

East Koy Creek

By Kyle Glenn

Originating in the heart of Wyoming County from the outflow of numerous springs, East Koy Creek offers a diverse array of fishing experiences. As you move upstream in the watershed from Lamont to Gainesville to Hermitage, you will notice the landscape change from open banks and rolling agricultural fields to thick, alder-cloaked sections surrounded by scenic and extensive wetlands.

Normally, this diverse valley-bottom landscape would lend itself to nurturing a strong spring-



Mergansers eat many of the trout stocked in our streams.

water-driven wild trout fishery. However, one or more environmental factors are preventing the wild trout fishery in this stream from reaching its full potential. Potential limiting factors include excessive withdrawals of water for agricultural purposes, declining aquatic insect populations, and predation by piscivores such as mergansers, osprey, minks, and otters. Especially destructive are fast-swimming diving ducks such as Common mergansers. These fish-eating species are suspected of consuming many of the brown trout stocked in New York streams, including East Koy Creek. Once uncommon in our region, their numbers have increased dramatically in recent decades.

The East Koy is utilized mostly as a put-and-take stocked trout fishery. Each spring, the stream receives multiple rounds of brown trout stockings totaling 12,240 yearling and adult fish. In the spring, this bounty draws hundreds of anglers out to try their hand at catching what can often be finicky stocked trout. And with 13 miles of public fishing right easements (PFRs) along the stream, every angler with a New York State license can get into the sport of trout fishing and enjoy a nice meal of the day's catch. For those willing to venture down some of the angler foot paths, good fishing and solitude can be had along with the opportunity to cross paths with wild brown trout and, occasionally, wild brook trout.

Over the years, I've learned much about the nature of this stream and its inhabitants while wandering along its banks. While flipping over rocks, I've found a rich mix of aquatic macroinvertebrates scurrying around the surface of the rocks looking for cover. Common finds are mayflies (*Ephemeroptera*), stoneflies (*Plecoptera*), and caddisflies (*Trichoptera*). These three orders of insects make up a majority of the hatches that occur along the East Koy and other regional streams.

Starting in 2024, the Western New York Chapter of Trout Unlimited began 10-year pilot study during which they will monitor East Koy Creek, Wiscoy Creek, and Oatka Creek to quantify the abundance of the associated aquatic insect communities. The results of this study may help to answer the question plaguing many of our western New York trout streams: "Where did the hatches go?" Historically, East Koy Creek experienced substantial insect hatches, which have since dwindled precipitously, making it a prime stream to include in this Trout Unlimited study.

Unique East Koy Fly Patterns Through the Seasons

Across the Northeast there has been a decrease in insect activity over the last 10 years. Among angler groups, the general consensus is that fewer hatches with actively rising fish are being observed. Although many nymphal-stage insects are found under rocks, few are seen being preyed upon by trout; the reason for this is unclear. Due to the significant decline in the abundance of

hatches, I have devised some new strategies to get fish to eat when the only other option is standard nymphing or blind casting dry flies.

Macroinvertebrates that are less well known to many anglers make up a majority of the fly-inspired patterns I use on East Koy Creek. These patterns include crawfish, worms, crane fly larvae, and grasshoppers. In terms of fish-catching potential, the crawfish remains the number one choice for both me and the fish. From mid-summer to early winter, crawfish remain active on the stream bottom and provide an easy meal for trout. Trout, both stocked and wild, are known to look up for potential food sources. But during periods of limited drifting food, trout will also scour the bottom of the stream, nosing over rocks and sifting through leaf piles to pick out food in a feeding mode similar to that used by common carp. Dragging heavily weighted brown streamer patterns downstream through slower holes perfectly mimics a crawfish and entices the trout to grab the easy bottom meal.



