

# DIVINE NYMPHS

Rob Denson and friends pick their favourites for the stillwaters

**T**HE NEW SEASON DRAWS NIGH! IF you're anything like me, then opening day means heading for your favourite quiet corner and getting down to some serious nymphing. Both our cold-blooded quarry, and the invertebrates they seek will be responding to lengthening hours of daylight and a slight lift in temperature. There will be no speed records broken by either party, so I'll be keeping my retrieve measured and slow – figure-of-eight with a few slow pulls to mix it up. When I'm swinging buzzers or nymphs around on the breeze, then a 'static' presentation will reap rewards.

Whether fishing from boat or bank, I'll be looking for large areas of consistently shallow water which will be starting to warm up and hold feeding fish, eager to take your delicately presented nymphs. But what should adorn your cast in those early weeks? I've asked four of my fishing friends that same question and they've come up trumps. So, pick out your favourites from this little lot – some standards, variations on classic, and one or two secrets out of the box!

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON

## JAMES BEWS



After working 'abroad' on Lewis and in Caithness as gamekeeper and ghillie, Orcadian James resettled back

home and continued his 30-year love affair with the Orkney lochs. He gets even further abroad several times each season on the competition circuit as captain of the FNF Loop Falcons, often venturing deep into England to fish the likes of Chew and the Midlands reservoirs. He was top rod in the AWAI 2018 final on Rutland.



## OWL NYMPH

**Hook** Size 10 Kamasan B160  
**Thread** Uni-thread, light cahill  
**Tail** Brown partridge **Rib** Fine black wire  
**Legs** Partridge and roe mix  
**Head** Golden olive seal's fur

With a lot of my nymph-based fishing taking place over relatively shallow water I am a great fan of this design of nymph. It holds up in the water well, especially on lighter hooks. From the Lake of Menteith, Harry and Hundland through to Boardhouse this one works well for mayfly, olives and lighter coloured midge.



## BLACK NYMPH

**Hook** Size 12 Kamasan B175  
**Thread** Uni-thread, black  
**Tail** Black hen hackle  
**Rib** UTC oval mirage, small  
**Throat** hackle As tail  
**Cheeks** jungle cock  
**Head** Black mole rat dubbing

This is one of my all-time favourites for both rainbow and brown trout. I'll fish this generic pattern right through the season as it covers a lot of bases. I think a lot of anglers fishing Orkney in a traditional fashion miss out on how powerful nymphing or straight-lining for wild fish can be. I fish this one a lot on Harry and it has the added bonus that it will take buzzer-feeding fish too.

## CAENIS NYMPH

**Hook** Size 12 B175 **Thread** Uni-thread, rusty dun **Butt** Glo-Brite No.7  
**Rib** Gold flat tinsel **Body** Opossum  
**Legs** Knotted pheasant tail  
**Cheeks** Jungle cock  
**Head** Fox squirrel

The flat clams of summer can see caenis hatch en-masse on almost all lochs up here. Peach, gold and hare's ear (aside a white muddler head) are staples for such situations. This nymph fishes well between suspender buzzers late in the hatch but comes into its own as the naturals climb through the water prior to the big emergence.



## BROWN CRUNCHER

**Hook** Size 12 B175 **Thread** Uni-thread, rust brown **Tail** Pheasant tail dyed fiery brown **Rib** Orange wire  
**Body** As tail **Hackle** Dark furnace hen  
**Dubbing** Fiery brown and pearl Ice Dub or similar

A favourite in late July and August when food is plentiful, making the fish a bit picky. At that time of year copper and orange colours come into their own, especially when fishing along the shores or around skerries late in the evenings. This one can go well on the peaty waters and often when shrimp or caddis are found in the fish. >

## OLIVE NYMPH

**Hook** Size 12 Kamasan B405  
**Thread** Uni-thread, rusty dun  
**Tail** Mallard flank dyed olive  
**Body** Olive stripped quill  
**Cheeks** Hot olive jungle cock  
**Legs** Brown or grey partridge  
**Head** Hare's ear

Once the early season buzzer feeding nears an end, olives will start to put in an appearance on many of the Orkney lochs. Mid-morning to lunchtime on brighter windy days should see the best of it. Nymphs of olive or orange hues held high in the water by Hedghogs will see great results on most occasions when over the right type of ground.



