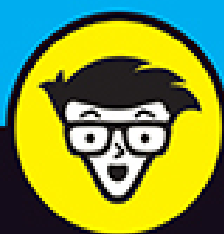


LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Fly Fishing

for
dummies[®]
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Raise your
fly fishing game

Cast like a pro, catch
like a champion

All-new guide to the very
best places to fish

Peter Kaminsky

Longtime "Outdoors" columnist for the
New York Times, Contributing Editor to
Field & Stream



Fly Fishing

2nd Edition

by Peter Kaminsky

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dummies
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Introduction

If you are new to fly fishing, forget about what you may have heard about fly rodding in the past. If you believe some people, fly fishing requires the touch of a surgeon, the body mechanics of an Olympic gymnast, and the serene soul of a Zen master. I know this isn't true because I am an okay fly fisherman and I fit none of those qualifications. The simple truth is I find that fishing with a fly rod is the most pleasant way to fish.

Baitcasting can be as demanding, and success with a spinning rig requires every bit as much knowledge of fish behavior. So, you really can't defend the position of fly fishing snobs that their sport is more challenging. The real difference between fly fishing and every other form of angling with a rod is that with conventional rods, the weight of your bait or sinker or lure carries the line, whereas in fly fishing *the weight of the line* carries the fly. This crucial difference requires that the fly rodder learns to cast in a special way, moving the line through the air like a very long bullwhip. This maneuver calls for a certain amount of timing and a whole lot of practice.

Most people cannot pick up a fly rod and begin to cast right away, but they can, after a few flicks, begin to use a bait-casting or spinning rod. Having taught many people to fly fish over the years, I promise you that I can have you casting and catching fish on your first day or two. You may not cast very far, and you may not catch very many fish, but you will be fly fishing. After that, the rest is just practice.

This is the second edition of this book, and a lot of years have passed since the first. Fly rods are made out of better materials; reels are better; clothing and waders

have become more lightweight and breathable while remaining waterproof. New flies have emerged from the daydreams of a new generation of anglers. Tens of thousands of women have entered the traditional male domain of this sport. And the internet has made just about every question instantly answerable — though often with a few grams of salt.

But in spite of all the change, what has *not* changed are the fish, the insects and other bait they consume, and the fact that they live in rivers and streams, lakes and oceans. In our consumer society, products change often, as I am told they must if manufacturers are going to stay in business. But evolution moves at the same creeping pace that it always has, and — so long as the environment remains hospitable to fish and those of us who pursue them — the basics of fly fishing and all angling remain the same.

About This Book

Do you remember the kid in class who never did any more than he or she was told to do? The kid who tried to get by on a minimum of work and a maximum of relaxation? Well, that is my philosophy of fly fishing. If you are interested, there are thousands of flies to learn how to tie and hundreds of insects and bait fish to get familiar with. You could spend your whole life learning about these critters and very little time fishing. In this book, I promise you that I will simplify the number of flies you need to carry around, the number of casts you need to master, and the number of insects and other bait that you need to identify. You can, as I do, make it through your fly-fishing life in fresh and saltwater, for all kind of species, with 20 flies, a half-dozen casts, and three knots.

My goal in this book is to winnow through the gazillions of pages that have been written about fly fishing and boil them down to the stuff you *need* to know to begin fishing successfully. After that, you can spend the rest of your life learning everything else, or you can just keep fishing, which is a great teacher in itself. I strongly believe that after you get the basics down, the best education comes from spending time on the water.

Foolish Assumptions

There are three kinds of people who can use this book:

- » People who have never fly fished
- » People who have done some fly fishing
- » People who have fly fished a lot

For those of you who have never held a fly rod, you will find enough to get you started. You don't have to learn everything all at once. If you're already a fly rodder, you'll find plenty of tips and techniques that you can turn to right away without starting over at square 1. And you master anglers will, I hope, discover a few new and helpful things about where-to, when-to, and how-to fish more effectively. So, depending on where you fit on the scale of never fly fished, fly fished some, or fly fished a lot, you can skip those parts of this book that aren't important to you right now.

Icons Used in This Book



TIP

This icon flags information that will save you from making the same mistakes that took the rest of us years to unlearn.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Having the right fly, rod, hat, boots, and so on can make all the difference between striking gold and striking out. This icon flags the stuff you *really* need.



WARNING

From a hook in your finger to a dunking in the stream, text next to this icon will show you how to stay dry, comfortable, and, most of all, safe.



