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1. Early epoxy fly found by Ken Vanderlaske; 2. Cockroach, tied by Lefty Kreh; 3. Janssen's Half Beak, tied by Hal Janssen; 4. White Deceiver, tied by Lefty Kreh; 5. Janssen's Striper Fly, tied by Hal Janssen.

Innovative Saltwater Flies: A History

by Bob Veverka

In January 1999, Stackpole Books will release Innovative Saltwater Flies, *a new book by Bob Veverka, renowned fly tyer and fly fisher. The book is a collection of flies organized by tyer, with background information on each tyer's saltwater fishing experience and the development of his or her favorite patterns. To set the scene, Veverka included a chapter dealing with the history of the sport. We'd like to share that chapter with you in this issue.*

—Editor

Saltwater fly fishing dates back to the late 1800s. At that time, anglers were fishing with large Atlantic salmon flies because no saltwater flies were available. The earliest saltwater patterns can be traced back to striped bass in the Northeast, bonefish and tarpon in Florida, and Pacific salmon in the Northwest.

Two of the earliest patterns on record are the Loving's Bass Fly, tied by Tom Loving in the 1920s especially for striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay, and the Bonbright Tarpon Fly, designed by Howard Bonbright and sold by Abercrombie & Fitch in the early 1920s.

An outstanding pioneer saltwater fly caster and early experimenter was Homer Rhode. Rhode tells of taking his first bonefish and permit on regulation fly tackle in 1930. An Everglades naturalist, Rhode roamed the Florida backcountry canals and boated and waded the shallow waters of Florida Bay, often for months at a time. He originated the Homer Rhode Jr. Tarpon Streamer. In his book *Streamers and Bucktails,* Joe Bates states, "This was the first established type of pattern and the forerunner of all tarpon streamers." With long hackles tied in at the hook point, it proved to be less apt to foul, and its palmered hackle caused the fly to land light and sink slow, the hallmark of a shallow-water tarpon fly. Rhode also experimented with long shank hooks. By putting in two forty-five-degree angle bends, he found that the hook would fish inverted and thus not snag on the bottom. This is what we know today as the keel fly hook. He also originated the Homer Rhode loop knot.

Harold Gibbs of Rhode Island tied one of the first saltwater flies to actually imitate a specific baitfish. Harold and his brother Frank fished in Canada for Atlantic salmon, but during World War II, gas was so scarce they had to find fishing closer to home. Harold tied a bucktail wing streamer that imitated a silverside, a baitfish found on the East Coast. It was an instant success, and the fly we know today as the Gibbs Striper Fly was born. Gibbs promoted the sport of striped bass fishing and personally pioneered fly fishing for this game fish. He also popularized the Magog Smelt as a striped bass fly. Originated by Frier Gulline of Fin, Fur and Feather in Montreal, this fly was used for landlocked salmon in Lake Memphremagog on the Quebec/Vermont border; it represented a smelt, a common baitfish found in that lake.

This is purely speculation on my part, but perhaps here was the idea that gave Gibbs the foundation for his pattern. Gibbs fished in Canada and was familiar with the Magog Smelt, which looks remarkably similar to the Gibbs Striper Fly. Gibbs tied his fly in a few different versions. Some of the similarities to Gulline's fly are three bunches of bucktail in the wing, teal cheeks, and a red throat. When Gibbs fished in the salt, he drew on his vast knowledge of salmon and trout fishing to successfully fly fish for striped bass. Gibbs originated his fly in the early 1940s, whereas Gulline tied his flies as far back as the 1930s.

Harold's brother Frank also tied flies and originated the Bluefish Bucktail. Also at this time, Edward Materne originated the Pig Tails, and Harvey Flint originated the Palmer Diller.

As far back as 1936 on the West Coast, Letcher Lambuth was experimenting with imitations of specific baitfish for Pacific salmon in Puget

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1. Pink Shrimp, tied by Jimmie Albright; 2. Frankee-Belle, tied by Jimmie Albright; 3. Magog Smelt, tied by Mike Martinek; 4. Gibbs Striper Fly, tied by Mike Martinek; 5. Bluefish Fly, tied by Peter Sang; 6. Sandeel, tied by Don Brown; 7. Silverside, tied by Don Brown; 8. Horror, tied by Pete Perinchief.

