

Mounting a Turkey Cape in 10 Easy Steps

By Marisa Lee, Regional Hunter Education Coordinator,
Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

Would you like to mount your turkey this season, but just can't afford to have it done by a professional taxidermist? Then, you might try caping and tanning your turkey yourself. The process is fairly simple and extremely affordable. It only takes an hour or two and costs about \$15.

BILLY POPE

Here's how:

1. After harvesting your turkey, keep it as clean as possible. Take extra precautions to keep the feathers from getting bent, ruffled, wet or dirty. Take your turkey home, back to the camp house, or a place you can dissect it in a clean environment.
2. Divide the turkey into four parts: the two wings, tail feathers and cape. Cut off each wing just behind the wing bone. On the underside of each wing use a single edge razor blade or sharp knife to remove as much of the flesh from the bone as possible. Be careful not to cut any flesh that will remove feathers from the backside of the turkey.
3. Spread the wings out on a sheet of plywood and tack it the way you want it to look. Stick pins or small nails into the plywood just behind the feather shafts to hold them in place. Always tack the feathers skin side up so you can cover the fleshy parts with borax to absorb the oils.
4. Cut off the tail feathers from the rump in one piece. Fan them out on a sheet of plywood and nail them in place. Use pins to get the feathers to lay exactly as you want them.
5. Remove the cape (the back feathers of the turkey). You will notice that the back feathers look different from the side feathers. At the bird's neck, gently pull the hide away from the bird and cut down each side. Continue cutting down the sides of the neck to the rump. Gently pull to remove the cape, starting at the neck. You will need to use a sharp knife for a neat job. Once the cape is removed, spread it out flat, but be careful not to stretch it. The feathers will not lay correctly if the cape is stretched too far.
6. Tack the cape flesh side up to the plywood with as many small nails as you deem necessary. You can't use too many nails, so be generous. Make sure all four parts are in the shape you want them, because they can't be reshaped once the turkey dries.
7. When the turkey is positioned the way you want it, apply borax to the fleshy parts of all four pieces, but especially the cape. Work borax into the skin with your fingers. This will absorb the excess grease and oil so your turkey will dry. Let the turkey dry for several weeks, or more depending on temperature and humidity.
8. When the turkey has completely dried (usually less than two weeks), remove the wings, tail and body feathers from the plywood. Shake and gently brush off the excess borax from the feathers with a fine bristle paintbrush. The turkey is now ready for hanging and displaying. An old piece of barn wood works nicely for this, but any piece of wood you like will work.
9. Nail the turkey tail fan to the bottom of the board first with the tail feathers pointed down. Then spread the cape over the tail fan until the feathers blend together and nail into place.
10. Nail the wings on last. Be sure to tuck them under the body feathers where the wing bone would have attached to the bird and overlap the tail fan just slightly on the outside edges to bring the turkey together. You may want to nail the beard and spurs somewhere near the turkey as well.

When selecting a place to display your turkey, be sure to hang it on a wall where it will receive adequate lighting. Turkey feathers are iridescent and lighting really enhances their subtle colors and beauty.

There are many benefits to caping a turkey yourself as opposed to having one professionally mounted. It is more economical, and gives you a sense of pride knowing that you did it yourself. In addition, the meat can be utilized as well, something you couldn't do if you were dropping your turkey off to have it mounted at the taxidermist. 