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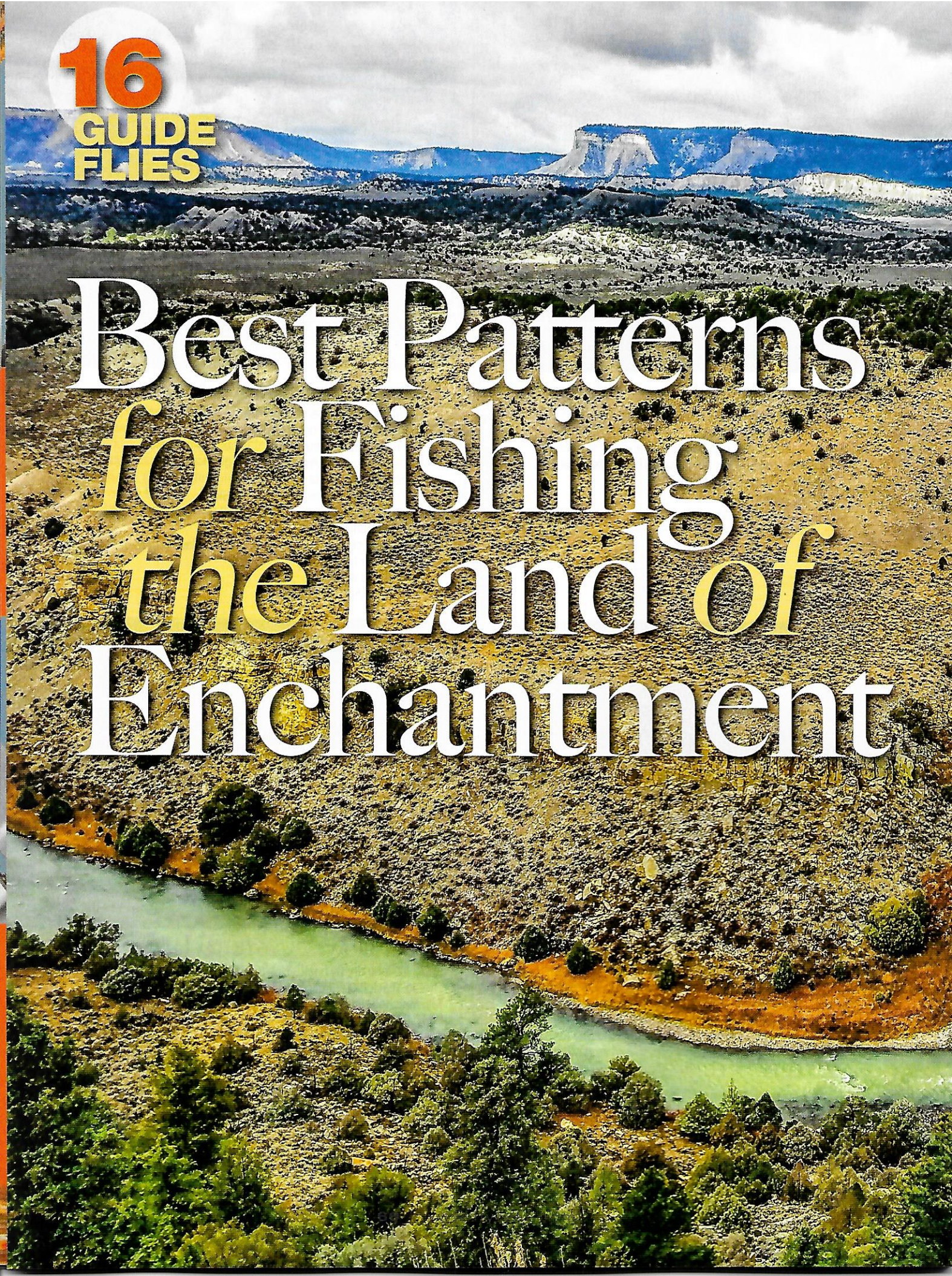


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GUIDE
FLIES

Best Patterns *for* Fishing *the* Land *of* Enchantment





Fly Tye editor David Klausmeyer thought they'd chat about flies for fishing in New Mexico, but guide Noah Parker took him on a tour through fly fishing history.

