

# LOOKING BACK

FLY FISHING IS EVOLVING FAST, BUT ITS HEART REMAINS IN TRADITION, LEARNING, AND A DEEP CONNECTION TO NATURE AND EACH OTHER.

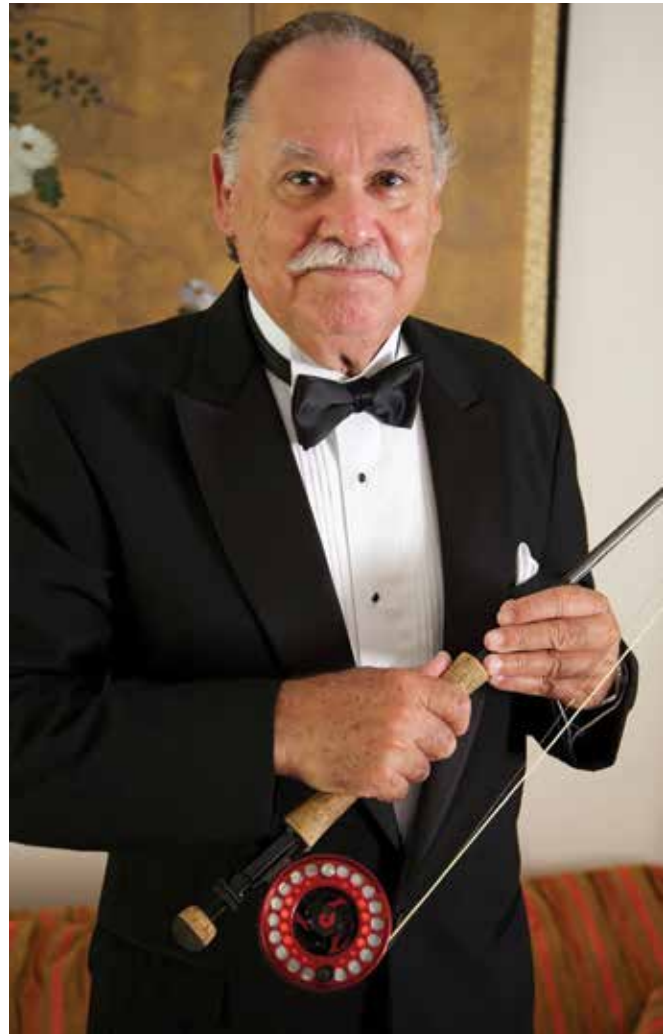
**STORY BY THOMPSON SMITH**



A fly fisherman wearing a cap, sunglasses, and a backpack is standing in a river, casting a fly. The river is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The water is a mix of green and brown, with many small white specks on the surface.

# TO SEE FORWARD TRENDS IN FLY FISHING

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**CHICO FERNANDEZ HIGHLIGHTED HOW TODAY'S LIGHTER, STRONGER REELS AND SMALLER FLIES IMPROVE PERFORMANCE, REDUCE FISH STRESS, AND REFLECT A GROWING FOCUS ON CONSERVATION IN FLY FISHING.**

Fly fishing has always balanced tradition with innovation. Today, we're seeing breakthroughs in design, materials, and techniques that are reshaping the sport in real time. So, to better understand how these advances change how we fish, I reached out to five legends of our sport and asked them how they see today's transformations and the impact they are having on both seasoned anglers and newcomers alike.

As anglers, we are naturally drawn to our history and understanding of how our pioneers have innovated the sport we love. Every one of us has a story about our grandfather, father, mother, or uncle who showed us a new knot or a unique way to cast, the best time to be on the water, how to understand weather patterns, or the best way to present your fly. To almost all of us, that knowledge is invaluable and forms the foundation of how we approach each day on the water.

However, the sport doesn't stand still. Changes are happening in fly fishing today, and they are shaping the way we fish—and think about fishing—going forward.