## ARTHUR MACDONALD



There's not many parts of Scotland where Arthur hasn't cast a fly in the 50 years he's been fly-fishing.

Living at the southern end of the Great Glen, Arkaig, Lochy, Morar, Shiel and Ness are his 'local' lochs, with regular forays further afield to Orkney, Watten, Shin and just about anywhere that holds wild brown trout. With several double-figure wild brownies to his name, he is working on a book, revealing the flies that he uses to catch them.



## OLIVE SPLITHEAD

**Hook** Sizes 12-14 B170/175 **Thread** UTC 70, olive **Tail** Bronze mallard **Body** Dark olive scruffy dubbing **Rib** Gold mylar **Thorax** A tuft of Glo-Brite floss (No7 or 11) **Horns** Two summer duck fibres **Head** Roe hair dyed olive **Splitter** Gold mylar

In its relatively short life, this fly style has been one of my deadliest creations to date. Big Loch Leven brownies and quality rainbow trout have been fooled when inching Splitheads back to the boat, but it also works really well as an emerging nymph, allowed to sink on a floating line and retrieved slowly. It mimics an all-out attempt to get to the surface, which might trigger a take.

## WIRE NYMPH

**Hook** Size 10-12 B175 **Thread** UTC 70, black **Tail** Bronze mallard fibres **Body** Green and gold UTC Ultra Wire, Brassie size **Thorax/head** Gold Flashabou

I rate this one highly right through the season but especially early on. Fished on the tail as an anchor behind two wet flies it gives me total control of the leader and the advantage of fishing various depths through the water column. The weight gives them a lethal rise and fall during the retrieve, while the 'plip' as the fly hits the water is like a big dinner bell to nearby hungry trout. Green and gold is my best colour combination, although black and gold is well worth tying.



## GAMMARUS

**Hook** Size 12 B170/B175 **Thread** Uni 8/0, tan **Whiskers** Natural rabbit and orange seal's fur **Antennae** Summer duck fibres **Eyes** Chameleon nylon (melted and dipped in black then clear varnish) **Abdomen** Gammarus scruffy dubbing/pearly mix **Back** Pearl mylar **Rib** Fine gold wire

When a shallow, stony windward shore is being washed by white breakers, trout can often be found searching in inches of water for some dislodged morsels. It's here in the shallows that the Gammarus can make the difference. I have had days where drifting a hundred yards toward these shores produces nothing until you're in danger of running aground — then a trout springs from the surf with your nymph in the scissors. When trout become boat shy, give Gammarus a go in the wash.

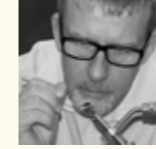


## PEARLY BLACK NYMPH

**Hook** Sizes 10-14 B170/175 **Thread** UTC 70, black **Tail** Bronze mallard fibres **Body** Black scruffy dubbing/red Flashabou mix **Rib** Pearl mylar **Cheeks** Jungle cock **Head** Gold flashabou

The black/red/pearl combination of materials feature in many of my wet-flies, but it also makes a great nymph. Fishing mainly loch-style, a Pearly Black Snatcher and this nymph has always worked well when fish are only interested in small stuff below the surface. For wild, early season brownies, an intermediate line and a steady pull usually brings success. A figure-of-eight retrieve gets the rainbows latching on when there's a buzzer hatch.

## LINDSAY SIMPSON



From his early days on Sweethope to the gin-clear streams of Slovenia, it's easier to list the lakes and rivers of

Europe where Lindsay hasn't cast a nymph. However, with his three loch-style International caps for England and being a long-standing member of the Soldier Palmer team, it was for his vast experience and knowledge of British stillwaters, in particular, the Midlands reservoirs, that he was asked to share his favourite patterns.



