

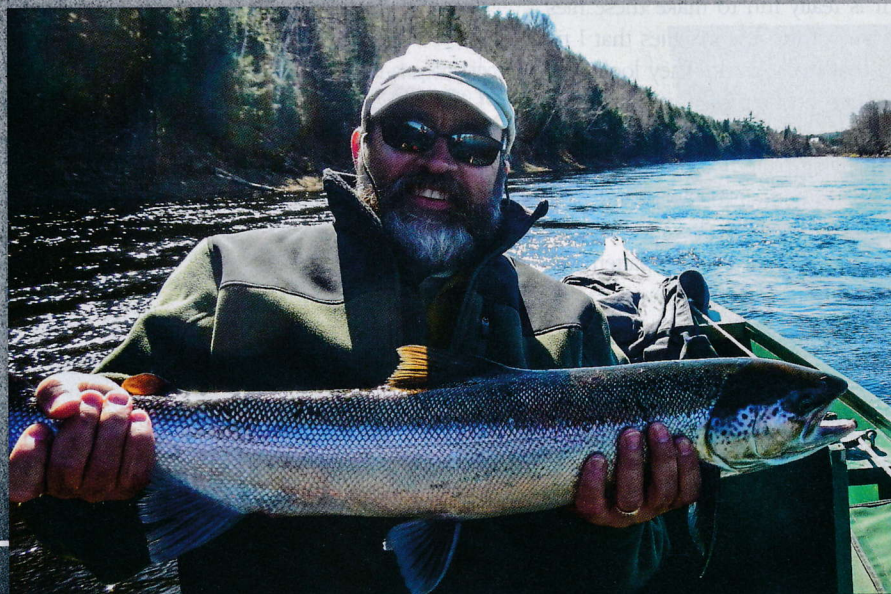
MIRAMICHI

Spring Fling

*Whether you are a neophyte or old hand at fishing for Atlantic salmon, your best odds of hooking into *Salmo salar* are in the spring. Fill your fly box with Larry Antonuk's favorite early season patterns and get ready for some of the best angling action of the year.*

When it comes to making a list of fabled North American salmon rivers, it's hard to argue that New Brunswick's Miramichi would be at or near the top. The river meanders for more than 150 miles from its headwaters near the Maine border to the city of Miramichi, where it enters the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Long a treasured destination of fishermen from around the world, due to its location, the Mighty Miramichi is especially dear to East Coast and New England anglers.

LARRY ANTONUK





Classic—and classically inspired—patterns are the ticket to enjoying fast spring salmon-fishing action.



MIRAMICHI SPECIAL

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Embossed silver tinsel.

Rib: Oval silver tinsel.

Throat: White calf tail.

Wing: Red bucktail, yellow bucktail, and brown bucktail dyed yellow. All three segments are equal in size.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: The tricolor wing gives this fly a fairly ornate appearance, but tying it is quite straightforward.



RED EAGLE

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Tag: Oval gold tinsel.

Body: Red floss.

Rib: Oval gold tinsel.

Wing: Yellow bucktail.

Note: The single-color bucktail wing is often tied smaller than a multicolor wing, producing a fly that sinks more quickly.

Saying that you fish the Miramichi is sort of like saying you have a brother-in-law in California. Sure, but just exactly where? In the case of the Miramichi, there are dozens of outstanding fishing areas sprinkled along the river. The mouth of the river even supports a run of striped bass. In spite of all this opportunity, it's also hard to argue that one of the more common destinations is Doaktown, which lies about halfway between Fredericton and the city of Miramichi on the Southwest Miramichi River. Doaktown provides easy access to the spring, summer, and fall runs of salmon via an accessible boat landing, ample guides, and a variety of accommodations ranging from simple motels to full-featured fishing resorts.

COLD WEATHER—HOT REWARDS

While there are no hard-and-fast rules about what flies to use, there are a few general guidelines. (Of course, fishermen who ignore these guidelines are often the most successful; showing the salmon something that is a bit different from what the rest of the crowd is using is often a good idea.) Spring fishing, done in the middle of April amongst ice floes and the occasional snowstorm, is traditionally done with large streamers and wet flies using sinking lines. Summer is the time of hopeful dry fly fishing, with the occasional drop-back position of using a wet fly on a floating line. And fall leans heavily to the traditional orange autumn flies—the General Practitioner, Ally's Shrimp, and really anything that's super colorful.

