

Taxidermist

Taxidermists use their artistic and technical skills to preserve dead animals, birds and fish so that they have a lifelike appearance. They do this by removing and preserving the skin and then stretching it over a custom made model which includes the original skull and an artificial framework.

Taxidermists do not kill animals. The animals have died naturally or have been killed in road accidents.

The Work

You could be:

- freezing animal carcasses
- working on several different animals at once, using power tools or manually skinning the dead animal, then tanning and preserving the skin
- studying the way the animal stands or sits and making a framework (or 'armature') for the body, using wood, steel rods, plastic or fibreglass
- attaching the skull to the framework or, if necessary, making an artificial skull
- fixing the skin, including fur or feathers, over the framework and adding teeth, claws and artificial eyes
- moulding and casting plaster models of fish
- creating a natural-looking background for the animal and mounting the animal in its background
- writing up detailed information about the animal, such as what it is, where it lived, and how, when and where you got it
- answering enquiries about wildlife from members of the public.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Salaries for assistant taxidermists in Scottish museums can be in the range of £16,000 to £30,000 a year.

Most taxidermists are self-employed. They charge a fee which varies depending on the animal. Some self-employed taxidermists earn quite a low income and have another job as well.

Conditions

- You could work for a local authority, national or private museum, a commercial taxidermy company or be self-employed.
- You would work in a workshop or possibly in your own home.
- In some cases, your working hours could be flexible or even part time.
- You would probably work on your own most of the time.

- The work is intricate and requires great attention to detail.
- You would work with chemicals, and wear protective overalls and possibly a face mask.

Getting In

- There are not many jobs and it is not easy to find full time work. The Guild of Taxidermists can give advice on finding a training place.
- A good general education is useful. In addition, it can be helpful to have subjects at National 4 or 5 including English, Maths, Art and Design and Biology.
- A good knowledge of wildlife and animal anatomy is also helpful.
- You should have good eyesight.
- You should be good with your hands in skills such as sculpting, woodwork and painting.
- By law you must have a licence to keep certain wild animals (dead or alive) from a list of protected species.

What Does It Take

You should be:

- interested in wildlife
- artistic and imaginative
- patient and accurate
- able to work alone
- able to deal with unpleasant sights and not be squeamish.

You should have:

- good practical skills
- an eye for detail
- a good knowledge of animal anatomy
- good hand to eye co-ordination.

Training

- You would normally train on the job with your employer.
- An apprenticeship would last around 3-5 years but it may take even longer to become fully competent.
- The Guild of Taxidermists runs a three-day annual conference, which includes lectures and demonstrations on aspects of taxidermy.

Getting On

- It is advisable that you become a member of the Guild of Taxidermists to make contacts and keep up to date with new techniques.
- If you work in a museum, you could become the head of a taxidermy unit once you have built up sufficient experience.
- In time, you might set up your own business, selling custom-made and self-initiated work.

- There can be good opportunities to work abroad.

Contacts

Guild of Taxidermists

Website: www.taxidermy.org.uk

Museums Association

Tel: 020 7566 7800

Email: info@museumsassociation.org

Website: www.museumsassociation.org/home

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Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.