

# STUFFED ANIMALS

## Hunting for Value Factors to Assess Taxidermy Claims

By Scott Lacourse

When most people hear the term “taxidermy,” they immediately link it to hunting trophies. However, animals frequently are mounted in order to be used in scientific study; displayed in a museum or function as a piece of art; or even used to preserve the memory of a cherished pet that has passed away. Regardless of the reason, taxidermy has been popular around the world for centuries and increasingly may show up in a claim. As with any specialty item, there are certain key value factors to use as best practices when encountering a taxidermy item.

### The Background and Process

A brief background of what taxidermy entails will help claims professionals build an understanding of the relevant questions that should be asked of the policyholder. Typically, when a decision is made to have an animal preserved, the first step is to choose and contact a taxidermist before bringing in the deceased animal. If a game license is required to hunt the animal in question, professional taxidermists usually will request a copy of this documentation so that their work is not in violation of any laws. Animals also are procured by scientists with special permission to preserve wildlife for museums. Pet owners who want to preserve their dogs, cats, and other beloved animals

also will work with taxidermists.

The process of taxidermy depends on the type of animal being preserved. Some animals with more delicate vertebrae—most often those that live in water—can be preserved in liquid such as ethanol or glycol ethers. Other deceased pets are preserved through a freeze-drying process where the animal is frozen, its insides vacuumed out, and then its exterior dried. The most common method, however, consists of the carcass being carefully skinned with a scalpel or sharp knife so that the hide stays intact.

When skinning an animal, its flesh must be dipped in plaster of Paris to create a mold that will help form a permanent fiberglass sculpture. Then the skin must be delicately, but firmly, applied to the fiberglass. Some taxidermists tan the animal skin before applying it, but the process can harm the skin and must be done meticulously. Finally, details are added such as teeth, hooves, and claws. There also is a large market for different animal glass eyes that can be purchased easily for almost any species.

### Valuing Taxidermy Animals

Most taxidermy can be assessed by obtaining the following key value factors:

- 1 What is the species of the animal? Is it a member of the deer family,

or is it a smaller mammal, such as a fox, bird, or fish?

- 2 How much of the animal was preserved? Anything ranging from the entire animal to just its head may have been kept.
- 3 Does the animal have horns or antlers? If so, how many points remain?
- 4 What is the size of the animal, and how is the animal measured? For example, fish are measured only in length by inches.

There are other less crucial but important things to look for when evaluating taxidermy. How is the animal mounted? Carved plaques or rough wooden mounts are common, as are rock mounts and regular flat bases or platforms for full animal mounts. Looking for signs of deterioration or bad craftsmanship also is key. If an animal is missing fur or body parts or if the skin has become loose from the model in any place, the value of the animal could go down drastically. If any flaws in the taxidermy can be repaired, such as the reattaching of skin or the replacement of eyes, the value of the item may not be affected to the same extent. In turn, if an animal was prepared by a well-known or renowned taxidermist and there is a certificate to prove it, its value may increase.

While taxidermy is an art that has not endeared itself to everyone, there are many people who are interested in







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owning a variety of creatures preserved in this manner. Regardless of the animal or motive for owning it, by using the key value factors, claims professionals can determine the worth of a taxidermy item in the event of fire, flood, theft, or any other disaster that might befall the policyholder or claimant.

**Online Purchasing and Processes**  
The purchase of animals prepared using

taxidermy is available from many sites on the Internet. One need only Google "taxidermy elk head for sale" and thousands of elk heads appear. In addition to specialized taxidermy websites, some sites, such as eBay, carry an array of taxidermy items. In fact, eBay has guidelines about the types of animals that are OK to sell, those animals that are restricted, and those that are not allowed. The reasoning behind such specific guidelines

## REPLACING THE RIGHT WAY

When buying taxidermy items from any business online, it's important to make sure the potential purchase can be legally sold within the U.S. For instance, eBay has an animal and wildlife products policy. Here are additional links for more information on taxidermy:

- Animal Freeze-Drying - [www.animalplanet.com/tv-shows/american-stuffers/videos/freeze-dried-pets.htm](http://www.animalplanet.com/tv-shows/american-stuffers/videos/freeze-dried-pets.htm)
- How to Perform Taxidermy on an Animal - [www.wikihow.com/Perform-Taxidermy-on-Animals](http://www.wikihow.com/Perform-Taxidermy-on-Animals)
- Taxidermy Appraisal - <http://fordinfo.com/trophycare/tcappra.htm>
- What Is Taxidermy? - [www.taxidermy.net/information/whatis.html](http://www.taxidermy.net/information/whatis.html)

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and instructions is due to precautions regarding endangered species. eBay provides additional contact information for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other relevant organizations in case there are any unanswered questions.

While taxidermy claims are not common, they are increasing in number for a variety of reasons. When claims professionals are faced with these unique claims, having accurate information and knowledgeable resources at the ready is important for a proper valuation, particularly when there is personal sentiment involved. The claims professional must be able to determine an item's key value factors and tap into expert resources to bring each item to resolution according to its distinctive circumstances. **CM**

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