Sound. He began to study what fish actually feed on by viewing baitfish in glass tanks. When he held the baitfish in his hand, he noticed that their colors were different than when hit by light in the water. He found herring to have an opalescent quality he could only capture with blended polar bear hair over silver tinsel bodies. It is likely that he was the angler/tyer who led the move to more realistic polar bear streamers. He would observe live candlefish and herring in his tanks while drawing streamer flies through it and try to match the baitfish's color. His candlefish and herring patterns became standards and are used widely today.

Saltwater fly casting for Pacific salmon enjoyed perhaps its widest popularity and greatest number of practitioners in the mid-1930s. But World War II came along, and when it was over, the interest was never quite the same.

After World War II, Joe Brooks became a leader in saltwater flies and fishing. Joe started fishing in the salt in the 1920s, but it wasn't until after the war that it really caught on. In *Salt Water Fly Fishing* magazine, Charlie Waterman writes, "Joe Brooks never invented saltwater fly fishing, but he made it move." In 1946, Brooks, fishing with guide Jimmie Albright, made the first attempt to catch a bonefish on a fly. They succeeded and became instant experts. Albright strongly influenced the development of bonefish flies. According to Brooks, Albright's Frankee-Belle "was one of the earliest patterns tied for bonefish," and it remains popular today.

Who actually tied the first bonefish fly is not clear. According to Dick Brown in *Flyfishing for Bonefish,* not until Captain Bill Smith plucked the hackle off the back end of an Islamorada chicken, tied it to a hook, and took his now-famous 1939 bonefish, had anyone designed a pattern for bonefish.

Brooks also tied flies, but most of his ideas were incorporated into flies by other tyers. His most popular flies were the Blonde series. The first two Blonde patterns, the Platinum and Honey Blonde, were originated by Joe and Tom Cooney. Another tyer who did a lot of work with Brooks, and tied many of his flies, was Bill Gallasch of Skipping Bug fame. Bill was a freshwater tyer until he met Joe. In 1948, Brooks caught a West Coast striper weighing 29 pounds, 10 ounces at Coos Bay, Oregon, on a popping bug, a world record at the time.

One of Joe Brooks's favorite bonefish flies was the Pink Shrimp tied by George Phillips. Phillips varied the amounts of bucktail and dressed the fly on different size hooks to control the sink rate. Its one drawback was that it snagged on the bottom. Phillips tried to correct this and make it weedproof by palmering the body with stiff hackle. This problem wouldn't be corrected until Pete Perinchief, while fishing with Brooks, became so frustrated with his flies snagging on the bottom that he developed a most important feature. Taking an idea from a weedless freshwater fly, he originated the Horror, a fly with the wing on the reverse side which, when dropped in the water, flips on its back with the hook pointing up. The wing works like a rudder, turning the fly over and also serving as a weed guard. His design is now standard on bonefish flies and his original pattern is still a popular fly.

The second most important development in the design of the bonefish fly came with Bob Nauheim's Crazy Charlie, created in the Bahamas in the late 1970s. Drawing from his steelhead flytying experience, Nauheim tied a pair of metal bead-chain eyes on a hook, which enabled the fly to sink to the bottom fast. The eyes also helped flip the fly so the hook rode point up, making it snagproof, and added an up-and-down action, making it sink naturally and quickly to the fish's level. The Crazy Charlie was the prototype for many variations of bead-chain–eyes bonefish flies tied today.

Nat Ragland also contributed to the development of bonefish flies when he created Puff, using chenille in the head and body to cushion its landing so it's less likely to spook fish. This was one of the first patterns tied for permit. These features—sink rate, action, snagproofing, and a quiet landing—are all key attributes of what we now know as a bonefish fly.

Joe Brooks's articles in fishing magazines had an enormous effect on saltwater fly fishing. He influenced two other early saltwater fly fishers and tyers—Lefty Kreh and Stu Apte. Lefty Kreh, an avid smallmouth bass fisherman from Maryland, recalls that one of his most important moments was when he met Joe Brooks. When Lefty began fishing in the salt water around the Chesapeake Bay in the 1950s, he wanted a fly shaped like a baitfish that swam well and cast with little wind resistance. In the early 1960s, he originated the Lefty's Deceiver, probably the most popular saltwater fly.

Stu Apte was another who fished with Joe Brooks and looked to him as a mentor. During high school and college, Stu tied simple bucktails and, to earn money for fishing gear, sold them as bonefish flies. He started guiding in the Florida Keys in the late 1950s, just as the modern era of saltwater fly fishing was becoming popular. Apte has fished widely and holds many records. He changed the design of Keys-style flies, tying them less than 3 inches long. His Stu Apte Tarpon Fly, originated in 1969, was considered one of the best at the time and is still widely used. Tied with red and yellow, it resembles the tarpon's favorite food, the Palolo worm.

