

GROUNDHOG & SILVER

Rob Denson's suggestive wet-fly can be anything you want it to be

MATERIALS

Hook Size 8-12 Kamasan B175 or 170 **Thread** Black UTC 70 denier **Tail** Groundhog, squirrel or rabbit **Rib** Silver or black wire **Body** Flat silver (or gold) tinsel/Mylar **Body hackle** Cree, red game, ginger or furnace hen **Wing** Same as tail **Head hackle** Same as body hackle



TRADITIONAL WET-FLIES TIED with paired wing slips are a thing of beauty. I still tie a few favourites to keep my eye in. As much as I love wing slips, though, I'm an even bigger fan of hair-wings. They're less of a palaver; I've seen wing slips reduce grown men to tears – I know, I was that soldier. Hair-wings on the other hand require little practice before one achieves a zero reject rate. They're much more durable, and arguably as pretty. For my money, though, they have two even more important advantages: translucency and mobility. The majority of water-borne invertebrates

and terrestrials that form the trout's diet have a degree of translucency, causing them to glow with the colour of the exoskeleton and its contents. Any tying materials, therefore, that have a good degree of translucency – seal's fur, cock hackle, and hair – are always a welcome addition to a fly. Another form of translucency comes from dense but mobile materials, such as hair and fur. The material itself doesn't have to be translucent, but the movement of the tightly packed fibres allows light to filter through, which further exaggerates the illusion of movement and life. My original idea behind the Groundhog & Silver was as a general, suggestive wet pattern

TYING TIPS

- Most hair and fur, with the obvious exception of deer and elk hair, is non-compressible so take care when tying a bunch in for the wing. Strong thread, pushed to the limit, is a must to prevent the fibres falling out when in use. Keep the wing slim, and if you're not confident in your technique, simply tie one really slim bunch on top of the other.
- Tie the tail hair along the full length of the body so it provides a flat bed for the tinsel/Mylar body. If the hair or fur is not long enough, build up the short area with thread.
- Treat this fly as a basic template – don't worry about not having precisely the same materials.

for food-rich waters – shut one eye and it's anything you want it to be: shrimp, sedge pupae, hoglouse, corixa, fry – for use on the top or middle dropper. Silver often works well in dark, overcast conditions, but can also grab the attention in bright sunlight (when a little flash never goes amiss) making it a great choice when the weather has even less idea what it's doing than you have. Indeed, one of the first fish it took for me was a solid 4lb wild fish at Malham Tarn on a nasty, moody day that didn't know its backside from its elbow. I considered the one fish on that day a success and have reached for the Groundhog & Silver on such days ever since.

It's a wonderfully versatile fly, too; almost a "concept" fly. That is to say, a basic framework that one can work with, changing certain elements – body colour, hackle colour and type, and wing and tail material – to suit specific waters, food items and conditions. Gold tinsel is an obvious alternative, and works well, with fox squirrel for the wing and tail. You'll also find that as well as on a floater in the surface layers, it has its moments on faster sinking lines, deep down, with the silver picking up what little light there is. In summary: worth its weight in silver, sometimes in gold. ■

TIE THE GROUNDHOG & SILVER



1 Prepare a pinch of groundhog hair by removing any soft underfur. Catch it in at the bend so the waste ends lie along the shank. Catch in the silver wire.



2 Cover the waste ends of the hair and wire with close thread turns to form an even base. Catch in a length of flat silver tinsel and wind towards the tail.



3 Apply touching, not overlapping, turns of the silver tinsel until it reaches the tail base. Wind the tinsel back over itself until it reaches its catching-in point.



4 Secure and trim the end of tinsel. Catch in a furnace hen hackle by its base. Using hackle pliers, wind the hackle along the shank in open, even turns.



5 When the hackle has reached the tail, take hold of the silver wire and wind it up through the hackle to lock it securely to the body.



6 Secure and remove the end of the wire. Prepare a second pinch of groundhog fur. Using mostly the stiffer guard hairs, secure in place with tight thread turns.



7 With the wing in position, catch in a second furnace hen hackle and apply two or three turns at the base of the wing to form a collar.



8 Stroke back the hackle fibres so they sweep over the body. Form a small head with the thread, then whip finish. Add a drop of clear varnish to the head.