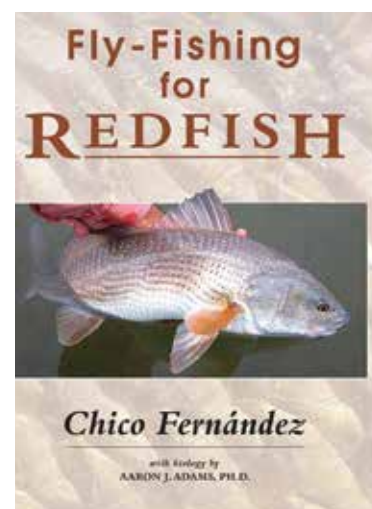
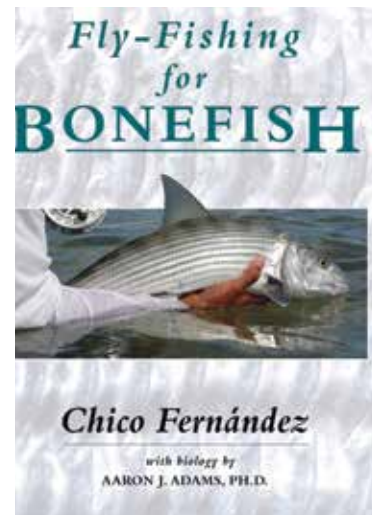
#### **CHICO FERNANDEZ**

My conversation with IGFA Fishing Hall of Famer, Chico Fernandez, started as many do, with talking about mutual friends and times spent on the water. In this case, a quick story about a recent tarpon trip he made evolved into a discussion about what equipment he is currently using and what changes he has made recently.

I was impressed with his insights and comparisons of his favorite reels from the past, from the heavy Seamasters and Hardys to the reels of today that are a quarter of the weight; things have changed a lot. But there were two variables that he kept coming back to that stuck with me—lighter, large arbor reels and heavier drag strengths.

Chico detailed what he thinks the advantages are of these lighter reels with larger arbors. Ceramics and titanium are replacing stainless steel, making today's reels almost impervious to the elements while decreasing weight. Chico told me that he also appreciates the lighter reels not being as strenuous to use, which allows him to fish longer days.





That led our conversation directly into the advantage of the increased drag strength of the new reels and how much that affects fighting times. “You can pull much harder with 16 and 20-pound tippet than you could in the past, which allows you to shorten the fight. I also like to use an eight-foot, eight inch fly rod with backbone when fishing for big snook and redfish, and the heavier drags help to muscle fish out from the cover and snags as well as reduce the fight time when water temperatures are high.” Chico is a self-proclaimed brackish water guy, and targeting big snook over 20 pounds is on the top of his list.

One other thing I will mention about my conversation with Chico is that he is all in with throwing smaller flies. On a recent trip, he was throwing a minuscule two-inch cockroach pattern for giant tarpon.

As our conversation started to wind down, Chico reiterated that he now enjoys the shorter fights with these new lighter reels with stronger drags and that he is all about taking care of the fish and our responsibilities to the conservation of our fishery.

#### DREW CHICONE

I caught up with master fly tier, Drew Chicone, just after he had returned from a trip to The Bahamas where he had followed up his first IGFA World Record catches – gag grouper and mutton snapper on fly.

“I never thought it would be important to me to catch a world record, but once I got my first one, well, it was really exciting,” said Chicone, as he opened up to me about the experience and how it had given him an unfamiliar perspective on the achievement.

On the trip, he had also been working on something that could be a game-changer for all of us that had me on the edge of my seat.

“We had heard about catching permit on topwater flies down in Mexico, so we decided to scale down some of these topwater permit flies to see if we could target bones,” said Chicone. Drew had been working on some crab patterns with Umpqua for permit, his Contraband Crab, and after some adjustments, he would eventually add a foam gurgler-style lip to the design. This led to the development



**“It is a whole new perspective for fishing bonefish. It is just fun. We were wrong the whole time!”**

**FRESH OFF HIS FIRST IGFA WORLD RECORDS, DREW CHICONE REVEALED A GAME-CHANGING TOPWATER FLY FOR BONEFISH—CHALLENGING OLD ASSUMPTIONS AND SHOWING HIS PASSION FOR INNOVATION, TEACHING, AND SHARING THE THRILL OF FLY FISHING.**

of a smaller topwater version that he felt was right on the money.

“It (the new design) comes down like a whisper,” said Chicone. “Just pop it a couple of times and BAM!” We whacked a couple of bones with the smaller flies...I’ve got pictures if you want to see them!”

The excitement in his voice was infectious, and I pushed him for more. “One of the coolest bites, they roll up on the fly, like redfish!”

They were fishing shallow from paddleboards on the edge of a small channel no more than a foot and a half deep, right under the edge of some mangroves. In about six to eight inches of water, they found the sweet spot. Having to use modified push poles instead of paddles for the boards made for some stealthy stalking.

