



Photo Credit: Wally Lutz



NORTHERN LIGHTS FLY FISHERS SEPTEMBER 2026 NEWSLETTER

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Doors at Queen Mary Park Hall (10844-117 St) are open at 7:00pm and coffee is on. Presentations begin at 7:30pm. If you can't be there in person our ZOOM meeting id is 668 142 7482, and the meeting password is 306090 (or just click [this link](#)).

Sept 23 - Round Table. Stop by for a coffee and share your experiences from the summer. In person only, no Zoom will be available

Oct 14 – Fly-Tying. The presenter and fly pattern will be confirmed in the coming weeks. Also available on Zoom

Oct 21 - Drop In Fly-Tying. No program or pattern, just drop in with your fly tying equipment and work on your own patterns while socializing with others, while learning tips and tricks from other club members. In person only, no Zoom will be available.

Oct 28 - Update on genetic work and Arctic Grayling on the Upper Pembina. Also available on Zoom

Alberta Conclave 2026

The 2026 edition of the Alberta Conclave brought together members of @FF, Northern Lights and the Kilpatricks' club from Saskatoon for a week of fly-fishing, camaraderie and a few memorable adventures. From Aug 10 through 16, the group gathered along the North Ram River, making camp at the Nice and Easy site - a fantastic base camp with excellent fishing both upstream and down.

Accommodations ran the full spectrum of comforts. One member arrived in a brand-new motorhome, while others discovered that bringing the wrong sized tarps can turn a simple camping set-up into an exercise in field engineering. Regardless, everyone shared the same important advantage; we were camped beside a beautiful piece of water.

The first few days brought plenty of rain, with heavy overnight showers soaking the camp. Fortunately, most afternoons dried out enough to provide some outstanding dry-fly fishing. The North Ram's hungry cutthroat were more than willing to cooperate, with most fish running between 12-16 inches. The combination of clear water, eager cutties and dry flies made for the kind of fishing that keeps everyone smiling.

The highlight of the week belonged to longtime conclave organizer Jim Fox. Jim landed the largest cutthroat of the trip, and a new personal best, measuring an impressive 19 inches.

Getting that fish was an adventure in itself. Jim made a 7.5 kilometer mountain bike ride, with Brett and Zac, down the rough and treacherous ATV trail that crosses the creek east of camp. The group was also soaked by a torrential downpour during the trip. Jim was understandably tired and sore after the return bike trip, but with a new personal best under his belt, there was little doubt that the effort had been worth it.



Jim will confirm in January where the 2027 Conclave will be held. It looks like it may return to the North Ram, although there is also a possibility of 'Claving on the Blackstone next year.

Bamboo Rod Raffle

Internationally famed rod builder, Don Andersen, of Rocky Mountain House has kindly donated to NLFF one of the bamboo rods he has created this year. It's a 2-piece 8' 0" linear taper, medium action rod designed for a 6 wt line and comes with a spare tip section, cloth bag and aluminum rod case. The taper that Don created for this rod is a copy of one developed by Everett Garrison, the most recognizable bamboo rodmaker of all time whose rods now sell for \$14,000 each! We're planning to auction the rod, possibly with one or two consolation prizes. More details will follow on how one can purchase raffle tickets. Please visit bamboorods.ca for more details on Don's rods.

Club Shirt Proposal



Dan Tulik has volunteered to find a means to get club shirts made with the Northern Lights/Freshwater Conservation Canada branding. The proposed shirt style is the Columbia PFG long sleeve button down fishing shirt with our logo embroidered on the chest. Anticipated cost is \$80 plus GST. More details to follow on how to place an order.

Backswimmer Fall Flight

In **northwest Alberta**, the conspicuous fall flights of backswimmers (*Notonecta* spp.) are best understood as **seasonal dispersal/overwintering flights**, rather than simply a response to cold weather.

The key point is that several cues probably interact:

1. The approach of winter / shortening day length

- Photoperiod is an important seasonal cue in *Notonecta*. Shortening days can induce a shift toward reproductive diapause and the autumn life-history state.
- In northern populations, adults commonly leave shallow breeding ponds/lakes in autumn and seek **deeper or more permanent water where they can overwinter**.
- Alberta-specific literature reports that at least one *Notonecta* species overwinters as an adult and notes autumn flight in the province.

2. A sufficiently warm period

- This is particularly important. Backswimmers don't simply take off because temperatures are falling.
- They need their flight muscles to reach an adequate temperature. Experimental/observational work on *Notonecta* indicates a **flight threshold around 18–20°C**, depending on species.
- Consequently, a classic Alberta fall flight can occur on a **sunny, relatively warm afternoon**, even though the general trend is toward much colder weather.

1. Sunlight and calm conditions

- ◇ Dispersal tends to occur disproportionately on **warm, calm days**. Backswimmers can position themselves where they warm up before taking off.
- ◇ This explains why you can see very little flight for several cold days and then suddenly see dozens or hundreds flying when the sun comes out and the air/water warms.

2. Conditions in their current lake

- ◇ The decision isn't necessarily "winter has arrived, so fly." Individual conditions and environmental circumstances matter.
- ◇ Experiments with *Notonecta undulata* show that dispersal is influenced by **body condition, population density and perceived predation risk**.
- ◇ Thus, a lake with increasing competition, poor food availability, or high predator pressure can produce more dispersal than another nearby lake under the same weather.



If you're trying to predict **when a northwest Alberta lake will suddenly have a big backswimmer flight**, I'd watch for: **Several progressively cooler nights → perhaps the first frost → then 1–3 days of clear, sunny weather with afternoon temperatures getting back toward ~18°C or higher.** That's potentially a much better predictor than simply saying "late September" or "when the water gets cold."

And there's an interesting consequence: **the biggest visible flights may occur *after* the first cold weather, rather than during the initial cold snap**, because the insects need a warm window in which to actually power their flight.



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