



10 TOP DROPPERS

Rob Denson reveals a selection of bob-flies that will serve you well whenever, and wherever, you fish

SELECTING A top dropper is undoubtedly one of the most important and enjoyable decisions we face each time we tackle up for a day's fly-fishing.

It is on those days when the action happens in the top few inches of water that top droppers come into their own, sending the fish mad. They are the star strikers - the players with flair that can turn an average day into an unforgettable one. From the simple, drab and relatively uninspiring get-up of the Kate McLaren to the celebration of colour that is the Gorgeous George, the classic top droppers are nothing short of alchemy, and much, much more than the sum of their parts. Make the right choice on the day, and the rewards can be spectacular.

There are 101 ways in which a trout

will attack the bob-fly - from a stealthy, clinical cat-and-mouse approach, to a crude, frenzied smash-and-grab raid - and I for one never tire of watching and waiting to see how my top dropper is going to be attacked next. Is there anything in fly-fishing as exciting as seeing the metallic flash of a flank a split second before the surface erupts in an explosion of spray and mist?

Allow me, then, to guide you through a selection of top droppers that have served me well in recent years. Please forgive the omission of the likes of the Soldier Palmer, the Claret Bumble *et al.* If this were an "all-time top ten", then they, and several others, would surely be there. It isn't. It is a collection of flies and variants that have found much favour on my casts of late as well as fooling more than a few fish. Most take their cues from the classic patterns, with a twist here and a variation there to suit the fishing that I do. ▶



(Pictured right)

Golden Dabbler

Hook Size 8-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** UTC 70 denier burnt orange **Tail** Bronze mallard **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Seal's fur mix: gingers, fiery browns **Body hackle** Natural ginger or brown, or dyed fiery brown or picric **Cloak** Bronze mallard

The proliferation and variety, not to mention the efficacy, of Dabbler variants means that it's easy to forget the original – the Golden Dabbler. Here's my interpretation, which I dress exclusively with cock hackles, keeping it high in the water so that the light floods through those lovely natural, golden tones. A true “superfly”.



(Pictured right)

Claret Sedgehog

Hook Size 10-14 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Thread** UTC 140 denier **Body** Claret seal's fur **Wing** Small bunches of dyed claret deer hair

Along with the Dabbler, the Sedgehog is one of few relatively recent creations to barge its way, on merit, into the great pantheon of classic flies. A strong silhouette, bags of presence and wonderfully versatile, the Sedgehog is a “must have” in any serious stillwater angler's box. It works well in practically any colour combination you care to think of. The claret is so often a first choice for me, though, especially on dark, nasty days.



STILLWATER TROUT FLIES

Muddled Kate Crippler

Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** Black **Butt** Flat silver **Rib** Oval silver **Body** Seal's fur mix: “ant black” and black **Body hackle** Furnace hen **Shoulder hackle** Natural yellow golden-pheasant body feather **Head** Natural deer hair

This is the first of the Bugger's Muddle series, and by far the most successful so far. The size 12 tying is a real buggy little mouthful and a first choice on a grey day and a good wave. The size 10 is a big fly for a big wave. It has accounted for a hefty brace of wild browns already this season.



Kate Crippler

Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 or Fulling Mill 31531 (black) **Thread** Black **Rib** Oval silver **Body** Seal's fur mix: “ant black” and black **Body hackle** Furnace hen **Shoulder hackle 1** Natural yellow golden-pheasant body feather **Shoulder hackle 2** Black hen

The Kate Crippler finds its way to the top end of my leader with an almost monotonous regularity these days. It is simplicity itself, and as with all the Cripplers, the Kate is at its best swilling around in the film, letting the water bring its hackles to life. Often a first choice on the top dropper, it seldom needs to be replaced.



Fiery Bugger's Muddle

Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** UTC 140 Denier black **Butt** Flat gold **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Seal's fur mix: fiery brown, fiery claret, dark ginger **Body hackle** Furnace hen, or grizzle hen dyed golden brown **Shoulder hackle** Golden-pheasant body feather dyed orange **Head** Natural deer hair

This is rapidly becoming my first-choice Muddler and is rarely off the leader when a good wave presents itself during the summer months. Another suggestive pattern for when there's plenty of “stuff” on the water, it still pulls up fish when there isn't.





(Pictured right, top)

Dunkeld Crippler

Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** Black **Butt** Flat gold **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Orange seal's fur with a pinch of gold ice dub **Body hackle** Grizzle hen, dyed orange **Shoulder hackle 1** Bronze mallard **Shoulder hackle 2** Golden-pheasant body feather, dyed orange **Cheeks** Jungle-cock splits

One of the best bright-weather performers on my last two Orkney trips, the Dunkeld Crippler seems to relish sunshine, blue sky and a good wave. It's a good choice, too, when the daphnia are high in the water.



(Pictured right, bottom)

Black-and-Red Hobbler

Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** Red or black **Butt** Datam Glo-Brite No. 4 **Rib** Oval silver **Body** Seal's fur mix: black and "ant" black **Body hackle** Furnace hen **Cloak** Bronze mallard **Legs** Knotted pheasant tail, natural

This is a variation on George Barron's Hobbler (Dabbler with legs). George gave me his Magenta Hobbler to try a few years ago. It worked a treat for me on Chew in September, and on many other waters since. The black-and-red version was a logical addition to the Hobbler family, doing its best work on upland waters and Scottish lochs.



STILLWATER TROUT FLIES

Mandarin Crippler

Hook Size 10 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** UTC 70 denier "brown olive" or black **Butt** Flat gold **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Hare's ear and grey squirrel mix **Body hackle** Grizzle hen dyed golden-olive **Shoulder hackle 1** Mandarin **Shoulder hackle 2** As body hackle

This is tied a little fuller in the dressing specifically to fit the top-dropper bill. One for a big wave and hungry fish. Suggestive of shrimp, daddies, sedge, Mayfly etc. A great pattern for the summer months, and another fly that just loves to be swamped rather than dibbled.



(Pictured left, middle)

Mandarin Muddler

Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B170 or B175 **Thread** Black or brown **Tail** GP toppings: one red on top of one yellow **Butt** Flat gold **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Squirrel and hare's ear mix **Body hackle** Cree or furnace hen **Shoulder hackle** Mandarin flank **Cheeks** Jungle-cock splits **Head** Deer hair dyed "west of Ireland golden-olive"

Sometimes you just want a beast of a fly for big fish in a big wave. The Mandarin Muddler suggests all kinds of summer manna, from sedges to daddies and other big terrestrials.

Furnace Bibio

Hook Size 10-14 Kamasan B170 or B175 or Fulling Mill 31531 (black) **Thread** Black **Rib** Oval silver **Body** Seal's fur mix: Black and "ant black" with red centre **Body hackle** Furnace hen **Shoulder hackle** Black hen

I'd best not tell you that this variant is better than the original. What I will tell you, though, is that I don't tie the original any more. For me, the addition of the furnace hackle broadens the remit slightly, the golden halo giving the pattern a little more scope than the original, yet remaining dark and wild at heart thanks to the black centre of the furnace hackle. It's a pattern that seems to work best slightly drowned, bulging away in the film, hence the use of hen hackle. Hold the fly in the film, rather than bouncing it. A good performer all season. **T&S**

Rob Denson writes Trout Fly Of The Month on p79.