

{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

RAISE YOUR HACKLES

Rob Denson suggests ways to lift the quality of your tying with cock hackles

Indian cock cape in badger colours. Good range of sizes and lengths. Vast range of colours. Great value.



Genetic cock cape in natural grizzle. Super-long hackles. Dense barb-count. Many flies per feather. Expensive.



FLY-TYERS HAVE BEEN LASHING STUFF TO hooks for a while. Debate about exactly when the Macedonian Fly was first tied and used on the Astraeus River continues, but upon one thing historians agree – it included a cock hackle. Almost 2,000 years later, fly-tyers still collect cock capes like no other material. With its natural translucency, warm glow, limitless range of colours, and inherent natural, spiky stiffness, Mother Nature's gift to fly-tyers bristles with life. Hen hackles, by comparison, are favoured for their soft, mobile fibres, exploited in wet-flies. In simple terms: water moves hen, cock moves water. The jargon can be confusing: cock capes (neck area) and saddles (rump) are harvested from chickens, mainly in India and China. Indian capes tend to be smaller and cheaper. Birds have long been selectively bred to exaggerate characteristics such as length and colour. These are known as genetic capes and saddles, and are much more expensive.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON



DADDY LONG LEGS

Cock hackle points (the top inch or two of the complete feather) can be extremely useful for imitating the wings of natural insects, such as upwinged flies, or the Daddy Long Legs (above). Simplicity itself to prepare and tie in, durable and very effective. Chinese and Indian necks are the perfect source providing a range of sizes and colours at low cost.



GRIFFITH'S GNAT

As simple and lethal as it gets. This Black Griffith's Gnat requires a dense barb-count (the number of fibres per inch), a long feather with little or no taper, and straight, rigid fibres – a genetic hackle, therefore, fits the bill perfectly. The stiff fibres easily support the weight of the fly while they dimple the water surface like a natural insect. Seen from below, the deception can only be described as unfair.

PARAMIDGE

For the Paramidge (right), the cock hackle is wound horizontally around a stem or "post" of poly yarn. The body of the fly sits in the surface film, while the hackle barbs form a "parachute", which uses the surface tension to evenly distribute the weight of the fly over a large area, thus floating it. Indian and Chinese hackles work well for parachutes, but genetic ones makes life much easier. Err on the side of caution when choosing your hackle – slightly too long is better than too short.



A WHOLE FLY

This dry-fly is made entirely from cock hackle. The tail uses the longer barbs of a large feather from a Chinese neck. The body is the stripped hackle stalk from the same Chinese feather. The wings are hackle points (tips) from two Indian neck feathers, and the hackle is genetic grizzle.



BUMBLE

Bumbles are traditionally palmered with two cock hackles wound together along the fly body. The resulting bushiness keeps the fly high in the water for as long as possible, as well as causing a disturbance. The method also allows for an extra hackle colour to be thrown into the mix. Alternatively, if you want two colours but without the bulk, strip each hackle down one side as with the Snatcher hackle.



SNATCHER

The Snatcher represents the latter stages of a buzzer's emergence in the surface film. The addition of a cock hackle along the length of the body not only suggests the explosion of appendages from the pupal shuck, but it also slows down the sink rate of the fly, keeping it in the effective zone for longer. Palmering a Snatcher as one would a Bumble or standard stillwater wet-fly would result simply in a Bumble on a curved hook. It would be too bulky and resistant to sinking. This is overcome by stripping the fibres from one side of the hackle (far left), keeping the fly slim but still lively and the sink-rate in check. ■

WHICH HACKLE?



Chinese hackle feathers suit size 14 to 4 flies. They're available in many sizes on each neck in natural and dyed colours. Useful for small trout through to large salmon patterns. Good value.



Indian hackle feathers suit size 16 to 8 flies. There's a good range of sizes on each neck. Available in natural and dyed colours. Use for small trout flies up to large lures. Cheap.

Use genetic hackle feathers for fly sizes 12-20. Larger and smaller fibres are available but difficult to obtain. These are perfect hackles and you get many flies from one feather. They're found in a good range of natural and dyed colours but can be prohibitively expensive.



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