

MACHAIR CLARET

Rob Denson ties a classic dropper for short-lining in a rolling wave

I LOVE HIGH summer. The sights, the sounds, the smells; for an all-too-brief few months everything about fishing suddenly becomes a pleasure, and everyone and everything seems glad to be alive. But as much as I love sunshine and swallows, it's those dark, brooding skies, big, warm winds and rolling waves that get me on the edge of my boat seat, and the adrenaline pumping. For this is when I can indulge and lose myself in my favourite fly-fishing discipline: the ancient art of the short-lined wet-fly. It's heart-stopping stuff when it all comes together, and for me, there's no bigger thrill than the sight of a heavy fish catching my peripheral vision a split second before it erupts out of a crashing wave to engulf my fly.

On such days, simple tools and simple rules will bring you the most action – a short, floating line, a three-fly cast, and of course, dark flies for a dark day. Black will always be a safe bet for the tail position. It provides a strong silhouette and seldom fails on days when, as they say, it never gets light. Claret comes into its own on the droppers: coloured seal's fur and hackle transmit light, but black will not, so when light levels are low, placing claret on the droppers, closer to what little light there is, will maximise the transmitted light, bringing the rich, warm hues of claret to life. Peat-stained waters set the effect off beautifully, one reason why claret features heavily in Scottish patterns, but trust me, it works fine in clear water, too.

The Machair Claret was created by Captain John Kennedy, at the time, manager of South Uist Estates. Most of us mere mortals would be happy leaving a legacy of one "famous" fly. Not so, Mr Kennedy. One could fish the machair (the fertile coastal lochs of the Uists) or any other lochs for that matter, in complete confidence using three of his legendary patterns: The Brigadier, Machair Claret, and last, but by no means least, Clan Chief. Captain Kennedy's original Machair Claret – essentially a Bumble – featured a jungle-cock nail for the tail. The pattern caught my attention at an early stage in my tying career, when I had not yet furnished myself with such luxuries, so a slip of natural French partridge flank feather was the



Hook Size 8, 10 or 12 Kamasan B170 or 175

Tail Fibres from French Partridge flank feather

Rib Oval gold **Body** Claret seal's fur

Body hackles One claret and one black cock hackle, wound together **Head hackle** Black hen

Thread Black



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nearest I had – squint, and you'll see what I mean.

Twenty-odd years later, and the French partridge remains. Jungle cock at the rear end doesn't sit quite right with me, plus, I like the movement, and the durability of French partridge. The rest of the pattern remains faithful, and has been a permanent fixture in my box of wet-flies, accounting for a great many fish on English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh waters.

The Dabbler version (just the addition of a bronze mallard cloak) was added to the collection about five years or so ago, mainly to streamline the pattern a little, allowing the option of fishing it further down the leader or in a smaller wave. It looks like it, too, will be holding its corner for a long time to come. **T&S**



For the Dabbler version, substitute the cock body hackles for hen, and add a cloak of bronze mallard.

TYING TIPS

The only tricky part of this pattern is the simultaneous palmering of two hackles. Match the two hackles for barb length, then stroke out the barbs, so they stand at 90 degrees to the stalk. Strip a barb from the butt end of the hackles, then trim the hackles to exactly the same length, and place one on top of the other. Tie them in at the butt end, then, ensuring there is no slack in either hackle, get a good grip of both tips with your hackle pliers and palmer them down to the tail.