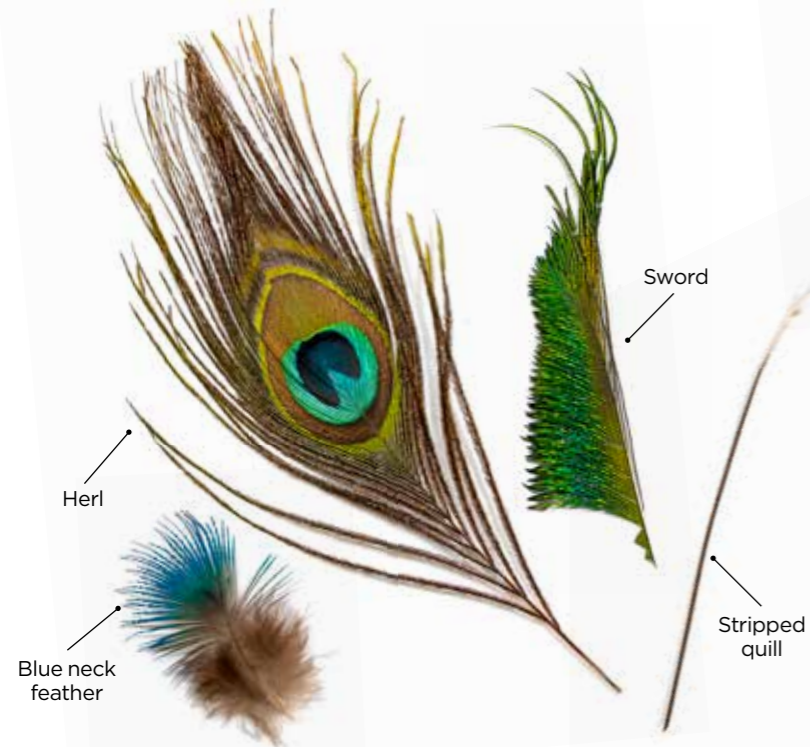


{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

HERL OF A LOT

Rob Denson exploits the beautiful and endlessly versatile peacock feather



MOTHER NATURE HAS A WAY OF taking one's breath away, often with something as simple as a feather. The peacock is covered from head to toe in such shimmering finery, and he justifiably struts and sashays with pomp and pride. As well as peahens, fly-tyers were quick to notice and have been exploiting the potent powers of peacock for centuries. From ancient spider patterns to constantly evolving competition nymphs and modern traditional wet-flies, peacock has always been and remains a cornerstone of the fly-tyer's kit.

The main items of interest harvested from the peacock are the eye feather, which provides the herl, the sword feather, and the blue neck feather. Quill is simply strands of eye herl stripped of the iridescent micro-barbs. Few materials, natural or synthetic, manage to balance eye-catching bling and natural subtlety in quite the same way as peacock.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



SPRING BLACK

Reducing the bulk of the herl is a trick I love to employ on many of my nymphs and spiders. Trout can get awfully picky at times, and it can pay to go anorexic. Gently rub a strand of herl against the nap between the nails of thumb and forefinger to remove as much of the bulk as you wish, then wind as your body material. Counter-ribbing (see "prepping") for protection is always a good idea — twisted fine red holographic suits this Spring Black variant perfectly.



BLUE NECK WET-FLY

The blue neck feather is highly prized among tyers of traditional wet-flies, adorning many a fine sea-trout pattern as well as flies tied with large brown trout and ferox in mind. Small bunches of barbs can be cut from the feather and tied in as a wing or tail, or the feather can be tied in by the tip, then wound as a hackle. The pattern above, tied for Loch Arkaig's leviathans, uses both techniques.



QUILL & PEARL

Some of the most accomplished tyers and anglers I know swear by stripped quill for their nymphs and buzzers. Using natural or dyed quill wrapped over tying thread or tinsel, the possibilities are truly endless. This cruncher uses natural quill wound over Mirage to suggest a segmented nymph body with trapped gas. A coat or two of varnish over the quill seals the deal.



BLACK MAGIC

A simple body of black thread and two turns of hen hackle are all it takes to fool the odd fish. Add three turns of standard herl at the thorax and you'll fool thousands of fish over the years. The natural colours and delicate sparkle of the herl complete the deception and elevate this Black Magic spider into the realms of super fly. One of my all-time favourites.

ALEXANDRA

Still producing the goods more than 150 years after its invention, the Alexandra makes great use of the sword feather's metallic green shimmer, which does a superb job of suggesting minnows and sticklebacks. Long ago, it was banned on many waters for catching too many fish. Thus far, however, my variant and I are welcome on all waters and continue to enjoy the odd red-letter day. Trim a small bunch of barbs from the sword feather and tie in as a wing and/or tail.



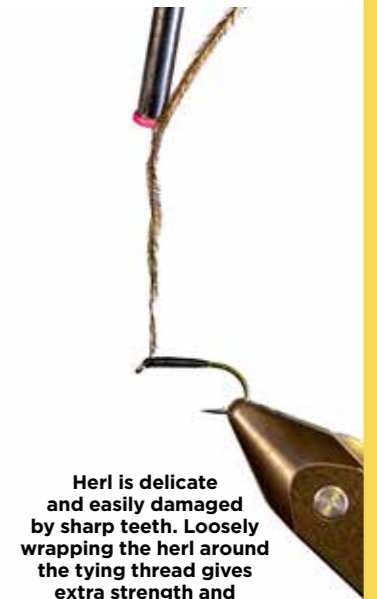
COCH

The originator of this coch-y-bonddu beetle pattern had an easy choice when it came to the body material, peacock herl being an uncanny match for both the colour and iridescence of beetles. Two or three strands of herl are tied in at the butt and wound together to provide a little extra bulk. The body can be left as is, or, for extra security and durability, ribbed with thin wire or wound around tying thread. ■



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PREPPING



Herl is delicate and easily damaged by sharp teeth. Loosely wrapping the herl around the tying thread gives extra strength and durability to herl bodies and thoraces and prevents the herl unravelling when damaged.



Counter-ribbing is the practice of winding a tinsel or wire rib in the opposite direction to the base layer (in this case, peacock) to prevent the strand of peacock from unravelling if damaged. The example above is double counter-ribbed with wire and tinsel for aesthetic appeal and added durability.



Stripping herl to the bare quill for buzzer and nymph bodies is child's play. Hold the herl down firmly on a flat surface and rub back and forth with an eraser. Note: part-stripped herl can also look great on skinny, minimal nymphs.