

tying locally

Story and photos by Michael Zeugin

M

ost of us Adirondack aficionados feel we are environmentally and economically up-to-date. We know what buying locally means, even if we don't always find it possible. We wait for berries not flown in from Chile. We stock up on locally grown produce at the farm stand down the road. We buy a Hornbeck or Placid Boatworks canoe, rather than an Old Town or Mad River. And we eat lots of apples in the fall.

impossible to say no to a kid collecting things she sees as treasures, especially when you know they will resurface years later during bittersweet clean-ups.

One day, while on my new fly-tying kick, copying quirky Irish and British patterns (one can only stomach tying so many of the standard Royal Coachmen), I spotted some grouse feathers we'd collected at the bottom of the Cooper Kiln Pond trail

Bored with tying the same old patterns...I started tying flies with scavenged remains from right here in the Adirondacks.

While I'm not fanatical about the buy locally concept, I do try to use products made close to home; it just seems right. So, recently I transferred this buy locally concept into my fishing life and began tying locally. No, this doesn't mean I'm standing out in the Ausable with one of those match-the-hatch portable, chest-mounted, fly tying kits (yes, there is such a thing). Nor am I sitting in the family cabin finishing a copy of Fran Better's famous Ausable Wulff. But you might find me out in the woods, one hand pinching my nose, the other plucking some tufts of hair from a skunk carcass or picking a feather out of the grass in South Meadow.

Bored with tying the same old patterns from feathers plucked from a capon in Singapore, I started tying flies with scavenged stuff from right here in the Adirondacks. Why? Because it's fun, creative, thrifty, and although I haven't yet proved tying locally lands more and bigger fish, it sure adds a wallop of satisfaction to anything you catch. There's a sort of circular, Native American ethos to this pursuit.

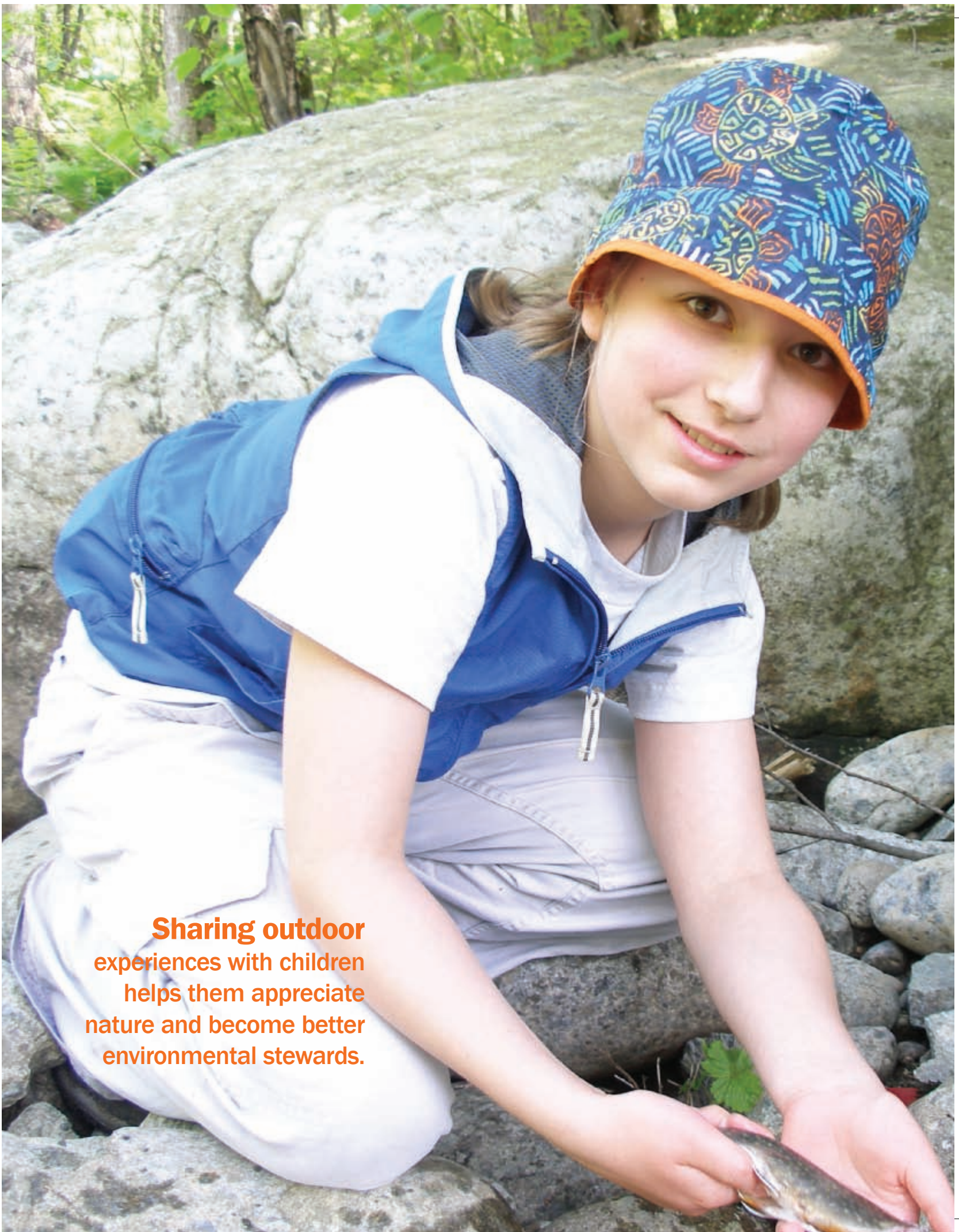
Besides, when my daughter joined me in the outdoors, feathers, hair and other animal flotsam normally examined, enjoyed, and left behind, suddenly ended up coming home with us. It is nearly

