

This interview with long-time Corrib angler Joe Creane first appeared in the 2004 Lough Corrib Angling Federation Newsletter. Some things may have changed, but not much.

What better way to pass a Sunday afternoon in January with a North wind forecast than to sit in Joe Creane's room, put an occasional stick on the fire and talk about fishing? Joe lives just outside Roundstone in the far west of Connemara, with the sea in front and a world of small lakes behind. He learned his sport from his late father Paddy and has passed on his love of angling to his son Ronan. But while he has done plenty of fishing near where he lives, Joe is best known as an angler on the Corrib. He is a keen experimenter and competitor. Joe and Ronan were one half of a remarkable angling result at the Galway and Corrib club's May competition in 2002 when two fathers and two sons took the first four positions, the other two being Joe and Anthony Trill. Check the record books for the exact placings.

You like the Galway and Corrib competition.

I do indeed. I won it several times. The first time was in 1983 and the first one to congratulate me was Pdraig McGrath: "Fair play to you a mac". The flies I had on that day were a Watson's Fancy, a Claret and Mallard and a Golden Olive. Straightforward simple flies. I was successful for years in competitions and then I went sour because I was blinded by every fool's invention. I went back to the mountain lakes and learned my basics again. Stay simple, that's the secret. The last time I fished that competition I put up a Golden Olive Bumble, a Green Drake and my own Green Peter.

During the mayfly, the Claret and Mallard is the best tail fly. In one year I fished three competitions on Conn, Mask and Corrib. I caught seventeen trout and eleven of them took a Claret and Mallard on the point. Would you want to put up something different?

The Peter Ross is probably the best fly of all for me. I know that some people hate it, but I'm definitely not one of them.

Do you like the Green Peter?

Who told you to ask me about that? I have a Peter of my own I like to use all right. There

might be one in my fly box, maybe.

Do you know what I'd love to see? A competition where instead of all these different flies you're given a box of ten flies and they are all you can fish for the day. That's done in America on the Snake River. You are given a dry Adams and a Madam X. If you lose them you sit down for the rest of the day. That will teach you discipline! The best anglers would come to the fore in a competition like that.

I'll show you a few flies.

Joe pulled in his bag. I've all kinds of junk thrown in here, he told me, but when he opened a flybox there was no junk. Armies of flies lined up in formation and ready for action! Here are a few of Joe's favourite mayfly patterns.

Yellow May:

Tying silk: Brown

Tail: Cock pheasant tail fibres

Rib: Colour code 4 floss

Body: Yellow seal's fur

Hackle: Yellow cock, palmered

Head hackle: Grey Partridge

Joe Creane's Drake:

Tying silk: Brown

Tail: Grey mallard fibres

Butt: Red seal's fur

Rib: Holographic tinsel with gold oval tinsel over it

Body: Green seal's fur

Body hackle: Light green cock palmered

Head hackles: A very light coloured bronze mallard, with a few turns of grey partridge in front (Joe calls this the crown).

Joe describes the third as "a killer for Mask" but also a fly that 90% of anglers wouldn't look twice at. I didn't record a name.

Anonymous mayfly:

Tying silk: Brown or lighter

Tail: Brown fibres of pheasant or bronze mallard

Body: Yellow seal's fur tied bushy

Head hackles: Four turns of long yellow cock, and grey partridge in front.

You learned your fishing in Connemara.

I did, and the greatest loss to fishing has been the loss of the seatrout in Connemara. I see that decline from when the salmon rafts came in. I caught my first trout when I was seven. There are some great lakes. Aughrisbeg was a great lake to fish from the shore, but now it's full of rudd. I caught big brown trout there, one over 4lbs. Lough Naweelin and Scannive were good. The club put out a boat on them in the 70's and you could get thirty trout in that boat on a Sunday. Then you'd leave the brownies behind for seatrout. You could not exaggerate how good Ballinahinch used to be. You could put out a cast on the river, lose a trout on your first pull and get another take as the line came around in the current.

And you like competitions.

Yes. I fish them hard and I'd fish as hard if the prize was an engine or a matchbox. The night before a competition I will tie up four flies, four "bankers". But I might change them the next day. It's important to go into a competition in the right frame of mind, and to keep thinking. But you can relax into your fishing in a competition as well as on any day out. And when you're in trouble in a competition, think simple!

It would be a shame to see competitions go. They breed a camaraderie among anglers, getting us to pull together – and we need to. When you see the seatrout gone, then Corrib and Mask are sacred, you can't let them pass. Too many people will sit on the fence, taking it out and not putting anything back. There is some great work being done. Look at the hatcheries, they help the lake and there's a huge amount of work involved. And the Water Protection Group, we have to keep on supporting that work and raising money for them.

Tell me about the early season fishing.

I like all the fishing. The duckfly fishing in March is something I did a lot of. Cyril Murray and Toby Bradshaw and Mike Faherty and myself did a lot of that years ago when not too many others were at it. It's interesting because the techniques have changed in my time. It was easier in the earlier years. In the early eighties my cast was a Peter Ross with red or hot orange, a Millerman and a Williams' Favourite. All size 14s. Fish them slow through the surface film on a 4lb. leader. Then we had to get more into emergers. You might try a Blae Wing Watson's, a Leonard's Favourite and an Orange Pupa. Then that got harder and now you have to use buzzers. Over that time the duckfly hatch got so much bigger that there is an abundance of feed below and you need the buzzers. The spread of duckfly came with a deterioration in water quality. And you get buzzers not just at duckfly time but later in the year too.