Woody Sexton guided in the Florida Keys from 1959 to 1988. He and Jim Adams headed out of California for Florida with a small aluminum boat filled with fishing gear. When they arrived, they saw hundreds of schools of tarpon. Flies were very primitive at the time. They used simple bucktails, and because almost anything worked, there was no need to develop more elaborate patterns. The tackle back then was also rather crude, and the tarpon were very docile, not the spooky, skitterish creatures they have become. According to Woody, one of the best tarpon flies at that time was the High Tie originated by Bart Foth. It cast well, landed lightly, and had a very seductive action.

During the early 1960s, Dr. Webster Robinson and his wife Helen, guided by Lefty Reagan, aimed to perfect the method for taking a billfish on a fly by using teaser bait to lure the fish to the artificial fly. Robinson wasn't successful until 1962 in Pinas Bay, Panama, where he landed the first Pacific sailfish on a fly—it weighed 74½ pounds. Robinson used a homemade Styrofoam combination popper-streamer built around a 7/0 hook with white saddle hackles about 4 inches long and a white Styrofoam head about 1 inch long, chopped off square to ensure popping action. This type of fly is widely used today. Others who successfully incorporated Robinson's method for teasing billfish include Stu Apte and Billy Pate. In 1964 off Islamorada, Florida, Lee Cuddy landed the first Atlantic sailfish on a fly. It weighed 47 pounds.

During the early 1960s, many tyers started tying saltwater flies. One pioneer was Bill Catherwood of Tewskbury, Massachusetts, originator of the Giant Killer series. Catherwood's flies initiated the shift from attractors to imitators. He used spun deerhair heads to give his baitfish patterns a three-dimensional shape. He studied colors of baitfish and

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1. Silversides, tied by Joseph D. Bates; 2. Tinker Mackerel, tied by Bill Catherwood; 3. Golden Prince, tied by Joseph D. Bates; 4. Needlefish, tied by Bill Catherwood.

used dyed materials to achieve the realistic look of squid, shrimp, and crabs. Dan Blanton was another fly originator during the 1960s who created the Whistler series in 1964 for striped bass in the San Francisco Bay area. He incorporated bead-chain eyes to give the fly a bucktail jig action.

Hal Janssen, a brilliant tyer and an artist when it comes to saltwater flies, originated the Janssen Striper Fly and the Half Beak, which imitates a balao. Bob Edgely and Dan Blanton originated the Sea Arrow Squid. Larry Green, a leading angler and writer, originated the Bonito Bandit and beer-belly–fashioned flies for bonito off the California coast. Another pioneer, Harry Kime, created the Tutti-Fruitti, a squid pattern used to tease billfish, and numerous patterns for Costa Rican tarpon and offshore fish in Baja. Bob Nauheim modeled his West Coast striper flies Bay Tern and Sea Tern after the Gibbs Striper Fly. The Winston Billfish Fly by Winston Moore has taken numerous marlin and sailfish. Moore says in Deke Meyer's *Saltwater Flies,* "It is not a work of art but it certainly is effective." Moore also developed the Agent Orange, which he claims is one of his best bonefish flies. In 1966, Russell Chatham broke the world record for striped bass with a 36-pound, 6-ounce fish from San Francisco Bay using an 8-inch black streamer. Ned Gray developed the Streaker, the first fly to incorporate a pair of peacock sword feathers for the wing, for fishing in Baja, Mexico, where he caught a 50-pound roosterfish on it. East Coast tyers of this era include Al Brewster, one of Harold Gibbs's fishing cronies; Paul Kukonen, who fished early shrimp patterns in Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island, for weakfish; Joe Bates, who fished extensively and promoted spincasting when it was first introduced and authored many books on all types of fishing; and Elmwood "Cap" Colvin, who operated a tackle shop along the New Jersey coast, encouraged many to try saltwater fly fishing, and developed the Kaboom-boom poppers, named after the sound they make.

