



Citizen Sportsman

"Preserving, Protecting and Defending our National Heritage"

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Field Care

The quality of the finished mount is usually a direct reflection of the care the animal receives when collected. The lower the quality of the skin, the lower the quality of the end product. There are some steps that you, the sportsman, can take that will account for about 50% of the quality of the finished mount. First, consider selecting a reputable taxidermist that is a member of a State or National Taxidermists trade organization. These associations are a critical link in a conservative coalition that supports localized wildlife management practices and your right to hunt and fish. They offer a wealth of information to the general public and professional development opportunities for taxidermists.

Next...if you choose to utilize a deer processor, choose one that is going to take the necessary steps to care for your cape. Ask him to explain to you his method of caping and storing mountable capes. Understanding a few simple principles will allow for a common sense approach to caring for your cape. If the processor does not want to do it your way, find another processor!

With fur bearers, there are three critical elements that you must remember...time, moisture and heat. Any of these elements alone or combined can create disastrous conditions that can ruin a good skin. Be selective with shot placement and try to make it as clean as possible. When you finally locate your quarry, remember those three elements in everything you do from that moment on.

- Do not wash the carcass down unnecessarily with water if the carcass is still warm. Heat combined with moisture makes an ideal atmosphere for bacteria to thrive. This is even more threatening in predators like foxes and bobcats and especially so in gut-shot animals. Bacteria born into this environment begin producing destructive enzymes that immediately begin attacking the skin causing epidermal separation known as slippage. In short, the hair falls out in chunks.

- Regardless of what your deer processor might think, bacteria does not stop causing damage in the cooler...it slows it down slightly, but it does not stop. Two elements present...moisture and time. If you are not going to take it to the taxidermist right away, freeze it but do not let it hang in the cooler for several days. The meat can hang but the cape must come off and should come off as soon as possible.

- Do not package furbearers (or birds) in any plastic material until they have cooled down.

- Do not carry by the tail or hang by the neck any animal that you intend to have mounted.

- Fish should be wrapped in a wet towel and frozen or frozen in solid block of ice.

- Birds...I will not even try to convince you not to use a dog to retrieve your birds. I will say that an overzealous retriever can make quick work of a beautiful bird. Careful with your handling...pay attention to the feathers and try to keep them in place. A stocking is perfect for any smaller birds, i.e., waterfowl and smaller upland birds like quail, dove and pheasants. Try not to let your turkeys flop around too long. It destroys the natural lay of the feathers.

Take these precautions and get your trophy to your taxidermist as soon as possible...you will be glad you did.

Ken