Fishing in the spring, when the hungry winter-over salmon are heading back to sea, can be extremely busy. Anglers who brave the cold weather are often rewarded with stunning days of fishing; of course, they are also gambling that the ice will be off the river by the time they arrive. Summer and fall fishermen, on the other hand, are rewarded with nice temperatures and good scenery,

but they need to work much harder to connect with any salmon. This is where the phrase, “days of 1,000 casts,” came from. In other words, while spring salmon fishing is not for the faint of heart, it’s certainly the place to start; you can catch the most fish in the shortest period of time, and then expand to summer and fall fishing when it’s convenient.

Due to the high, fast, and cold water, about 98 percent of all spring fishing is done from a small boat in the company of your mandatory guide. Sinking lines are required. In contrast, summer and fall fishing are done using conventional wading methods and a more liberal rule of three clients per guide. Spring guiding is often a combination of guiding and chauffeuring: your guide will pick you up at the landing in his boat, providing the day’s transportation, and offer his best advice on where to fish.

LIVING TRADITION

In terms of tradition, spring flies are the most historically accurate. While the design of the summer and fall patterns tends to reflect the modern worlds of dry fly and steelhead fishing, it’s fairly easy to trace the progression of spring salmon flies from their origins in England and Scotland.

The hook-based components of these flies—tips, tags, bodies, ribs, and throats—are fairly similar to the classics, but the wings on the New England versions are markedly different. This distinction is a result of simple geography. When the salmon fishermen arrived in the New World, they transported their English and Scottish fishing techniques to the coasts of America and Canada. When they ran out of flies, they found a distinct shortage of exotic feathers; they had no bustard, chatterer, macaw, or Asian pheasant. Being resourceful, they used whatever was at hand: black bear, deer, squirrel, turkey, and even polar bear. They dyed all these materials to produce something as close



RENOUS SPECIAL

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Bright red 6/0 (140 denier).

Tag: Oval silver tinsel.

Tip: Red floss.

Tail: Lime green bucktail.

Body: Medium green floss.

Rib: Oval silver tinsel.

Throat: Yellow bucktail.

Wing: Lime green and yellow bucktail.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: A more recent classic pattern, this fly is named for the Renous River, which is a tributary of the Miramichi.



COCK ROBIN

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Tag: Oval gold tinsel.

Body: Rear half, yellow wool; front half, red wool.

Rib: Oval gold tinsel.

Throat: White calftail.

Wing: Hot orange and white bucktail.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: This traditional pattern exists almost exclusively along the Miramichi. It is very well known in the Doaktown area.



GOLDEN EAGLE

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Tag: Oval gold tinsel.

Butt: Black ostrich herl.

Body: Embossed gold tinsel.

Rib: Oval gold tinsel.

Wing: Yellow bucktail.

Note: A cousin to the Red Eagle, this fly adds the black ostrich herl butt that is common on the traditional classics.

to the original colors as possible. To their probable surprise, they discovered that a six-strip married swan wing wasn't needed to fool salmon after all. The New World fishermen found that hair-wing flies were just as effective and actually more durable than the original patterns. These days, it's hard to find an East Coast salmon fly that doesn't contain at least a couple different colors of bucktail, and feather-wing patterns are seen almost nowhere.

Over the years, West Coast steelhead patterns began influencing hair-wing Atlantic salmon flies. Autumn salmon fishermen began using steelhead patterns in the early 1990s, and they eventually became the flies of choice for many anglers in the spring. Recently, modified Rangeley-style streamers have shown up on the scene. The current state of patterns used on the Miramichi is a melting pot of the flies visiting anglers bring to the river.

Of course, tying your own patterns brings a special element to a fishing trip, especially when you consider the cost of buying flies. Spring flies often go for five dollars or more apiece, so filling up a box with your own handiwork before a trip makes a lot of sense. Since the bodies of these flies are basically the same as on the old Scottish patterns, spring flies are also an excellent entry point to tying classic salmon patterns. Once you've tied a couple dozen spring patterns, you'll have the body work down pat and can slide into learning how to make the fancier married wings as time and money permit.

