

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

TIP-TOP

Rob Denson explains how imaginative tyers make the most of golden pheasant



I T'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO IMAGINE THE great pantheon of traditional tying without golden pheasant. Introduced to Britain and Ireland from China around 100 years ago, this peculiar, garish bird appears to have evolved with the sole purpose of furnishing salmon, trout and sea-trout tyers with its rich, vibrant feathers and soon became an indispensable part of the traditional tyer's kit.

The GP, as we tyers like to call it, offers four main feathers of interest: the tippet feather from the neck; the delightfully translucent topping feathers from the head; the body (rump and breast) feathers; and, of course, the tail.

Resplendent in their natural state, all GP feathers dye superbly well, offering the creative tyer endless possibilities. There's something wonderfully comforting and confidence-inspiring about tying and using flies with GP, such is the history and tradition, not to mention the fish-pulling power, that it brings to the party.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



DUNKELD CRIPPLER

The long, slightly spiky yet mobile barbs of the GP body feather simply bristle with life and movement — the perfect choice for head-and-shoulder hackling on this Dunkeld Crippler or other similar Octopus-style flies.

BO DIDDLEY

Simple and elegant, like a thousand and one traditional wet-flies before it, a tippet tail adorns George Barron's Bo Diddlely. Don't overdress and keep a close eye on proportions (tail approximately the same length as the body) and your "trads" will look and fish like George's in no time.



GORGEOUS GEORGINA

What could possibly be more seductive than a GP topping tail? It's for this reason that I'm guilty of ignoring the "rules" on proportions and being more generous with length where topping tails are concerned — it seems such a shame not to fully exploit that gorgeous, slow curve and translucency on this Gorgeous Georgina and other traditional-style wet-flies.



SNOW QUEEN

Dressed to kill! A fully dressed salmon fly is almost certainly underdressed without some skilfully placed topping. Mark Harrison's Snow Queen duly obliges, using topping for the tail and the wing assembly. It's the pinnacle of the tyer's craft — several years' hard practice will help you pull off something like this.

OLIVE CRUNCHER

A few strands of the much overlooked and underrated GP tail feather form the body of this olive cruncher. The bold markings of the GP tail give a very attractive and natural-looking variegated effect when wound as a body for nymphs, spiders and wet-flies. Dyed-olive tippet works beautifully in tandem with the dyed golden-olive GP tail.



CROW-WINGED BIBIO

For an interesting and effective twist, the body feather can front up practically any style of traditional wet-fly. This Crow-winged Bibio uses a dyed-red body feather to devastating effect, adding a splash of rich colour and some welcome kick from the springy barbs.



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PREPPING



A GP body feather before (left) and after being prepped for tying in (right). Strip the fluffy waste from the stalk, then spread the barbs horizontally at right angles to the stalk. Snip four to six of the upper central barbs (this is your tying-in point) and remove some lower barbs leaving about a dozen or so on each side of the stalk. Tie in with the trimmed barbs, double (fold feather in half) and wind as a regular hackle.



I sometimes straighten GP topping to make it fit better with the Dabbler template (Kate Dabbler, pictured). Select fibres from a long topping feather, then dampen. Place on a hot, flat plate, straighten, and leave for five minutes.



Tippet and topping tails can prove tricky to align properly. Here's a tip that helps me catch them in exactly as I want them, first time. Offer the tail to the hook shank, then spin the bobbin holder clockwise for five seconds or so. The thread will want to hug the hook shank as you wind, rather than going slack and forcing a pinch-and-loop to get the tail on straight. The tail pictured is held in the perfect position with just one turn after spinning.