Chicone described it as “close-quarters warfare” involving ducking mangrove branches and being just six feet away from the fish.

This experience really got Drew thinking about the potential of this approach. “It is a whole new perspective for fishing bonefish. It is just fun. We were wrong the whole time!”

He was talking about what we consider typical feeding patterns of bonefish and the potential of what is out there for other species we would normally consider bottom feeders. He challenged me (well,

all of us) to think about this innovative approach and the opportunities it presents.

My head was spinning, as I am guessing yours is right now. I live on the Chesapeake Bay and fish the Lynnhaven River...skinny water flounder on topwater flies? Ha! I would never have thought of bonefish before either.

Sharing information is how Drew has based his career, and he was happy to share this experience with us, and for that, we should be grateful. He wants to make sure we can use his designs to catch fish and loves sharing those designs. Look out for the “Chicone’s Thin Space Crab,” coming out soon.

“I would much rather be a professor than a pro. That is what moves the needle for me,” says Chicone.” Well said, Drew.

#### **COLBY TROW**

“Euro nymphing or tight line fishing is not a new trend, but the innovations happening within it are. These innovations give anglers the ability to catch more fish.”

This is the insight that Colby Trow shared with me when I asked him about what is happening now on the streams, rivers, and creeks in the Shenandoah Valley. Colby is a well-known fly angler and co-owner of Mossy Creek Fly Fishing, a promi-



nent fly shop and guide service based in Virginia. He's heavily involved in promoting fly fishing in the Mid-Atlantic region and is recognized for his expertise in targeting trout, smallmouth bass, and other freshwater species. Colby is also active in conservation work and has appeared in various fly fishing media, including films, podcasts, and magazine features.

He shared that the Euro nymphing technique has staying power and continues to grow in popularity with anglers from all over.

The process of euro nymphing involves keeping a tight connection with your fly throughout a drift to make it highly effective. It is a technique that uses a tight line, weighted flies, and a long leader with a colored sighter to detect subtle strikes without a traditional indicator. It's ideal for precise, close-range fishing in fast or clear water where drift control and sensitivity are crucial.

"Euro nymphing has earned a certain reputation over the years in the industry, but really, it's intuitive fishing." Tools and tactics being developed are making the technique more effective and more efficient," said Trow.

The one thing that Colby kept repeating was how effective the technique is, and has been, over the years but keeps gaining in popularity because of the consistent changes that keep improving this "simple" way to fish for a wide variety of species.

Colby is well-versed in this simple yet very technical way to fish, and honestly, I was a little over-

whelmed with the amount of knowledge he shared with me in a brief time.

Super light, round indicators, colored lines, waxes, tippet rings, getting flies deeper in the water column, reels that have weighted systems to balance the rod – it just kept going. I will be looking into one of the Euro nymphing classes offered at Mossy Creek!

"Rods have been tweaked to be more balanced while they're drifting the fly along," said Trow.

The trend for rods leans towards longer 10 to 10.5 and even 11-foot 3wt rods that are very versatile.

He continued, "We are a sport of essential gadgets; look how many things we have on our vests! This is another tool for your toolbox that gives you another approach to be effective on different types of waters. It is one tool on your belt that is not going away."

Colby has used so many techniques for so many different species of fish over his career, so having him share his insights about this in-demand topic that he gets asked about all the time at his shop was invaluable!

To validate that, he told me a story about a guy who was very interested in learning about Euro nymphing and came by the shop to find out more.

"This gentleman came to the shop and said he was interested in Euro nymphing. He said he knew some things about it being a great

**EURO NYMPHING IS A TIME-TESTED, INTUITIVE TECHNIQUE THAT'S GAINING POPULARITY THANKS TO CONSTANT INNOVATIONS THAT MAKE IT EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ANGLERS OF ALL LEVELS.**



JIM KLUG PHOTOGRAPHY / YELLOW DOG FLYFISHING



**JEFF CURRIER, A GLOBE-TROTTING FLY ANGLER, ARTIST, AND CONSERVATIONIST, IS FAST APPROACHING HIS 500TH SPECIES CAUGHT ON FLY—RECENTLY ADDING THE ORANGE-SIDED TRIGGERFISH AND SPOTTED ROSE SNAPPER IN COLOMBIA, ALL WHILE CONTINUING TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO CHASE NEW SPECIES BOTH IN FAR-OFF RIVERS AND RIGHT IN THEIR OWN BACKYARDS.**

way to fish but wanted to know more. We talked for a while as I showed him around the shop and told him how a lot of our clients were utilizing the technique and the success they were having. He decided to get set up.”

