

THE BACKCAST



THE BACKCOUNTRY FLY- FISHING ASSOCIATION OF
BREVARD

www.bffa-brevard.com

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October 2023

Oct

Tuesday-October 3rd, at 5:00 for casting

And 6:00 for the meeting

BFFA Club Meeting

at the Italian American Club

1471 Cypress Ave

Melbourne

Joe Mahler is a leading American fly-fishing writer, illustrator, and casting instructor. His fly-casting articles and illustrations appear in publications such as Fly Fisherman and Outdoor Life. Known for his easy-going personality and effortless casting style, Joe is a popular speaker at sport shows and club events.

Joe's presentation will be **"Fly fishing for freshwater natives in Florida's public waters"**

In this presentation, Joe will share his approach to simplify fly fishing and increase enjoyment by returning to our fly-fishing roots. Bass, bluegill, crappie and other native species are explored, along with tactics to catch them.



BFFA Officers and Directors
Board Chairman—TBA

President—Frank Catino
321 777 5706
fcatino@cfl.rr.com

VP/Programs—Alec Buchness
alecbuchness@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer—Ron Winn
321 723 3141
ron@winnaccounting.com

Conservation Director—Bill DeLuccia
321 729 8818
deluccias@hotmail.com

Fly Tying—Jeff Ward
321 242 2815
cojeward@gmail.com

Outings Director—Steve Stewart Sr.
Capt.IndianRiverSteve@yahoo.com

Auction Chairman—Chip Turknett
William.Turknett@gmail.com

Newspaper Editor/Email Distribution—
Craig Smith
Craigsmith52@gmail.com

Ramblings and Such

October

This next meeting in October is going to start out a little earlier than normal if you are interested in a casting demonstration by Joe Mahler. Joe is well known in the industry for his fly casing instructions and videos. We plan on Joe casting in the grassy area on the north side of the Italian-American Club. The normal times for dinner and a presentation will stay the same. The restaurants inside facilities will be off limits till 5:45.

Thirty-four years ago our first newsletter was sent out to the club members. Hard to believe that we have been doing this for that long, yet the club has continually maintained a strong membership throughout the years. Many members have been with us from either the beginning or joined soon thereafter. The club has been and still is a great way to meet other people who enjoy fly fishing and pick up tips on everything from casting to tying flies.

A big shout out to Bill Sargent for another one of his contributions to the newsletter. Recently I had asked Bill if he had any of his older columns which are full of the history of this area and once again, he provided a great article pan fishing and bass fishing in our areas back in the 60's.

Some of our fellow members are no longer physically with us yet the memories made with them along the way remain within many of us. Those memories of shared adventures are still influential in many ways. Though they lay behind us in the past, you could say memories are like our back cast which we all know is fundamental to the cast forward. All apologies to Socrates for that little bit of philosophical blundering.

Fly Tying with Jeff Ward

The class will be October 16th at 6:00 pm
at the Melbourne Library.