off Bonnie View Road. "Let's use some Adirondack grouse feathers," I said to my daughter, "instead of this woodcock." "Oh, cool," she said, "I've got some too."

She darted out of the kitchen, where I had bolted the vise to my place at the table, but came back with some grouse and turkey feathers she'd collected on hikes. "I want to use these when I start tying flies," she said, holding them in front of me. "But, I'll let you use a piece or two now, and I'll watch." Tying locally takes on a whole new meaning when your 10-year-old daughter wants to watch, keep you company and ask questions.

A few imported peacock feathers for a tail, rose-pink body-dubbing from a shop in Wilmington (scavenging of a different kind), followed by tinsel from Massachusetts, and then the rust brown Adirondack grouse feathers for wings, finished with some darker grouse on the throat. Suddenly my British Woodcock and Pink pattern had turned distinctly American—Adirondack.

Soon we whipped up a few samples. "We're not matching naturally occurring insects here," I explained. "Fly tying can also be creative."



Sharing outdoor experiences with children helps them appreciate nature and become better environmental stewards.



Beautiful turkey feathers will become wings of a different kind.



Hair from a black bear snagged in a twig becomes part of a "local fly."



Grouse and Pink, a local modification of the British Woodcock and Pink pattern.

As I explained the concept of attractor flies—things a fish thinks look good to eat, or maybe just good to kill—I trimmed some blue-grey grouse feathers, and looped the nylon thread around them once, twice, three times.

"I need some darker feathers for the throat," I muttered, squinting more than I used to. As I wound on some grey mohair from Massachusetts, she handed me a charcoal grouse feather, with a tan stripe running through it. "That looks nice," she said. "Make me one to use when I go fly fishing, please." As would any father, I complied.

When I handed the finished fly to her, she held it in her yet uncalloused hand as if it were a finely polished gem of inestimable value. My heart swelled.

"It's perfect," she said.

"Wait until you catch a fish with it," I added, starting another.

Then I pondered if, or how, I might use that precious tuft of black bear hair she discovered snagged in a snapped twig, a memento of one of our early backcountry ski trips when she was only six. A Black Gnat Wulff, perhaps?

