

Preventing Scale Loss WITH GLUE

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*It's a sticky job,
but someone has to do it!*

BY DAN RINEHART

Dan Rinehart followed the advice of his friend, Steve Henthorn, and found ordinary Elmer's glue to be indispensable in making loose scales tight throughout the entire skinning process.

ANYONE WHO HAS SKINNED A LOOSE-scaled fish understands the problems of losing scales during the skinning process. Scale loss leads to a mount with an inconsistent and rough finish. Once scales have separated from the skin, there is little that can be done to fix the damage. Some people try to glue the scales back in place, however, I have not seen this process successfully performed. The end result is that there is no way you can achieve an attractive, professional mount if you lose scales during the skinning, scraping, and mounting processes.

So, the answer to this problem is don't lose scales! The success you have in keeping the scales attached depends on how you prepare and secure the scales

prior to skinning. I have tried numerous techniques to prepare the scales prior to mounting, and found one technique to be superior in regard to efficiency and overall results. My friend Steve Henthorn introduced me to this technique, which I tested and will recommend throughout this article. This technique actually glues the scales together and holds them to the skin before skinning, so I will be referring to this process as the "glue technique." Let's get started on a crappie, one of the worst fish for losing scales.



FISH TAXIDERMY



Step 1. On all fish, the protective slime coating must be removed from the fish. Bacteria is plentiful in this coating, and will result in odor and the attraction of bugs if not removed completely. I use a garden hose attached to a sink nozzle, and high-pressure-spray the slime from the fish. Many people like to use slime remover products, however, I find that simple high pressure water does the job just fine.



Step 2. Open the gills and thoroughly remove the slime from between each gill and the mouth area. Be thorough—slime remaining in this area creates odor.



Step 3. Once the slime has been removed, completely dry the surface of the skin and gills with a dry cloth. It is extremely importance that the surface of the fish is completely dry before applying any glue to the fish. Since the glue we are using is water-soluble Elmer's glue, it only makes sense that if glue is applied to a wet surface, it will be diluted and decrease the bonding capabilities. Again, dry the entire surface of the fish, starting with the gill and mouth areas.



Step 4. To dry the fish, place the fish on tow-

els and begin blotting with a towel. Do not wipe the fish skin! Wiping will result in loss of scales and defeat the purpose of the entire glue process. Simply dab the skin surface dry with a dry towel.



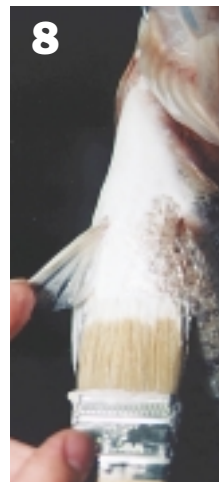
Step 5. Once the skin has been blotted dry with a towel, use a hair dryer over the entire fish to finish the drying process. Be sure that the blow dryer is set on cold! If the blow dryer does not have a cold or cool setting, *do not* attempt to dry the fish on a warm or hot setting. You will destroy the fish if you apply heat to the skin!



Step 6. The fish needs to be hung head up so that the glue can be applied evenly to all side of the fish. To hang the fish without making any holes or causing any damage, just bend a wire in an S-shape and insert one end up through the gills and mouth.



Step 7. Hang the fish using the other end of the "S" as the hanging hook.



Step 8. I like to begin by applying the glue in the throatlatch and head areas, then continuing down to the tail fin. I also coat the fins with this first coat as it protects the fins once they dry. (All the glue will be removed later.)



Step 9. Once the throatlatch has been glued, move on to the cheek and head juncture. The head juncture is extremely important to cover due to the fact that this is one area that is most likely to create scale loss.



Step 10. Continue coating the fish with glue until the entire side and fins of the fish are covered.



Step 11. I like to speed the drying of the glue by placing the fish in front of a fan. Remember the guts of the fish have not been removed and are in a constant state of decomposition. Therefore, you want to apply and dry the glue as quickly as possible so you can get the fish skinned and mounted as soon as possible. The first coat of glue usually takes 30 minutes to dry if the fish is placed in front of a fan.

