

A new season is under way and a big rainbow nears the net.

# FLIES FOR OPENING DAY

With a little help from his friends, **Rob Denson** reveals a selection of stillwater patterns with impeccable credentials for great sport this spring

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON

**T**HE NEW SEASON is upon us, and like most of us, you'll be on the lookout for inspiration. Fail-me-never favourites are all well and good, but for every so-called "banker", there are a dozen or more patterns that fall by the wayside. Those patterns need replacing; otherwise what will you do when your fail-me-never fails? New flies keep flagging spirits high and inject fresh purpose and confidence - they put a spring in the step. I've therefore called upon the services of a motley bunch of trout-fishers to bring you a few ideas for the early season.

What they all have in common is a passion for deceiving trout on the fly. The brief was simple: to proffer a selection with genuine credentials for spring fishing. The collection is as disparate as its creators, but all the flies have taken more than their fair share of trout, and will cover you for most eventualities - from those cold, damp days that feel more like February, to the days when spring gets us down to our shirt-sleeves, promotes a hatch and puts the fish on the fin. Another thing these contributors have in common is that they know, only too well, that there's no such thing as a fail-me-never. Add a few of the following to your fly-box this spring, though, and, deployed in the right place, at the right time, I think you'll find that they'll fail you rarely.

## Ben Dobson's top four



*When Ben Dobson isn't too busy running Stocks Reservoir, Bank House Fly Fishery, and two trout farms, he occasionally finds time for the little pleasures in life, like fishing for England, and winning the Lexus individual title. This year Ben will celebrate his 20th year at the helm, during which time he has transformed Stocks into one of the UK's favourite fly-fishing waters. A thriving fishery and a busy competition schedule ensures that Ben is privy to the latest killing flies and tactics, which, thanks to his infectious passion and generosity, he will gladly share.*



### Green Pea Buzzer

**Hook** Size 12 Grab Gape or size 12 Kamasan B175 **Body** Black UTC **Rib** Silver wire **Head** Chartreuse UTC **Finish** Hard as Nails

Sometimes the simplest of flies can be deadly, and this is one of those patterns. It was given to me by Stocks regular and England veteran Keith Landless. Keith first fished it to great effect on Rutland Water but is now fishing it almost everywhere. It's one of my go-to Stocks flies, standing out in the slightly peaty water and catching fish throughout the spring and into the summer.

### Inky George

**Hook** Size 10 Fulling Mill Grab Gape **Thread** Red UTC **Body** UV tinsel **Palmer** Black cock **Tail** Chartreuse fluoro fibre **Cheeks** Jungle cock

I tied this variant of the Gorgeous George after practising for a match when the trout were particularly keen for pulled black-and-green lures or nymphed UV Diawl Bachs. I left out the hopper legs but it doesn't need them. It works well throughout the season but is a particularly good early season top-dropper pattern.



### PB's Olive Buzzer

**Hook** Size 12 Kamasan B175 **Body** Olive UTC thread **Rib** Stripped peacock herl dyed red **Head** Dark brown UTC thread **Cheeks** Gold holographic tinsel

This is a real fish-catcher. Stocks fishing guide Paul Bebb developed this pattern and it has been a valuable addition to our team fly-box ever since. It comes into its own in late March or early April and continues to work well through to early summer. It imitates a species of chironomid that is particularly abundant on Stocks in the spring, but is effective on all the main competition waters, too.

I usually fish it on the middle dropper but sometimes I end up fishing three of them.



### Ben's Black 'n' Silver Cormorant

**Hook** Size 10 Kamasan B175 **Thread** Black UTC **Body** Black seal's fur **Rib** Silver wire **Wing** Black marabou **Head** Silver and UV lite-brite

This is a deadly middle or top-dropper pattern on Stocks Reservoir, where black-and-silver or black-and-gold patterns are proven colour combinations. It works well from March to May, especially when the trout become a bit wary of more garish patterns.



## Alex Ferguson's top five



A Scot abroad, honorary Leicesterman Alex Ferguson has been fly-fishing for 35 years, gaining an intimate knowledge of the Midlands reservoirs on his doorstep. You can take the man out of Scotland, but you can't take wild brown trout fishing out of the man, and Alex regularly travels further afield to Corrib, Caihness and Orkney in pursuit of his first love. Alex has a rare talent for combining pragmatism with flair and beauty in his tying, and has been a huge influence on my own tying, fishing and thinking in recent years.



