

# Skinning

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**Skinning** is the act of skin removal. The process is done with animals, mainly as a means to prepare the muscle tissues beneath for consumption or for use of the fur or tanning of the skin. The skin may also be used as a trophy, sold on the fur market, or, in the case of a declared pest, used as proof of kill to obtain a bounty from a government health, agricultural, or game agency.

Two common methods of skinning are **open skinning** and **case skinning**. Typically large animals are open skinned and smaller animals are case skinned.<sup>[1]</sup>

Skinning, when it is performed on live humans as a form of capital punishment or murder, is referred to as flaying.

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## Skinning methods

**Case skinning** is a method where the skin is peeled from the animal like a sock. One would usually use this method if the animal is going to be stretched out or put in dry storage.<sup>[2]</sup> Many smaller animals are case skinned, leaving the skin mostly undamaged in the shape of a tube.<sup>[3]</sup>

Although the method of case skinning individual animals varies slightly, the general steps remain the same. To case skin an animal, it should be hung upside down by its feet. A cut should be made in one foot, and continued up the leg, around the anus and down the other leg. From there the skin can be pulled down the animal as though removing a sweater.<sup>[4]</sup>

**Open skinning** is a method where the skin is removed from the animal like a jacket. This method is generally used if the skin is going to be tanned immediately or frozen for storage. A skin removed by the open method can be used for wall hangings or rugs.<sup>[5]</sup> Larger animals are often skinned using the open method.<sup>[6]</sup>

To open skin an animal, the body should be placed on a flat surface. A cut should be made from anus to lower lip, and up the legs of the animal. The skin can then be opened and removed from the animal.<sup>[7]</sup>

The final step is to scrape the excess fat and flesh from the inside of the skin with a blunt stone or bone tool.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Dorsal skinning** is very similar to process of open skinning, however instead of making a cut up the stomach of the animal, the cut is made along the spine. This method of skinning is very popular among taxidermists, as the backbone is easier and cleaner to access than the stomach and between the legs.<sup>[9]</sup> The best way to make a dorsal incision is to lay the animal on its abdomen and make a single cut from the base of the tail to the shoulder region. The animal's skin is easier to remove if it has been freshly killed.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Cape skinning** is the process of removing the shoulder, neck and head skin for the purpose of displaying the animal as a trophy on the wall.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Animal skin and Native Americans

Native Americans used skin for many purposes other than decoration, clothing and blankets. Animal skin was used as a staple to the Native Americans' daily lives. It was used to make tents and therefore provide shelter, to build boats which provided transportation, to make bags, to create musical instruments such as drums, and even to make quivers which helped them hunt.<sup>[12]</sup>

Since Native Americans were practiced in the means of acquiring and manipulating animal skin, fur trading developed from contact between them and Europeans in the 16th century. Animal skin was a valuable currency which the Native Americans had in excess and would trade for things such as iron-based tools and tobacco which were common in the more developed European area.<sup>[13]</sup> Beaver hats became very popular towards the end of the 16th century, and skinning them was necessary to acquire their wool. In this time, the beaver skin drastically rose in demand and in value. However, the high number of beavers being harvested for their pelts led to a depletion of beavers, and the industry had to slow down.<sup>[14]</sup>

## PETA's stance on skinning

To raise animals for the purpose of collecting their skin is called fur farming. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) alleges fur farmers are involved in skinning animals alive for their fur or skins.<sup>[15]</sup> Killing tactics deemed brutal by PETA are also in concern. Many fur farms allegedly skin animals alive to keep the pelts intact from damage that could occur while killing them. To avoid bullet holes, tears or slits from a knife, fur farmers can use methods such as beating the animal, electrocuting them, using poison to paralyse them, or breaking their necks.<sup>[16]</sup> Although these methods ensure an undamaged pelt, they are sometimes not enough to confirm the death of the animal, leaving the creature to be skinned alive.

The fur trade, however, insists that the only evidence of a fur animal ever being skinned alive was almost certainly staged by animal rights activists. This was an horrific video taken in a Chinese market of a raccoon dog being skinned alive, released in 2005 by Swiss Animal Protection.<sup>[17]</sup> Despite requests from the trade and the Chinese government, Swiss Animal Protection has never released the uncut

video, while analysis of the available audio track strongly suggests the man doing the skinning was doing so at the instruction of the cameraman. PETA and other animal rights groups continue to this day to claim this video is "proof" that live skinning takes place on a regular basis.

The fur trade furthermore insists that, for several reasons, animals are never skinned alive.<sup>[18]</sup> Aside from the inhumanity and illegality of such an act, it says that skinning an animal that was still alive (1) would expose the operator to the risk of infection from the animal's claws and teeth, as well as to the risk of being cut with his own knife; (2) would take longer than skinning a dead animal; and (3) would result in a spoiled fur because the animal's beating heart would cover it in blood.

Among many campaigns, one of PETA's goals is to enforce animal rights so they will not be used in any way as tools for humans; including as family pets. This includes utilizing their skin for clothing or decoration, and especially hurting the animals in any way.<sup>[19]</sup> Therefore, regardless of the method used for animal skinning, PETA is against the industry in general.<sup>[20]</sup>

## See also

- Animal trapping methods: Skinning animals
- Scalping
- Fur farming
- Taxidermy

## Notes

1. Churchill 1983, p.2.
2. Burch 2002, p.63
3. Burch 2002, p.66
4. Churchill 1983, p.44
5. Burch 2002, p.63
6. Churchill 1983, p.44
7. Churchill 1983, p.44
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