

CDC vs Marabou - the challenge

by Craig Thom

This may be fly fishing heresy, but is CDC (Cul de Canard) all that it is cracked up to be, or is marabou an appropriate substitute?

Two things got me onto this train of thought, the first when trying to 'drown' a filoplume* dragon, and the second when looking at feathers through a microscope.

The first must be familiar to most flyfisher-persons. The marabou fly you have just tied on just wont sink. You squeeze the air out, wiggle it in the water, squeeze it some more and it still doesn't sink. Doesn't that sound like an advert for CDC?

The second was discovered serendipitously when I was helping my daughter with some school work and we hauled out the microscope onto my fly tying desk, one thing led to another, and before long we were examining feathers and fur. (The prettiest by the way is peacock herl).

The structure of the CDC was very similar to marabou, in that the thickness of the barbs were similar, and they both had tiny spiky barbules at the nodes.

Further investigation was required.

The first thing was to photograph each type of feather, and then compare them side by side. Lacking the proper equipment, a digital camera looking down the throat of the microscope would have to do, so the quality of the pictures is not that great.

The following materials were used:

Veniard Select CDC (Orange)

Spirit River Bulk CDC (Black)

Hends CDC (Natural)

Marabou Tips (Red)

Marabou 'side fluff' from a turkey flat. (Orange)

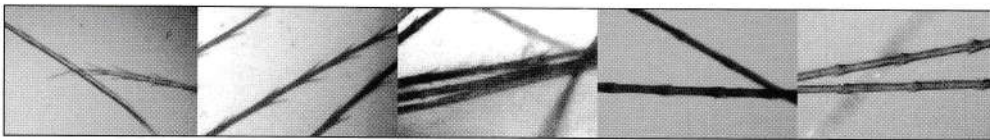


Illustration (a) shows each of the materials in order from left to right (Select, Bulk, Natural, Marabou tips, Marabou).

Note that of the CDC, the bulk black showed the most pronounced barbules, and the natural the least. The marabou showed much smaller barbules. It is also important to note that the amount of barbs varied amongst the CDC and the marabou, the latter being most dense, and within the CDC selection, the natural was most dense and the bulk the least.

To test the theory of whether marabou can be a substitute for CDC, some flies were made up, based on the F-Fly by Fratnick (with rabbit dubbing body). These were then dropped on the water from about a metre up and photographed. Apologies again for the quality of the pictures, plain glass is not conducive to fine focus.

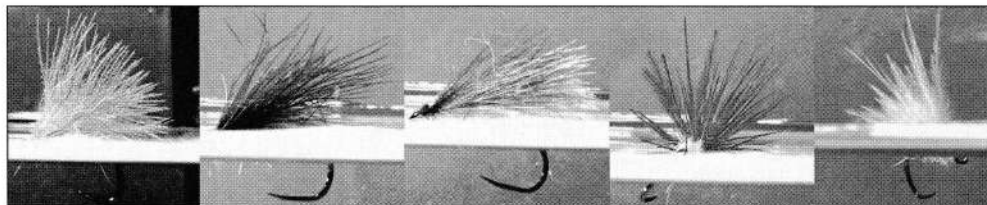


Illustration (b) shows each of the materials tied as an F-Fly and floating on the surface.

As is evident, all of the materials floated well, but because in real life flies take a bit of hammering this was not a realistic test.

The next step was to hold the flies underwater and wiggle them a bit, take them out and drop them back onto the surface.

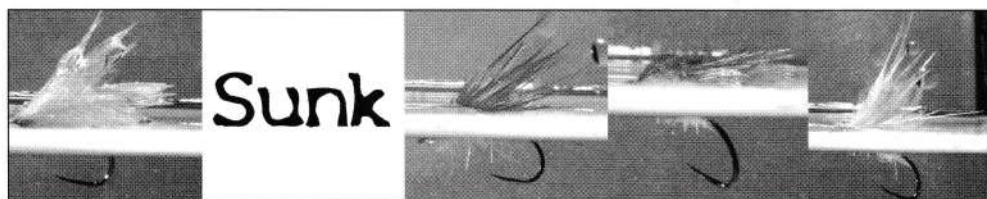


Illustration (c) shows the flies after a bit of 'rapid treatment'.

The first CDC has taken up some water in its structure, the bulk CDC just sunk and the natural CDC has come out completely dry. The marabou tips are looking a bit bedraggled, but the 'plume' marabou is riding high with little water in it.

The flies were then repeatedly pushed into the water to sink them. Other than the one that sank originally, none really sank but all but the natural CDC ended up hanging just under the surface, this proved unsinkable.

The next step was to see how many bubbles are held by a single plume underwater. A single plume was attached to a hook with a brass bead, and dropped into the water from about a metre up. The first one wouldn't sink, so all were trimmed in half and then dropped again.



The Select CDC held a lot of air, bound together as one bubble.

The Bulk CDC held some air, lost it and ended up with a single bubble.