### Black and Green Cat

**Hook** Size 8-10 Partridge Wet Heavy Supreme  
**Thread** UNI-Thread 6/0, black **Tail** Glo-Brite 11  
**Body** UTC opal mirage (double layer)  
**Rib** 5 lb copolymer **Hackle** White hen dyed chartreuse, palmered halfway down body **Wing** Marabou – fluorescent yellow peril, honey olive, damsel olive, black

With a classic early-season colour combination, this mini lure is derived from one of Rob's patterns, which was itself, I believe, derived from a Jim Bews pattern. I've retained the mixed wing, although I prefer layers to a general mix. The opal tinsel over black thread gives the body a nice green sheen and a very inviting glint. If you change the underwing and tail to subdued olives and the hackle to a drab brown dun or black, you have a passable suggestion of a stickleback.



### Straight Brown Buzzer

**Hook** Size 10-12 Hayabusa 373  
**Thread** Orvis 8/0, dark brown  
**Rib 1** UTC opal mirage, small  
**Rib 2** Copper wire, fine  
**Body** Thread  
**Wing buds** Jungle-cock splits  
**Coating** Bug bond, or similar resin

This is another of my first-choice patterns, fished on the droppers. Rob has already described his version of this fly in his 7&S Trout fly of the month article, but he tends to dress it on a heavier wire hook. I prefer the medium wire of the 373; it helps retain a slim profile and doesn't sink so quickly, making it perfect for a static washing-line set-up, where the opal really catches the light. Just alter the length of the body to suit the natural. Fish will still readily take a dressing that covers only half the shank.



### Sparse Crimson Dabber

**Hook** Size 10-12 Partridge Wet Heavy Supreme  
**Thread** UNI-Thread 8/0, red  
**Tail** Golden-pheasant yellow body feather dyed crimson **Body** Seal's fur dyed crimson  
**Rib 1** Flybox red holo tinsel, medium  
**Rib 2** 5 lb copolymer **Body hackle** Ginger cock dyed blood red **Wing** Sparse bronze mallard, semi cloaked

This is not the most obvious early-season fly but it has proved its worth on the top or middle dropper on many occasions, especially when fished deep on a Di 5 line. The holo rib is wound directly over the fur. The palmer runs back over it and is secured by the copolymer. I like a bombproof fly and this creates a supremely robust rib – stronger, and much less prone to snapping than wire when snagged on trout teeth.



### Black Snatcher

**Hook** Size 10-12 Hayabusa 384  
**Thread** UNI-Thread, 8/0, black  
**Rib** Flybox fusion thread, bloodworm, or Gutermann metallic thread, colour 247  
**Body** Seal's fur – ant black **Hackle** Black hen dyed scarlet, stripped down one side  
**Cheeks** Jungle-cock splits

When a buzzer-themed washing-line set-up is called for a Snatcher is hard to beat if you want to stay higher in the water. I'll team Snatchers with Sugar Cube Buzzers for a near-static presentation, but they really come into their own when used in conjunction with Sedgehogs for buoyancy and a medium/slow figure-of-eight retrieve, the hen hackle and picked-out fur giving an enticing flutter of movement. Again, no wire here – the metallic thread offers a more eye-catching sparkle than wire and, again, is less prone to damage.

### Beadhead Hare's Ear

**Hook** Size 10-12 Hayabusa 387 **Bead** 3.2 mm tungsten bead, fluoro yellow **Thread** UNI-Thread 8/0, light olive **Tail** Hare's cheek fur  
**Body** Hare's ear, hare's brow and fox squirrel mix **Rib** Lagartun oval gold, small

This is a great early-season anchor fly when fishing deep Buzzers. The hare mix may suggest hoglouse, the yellow bead may just catch the eye of the fish or it might even be taken as a buzzer. Whatever the reason for its success, this nondescript pattern is one of my first choices when fishing deep over an early-season clay or silkweed lake bed.



