

bou and bison. Small imported game like springbok and oribi.

\$500-\$1500: Imported big game, like kudu, eland, waterbuck, warthog, impala, blesbok, sassaby, wildebeest, bushbuck, black buck and zebra. Somewhere in there you have your imported exotics, like wallaby and capercaillie. Also really nice salt-water trophies like hammerheads, marlin, huge sailfish.

\$1000-Up: Museum-quality pieces and dioramas.

Prices in each category depend mostly on size, though it's up to you to bring the price down by scrutinizing the condition.

ANTLERS & SKULLS

Some of the most outrageous sums are asked for deer antlers, even though they are so commonplace that even a six-pointer on a plaque shouldn't top \$40. Take a ride out to the sticks and buy 'em cheap. I actually bought a box of 30 skull 'n' rack combos for five bucks at a garage sale.

When you get into caribou and elk, the price obviously goes up. Although caribou rack are plentiful in the tundra, I have it on authority that bush pilots fly them out at \$50 a pop. For whole skulls with rack, \$75. Adjust your dealer's price accordingly. For some reason I see a fair number of handsome old elk rack, on ornate plaques, at decent prices (around \$100).

African horns aren't as priced-out as you might expect, and there's a fair amount of old stuff floating around out there, which somebody once told me came from souvenir-buying during the African tourism boom in the *Born Free* era.

A wide variety of skulls can be had at much more reasonable prices than antlers, with most domestics under \$100. Any skull (or bone) you could ever want is available up-

town on Columbus Ave. at Maxilla and Mandible (724-6173). As you would expect, their prices can be very much uptown too, but we're talking museum quality all over the place. The last time I was there they had some economy bins with all sorts of cool parts and damaged skulls. Stop in next time you visit the Museum of Natural History.

Free skulls are easy to come by in the woods or by the side of the road if you keep your eyes open. Especially common are deer, possum and raccoon. The effort required to clean found specimens depends on how much skin is still attached. Bugs are the only good way to clean a skin-covered skull, so if you bring it home, put it outside. Maggots don't do rawhide, so the fire escape won't do. The specimen has to be in contact with the ground to get the right bugs for the job.

If there's just a little rawhide still attached, tear it off with pliers and boil the skull in vinegar to remove any stray tags of flesh. If the skull seems somewhat oily, soak it in a 8:1 water/ammonia solution for as long as a week. If you want it white, or if it still has some odor, soak it in a 8:1 water/bleach solution and place it in the sun to dry.

THE LAW

Watch out for protected species. Duck and geese, while legal to shoot and mount, cannot be sold to a third party. Lions, tigers, polar bears, cheetahs, leopards, crocodiles, elephants, caimans, chimps—all bad news. A good way to tell what's legal and illegal is by calling NYSDEC Fish and Wildlife at 718-482-4882. Not only can you get advice on what you can buy, but you can also report shops that sell protected or endangered species, which I would urge everyone to do.

However, I'll be the first to admit that the DEC can't help you late Saturday afternoon at a remote flea market when a bargain is at

hand. Right then, one of those Pueblo, CO pamphlets on taxidermy would come in handy. No such luck.

But there are three lists of protected animals. In New York, there's a "blue book" entitled *Checklist of the Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds, Mammals of New York State, Including Their Protective Status*. Call 518-457-0698. U.S. Fish & Wildlife (718-533-1767) has two lists: Title 50, Parts 23 and 17. The first is Appendices I-III of *Convention on International Trade of Wild Fauna and Flora*, while Part 17 is more simply entitled *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants*.

As you might already have surmised from the titles, the material is not nearly as comprehensive as it should be. While they name what is and isn't protected, they fail to tell you adequately what that means as far as buying, selling and owning domestically. For example, what if you happen to find a dead songbird and want to have it mounted? I've been told by the DEC that there is no "rule book" geared for the public.

However, the DEC has intimated that if you perchance inherited a polar-bear rug, or own a heirloom gorilla's paw, you won't be hounded as long as you're not trying to sell it. But I've never seen that in writing, and I'm still uncomfortable as to what the legal parameters are on owning protected and endangered species, what you must do to document how you got them, or if you even have to.

The vagaries are further exemplified by NYSDEC Form 82-19-35, which I was told is the permit needed to buy or sell endangered or protected taxidermy. However, this form is clearly for live animals. They want to know what zoo my polar-bear rug came from, the purpose for which I want the rug, the pen I'll keep it in, the measures I'll employ to make sure it is humanely kept. No "DEAD" boxes to check.

ART

Taxidermy catalogs are helpful for understanding the taxidermist's art. A good catalog with color photos can be had from Van Dyke's Taxidermy (605-796-4579). You'll get an idea of what's out there from the mounting forms they sell. You'll see that taxidermists have a vast number of possible mounting positions from which to choose.

For example, many squirrels I see for sale are mounted in a sitting position, a nut in their paws—doubtless practice for budding taxidermists. An artful, clever squirrel mount can be quite hard to find. I finally discovered and purchased a western gray squirrel mounted lying down on a horizontal poplar branch. Head up as though he's just been awakened from a siesta.

The general idea is that a mount should look alive, not like a specimen. It should be a natural snapshot from the varmint's life. Many taxidermists fail to accomplish this. A case in point is the fox-standing-on-a-log mount. Most of the time, the taxidermist tries for the one-paw-in-the-air stance, but mostly ends up with what looks like a fox with a broken paw.

It's helpful to know some terminology. An animal head mounted bolt upright, alert, is called swollen upright. One that looks like it's ducking slightly is called a sneak, while one mounted all the way down is called browsing. A mount licking its shoulder or paw is called grooming. Neck, shoulder, crouch, pouncing, leaping, howling, fighting, etc. are self-explanatory.

PRESENTATION & MAINTENANCE

Where to put the stuff is my problem, but then I've got over 50 pieces. I recommend

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