

The Flydressers Guild Sussex Branch



Newsletter

January 2025

Published by the Sussex Branch of the
Flydressers Guild

Chair: Peter Winder 07732024857
Acting Secretary: Alan Wells 07795523608
Treasurer: Bill Black 01323 763807
Membership: Andy Wood 07445274967
Newsletter: Simon Rickard 07799484166

Visit our web site
Sussexflydressers.org.uk

or on Facebook @
Sussex Flydressers Guild

or on Youtube
Sussex Flydressers Guild

Xmas Competition. 2024

Despite the rather wet weather the fishing was quite good at Brick Farm on 1st December. As you can see from the table below everyone caught and the general stamp of the fish was quite weighty. Most caught on lures of some description with Cats Whiskers and Damsels being among the favoured patterns. Alan Middleton kindly shared some of his tyings which

proved successful for Cliff. I had my two by 9.30 and then, to relieve the tedium, paid for another fish, which of course then took me several hours to produce. The northern end of Brick Lake and the Western end of Spring were the hotspots, though Tony and Bill both had their fish from Well. By about 12.00 most were back in the lodge drying out over welcome cuppas. After a fittingly brief AGM, we gorged ourselves on turkey, stuffing and cranberry rolls, roast spuds and some excellent mince pies. It was good to see John Cooper who came along for lunch. Thanks to Dani's Mum and Dad for their excellent service throughout the day. We shall return!

	Best Rainbow	Total Weight (2 fish)
Cliff Brown	2lb 8oz	5 lb
Andy Wood	2lb 2 oz	4lb 2 oz
Tony Woolnough	1lb 8oz	1lb 8oz
Bill Black	1lb 12oz	3lb 10oz
Chris Nunn	3lb	3lb
Alan Middleton	3lb	5lb 12oz
Keith Verrall	2lb 8oz	5lb
Alan Wells	3lb 8oz	6lb 4oz
Martyn Gray	2lb 8oz	4lb 12oz

AW 1 12 24

**The first tying session for 2025
will be on Thursday 2nd
January 2025.**

Minutes of Sussex Flydressers' Guild AGM- Held at Brick Farm Fishery, 1st December 2024

Present: 3 Committee members AW ,WB and AWo plus 7 other club members.

Apologies: from Peter Winder due to illness
1. Minutes of the 2023 AGM were accepted and any matters arising were dealt with in the ensuing sections.

2. Officers reports:

In Peter's absence AW read out his welcome and then as the reports had been distributed to members prior to the meeting he made a brief synopsis of the main points.

Chairmans Report:

Welcome to the Sussex Fly Dressers AGM. To those members who have been suffering from various ailments I wish you all a speedy recovery.

After a lovely morning in which every member caught their limit in gorgeous weather and a very nice lunch, its time to get down to business.

The Guild finances are stable and we have money in the bank. Membership is also stable. The tying sessions have been generally fairly well attended with some new members joining during the year. The Guild is ticking along nicely.

Thankyou to the committee members for all their hard work.

To all members and their families, MERRY CHRISTMAS & TIGHT LINES FOR 2025.

Membership Secretary Report:

Branch membership for this year currently stands at 32 paying and 3 non-paying honorary members, for a total of 35. It's possible that a further two people may still choose to renew this year. This compares to a total membership of 41 for the previous year. Although we gained one paying member this year, it was more than offset by the loss of four (six if the above mentioned two possibles do not renew). Of the four, one passed away,

one moved out of the area and two stated that they no longer had time available for tying. Sadly, branch membership continues the trend of a steady and sustained decline, where the trickle of new members fails to keep up with yearly losses.

Treasurers Report:

At the end of the first month of the financial year September 30th we had moved the remaining money into the new Branch account with Lloyds Bank . We had £21.38 cash in hand and a bank balance of £9367.04

At the end of the last financial year on 30th August 2024 the Branch Account had a small surplus of £291.89

The bank balance was £8905.96 and that is due to the fact that we paid for the hall hire fees for September 2024 to April 2025 as we were invoice early which was £450 and should really be shown in this year's accounts.

