

28 Taxidermy

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Cordura vest

THIS cordura vest features multiple pockets, a large rear game pocket and removable meat pouch. The shoulder straps are fully adjustable.

Cost: around £55 plus P&P

Available from: Falcon Fabrication

Contact details: ☎ 01782 396054

🌐 www.falconfabrication.co.uk



Nubuck leather vest

MADE from green nubuck leather, this vest is lined with detachable meat pocket, large mesh vented quarry bag with zips to both sides, fully adjustable straps and belt. Sizes S, M, L and XL.

Cost: around £59 plus P&P

Available from: Falconiformes UK

Contact details: ☎ 01327 261485

🌐 www.falconiformes.co.uk

Canvas vest

THIS fully lined green canvas vest features assorted pockets, including a large quarry pouch on the rear. Comes in one adult adjustable size.

Cost: around £40 plus P&P

Available from: UK Falcons

Contact details: ☎ (Spain) 0034 952 594826

✉ gino@ukfalcons.com 🌐 www.ukfalcons.com



Kids' hawking vest

YOU'RE never too young to go hawking, as is proved by this vest designed with the younger falconer in mind. Adjustable size to fit approximately 55-85cm (22-34in) chest.

Cost: around £17 plus P&P

Available from: Due North Falconry Supplies

Contact details: ☎ 07840 954 769

🌐 www.due-north.eu



Life after death

CARL CHURCH tells Gillian Sumner how his passion for bird taxidermy has led to work that wins great acclaim

CARL Church's interest in the world of taxidermy started at the age of 12 when he was given a little mounted owl for a birthday present. He was fascinated with the mechanics of taxidermy and wanted to learn about preserving birds. Carl started collecting them and his collection had grown to 15 by the time he was in his early 20s.

He decided he would have a go. Armed with an old book from the Victorian era and no proper materials he produced his first 'work of art'. This overstuffed crow with eyes of ball bearings started off a lifelong passion for taxidermy.

Carl recalls the day he attended his first convention of the Guild of Taxidermists in 1995: "I walked in proudly with my prized exhibit of an overfilled, cross-eyed and long-necked sparrowhawk, only to be met with my first encounter of top-quality taxidermy. You can imagine how I felt – if there had been a hole big enough I would have gladly jumped in."

Guild members were kind at first, he remembers, but they soon moved on to some strong but constructive criticism. Luckily this did not deter Carl but spurred him on to gain more knowledge and experience. With the help of the Guild members he soon grew more adept and the standard of his work improved as his confidence grew.

In 1998 the European taxidermy competition in Helsinki made him even more determined to develop. His prime ambition was to compete at world level in America, something he achieved in 2003 when his two exhibits of hooded crows were placed first and second. When he received the prize for best professional bird of 2003, it was the first time a British taxidermist had received this prestigious award. "I was so honoured and proud," Carl recalls.



The award-winning eagle owl.



Carl and one of his many lifelike works.



This snowy owl will always be watchful.



This hornbill proved a winner.

“The birds are so lifelike that they look as if they might fly away at any moment”

"I realised that to be the very best at anything you really had to stick to one field and in 2004 I made the decision to concentrate on bird taxidermy," he said. "After ten years' experience I attended the world show again in 2005. Taking three mounts and six birds with me, it was really an awesome task. But when I won four second-place ribbons, two first-place ribbons and best professional bird of 2005, all the hard work and dedication had paid off and to my amazement and joy I was also awarded the title of best professional competitor for that year."

Carl told me that he is still striving to improve his work, though looking at it you cannot see how it could be any better – the birds are so lifelike that they look as if they might fly away at any moment. But he explained that there are always new

A brief history of taxidermy

TAXIDERMY is from the Greek meaning 'the arrangement of the skin'. It is the art and craft of mounting or reproducing dead animals to a lifelike facsimile. In the 1700s, practically every town had its own tannery business. During the 19th century, hunters would take their 'sporting' trophies along to the local furniture upholsterers, who would remove the internal organs of the animals, stuff them with cotton rags and then sew them back up again.

Taxidermy as we know it today has its roots in those practices, and that is why they are so often still called 'stuffed' animals, a description which most professional taxidermists find insulting. 'Mounting' is the preferred term.

By the 20th century, the art of taxidermy had been perfected so as to portray anatomically correct subjects that were also arranged in realistic poses and settings. It's a far cry from the weird and wonderful parodies of animal and bird life that were presented to the early 18th and 19th century patrons of taxidermy.

techniques and materials coming onto the scene and you have to keep up with all the latest ideas if you are to compete among the best. Carl said he is still learning about his subject and is constantly observing birds so that he can transform the pile of dead feathers he is faced with into a lifelike work of art.

As for where he gets his subjects, a large percentage are road-traffic casualties and quite often he is given birds that have flown into windows. Also there are a number of bird keepers – falconers among them – who wish to capture for ever the beauty of a much-loved bird that has died.

Carl decided to go full-time with taxidermy this year, after attending the Guild of Taxidermists Conference in March. There he took many awards with his European eagle owl, including best cased exhibit, best professional bird and best in show 2007. He also bagged a third with a hornbill.

It has been a change in direction for Carl, after spending many years making 15-ton tipper trailers and putting up welded columns that weighed three or four tons each. These days, assembling birds as small as hummingbirds and creating artificial eyelashes for the hornbills, Carl works with tools as small as very fine sewing needles.

★ Gillian Sumner keeps and breeds a variety of birds including softbills, quails and finches.