

# FERGIE'S SKINNY DAMSEL

*Rob Denson ties a sophisticated fly that is definitely a nymph and not a lure*

**T**HE MORE observant among you will remember this pattern from my 2015 "Summer Flies" article, which featured patterns from several friends. Go straight to the top of the class if you also recall that it came from the vice of Alex Ferguson. It was mentioned then in brief, but I think it deserves to be described in more detail.

I'm a huge fan of Alex's tying. Technically, I know of no one better, and his thinking is always beyond reproach. What sets him apart is a rare and enviable touch that bestows life and beauty on his flies, making them much more than just cold logic.

The Skinny Damsel dropped through my letterbox three or four years ago, along with a few samples of partridge and bronze mallard that Alex had been busy dying, and were integral to the Damsel and a couple of other new patterns. Typical Alex: a simple fly of few components, yet much more than the sum of its parts.

I couldn't wait to get it wet. Alex had reported good results on his local waters, Pitsford and Ravensthorpe, and I had similar success on an unusually rich and fertile northern reservoir, Upper Roddlesworth.

This is a damsel "nymph", not to be confused with a flashy, oversized, damsel "lure". Lure versions are fine for, well, lure work, especially in the early season, but have little in common with the nymph. The naturals spend up to 18 months hunting on the bottom or in vegetation and are therefore an ever-present prey item for trout. The cream of true damsel nymph fishing - often overlooked in favour of random damsel lure fishing - comes in the summer months when the mature nymphs ascend to the surface and swim, close to, or in the surface film, in a conspicuous manner, toward the bank where they complete their transformation. This is what Alex's nymph was designed for, and where it excels - although there is nothing stopping you from trying it a little earlier in the year.

Sport can be hectic and occasionally on a par with any other mass-emergence or fall, producing quantity, quality and bags of excitement.

Line-wise, a floater or very slow intermediate are your best options. A team of three with the Damsel top or tail, with sparse wet-flies or nymphs in cahoots, would be a good prospecting rig for starters, changing to a single Damsel as and when a proclivity for the



**Hook** Size 10 Hayabusa 373 or 761, Partridge Wet Heavy or Kamasan B175

**Tail** Olive, brown-olive or sooty-olive marabou

**Rib** Chartreuse UTC wire or oval gold **Body** Olive or sooty-olive seal's fur **Hackle** Dyed-olive cock partridge

**Thread** Olive Uni 8/0 or UTC 70



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nymph becomes apparent. A varied figure-of-eight retrieve, with occasional pauses and jerks, will usually elicit the desired response. John Goddard reckoned that bank anglers have a distinct advantage, due to the brisk migration of the natural in the direction of the shore. As ever, though, observation, stealth and good presentation ensure equally good results for the thinking boat angler.

There is a serendipitous twist in the tail, which Alex hadn't accounted for. His Skinny Damsel has also proved to be a big hit for me with Mayfly-feeders, especially when the hatch slows, or the trout refuse to rise and they are likely to be having a spell eating nymphs. Fish it in much the same way as above and hold on tight! **T&S**

## TYING TIPS

- As always, vary the hook weight to control depth.
- Rake out the seal's fur for extra life and colour transmission.
- Keep the tail and hackle sparse - less means more movement.