

Carp On The Fly With Brian Flechsig

By Mark England

Don't laugh or look down your nose. If you don't fish for carp now, odds are you will be soon. The carp is an esteemed game fish in the UK and Europe. Abroad it's admired for its keen senses and wariness.

Here in the US it is disdained as a trash fish, not a worthy pursuit for the serious angler. If we can put aside our preconceptions, what's not to like? It grows large, fights hard, is found everywhere, and is difficult to fool with a fly.

Our featured speaker at the May meeting was Brian Flechsig—guide, author, photographer, and owner of Mad River Outfitters in Columbus, OH. Brian spoke to the NKFF earlier this year on steelhead fishing in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.

Brian Flechsig compares fly fishing for carp with red fish on the flats. Flechsig identifies feeding carp by their “tailing” actions—head to the bottom, tail breaking water, just like a red fish. He only casts to feeding fish, stalking them like red fish, and presenting the fly ahead of the fish's feeding path. Or, in some situations, a pinpoint cast within 6” of the carp's nose is required.

I can't speak from experience, but many of our club members can. Stalking and casting to a 10 lb. carp or “chucking and ducking” for 8” hatchery rainbows—which sounds like the greater challenge?

Flechsig is not the only expert to come out of the closet. Dave

Whitlock, perhaps the best known authority on fly fishing in America, calls the carp “the fish of the new millennium”. Flechsig and Whitlock have put together a video on fly fishing for carp. It's available from madriverroutfitters.com. Mention NKFF and get a discount.

Flechsig's strategy focuses on identifying catchable fish. He looks for tailing fish in 3' or 4' of water, often finding them by the mud they've stirred up while rooting for nymphs and crayfish. He casts flies ahead of the feeding carp, stripping line very slowly or tries to put it right on their nose. Typically, the carp only gives you one shot. A spooked carp won't return and won't feed again.

Carp will also cruise the shallows, but these cruisers are much more difficult to catch than actively feeding fish. If they're shallow and moving slowly, don't pass up an opportunity, but realize your odds of a strike are lower.

Size your rod and line to the size of fish in the waters you target. 6 wt. is a typical outfit paired with flies in sizes 8—12. Flechsig recommends 5 to 9 wt. rods with WFF lines paired with 9' bass taper leaders. He favors fluorocarbon in 1X to 4X sizes.

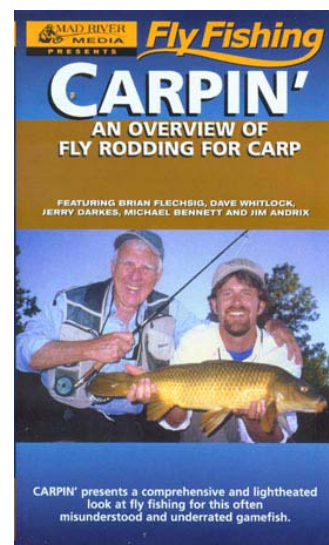
Carp are omnivores, eating both insects and plant matter. The most common flies are nymphs and crayfish—caddis patterns, damsel fly nymphs, and any crayfish pattern. Carp will also take Clouser minnows and egg patterns. Woolly buggers and San

Juan worms are effective. Carp eat a varied diet. You can try midges and terrestrials, too.

Healthy carp eat their vegetables, too. They are not algae grazers, but are known to be fond of cottonwood seeds, those pesky bits of fluff that cover the water at times and stick to your line. And mulberries—carp love mulberries. Carp will gorge themselves on mulberries from mid-June through August. Flechsig and Whitlock tie imitations of cottonwood seeds and 3 variations of mulberries. They tie them in green, red, and black for green, semi-ripe, and ripe berries.

Most people turn up their noses at carp in the kitchen and I no different. I'm not much of a cook and I can't give you any carp recipes, but I will mention I ate carp at a banquet in Tokyo some years back and it was delicious. Our hosts cooked it with a sticky, red sweet sauce that tasted great by itself. I knew it was carp because it was served whole, that is - head, lips, tail, and all. My own efforts at cooking carp have been “undistinguished”, shall we say?

While the US has made great progress in bringing back and developing sports fisheries, we still struggle with populations that cannot sustain themselves without stocking programs. And yet, most of us are blind to a challenging game fish that thrives in every fishable water in the area. I'll say this—the next time the small-mouth let me down and I see a mulberry tree hanging over the water, I'll know what to tie on.



Halfback Nymph



Woolly Worm



Lil Bugger



San Juan Worm

Top—Dave Whitlock and Brian Flechsig. Flies available from MadRiverOutfitters.com. Photos used with permission.