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In Praise of CDC

Our January 2002 contribution from Lesley Crawford

*Lesley takes a look Cul de Canard and its
uses in fly tying*



Any way you look at it, CDC, Cul de Canard or Ducks Bum is a pretty fabulous fly tying material. Softly wispy, buoyant and subtle these feathers are tops in the creation of trout flies. I know of no other material which has the ability to float as well yet remain delicate and insect like. If well tied, CDC flies are capable of fooling trout anywhere in any situation from the big loch to the tumbling stream. If you take your trout fishing seriously these patterns must be in your fly box at all times - whatever the venue.

So what is it that makes CDCs so special? It's a lot to do with the fineness of the feather which makes them ideal for representing insect wings. But CDC also has important light and air trapping qualities long overlooked by trout fishermen in their quest for the perfect fly. Though these factors may have been discussed before, Kingsmill Moore) in his ground breaking book 'A Man May Fish') seems to be one of the first angling doyens to discuss the trout attracting qualities of light and air in both naturals and imitations.

Many insects in an aquatic habitat trap light and oxygen bubbles about their bodies - particularly in their emerging state. For example anyone who has closely observed a sedge emerging in calm water will tell you of the peculiar silvery ball of air which appears just before the insect pops up on to the surface. When a dense hatch of sedge is occurring the water briefly takes on the appearance of 'bubbling' and this effect sends the trout into a frenzy of activity.



CDC flies are excellent
trout attractors, subtle
and insect like

Equally, nymphs like those of the mayfly have an odd translucent glint about them as they float to the surface and then a brief but quite recognisable simmer of air as the nymph case splits to allow the insect to emerge. Midge pupa also have little translucent breathing tubes which hold air at the head and these can resemble

air 'bubbles' especially when they lie trapped in the surface film. The original 'Footballer' design of Geoffrey Bucknall amply copies this phenomenon. In addition, terrestrial born insects blown on to the water surface illustrate these characteristics, especially when first alighting on the water surface - projecting little points of light and shade where legs and body make contact. Before these insects are drowned there is a reasonable amount of air trapped in the wings and this acts as a highly charged signal to trout to attack the insect in a vulnerable state.



No fly box should be without some CDC's

The other important feature of CDC is the subtle way it moves in the water. All trout recognise their prey from its appearance on or below the surface and CDC has a pulsing natural flow which deceives feeding trout in most conditions. While trout may think twice about a stiff hackled fly which might look incongruous amongst the prevalent hatch, they do not usually shy away from a CDC unless its presentation has been overly clumsy. The beauty

of this material lies in its versatility. It can be easily used in a broad variety of patterns from Sedge to Buzzer and from Midge to Hopper. In all cases CDC adds a degree of subtlety to the tying leaving most other feathers far behind. The fibres are pliable, yet do not collapse along the body of the fly when wet and this allows shape and buoyancy retention even in the roughest of water.

All this makes you wonder why they were never used in bygone days. I suppose indirectly they could be attributed to the very sparse border/north country patterns like those of W C Stewart of the late 1800's. However, the particular use of Cul de Canard, a material which most fly tyers would simply discard as too 'soft', was probably not found much until the 1980's. This is a pity as CDCs can take minimal fly dressings to another level. What's more they can be relatively easy to tie which is a boon to the more cack handed among us! Here's a guide to some of the best CDC patterns in regular use today;

Top CDC patterns

CDC Midge

This is a generic name for midge or buzzer like patterns tied with a CDC wing. They are of great use on flowing water but the 'Hares Ear' version can be put to just as good a use on stillwater. They are at their most effective when tied in small sizes 14 to 18. One of my favourites is the Hares Ear CDC which can be fished upstream or across and down on rivers or on a slow twitched retrieve on the loch. The dressing is Paul Buchanan's and is as follows:

Head - Sparse Hares Ear.
Wing - 2 small CDC plumes.



Body – stripped quill from peacock eye feather.

CDC flies lead on from the patterns of old

CDC Sedge

This pattern is particularly effective when trout rise and slash at firmer bodied flies but fail to take hold. Artificial flies made with deerhair or similar can sometimes be too buoyant for their own good and trout wanting to stun the fly and take it under the surface can be frustrated in their efforts. A CDC sedge (size 10 to 14) usually allows the fish enough time to smack it down and snatch it. While this tying is primarily for use on stillwaters, big river trout will also take it with vigour. The dressing is as follows:

Body – blended hares mask with straggly bits picked out.

Rib – oval gold.

Wing - 4 CDC feathers tied flat.

Hackle – medium red/brown hen clipped underneath the head.



Anglers can use CDC's on flowing or stillwater

CDC Emergers

These flies are very easy to tie and resemble the CDC Midge without the Hares Ear at the head. They are normally most effective on the river but are of good use for picky stillwater trout in difficult conditions. Make them in size 12 to 18. The dressings are variable but a body of olive, amber or yellow hue of either wool or seals fur, rib of monofilament or oval gold and wing of 2 CDC feathers tied flat slightly longer than the body does the business.

That's a top three to start you off, now is the time for fly tying so lets get to it!

About Lesley Crawford

Lesley has fished for brown trout and sea trout from a very early age and her enthusiasm for these beautiful Scottish fish shows no signs of diminishing. She is well known as a leading angling writer and photographer with prodigious articles in a wide range of publications including Salmon Trout & Sea Trout and the Scotsman.

Lesley is a REFFIS qualified fishing guide and arranges bespoke wild trout angling holidays in the Northern Highlands. Her first major book '[Fishing for Wild Trout in Scottish Lochs](#)' (Swan Hill 1996) was a runaway success and the long awaited follow up '[Scotland's Classic Wild Trout Waters](#)' (Swan Hill) was published in 2000. Order your copy now. Read more about Lesley at www.wildtroutfisher.co.uk