So the true balance should be the £8905 plus £450 =£9355, the difference over the 12 months being £11.09

Secretary's Report:

This last year has been one of rather mixed fortunes for the Branch. On the one hand we have gained 4 new members but have lost several long- term members for a variety of reasons. Alan Middleton's huge contribution to the club & sparkling wit will be greatly missed but we hope to see him at the bankside occasionally. John Cooper is also sadly retiring from tying and his 20+ years of service have been recognised through Honorary Branch membership. Also at the beginning of the current tying season we have lost the instruction services of 2 stalwarts of the club in Jim Harris and Phillip Ellis due to ill health. We wish them both well and hope they can "return to the fold" in the not too distant future.

In mentioning service to the club we should not forget the hard work that Mike Guest has put into the website, which has produced nearly all of our new members through the "contact" section. The seemingly indestructible John Plowman continues to battle on through various traumas to offer sterling service as an instructor, now taking on the Intermediates.

We hope his recent illness does not mean too long an absence. Robert Forster and Steve Smith are to be congratulated on achieving the Bronze Award for fly tying.

*As with tying, our fishing event numbers have dwindled somewhat but we have usually managed to scrape into double figures **and the committee have taken the decision to use some of our reserves to subsidise events judiciously.** A welcome return as an event was the Brass Monkeys where we received a great welcome from Monica and family at a much tidier Hazel Copse.*

Tony Kaatze has organised the South of England show stand and is currently trying to negotiate our attendance at the Spring Fayre rather than the Autumn Show. John Plowman once again exhibited tying at the Heathfield Show but quite rightly says that he should no longer be expected to do the onerous task of setting up..... volunteers needed.

Simon Rickard continues to produce our newsletter which goes out to a broader group of present and ex-members but needs more contributions from a wider range of people.

3. Motion on minor change to the constitution. As this had been circulated to members before hand and was a change in wording to make the administration of the club funds more efficient, a vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

So section 5 g will henceforward read: "The funds of the Branch will be kept in an appropriate bank account and any relevant expenses/costs can be authorised for payment by the Treasurer and two other nominated committee members"

5. Election of officers:

As there were no nominations for any of the committee posts the current officers agreed to continue in post ,including the Chairman. This is with the understanding that AWo will gradually take over the roe of Treasurer from Bill over the next few months.

6. AOB

There was some discussion of the difficulties at present and possibly into the future created

by the loss of all 3 of our regular tying instructors. For the present AW is prepared to take on the guidance of the Intermediate tiers but our new novice will also need support. We hope to be able to achieve this through combined support from more senior members of the branch but this is an issue we need to return to. Alan Middleton's videos on the Branch website may also be a useful teaching support for our novice.

Keith brought up the return of Hazel Copse as a venue, which although not that well attended in November was acknowledged as good addition to our fishing events.

It was also agreed that we need to enlist the support of some of our newer members to help Tony Kaatze with the show setups and exhibiting.

The meeting closed at around 1.00 pm as lunch was served!

AW

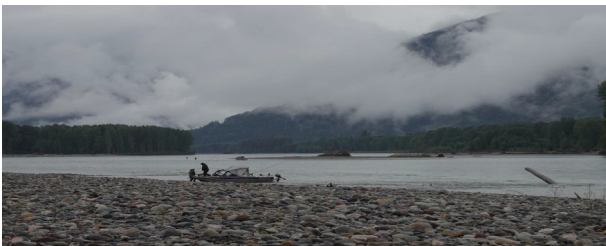
Confluence of the Runs' trip to British Columbia July – August 2024

Looking out of the window at a cold, damp day, it seems an age since I made my second trip to fish the Skeena River system in British Columbia (BC) in the Summer. Having enjoyed it so much first time around, and in an attempt to better manage journey fatigue and jetlag, my second visit would be for two weeks rather than one. What follows is some of the highlights of a trip that proved to be an even better experience than before.

The time of the holiday was again scheduled to cover what is known as the 'confluence of the runs', which occurs around the first week in August. It sees the tail end of the Chinook and the start of the Sockeye and Coho runs. With Chum, Pink and Steelhead in mid run, it means that there is a realistic chance of catching all five species of Pacific Salmon, as well as everybody's dream fish, the Steelhead. The slight downside is the presence of huge numbers of Pink Salmon in the 4-8lb class. Breaking through them to other species is often a numbers game, which can easily reach 20:1 or more. Most BC novices are extremely happy to catch Pink after Pink all day for a

time. But, believe me, the novelty does wear off in fairly short order once you appreciate what else is out there.