## Matt Eastham's top five



New T&S contributor, close friend and regular fishing accomplice, Matt claims to be a river man first and occasional stillwater man second; or so he told me on our very first outing together when I agreed to show him the ropes on Malham Tarn. He beat me, netting what was at the time his best wild stillwater brown. He's no slouch on the reservoirs, either, very effectively combining stealth and watercraft with an in-depth knowledge of entomology and fish behaviour learned from his time on the riverbank.

### Mini Cat >

**Hook** Size 10 Hayabusa 761 **Thread** UTC70, fluo fire orange  
**Body** Chartreuse UV micro chenille **Wing** White marabou  
**Hackle** Olive grizzle hen **Cheeks** Hot-orange goose biots

You just can't go wrong with a Cat's Whisker! On my local stocked waters small and large, this simple "sawn-off" version has done me proud time and again in the early weeks of the season and beyond and its relatively compact profile means that it can, if necessary, be fished as part of a nymph team in much the same way as a Cormorant. A steady retrieve on an appropriate sink-rate line is all that's required to get the most out of this pattern.



### Foam Suspender

**Hook** Size 14-16 lightweight grub hook **Thread** Griffiths sheer 14/0, mallard brown **Underbody** Black krystal flash, wound in two layers  
**Rib** Stripped peacock quill, three coats of Hard as Nails varnish  
**Thorax** Blend of dubbing to suit **Thorax cover/sighter** White foam

I've taken stick for this fly in the past because it looks so unappealing, but when it comes to early-season buzzer hatches on my local stillwaters, it has accounted for more fish than any other single pattern in my armoury when presented to trout visibly feeding on emerging midge pupae. The size and colour can be varied to suit the hatch in question, but in truth there is little need to lose sleep over the exact materials as it is the profile and footprint of the pattern that are key to its effectiveness. The extended foam sighter means it floats like a cork.



### Black and Peacock Stewart's

**Hook** Size 10-12 Hayabusa 762 **Thread** Griffiths sheer 14/0, black **Rib** Fine red wire **Body** Three strands of peacock herl twisted into a rope **Hackle** Black hen tied in Stewart style

Spider patterns, dressed rather heavily on biggish hooks, can be as deadly for upland stillwater trout as their more minimalist cousins are on the rivers. On my local Lake District tarns and Pennine reservoirs, a Black and Peacock Spider takes some beating from the early weeks of the season onwards. I like the added "buzz" of a Stewart-style hackle, which serves to get the fly noticed quickly when dribbled back through the ripple. At places such as Cow Green and Hayeswater, a pair of these and a floating line is often as much as you need to keep you in business with the resident browns.



### Flashback Hare

**Hook** Size 12 Kamasan B170 **Thread** UTC70, red **Tail** Coq de Lyon **Rib** Fine gold wire  
**Flashback** Medium mirage tinsel  
**Dubbing** Hare's ear

On the stillwaters I fish in the early season, midge hatches reign supreme. I have to confess, though, that the relatively passive approach to fishing teams of Buzzers more or less static leaves me cold. A more rewarding method, I find, is to fish high in the water with a team of "darty" little nymphs shuttled back through the ripple. On milder days, and in the period leading up to a hatch proper, such an approach can prove deadly and is tremendously exciting. This nymph always finds a place on my cast in such situations.



### Scruffy Black Nymph

**Hook** Size 10 Hayabusa 761 **Thread** UTC70, black **Tail** Black cock hackle fibres **Body** Black pseudo-hackle **Cheeks** Jungle-cock splits  
**Head dubbing** Blend of gold litebrite and black spectra

I owe Rob Denson a pint or two for this nymph pattern; I based it on one of his rejects, cheerfully tossed my way one day about five years ago. Straight out of the packet, pseudo-hackle doesn't look as though it will produce a very natural looking imitation, but I think that when snipped short and wrapped in touching turns, it definitely has "the look". It has certainly worked well for me on the point position of a "twiddle-nymph" team, or trailed behind a pair of lures.

