

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

# MARABOU IN MOTION

Rob Denson demonstrates the effectiveness of this highly mobile, inexpensive feather



**CHEAP, EASY TO OBTAIN, EASY TO WORK** with and devilishly attractive to trout, marabou is another natural material that the fly tyer simply cannot afford to be without. Marabou is all about the movement of the hundreds of super-soft barbs (strands coming off the stem) per feather and thousands of barbules (short fibres coming off the barbs). Even the most imperceptible, minute breath of current or nudge of the fly results in slow, seductive movement. Marabou also dyes like a dream, allowing an infinite range of colours and limitless design possibilities.

Don't be confused by the various types – turkey, ostrich, blood quills, plumes *etc.*, it's all much of a muchness and behaves and costs similarly. I generally use ostrich plumes but will buy anything within reason if the quality, colour and price are right. The most common ways to best exploit marabou's wonderful movement is with simple wings and tails, but read on for a few extra tips and tricks.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



### DAWSON'S OLIVE VARIANT

Five subtly different shades of marabou blend beautifully to give this Dawson's Olive variant a natural yet eye-catching look. Layer the colours in small bunches, either in hand, or add one layer at a time directly to the fly. Layers of colour also further enhance the illusion of life.



### VIVA VARIANT

The faintest breath of breeze on this simple Viva variant gives some idea of the way marabou behaves in the water. The gossamer barbs and barbules catch the slightest movement of water in a most seductive way, giving that suggestion of life that fish find irresistible.

### MAYFLY NYMPH

Three different techniques with one plume of marabou result in this lively mayfly nymph: a pinch for the tail, a few strands wound down the shank for the body, then a dozen or so barbs trapped in a dubbing loop and spun before winding around the thorax to suggest legs. Vary the size and colours to suggest a range of nymph species.



### SOLDIER PALMER VARIANT

When is a tail not a tail? When it's a collar ... or is that a cuff? Either way, this Soldier Palmer variant benefits from a big, pulsating splash of colour at the rear. Tie in the tip of a plume at the bend then "double" the plume as you would a hen hackle. Make two or three turns, tie down, and pluck the collar between forefinger and thumbnail to the required length. The limit is your range of marabou colours.

### BLACK CORMORANT

The body materials and colours on this simple Cormorant are practically irrelevant, such is the devastating fish-catching power of a tiny pinch of marabou. One of my all-time favourite flies and with good reason – it is simultaneously a nymph, wet-fly and mini-lure, catching trout anywhere, any time.



### BLACK & OLIVE LUMP

It's all going on in this Black & Olive "lump", and for once, more is more – within reason. The volume and bulk of marabou is dramatically reduced when wet, so, to get the body of the lump to really throb and pulse we have to pile on the plumes. The body here is constructed by trapping the barbs of half a plume in a dubbing loop. Once spun, it is wound down the shank, then plucked to the desired length and bulk. A technique worth mastering. ■



### 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](http://robdenson.co.uk)

## DOS, DON'TS AND DOUBLING



Using the tiniest pinch of the skinniest barbs from the very top of the plume seems to be *de rigueur* these days (Red Cormorant, above left). I'm not a fan. The barbs at the very tip of the plume have next to nothing in the way of barbules to help catch the movement of water and fly. Avoid. The other extreme of overloading marabou wings and tails is counter-productive. Excessive bulk limits movement and translucency. This olive Cormorant (above right) is seriously overdone. Also, trimming marabou is not a great look and achieves nothing. To roughly align wing and tail tips, simply pluck with forefinger and thumb.



This claret plume is prepped for "doubling": tying a hackle or plume in by the tip then effectively folding it in half by stroking the barbs behind the stem. The plume is then wound as you would with cock or hen hackle. The technique is perfect for unusual and highly mobile lures, such as the Black and Ginger (below), and salmon, steelhead and pike flies.

