

Furnace Bibio

Rob Denson tweaks a classic wet-fly



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IN MUCH THE same way that little guys often feel an uncontrollable urge to thump big guys, I struggle to resist the temptation to tweak and “improve” classic flies. I’ve even had the brass neck to bring one or two to your attention through these pages: Haul a Gwynt, Kate Maclaren, Alexandra, to name a few. Some would say these flies are sacrosanct and it’s a crime to tamper. In which case, I’m a confirmed recidivist. In my defence, perfection, like beauty, and that “fishy” look is in the eye of the beholder. There’s no harm in bringing your own little twists, new ideas and new materials to a pattern as long as variants, no matter how slight, whether published here, on social media or anywhere else for that matter are named as such, and original patterns and their creators are acknowledged and ultimately preserved.

A relative spring chicken in the great pantheon of classic flies, the Bibio was originally tied and fished as a sea-trout and salmon fly by Burrishoole fishery

manager, Major Charles Roberts. Details are sketchy, but legend has it that the fly was conceived and tied by Major Roberts at the behest of a regular guest who frequented loughs Furnace and Feeagh in the 1950s. No prizes for guessing, then, that the guest had witnessed a fall of heather fly – *Bibio pomonae* – and the rest is history. The Bibio soon gained a big reputation, not only for migratory fish on Ireland’s west coast, but also as a first-class heather-fly suggestion and killer of trout. I think it’s worth noting that the original Bibio featured an orange centre section. Major Roberts had duly observed that the “red” legs of *Bibio pomonae* are at best a red/orange, or scarlet, and not the bright red that is the accepted modern tying of the Bibio.

Red or orange, I doubt I’ll be alone in ranking the Bibio up there in my top five wet-flies of all time. Simplicity itself, the three colours and three components (rib, seal fur, and hackle) work perfectly together to produce a fly with extraordinary fish-catching power at any time of year, with or without heather fly on the water.

My tweak, as with the Improved Kate Maclaren, was simply to swap the black body hackle, appropriately enough, for furnace hen. You won’t necessarily notice any significant shift in your catch-rate with this version, but what you do get is another subtle hue without drastically altering the character of the original, and the freedom to fish the Bibio anywhere on your cast. The softer hen hackle liberates the fly from the confines of the top dropper, allowing it to be used on middle or tail positions where flies palmered with hen do their best work. The overall feel, importantly, remains predominantly black, punctuated with the splash of red, and the furnace hackle adding a nicely contrasting golden halo around the black centre list. As with the Improved Kate, the original version no longer has a place in my box, such has been the success of the Furnace Bibio over the last seven or eight years. It may all be in the eye of the beholder, but if it’s your eye, and your fly, then the confidence that it bestows is worth its weight in gold. **T&S**

“The softer hen hackle liberates the fly from the confines of the top dropper”



Hook Size 8-14 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Rib** Oval silver
Body Seal fur – black/red/black **Body hackle** Furnace Hen
Head hackle Black hen **Thread** Black

TYING TIPS

- This is a very easy fly to tie. As always, less is more. Keep it lean, and let the fly “breathe”.
- This fly benefits greatly from a severe ragging with a piece of velcro.
- Feel free to tie it with furnace cock. It’s also a great fly on the top dropper, and I keep a few cock-hackled versions in my box.