Colby has made sure that the shop is up to date on everything we need to hone our Euro nymphing skills.

“He came back a few days later and said he had fished Mossy Creek in the areas we talked about and that he had caught a lot of fish. He also told me that he will be using his new setup exclusively when the conditions allow.”

If you have been Euro nymphing or are thinking about a situation you may have been in on your favorite stretch of water, where you intuitively “tight lined” a section, check into all the new trends for this tried-and-true technique to improve your chances of turning a good day on the water to a great one!

#### **JEFF CURRIER**

There are a lot of you out there who know about Jeff Currier ([jeffcurrier.com](http://jeffcurrier.com)). He is a unique individual with a Zen-like calm demeanor and is a self-described international angling nomad. He is a globally respected fly angler, artist, and educator who has caught over 450 species on fly in more than 60 countries. Known for his adventurous spirit and detailed fish illustrations, he’s a popular

speaker and advocate for conservation in the fly fishing community. When I called, he was listening to a baseball game on the radio. A rare practice these days, which recalls a time-honored tradition that has been passed down like fishing stories from the past.

Jeff recently went to Bhutan chasing the chocolate and golden mahseer. These fish are found in the Himalayan region and are vital to the ecological health of river systems and, more importantly, the cultural heritage of South Asia.

“The golden mahseer and the chocolate mahseer are migratory fish living in one of the most remote places in the world and are under a lot of environmental pressure. We need to spread the word and shed some light on the importance of this great fish and preserving the fish and the entire region,” said Currier.

Threats to its habitat and overfishing are issues that Jeff has worked on with organizations like the World Wildlife Fund.

Jeff has built his life around pushing the boundaries of traditional fishing, and he’s seeing more anglers embrace the same adventurous spirit. In his talks, he often highlights the deeply rewarding and therapeutic aspects of exploring new fishing experiences.

We talked at length about his time in Bhutan and what it has meant to him and the importance of bringing attention to this unique fishery.



Jeff spoke about a new trend in fishing, traveling to fish for varied species, not just trout, tarpon, and musky. It was not that long ago that fishing in the Amazon for peacock bass was considered an expedition adventure trip, and now we have tremendous resources there.

"There is a trend for younger anglers to travel to more distant locations, and they are not afraid to spend the money to go there. I am glad people are getting to see the Amazon and fish for peacock bass. Look at the positive impact fishing has made there."

A simple but profound observation Jeff shared with me.

But it is not only long adventure trips that allow us to search for new fishing opportunities; we also just need to open our eyes a little bit more to the possibilities that surround us.

"Trout will always be fifty percent of all fish being fly fished for, but there are only so many trophy streams, and they are crowded. I encourage people not to drive four hours to fish but to look within ten miles of your home, and you will find new species to fish for." Jeff went on to talk about all the opportunities that we have in our backyards.

"Walk down to a city pond or your local canal, and you will find something new, which is pretty fun! How many people have caught a bluegill on fly?" Encouraging people to open their minds to the near and far possibilities is part of his regular speaking engagements. Jeff is encouraging fishing near your home if adventures to Bhutan and other remote areas of the world are not your thing. "If there is a weird fish in their local pond, they should fish for it!"

Trying to catch as many varied species on fly as he can is a big part of Jeff's DNA. On a recent trip to Colombia, Jeff managed to add two more to his list, the orange-sided triggerfish and the spotted rose snapper. He has 459 species and counting!

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LANDON MAYER FLY FISHING



#### LANDON MAYER

Weather is a driving factor in our world of fly fishing. For fishing guides, it is knowing the day-to-day, hour-to-hour conditions that keep their clients safe and on fish. Conditions in north central Colorado can be downright maddening. Rising river flows and flooding tributaries keep guides busy with scheduling and rescheduling.

Due to the weather and after a week of trying, Landon Mayer and I finally connected to talk about one of his favorite things that is greatly affected by river flows: sight fishing. Mayer is a renowned Colorado-based fly fishing guide, author, and educator known for his expertise in catching trophy trout on technical waters. He's a frequent speaker at fly fishing events and has written several popular books and articles on advanced trout tactics and sight fishing.

