

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

GET MORE FROM MASKS

Don't know how to use a hare's mask? Rob Denson explains how this essential fur can enliven your trout flies



THAT CORNERSTONE OF IMITATIVE AND suggestive fly-tying, the hare's mask, is cheap, readily available, versatile, easy to use and, above all, deadly. Fly-tyers from the Catskills to Christchurch have been cunningly crafting the fur from the hare's mask and ears into simple killer patterns for centuries and I, for one, have found nothing, natural or synthetic, that comes close to matching it for sheer fish-catching power. Hare fur mimics beautifully the shades and tones found in many of the trout's favourite food items, such as nymphs, buzzers, lice, shrimp and sedges, as well as many terrestrials. The longer, spiky guard hairs complete the deception by providing all-important bugginess and "kick" to create a thoroughly convincing illusion of life – an offer that fish seldom refuse. With its unparalleled ability to deceive, and to perform in virtually any light, hare fur is worth its weight in gold.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



BUZZER

For this devilishly simple buzzer, long guard hairs are cut from the middle or edges of the mask, tied in the back of the thorax, then folded forwards to form a thorax cover, then tied off to form breathers. The thorax is my standard mix. As always, rake out the fur with velcro.



PAIR OF NYMPHS

Few, if any, invertebrates or terrestrials are a single, flat colour. Hare's fur mimics perfectly the shades seen in most trout and grayling food items. Simplicity itself and as deadly as they come: hare's mask, rib, and a nice, sharp hook. Why do we bother with anything else?



TOUCH-DUBBED NYMPH

Touch-dubbing is a technique used to apply very small amounts of dubbing to a sparsely dressed fly. Apply a small amount of tacky tying wax to the thread, then literally touch the thread with tiny amounts of your chosen dubbing.

Pictured above (top) is some short ear fur touch-dubbed on to thread for very sparse patterns. Below it is a noodle or rope dubbed with my standard mix ready for winding.

The rear section of the simple, sparse nymph/buzzer (right) was touch-dubbed with light fur scraped from the ear. The thorax was dubbed with my standard mix.



SWAMP DONKEY

A good mix of fur of all shades and lengths provides the perfect body for the Swamp Donkey wet-fly, complementing the drab tones of the mandarin flank and the brown hen body hackle. An irresistibly vague suggestion of shrimp, sedge, hog louse and much, much more in one quick, simple pattern.



HAIRWING

Cutting fur from the mask with scissors is not recommended. Much better to pinch and pull with forefinger and thumb, or use a dubbing rake. For the very short staple on the ears, try scraping with a scalpel. Sometimes, though, scissors are required to dig in deep and harvest the longest fur from the middle of the mask: this traditional-style hairwing wet-fly makes the most of the long fur from the middle of the mask. Cut a small bunch, hold by the tips and blow or brush away the underfur, then tie in.



DUBBING MIXES

When a dressing calls for "hare's ear", chances are it's really a mix from all parts of the mask. Pictured (near left) is my standard mix, harvested from all over the mask and ears, which is suitable for the vast majority of nymphs, dry-flies and wet-flies. Generally, the longer staple (hair or fur fibres) is harvested from the face, and the shorter staple from the ears. Occasionally, you will have more specific requirements of staple and shade. Get to know the mask and you can harvest accordingly. Also pictured (far left) is my standard mix with a pinch of pearl Ice Dub added to catch the eye and suggest trapped gas bubbles. Gold Ice Dub is another great option. ■

PREPPING



If you struggle to extract fur with the pinching technique, try scraping with the tip of a scalpel or similar blade. But scrape, don't slice!



Mixing small amounts of underfur (left) with guard hairs (right) makes dubbing easier as well as making a mask go further.



Glue a small patch of velcro (the part with the hooks on) to a stirring stick from a coffee shop to make the perfect tool for raking out.



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