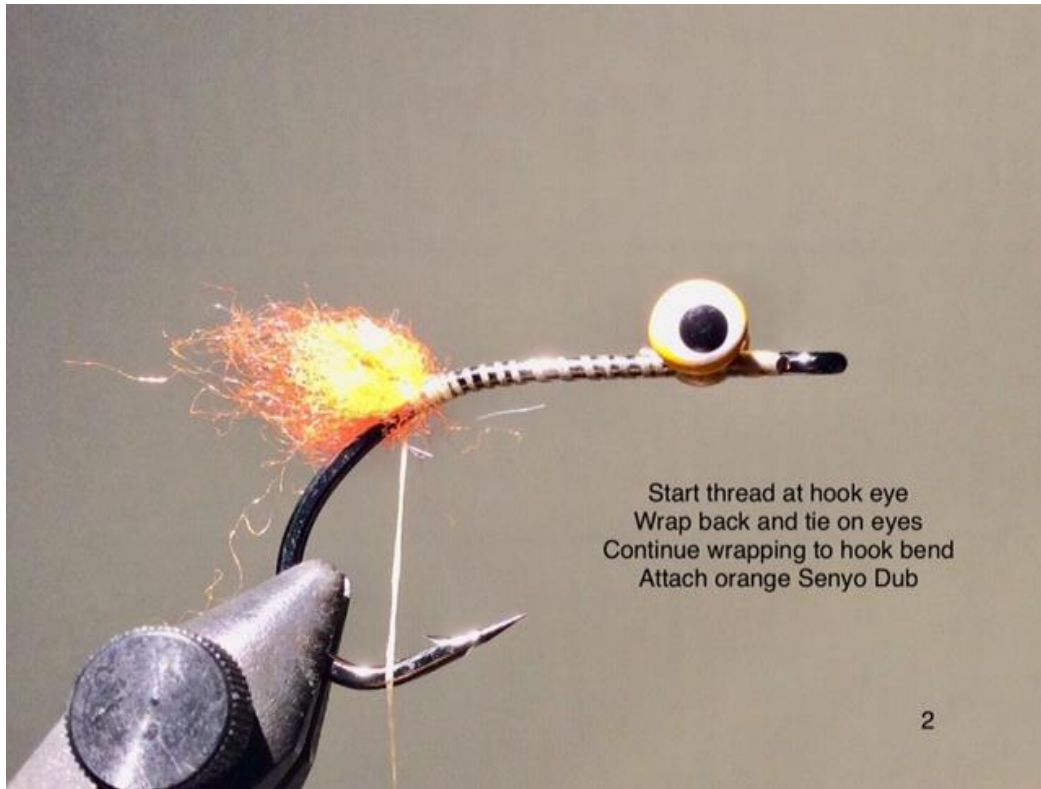
October's fly is a Redfish Cracklin Fly

Recipe:

Hook: FTD MS100 1/0
Thread: 210 Tan
Eyes: Medium Double Pupil
Tail: Tan Congo Hair
Orange Senyo Dub
Flash: Copper Flashabou
Body: FTD Kraken Dubbing Gold Demon

Redfish Cracklin Fly





Tie on leggy brush and Palmer up to the hook eye



4

Tie off and form head
Head cement
Trim brush around eyes



5

Looking back at the good times—By Bill Sargent

For bass and bream, the '60s and '70s were tops. In looking back at stories I did on our freshwater fly fishing in the late 1960s and '70s, it makes me realize that at the time we didn't know just how good we had it. Fly fishermen were experiencing some of the best of times with Central and South Florida panfish and bass. It was a period before the urban sprawl was having its effect on the water quality in our lakes and rivers and before the over-spraying of aquatic vegetation became the norm. Talk to any long-time fly fisherman and he or she will tell you about the toll all that has had on our fisheries.

Starting in 1968 each May, I was part of a group of 10 to 12 newspaper writers invited to Okeechobee to compete in the three-day Thlatho Tumka Fly Fishing Invitational sponsored by the Glades County Chamber of Commerce. It served as a promotion for the good fishing along the western sections of the lake, and needless to say we found plenty to write about in our respective papers. It was the creation of Harold DeTar, a retired oil company executive and life-long fly fisherman living in Moore Haven who convinced the Chamber to host the annual event. It ran for 25 years, even after DeTar's death in 1981 at the age of 82. DeTar took the Thlatho Tumka name from the Seminole Indian language meaning "fishing with a fly" and he would spend months organizing the guides, host fishing camps and businesses in Glades County. He devised a points system for our catches of panfish and bass, and each year a points champion was crowned at an awards dinner attended by a crowd of locals. The winner received a small trophy and the satisfaction of beating his cohorts. The three days usually were scheduled around the full moon in late May or early June when the Okeechobee bluegills were concentrated on their spawning beds. DeTar set up our schedules with six half-day periods, each out of a different fishing camp, with a different guide and on a different part of the lake. When it was too windy for fly fishing on the open lake, we'd move into the protection of major canals including Rim Canal, the result of diking the lake in the 1930s.

Using surface poppers or small weighted sinking bugs, we seldom had a problem accounting for our daily limit of 50 bream, and we'd go with poppers or small streamers for our 10-bass limits, with the heaviest in each session worth bonus points. All the fish except for our bonus weight fish were released on the spot. A chartreuse-colored Boone Bait Co. No. 6 or No. 8 popping bug was all that was needed for the chunky 12- and 14-ounce female "copperhead" bluegills that spawned by the thousands along the six miles of rocky edges of Rim Canal between Moore Haven and Liberty Point. Seeing the fanned-out beds, the trick was to cast a popper to a point directly over the bed, pop it once to get the attention of the larger female and the accompanying male guarding the bed, and then allowing the popper to lay motionless. Seeing it as a potential intruder, one of the bream would sprint to the top, slamming the bug and you best be holding tight to the rod. Always with a laugh, DeTar would say "If Okeechobee bluegills grew to 5 pounds, you'd never land one on a flyrod."

