



WISDOM OF THE CAST

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFF CURRIER

By Bill Forward

Many fly fishers would say that Jeff Currier lives the fly fisherman's dream. Jeff has caught over 275 species of fish on the fly, traveling to more than forty countries on six continents to do so. To suggest that he is one of the foremost authorities on exotic fly fishing would be an understatement. Fly fishing the world has its downside, as he was busily packing for Madagascar when I roped him into doing this interview. Nevertheless, I could think of none better to ask about carp fishing than someone who has a zeal for it and can contrast it with so many other fishing experiences. Also worthy of note, is that Jeff Currier is an extremely accomplished watercolorist who's work expresses an unmistakable passion and respect for nature. Enjoy!

Q. What's the attraction of carp? What gets a world-class fly angler such as you so excited about hooking and landing a fish that many of the "unenlightened" consider an ugly, bottom feeding creature that, given an opportunity, its own mother would probably eat out of humiliation?

Carp are natives to Asia and Europe, where there are a variety of species. They have since made their way around the globe carried by settlers for food. Here in the US the most prevalent and widespread carp is the Common Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), which is so widespread that it is found in 48 of our 50 states.

The first time I caught a carp on a fly I was "blind fishing" a double bunny fly for striped bass in New Mexico. We were catching stripers on 10-weights up to 20 lbs! When I hooked this carp, I thought I had a striper bigger than 20 lbs. It fought much harder. Then to my amazement, there was my first Common Carp of only about 12 lbs with a double bunny hanging from his mouth. I couldn't believe it! It fought harder than a 20 lb striper!

That was just the beginning. I soon found out how lucky I was to hook and land that carp. It was a total

accident. Carp are actually very difficult to entice into eating your fly and that's the main thing I love about them – the challenge. I've learned to love the challenge in getting them to eat. I also like the fact that carping is mostly sight fishing. Sight fishing offers a thrill more similar to hunting and I enjoy seeing them cruising, mudding or best of all tailing.

Q. I have seen you pictured with a Mirror Carp. How does a Mirror Carp compare to the Common Carp?

The Mirror Carp is a mutation of the Common Carp and is so different in appearance that one might incorrectly assume that it is a separate species. It is actually descended from Common Carp bred by monks back in the 12th century to have few or no scales, making them easier to prepare for eating (Although we've tried, my friends and I haven't had much success making them edible!). The Mirror Carp's shape is similar to that of the Common Carp, but its scales are fewer and significantly larger. Usually, the scales are arranged in linear fashion, with two rows on top of the back, one down the lateral line of each side, and a row along the belly, all separated by golden brown skin. Some mirrors, however, have completely haphazard scale designs, and others are fully scaled. No matter how many mirrors you catch, no two will be the same, but all will be beautiful.

Q. Most fly fishers assume that carp are merely scavengers, the Kirby vacuums of the fish world. Provide a little insight into carp feeding behavior.

I prefer to fish for carp in the shallows at midday when the sun is shining so I can see them. They too are most active as this is generally the warmest time of the day. Carp are opportunists and eat anything. They are



A Common Carp



The Fight

often seen inhaling various floating seeds and berries as well as sipping the scum off the surface of a lake. Opposite the surface, they feed nose down into a muddy bottom picking through and eating various aquatic plants. But they will take advantage of more than just plant life. They often stumble upon and devour nymphs, snails, minnows and I can assure you, carp love to eat crayfish.

Q. Regarding technique and behavior, how is sight fishing carp similar to sight fishing bonefish?

Carp are often seen feeding amongst muddy areas that they created. Their feeding habits of picking stuff out of the bottom and digging out roots of aquatic plants causes puffs of mud. Then the mud works to their advantage as it disorientates their prey. If you have ever fly fished for redfish or bonefish on a flat, you'll notice the carp's feeding habit is very similar.

When fishing for carp be prepared for an aggressive grab on the first strip. Hold your rod tip low and get tight to the fly. Then, rather than raise the rod to set the hook – strip set. Therefore, if you miss the carp your fly will remain in the zone and

give you another chance for either the same carp or another that was also following your fly.

Carp pull with the best of them. Although they don't jump they can easily scream off all your line and take you into the backing. Then be ready for a tug of war for several minutes. Their strength is usually much stronger in comparison to a trout or other species the same size.

