

H.E. CDC

Rob Denson suggests an easy-to-tie emerger for picky stillwater trout

NOTHING POLARISES fly-fishermen and fly-tyers quite like CDC. The mere mention of those fluffy, puffy little feathers can, and often does ignite debate of an intensity and ferocity usually reserved for football, politics and religion. Adherents extol the virtues of its delicacy, gravity-defying properties and magical fish-catching powers. Antis “can’t be doing with it”, and cite its expense and its “high-maintenance” as their main bugbears.

Cul de Canard feathers (French for “duck ass”) are situated close to the bird’s preen gland and have two main functions. Firstly they act as a wick, drawing the oily secretion from the gland; secondly they act as a pad from which the bird can access and distribute the oils with its beak. Contrary to popular belief, it is not the oils that give the feathers their superb floatability – CDC feathers, when washed and dried, or dyed, are oil-free, yet still float a treat. It’s a happy coincidence that their primary function and design lends itself to a secondary function – fly-tying. The real secret is hidden at microscopic level in the structure of the feather: ultra-fine barbs, barbules and microbarbules form a dense, yet light, airy mesh, adding practically zero weight to the dressing, but trapping air by the bucket-load.

I’m not the world’s biggest consumer or fan of CDC; as mentioned, when it comes to actually fishing with the stuff, it’s high-maintenance (reviving the fly after a fish) and expensive. I also feel that CDC is used somewhat gratuitously on a great many patterns. However, there are certain flies and certain fishing situations where nothing else will do. This month’s offering is a prime example. Unfortunately, I don’t have much detail on its origins. About three years ago I was asked to tie a few for a New Zealand-bound customer and liked its simplicity so much that I tied a few for myself. I’ve been fishing it since with great results. For now I’ll call it the H.E. CDC.

This style of fly, commonly referred to as “Culs”, excels when you need your presentation to be as near to perfect as possible. I regularly fish three dry-flies/emergers on a cast – two if I feel that presentation and/or turnover are being compromised due to a lack of breeze and/or regular refusals. In a mirror-like flat calm and with no hint of breeze, presentation can get really tricky, and the fish, picky; that’s when I go down to a single fly. Scaling down the fly size and tippet diameter accordingly often helps, too, as does the sub-surface presentation of a sparsely dressed hook. Deploying emerger patterns like the H.E. CDC in such conditions when high-riding dry-flies fail can often swing the balance in your favour. Nothing facilitates the vertical-hanging presentation and suggestion of



Hook Size 12-16 Kamasan B170 or B400

Thread UTC 70 tan, olive or white

Body Hare’s Ear

Wing Four natural CDC plumes



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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

emergence quite like CDC. It has made all the difference between success and failure more times than I care to remember. As for the high-maintenance aspect, well, when a CDC fly comes back with a fish attached, decidedly wet, bedraggled and slimy, I simply snip it off, rinse it, and hook it into my hat to dry. A fresh one is tied on and I’m fishing again much sooner than if I’d tried to revive the one that’s just been successful. As we all know, there’s no such thing as a dead-cert in fly-fishing, but deployed at the right time and right place, the H.E. CDC is as close as it gets. Tying half a dozen should take you around 15 minutes. Love or hate CDC, that’s a serious effort/reward ratio and I, for one, cannot pass that up. **T&S**

TYING TIPS

- Starting at the eye, run the thread, in touching turns, down to a point just short of the bend.
- Starting at the rear, dub the body material up to the thorax area.
- Tie the CDC bunch on to the bare thread.
- Apply more dubbing to the thread and cover the tie-in point of the CDC with two or three turns of dubbing.
- Tie off close to the eye and trim the rear of the CDC, leaving a stump.