And moving on into the year?

The olives and the mayfly. There are still great rises of trout, although I don't think you get rises in a big wave the way you used to. I'm getting into dryfly more, for olives particularly. It's a magic way of fishing. Even in a fair wind. Patterns I use for olives are an Olive Klinkhamer 14, Grey Wulff 14, an Adams and a dry Hare's ear. Don't gink the whole fly, just the head hackle so the body stays in the water. You could try a Klinkhamer version of a duckfly emerger too, with a red thorax and black body. You can try anything, that's part of the fun!

For dry mayfly I use a Grey Wulff, a Royal Wulff and an Adams. Dries are changing fashion, getting smaller and slimmer. Size 12s are big enough, even in the mayfly if the wind is down, or a slimmed-down size 10. If the wave is big, use a big hairy Wulff (showing me one like a shaving brush).

Later on in the year, I like the Green Peter. What do you reckon?

The Green Peter is a great fly. I must show you my Green Peter. The Daphnia late in the summer is a type of fishing I want to crack. I reckon the trout were always feeding on them but the anglers were in the shallow areas, not out over the deep water.

Nick Giles reckoned the daphnia-feeding trout and the shallow water trout were

different populations or strains of trout.

Definitely. I believe the daphnia-feeders are a strain of sonnaghan. They are longer-bodied with a big tail. But the “local” trout will go out after the daphnia too. If you see a fish jump out in the middle I’m convinced he’s on daphnia and he’s not alone. I notice if you spoon a trout the daphnia are not always the same colour. I want to crack that fishing, and colour is important.

Talking about varieties of trout, one of the things I love is getting trout to mayfly out in the black open water. There seems to be a wider distribution of trout now. Those ones that come up out of the black to mayfly, I believe it’s their first time up and that they are habitual bottom feeders that only rise at that time. You’ll notice a thicker fin on them and a yellow trim on the fin.

Can we talk a bit about how to fish the wetfly?

We certainly can, because some fellows think that all you do is throw out a line, pull it back and repeat. You can do three or four different things with a fly on the one cast. When your flies hit the water give a couple of fast pulls. That’s when most fish are caught. Then you can vary your retrieve to go a bit slower or faster as you like. Then you stop and bob your dropper flies along. Before you bob you should stop the fly, and at the end before you lift off you should stop again.

After a heavy night’s rain fish will slow down on the lake so you should slow your retrieve. Big fish want it slow. The old fellows who fish slower get a lot of big fish, and that’s no accident. And when you hook a fish get to playing him on the reel as quick as you can. Loose line in the bottom of the boat is a problem and a potential disaster.

Buzzer and nymph fishing are different again. Buzzer fishing is static fishing. Your line has to go out as straight as a die. Sometimes I have so much line out I have very little left on the reel, and I use a 24 foot leader. You can fish a floating or an intermediate line. It’s very controlled; you keep in touch all the time but don’t move them. Sometimes if you just move them a little before you lift – bang! Just a small pull before you lift. The buzzer can be a deadly form of fishing. But then, the last time I fished the Galway and Corrib I had buzzers up

until one o'clock and I didn't get a pull. That's the magic of fishing!

Nymph fishing is one gear above static, with very slow movement. Nymphs are good for olives and duckfly. Stick to the simple patterns like pheasant tail and hare's ear and you can vary the colours to suit what's in the water. Hare's ear is great. Visualise the nymphs going slowly up and down in the water, and that gives you an idea of how to retrieve your line. If you fish a mayfly nymph you can be a bit livelier. I think the mayfly nymph resists and struggles against coming up in the water so there is more movement.

What's the future on the Lake?

Well I don't think stocks are the problem, I think there are as many trout in the Corrib as ever there were. Water quality is the big question. You see the spread of duckfly and buzzers, weed growth and algae, they aren't good signs. We can't allow water to deteriorate. Slurry spreading needs to be looked at. No one has a right to contaminate the water. I'd like to see the clubs more closely involved with the Fishery Boards, working more together.

If I thought stocks were going I wouldn't be able to fish. Things seem positive at the moment. The sale of wild trout is as good as gone, and we will see more of catch and release. Predator control has to continue. When you get pike in a bay the trout will leave, I can tell you that.

The important thing for the future is that we all work together. I have strong views on fellows who come up to fish the lake and don't contribute to the work that is going on. Out of respect for that work they should buy share certs and contribute to the Water Protection Group. All that money will go back to improving the fishing they enjoy.

People ask me if I ever get tired talking about fishing. It'll be a sad day if we do. I don't believe in too much secretiveness.

We must have a look at your Green Peter.

Don't let me forget it!

The way you learn about fishing is to put out opinions and people will contradict you and

that's how you find out if you are right or wrong.

I have no regrets about my time fishing. I love to try different things. Each day is a new day and each trout a new trout. You miss one and you say "why was that?" That's the mystery. Years ago I qualified to fish on the Irish team in New Zealand but my children were too young so I didn't go. Do I regret that? Not for one minute do I regret not going.

But I'm going this year. I've the flies picked out already.

So we inspected the New Zealand flies and very fine they were. Joe sent me home happy, but what put the smile on my face were his parting words: "I do a lot of sea fishing too".

By the way, the Green Peter didn't look like anything special. Not at a distance anyway.

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