If you're a regular *Fly Tye* magazine reader, you know that I often interview fly anglers and tiers. I pick their brains about their favorite patterns and tying methods, and report to you what they say. I follow the old newspaper adage: People like to read about other people. So, I find good anglers who tie nice flies and tell you about them—the people and their flies.

The first question in a typical interview is something like: "How did you get into fly fishing?" (Blah, blah, blah . . . right?) There are only a few responses to such an obvious question: my dad taught me how to fish; I took a class; or, I read books and magazines. Every once in a great while, however, a reply stops me with surprise. Noah Parker, the head honcho at Land of Enchanted Guides, based in Velarde, New Mexico, shocked me with his answer to that simple question.

"As a kid, I grew up in New York City. My father was an architect, and he was friends with Ernie Schwiebert, who was also an architect. Arnie Gingrich was another of his friends. I had the dubious pleasure of fishing with my dad and his pals in the Catskills."

Schwiebert and Gingrich were two of the most important fly fishermen of the last century. Their patterns and methods influence what we tie and how we fish today.

"As you know, there was this whole fly tying scene in the City at that time. I met Lee Wulff a couple of times, as well as Charles Ritz. I met a lot of the people who are now considered part of the old fly fishing guard. It was great as a young kid from the City because we fished every weekend during the season."



Noah really hooked me with his story. Before we talked, all I knew was that he was a good tier and ran a well-respected guiding business in New Mexico; I had no idea of his connections to many of the most prominent fly fishers and tiers of the 20th century.

The next question was just lying there, begging to be asked: How did you get into fly tying?

"I started tying flies when I was about seven years old," Noah replied. "We would all go fishing in the Catskills—my dad, his buddies, and me. We would stop at the Darbees' fly shop to visit with Harry and Elsie. They would always ask, 'So, what have you been tying, young fella?'"

When I called Noah, I thought we would spend all our time talking about fishing in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. First, however, we took a detour through fly fishing history. If you're an experienced fly tier, you know the importance of the Darbees to our craft; if you're a new tier, this mom-and-pop fly tying duo occupy an important place in American fly fishing lore.

"They were just so sweet and inspirational," Noah remembers. "I relished going there about as much as I enjoyed the fishing. When I think back on it, the Darbees were the salt-of-the-earth type of people. There was this uppity group fishing in the Catskills, but then there were the ordinary people. The Darbees were part of that last group."

Did the Darbees teach you anything about how to tie flies?

"Oh, yes. I remember Elsie Darbee showing me how to tie a Quill Gordon. She showed me how to remove the flue from a piece of peacock herl using a pencil eraser, and things like that. I distinctly remember sitting in that shop and learning to tie that pattern."

As you can imagine, Brooks Parker supported his son's interest in fly tying.

"My father started buying fly tying stuff for me," Noah reminisced. "At the time, there was a fly shop in the city called the Angler's Roost; that was fifty years ago, God help me. I don't know if these guys were humoring me or what, but they started buying a few of my flies. I went back to my father and said, 'Look at this: they bought a bunch of my flies.' He said, 'Well, that's just great. Your allowance has just been cut. Start tying more flies!'"

Of course, it's a big world, and Noah left fly fishing for a while.

"That was the sixties, and I found drugs, sex, and rock and roll. I stopped fishing and moved around the country. Today, I look back at that whole scene as sort of snobbish—it's totally opposite of who I am today—but now I realize that I was hanging out with the grandfathers of what you might call modern fly fishing."

The Land of Enchantment

Noah bounced around the country: east, west, east, and then back west. He and his wife returned to New Mexico about 15 years ago.

"When I got here, I had some money from selling our

house in Maine, so all I did was fish. I went everywhere I could in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. I did this for two or three years by myself and with friends. It was great, but then I looked at my bank account. I had to make a change, so my son and I started this guiding business. We've been working flat out ever since: I guide, we have five full-time guides, and then two guys work part-time. That's three hundred and sixty-five days a year."

