



Proper Care and Uses For...

Claws & Canines

by Tom High

The time will come when the trophy will be rare and valuable. As taxidermist you are aware that there is a proper way to care for these trophies so they will stand the test of time and foster fond memories of past hunting adventures. Let's not forget another valuable part of predator trophies—the claws and canines. If your client requests a full body mount, such as a bear or cat, you can replace one or several claws with reproduction claws. This will allow the original claws to be used as an added memento of the hunt. Head mounts of predators (bears or cougars) yield twenty claws that can be recycled into added trophies and profits for you.

Care and preparation for claw and canines is as important as the care and preparation of the hide. You no doubt have collected extra claws and canines over the years and wonder what could be done with them. I will give you some suggestions. First let's consider proper care.

CLAW REMOVAL

To remove claws from a fresh skin, make an incision through each toe pad, dissect the bone to which the claw is attached, and clip it off with tin snips. Gently boil it in sal-soda until the claw slips free of the bone. If you wish to fill the claw, mix epoxy with the desired shade of artist oil paint to match the claw (brown, burnt umber or black for black bear, grizzly, kodiak brown bear, and wolf; yellow ochre for cats, cougars, African lions, bob-

cats or leopards.) After the filling has dried overnight, hand sand, starting with 220 to 600 grit wet and dry sandpaper. Excessive heat or water will eventually damage a claw, causing it to separate.

CANINE TEETH CARE

Proper care and preparation of the canines is very important for several reasons. Once they are removed and cleaned of all fleshy root material, they are susceptible to cracking. To preserve and prevent possible damage they should be filled. We have had excellent success filling canines with a mixture of mammoth ivory dust and specialized liquid epoxy, which absorbs the heat from the epoxy's chemical hardening action. Without this dust this heat would damage the canines. Mammoth ivory dust is a waste product of my work. A substitute you can mix with liquid epoxy (a product like FantastiCast) is molding plaster or whiting. The important thing is slow curing to reduce heat which will cause the enamel to crack. The hard filler also makes the tooth solid which can prevent breakage in shipping and handling. Be sure to save the entire canine and not cut off or damage the root.

The area above the tooth (root area) can be scrimshaw-ed (engraved), but the tooth enamel is too hard to scrimshaw. Keep in mind the finished jewelry canine should never be left in direct sunlight for long periods of time or near excessive heat or water, which could cause cracking.

Please allow me to share some ways I've learned over thirty years of utilizing these items to make unusual jewelry for my clients. These suggestions have worked well for black bears, grizzly bears, kodiak brown bears, mountain lions, African lions, wolves, and leopards. To expand your business with clients, we offer a unique jewelry and wearable accessories line that can be made from claws and canines. These items include fine scrimshaw on fossil ivory, natural gold nuggets, genuine gemstones and natural stones with sterling silver and 14K gold, with each piece being hand fabricated to the individual. Over the years we have been asked by many taxidermists if we have cast caps they could buy and put on themselves. We do not. We find the problem with cast items is that all claws differ in size and shape, requiring that we hand build all our pieces for proper fit.

Offering these extra services allows you to expand your profits and build a client relationship that will bring you repeat business. It also allows you to utilize excess claws and canines to offer for sale in your showroom for added capital, or as gifts to special clients for friends. Be sure to know your state's or country's laws in relation to sale of claw or canines. ■

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