FIND A LOCAL TIER

Checking with a local tier is the best way to get accurate information about regional patterns; if that person ties for the local fly shop, so much the better. And if he happens to be an active guide, that's better still. In the case of Doaktown, you'll find all of these in a man named Dickie Storey.

Dickie produces all his flies in a small shed just behind his house. Unlike most



BLACK GHOST

Hook: 3/0- to 5/0-long streamer hook, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Tag: Oval silver tinsel. (Flat tinsel on larger sizes.)

Tail: Yellow calftail.

Body: Black floss.

Rib: Oval silver tinsel.

Throat: Yellow calftail.

Wing: White bucktail and pearl UV Krystal Flash.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: This fly migrated north from the Rangeley Lakes region of Maine, probably in the early 1920s. It remains basically unchanged since the first version tied by Herb Welch. Rather than a traditional feather wing, modern fishermen prefer a white bucktail wing, but it is also seen with marabou and polar bear.

tiers, Dickie got involved in fishing late in life. In the spring of 1979 (at the age of 26), he purchased a Thompson Model F vise (cast iron with a red handle) from Jerry Doak at the local fly shop. In the early 1980s, following a months-long evaluation period with Jerry and the tiers at the famed shop called WW Doak, Dickie started trading his flies for materials. After many iterations, his smelt patterns finally passed muster, and he tied spring patterns and Bombers for the next seven years. At that point, Dickie started a small tackle shop and ran that for the next 10 years, and then switched to full-time guiding. Dickie considers most of his tying at just the hobbyist level, or at best to provide flies to his clients and friends. He was able to provide a wealth of information about local patterns and a number of tips concerning how to tie them.

TIPS FOR TYING SPRING SALMON FLIES

Start with a quality hook. Using a robust hook is important because the fish are likely large, and a “heavy iron” helps get the fly down deep in the fast water. Hooks for fishing in the spring range from sizes 1 to 3/0; size 1/0 is comfortable for most fly boxes.

Make your flies broad but sparse; the wings should flare up to produce high profiles. These fish are hungry, so bigger flies are better, but don’t introduce too much bulk or they won’t sink so quickly and be easy to cast. This sounds like a contradiction, so if you’re not sure, err on the side of sparseness.

In terms of tying traditional patterns, there are no new techniques; just follow the age-old methods for making tips, tags, tails, and bodies. At a minimum, explore the concept of tying an underbody. This component is usually several layers of white rayon floss, and today’s salmon fly tiers often use serger thread, which you will find in sewing stores. Build the



MERCURY ISLAND KILLER

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Silver tinsel.

Rib: Oval tinsel.

Wing: Three or four wraps of white marabou followed by four strands pearl Krystal Flash, and then five to seven wraps of olive marabou.

Shoulder: Fluorescent green/yellow mallard flank feather.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: This fly is the top pattern in Dickie Storey’s fly box. It always catches salmon in the spring. The shoulder on this and other marabou flies helps keep the marabou splayed out above and below the fly, creating a big profile without much bulk.



SUTTER POND SPECIAL

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Green Diamond Braid.

Wing: Five to seven wraps of olive marabou with four strands of red and green Flashabou on each side.

Shoulder: Yellow guinea hen.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: Perhaps the simplest of the new patterns, the Sutter Pond Special features tried-and-true olive with just a slight bit of Flashabou enhancement.