REMEMBER

With more and more people pressuring fewer and fewer fish, we all need to learn some basic rules of the road (what my mom called “common courtesy”).

Beyond the Book

This book comes with a free online Cheat Sheet that includes helpful reference material that you can peruse from your computer or mobile device.

To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and type “Fly Fishing For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

This book is a reference; you don't have to read it from cover to cover. I suggest that you poke around, and when you find a topic that interests, you go from there. I've peppered the chapters with cross-references to related topics in other chapters. If you want to read this book from front to back, it will do you no harm, but like I said, skipping around works too.

Part 1

The Basics

IN THIS PART ...

Get a refresher on the general concepts of angling.

Discover all the equipment you need for fly fishing: rods, reels, line, leaders, and more.

Chapter 1

What Every Fly Rodder Needs to Know

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Finding out what fish really want
 - » Discovering what information you need (and where you can find it)
 - » Getting a license (and why you need one)
-

If you're reading this book, you probably have some interest in catching fish. Perhaps you have never tried to catch one, or you may have caught many and would like to improve your skills. Either way, whether you're a newcomer or a veteran angler, the equation remains the same — catching a fish requires three things:

- » A fish
- » An angler
- » Some fishing gear

What Is a Fish?

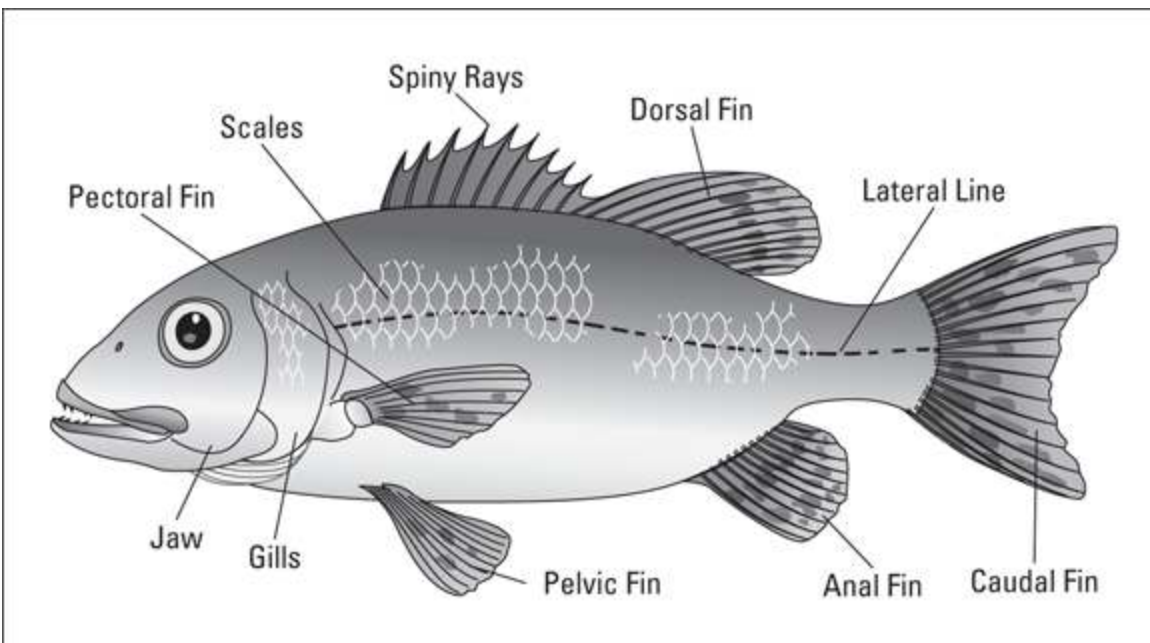
A *fish* is a cold-blooded animal that lives underwater, has fins, and breathes through gills. Some fish, such as eels, may not look as if they have fins, but they do. Other fish, such as manta rays, may look more like the design of a B-1 bomber, but they, too, live in the water, navigate with fins, and breathe through gills.

As far as the angler (that's you) is concerned, fish eat other fish, insects, and the occasional unlucky mammal, reptile, or other animal that finds itself in the water. Although some fish subsist on a diet of plants, *fishing* is the art of convincing a fish that the thing at the end of your line is an edible animal.

Whether you use a bait, a lure, or a fly, a fish usually strikes because it thinks that your offering is an easy meal. At other times, a fish, like any protective parent, may strike because it may think that your imitation animal is going to eat its babies — and no creature responds agreeably to that threat (although it needs to be pointed out that some fish will eat the young of their own kind).

