

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

BRILLIANT BUNNY

How Rob Denson ties rabbit bodies, wings and tails to improve fly movement and silhouette



Dyed patches are available in popular colours such as black and olive, but also in bright hues such as orange and pink.

The mottled, natural colouring of rabbit fur lends itself perfectly to imitative patterns.

MOST OFTEN CUT INTO STRIPS FOR use in Zonker and Minkie-type patterns, rabbit fur has much more to offer than you might first think. I always ensure I have several patches at my disposal, in natural, dyed black, white and olive, although being of light, relatively neutral tones, rabbit will take almost any colour well. It's a great straight swap for hare's mask, natural or dyed, but it's the inherent softness and mobility that makes rabbit so special. What appear to be bulky tails and wings collapse to nothing when wet, yet pulse and throb irresistibly when the retrieve is paused. From lures to dry-flies, and wet-flies to nymphs, rabbit can be worked into a vast range of patterns, substituting and often surpassing hare, mink and marabou in many of their classic roles. Any material this versatile, not to mention affordable and available, needs to be in your armoury.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



RABBIT HOG

Over the years, I've come to favour natural rabbit fur for flies like the Hare Hog. The combination of movement and colouration makes for a terrific baitfish pattern. It's tied using the same technique as a Hedgehog: bunch by bunch, with a turn of Straggle in between. Keep in as much underfur as you can handle for extra body and pulse.



HOPPER

Much overlooked when it comes to dry-flies, a pinch of rabbit provides a lively silhouette to this Hopper. Tucked in behind a few CDC plumes, the rabbit wing also acts like a sail, imparting movement at the slightest hint of a breeze. Use sparingly, with most of the underfur removed.



OLIVE LURE

Triple trouble. This olive-and-gold lure has a dyed rabbit "wing", body and tail. The tail uses a generous bunch with all the underfur retained; the body is a simple mix of guard hairs and underfur; and the "wing" uses the dubbing loop technique. Gold Ice Dub or similar is added sparingly to each part of the fly.



CORMORANT

It has been fashionable in recent years to dress Cormorants with very sparse wings made of the skinniest marabou tips — a complete waste of time. The whole point of marabou, and for that matter, rabbit, is to make the wing pulse with life. Use the biggest bunch you can (keeping an eye on proportions) retaining all the underfur. A rare case of more is more.



CAPERCAILLIE

Your mission, should you choose to accept it... is to design and tie a fly that exploits perfectly the attributes of rabbit. Seeing Arthur Macdonald's Capercaillie live and breathe really is something to behold. It drives both brownies and rainbows potty. A good chunk of rabbit with all the underfur is applied using a dubbing loop — investigate this technique on YouTube if you don't know it already.



ZONKER

The hugely successful Zonker baitfish imitation, tied with a rabbit strip. Simply change the wing and body colour to suit the baitfish you wish to imitate. Natural (above), white, black or olive wings will cover most eventualities, although pink and orange are becoming popular attractor colours.



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PREPPING



To thin a bunch of rabbit fur, or completely remove underfur, make a rake with a self-adhesive strip of velcro (hooks) attached to a coffee stirring stick. Hold the bunch firmly by the tips and rake slowly.



Before and after. A bunch about the thickness of your finger is ideal for wings and tails. Use this as a starting point, reducing or increasing the size depending on the size of hook and proportions of the fly.



This is how underfur (left) and guard hairs (right) should look when separated and ready for dubbing on nymphs, dry-flies, wet-flies and lures.



Cut rabbit strips from a patch or a complete skin. Pre-cut strips available from tying retailers work equally well and save wastage as a result of cutting errors.