Q. Regarding that pull, as steel-heads are known as "a fish of a thousand casts," from my reading, carp could be characterized as "a fish of a thousand rods" because so many novice carp anglers break rods in the process of bringing their catch to hand. What does the average trout fisherman have to be aware of while landing a carp?

After a long battle and your carp seems ready for landing, beware. Although a carp may appear beaten as you begin to either net them or beach them, they often make one last surge. Be ready for this. Don't lay your rod down too soon and don't reel the fly line into the rod. Often times anglers reel in too far, allowing a powerful carp to snap a rod if the nail knot hangs up on a guide.

Q. I have read that a carp's sensitivity to sound and vibration is so keen it can tell what brand of wading boot you were wearing from hearing you walk from the car to the lake or streamside. How does knowing this affect the way you approach this prey, and is there



Landing a Carp

any way that this 'sensitivity to vibration' can be turned into an advantage to the fly fisher.

Carp are incredibly spooky. They often see you long before you see them giving you no chance to catch them at all. On top of their keen eyesight, their vibration sensing lateral line can pick up your footsteps long before you even get to the water's edge. I always walk softly and slowly when hunting for feeding carp.

Q. Before we get into specific carp flies and setups, let's say a reader is so inspired by my questioning and your answers that he is going to go carp fishing at first light tomorrow. What tackle and flies do most fly anglers have in their possession that they can grab and use immediately?

The great news about fly fishing for carp is that most of us already have the gear. I use a 5 or 6-weight rod with a floating line. When I first started I fished heavier rods because of the immense size of the average carp, however, heavier fly lines and rods didn't allow me the finesse often required to present a fly delicately to a spooky carp. The lighter rods did. And when it comes to flies, remember, carp are opportunists. Almost every fly in your box offers you a chance. But we all have a few nymphs and the ever common Hare's Ear. The Hare's Ear nymph in a size 14 works under most conditions.

Q. Share and explain your optimum rod, reel, line and leader selections and variations for targeting carp.

It doesn't matter where you fly fish for carp, moving water or stillwater, the best all-around rod is 9-foot 6-weight. As long as you have about 50 yards of 20-pound backing and some basic fish-fighting skills, you can horse-in carp up to 20 pounds in a relatively short time. Carp generally feed in the shallows, so a floating line and a 9-foot, 2X leader are all you'll need. If you see carp feeding on dry flies, dropping down to 3X may result in more takes.



A Mirror Carp

Q. You are standing relatively motionless on a bank when you make out a school of four to five carp, 15 feet away, cruising the shoreline slowly, and coming toward you. What do you do?

That's about the distance that carp spot you and run for dear life. If I see them that close, I hit the deck and get ready to cast from my belly. React fast though, if they are coming towards you get that fly in the water quickly. This may be your only chance.

Q. What are your favorite, got-to-have, go-to carp flies? Share a typical setup.

I start my day with a red nymph in about a size 14. The red Copper John works superb. On rare occasions when the water is clear I like a size 14 Rubber Leg Hare's Ear nymph. When you know where carp are holding but can't quite sight fish to them, try a Woolly Bugger (no bead) and strip it slowly. I like the color rust best. Carp love eating crayfish and a Clouser makes a good crayfish but lands on the water with such a splat it often scares the daylights out of the carp. My latest favorite is a tan Crazy Charlie in size 8.

On the right day, carp will take a dry fly. Usually this is obvious as they can be seen slurping on the surface. Observe the situation. Sometimes you will see seeds or berries. Do your best to imitate them. If you can't see anything I go with Chernobyl Ants, hoppers, crickets, ants and even a Parachute Adams. There will be times when they simply feed around your fly, but won't eat it. Likely they are so focused on the algae and surface scum they aren't likely to change their minds. The last hope is a midge pupae fished on the surface film.

Q. Carp are ubiquitous, through the years, I've seen books, magazine articles like this, television programs, YouTube clips, and podcasts on fly fishing for carp. Why isn't fishing for carp more popular in the U.S.?

