

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

NUTS ABOUT SQUIRREL

Rob Denson exploits a fur that works beautifully in many fly styles



I SIMPLY COULDN'T LET THIS SERIES SLIP BY without mention of one of my favourite natural materials – squirrel. Similar but different, as they say, to hare fur, squirrel can be interchangeable with hare and rabbit, but has a few special attributes of its own that warrant your attention and investment.

There are many squirrel species on the market, but I find grey, fox and pine cover most eventualities. Grey squirrel tails need no introduction, especially to salmon and sea-trout anglers. For me, the grey also offers the most beautifully marked body fur of all the small mammal skins available to tyers. Fox squirrel is also beautifully marked and offers a slightly longer staple in the body fur and a warmer, redder tone than the grey. In terms of colouration, pine squirrel falls somewhere between grey and fox and is the most popular choice for Zonker strips. All three species are easily sourced, readily available and take dye beautifully.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



ADAMS

Hair-winged wet-flies are quick, easy to tie and extremely durable, offering a great alternative to tricky, traditional slip-winged wets. For my money, they're equally pretty and highly effective. This hair-winged Adams uses grey squirrel body hair (or fox) for the wing and underfur for the body.



SCRUFFY DRY

If you can take a leap of faith and place your trust in super-minimal flies (and I wholeheartedly recommend that you do), then try a pinch or two of fox squirrel tied to a hook; you'll be glad you did. Match your hatch with dyed or natural body hair. Super simple and super effective.

COMPARA-STYLE

Using grey tail for the tail, a mix of fox and grey body hair for the body, and again, a mix of fox and grey body hair for the wing, this Compara-style dry-fly is a real celebration of squirrel and a great suggestion of upwinged flies. You can also try bunches of squirrel as an alternative to deer.



SALMON AND SEA-TROUT

Beautifully marked, mobile, durable and cheap; grey squirrel tail is as popular and effective as it ever was for salmon and sea-trout hair-winged flies. Throw dyed tails into the mix and the possibilities are endless.

NYMPH

This Squirrel and Pearl nymph may look like the fluff that collects between your toes, but it's one of my most successful nymphs in recent years. A mere slip of a tail (grey squirrel) and a dubbing mix of grey and fox squirrel body hair combined with a pinch of Ice Dub are all that's needed to fool the wildest trout.



BOOBY

Pine squirrel strips are a favourite choice for Zonkers, but they also work perfectly on Minkie-style flies and this Booby fry pattern. Natural is always my first choice, but bold colours, or black can work well. ■



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. Web: robdenson.co.uk

PREPPING



Try to avoid cutting squirrel with scissors. The best way to harvest body hair is to pinch between thumbnail and index finger or forefinger tips. Grip hard and tug quickly. The process will harvest mostly guard hairs but also just the right amount of underfur to help the hairs knit and make dubbing easier.



The harvest: (left to right) yellow-olive, fiery-brown and natural grey, with a yellow-olive skinny nymph.



The sky's the limit with dyed patches and tails. As you can see, fox, pine and grey all take dye beautifully: (clockwise) grey squirrel dyed yellow-olive, fox squirrel dyed WOIGO, grey squirrel tail dyed scarlet, pine squirrel dyed fiery-brown.