

BLACK & RED DHE

Try this irresistible emerger on mild winter days, suggests Rob Denson

I HEAR RUMOURS that some folk like to fish through the winter. If you do, then the chances are that you'll encounter black buzzers. The way our winter pans out these days, there's also a good chance you'll encounter rising fish, and, if you're brave enough to float something on the surface, I also hear rumours there's a damn good chance you'll catch a trout.

Rumour has it that winter dry-fly fishing, thanks in part to the fact that trout never look a gift-horse in the mouth (especially through the winter) and partly thanks to climate change, is an increasingly viable tactic. Look out for high pressure – trout like settled weather, whatever the time of year. A spell of high pressure will also likely clear the skies for a day or two, letting the sunshine through, gently warming the quiet corners of your favourite reservoir or loch. Here's a fly then, that should, or so I've heard, do the trick for you.

I've voiced my thoughts on the DHE (Deer Hair Emerger) on this page before. To paraphrase: it's as good as it gets. A true "super-fly" with fish-catching powers inversely proportional to the number of materials used and the time it takes to tie. Or, to put it another way, it's so much more than the sum of its parts.

The DHE is ideally suited to winter dry-fly fishing by virtue of the fact that, strictly speaking, it's not a dry-fly; it's an emerger – as it says on the tin. It's common, especially in a flat calm for rings on the surface to be mistaken for rising fish taking meat off the surface. Look closer, and quite often, the "rise" is actually the disturbance left by fish taking nymphs that are very close to the surface moments before they begin to hang in the film and emerge from their shuck. The phenomenon is particularly common and noticeable in the cooler months. The depth at which the nymphs are taken and still produce this misleading bulge can vary – from eight inches to a few millimetres below the surface.

When the action is taking place a good few inches down, it usually pays to employ the services of sparsely dressed nymphs on lightweight hooks, fished on a floating line. The closer the action is to the surface, the more likely it is that the fish will be tempted by an emerger. The DHE, a real iceberg of a fly, makes an offer to the trout that is nigh-on impossible to refuse. With practically all the hook hanging below the surface, it penetrates the water column deeper than just about any other hackled dry-fly or emerger I can think of.

The DHE does, of course, fit the bill superbly well when rise forms are "genuine", and fish are actively picking off adults and/or nymphs at the moment of emergence.



Hook Sizes 10-16 Kamasan B100 or similar curved light-wire hook
Butt Glo-Brite No.4, fluorescent seal fur, or similar thread/dubbing
Body Black seal fur, or a mix of dark colours – black, claret, brown
Wing Natural deer hair
Thread Black



▼ Rob Denson has fly-fished for trout for 25 years, visiting all four corners of Britain and Ireland, combining his love of fly-tying, photography and a rolling wave. Website: robdenson.co.uk

But don't limit the DHE to winter or stillwater use, or to the black and red livery pictured here. The DHE is a devastating pattern on rivers, too, covering all emerging upwinged species, sedges and chironomids as well as cripples and drowned or struggling terrestrials. The classic DHE in drab, natural furs and hairs takes some beating, no matter what insect life is on (or partly in) the water, but can be adapted to specific colours for species you feel most likely to encounter. **T&S**

TYING TIPS

- The balance between hook weight, body weight and wing size and volume is critical. If the hook is too heavy, the fly will sink.
- Aim for as slim a wing as possible, but too much deer hair isn't necessarily a bad thing – at least the fly will float. The wing serves largely to float the fly. Try flies out in a glass of water to see how slim you can take the wing.
- Tying sequence: tie in the deer hair bunch (tips facing away from the hook). Cock the deer hair with several turns around the base. Take the thread down to the bend of the hook. Tie in the butt, then dub the body up to the wing, then make a few turns in front of the wing.
- Rake out the dubbing with velcro, concentrating on the area directly below the wing, stroking it in an upward motion towards the wing. This provides a little lifelike "chaos", and aids buoyancy.