## Chris Guthrie's top five

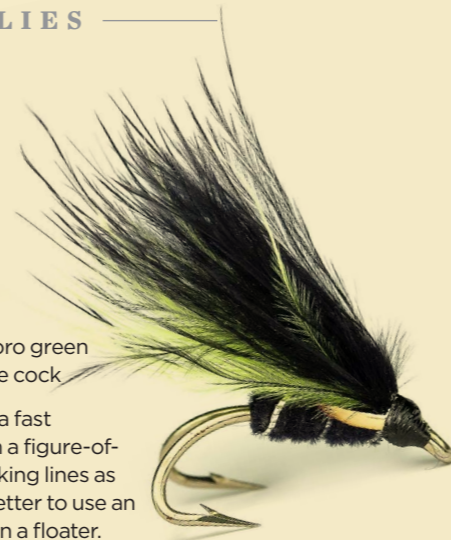


Ex top-flight footballer, long-time top-flight competition angler, and winter cod addict - there's not enough space to list Chris's achievements here, but if you've stayed in the same pub as Chris on competition weekends, you'll have heard all the footballing stories anyway! Strangely, for such an experienced and enthusiastic angler, the fishing stories are a little harder to come by, but when you get to know Chris, you realise why: to him, it's all so simple. Usually a nod, a wink or a subtle gesture is the best you'll get, but invariably it will be worth 1,000 words.

### Jungle Lure >

**Hook** Size 10-12 Kamasan double **Thread** Black  
**Body** Black chenille **Rib** Oval silver tinsel **Underwing** Fluoro green marabou **Overwing** Black marabou tips **Cheeks** Jungle cock

This one seems to be effective almost everywhere. Not a fast pulling fly as you might think: long, slow pulls interspersed with a figure-of-eight is the best method of retrieve. It's best not to use fast-sinking lines as they will sink too quickly and not suit the required retrieve. Far better to use an intermediate to a DI-3. Can also be devastating "nymphed" on a floater.



### < Crisp-packet Buzzer

**Hook** Size 8-14 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** Black UTC  
**Body** Black UTC **Rib** Natural stripped peacock herl  
**Cheeks** Orange crisp packet or goose biots **Breathers** White antron

This has got to be my best all-round Buzzer for stillwater fishing. It can be fished from just under the surface to great depths using a floater to a DI7. In a big wind, fast-sinking lines come into play, when casting 10-15 yards from a drifting boat. When conditions are calmer, using a floater would be my first choice, selecting three flies - eg size 8, 10 and 12 - on a 20 ft-plus leader. Fish these flies as slowly as possible, letting the point fly stick in the bottom of the lake as a sacrificial fly. You should find most fish take the fly above the point.



### < Sweethope Hopper

**Hook** Size 12-16 Kamasan B170 or any suitable light/med dry-fly hook  
**Thread** Black **Butt** Fluoro red **Body** Black seal's fur with a few strands of red at the throat **Legs** Two hen pheasant tail fibres tied either side of the head (not knotted) **Hackle** Black cock - two turns; trim off underside **Wing** Four or five CDC feathers

This is a deadly pattern "up North" that seems to work throughout the season. It is very effective when dark terrestrials, particularly flying ants, heather flies and beetles, are on the water but is also excellent in early season as a general dry-fly. Lightly Gink the CDC and cast short. This is the first fly on my cast for Sweethope Lough, where 90 per cent of the fishing is dry-fly from April to October. However, it's also a great fly to use on upland waters such as Stocks and Brenig.



### Guthrie's Beetle

**Hook** Size 16-18 short shank **Thread** Black  
**Body** Two turns of black seal's fur - the size of a matchstick head  
**Hackle** Black cock - two turns. Cut underside off

This is the easiest fly to tie, but it has been extremely successful over the years. A great fly on northern waters in flat calm, sunny conditions. I use 3 lb-4 lb green Maxima on a five-weight rod and fish one or two flies on a 15 ft cast. Cast short at rising fish or, if no fish are rising, try to find calm water and let the fish find the fly. Lightly Gink the fly and degrease the leader.

### < Wee Sandy

**Hook** Size 8, short or long shank **Thread** Black  
**Head** Fluoro pink bead **Body** Black chenille or black seal's fur  
**Tail** Black marabou with two or three pearl tinsel strands

This fly was given to me by Sandy Robertson, an experienced Scottish fly-fisherman, and therefore an excellent choice for peat-stained waters. It fishes best on lines from a floater to a DI3. The best method is a slow figure-of-eight with long, smooth pulls. In my opinion, this is a fly that seems to do its best work on dull and rainy days. It is successful at catching both stock-fish and grown-on fish.



