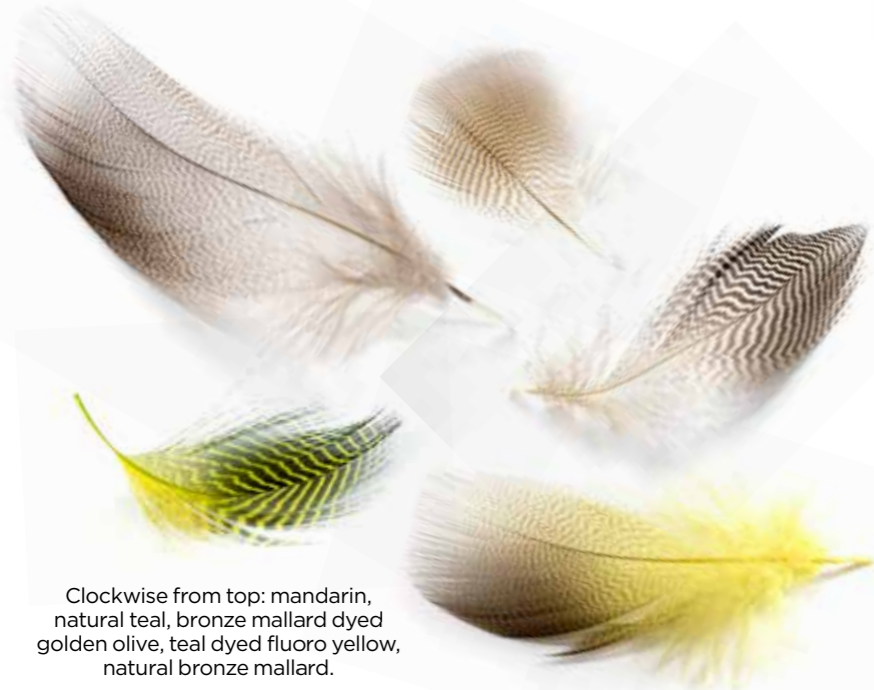


{ MATERIAL OF THE MONTH }

LOVE A DUCK

Rob Denson suggests artful ways to make the most of flank feathers



Clockwise from top: mandarin, natural teal, bronze mallard dyed golden olive, teal dyed fluoro yellow, natural bronze mallard.

WITH JUST A HANDFUL OF PRIME feathers located on each side of the duck (drake) below the wing, flank feathers are a scarce commodity. But what they lack in quantity, they more than make up for in quality, providing an irresistible combination of delectable barring with a light, delicate construction, ranging from the subtle, dark markings of the bronze mallard flank to the bold, graphic contrast of teal. Flank feathers also have a slight, glossy sheen that sets off their unique beauty. But it's the barring that gives flank feathers their edge — causing an optical illusion that creates the impression of movement and life. When the illusion is complemented with actual movement in a well-designed and constructed fly, you have a killer on your hands; just add water. Many species of duck can provide useable feathers for tyers, but over the centuries, a hardcore of favourites have emerged: teal; mandarin/wood/summer duck; and, of course, bronze mallard.



TEAL-WINGED BUTCHER

A modern twist on a classic fly and classic colour combination. Arthur McDonald's deft touch with the teal fully exploits its seductive, natural mobility while the contrasting stripes fool the mind's eye resulting in an all too tempting proposition. Teal is readily available, but gadwall and wigeon make excellent substitutes.



CATSKILL DRY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. The Catskill style of dry-flies not only looks gorgeous but has been fooling fish around the world for more than 100 years. A rare and clever example of duck flank being incorporated in a dry-fly, small bunches of wood duck (or mandarin) are beautifully set in a "V" among a few turns of cock hackle resulting in a well-balanced, easily sighted and incredibly lively, lifelike fly.



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. Web: robdenson.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROB DENSON

GOLDEN DABBLER

A legend in its inventor's (Donald McLearn) lifetime. A huge amount of its success is due to Donald's choice of feather — bronze mallard. The barring is subtle in the mallard but still noticeable, perfectly mimicking the markings of invertebrates. My slight variant uses mallard for the tail, throat and, of course, the cloak.



SHRIMPY CRIPPLER

Tied with thin, wispy slivers for maximum mobility, my favourite of all the flank feathers mandarin adorns one of my favourite and most productive wet-flies, the Shrimpy Crippler. I just love the perfect balance of contrast, barring and truly beautiful, warm, smokey golden-brown hues. Mandarin and wood duck are different species, but the flanks of the drakes are visually and structurally almost identical and therefore interchangeable.

PHOSPHOR DABBLER

As with most feathers, dyeing opens up a plethora of possibilities and duck flank is no exception. All the species mentioned here take dye beautifully. The tail (gadwall), cloak (bronze mallard) and throat (teal) have all been dyed fluorescent yellow to create this Phosphor Dabbling. Note: the cloak (a tent-shaped structure) is entirely different to a standard wing (see YouTube for tutorials).



ROLLED-WING WET-FLIES

A traditional "rolled" duck flank wing adds the finishing touch to this simple yet striking wet-fly. To quickly create a fishing fly, nothing could be easier — cut a section from the feather, roll it up and throw it on. Sticklers for technique and tradition should see YouTube for more in-depth tutorials. ■

PREPPING



Feather sections. Use the top quarter and far side for throats and tails on smaller flies. The middle section is prime flank and has the best colour, sheen and structure for wet-fly wings, dry-fly wings and dabbling cloaks. Use the bottom quarter for tails and throats.



Mallard cloak: cut a 15mm-20mm wide section from the middle of the feather, fold in half, offer up to the fly, then pinch and loop. Two-ply works just fine, but if you want a heavier, more Irish feel, go for a 25mm-wide section and three-ply. Vary the size of your section to suit hook size.



Feather slips (top to bottom). Mandarin/wood duck is the best choice for Catskill-style split-wing dry-flies. It's also great for tails on dry-flies; and throats, tails, wispy appendages and rolled wings on wet-flies. Can be "dabbled", too. Bronze mallard is my first choice for dabbling cloaks. It's also great for tails, throats and wispy appendages on wet-flies. Teal is best suited to rolled wings and wispy appendages on wet-flies.