

# THE TIES THAT FLY

Exploring the secrets of fly fishing in south Mississippi streams

Story and photos by Samantha Bergeron

**G**rowing up in south Mississippi, I have experienced plenty of outdoor activities throughout my life. I could regularly be found looking for snakes in the woods behind my house, catching lizards at my grandparents' home, or fishing at any pond available. In those years, the bait was any grub or worm I could find under a log or any cricket that was too slow to evade my hand.

As I have grown as an angler, I have fallen in love with the art of fly fishing, and it is truly an art. It takes a delicate hand to create the fly, a finesse to cast a line that will drift through the air and land delicately on the water, and a ballet to land the fish once it hits the fly.

For those interested in fly fishing and fly tying, a logical first step is to find a local group of like-minded anglers. After a few meetings, you will find that the art of fly tying is more of an addiction and you will want to get your own vice and materials.



## learning to tie

These are the essentials to begin tying:

- ▶ Fly-tying vice
- ▶ Tying accessory kit (scissors, bobbin, bobbin threader, half hitch tool, hackle pliers)
- ▶ Assortment of hooks (sizes 2-12 would be sufficient)
- ▶ Variety of thread, feathers, fur, chenille, and foam pieces

The first fly that I tied was at the local fly fishermen's club meeting. A longstanding member, Ken Koffel, led me through tying his "Bream Killer Fly." The materials needed to tie this fly were a size 6 hook, black chenille, black thread, white rubber legs, and squirrel fur. He was kind enough to let me use his vice and materials before I had my own. The guided lessons have given me the confidence to take on fly tying myself (if you cannot find a local fly tying group, I recommend viewing a variety of videos available online).

Remember, this is an art, which means that every fly is unique. Even if your fly is not exactly like your mentor's, it will still catch fish. Be prepared to become frustrated with the first few attempts as you learn to effectively hold the tools and manipulate the materials.

Anytime you go fly fishing, remember to bring a variety of options for casting. I prefer



to have my flies organized by where they sit in the water. You have dry flies, wet flies, and sinking flies. The terms "wet fly" and "sinking fly" are often used interchangeably, but I use the terms here to describe where they will stay in the water column.

- ▶ Dry flies float on the water's surface. These are most of your flying insects (dragonflies, butterflies, bees) but also include poppers, some fish eggs, and frogs.
- ▶ Wet flies sit just under the surface. These will resemble insect larvae or small fish. Streamers, nymphs, worms, and wooly buggers fit in this category.
- ▶ Sinking flies sit on the bottom. These can include snails, caddisfly larvae, some nymphs, and some fish egg flies.

It will help you to know the diet of the fish you are seeking. Bluegill prefer the dry flies, bass will hit the wet flies, and redear will often hit the sinking flies and, occasionally, the dry flies.



Longear sunfish, Tuxachanie Creek

## best places to land

When fly fishing, there is a trick to finding the spot that is right for you. Knowing the type of fish you want to land will help narrow down the waterbody type. If your goal is to catch largemouth bass, you will want to head to a lake in the dawn hours and use some streamers, which are bigger flies that can imitate bait fish or aquatic insects. If you like to catch a variety of bream, like bluegill or longear sunfish, try creeks or rivers with dry flies on the water's surface. Because I prefer to fly fish from foot or kayak in the shallow streams, I focus on these small south Mississippi creeks.

### Tuxachanie Creek

This Biloxi River tributary is quite narrow but holds a wonderful fishery in its banks. The bottom of Tuxachanie Creek can change with every bend. At one point there is a sandy bottom that quickly changes into hard clay and then, around the next bend, becomes gravel. The creek contains a lot of undisturbed natural structure in the creek. These factors are part of the equation for diverse fish assemblage. The first fish I caught here was a longear sunfish that was tucked in a fallen log in a swift current. I used a hopper in natural browns cast behind logs in the current. The longear sunfish prefers a swift current, so they are readily found in creeks and rivers throughout the state. While they are a smaller bream species, they still put up a fun fight on a fly rod and, in my opinion, are one of the most beautiful fish to see up close. The rest of my day was filled with bluegill and spotted bass.

### Catahoula Creek

This Jourdan River tributary is part of the Bay of St. Louis watershed. Most of the creek is a sandy bottom with small clay sections throughout. This creek has the sought-after yellow bass and many bream species. Catahoula Creek is not one of the easiest creeks to walk. I kept sinking shin-deep in sand and gravel as I waded.



Catahoula Creek

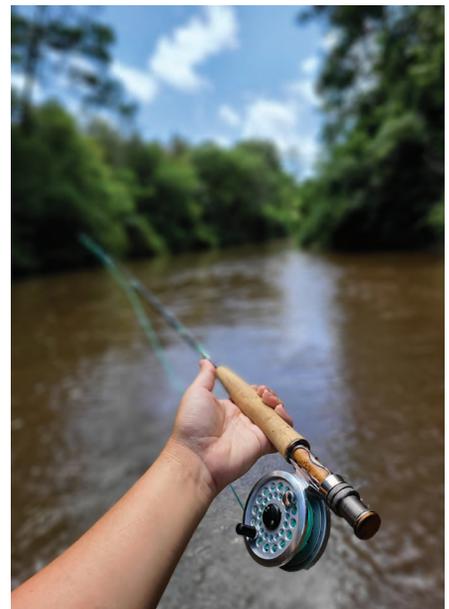
It is quite shallow throughout the center of the creek with deeper channels that line the banks. The banks are hard clay with many small springs. While wider than the other creeks featured here, it was actually harder to fly fish as the deeper portions of the creek were underneath trees and vegetation. I found my fly caught in trees and shrubs more often than in the water. Still, any day of fly fishing is better than sitting at home or in an office.

### Black Creek

This Pascagoula River tributary is well known for holding an amazing fishery within its banks. Black Creek is deeper than the other creeks featured here and is best accessed with a kayak. The current state fly fishing record for shadow bass was set in this creek in September 2020. Cary Crosby set the record fishing with a black popping fly near the Fairley Bridge Landing. This fishery is also popular for spotted bass and large bluegill. To target spotted bass, use streamers with flashing and focus fishing effort near brush piles. To target large bluegill, use poppers and dry flies focused around overhanging vegetation. Remember to always wear your personal flotation device while kayaking. Without one, a submerged log in a creek could ruin your day, or worse.

Once you are confident in casting a fly, you will be ready to hit the water. The cast is half the battle and is best learned in person with someone who can show you the way. Remember to take it slow and watch your wrist action. Make a plan for what you want to catch, pack your flies accordingly and prepare a backup plan in case the intended fish are not biting. Be safe, do not trespass, and have fun.

*Samantha Bergeron is an MDWFP Fisheries biologist.*



# HOW TO TIE THE BREAM KILLER FLY



**Materials:** Size 6 hook, dark thread, squirrel tail fur, white rubber legs, black chenille

1. Dress the hook.
2. Tie in fur; do not extend too far beyond the end of the hook.
3. Tie in legs, one strip on each side of the hook.
4. Tie in chenille.
5. Wrap chenille around the hook; start from the rear and wrap forward. It is typically two wraps behind the legs, one between the forward and rear, and two in front. Tie off chenille near, but not crowding, the eye of the hook. Clip off excess.
6. Hold back overhanging squirrel fur at the front of the hook and wrap toward the back of the hook, wrap tightly to push fur down and make a large head on the fly.
7. Tie off the thread at the front of the hook using either a whip finisher or clinch knot. Apply hardening liquid (epoxy or nail polish work well).
8. Let dry, attach to the line, and catch a bluegill.

