

Rob Denson's trout fly of the month

Hairwing Wickham



Hook Size 10-12 Kamasan B175 or 170

Tail Ginger, badger or furnace cock (hiding the dark centre)

Body Flat gold

Rib Gold wire or oval

Body hackle Grizzle hen dyed golden-olive

Wing Fox squirrel, but grey squirrel will do

Cheeks Jungle-cock splits

Thread UTC Brown, olive, or black



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.

WE ARE lucky in these isles. For the past couple of hundred years, while the rest of the world was busy getting invaded, or still waiting to be discovered, the gentleman fly-fishers across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales generally had less pressing concerns and duly set about creating probably the greatest fly-tying legacy anywhere in the world. Ancient and iconic, many of our stillwater patterns are as effective today as they ever were, and continue to float boats and fill baskets around the globe.

Such is the efficacy of those cunning combinations of fur and feather that many are still dressed practically to the letter of the original dressings by home tyers and fly-tying companies alike. Many of these patterns, such as the Palmers and Bumbles of this world, have long-standing places in my box, often tied true,

or as near as damnit to the original. Seldom will one significantly "improve" a classic pattern - that's why it's a classic in the first place - but sometimes a tweak here and a twist there can transform an old master.

Sometimes the change may be purely practical, improving durability, or simply introducing a modern equivalent of an outdated or rare material. Often it's just a case of "adapting" a pattern to suit the way you fish, the fish you fish for and those pet theories one has about flies, trout, and life. One such theory is that hairwing flies will catch you more fish than those tied with matched slips of feather. This is nonsense; they won't. The old featherwing flies still have their place, and still have their days. What does make perfect sense is that hairwings are more durable and more mobile than matched wing-slips, and they are much easier to tie. A

size 14 Silver Invicta is a test for any tyer. Substitute the hen pheasant wing-slips for a grey squirrel hairwing and an equally beautiful and equally effective pattern is within reach of all but the clumsiest tyer.

The Wickham's Fancy is another classic that can benefit greatly from the hairwing treatment. As with the Hairwing Silver Invicta, anyone can make a fist of the Hairwing Wickham and in doing so create a durable, killer pattern with a modern twist and genuine fish-appeal.

The best work from the Hairwing Wickham (HW) seems to come as summer is all but a not-so-distant memory and the fly begins to match its surroundings. The back-end of last season saw the HW produce good bags of fish for me from Malham Tarn, Stocks, and surprisingly, Bewl, when a bright and breezy day saw me tackling up, for reasons best unknown to myself, with wet-flies. A brisk drift across the main basin, and the HW was to prove the undoing of an angry Bewl rainbow. Several more followed in a very productive day, half of them taking a shine to the HW on the middle dropper.

As with the standard wet Wickham, vague suggestion is the name of the game. Sedge (both pupa and adult), shrimp, fry and wayward terrestrials are all plausible bases covered by the HW. It is genuinely versatile, and will deceive fish for you in any position on the leader and on any line. My best results, though, have come to nothing more complicated than good old-fashioned loch-style fishing, a "shallow" line and a couple of other classic wet-flies for company. What's not to like?

TYING TIPS

- Avoid lumpy tinsel bodies by ensuring your tail material covers the full length of the body.
- Gripping only the tips to avoid the soft underfur, pluck bunches of the stiff guard hairs from the squirrel pelt to create your hairwing. Fox squirrel will make the best match with the body and hackle tones.
- Think slim for the wing - you can always add more "layers" to suit.
- Jungle cock cheeks are optional, but recommended when fry are on the menu.