The majority of US fly fishers continue to fly fish for trout only. Many are badly informed and don't realize you can fish for more than just trout while others are just plain stubborn. Well, if those folks prefer crowded opening days and if life is interesting enough with several species of trout that rarely top 20" that's great. More fish for me! I'll continue to pursue anything that swims. I'll enjoy the gentle take of a cutthroat three miles from my house but the next day I may drive the two hours to an Idaho reservoir to fish by myself and tackle the challenges that the spooky carp offer from the hunt to the hook up and the amazing bend they put in my rod.

Aside from the fact that carp are an extremely underrated target species here in the States, and aside from the fact that I thought they were incredibly worthy of your consideration, I had a very selfish reason for doing this interview. There are a number of large carp in the

Middle Fork of the Feather River, a quarter of a mile from my home that I have had limited inspiration and success in pursuing, and I believed that interviewing Jeff Carrier would give me the prod that I needed. Without question, it has, as I hope it has influenced you similarly.

Q. Jeff, your passion for Mirror Carp is as evident as your photos are intriguing. How does one go about stalking and fly fishing for one of these creatures?

Bill, that question may best be answered by quoting from an article that I wrote for American Angler Magazine, and it will also give your readers a few ideas about fishing for carp in general.

"Among the carps, the mirror carp is the easiest to catch, but be aware that all carp are spooky. They are alerted as easily as any trout. Luckily, mirror carp seem less spooky than most other species. Despite this relative obliviousness, mirrors exposed to consistent angler pressure can frustrate even the best carp fly fishers.

When you start fishing for mirrors, focus on an individual fish. Look for cruising mirrors, protruding tails, or a muddy area created by feeding fish. Don't bother casting to free-jumpers. There are many theories as to why they jump, but it is certain that they are not feeding on the top. Mirrors do at times feed on the surface, but they sip their food gently like a trout eating a beetle on a spring creek.

Cruising mirror carp, the most difficult to catch, like to move about in pairs. Sometimes they travel quickly and seldom stop to eat a fly. Other times they push themselves along for a couple of feet, stop to detect any food on the bottom, and then repeat the process. Although their barbells are doing the detective work, mirrors have respectable eyesight and are always looking a foot or so ahead for any fleeing prey.

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That is where you present your fly. Drop your cast about two feet in front of the lead fish. This allows the fly to get down near the bottom. When the mirror gets within about six inches, give the fly a short strip. If the fish makes a sharp turn away from where the fly landed, gently pick up the cast and try again.

Mirror carp feed most heavily along the bottom. They usually have their noses down searching for plant life, aquatic insects, crayfish, or minnows. As they root around, they kick up debris from the bottom. This debris often forms a cloudy or muddy spot in otherwise clear water called a "mud". Watch the mud to determine which direction the feeding mirrors are traveling. Place your first cast slightly ahead of the mud. Then gradually move your casts closer to the mud until you finally drop your fly in the center of the mud. Let the fly settle, and start slowly stripping.



Spring Common and Mirror Carp

A tailing mirror, with its nose on the bottom, is engrossed in feeding and has let its guard down. This is one of the best opportunities to get a hookup. Despite this advantage you must make a good cast. Try to drop the fly three inches in front of the fish. To the fish, your fly will look like disoriented prey trying to get back to bottom to hide after being stirred up. Hold your rod tip low and get tight to the fly. Be prepared for an aggressive grab on the first strip."

Jeff leads an extraordinary life that he well documents in his blog found at <http://flyfishingbum.blogspot.com>

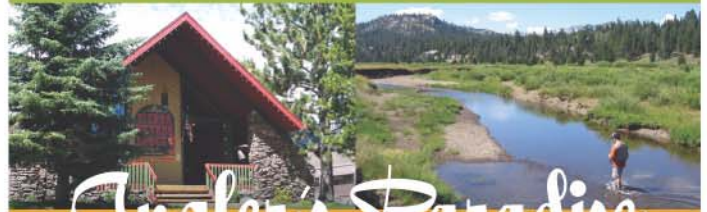
Also, be sure to investigate his website at <http://www.jeffcurrier.com>

Spend some time exploring. These sites are well organized and have lots of practical information for the fly angler. Pay particular attention to his artwork. You will be very impressed.

Jeff, thank you for taking the time to do the interview and continue fishing the world. For us vicarious adventurers, You're the Man!



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