## AL'S DIAWL BACH

**Hook** Size 10-12 Hanak H200 BL **Thread** Fish On UTS, copper brown **Tail** Ginger cock hackle fibres **Body** Red holographic tinsel **Rib 1** Stripped peacock herl **Rib 2** Fine gold wire **Beard** Ginger cock hackle fibres **Cheeks** Jungle cock splits

Alan Ward is a former Army team captain who used to do a lot of fishing with the Bristol boys at Chew Valley. This fly was brought to the team under tight hold at the time. It was an amazing pattern and took fish from every venue it was fished. The slim profile and glint of red seems to really switch the fish onto this pattern. I find it best in the smaller sizes. I usually start with a size 12 before going smaller.



## LEGGY CRUNCHER

**Hook** Size 12 Hanak H230 BL **Thread** Fish On UTS, copper brown **Tail** Ginger cock hackle fibres **Rib** UTC copper wire, small **Body** Cock pheasant tail fibres **Legs** Knotted pheasant tail fibres **Thorax** Peacock herl **Hackle** Badger

I was sent this fly to photograph for Wayne Jones who was setting up a new venture — the Fly Shop. It is a combination of a Cruncher with the added value of some knotted pheasant tail legs. The Cruncher on its own is one of my go-to flies but this updated version just brings a little more to the party.



## GRAFHAM WET

**Hook** Size 10-12 Hanak H230 BL **Thread** UTC 140, red **Tail** Glo-Brite No.4 **Rib** Gold wire **Body** Troutstalker dubbing, natural tweaked **Hackle** English partridge

I call this fly the Grafham Wet as it has worked particularly well at that venue, but I dare say it would work anywhere there is water and trout. It works best fished in a team, usually on the top dropper, although I have had success fishing it on the middle dropper between a booby and a blob. A fairly generic pattern that represents many different aquatic creatures.



## SIMMO SURPRISE

**Hook** Sizes 10-14 Hanak H200 BL **Thread** Fish On UTS, black **Tail** Black cock hackle fibres **Rib** Silver wire **Body** Two black peacock herls **Beard** Black cock hackle fibres **Cheeks** Jungle cock splits **Head dub** Prism Glister

When I served in the Army my nickname was Simmo and my fishing mentor Ronnie Christie would always laugh at some of my fly concoctions. He would call them Simmo Surprises. The name stuck with this one though and it has been devastating over the years. It came from a pattern that was passed to me by Andy Everitt when the Army team was at the top of their game. I simply added a bit of bling to the front end and it has proved to be a firm favourite on a team of nymphs. ➤

## MATT EASTHAM



Matt claims to be a river man first and occasional stillwater man second; or so he told me on our very first outing together when I agreed to show him the ropes on Malham Tarn. He beat me, netting his then best wild stillwater brownie. He's no slouch on the reservoirs either, combining stealth and watercraft with an in-depth knowledge of entomology and fish behaviour learned from his time on the riverbank.

## BLACK FRANCIS

**Hook** Size 12 Fulling Mill comp heavyweight black nickel  
**Thread** Black  
**Tails** Black cock fibres  
**Rib** Flat silver tinsel  
**Dubbing** Hare fur dyed dark grey  
**Cheeks** Jungle cock splits

Dyeing materials has never been my strong point and when I tried my hand at a black hare's ear fur, I ended up with something more like mucky grey! I was actually quite taken with it and have used the blend to good effect on several patterns. This nymph works well on the point, tied on a heavyweight hook. Effective with both resident brownies and stocked rainbows — unsurprisingly considering it's a variant on the tried and tested Hare's Ear Nymph template.



## UV STRAGGLE NYMPH

**Hook** Size 12 Kamasan B170 **Thread** Cinnamon  
**Tails** Coq de Leon fibres **Body** Micro straggle, black and gold UV **Thorax dubbing** Blend of hare fur and fox squirrel, spun in a split-thread loop  
**Cheeks** Jungle cock splits

There's something magical about black and gold UV micro straggle as Mr Denson will no doubt attest. Rob's Dabbler of the same species is a little belter and it didn't take a huge dollop of lateral thinking to translate its appeal to a nymph pattern. It's equally at home fished slow, or tweaked back at pace when fish are up for a chase. It is regularly on my cast on bright days; wild brownies in particular seem to approve.