I've been fortunate to fish in a lot of very nice places, but it's a long trip from my home in Maine to New Mexico. I've never been there, so I asked Noah to describe the rivers he fishes near Santa Fe, Chama, Taos, and the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

"Most people think of New Mexico as nothing but roadrunners and cactus, but the Rocky Mountains come down into New Mexico. And it's very dry, so even in the winter, unless there's a snowstorm, we can fish; if you hit a good day in January, you can wear shirtsleeves and the fishing will be phenomenal.

"We fish the San Juan River, which is at the lowest altitude at about fifty-four hundred feet; everything else is higher than that, from six thousand to ten thousand feet. If you're not here during runoff or the middle of winter, you'll almost never run out of places to fish. If you're in the town of Chama, you can visit a different piece of water for a month and never drive more than forty minutes. It's incredible."

With so much opportunity, how do you decide where to fish?

"It all depends upon altitude. The only poor months are during runoff, but if you look at a map of northern New Mexico, you can find fishable water even during runoff. By that I mean that if one part of a river is high, another part will be more normal and fishing well. During winter, you won't fish in the mountains because there might be ten feet of snow, but even then we can fish at lower altitudes."

New Mexico and Colorado contain some of the best fly fishing for trophy trout in the United States. So much good fishing, of course, attracts lots of anglers.

"That must be another part of your planning," Noah said. "My favorite time to fish the San Juan, for example, is from late autumn to early spring; if you go there during the summer, it's wall-to-wall people. If you go there during the winter, you'll have the entire river to yourself. And if you hit a good patch of weather, the temperatures will be in the fifties. But don't get me wrong: you might go back the next week and be in a snowstorm. But the option is there."

Most anglers have heard of the San Juan River. Where else do you fish?

"The Chama is an incredible river. There is a total of well over one hundred miles of river, and seventy of those are fishable."

Do you wade or float rivers?

"We float the San Juan and occasionally the Rio Grande. The Rio Grande is also a great fishery, especially in the autumn. But we always have water to fish, and we can



Killa' Cali Caddis

Hook: Tiemco TMC2487, size 12.
 Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier).
 Weight: 1/8-inch black tungsten bead.
 Hackle: Black cul de canard.
 Body: Light olive Bug Skin with peacock herl and a hackle.
 Note: Jesse Lee tied this fly.



Low Water Baetis

Hook: Tiemco TMC2487, size 18.
 Thread: Olive 8/0 (70 denier).
 Weight: Small mercury glass bead.
 Tail: Coq de Leon.
 Legs: Dun Micro Fluro-Fiber.
 Abdomen: Natural latex Nymph Skin.
 Thorax: Olive thread with extra-small black wire.
 Note: Jesse Lee whipped up this fly.



Supa-Pupa

Hook: Tiemco TMC2487, size 14.
 Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier).
 Weight: 1/8-inch brown tungsten bead.
 Hackle: Black hen hackle with wood duck accents.
 Body: Dark olive Bug Skin.
 Collar: Peacock Ice Dub.
 Note: Jesse Lee tied this fly.



Nal-Bug Caddis

Hook: Umpqua 5506, size 14.
 Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier).
 Weight: 7/64-inch black tungsten slotted bead.
 Tail: Coq de Leon.
 Hackle: Black cul de canard.
 Body: Brown Hare's Ear Plus Dubbing with a gold wire rib.
 Collar: Light green hare's-ear dubbing.
 Note: This concoction is from the vise of Jesse Lee.

take clients to places where they will see few other anglers. We'll often have the water to ourselves."

Of Flies and Fly Tying

Noah and his guides sent a collection of outstanding flies; the entire gang are experts at the vise. I asked Noah about his amazing pattern he calls Sargeant Stone; making this fly obviously takes more than a few minutes.

"Yes, that's one of my patterns. It's great for fishing clear water. That fly takes some time to make, so I make a dozen at a time—tie the tails, and then the bodies, and so forth. Those flies are rationed; if you lose a couple of those, then I give you something with rubber legs. I can't lose two or three dozen of those or it would kill me. But stonefly nymphs work throughout the year on all the streams and rivers we fish."

A lot of anglers use worm imitations in your part of the country, don't they?

