

A METHOD OF SALTING AND PREPARING WATER
BIRD SKINS.

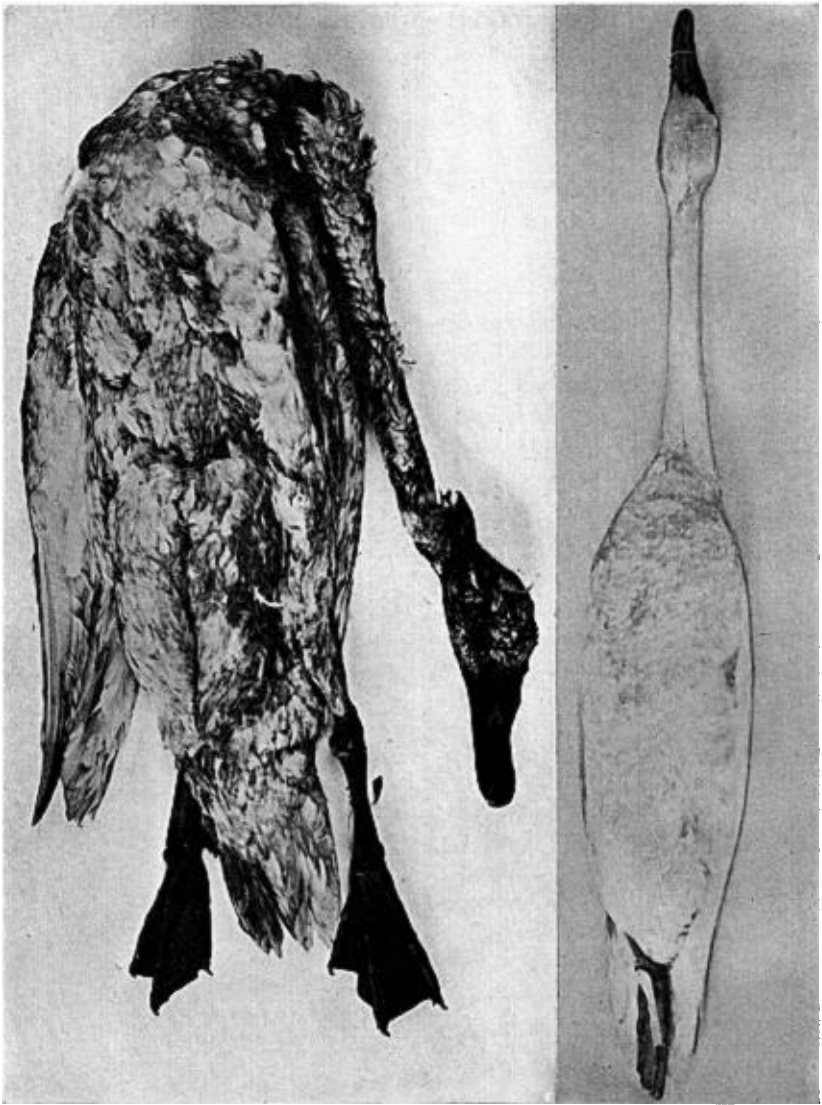
BY WHARTON HUBER.

Plate XII.

As we have received many inquiries as to the method employed at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia in salting water bird skins for temporary preservation and their subsequent preparation for study specimens I submit the following outline, including some account of the relaxing, cleaning and remodelling of old dirty and grease-soaked specimens.

Skin the birds in the usual manner leaving the fat on the skin. Leave in all wing bones including humerus. Be sure to skin the head thoroughly, loosening the skin as near to the base of the bill as possible. Remove brains, eyes and any extra meat from the skull. Then take fairly fine table salt, and rub it well into the skull and skin of the head, forcing as much as possible into the skull and about the base of the bill. Turn the skin over the head and salt the neck thoroughly. Make a cut on the underside of the wing, between radius and ulna, removing all the flesh from between these bones and rub the salt thoroughly into this part. Make a slit on the underside of the terminal joint of wing (metacarpel joint) rubbing salt in thoroughly.

