

Vietnam Vet Has An Alluring Hobby

BY MICHAEL PEARCE

(c) 2015 The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kan.)

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. – Watch him work and you will recognize Mike George is a sculptor. Using his hands and a few simple tools, he converts what to most looks like a multi-colored blob into highly-detailed figures. His medium is dyed deer hair. His creations are fishing flies with “omigosh” realism.

“I guess this is a combination of my two passions, art and fly-fishing,” George said as he wrapped deer hair around a hook recently. “I think it’s become an artistic relief for me. It’s just hard to explain.”

George’s deer hair poppers and flies are so intricate, many never touch the water to tempt a fish. Some are sold to collectors, others auctioned so George can honor fellow servicemen he knew 45 years ago. Many didn’t come home.

“It’s good to feel like I’m giving something back,” said George, who loaded weapons on F-105 aircraft in Vietnam. “Those (pilots) really had it rough over there.”

George, 67, fished a lot as a kid in Iowa. His love of angling never faded and he’s been a fly fisherman about 25 years. The desire to tie his own top-water poppers began about 15 years ago for simple reasons.

“To be honest, I didn’t want to spend \$6 on a fly and lose it in a tree without it ever hitting the water,” George said of why he got into tying top-water flies made of deer hair. “After that I just kind of became obsessed.”

Deer-hair flies have been around for centuries, and are valued for the life-like appearance and action they give to flies, especially poppers that chug across the surface.

George is self-taught at fly tying. In the past, he tanned and died his



MICHAEL PEARCE/WICHITA EAGLE/TNS

Master deer hair fly tier Mike George demonstrates how he makes his creations.

own patches of deer hair. Now, he buys chunks of tanned hide already dyed. He has no idea how many colors he has on hand, other than “a lot.” Those same words describe the time he puts into a fly.

“For flies I fish with, I may put in an hour to an hour and a half,” he said, “but I’ve done stuff that took me 10 hours. I’m too much of a perfectionist.”

Like a true perfectionist, George takes no short cuts like adding plastic eyes or paint markings on flies tied to imitate frogs, crayfish, shrimp or small versions of most popular fish.

Last weekend’s demonstration was at K&K Fly Fishers. He

used small scissors to clip tufts of colored hair from patches of deer skin, and thread to attach them to a hook. The combination of pressure from his fingers and knots got the deer hair to stand nearly vertical. The clumps of hair varied in thickness, depending on what George wanted to show on the fly.

That could mean a something the size of the end of your little finger, or another that is just a few strands. His attention to detail includes the pupil and iris on a fish’s eye, and the most minute specks of color on a bluegill or trout.

“Every color on there is a different tuft of hair,” he said as he worked. “I’ve tied flies that have up

to 72 different bundles of hair.”

Most work is done on hooks no more than three inches long.

To observers, George’s tying process produces a multi-colored, fuzzy blob. He uses first scissors, then a small razor blade, to snip and slice away enough hair to unveil what he knew was in that blob all along. He said the fine details of what he’s creating have been in his mind the entire process, and some of his best fly patterns came to him in dreams.

“I hate to say this in front of him, but he really is a genius at this,” said Ned Meyer, a friend, as he watched him work. “People come in here and they’re amazed

at what he does.”

The detailing on his flies is so good George’s website, deer-hairsculptures.com has a long list of contests he’s won. Recently, at the International Fly Fishing Fair in Oregon, he received the Buz Buszek Award.

“For fly tiers, that’s like being inducted into the baseball hall of fame,” George said. “It’s pretty special.”

Though he spends more time tying flies, or teaching seminars, than fishing, George knows his products have fooled at least a dozen kinds of fish. He estimates his best large-mouth bass on one of his flies was upwards of eight pounds. His biggest fish have been Pacific sailfish of more than 100 pounds, a feat few fly-fishermen accomplish.