Jigged Crawfish

During cold winter and early spring days, East Koy trout won't move far to chase an offering. Often seen as cheating, a heavily weighted rubber worm fly will almost always outfish any other pattern tied on that day. Two theories I have for the success of this pattern come down to availability and presentation. Because the watershed of East Koy Creek has a high level of agricultural activity, there tends to be ample runoff after the ground defrosts on a warm winter day. Paired with a light winter rain, the flows from many of the tiny tributaries entering East Koy, many of which are simply runoff ditches, are likely to contain earthworms from the surrounding fields. Fishing below the mouths of these tributaries at mid-day often provides some



Weighted Squirmy Worm

of the best action on an otherwise slow winter day. However, you can also have successful days fishing a worm fly on low, clear days. Unknown to many anglers, our streams also have many species of completely aquatic worms that remain in the system throughout the year. These aquatic worms are smaller and lighter in color compared to red worms and nightcrawlers. Usually residing in organic debris such as the silt and submerged woody debris found along the margins of streams, these worms often get dislodged, and when they enter the water column they become vulnerable to predation. Patterns that work well are rubber squirmy wormies, and pink chenille San Juan worms, both heavily weighted. Presenting these worm patterns doesn't take much casting finesse, as the trout will often move out of their feeding lane to gulp down a worm, similar in fashion to chasing a streamer. During their decreased metabolic activity in the winter, perhaps trout see a protein-rich worm as an easy way to satisfy their limited energy needs.



A big brown trout brought to net on a weighted squirmy worm from the lower end of East Koy Creek in winter.

As early spring wanes and water temperatures begin to increase, East Koy Creek comes into its prime as a streamer fishery. The system has an abundance of white suckers, dace, and creek chubs, all of which are on the menu for active and hungry brown trout. Patterns I tend to favor are white/cream and olive streamers with minimal flash. Unlike the other strategies mentioned above that work throughout the whole East Koy system, the best streamer action tends to take place in the lower PFR sections near Lamont and the upper PFR sections in Hermitage. In these two areas, streamers are especially effective because both areas have the most robust baitfish populations in the creek.



Streamers are effective imitations of the baitfish in East Koy Creek.

If using streamers isn't your style of fishing, grab your fly rod. Fly fishing is still possible on this stream as during the spring many riffles have sporadic hatches of Blue Wing Olives, Caddis, and a few Green and Brown Drakes. As spring progresses, you might also run into a small Sulfur hatch and a consistent early-morning Trico hatch.

Much success can also be had night fishing with large spinner patterns after an evening of fishing a hatch. Night fishing on East Koy can be quite productive, as most of the largest browns lay at rest during the day. I've had success during the night when the water is low and clear, but your potential to spook fish is higher. I generally choose days when the water is up and high but has at least a foot of visibility. During higher flows, the browns feel comfortable reaching into the shallows to grab a fly (sometimes right at my feet!). Fishing higher water at night is best done with large black streamers that push a lot of water and create vibrations for big browns to key in on. Only once have I had success here with a classic mouse pattern. Nymphing with standard patterns and a glow indicator has also produced fish.

I suspect that standard nymphing would be effective during the night due the phenomena of macroinvertebrate drift. Drift occurs when, after nightfall, macroinvertebrates leave the stream bottom and suspend in the current. What motivates this behavior is mostly likely the need for macroinvertebrates to find new feeding grounds. Having nymphs in suspension provides trout with an easy meal that doesn't need to be chased down. An interesting observation I've made during my years of night fishing over both stocked and wild fish is that about 90 percent of the fish I've landed have been 12- to 14-inch wild browns. Anecdotally, this indicates to me that it's not just the largest brown trout that feed at night.

If the water temperatures in late spring and early summer are conducive to fishing, I find myself almost always throwing a large grasshopper fly. Even if limited hatches are present, I often hook the largest riser on a big hopper pattern. Fishing only a single hopper allows me to cover substantial portions of the creek in Lamont and Gainesville, and the single fly is more forgiving when the inevitable hangups occur while fishing around brushy structure. I often fish my hopper in a style similar to the way I fish streamers. I cast upstream to structure at a 45-degree angle and then let it dead drift until it passes me. From there I utilize more of a downstream swing and wiggle to keep the hopper dancing on the surface of the water. This motion creates a lot of vibration, which the trout detect with their



Foam Hopper

pressure-sensing lateral line, allowing the fish identify the speed and distance of the hopper fly before seeing it. In terms of inland trout fishing, the explosive strike of a big brown trout on a hopper fly is one of the most exciting fishing experiences to be had.

