

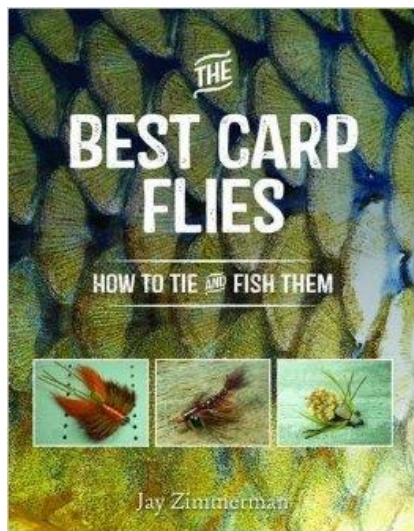
## On legends, carp flies and the pursuit of excellence

By Ian Cox



Matt Gorlei posted on Facebook a while ago of an afternoon he spent with “the Legend”. The Legend is of course Ed Herbst. We are very fortunate to have a number of living fly fishing legends in this country. Ed Herbst is one of them. So is his good friend Tom Sutcliffe. Another, albeit still under construction, is Gordon Van der Spuy. The wonderful thing about these legends is that they have not become legendary because of their undoubtedly superb talents. The truth is that the number of outstandingly talented members of our fly fishing community is far larger than the number of legends within this community.

Fly fishers become legendary because they give back.



I was reminded of this the other day when a book arrived on my doorstep, courtesy of Ed Herbst via that superb purveyor of fine fishing literature, Craig Thom of [Netbooks](#). I was as much touched by the gift as I was startled by the title –The best carp flies. Nonplussed I got on the blower to Ed who said that since I already had the other great modern book on fly design; he thought he would send me the other. His other great was Draw Chicone’s Feather Brain which is all about developing testing and improving saltwater fly patterns.

Though I do indeed have Feather Brain in my library and have waxed lyrical about it in the February 2014 issue of the Bobbin ([Fly tying for feather brains](#)), I had banked its big message and forgotten about the source.

Duly intrigued, I dived right into Best Carp Flies by Jay Zimmerman to see what Ed was talking about. And there it was. You see carp are dead smart and fishing for them is consequently pretty difficult. Presentation needs to be perfect and the flies must be just right. So right in fact that a jeweller’s scale is an essential part of any carp fly tyers tool box. (Those who know Ed or who have read his stuff will be beginning to join the dots.)

Zimmerman advises that the secret to catching carp is a good short term memory. By that he means you must be able to forget the number of times you don’t catch carp. Your ability to do that depends on reducing the number of blank days which he says means that you must concentrate on getting your carp flies to swim just right. That means knowing the mass of the ingredients that make up the fly and placing those ingredients scientifically to achieve the

best posture in the fly. Yup Carp fly recipes start with the mass of the ingredients. Have you, for example, ever bothered to weigh the hook you are using. Do you know that the largest bead chain eye weighs 10 times more than the smallest one or that you double the weight of animal fur when you tie it in as a zonker? Have you ever worried about the effect placing material or the length of material has on how it swims or how the fly trims?

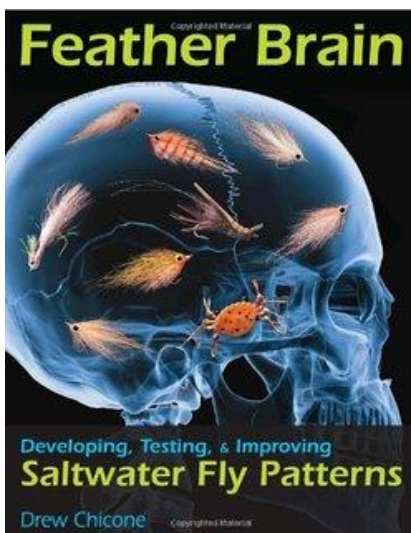
Probably a little bit but a little bit is not good enough if you want to avoid blanking when fishing for carp.



Apparently when you fly fish for Carp you need to worry about these things a lot. It is not good enough the fly looks right, it must also be of a size and shape that enables it to present right as well as swim right.

This is easier said than done. These priorities are not always compatible with one another, requiring the fly tyer to embark on an exact exercise of achieving the perfect balance through a process of intelligent compromise. Hence the jeweller's scale!

Also you must forget about production tying. We are dealing with the formula one end of the fly fishing scale. No two flies are the same even though they may have been tied minutes apart. Each fly must be individually tested to see if it does indeed swim right.



So why is this like Feather Brain? Again you can see Ed's passion for thoughtful precision at play here. Best Carp Flies is a thoughtful book and so is Feather Brain. This is what I wrote about Feather Brain last year.

*You see Drew does not get hung up on the little things like triggers. His approach to choosing flies and thus tying them is all logic.*

- *first it helps if you know what you are fishing for;*
- *second you should know what your quarry is eating;*
- *third you should know where the fish are feeding; and*
- *fourth it helps if your fly is swimming right.*

Do you begin to see the similarity?

Imagine how much better our fishing and fly tying would be if we applied this level of thoughtfulness to what we do? The competition fly fishers are doing so and it is paying dividends.

It is not surprising that Matt who was a member of the junior national team who came third at the world chaps last year would spend an afternoon with Ed. It should also be no surprise that our junior team fly fishing team is one of the best in the world following up its third place last year with a fourth place in the world championships that has just taken place.

You see the wonderful thing about legends is that they make all of us better at what we do.