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PROPOSAL FOR AFTERCARE OF MOUNTED ANIMAL TROPHIES

By Dennis Pickard

I get contacted frequently with requests for an "aftercare" procedure/treatment of mounted animal trophies.

Following are some of the common problems trophy collectors experience in this regard as well as the possible causes for these problems and some suggested remedies to combat/treat these.

There are many kinds of dermestids. Most people may not recognise them, or they may misidentify them. A group of beetles that includes carpet beetles, cabinet beetles, hide beetles and others is commonly known as dermestids. They occur frequently in mounted animals and go undetected until major damage is evident.

In nature, dermestids are beneficial scavengers found in mammals, birds and insect nests, feeding on shed hair and skin, and also on dead animals. They are one of the few organisms capable of digesting keratin, the protein found in hair, fur, feathers, skin, horn, hoof and claw.

How do they get into your mounts? You never quite know, but in the same manner that fruit flies find your bananas, dermestids will find your trophies. They were put here to eat dead animal parts, and that is exactly what your trophy is.

One dermestid can produce six generations in a year. When the larvae molt, they are almost microscopic. Usually, all that you can see is a little shell or casing that resembles a piece of rice cereal.

Often, these little beetles can translate into big headaches for people with mounted animals. Dermestids cause more trophy loss than fire or theft combined.

The reason for this problem today is banning the use of arsenic in tanneries by the latest environmental legislation. Nothing else on the market controls the infestation, and repeated fumigation is costly. The inevitable infestation of dermestids in mounted animals is out of the taxidermist's control.

There is no magic remedy and I'm sure if you talk to 10 people regarding this, you will get 10 different views.

Please note that the remedies proposed in this document may not be the ideal or only treatments but it is based on the latest generation chemicals available with environmental friendliness in mind.

Common problems and the associated signs to look for include the following:

Problem: A fine white powder collecting around the horn bases, nostrils, hooves and claws of mounted trophies.

Possible Cause: Normally caused by insects.

Remedy: Remove horns from base (if mounted loose) and look for presence of any insects. If insects are found, destroy and remove same and then look for small holes that could have been made by some types of insects. If holes are found, you can spray an aerosol insect spray into the hole but keep it to the absolute minimum and concentrated in the hole only. Prevent spraying such aerosols onto the skin and hair of the mount.

If the horns cannot be removed as is the case on some animal species like Red Hartebeest, Black/Blue Wildebeests, etc., you may have to resort to some type of fumigation process, or contact your taxidermists for advice. You can also remove any taxidermy materials installed around the horn bases in such cases which will allow you access to the core of the horn, or holes can be drilled through the horn material (in areas not normally visible when the trophy hangs on the wall) which again will allow you access to the core of the horns to administer either Carbadust or Bexadust obtainable from a hardware store. These holes can easily be repaired by using commercially available black Pratley putty.

Problem: Hair falling out

Possible Cause: Hair loss on mounts can only be as a result of insects, i.e. small white moths or a little black beetle with a white underside. If insects are the problem, then hair loss will normally be localised in small areas. If the hair loss is of a general nature (large areas) a

substandard tanning process could be the reason or the “cape” was not properly cared for in the field before the tanning process.

Remedy: If insects are the culprit treat with “DonClaire Aftercare” available from Mr Peter Meyer at cell 082 443 6030.

There are other remedies that may be prescribed by the older generation such as Paraffin mixed with Dubin or Turpentine mixed with Raw Linseed oil and Naphthalene balls ground to a powder, etc., etc. All these recipes are aimed at achieving two things really i.e. getting some moisture back into the skin and to repel insects.

Lately there are chemicals available that will achieve this even more efficiently like “Donclaire Aftercare” without the strong smell given off by some of the older recipes.

Problem: Skin on trophy cracking

Possible Causes:

- A substandard tanning process/procedure by the taxidermist/tanner.
- Poor field preparation and care of the trophy before the tanning process, e.g. treating the skin with poor quality or too little salt or treating it with a chemical in an attempt to combat insects/ rodents which could be detrimental to the integrity of the final product.

Remedy: Ensure that your taxidermy work is done by a reputable taxidermist, especially when we talk about trophies that were hunted at a considerable cost.

Remember, there is no such thing as cheap taxidermy. Many people have been sadly disappointed by choosing the cheapest option. A good mount does not only look good on completion but only lasts a few years. A good mount looks good on completion and lasts for many years to come.

General

- Your trophy should be displayed in an area where the environment is kept as constant as possible in respect of temperature changes, changes in humidity, the amount and positioning of artificial lighting, direct exposure to the sun, etc. A properly constructed trophy room should have an environmental control system installed to achieve the constant environmental conditions required. A trophy hanging on an

open verandah of your cottage with a sea view is perhaps not a good idea.

- Field preparation of your trophies should receive the required care, i.e. skinned as soon as possible after the hunt by someone competent in skinning/caping techniques. The drying of skins after salting with the best quality salt available and the care of the dried trophy products with regards to protection against rodent and insect damage is very important.
Skins and capes should also be folded such that the hair side and ears are protected against mechanical damage during handling and transport.
- Select a reputable taxidermist by visiting his premises, talking to some of his clients or contacting the Taxidermy Association of Southern Africa (TASA) for assistance/information about the taxidermist you intend using. Watch out for cheap taxidermy. In the long run it may turn out to be the most expensive.
- Mounted trophies need aftercare and the product called "Donclair Aftercare" available from Peter Meyer should be effective if used as prescribed once a year. Inspect your trophies from time to time and look out for the signs described in this document.

I hope this answers some or most of the questions trophy collectors may have and should there be additional information required, you can contact the writer (Dennis Pickard) on 083 626 2178 or 084 792 3736

I'll be glad to assist where I can.

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