An ever-evolving skill in fly fishing for trout is refining an angler's ability to see fish or sight fish, and Landon has made that a primary focus for his clients. "Most of the guided trips I do are designed to get the client to see more fish, which allows them to catch more. There is a lot of pressure in traditional runs, so to be able to read the water between the runs is where you can be incredibly effective." Landon concentrates on these areas to maximize opportunities.

"The biggest thing you can do is focus on the objects or silhouettes of the fish, which allows you to locate more fish. Resident fish have more color in their tails, and migratory fish have darker tails", said Landon. Easy for a renowned and highly skilled guide to see but difficult for the

average angler. I asked Landon if being able to see these subtleties was easier in slow-moving water and pools. "Pools, riffles, the edges of undercut banks, it is important to be able to see the fish wherever they are. Reading the water and being able to dissect it is key. Seeing the triangular shape of a tail allows you to differentiate the fish from the bottom."

Recently, Landon had the privilege of taking his daughter, Madelyn Mayer, along with his "Earth-loving partner", Cat Loos, to Puerto Maldonado, Peru. Madelyn was embarking on her journey of primate studies at the Los Amigos Research Center. There, she would spend five weeks learning about Tamarin monkeys as a foundation for future studies.

Landon was hoping to put the same sight fishing skills he uses at home to the test in the Andes lakes for rainbows. His goal was to sight fish, find green buckets, and use a dropper rig with his tried-and-true mini leech jig and a dry fly to target cruising trout.

IGFA Rules for Fly Fishing allow the use of dropper rigs only for Salmonid species and must meet the following configurations:

Dropper rigs are permitted only for Salmonid species and must consist of no more than two flies fished in tandem—surface, subsurface, or a combination—with the connecting material equal to or less than the breaking strength of the class tippet, and all catches categorized by the class tippet preceding the lead fly, regardless of which fly the fish is caught on.

RENOWNED GUIDE  
AND AUTHOR,  
LANDON MAYER,  
HIGHLIGHTS THE  
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AND OFF.

"In Peru, looking for vegetation, cover, and oxygen-rich areas, beyond the visual of the surface, is where you will see trout." Landon went on.

"This type of sighting is more about reading the water instead of the fish itself and the placement of the flies to trigger a strike. If you see a flash below the dry fly, it is a fish; that is the sight fishing aspect," said Mayer.

While on the river, the girls quickly adapted to the techniques that Landon showed them, and throughout the trip, Landon was tickled whenever the girls would see the flash of a fish and the girls would react.

"Booking a trip in a far-off country with family, seeking out another guide you've wanted to fish with, and sharing tips from angler to angler, are all a part of us always remaining students of the game." Landon's voice took on a calm, quiet turn as he explained this to me. "Many teachings stem from other anglers, and that gives us a broader perspective."

I paused for a moment as I came back to my original thoughts for this project. Listening and learning from the conversations I had with these wonderful individuals is how lessons are passed on.

Landon had one last thing to leave me with, "The fish you land teach you something and the fish you lose teach you everything."

I agree with Landon, but I must say the conversations you have with the people that you look up to and the ones you are close to teach you an awful lot as well.

Fly fishing continues to evolve in extraordinary ways—through technology, technique, and the tireless curiosity of those who push the boundaries of what's possible. But what remains constant is the deep connection we share with each other, with nature, and with the history that shaped us. The insights from Chico, Drew, Colby, Jeff, and Landon show that while we move forward, we carry the lessons of the past with us. Whether you're chasing world records, refining your drift, or simply exploring the waters near home, fly fishing remains a journey of learning, appreciation, and growth. In this sport, the stories, like the fish, are what keep us coming back.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Thompson Smith is a Virginia Beach-based copywriter, storyteller, and published author of *Catch a FLORIDA KEYS Grand Slam*. A lifelong waterman, he's spent decades exploring the world—researching fishing traditions, conservation efforts, and coastal culture for his writing. His work blends lived experiences with a deep respect for the sport, and he now focuses on helping organizations connect with anglers through compelling, conservation-minded storytelling.

**LANDON MAYER IS THE AUTHOR OF 101 TROUT TIPS, SIGHT FISHING FOR TROUT, AND THE HUNT FOR GIANT TROUT—BOOKS PACKED WITH EXPERT ADVICE ON SPOTTING, PRESENTING TO, AND LANDING TROPHY TROUT.**

LANDON MAYER FLY FISHING