"The water is really high right now because of runoff, and we do use a lot of worm patterns. [Noah and I spoke in mid-June.] When runoff is at full bore, you need flies that are big and bright so the fish can see them. Right now, the banks are being ripped up, so earthworms are all over the place. We use these patterns to catch huge fish; just the other day, I had an eighty-four-year-old woman catch an eight-pound rainbow trout using a worm pattern. Sometimes we'll use stonefly nymphs in tandem with worm imitations."

What are the most prominent hatches?

"The greatest hatch in the high-altitude meadows are terrestrials. These are alpine meadows, and it's just gorgeous. That might last until the end of September, but the fish are used to seeing grasshoppers, so they'll take an imitation well into October. I think those fish count on grasshoppers for a large percentage of their annual intake of protein.

"Green and gray drakes, *Baetis*, and blue-winged olives are also all over the place. Pale morning duns are also important. But, in all due candor, where we fish doesn't get that much pressure. You keep asking about hatches, but we're not talking about the old Catskill dry fly mentality or some of the heavily pressured Colorado rivers you read about. For us, fly selection is pretty much about size and shape rather than exact imitation; a well-presented piece of crap will catch more fish than a well-tied fly that is presented poorly. You can fish a wide variety of the standard patterns with great success, but we're not dry fly snobs; we fish a lot of nymphs."

What types of materials do you prefer using: natural or synthetic?



Jig-Head Jumbo Drake

Hook: Tiemco TMCC400-BL, size 12.

Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier).

Weight: 3.8-millimeter gold tungsten slotted bead.

Tail: Coq de Leon.

Hackle: Amber or tan cul de canard.

Body: Peacock herl with an olive wire rib.

Legs: Brown Flex Floss.

Note: Jesse Lee tied this fly.



Chama Hottie

Hook: Daiichi 1167 or 1120, sizes 14 to 8.

Thread: Tan and black 8/0 (70 denier).

Weight: .020-inch wire.

Abdomen: Olive hare's-ear dubbing.

Hot spot: Fluorescent pink hare's-ear dubbing.

Thorax: Black Hare's Ice Dub.

Shellback: Gray Scud Back.

Rib: 4X monofilament.

Note: Thanks to Noah Parker for tying this fly.



Chama Trauma

Chama Trauma

Hook: Tiemco TMC5263, size 14.
 Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier).
 Weight: 1/8-inch brown tungsten bead.
 Tail: J:son brown Stonefly Tails.
 Hackle: Black saddle hackle.
 Body: Yellow Hare's Ear Plus with mottled turkey Thin Skin and a gold wire rib.
 Wing buds: Mottled turkey Thin Skin.
 Note: Jesse Lee tied this fly.



Sargeant Stone

Sargeant Stone

Hook: Daiichi 1730, sizes 10 to 6.
 Thread: Brown 8/0 (70 denier).
 Weight: .020- or .025-inch wire.
 Tail & antennae: J:son Stonefly Tails with brown olive Ice Dub to spread tails.
 Legs: J:son Stonefly Nymph Legs.
 Abdomen: Natural Latex Nymph Skin.
 Thorax: Tan Hare's Ear Plus Dubbing and brown Dura Skin for the wing buds.
 Note: Noah Parker tied this fly.



The Extra

The Extra

Hook: Daiichi 1260, size 12.
 Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier).
 Eyes: Chartreuse foam cylinder.
 Legs & antennae: Black rubber legs.
 Underwing: Pearl Flashabou.
 Body: 2-millimeter-thick black foam.
 Sight indicator: White polypropylene yarn.
 Note: Noah Parker tied this fly.



Hirudo

Hook: Daiichi 1710, sizes 12 to 6.
 Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).
 Weight: .025-inch lead wire.
 Body: Peacock Ice Dub.
 Back: Black rabbit strip.
 Collar: Black Hare's Ice Dub.
 Head: Black conehead.
 Note: Noah Parker tied this fly.

"It's hard to say exactly what type of materials I will use. I use what works best, and I am not a purist. In the early spring and during runoff—mid-April through early June—we use all kinds of synthetics. As the water becomes clearer, we'll switch to plainer or drabber-looking flies; they're not all blinged out, I guess you would say.