GOLDEN GINGER STREAMER

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

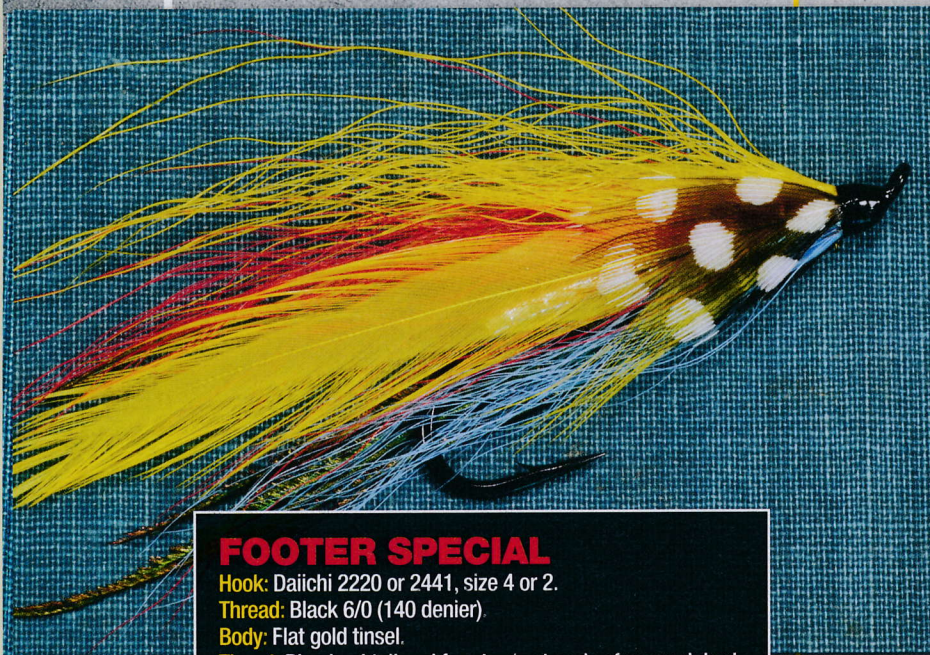
Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Silver Diamond Braid.

Wing: Three or four wraps white marabou, followed by multi color Krystal Flash, and then three or four wraps of ginger and five to seven wraps of golden olive marabou.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Note: The originator of this fly is unknown, but it came into the region with the original wave of steelhead flies. While slightly more complicated to tie than the other marabou flies, it is worth the extra effort.



FOOTER SPECIAL

Hook: Daiichi 2220 or 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Flat gold tinsel.

Throat: Blue bucktail and four to six strands of peacock herl.

Wing: Red bucktail, over which is sparse yellow bucktail, over which are two yellow hackles.

Shoulders: Guinea fowl.

Head: Black.

Note: Maine artist and taxidermist David Footer originated this pattern as a brook trout fly. It is thought to have come to the Doaktown area around the year 2000. Most tiers have abandoned the normal streamer hook and tie it on a more robust salmon hook.

underbody into the shape of a carrot or cigar, and then wrap the floss body. The white underbody provides a good background for the colored floss and creates a much more attractive fly, certainly to the angler and hopefully to the fish as well. As a bonus, when you're using a looped-eye hook such as the Daiichi 2441, the underbody provides a smooth transition from the end of the loop, eliminating the unsightly bump in the body material.

Make these flies using normal hair-wing tying methods, with a couple of small twists. First, when tying a bundle of bucktail to the hook, don't lay it directly on top of the shank. Instead, hold it about an 1/8 inch above the shank, and bring the tying thread over the top of the bundle. Next, rather than going down and around the hook, pass the bobbin holder between the bundle of hair and the shank; then go over the top of the bundle again. This method produces a single wrap of thread around the bundle of hair. Lay the bundle on the shank, tighten the thread, and make a few more thread wraps. Increase the tension as you add wraps. Repeating these steps as you add bundles of bucktail to the wing keeps each color of separate.

Second, apply a drop of head cement to the bucktail before tightening the thread wraps. The cement softens the bucktail, allowing the thread to bite into it more deeply. And, of course, the cement penetrates through the front of the wing, making it practically bulletproof.

In terms of tying difficulty, think of making a Mickey Finn with a slightly fancier body; this is the equivalent of the most complex spring salmon fly, which means that most tiers will have no problem making any of the Miramichi patterns.