Frank Woolner was the editor of *Salt Water Sportsman* magazine and very knowledgeable about northeastern fly fishing. Fishing mostly on Cape Cod, he originated Woolner's Sandeel, which features neck hackles with the tip removed and inserted into Mylar piping as a tail. Many tyers now incorporate this feature in their baitfish patterns. One of Woolner's fishing partners, Hal Lyman, another editor of *Salt Water Sportsman,* originated Lyman's Terror. In 1970, George X. Sand published *Saltwater Fly Fishing,* one of the first books to deal strictly with the sport. Two years later, Kenneth E. Bay's *Salt Water Flies* became the first to deal strictly with saltwater flies and how to tie them. During the 1970s, Peter B. Sang of Percy Tackle Company in Portland, Maine, also developed a sandeel pattern, the Percy Sandeel, while Don Brown of Massachusetts originated his Silversides and Brown Sandeel.

Around the same time, George "Chappie" Chapman enlarged his smallmouth bass poppers, added pearlescent tape, and began using them for striped bass. The first time he saw Mylar piping, he knew exactly how he was going to use it. Chapman's Mylar-Covered Poppers have taken numerous offshore and inshore species.

Another true saltwater fly innovator is Bob Popovics, who started tying saltwater flies in 1971. Striving to make a fly durable enough for toothy bluefish, he originated a style of flies with the heads and bodies covered with epoxy. Not only did the epoxy make the fly more durable, it also allowed tyers to set the shape of any baitfish they wished to duplicate. He originated the Surf Candies, Bob's Bangers, and his most recent, the Spread Flies, which have the silhouette of large-bodied baitfish. Another tyer to experiment with epoxy is Harry Spear, a flats guide in the Florida Keys. His Mother of Epoxy was the first epoxy fly to draw the attention of bonefish anglers.

During the late 1980s, saltwater tying innovation really took off. In his 1987 *Book of Fly Patterns,* Eric Leiser writes, "The saltwater category of flies is still a wide open area with many new opportunities for *pioneering.*" Some of the true innovators of this time were Matty Vinciguerra, who developed the Salty Beady Eye, and Larry Dahlberg, whose revolutionary Dahlberg Diver dives, swims, and resurfaces like a spinning lure. Dahlberg learned much about fly design by studying the attracting and triggering attributes of artificial lures.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Western trout fly tyers took off to fish the bonefish flats in the winter. Mike Wolverton created his Flats Master, and Craig Mathews developed new patterns while chasing bonefish and permit in Belize and the Bahamas, including Pop's Bonefish Bitters and the Turneffe Crab.

Many tyers tried to devise crab patterns to catch the elusive permit. Dave Whitlock developed the clipped Deer-Hair Crab. George Anderson, with the help of John Barr and Jim Brungardt, designed one of the first flies to take permit consistently, the McCrab. Del Brown used rug yarn for the body of his Merkin. It isn't a realistic pattern, but it looks enough like a crab and is effective because of the way it dives to the bottom. Many Florida Keys guides use it, and Del's permit count certainly confirms that it works. Tied in small sizes, it is also a good bonefish fly. Other successful crab patterns include Phil Chapman's Hair-Ball and Infuraytor. Tied with rabbit fur, they hang suspended in the water with lots of action. Bill Catherwood has a unique crab pattern. Tied articulated, it takes on a defensive stance when at rest on the bottom. Another novel crab pattern is Krohel's Permit Krab by Ken Krohel, which he creates using hot glue, shaped cork, rubber bands, a diving fin, and an outer shell of leather. Tim Borski ties his Chernobyl Crab with long, soft, tan hackle much like a spey fly. He likes the action of the long hackle and uses it in many of his patterns. Carl Richards has taken crab patterns to the extreme. These truly artistic flies look as if they could crawl off the tying bench.

In 1992, Randall Kaufmann published *Bonefishing with a Fly.* Having fished from Venezuela to Christmas Island, Kaufmann claims to have studied, collected, dissected, designed, redesigned, ordered, sold, explained, demonstrated, and dreamed flies for thirty years, a mania that has led to better and more efficient fishing and tying. His patterns include Pink Sands and Marabou Shrimp. Other bonefish patterns include Jim McVay's Gotcha, a standard on Bahama bonefish flats; Jim Orthwein's Jim's Golden Eye Shrimp, which accounted for three bonefish fly records; and Barry and Cathy Beck's Silli-Legs. One of the most versatile, popular, and effective saltwater patterns is the Clouser Minnow, developed by Bob Clouser for smallmouth bass. According to Bob, "An effective smallmouth bass fly should have a darting motion and must sink as the fly is dead-drifted or between strips."

The Clouser Minnow mimics this fleeting trait—the fly never stops.

Excerpted from *Innovative Saltwater Flies* (ISBN: 0-8117-0902-7) by Bob Veverka, available January 1999 from Stackpole Books, 1-800-732-3669.