

DALEHEAD DABBLER

Rob Denson ties a versatile English wet-fly with Irish roots

FOR SOME STRANGE reason, best unknown to myself, the Dalehead Dabbler has hitherto remained absent from this column. Remiss in the extreme. Allow me to offer profound apologies for depriving you of a corker. I am forever indebted to Stocks Reservoir regular, Darren Booth, for creating the original Dalehead Dabbler (named after the Dalehead valley that was flooded in the 1920s to create the reservoir), the basis of one of my most productive wet-flies ever.

Darren's tying was one of the first non-Irish Dabbler interpretations that I saw which successfully transposed the heavily cloaked, out-and-out top-dropper Irish beast into a workable and more versatile template for UK waters, eminently fishable in any position on the leader, and on any line. It has taken memorable bags and some memorable fish - wild browns and rainbows - on waters as far-flung and diverse as Grafham, Brenig, Malham Tarn, Orkney, and of course, Stocks. But not yet in Ireland, the spiritual home of the Dabbler. Conn, Cullin, Carra and Corrib will have to wait - the last time I fished in Ireland, the original Dabbler was still a well-kept secret, and in true competition-fishing tradition, Darren and his team kept the Dalehead under wraps for as long as possible. Thankfully, such secrets are hard to keep.

Darren's original, with its all-gold body and black hackle, exploits the time-honoured black/gold combination, for which the Stocks residents are not alone in having a distinct proclivity. My variation on Darren's theme retains the character and feel of the original, but brings a little more tonal variation to the mix in an effort to broaden its scope and appeal in terms of water colour and lighting conditions. I made two small tweaks to achieve this: I swapped the solid black body hackle for furnace - a dark heart with a golden halo - then broke down and subdued the solid-gold body (originally gold Lite-Brite) by mixing black seal fur with gold Ice Dub. A simple adjustment to a simple fly. Any tangible improvement is debatable, but I'm happier with the tweaks, which give me confidence in a wider variety of situations.

I keep a couple of versions of my variant Dalehead in my box: one tied with furnace cock for the body hackle, and one tied with furnace hen. The slightly bushier, stiffer, cock-hackled version takes care of the top-dropper position, with the softer, more mobile and quicker-sinking hen-hackled version being more regularly deployed on the middle or tail.



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Hook Size 8-14 Kamasan B175 or B170 **Tail** Bronze mallard **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Mix of black seal fur and gold Ice Dub or Lite-Brite **Body hackle** Furnace hen or cock **Cloak** Bronze mallard **Cheeks (optional)** Jungle cock **Thread** Black

Go with the flow in terms of technique. The overriding drab, dark feel makes the Dalehead a first choice for drab, dark days, but don't rule it out in brighter conditions - the subtle glint of gold from the hackle and dubbing keeps the tally ticking over when the clouds clear. The Dalehead transcends seasonal constraints, and will perform if fished deep on a Di7 or stroking the surface on a floater. It's a suggestive attractor: catching the eye with a wink, rather than a whistle. **T&S**

TYING TIPS

- As always with seal fur bodied wet-flies, use a velcro pad to rake out the dubbing to give a little extra buzz.
- Jungle cock cheeks really set off the Dalehead, but are a luxury, and by no means essential.
- Tie the cock-hackled version on the lighter B170 hook to keep it higher in the water for longer, and conversely, the hen-hackled version on the heavier B175. Again, not essential, but it's another small gain, and worthwhile if you have the choice of hooks and hackles.