run ads from non-members if the goods or services sought or offered would be of interest to our members. Send your ad by e-mail to ralphnchristineadams@earthlink.net or regular mail to Ralph Adams, [your preferred address here]. You may include a photograph of items to be sold if you like.

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Texas Flyfishers
P.O. Box 571134
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Texas Flyfishers Membership Application

Please check one: New Application Renewal

To join Texas Flyfishers or renew your membership, please complete this form and mail it with your check to the address below, or bring it with you to one of our monthly meetings. All memberships expire June 30th of each year, and renewals are due July 1st. New members, please pro-rate your payment for the number of months between now and the end of June, inclusive. Our monthly meetings are held on the last Tuesday of every month (except December), beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Dues are for (check one): Individual at \$24 a year Family at \$32 a year Student at \$16 a year

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Email: _____

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