But he is more proud of his works that raise funds for several charities. One of his favorites is Project Healing Waters, which uses fishing to help wounded veterans heal physically and emotionally. Some such flies carry patriotic themes.

“Freedom,” is a red, white and blue fly complete with white stars tied in to the blue. It honors the F-105 pilots he met in Vietnam.

“They had more casualties than any kind of aircraft over there,” George said. “... They couldn’t fire at the (surface-to-air) batteries until they were fired upon. That wasn’t right.”

His “Heart of a Veteran” is a four-inch, heart-shaped fly complete with stars and stripes. His fund-raising flies have brought up to \$850 at auction.

“Sitting there the first time, and listening to how high the price was going was really something,” George said. “I’ll admit, it brought some tears to my eyes.”

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Pallid Sturgeon Stocked In Missouri River

LINCOLN, Neb. – More than 2,000 5- to 6-inch pallid sturgeon were stocked in the channelized portion of the Missouri River along Nebraska’s eastern border on Aug. 24. The stocking is part of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s recovery efforts for this federal- and state-listed endangered species.

The pallid sturgeon were stocked in two locations. The first was at the newly-constructed Deer Island shallow-water habitat improvement project near Tekamah (river mile 762.3) in Burt County. Deer Island has more than 100 acres of shallow water and sand bar habitat suitable for small pallid sturgeon. The second site is just north of Rulo (river mile 508.5) in Richardson County in an area where river dikes have been modified to increase habitat diversity. These locations have had few or no previous stockings, and similar-size shovelnose sturgeon have been sampled there.

These pallid sturgeon were products of the Game and Parks’ annual spring effort for the basin-wide Pallid Sturgeon Conservation Augmentation Program. This spring, Game and Parks captured two reproductively-ready female pallid sturgeon and a number of males from the Missouri River. Those fish were transferred to Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery in Yankton, S.D., where the females were spawned in late April and early May. Approximately 49,000 eggs were collected from those females. Four male pallid sturgeon were used to fertilize those eggs, which produced four, genetically-unique family lots. An additional 10,000 fish from these families were stocked throughout the lower Missouri River below the Nebraska border.

If caught while fishing, pallid sturgeon must be released immediately. Identification of pallid sturgeon and shovelnose sturgeon can be difficult. Anglers should always know the distinguishing characteristics of sturgeon before harvesting any sturgeon species.

Shovelnose sturgeon is a sport fish, although no harvest is allowed on the Missouri River upstream from the mouth of the Big Sioux River.

Several Hunting Seasons Opening In Early Sept.

LINCOLN, Neb. – September in Nebraska means football – and hunting. The first day of the month brings the opener of several hunting

seasons, including dove, grouse and archery deer.

Dove hunters should be reminded that they are required to have a Harvest Information Program number. They can obtain one at outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hip or by calling 1-877-634-8687. The 2015 Dove Fact Sheet is a good source of information for the season and may be found at outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/guides/upland_game/pdf/dovefactsheet.pdf.

A resource for grouse hunters is the 2015 Upland Game Hunting Outlook, available at outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/guides/upland_game/pdf/UG_Nebraska_Forecast.pdf.

Archery deer hunting is available under the authority of several different permit types, although statewide archery permits are unlimited in number. Read the 2015 Big Game Guide at digital.outdoornebraska.gov/502872-big-game-guide-2015 for more information.

Sept. 5 brings the opening day of early teal season in the Low Plains zone. The season opens in the High Plains zone on Sept. 12, and seasons in both zones run through Sept. 20.

The teal season in the northern portion of Nebraska is on an experimental basis. Continuation of the teal season in that area depends on hunters’ ability to distinguish teal from other duck species. During this experiment, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will evaluate the rate at which non-target species are shot at or taken. If the rate is considered unacceptable by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the northern portion of Nebraska will lose its teal season. In addition, those who take or attempt to take ducks other than teal will be subject to prosecution.

Other hunting seasons opening Sept. 1 are cottontail, jackrabbit, snipe, rail, raccoon and opossum.