The guides usually knew the locations of bedding bluegills in other major canals like Harney Pond and Indian Prairie and during one of the tournaments two of them found more than an acre of lake bottom packed with shellcracker beds. It was the perfect situation for a flyrodder. The water was only three feet deep, you could see the beds and you could pinpoint your casts to those spots. The two guides fished their writers on that one bedding area each of the three days and I drew one of them the second afternoon. We found the shellcrackers to be interested only in a green-colored dragonfly nymph, a slow sinker made by Al Klemack, a fly tyer and one of the Invitational's guides who made it in size No. 8 for shellcrackers and No. 12 for bluegills. That afternoon the green nymph got me 35 shellcrackers before they tore three of them to shreds. I had it in brown and black colors but the fish weren't interested. Our fly fishing at East Lake Toho, north of St. Cloud, in those years was different because we would wade hip-deep along the outside edges of thick growths of bulrush for bluegills and bass. The fish were inside the tangled bulrush, and to draw strikes with popping bugs, our casts had to be inside tight pockets and close to the outside edges, so our accuracy was tested. Hang-ups in the tough stems of bulrush were common.

In the late 1960s, I started fly fishing with Brad Bradley, a retired pipeline construction superintendent who owned Bradley's Fish Camp on the north shore of East Lake, the northernmost lake on the Kissimmee Chain. Today the camp is called East Lake Fish Camp and it includes a small marina, a restaurant and airboat rides. The Boggy Creek Resort and RV Park is next door. Bradley was a die-hard flyrodder who in his pipeline work fished all over South America and British Columbia but always said Florida bluegills on fly rod was his first preference.

East Lake's solid sand bottom in those years made wading comfortable and the water was clear. There was little development around the lake, the exception being the small town of St. Cloud along the southern shore. State Road 15, known as Narcoossee Road, was two lanes and passed through barren pastureland and ranches. From U.S. 192, it was a shortcut to Orlando. We started the mornings along the north shore for bluegills and did best on the larger "copperheads" in May, June and July. By then the water temperature was in the mid 80s, so shorts and tennis shoes was our attire. Because the water clarity was exceptional, we'd try two or three colors of our No. 6 and No. 8 poppers, including those same chartreuse patterns by Boone. Some days white or yellow brought results, and the black and yellow Queen Bee popper usually produced. The bulrush bluegills were thick and many of them spawned in the protection of the reeds. In a couple hours, we'd each have 20 to 25 on stringers tethered to our belts. After having our fill with the bluegills, we motored to the lake's west shore where bass were better. Again, we waded. Bradley switched to a Peck's Popping Minnow in a frog finish and a 1-O size for the bass and I followed suit. Because of the summer heat we'd quit by 10 a.m., producing at least six to eight bass each in two hours. The heaviest East Lake bass I ever took on fly gear weighed 6½ pounds, and Bradley beat me out another time with a beautiful 8-pounder. Both were released. In fact, we seldom took many over 3 pounds, generally an accepted fact for fly fishing.

In the '60s and '70s there were plenty of other lakes in Central Florida with healthy fisheries offering good fly fishing, among them Blue Cypress Lake, Lake Marian, and all the lakes on the Kissimmee Chain. The Farm 13 Stick Marsh and its famous bass fishing wasn't completed until 1991.

Diking and draining along the Upper St. Johns River were beginning to take a toll, but the lily pad fields in Lake Sawgrass south of U.S. 192 made for good fly fishing and another test of your accuracy in the pads. Lake Washington west of Melbourne and Poinsett west of Cocoa also produced well, along with Middle River.

Three fly fishing clubs are based in Brevard, the Backcountry Fly Fishing Association of Brevard in Melbourne, and the Florida Flyrod Club and the Florida Fly Fishing Association, both in Cocoa.

Bill Sargent of Melbourne is a charter member of our club. He wrote about sports and outdoors for FLORIDA TODAY and other publications for over 50 years. Contact Sargent at sargentwb@gmail.com.

BFFA October 2023 Events

Monthly Dinner Meeting:

**October 3rd at 6:30
Italian American Club—
1471 Cypress Ave. Melbourne**

Fly Tying:

**Melbourne Library
October 16th at 6:00 pm**

Outings:

Nothing scheduled

Board Meeting:

**October 10th 5:00 meet at Ron Winn's
office 2103 Grant Place Melbourne All members
are welcome to join. We typically eat at Megs
first and then rejoin at Ron's office around 6:00**



Backcountry Fly Fishing Assoc. of Brevard
P.O. Box 524
Melbourne, FL. 32902-0524