Our party of seven on the first week split into two groups, each allocated one of the lodges highly experienced local guides. My first few days was spent on the 'River of Mists', the mighty Skeena, where jetboats are used to ferry anglers up and down the vast expanse of water. The weather on the first few days was cool and very wet, the kind of conditions that exposes any shortcomings in waterproof clothing. The fishing, however, was excellent. As well as numerous Pinks, caught plenty of fresh Sockeye that had only started running a few days earlier. Sockeye is generally considered to be the finest eating Salmon – I don't disagree myself – and several fish were taken for the table. As well as Sockeye, 3 or 4 nice Steelhead were caught, as well as a bonus, late run, decent Chinook.



The Skeena, 'River of Mists' living up to its name.

Day three saw a change to the Kitimat River, a much more intimate experience than the Skeena, even if the potential rewards are not quite as big. Drift boats are used to navigate this waterway, providing a more leisurely and peaceful experience as the boat drifts downstream from one likely looking pool to another. Out before sunrise, as well as the stunning vistas, there was plenty of wildlife to see, including numerous Bald Eagles, the odd Golden Eagle, Wolves and Moose.



Launching the drift boat on the Kitimat River

As with the Skeena, Pinks were caught in abundance. Once the Guides have deemed you competent, their expectation is that you deal with 'Pinkies' on your own. This is understandable as they serve several clients at a time, often spread out over several hundred yards of difficult rocky terrain. It would be impractical for them to run up and down with the landing net for every fish. However, unhooking an angry 10lb Cock Pink without a net can be very tricky undertaking indeed. As you try to judge the optimum moment to grab the leader, rods can bend at angles that they weren't designed to handle - breakages are an all-too-common outcome.

Losing count of the number of Pinkies we had caught, and after using the BBQ to cook a couple of them for lunch, we were ready to move downstream and try to track down some of the big Chum that the Kitimat is known for. Our guide, Donny, took us to a favourite spot of his, where he was sure that we would catch Chum. What followed was possibly the most memorable afternoon of my angling life. I had one of those (rare) days where I simply could not put a foot wrong. In the space of a couple of hours, I landed 7 very hard fighting Chum. Most were well over 20lb, while the largest was estimated at 30lb plus. Considering my 2023 trip had produced a single upper double Chum, I was over the moon. To underline just how hard these fish fight, Gary, the trip organiser, broke not one but two rods on big fish that afternoon. Having fished for some 50 years, I can count the number of rods I have seen broken on one hand. Indeed, outside of Canada, I have never seen a rod broken on a fish before.



Another 'Pinkie' – you soon stop counting!

Sure, it is not the most rod friendly place, with rocky banks and tungsten weighted flies all

taking their toll. But I don't know many people, myself included, who have not broken a rod out there. Lifetime manufacturer warranties were designed with this place I mind!
 A hard-fighting Chum from the Kitimat River – John, in the background, is into another!
 The following day we were back on the Kitimat, again targeting Chum.



The hard-fighting Chum from the Kitimat River – John, in the background, is into another!

Gary, after promising Tracey, the lodge owner, that he would look after it with his life, had borrowed a Sage rod and reel combo for the remainder of the trip. Having had such a good day previously, we agreed to go straight to the Chum hot-spot we had fished the day before. I fished somewhere near where I been the previous day, while Gary dropped into the same pool about 50 meters upstream. As I was swinging my fly, I saw Gary bend into a fish. It moved off violently in a way that characterise Chinook and Steelhead when they feel the hook – Chum usually feel like you've snagged bottom, eventually moving slow but hard. As I watched, I saw the rod disappear into the river as the fish ripped it from Gary's hands. With a look of horror on his face, he started to run into the river in an attempt to reconnect with it. However, the pool we were fishing sloped off sharply and he quickly realised that he would soon be out of his depth. He stopped, watching helplessly, as two grands worth of outfit disappeared into the river. From my viewpoint, it was one of the funniest things I've ever seen. Donny, our Guide, had also watched the episode unfold from where he was sitting next to the boat. We were soon in uncontrollable laughter at Gary's misfortune, even more so when we considered just how he would explain the loss

to Tracey. A couple of hours later, when I had regained my composure, Donny was netting a Chum for me. At some point after we landed it, he spotted something in the middle of the river. We weren't quite sure what it was we were looking at, but Donny suggested that it might be a rod butt. I was far from convinced, but hopped into the boat with him as we went to investigate. Much to my surprise, I saw the cork handle of a fishing rod gently floating downstream. It was the missing rod and reel! Predictably, there was no fish, fly or leader attached to it. We figured that the fish must have dragged it upstream for quite some distance, before the leader snapped. The rod then floated to the surface and was carried back downstream. Scarcely believable, it saved Gary the embarrassment of having to break some bad news to Tracey.

