

THE MINIATURE GUIDE TO  
*MODERN*  
*TAXIDERM**Y*

MAMMAL AND BIRD PREPARATIONS



CONTENT WARNING: Contains minor  
blood, animal dissection, animal  
bodies and skeletons.

BOTH OF THESE TAXIDERMY PIECES WERE  
CREATED ON A TAXIDERMY COURSE WITH  
JAZMINE MILES-LONG.

THE ANIMALS WORKED ON DIED DUE TO  
NATURAL CAUSES.

(All photos are authors own)

# Bird Taxidermy



## Stage One - Skinning

In birds, the incision is typically along the chest, where the feathers are often thicker and can hide the final stitches easily.

[You won't see the internal organs, unless the piece you are working on has internal damage from their cause of death or you want to use them for scientific research.]



At this point, the legs and wings have been detached from the main body however it is still connected by the skull. In a piece of bird taxidermy, the skull, leg and wing bones are all original where possible.

Once the body is detached from the neck it is measured, recorded and kept in a freezer prior to making the replacement.



Once the bird has been skinned it looks like this, any muscles left on the bones is removed and the fat is scraped away from the feather tracts poking through the skin.

Excess fat left in a bird taxidermy can cause discoloration or loss of feathers in the future.

## Stage Two - Prepping



Different taxidermists will use a variety of materials for the body of a taxidermy piece. Common materials are wood wool, a pre-made form or balsa wood.

For this piece balsa wood was used, in total there are four pieces which have been shaped against the original body. In this case they were adhered together with superglue due to time restraint although wood glue is more typical.



This is the finished body with the neck in place which is made using wire wrapped with cotton wool to replicate the missing muscles.



The skin is washed in a taxidermy soap with some added salt, this removes more of the excess fat, blood and helps preservation.

[Throughout the skinning process Borax is used to aid gripping, this also aids in preservation.]



Before and after drying briefly with a low-heat hairdryer

## Stage Three – ‘Stuffing’



Wires are run along the remaining wing and leg bones. The muscles are built up in the same way as the neck, with cotton wool and thread.



To provide a mounting point for the final piece, the leg wires are run through the pad of the foot.



The neck wire is attached into the skull using hot glue to fill the cavity. The eyes are inserted into the sockets using clay with low shrinkage.

Eyes are pre-made by a variety of companies and the taxidermist matches the style to the species and size of the individual bird. They can be made of either glass or acrylic.



The wires get inserted into the balsa wood body where they are secured in position, at this stage the final starts to take place.

The incision is sewn up with a cotton thread and the feathers on the chest cover the incision.



## Stage Four – Finalising

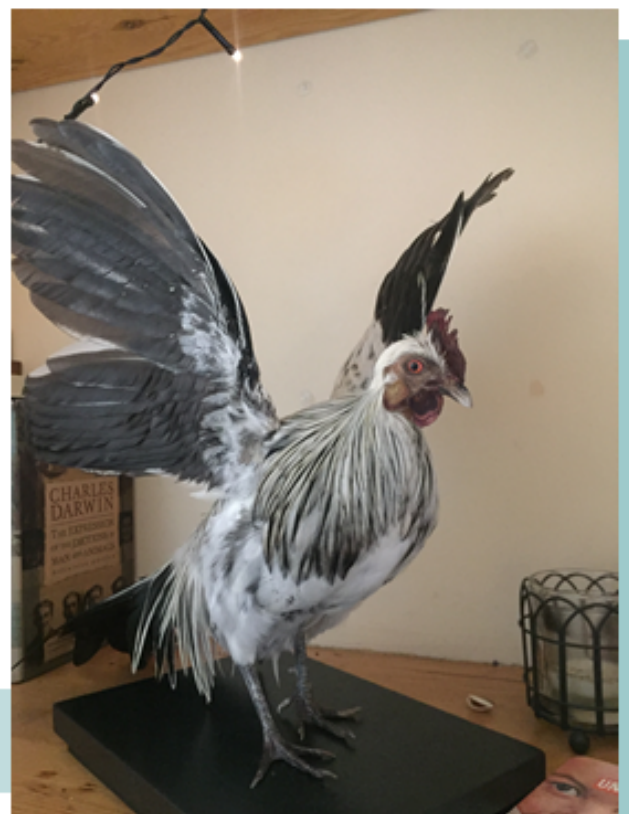


The final taxidermy is added to the mount using the wires coming out of the feet. This is where the pose is finalized. The feathers are aligned and organized into a natural appearance.



Card and wire are used to hold the crest and tail feathers in position whilst the taxidermy dries. The feathers can be monitored whilst they dry to ensure they are in the right position.

The final chicken



# Mammal Taxidermy

## Stage One - Skinning



Mammals often have more signs of damage than birds when working with ethically sourced specimens. In the case of this squirrel, which was hit by a vehicle, there was some damage to the skull.



For mammal taxidermies the incision when skinning is made down the back where the fur naturally parts. This makes it easier to put the skin back over the new form later.



[If this was a study skin specimen, the incision would be made along the stomach to avoid damaging any key fur patterns.]



In mammal taxidermy the skin is completely removed from the body, the skull will later be cleaned to use in the final piece. The claws remain in the skin as these are used in the final taxidermy piece.

## Stage Two – Prepping the body



Different taxidermists will use a variety of materials for the body of a mammal taxidermy piece. Common materials are wood wool or a pre-made form.

For this piece wood wool bound with cotton around a wire frame was used, the body, limbs and tail are all made using this technique.



Because of the broken skull on this piece, caused by the way she died, a replacement was made using balsa wood. The replacement was carved to match the original and eye sockets added.

At this stage, the form starts to take the final position. The skull is secured and bound into the body using more wood wool and thread.





## Stage Three – Tanning

After de-fleshing the skin which involves removing excess muscle and fats the skin is rinsed and then tanned.

The type of tanning fluid and length of time in the tanning fluid is influenced by the species. For the squirrel, the tanning fluid was left on the skin overnight.



## Stage Four – Mounting

As with a bird taxidermy, the skin is stretched around the replacement body with the wires extending out from all four feet, to be used in the final mounting.

The ears are split internally, and clay is inserted which helps the skin to keep its shape. The mussel is also built-up with some extra clay and, in the case of the squirrel, the visible front teeth are replaced.