## Rob Denson's top five



Rob Denson has fly-fished for trout for 25 years, visiting all four corners of Britain and Ireland, combining his love of fly-tying, photography and a rolling wave. Website: [www.robdenson.co.uk](http://www.robdenson.co.uk)

### Black-and-Gold Straggle Dabblers >

**Hook** Size 8-10 Kamasan B175 or Fulling Mill 31531 (black)  
**Tail** Bronze mallard **Body** Black-and-gold straggle  
**Cloak** Bronze mallard **Cheeks** Jungle-cock splits **Thread** Black UTC 70

I could happily fish this one any time, anywhere - rainbows or browns, loch or reservoir - such is its pulling power. I've included it here because it's one of the few Dabblers I'll reach for this early in the season, and, to be fair, it's as much a mini-lure as it is a Dabblers. Black-and-gold is a great early-season combination on most waters, and remains so for the duration of the season, especially on upland waters such as Stocks and Brenig, and Scottish lochs. Fish it slowly in early season then speed up as the water starts to warm.



### < Black and Olive Lump

**Hook** Size 8-10 Kamasan B175 **Tail** Marabou, dyed "honey olive"  
**Body** Black marabou, spun and wound in dubbing loop  
**Wing** Brown-olive over honey-olive marabou **Wing slips** Mirage or similar **Hackle** Brown olive hen **Thread** Black UTC

The "Lump" has done well for me over the past two seasons, particularly in the spring. The "blobby" profile and flash appeals to stock-fish, while the subdued early-season colour scheme, and the pulse from the marabou, means you're also in with a chance of an overwintered fish. It works well fished on any line.



### Skinny Sooty

**Hook** Size 12-14 Kamasan B170  
**Tail** Golden-pheasant tippets, dyed chartreuse or olive **Rib** Guttermann metallic thread, colour 247, or twisted red holographic **Body** Sooty/medium-olive seal's fur mix **Wing** Bronze mallard **Hackle** Olive hen - two turns  
**Thread** Red UTC 70

A debt of gratitude to Alex Ferguson, here, whose series of delightful, irresistibly skinny traditional wet-flies was more than a little influential in the development of this pattern. Somewhat paradoxically, this seemingly simple, skinny affair will cover an awful lot of bases: there are elements of nymph, Buzzer, olive, Cruncher, wet-fly and emerger, and fished at the right time it is hard to resist. The right time is when the fish start feeding in earnest; even if you're not sure on what, the Skinny Sooty will likely get the desired response. It is at its best fished high in the water in conjunction with other nymphs, wet-flies or Buzzers, and works well on the washing line, too.



### Traffic Light Buzzer

**Hook** Size 8-14 Hayabusa 387 Black Nickel, or your preferred choice **Rib** Red wire over mirage over red holographic **Body** Seal's fur dyed "ant black" with a pinch of grey squirrel or hare's mask **Thorax** Hare's ear and grey squirrel mix  
**Thread** Black

This is just my interpretation of what is now a standard pattern and ubiquitous colour scheme. The Mirage, the red under-rib and the red wire not only catch the eye, but also suggest gas and blood - both features of the latter stages of the chironomid life-cycle. This one can be varied to suit your local early hatches by changing the seal's fur colour and the hook size and weight - lighter, smaller hooks for fishing high in the water and larger, heavy-wire hooks for getting down quickly.



### McCann's Ace (variant)

**Hook** Size 10-14 Kamasan B170 or 175  
**Rib** Red holographic **Body** Black UTC 70 - rib and body coated with nail polish **Wing** Pinch of black marabou **Overwing** Bronze mallard **Hackle** Black hen **Cheeks** Jungle-cock splits  
**Thread** Black UTC 70

This fly comes courtesy of Orcadian Sandy McConnachie, whose "Ace" I was asked to tie by a customer for an Orkney trip. I set about tying a few for myself, plus this red-ribbed variant. I omitted the tail, added a shoulder hackle, then substituted the usual silver rib for red holographic. Dropping the tail is just a personal option. Keeping it broadens the scope of the template considerably: use a pinch of marabou, or Glo-Brite. It bridges the gaps between wet-fly, mini-lure and Cormorant, and works as well with wild browns as it does rainbows. Try gold- or mirage-ribbed versions, too. **T&S**