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## **The basics of fly fishing**

By Ichthus (Tony Wee)

Oi, Encik Wee, pandang bola mana ada ikan (where is there fish on a football field)?" came a shout, followed by cheeky laughter from a few others.

Turning round, I saw it was Encik Yusoff and his motley crew from Alam Flora doing their Wednesday morning round in our housing estate.

Yusoff and his merry men had found me in the soccer field trying out my new 5 wt. Fly rod, and they must have been amused to see me swing the fishing rod to and fro, backwards and forwards . . . at least they knew it had something to do with fishing.

"Tak adalah, Yusoff, practising saja," I shouted in reply, and continued practising my roll casts and double hauls.

Fly fishing must seem a strange way to fish to some, waving a long rod and using funny terms like roll casts and double hauls. However, it's only another method or "style" of catching fish . . . and it's quickly catching on here.

Nick Ooi caught this nicely-sized Siakap by fly fishing.  
So what is "Fly Fishing"?

Surprisingly, fly fishing was practised by the Macedonians around 200AD, and became common by the late 15th century in England.

Traditionally employed to catch trout and salmon in England and Europe, fly fishing uses an artificial fly, rather than natural or artificial bait to catch a fish. This artificial fly represents the midges, small insects and minnows that form the fish's diet. These "flies" imitate the fish's food, either scurrying on the bottom of the stream, swimming or darting about in the water or on the surface.

Being relatively light, these flies cannot be cast out the same way as traditional fishing methods where the heavier bait and weight or lure "pulls" the line out from the reel.

In fly fishing, it's the line that is relatively heavy, and this assists in "throwing" the fly out to where the the fish are.

Fly fishing equipment is specialised and thus markedly different from the conventional rod, reel and line used in traditional fishing.

### Fly fishing equipment

#### The fly rod

Chinese bamboo was the traditional material used to make fly rods. Whilst there are still fly fishermen sticking to bamboo, the modern fly rod is made of graphite and graphite composites which are light, flexible and strong.

And just as there are many types of fishing rods, there are fly rods of various lengths and weights

too.

Smaller fish require a shorter and lighter rod. A 4-weight 8ft (2.4m) fly rod would be sufficient for a 1g fish. On the other hand, one would need a 9ft (2.7m) 12-weight fly rod to tame a sailfish. A 6-weight 9ft fly rod would be a good compromise for freshwater fish and a heavier 8 weight for saltwater fish.

### The fly reel

The fly reel holds the fly line and backing line. There are many brands of fly reels, in different sizes, some with strong and efficient drags to tackle hard fighting fish.

Most fly fishing reels are sized to go along with the weight of the rods and lines used. A reel for a 10-weight rod will therefore be bigger, to take longer backing lines, and would have a stronger drag to tackle bigger fish, while a light 4-weight rod would need a much smaller reel to hold a backing line of only 70ft (21m).

### The fly line and leader

The fly line is much heavier than normal monofilament fishing lines as it has to propel the fly forwards with the help of the fly rod.

The average fly line is about 30 yards (27.4m) long. This is not long enough to fish with and so some “backing line” is first wound on to the fly reel and the fly line is then attached to the backing. This backing line can be monofilament or braided, and the length required depends on the size of the reel used. The backing line can be anywhere from 50 to 300 yards (45.7m to 274m) long, depending on the size of the reel.

The leader is then attached to the fly line. This is normally from 9ft to 18ft (2.7m to 5.4m) long, and is made up of tapered mono to allow the fly to unfurl and land on the water without too much of a splash.

### The tippet and fly

A short length of mono known as the tippet is attached to the leader. The breaking strength of this tippet depends on the strength and type of the fish, ranging from 2lbs (1kg) for a small fish to 80lbs (36kg) for a trout, and 100lbs (45kg) for a sailfish. W

### Fish caught on fly

As long as the action, size or colour of the artificial fly is deemed edible at a glance, the fish can be fooled into eating it.

In Malaysia, nearly all sport fish species have been caught using fly fishing equipment, from the freshwater Kelah and Sebarau, to the saltwater Trevally and Sailfish.

Fly fishing is usually seen as more of a challenge than conventional fishing with bait. It may even be described as a higher class of fishing by the snobs in the angling fraternity.

The sport is not difficult or too expensive. Malaysia is blessed with ample opportunities and places to fly fish. Why not give it a go?

You do not find fly fishing gear readily available in tackle shops in Malaysia as yet. One of the better ones carrying a good range of fly fishing and fly tying equipment is Tackle Box Adventures in

Subang Jaya.

Apart from being the hangout for many fly fishers in the Klang Valley, proprietor Nick Ooi gives free casting and fly tying lessons to beginners and arranges fishing trips as well.

Prices of basic fly equipment start from an affordable RM350 to RM500, while the more sophisticated branded stuff can set you back some RM4,000.