If the bird is large such as a Goose, it is best to make an incision on the outside of the bend of the wing in order that salt may get into the metacarpal bones. Draw the tendons from the leg and force salt up into the tarsus. Salt the inside of the skin thoroughly rubbing the salt in, then lay the skin belly up in a box and allow to dry. It is best to sprinkle a little salt over the skins in order that they will form their own pickle and become moist. If in a dry climate the skins should be moistened a little on the inside in order that the salt will melt and form a pickle. If in the tropics where it is very moist and the salt turns to water and runs away, add a little more salt on top of the skins in order that it will renew the salt solution on the skins. The skins can be packed tight in a box after a few days, but it is best to let them have air for a couple



1. DISMOUNTED SPECIMEN OF WHISTLING SWAN OBTAINED ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER, FEBRUARY 10, 1836, BY J. K. TOWNSEND.
2. THE SAME SPECIMEN CLEANED AND REMODELLED, 1930.

of days until they are thoroughly cured. They may then be packed and shipped.

RELAXING AND MAKING UP OF SALTED SKINS.

The salted skins should be immersed in a bucket of water for an hour or so in order to relax them thoroughly. Then hold the skin over a faucet and allow running water to run through it, in order to wash out all of the salt. Be sure to wash out all of the salt from the plumage. When the skins are relaxed enough to turn inside out take a knife or scraper and scrape off all of the fat. Skins should not be immersed in water long enough to start maceration or the feathers will slip but they may be safely immersed for several hours. When all of the fat is removed from the skin by scraping, immerse it in the following solution:

Gasoline two gallons
Alcohol one pint
Spirits of Turpentine four ounces

The skins may be immersed in this solution for twenty-four hours, then squeezed out carefully with the hands. This squeezing process should be continued for some little time until as much as possible of the grease is removed, then immerse the skin in a fresh solution made as above and rinse out thoroughly. These solutions can be used until they become heavily laden with grease when the old solution is thrown away and the second solution used for soaking the skins. After the skins come from the last rinsing bath put them in a tight box containing hard wood sawdust, maple is the best. Never use oak sawdust as it will stain the feathers. Then shake them carefully from end to end in order to get the sawdust thoroughly into the feathers. If you have a drum that will revolve, such as is used by tanners, so much the better. A shaft may be fastened on each end of a box, the shaft end inserted in a groove, and the box made to revolve by hand. After shaking from end to end for some little time, take out the sawdust and put in fresh sawdust and continue this shaking or revolving process until the feathers are comparatively dry and fluffy, then the skins may be shaken out by hand to remove sawdust and the drying process continued by using a blower. Many of these small blowers are

now on the market, or a vacuum cleaner may be used by hooking the nozzle on the reverse end and putting a cork in the end of the nozzle with a small hole in it, in order to reduce the volume of air current and make it stronger. In other words, making a blower out of the vacuum cleaner. In using the blower, blow the air against the grain of the feathers until they are thoroughly dry and fluffy. The skin should now be in perfect condition for making up, but if after going through this process it is too dry, it may be moistened again by leaving it for an hour or two in a damp box, a tight box with several inches of damp sawdust or sand in the bottom, putting a little moist cotton inside, but it should not be left in long enough to allow the feathers to become wet again. Be sure to poison the skins carefully with arsenic before making them up. Make up in the usual manner, using a stick in the neck to keep the head from breaking off in handling. There will be no further danger of any grease coming out on the feathers or legs if this degreasing process has been carried out properly.

Old dirty and grease-soaked skins may be treated the same as freshly salted skins. Soak in water for a time, so as to partly relax. Remove the stuffing and scrape away any large pieces of fat. Immerse in the gasoline bath for at least twenty-four hours. Very dirty and greasy skins may take two or even three days of soaking in the gasoline bath, but they should be squeezed out several times a day and the bath changed until it is comparatively clean after squeezing. Then dry the feathers in the sawdust box or drum and blow out with the blower. Be sure to poison the skin thoroughly before making up.

Mr. F. W. Wood, one of our Taxidermists, who has made a specialty of remodelling old specimens, has recently degreased and remade, by the above method, the skin of a Whistling Swan, one of the dirtiest skins I ever saw. This Swan was shot on the Columbia River in 1836 by J. K. Townsend. It is now as clean and almost as white as a freshly collected specimen. (Plate XII.)

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