

Field Trophy Care

SELECTING A SPECIMEN

In order to get the best results possible for your bird mount, it is important to get the best possible specimen to the taxidermist. Here are a few things you can do to assure you receive the best quality mount possible:

1. **Pin Feathers:** Early season waterfowl typically are still growing in their winter or breeding plumage. Feathers that are not fully developed are called pinfeathers. These feathers are not set in the skin yet and will most likely fall out during the mounting process. Even if they don't fall out, they do not lay and cover the bird as a fully plumed bird will. Try to select late season birds for mounting if possible. This is especially true for many of the diver species. Even late December Canvasbacks for example can still have many pinfeathers in the head and neck. This may be only noticeable to the taxidermist at closer inspection, but you can inspect the bird yourself. Check the sides of the body and move feathers to see down to the skin. Also, look at the back of the bird and inspect the feathers at the shoulder area. Any feathers that still have a "sheath" on them near the skin or are very short are still growing. Having a few of these may not cause many problems, but having several just might.
2. **Immature Birds:** Birds of the year, those that hatched during the early summer, will not only have many pinfeathers, but even in late season, their plumage will not equal that of a mature bird, one that is in it's second or third year or more. The more birds you are around, the more this will become obvious. Juvenile birds can lack many colors of mature birds. Tail and shoulder feathers for instance will not end in nice long points. Try to select only larger bodied mature birds with bright colors. Ask other seasoned hunters or the taxidermist if you are not sure. Decent taxidermists should advise you about a marginal bird. Remember, I would much rather have "nice" mounts in customer's homes than bad ones.
3. **Field Care:** This would seem obvious, but apparently it isn't. Taking care of the bird prior to getting it in the freezer is also an important part to assuring a quality mount. Try to keep your specimen separate from other birds taken that day. Don't just hang it on a duck strap or throw it in with a pile of other ducks. You want to keep it cool and the feathers aligned. If you expect the bird is a "trophy" upon shooting it, don't let "Fido" swim out and munch on it. Handle the bird by the bill or feet, or cradle the body in your hand. Don't throw the bird in the back of your pickup or the bottom of your boat for the ride home. Remember, the better the shape I get him in, the better the mount will be!!!
4. **Freezing:** If you are not going directly to the taxidermist, then you must freeze the bird. This too must be done correctly if we want the best mount possible. Place the head over the back or under a wing. Slide him into a GOOD plastic bag, preferably a freezer bag such as "Ziplocs". Carefully roll the bird and bag toward the opening, forcing out as much air as possible and then seal the bag. Double bagging is even better, especially if it will be several weeks or even months before it gets to the taxidermist. Please DO NOT use paper bags or freezer wrap or any other packaging except plastic. All these items will do is allow air to enter and freezer burn to happen quicker. Label the bag and put it in the freezer. Avoid using frost-free type freezers as these also dry out specimens quicker.
5. **Freezer Burn:** Certainly one of the worst cases for a bad mount is a freezer burned specimen. These are dried out skins from being unprotected in the freezer. Once the facial area and wings and feet dry to a certain point, there is not much a taxidermist can do. It may be "mountable", but remember, we are trying to get the BEST mount possible. Please follow the above freezing comments if you expect to keep the bird for several weeks or even months before taking it to the taxidermist.
6. **Other "Problems":** Broken wings may or may not cause problems, depending on the pose desired, and/or location of the broken bones. A wing broken at the wrist for example may limit a flying pose. Generally speaking, broken bones are repairable. Wing feathers damaged from shot will show in a flying pose, but may not in a standing pose. Large shot or dog chew holes in the face may also be noticeable in the finished mount. Blood is usually not a problem and shouldn't be worried about. Also, damage to the bills of waterfowl is not a problem as I use cast reproductions on all waterfowl mounts. Hopefully we now realize by taking a few steps toward caring for your bird will result in a quality mount worthy of the time spent to acquire it. If you have any questions do not hesitate to email or call me. I'd be glad to discuss them with you.



BRAD'S BIRDS
TAXIDERMISTRY STUDIO