

**BIRD-PRESERVING, BIRD-
MOUNTING,
AND THE PRESERVATION
OF BIRDS' EGGS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649326457

Bird-preserving, bird-mounting, and the preservation of birds' eggs by Richard Avis

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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RICHARD AVIS

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BIRD-PRESERVING
BIRD-MOUNTING

AND THE

PRESERVATION OF BIRDS' EGGS.

WITH A CHAPTER ON BIRD-CATCHING.

By RICHARD AVIS.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:
GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS,
5, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1870.

189. g. 80.

BIRD-PRESERVING.

ALMOST the first thing a young naturalist takes interest in is what is commonly called "bird-stuffing," and with him, when he attempts it, the term is very applicable. Oh! the wretched, distorted things which rise from their collapsed state, where it had been better had they remained, "they mimicked Nature so abominably." But we must not suppress and dull the aspirations of genius, remembering that the most accomplished in any art had their beginning too. Many things are required to make anything of this art—such as delicacy of hand, great practice, but, above all, patience, the most inestimable of all common virtues. But I shall proceed to give a few plain directions, that the aspirant after taxidermal excellency may judge and try for himself, and not be disheartened. A fair specimen being obtained, take common cotton wadding, and with an ordinary paint-brush stick plug the throat, nostrils, and, in large birds, the ears, with it, so that when the skin is turned no juices may flow and spoil the feathers; you must then provide yourself with the following articles:—A knife of this kind, A, which is very common; a pair of cutting pleyers, B; a pair of strong scissors, C, of a moderate size; a button-hook, D; a marrow-spoon, E; and a hand-vice, F. With these, a needle and thread, and a sharpener of some kind, to give you

knife an occasional touch, you are prepared, so far as implements go. Then provide yourself with annealed iron wire of various sizes; some you may buy ready for use, some not; but you can anneal it yourself by making it red-hot in the fire, and letting it cool in the air. Common hemp is the next article, cotton wadding, pounded whitening, and pounded alum, or



chloride of lime; as to the poisons which are used, they will be spoken of by and by. You should also have a common bradawl or two, and some pieces of quarter-inch deal, whereon to stand the specimens when preserved, if to be placed as walking on a plane; if not, some small pieces of twigs or small branches of trees should be kept ready for use, of various sizes according to the size of the bird; something of this

form. Spanish chestnut, or common laurel cut in December, will be found to answer best, but this must



be regulated by fancy and the requirements of the case; oak boughs are sometimes of a good shape.

The best time for preserving specimens is in spring, because then the cock birds are in the best feather, and the weather is not too warm. In mild weather three days is a good time to keep a bird, as then the skin will part from the flesh easily. If a specimen has bled much over the feathers, so as to damage them, wash them carefully but thoroughly with warm water and a sponge, and immediately cover them with pounded whitening, which will adhere to them. Dry it as it hangs upon them slowly before the fire, and then trituring the hardened lumps gently between the fingers, the feathers will come out almost as clean as ever. To test whether the specimen is too decomposed to skin, try the feathers about the auriculars, and just above the tail, and if they do not move you may safely proceed.

Lay the bird on his back, and, parting the feathers from the insertion of the neck to the tail, you will find in most birds a bare space. Cut the skin the whole length of this, and passing the finger under it on either

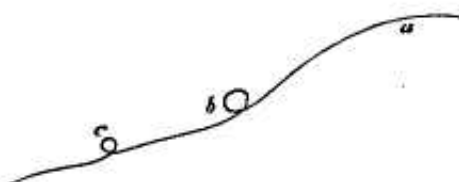
side, by laying hold of one leg and bending it forward, you will be able to bring the bare knee through the opening you have made; with your scissors cut it through at the joint; pull the shank still adhering to the leg till the skin is turned back as far as it will go; denude the bone of flesh and sinew, wrap a piece of hemp round it, steeped in a strong solution of the pounded alum, and then pull the leg by the claw, by which means the skin will be brought again to its place.

After having served both legs alike, skin carefully round the back, cutting off and leaving in the tail with that into which the feathers grow, that is, the "Pope's nose." Serve the wing bones the same as the leg, cutting them off close to the body, and turn the skin inside out down to the head. The back of the skull will then appear, and you will now find it of advantage, as soon as you have got the legs and tail free, to tie a piece of string round the body, and hang it up as a butcher skins a sheep. Make in the back of the skull



a cut of the annexed form, with your knife, which you can turn back like a trap-door, and with the marrow-spoon entirely clear out the brains; A representing the neck, and B the skin turned back. Having done this, wash the interior of the skull thoroughly with the alum, and fill it with cotton wadding. The next ope-

ration requires care and practice—namely, to get out the eyes. This is done by cutting cautiously until the lids appear, being careful not to cut the eye itself, and you can then with a forceps, which you will likewise find useful, pull each from its socket; wipe the orifice carefully, wash it with the alum solution, and fill it with cotton wadding. Cut off the neck close to the skull, wash the stump, and the whole of the interior of the skin with the alum, and the *skinning* is done. Now comes the stuffing. The ordinary mode used by bird-preservers is a simple one, and answers very well; there is a French method, however, which has its advantages, and will be adverted to hereafter. Take a piece of the wire suitable to the size of the bird—that is, as large as the legs will carry—and bend it into the following form, *a* representing the neck, *b*, the body, and *c*, the junction of the tail, allowing sufficient length of neck for the wire to pass some distance



beyond the head, and being sharpened at each end, which may be done by obliquely cutting it with the piers. Wind upon this wire hemp to the size of the bird's body, which you should have lying by you to judge from, and it will present something of this appearance. You can shape it with the hand, but be careful not to make it the least *too large*; and, after you have finished it to your satisfaction, you may singe it as the poulterer would singe a fowl, which will make all neat; but be particular to wind the hemp very

tight. Then take the skin, lay it on the table on its back, and pass the wire at the head into the marrow



where the neck is cut off, through above the roof of the mouth, and out at one nostril, and draw it up close to the skull; turn the skin back, and draw it down over the hemp body, and pass the wire spike protruding at the lower end through the flesh upon which the tail grows, about the centre, and rather below than above. The skin may now be adjusted to the hemp body, and sewn up, beginning from the top of the breast, and being particularly careful always to take the stitch from *inside*, otherwise you will draw in the feathers at every pull. At first sew it very loose, and then, with the button-hook, draw it together by degrees.

With the plyers cut two lengths of wire long enough to pass up the legs and into the neck, and leave something over to fasten the bird by to the board or spray upon which it is to be placed. The next operation requires some address and great practice, namely, the passing the wire up the legs. This is done by forcing it into the centre of the foot, and up the back of the legs into the hemp body, through it obliquely, and into the neck until it is pretty firm. In doing this, you must remember the ordinary position of a bird *when alive*, and, therefore, instead of passing the wire