Michael Zeugin caught his first trout in the Ausable River at age three. When not pursuing outdoor sports, Zeugin teaches writing for the NJ Institute of Technology and Rutgers University.

Editor's note: Even if found in the wild, it is illegal to possess most feathers without a permit. Also, although you may use legally acquired game bird and waterfowl feathers, it is illegal to sell them. Good luck tying locally!

Connect to Nature

New York State Fly-Fishing Locations

Even if tying your own flies from found materials seems a little intimidating, there are still great opportunities for exploring the joys of fly fishing in New York State. In particular, New York's water bodies offer great opportunities for catching both wild and stocked trout and salmon. Listed here are a number of notable areas for fly fishing in the state.

However, do not feel limited by these traditional fly-fishing sites. Anywhere with a substantial fish population and wadable water can be a fly-fishing location. Some anglers in the Adirondacks even fish from float tubes and light-weight canoes! A willingness to explore and catch a variety of species can lead to a fishing experience like no other.

Lake Erie tributaries: *Cattaraugus, Eighteen Mile, Canadaway, Chautauqua, Buffalo, Cazenovia, Cayuga, Silver, and Walnut creeks; steelhead (rainbow trout)*

DEC stocks about 270,000 steelhead yearlings in Lake Erie tributaries annually, adding to the naturally reproducing population. As a result, this area has an excellent steelhead fishery.

Wisicoy Creek (Allegany and Wyoming Counties); wild brown trout

Anglers consider Wisicoy Creek one of the state's premier wild brown trout streams. Last year, biologists found an average of 1,433 adult wild brown trout per mile of stream. Special regulations on the Wisicoy limit anglers to a three-fish daily limit, 10-inch minimum length, and catch-and-release only from October 16 to March 31.

Lake Ontario tributaries: *Eighteen Mile Creek, Oak Orchard Creek, South Sandy Creek, Salmon River and many smaller tributaries; steelhead and salmon*

These areas are known for their tremendous fish populations. DEC annually stocks about 1.8 million Chinook salmon fingerlings in Lake Ontario tributaries, and a

spawning run occurs from September to November. Oak Orchard Creek is particularly notable in that it does not freeze, making it accessible even in winter.

Lake Champlain tributaries: Ausable River, Saranac River; landlocked salmon

Although once locally extinct, restocking and restoration efforts have returned landlocked salmon to these waters. When the water is high or discolored, or when the salmon are active in the fast water at the head of pools, anglers find smelt imitations are the most effective. In contrast, fishing with wet flies and nymphs may be most successful in a low, clear river.

West Canada Creek (near Utica); brown and brook trout

West Canada Creek is one of the best brown trout streams in central New York and provides a variety of species for anglers to pursue along its entire length. Although DEC stocks this creek, anglers can find natural trout populations at the mouths of smaller tributaries.

Adirondack lakes and ponds; brook trout

Fly fishing many Adirondack lakes and ponds is a special challenge, as anglers may have to hike or canoe to their desired location. Many of the most treasured water bodies

are remote and the people who frequent them are reluctant to share their locations. However, the lakes and ponds that DEC has recently stocked are good bets for excellent fly fishing. The DEC website (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7739.html>) lists lakes that the fisheries staff has recently stocked.

Esopus Creek (Catskills); brown and rainbow trout

Esopus Creek is fairly accessible compared to other water bodies in the Catskill region and is a very productive wild trout stream. However, this stream can be challenging to wade in and is often cloudy from the local soil's red clay deposits.

Beaverkill (Catskills); brown and rainbow trout

Many people consider this area the birthplace of fly fishing in America. The Beaverkill and Willowemoc rivers, considered two of the best trout streams in the Northeast, meet at Junction Pool. This area has become famous for its abundance of riffles and pools, although parts of this section can be dangerous for the less sure-footed.

For more information on fishing opportunities in New York, check the DEC fishing website at: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/fishing.html.



Our ideal "secret location" for fly fishing.