A companion for every hunter should be the 2015 Nebraska Public Access Atlas. This free publication details sites enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program, which allows public walk-in hunting, trapping and fishing access on private lands. The atlas also includes public lands. It is available wherever permits are sold and at digital.outdoornebraska.gov/554204-public-access-atlas-2015.

Public hunting lands listed in the 2015 Hunting Guide now reference maps in the atlas that show their location. This publication is available at digital.outdoornebraska.gov/550928-hunting-guide-2015.

Permits may be purchased at Game and Parks permitting offices or at OutdoorNebraska.org.

BY DOUG SMITH

(c) 2015 Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

For Minnesota pheasant aficionados, the state’s hunter walk-in access program has been a godsend, providing nearly 23,000 acres of private land to hunt in 31 counties.

But since the program began in 2011, it’s been on shaky financial ground.

Now that ground is a little firmer after the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced Minnesota will receive \$1.6 million over the next three years to continue the program – and add another 8,000 acres. Most of the money will be used to pay landowners to allow public hunting on their property.

“I’m absolutely thrilled,” said Kevin Auslund of Eden Prairie, a pheasant hunter, outdoors activist and walk-in program supporter. “With corn and soybeans gobbling up the landscape, and CRP grasslands disappearing, we’ll take anything we can get.”

Auslund said he often hunts the walk-in lands. “They’re some of the highest-quality pheasant hunting lands in the state,” he said.

The money is part of \$20 million from the 2014 Farm Bill that will go to Minnesota and 14 other states to improve and increase wildlife habitat and public access on privately owned lands. For Minnesota, it was a program saver. It was set to run out of money next spring.

“The program could have died,” said Craig Hoch, DNR prairie habitat team supervisor. “This gives us at least another three years.”

The grant also gives the state something it’s never had: \$375,000 specifically pegged to improve wildlife

habitat on lands enrolled in the program.

“It could be removing old dead trees, or burning grasslands or increasing wildflowers,” Hoch said. “We have funds to do habitat work on public lands, but there’s not a lot of funding sources for habitat improvement on private lands. We’re hoping this will be a shot in the arm.”

Also included is money for the University of Minnesota to survey landowner and hunter interest and participation in the program.

But future funding remains a key concern.

Minnesota competed with other states to get the federal grant money, and Hoch said it really needs steady, reliable funding. Currently, hunters pay \$3 for a validation allowing them to hunt the 200 parcels of walk-in lands, but that raises only \$45,000. A surcharge on nonresident hunting licenses raises another \$100,000. And the DNR asks license buyers if they want to contribute \$1, \$3 or \$5 to the program. Last year, \$21,804 was donated.

That only about 15,000 of the state’s 70,000 pheasant hunters buy the \$3 validation is a concern. And it’s unknown how much more hunters would be willing to pay to access those lands.

Auslund says the DNR should consider raising the \$7.50 pheasant stamp fee and using the extra money for the walk-in program. “Three dollars (for the validation) isn’t going to fund it,” he said.

“Most of your walk-in users are pheasant hunters, so why not pump this up and have all pheasant hunters contribute?” Auslund said.

Currently, landowners are paid \$10 per acre to

Minn. Hunter Access Program Gets Boost

Upcoming Opportunities!

The following special promotions/sections are coming in the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan:

- **Labor Day Salute**, deadlines August 31, publishes September 4
- **Bridal Directory**, deadlines, August 31, publishes September 3
- **YHS Homecoming**, deadlines September 8, publishes September 15
- **Citywide Rummages**, deadlines September 4, publishes September 9 and 12
- **Heritage Edition**, deadlines September 16, publishes September 28
- **Home Improvement**, deadlines September 17, publishes September 24
- **Health & Medical Directory**, deadlines September 23, distribution starts October 23

Please watch for these upcoming promotions or if you would like your business or service featured please call 665-7811 today.

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