

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

SEAL APPEAL

Rob Denson explains how to exploit a fur that gives flies the illusion of life



In a class of its own: dyed and natural seal's fur.

IN THIS SERIES, I'VE USED SOME SERIOUSLY versatile and efficacious materials, none of which I'd care to be without. However, if it came to a balloon debate, for me at least, there's only going to be one survivor: seal's fur. It is light, lively, easy to work with and can be dyed any colour under the sun. It also has a clever trick up its sleeve: translucency, the ability to transmit light.

Most invertebrate bodies have a degree of translucency, therefore light is transmitted through the body parts when the animal is between the light source and viewer (think stained-glass window viewed from the inside) as opposed to reflected off the animal. Transmitted light causes a natural glow that trout instantly recognise as a potential food source. This quality gives extra magic to dry-flies, nymphs, wet-flies and emergers. All the flies on this page are deliciously simple yet devilishly successful — testament to the potent powers that seal's fur bestows upon them — light and life. For imitative and suggestive flies, there's nothing quite like it.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



CRUNCHER

Skinny but lively. By using seal's fur for the body, this slimline little Cruncher bridges the gap between nymph and wet-fly. Keep it "lean 'n' mean" but as always with seal's fur, rake it out with velcro to give the gift of life. Note the colour gradient from black, through claret to bright red — another trick to turn the heads of trout.



BITS

With a basic dry-fly profile as old as fly-fishing itself, this Bob's Bits variant is anything that trout want it to be. By varying the hook size (from 20 to 10) and the body colour, the Bits does a more than passable suggestion of practically everything that emerges from or lands on the water. This ginger and fiery brown version is particularly killing in the summer months.



HOG

Seal's fur and deer hair are another marriage made in heaven. This well-chewed Hog has accounted for dozens of fish thanks to two cleverly combined natural materials. The deer hair provides buoyancy and an irresistible silhouette, while the seal's fur provides a splash of attention-grabbing living, glowing colour. Rake the fur up and into the deer hair to give extra buoyancy.

SHIPMAN'S

Few flies have ever exploited the properties of seal's fur to such devastating effect as Dave Shipman's Buzzer. Ragged out to within an inch of its life, colour and light literally stream out of the dubbing while the dishevelled fibres suggest the chaotic final moments of emergence as well as aiding floatation; a stroke of pure genius. Don't wait for the buzzers to hatch, though — it's a first-class general and searching dry-fly, too.



TRADITIONAL WET-FLY

A twist of fur and feather, the framework upon which a million and one wet-flies have been based. Like all successful flies, a simple formula results in something greater than the sum of its parts. Traditional-style wet-flies like this Soldier Palmer variant tend to excel when fished higher in the water where the light is shining through the seal's fur, creating a symphony of light and colour. The movement of fur and hackle closes the deal.



BUZZER

Expert buzzer anglers exploit the properties of seal's fur in lightweight Buzzers crafted specifically for use on the top dropper, fished high in the water. The raked-out fur not only provides movement and colour but, crucially, slows down the sink rate, keeping the fly higher for longer — the complete opposite of heavy, slimline epoxy or varnish-style Buzzers. ■



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PREPPING



Adding a splash of sparkle to seal's fur can give extra zing to your flies. Apart from catching the light, the sparkle also suggests trapped gases in and around the body of the natural insect. Add small amounts of very fine, shiny dubbing to the seal's fur, then pinch and mix between forefinger and thumb. Olive and pearl, and black and gold are two very successful combinations.



Mixing several colours from the same area of the spectrum can give a mouthwatering kaleidoscope of colour when bathed in light and water. The technique also mimics nature where one single, solid colour seldom occurs. Invertebrates usually transmit an array of hues. On the left is fiery brown, ginger, yellow, Orkney peach and fluoro orange. The resulting mix is on the right.



Seal's fur always benefits from a good raking out with a velcro stick. Make your own from coffee stirring sticks and self-adhesive velcro. Brush the fur out until you see plenty of loose strands as per all the flies on this page. Don't worry about being too vigorous — if your flies are well tied, they'll stand the test.