## ROOTBEER CRUNCHER

**Hook** Sizes 10-14 Kamasan B170 **Thread** Cinnamon  
**Tails** Olive cock fibres **Rib** Fine black wire **Body** Gliss 'n Glow rootbeer wound in touching turns **Thorax** Sparse application of copper olive seal's fur **Hackle** Greenwell hen dyed dirty olive

I don't get on with Crunchers too well but have grown to love this simple variant. It fits the bill anywhere a hatch of lake olives is on the cards, and anywhere else for that matter. The rootbeer is hard to source these days but is well worth tracking down — the attractive brown/olive iridescence can prove deadly, particularly for rainbows.

## ROB DENSON



Has fly-fished for trout for 32 years, visiting all four corners of Britain and Ireland, combining his love of fly-tying, photography and a rolling wave.  
 Web: [robdenson.co.uk](http://robdenson.co.uk)



## OLIVE SQUIMPH

**Hook** Sizes 10-14 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Thread** UTC 70, olive  
**Tail** Badger or olive cock hackle fibres **Rib** Mirage  
**Body** Seal's fur mix: medium and sooty olives  
**Throat hackle** As tail

I featured the original 'Squimph' in T&S's Fly of the Month November 2014. At the time it was responsible for my personal best wild brownie — a Malham fish of well over 6lb. In its olive guise, it's taken a double-figure rainbow on Stocks reservoir and given me some unforgettable nymphing sessions on Chew and Rutland. Vary the colour, size and hook weight to suit local hatches and conditions.

## RED-RIBBED CRUNCHER

**Hook** Sizes 10-14 Kamasan B170  
**Thread** UTC 70, red  
**Tail** Ginger or red game cock  
**Rib** Gutermann's Sulky thread, red  
**Over-rib** Fine gold wire **Body** 1 strand peacock herl **Thorax** Peacock herl  
**Cheeks** Red holographic  
**Hackle** Ginger, red game or greenwell/furnace hen

Take your pick from the plethora of 'Nemo' (red holo ribbed Cruncher) variants out there, but you could do worse than this one. It evolved over a period of a few years, into a lean, mean, and extremely attractive fly to trout of all denominations from the word 'go' until closing day. Almost always performs, whether fished on a washing-line or straight-lined.



## UVHE

**Hook** Sizes 10-12 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Thread** UTC 70, brown olive  
**Tail** Badger or ginger cock **Rib** Fine gold wire **Body** Grey squirrel and hare's ear mix, with a few strands of olive and UV straggle  
**Thorax cover** Pheasant tail **Thorax** As body  
**Throat hackle** Pheasant tail

Hare's ear ticks all the boxes when it comes to nymph patterns: drab, natural, vague but very suggestive and just bristling with life and movement. Based on a simple, 'old school' hare's ear nymph, I've settled on this one which remains unchanged for the last 10 years or so. Not sure if it's the subtle flash of the straggle that gives it the edge, but it's always a first choice on a first outing.



## ICE BLUE DIAWL

**Hook** Kamasan B170 or 175  
**Thread** UTC 70, tan  
**Tail** Ginger or red game cock  
**Rib** UTC Flashback, ice-blue pearl  
**Body** Hare's ear/grey squirrel mix  
**Throat hackle** As tail  
**Head** UTC 70, wine or red

I just love the 'darty' dynamic of the simple Diawl Bach, which suggests invertebrate life and movement quite beautifully. Get the hang of the basic Diawl template and the world is your oyster. The UV or rather ice-blue rib on this one can often make a big difference, particularly on very bright days. In better light, it provides a subtle, natural looking 'gassy' flash. ■



## STANDARD BUZZER

**Hook** Sizes 10-14 Kamasan B110  
**Thread** Black 14/0 **Rib** Fine pearl tinsel  
**Cheeks** Orange Spanflex with dab of hot orange nail varnish over several coats of varnish

My local north-west stillwaters are more often than not windswept and cold early in the year and an anchor pattern on the point helps get the team down through the upper layers quickly, stabilising the drift and putting the flies in front of deeper lying trout. A dab of hot orange nail varnish to the cheeks affords a slightly greater degree of visibility in the murky depths.