How do I know it's a fish?

A biologist may need to know hundreds of parts of the anatomy of a fish. As an angler, you're only interested in a few of these parts (see [Figure 1-1](#)).



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FIGURE 1-1: Your average fish.

The torpedo shapes of most game fish allow them to move easily through tides and currents. The fins propel and guide their movements. Gills enable fish to breathe by extracting oxygen from the water. The lateral line is a special sensory organ that enables fish to detect vibrations in the water (like the kind of vibrations that are made when you clank an oar on the bottom of a rowboat or when you tramp along the rocks in the bottom of a stream).

What does a fish want out of life?

On most days, a fish has only two requirements:

- » Finding something to eat
- » Avoiding being eaten

In other words, food and shelter are at the top of the priority list of every fish. At certain times of the year, making babies also goes on the to-do list. But by and large, in looking at any fishing situation, you should ask yourself these two questions:

- » What will the fish be looking for in the way of food?
- » How will the fish avoid predators while it is looking for food?

Figuring out the food

Knowing what fish like to eat can tell you a great deal about what kind of fly to use to seduce a fish into biting down on your not-very-good-tasting hook. Often, when you see a fish feeding, a close look at the water can tell you what food is available. After you have figured that out, your job is to tie something on your line that looks like that food. If a fish is taking something big, such as herring or shrimp, guessing the right food isn't very hard. However, as any frustrated angler can tell you, four

or five kinds of food — little insects, bait fish, crawfish, worms, and the like — are often in the water at any given time. In these cases, some close observation is called for.

Be prepared to be stymied, because I often think fish have agreed on this unwritten rule: If there's a choice between large food and tiny food, eat something that is so small that it is just about invisible to the angler. Or at least, they have defiantly agreed to do that when I'm around.

Staying alive is important too

All other things being equal, a fish would spend all of its time in a safe place, where predators can't see it or reach it. But to get food, fish, like people, need to get out of the house and go shopping; and the time that a fish spends away from home is when the angler has an opportunity to catch the unwary fish. Although a fish in pursuit of a juicy meal may be a little less cautious than a fish lying under a rock, safety is always a prime concern; and no fish worth its fins *ever* chases food without having some kind of escape route close at hand. After you know what and where these escape routes are, you are well on the way to knowing where — and, more importantly, where not — to fish.

TWENTY THOUSAND YEARS OF FISHING

Although no one is sure exactly when people started to use fishing rods, we do know that Stone Age people used pieces of flint, bone, or wood to make fishing implements. Jumping ahead a few hundred centuries, the first real proof we have of people actually fishing with rods comes from drawings of the ancient Assyrians and Egyptians. Whether the Phishing Pharaohs used bait, lures, or flies is an open question.

Those ancient anglers used a wooden rod with a line attached to the end. It was very much like today's cane poles that many young anglers first use to fish for panfish at every lake and dock. We know that people were using

reels a thousand years ago because pictures of rods and reels appear in China shortly before Marco Polo visited there. And the art of fly fishing was already well advanced in England when, in the 15th century, the most famous fisherwoman of all time, Dame Juliana Berners (an English nun), wrote her *Treatise on Fishing With an Angle* during this time.

By the time that Izaak Walton wrote *The Compleat Angler* in the 17th century, knowledge about the fish that lived in the rivers of Europe was well advanced, but Walton never saw a rainbow trout, largemouth bass, bonefish, bluefish, or golden dorado. As fly fishing has grown around the world, more and more types of fish have expanded the possibilities of the sport.

A fish can use one of three ways to escape being caught:

- » **Hide in the dark.** Look for fish to hang out in or near shadows. Also, expect them to be feeding when the light is low (at dawn and dusk — and sometimes at night).
- » **Hide under something.** If food is around, expect to find fish under nearby rocks, fallen trees, and undercut banks.
- » **Get down.** If you are a bear or an eagle, chances are you are not going to go very deep to chase a fish. So, even on a bright sunny day with no tree limbs or rocks to crawl under, a fish may stay in plain view, but in deep water.

Fishing versus Angling

People catch fish by using all kinds of gear (from spear guns to nets to bare hands). An *angler* is someone who angles (an Old English word for *fishing*) with a rod. This book is about angling. [Figure 1-2](#) shows a *fly rod*der on the right, someone who angles with a fly rod.