Step 12. This photos show the fish after 30 minutes of drying time. You will know the glue is dry when it becomes clear and transparent. There are usually some small areas



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around the tail that do not dry completely clear. This just means that a little too much glue has settled in this area and will not completely dry. This area will be dry to the touch, but will not become completely clear. If it is dry to the touch, it's okay to move on.



Step 13. Once the first coat of glue is dry, apply a second coat and let it dry under the fan.

Step 14. I do not apply a second coat of glue to the fins. The first coat is sufficient in protecting the fins. A second coat will only make removing the glue from the fins more difficult.

Step 15. After approximately 30 more minutes of fan-drying have passed, you can prepare to start skinning the fish.



Step 16. To begin, place the fish on a *dry* towel and begin the back incision by severing the gill girdle bone. Note: The towel must be dry! A damp towel will rehydrate the glue and create a sticky mess!



Step 17. As you make the back incision and skin the fish, you will find that fluids from the fish want to run onto the body. Use a dry towel to soak up these fluids and keep them off the glued skin.



Step 18. Here you can see that I have released the lower flap of skin from the meat without the loss of a single scale! Believe me, without the glue securing the scales together, we would have a handful of scales by this point.



Step 19. As you skin, keep your hands dry and avoid touching the glued scales with wet hands.

Step 20. Now the fish is skinned and ready for final scraping.



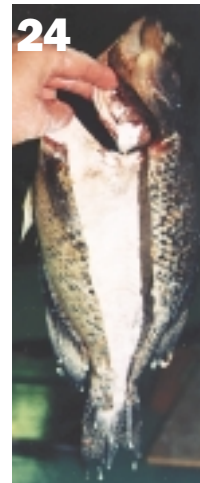
Step 21. Even though the glue technique has worked and no scales have been lost, there are a couple areas where I notice the scales loosening a little, mainly at the tail juncture and head juncture. To stiffen these areas and protect the scales, I apply one more layer of glue specifically to these areas.

Step 22. Then I hang the fish one last time and let the

glue in the tail and head junctures dry. This takes approximately 15 minutes under a fan. Once the glue in these areas dries, I can safely complete the scraping process.



Step 23. Once scraping has been completed, the skin needs to be preserved prior to mounting.



Usually, I soak fish in a solution of water, borax and baking soda, but it's obvious that if I submerge this fish in water, all the glue will liquefy and the scales will be unprotected during the mounting process. Therefore, I preserve this fish by omitting any water and rubbing borax and baking soda directly into the inside surface of the skin, head juncture and throat areas.

Step 24. I then *gently* shake out any extra preservative powders and the skin is ready to mount over a mannikin.



Step 25. Once the skin has been mounted and secured to the mannikin, run cold water over the glued surface of the fish until the glue rehydrates and turns white.



Step 26. Now that the glue has turned white, I can peel the glue away from the scales. Not all

the glue separates as easily as shown in this photo. Some areas of glue will require more re-hydrating and peeling. Note: It is essential that *all* the glue is removed from fins, body, head, *everywhere!*



Step 27. All the glue has been removed from the crappie. The eye sockets are now filled and the Flex Eyes set.



Step 28. It is necessary to rehydrate the fins more. Wrap the fins in wet towels and let sit for 30 minutes. After removing the towels, the fins have regained flexibility and are ready to be spread and carded.

Step 29. Position and card the fins as you nor-



mally would. Again, it is *very* important that all the glue has been removed from the fins! If any glue remains, the fin carding will adhere to the fins.

This crappie is now complete and all the scales remain attached on the show side. I have mounted hundreds of crappies without using this method, and I have to admit that I usually lose a few scales here and there. This glue method has impressed me, and I find it to be a very effective technique for retaining all the scales on loose-scaled fish. Because this technique increases the time it takes to complete a fish mount, I recommend you charge \$10.00 to \$15.00 more for loose-scaled fish, such as crappie. If you explain the reason for this additional charge to your customers, I bet they will understand. Give this technique a try, and I believe you will be as impressed as I am. ■