Most of the upper half of East Koy Creek is flanked by wetlands and marshes, which is prime frog habitat. When fishing a large hopper in these areas in mid-spring before prime summer hopper season, I suspect the large browns think the hopper fly is a small frog preoccupied with mating.

Following summer rains when the water is high and visibility is limited, many large food items become dislodged from the sediment, prompting many anglers to tie on a worm fly. However, after having fished both worm fly and crane fly larva patterns under these conditions, I've found that the crane fly larvae pattern will out fish the worm fly by about 5 to 1. The crane fly larva pattern I often use is a cream-colored mop fly, since the actual crane fly larvae has an off-white appearance.



Mop Fly

Fishing East Koy Creek Using Environmental Cues

Structurally, East Koy Creek follows a pattern similar to that of most Wyoming County trout streams. The lower and middle reaches, which extend from the DEC parking area off Overholt Road upstream to the Route 39 bridge, contain the most consistent riffle-to-pool spacing. From Route 39 upstream to Hermitage, the stream has a lower gradient and is a lot shallower, creating long meandering pools with less-abrupt to nonexistent riffles, and it is peppered with beaver activity.

In the lower half of East Koy, some riffles areas often flow over uneven bedrock. These rocky riffles pump substantial amounts of oxygen into the water, greatly benefiting the trout in a variety of ways (e.g., protection against excessively warm water temperatures). Holdover stocked trout and larger wild trout will respond to the differences in oxygen concentration along the stream and will preferentially reside in areas with higher oxygen concentrations. (Younger/smaller trout, though capable of detecting the differences in oxygen levels, are bullied out of the competition for these preferential areas by the larger trout.) Fishing the first deeper stretch after a long cascade of riffles will often provide you with some great action.

During the hottest days of summer and the coldest days of winter, inflows of spring water will also draw trout to specific sections of the creek. The flows from springs typically have a nearly constant temperature that is cooler than the surrounding flowing water. These cooler inflows result in stretches that are cooler than the immediately upstream and further downstream sections of the stream.

On East Koy Creek, these spring-fed stretches attract congregations of stocked fish. The wild fish in the system often seek more isolated springwater inflows away from the stocked fish. The reason for this aversion by wild fish is a matter of energy conservation. Wild trout are constantly in competition for the best position in the hole to conserve energy and intercept food. When hundreds of stocked fish are introduced, the pre-existing wild fish will still fight and compete for their original lie. The process of defending their spot often leads to intense energy consumption as they

are constantly trying to bully stocked fish out of their lie. The outcome of this interaction leads either to the wild brown trout winning, but at a significant energy cost, or vacating to areas of the creek with lower fish densities. In some cases, the wild brown trout expend so much energy that mortality can occur.

In the upper half of East Koy Creek, trout density is key to determining where to target some of the system's larger wild fish. To locate the bigger fish, you have to be willing to walk. A general rule of thumb to follow when fishing the upper East Koy is to remember that a low density of fish generally equates to a larger average size of fish. At times, walking what feels like barren stretches of alder-cloaked creek for hours can feel almost foolish, but that can change in an instant when a really big trout slams your offering. Hunting for trophy browns on East Koy is a lot like musky fishing in that the targets are limited but, if you are successful, the reward is worth the grind you have to endure.



Big wild browns are found in the upper section of East Koy Creek but are unevenly distributed. You have to hunt for them.

It is important to note that much of the upper section of East Koy Creek has a bottom consisting of very loose muck and mud, making wading potentially dangerous for a solitary angler. I strongly advise bringing a friend along in case one finds themselves stuck in the muck.