

Rob Denson's trout fly of the month

Ess Cat

Hook Size 10 Kamasan B175
Body Straggle 'n gold, black
Wing Marabou in several layers –
chartreuse, yellow peril, citrus burst
Wing slips Two strands of mirage
Head Chartreuse deer hair



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.

IN OUR LIFETIMES, hundreds if not thousands of flies come and go, in and out of our boxes. Whether tyers or buyers, we all succumb to flights of fancy, hare-brained ideas, and flies forced upon us by friends! Over the next 12 months I'll show you a few of my flies that have held their places, and look like doing so for a long time to come.

The only thing predictable about surface sport on any stillwater these days is its unpredictability, be that Harray, Leven, Rutland or Bewl. Things ain't what they used to be. These truths, and the thinking of the modern angler, give rise to flies like the Ess Cat.

The originator of the Ess Cat was crafty Orkney fly-tyer Jim Bews. The fly takes its name from Ess Holm on Harray Loch, an area of shallows, small islands and skerries around the middle of the water. Despite the name, Jim designed the Ess Cat for deeper parts of Harray, off Nistaben, close to Ess Holm, and the "golden triangle" in the northern half of the loch where the fly was a great success in its first season, 2007.

The loch plummets to 14 feet in these areas, and while that breaks no records, these are not depths traditionally explored by your average loch-style angler. Orkney anglers are not your average bunch, though, and needs must when the devil drives, or when surface sport dries up.

"If they're not up, they're down," as one enlightened angler once said, and likely feeding hard on daphnia, too - which is where the Ess Cat comes in.

Places like Harray have in recent years fast become a happy hunting ground for a sinking line and an effective daphnia pattern. I say "daphnia pattern", but it's not the individual daphnia we're imitating here; it's more a case of colour(s), and finding a formula that keeps daphnia-feeders feeding, and feeding on our fly. It's the same scenario the length and breadth of the land - witness the proliferation and efficacy of the Blob. It's no coincidence that the most prolific Blob colours - from oranges, yellows, chartreuse, sunburst and pink - are those commonly associated with

daphnia. Whether we like it or not, more of our sport is being played out beneath the surface.

The Ess Cat first came to my attention in 2008, and it first struck me as an early-season option. The combination of greens/yellows, black and gold is formidable at any time of year; in early season, though with few exceptions, it's a banker. And so it proved, chalking up a double-figure tally on its first outing to my opening water of the season, Lancashire's Stocks reservoir. Since then, the Ess Cat variant has taken good wild fish for me from Malham Tarn and Harray, and more good stocked fish from Rutland and Blagdon in early season, and later as a daphnia pattern. For me, though, it is at its most effective in March.

I made two small changes to Jim's original; the removal of the tail - for no other reason than I'd no yellow mirage crinkle, which Jim called for in his original. I have in recent years, however, developed a habit of omitting tails. I'll tell you why, just as soon as I know! The other alteration was the "layering" of the marabou wing. Jim called for chartreuse marabou; I opted for layers of complementary yellow/green hues. With odd exceptions such as a "solid" black, I tend to layer marabou wings with several colours/shades, the theory being that the striped effect exaggerates movement in the wing.

I'm happiest with my variant on the top dropper or tail positions, depending on the coloration of the other members of the team. As for lines, well, this is a relatively deep fly, which benefits immensely from curves, falling and lifting, and "the hang", making DI3 and DI5 lines, sometimes a DI7, ideal for the job; "sweep" lines are even better. Slowly does it, until the fish reach that point, usually in April, when they're prepared to risk a calorie or two to chase a fly. After that, you'll find it's a versatile number, not to mention a first choice when the daphnia is on the green side.

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