



Cat Dabbler

Rob Denson ties a middle dropper inspired by a classic lure



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: robdenson.co.uk

THE ORIGINAL IDEA behind the Cat Dabbler was nothing more cunning than morphing Cat colours (the white and chartreuse or lime-green of the Cat's Whisker lure) into the Dabbler framework, thus creating a mini lure with impeccable credentials.

Toning things down was part of the plan, too, and hopefully a slightly smaller, slightly quieter Cat would score when larger, louder lures make fish think twice. That was the theory but as we all know, theory and practice, especially when it comes to fly design, can be completely different things. I am, however, happy to tell you that on this occasion the theory worked a treat. The Cat Dabbler has been in my circle of trust for eight years and has caught fish the length and breadth of the UK.

As with many of my fly-tying brainwaves the initial proving ground was Stocks reservoir in Lancashire where a healthy mix of browns, rainbows and blue trout gives you an idea of the

scope of a new fly's appeal. I soon discovered that the Cat Dabbler was equally appealing to all Stocks' residents. Not that this came as a great surprise: one might think of the Cat's Whisker as a stockie-basher but trust me it accounts for many specimen brown trout - wild ones too - all over the world every season and has done so since its creation in the mid-1980s by David Train.

As I mentioned, the first few outings for my dabbled version were on Stocks in mid-March. In the Bowland Fells, winter can still bite at this time of year and the water warms slowly, so I chose leisurely early-season tactics: an intermediate line and a slow retrieve. I found good accomplices for my Dabbler: on either side I tied contrasting Cormorants, wet-flies or mini lures in trusty early-season livery (black, lime-green or chartreuse, gold and olive). This is a relatively lean Dabbler, dressed with hen and a pinch of marabou, which benefits from the extra time and depth afforded by fishing in the middle-dropper position.

The next few seasons saw the Cat Dabbler go on the prowl far beyond Stocks with good results practically everywhere and right through the season. Scaling down to size 12, it put in good performances in Orkney - Harray and Hundland - in June and in bright sunshine. A fly that makes the middle dropper its own and catches fish in the midday sun is a rare thing, and worth tying if only for that eventuality.

As an unexpected bonus the Cat Dabbler pulled me out of the litter tray during Rutland Water's back-end Fry Bash competition six or seven years ago. I was staring a blank in the face after a long, slow morning, which soon became noon and I still had a dry net. Deployed as a fry pattern and fished on an intermediate line during long drifts along the North Arm banks, the Cat Dabbler removed four of Rutland's finest in as many hours. Instead of going home with a face like a gasman's raincoat, I scraped into the prize positions and went home with a splendid Grey's shirt. **T&S**



Hook Size 8-12 Kamasan B170 or B175
Thread (for body) White, yellow or green
Tail Bronze mallard **Rib** Chartreuse UTC wire
Body Chartreuse or lime-green seal fur or synthetic dubbing
Body hackle Olive or golden-olive grizzle hen
Wing slip White marabou **Cloak** Bronze mallard
Cheeks Jungle cock splits
Thread (for head) Fluorescent red

TYING TIPS

- The tying sequence after the body hackle is: marabou, cloak, jungle cock.
- Don't forget that the bronze mallard is tied in as a cloak (as opposed to a wing): spread the feather around the top, 180-270 degrees.
- Try to keep the fly as slim as possible, but do use a good chunk of marabou - it slims down to nothing when wet.