"Going back to the Darbees, I haven't tied a fly with a quill body in at least fifteen years. When we're talking about guide flies, those patterns have to last. There are all kinds of synthetic substitutes that look just incredible; Ice Dub, for example, has been a real game changer. Hare's Ice Dub is another great material. But, as the water becomes clearer, you have to pull back on those types of ingredients and use more plain rabbit dubbing."

Noah and his guides spend more time on the water than average anglers, and they learn what attracts fish and what spooks them from striking flies. Sometimes, he said, the most popular materials do not fit every fishing situation.


"The new UV materials have become very popular, and that includes the light-cured resins," he said. "I started using that because I thought it would be quicker than using epoxy on the backs of some nymphs, but when you put a flashlight on your fly box, it will almost glow. The same is true for super-bright beads. But when the water is low and clear, flies tied with those materials seem to scare the fish. A lot of people think that when the water is clear, all they have to do is use a lighter tippet, but you should also switch to a plainer-looking pattern.

"With respect to natural materials, I think there are three magic ingredients. Peacock herl is the first; I use a lot of that. Wood duck flank feathers and cul de canard are also very important to my tying."

What's one tip you can give tiers planning a fishing trip to New Mexico?

"The biggest single mistake we see anglers make is that they don't fish deep enough. Sure, when you fish deep, you'll lose a few flies, but sometimes you won't catch fish if you don't get down to them. I tie nymphs with a lot of wire for weight, and sometimes I add tungsten beads."

Are you still developing new flies?

"Yes, I develop new flies almost every day, but I'm sick in the head, you know? Well, it's true. I'm a fanatic about this, and I always think you can develop a better mousetrap." 

David Klausmeyer is the editor of this magazine. He is also the author of a fistful of fly fishing and tying books.

Want to learn more about Land of Enchantment Guides? Go to www.loe-flyfishing.com.



Duppy Conqueror

Hook: Tiemco TMC2302, size 8 or 6.

Thread: White 6/0 (140 denier).

Head: Brown 8/0 (70 denier).

Weight: .020- or .025-inch lead wire.

Body: Kiley's Nymph Skin.

Rib: Copper wire.

Note: Noah Parker tied this fly.



Doctor Drake

Hook: Daiichi 1167, sizes 14 to 10.

Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier)..

Tail: Gray barred Microfibrils.

Abdomen: Hareline Synthetic Quill Body Wrap.

Thorax: Gray Antron dubbing.

Underwing: Gray synthetic wing material.

Hackle: Regular and green grizzly hackle.

Post: White Antron.

Note: Shane Parker-Kast tied this fly.



Boom Baetis

Boom Baetis

Hook: Daiichi D4647, sizes 16 to 12.
 Thread: Brown 6/0 (140 denier).
 Bead: Black tungsten.
 Tail: Brown or tan Microfibbets.
 Abdomen: Brown thread and small gold wire.
 Thorax: Gray UV2 Seal-X Dubbing.
 Shellback: Purple holographic tinsel.
 Note: This is a Shane Parker-Kast pattern.



Jelly Belly

Jelly Belly

Hook: Mustad 37160, sizes 10 to 6.
 Thread: Red 8/0 (70 denier) or 6/0 (140 denier).
 Underbody: Small or medium purple holographic tinsel or Flashabou.
 Overbody: Red or orange micro or medium tubing.
 Note: Shane Parker-Kast made this fly.



Secret Softie

Secret Softie

Hook: Tiemco TMC200R, sizes 18 to 10.
 Thread: Red 8/0 (70 denier).
 Tail: Gray barred Microfibbets.
 Abdomen: Gray-olive turkey biot.
 Thorax: UV Shrimp Pink Ice Dub blended with brown hare's-ear dubbing.
 Hackle: Starling soft hackle.
 Note: Shane Parker-Kast tied this pattern.



Rasta Bugger

Rasta Bugger

Hook: Daiichi 1710, size 10 or 8.
 Thread: Black 8/0 (70 denier) or 6/0 (140 denier).
 Eyes: Black bead chain.
 Weight: .020-inch lead wire.
 Tail: Black marabou.
 Hackle: Black saddle hackle.
 Body: Dark hare's-ear dubbing and olive Ice Dub with a dash of olive brown Ice Dub.
 Note: Noah Parker tied this fly.