New to Canadian Salmon fishing were a couple of guys from the West County, Bob and Alan. For the previous five years that had been on the Norwegian Salmon fishing circuit. I think it's fair to say that they were both blown away by the quality of the fishing in BC. Alan, in particular, who closely followed all the advice given by the guides – oddly, some anglers do not - enjoyed resounding success, taking all five species of Pacific Salmon and a cracking Steelhead. Realising what they had been missing, the pair stated that they would not return to Norway again and reserved their spaces for BC 2025

Having greatly enjoyed the sea day on the Douglas Channel the previous year, we mutually agreed that we would like to do another. It turned out to be yet another great day's fishing. We all caught Halibut between 20 and 30lb, together with Cod and brightly coloured Rock fish, using a combination of static baits and jigs near the seabed in 200 feet of water.



Halibut from the Douglas Channel – that's dinner sorted!

Surprisingly we caught no Salmon when

trawling later in the day. And, having lost count of the number of Humpback Whales we spotted last year, they were very much conspicuous by their absence this year – apparently due to the Herring being late. On the upside, the Crab pots we set earlier that morning provided us with plenty of prime Dungeness crab for the table. That evening dinner was a veritable feast, with starters of fresh crab, followed by fried Halibut fillets and home cooked chips.

The following day we were again out in a jet-boat on the Douglas Channel. This time on route to the coastal river that is known locally as 'Jurassic Park'. This is a rather exclusive location that only a handful of the lodges have licenses for. It's remote location, means that access is only possible via Jetboat or Helicopter. Since water levels were low, the trip up the estuary was even more hairy than it had been the previous year, the guide advising us to sit down and hang on. We eventually arrived at a Pool known as the 'G-spot'. It must rank as one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. Turquoise coloured Glacial melt rivers, with a backdrop of snow-covered peaks and waterfalls, stunning! We were soon into beautiful fresh run, hard fighting Coho Salmon. Thrown in for good measure were some big Chum, but surprising few Pinkies. However, the place is



A 'bar of chrome' - fresh run Coho, complete with Sea Lice, from the 'G-Spot'

As the temperature climbed, clouds of Horseflies started to realise that fresh meat was very much on the day's menu. Having experienced them the previous year, I thought I was better prepared this time around. However, the sheer numbers were like

nothing anybody – including our guide – had experienced before. To my cost, I soon learned that long shirtsleeves and cotton gloves are no barrier at all to hungry Horse flies, they simply bite through clothing! After half a day of being eaten alive, and despite the excellent fishing, we mutually agreed that we could take no more and decided to return home early, leaving the clouds of flies behind. A real shame as later that week another group went there with the same guide and it wasn't nearly as bad.

The second week saw the thermometer rise into the mid-thirties; temperatures at one time unheard of in Northern BC, have sadly become more common in recent years. With the Kitimat also starting to suffer with a lack of rain, we agreed with the guides that we would move the daily schedule an hour forward, hoping to avoid the worst of the heat. The fishing was definitely tougher than the previous week. But there were still plenty of sport to be had in the relatively cooler mornings. The highlight of my week was a beautiful fresh run Hen Steelhead of around 15lb from the Skeena. Most of the group caught a Steelhead this year. Apparently, the Skeena had its best run of them since the sixties this year. Nobody can definitively say why, but the Canadian authorities have been taken conservation measures very seriously over recent years. Once you've caught one of these 'Unicorns' you start to understand why they are the possibly the most coveted sportfish in the world. Nothing I have ever caught fights quite like it, they can take you down to your backing line in seconds. Anglers come from all over the globe to fish for Skeena 'Steelies'. Some of the classified waters, available only on a special, very expensive licenses, include legendary Skeena tributaries such as the Copper, Kalum Bulkley, and Babine Rivers. Once the lodges close down for the Season around October time, the guides fish the Winter Steelhead run; a prime time when, due to the lack of Salmon, the odds are much better.