WORKING WITH MARABOU

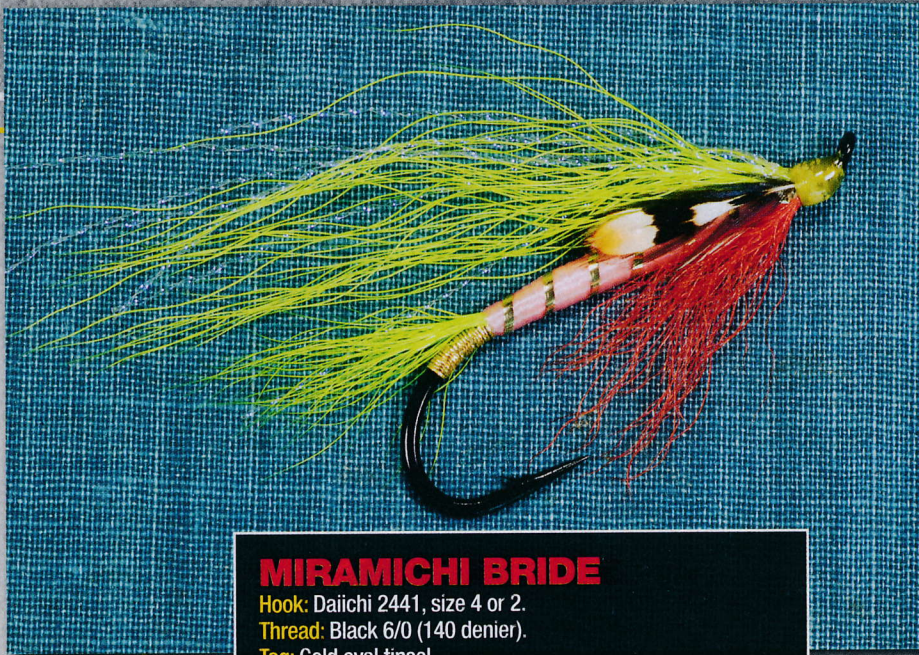
Modern marabou salmon flies—the Sutter Pond Special, Golden Ginger Streamer, and others—are even easier to tie. Wrapping

the marabou like a hackle is perhaps the trickiest thing to learn; if it's making you crazy, just moisten the feather fibers. In terms of the marabou-bodied flies, Dickie Storey's method is pretty straightforward. Simply tie the body, stopping about one-third of the way from the hook eye; the color of the body is important, even if you can't see it after wrapping the marabou. Tie on the butt end of the marabou where it becomes less bulky and more flexible, and wrap the feather forward. Stroke back the fibers between each wrap to prevent binding them down and so they do not bunch together on one side of the hook. When wrapped correctly, each marabou fiber radiates out from the shank. The number of wraps of marabou is dictated by the desired sparseness or fullness of the fly, as well as by the quality of your feathers. A good rule of thumb is to make no fewer than three and no more than seven wraps.

Canadian tradition insists that your flies have jungle cock cheeks, but many very successful patterns lack these feathers; use this expensive ingredient at your discretion. Put a hearty head finish on your flies, and the job's done.

Fishing the Miramichi in the spring is an excellent introduction to the wonders of Canadian salmon fishing. The fishing takes a certain amount of persistence, but not an overly large amount of skill. It can produce high rewards for those willing to gamble on the ice floes and brave the weather. For most New Englanders, it's a great destination that is accessible by automobile. Today you need a passport to travel back and forth across the Canadian border, and you must hire a guide, but you no longer have to let the expense of a full fly box hold you back.

Larry Antonuk is a longtime friend to this magazine. Larry is a talented tier and teacher. He is also a fly tying historian who occasionally unearths unusual collections of patterns. Larry lives in New Hampshire.



MIRAMICHI BRIDE

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Tag: Gold oval tinsel.

Tail: Lime green bucktail.

Body: Pink floss.

Rib: Flat gold tinsel.

Wing: Lime green bucktail and pearl Krystal Flash.

Throat: Orange calf tail.

Cheek: Jungle cock.

Head: Light olive.

Note: Originally tied as a commemorative wedding fly by Dickie Storey in 2010, the Miramichi Bride has gained popularity as a strong producer during the spring run.



GREEN SLIME

Hook: Daiichi 2441, size 4 or 2.

Thread: Black 6/0 (140 denier).

Body: Purple Diamond Braid.

Wing: Two or three fluorescent lime green marabou feathers and strands of fluorescent chartreuse Krystal Flash on each side.

Head: Fire orange.

Note: The originator of the Green Slime is lost in the annals of time, but the fly probably migrated to the Miramichi region in the early 1990s. Dickie Storey simplified and modified the pattern. He attributes the success of this version mainly to the purple Diamond Braid body.