The penultimate day of the trip saw Tracey guiding myself and John on a stretch of the Skeena that I had never fished before. As the sun came up over the snow-capped mountains - it was clear that it was going to be another scorcher - the flies seemed eager to get on with the days business of devouring fisherman. For me, it rapidly turned into one of those days

where I couldn't put a foot right! John, on the other hand, was absolutely nailing it. He was on a Pink a cast, some of which were bigger Cocks that can provide some great sport. As I struggled to attract even pinks, he was also breaking through to Coho and Sockeye.



A pristine Skeena Hen Steelhead – the ultimate sportfish?

Tracey did his level best to put me on fish, suggesting all manner of adjustments to my technique and moving me to likely holding areas. It all felt rather frustrating, especially since John was breaking every rule in the book. In his usual manner, and largely due to his dodgy knee, he settled into a spot less than 10 metres from the boat and stayed put. And, as even he would freely admit, had can't Spey cast for toffee. However, none of the usual rules seem to apply where John is concerned. He is a damned good angler and fish, who don't seem to have read the book, just find him. Even Tracey gave up coaching me that day; he eventually told me to 'just do what John is doing' - if only I could have figured it out!

Another day on the Skeena River as our Guide provides some coaching, snow-covered peaks as a backdrop

As I pushed on catching the odd Pink, the water to my left suddenly exploded, as something big and silver leapt up into the air. This was followed by a cry of 'Steelhead' from Tracey. John's reel was soon screaming in protest as the fish bolted off downstream. He was very soon well into his backing, as I heard Tracey tell him that he was going to have to chase it downstream and recover some line. It was quite a sight to see John hobbling over the rocks, rod in hand, with Tracey holding

him upright by the scruff of the neck. Thinking it unlikely that the fish would be landed, I kept watch on proceedings as I continued to fish. I became distracted, as I hooked a Pinkie and concentrated on dealing with it. When I next looked downstream, I could see the curious sight of John holding his rod in one hand and his reel in the other. Tracey was shouting like mad at this point, so I thought I'd better stop fishing and join them. I heard the word 'net' and realised that the landing net was still with me. Grabbing it, I moved as fast as I could to cover the hundred or so yards to where John and Tracey were still in contact with the fish.



Another day on the Skeena River as our Guide provides some coaching, snow-covered peaks as a backdrop

As I got closer, I could see that John was still struggling with his reel, the spool having parted with the reel body. But the fish was as still on. At that point I saw the rod tip go slack when his 30lb running line snapped. As the shooting head followed the fish out into the river, Tracey ran in after it. A quick mental calculation of two speed vectors, Tracey vs shooting head, suggested to me that there was no way he would catch it. However, miraculously, the line suddenly stopped dead, allowing Tracey to grab it. The fish must have stopped momentarily as it was still very much attached. As Tracey continued to battle the fish with bare hands, I waded out into the river with the net. John was stood there in a bit of a daze as we managed to net a truly magnificent Hen Steelhead. It looked enormous to me and was clearly something special because Tracey had become very excited indeed. He said that it was one of the biggest he had seen in years, probably a mid-twenty, he could not get his hand around its tail – a common measure used by the guides. After a few trophy shots and

agreeing that all three of us should share the credit for catching it, the fish was safely returned to continue its journey.



Tracey, cradling John's mid-twenty Steelhead – truly 'the fish of a lifetime'.

In summary, my experience was even better than the previous year. The quality of the fishing was off the scale, the banter and company weren't far behind. I was over the moon with a near 20lb Chum the previous year, I must have had a dozen in excess of that weight this year. Coupled with some superb Sockeye and Coho, Halibut and, always a highlight, a pristine double figure Steelhead, it's hard to imagine how fishing gets any better than this. Sadly, as with elsewhere on our planet, this wonderful environment is under threat from all angles and I wonder how long it will be before the fishing goes the same way as Scotland or Scandinavia. In order to make the most of it while it still exists, I had barely got off the plane at Gatwick when I asked Gary to reserve me another two-week slot in 2025!
Andy Wood