

# Ears, eyes, lips & nostrils.

Ear turning, nostrils splitting & lip splitting are the 3 main areas that successful hunters tend to hesitate at attempting when capping out their trophy animal. Eye lids are also a common problem area.

The thing is that unless these areas are tended to no salt should be applied to the cape, period.

If, for example, the lips have not been split or the ears not turned you end up with a dehydrated, withered, solid area that still contains moisture deep inside and that area is highly likely to suffer epidermal loss or at worst, hair slip.

Salting without turning/splitting also presents a head ache for the persistent taxidermist whose job it is to try and stop the damage and get those areas split to allow salt to draw the moisture from the flesh inside.

Some taxidermists won't accept capes such as these.

The beauty of being able to cape, thoroughly attend to these areas and salt a skin is that a freezer is not needed for skins either on the trip away, the travel home or storage at home.

The following is a short review of the process.

*\*Due to the fact that I often forget to take photos as I prepare skins, I would like to thank US taxidermist Glenn Conley for his permission to use the following photographs.\**

Ears:

This is how an ear will look right after skinning off the head skin. You can see the base of the ear butt surrounded by red meat. If you have cut close to the bone you should have just a small hole, the ear canal, visible:



Separate enough ear skin from the pink flesh making a pocket that you can fit your fingers, a spoon or a special ear turning tool into. (Following 2 pictures)



Ear skin pulled back to show where you will place either fingers or tool to separate the skin. (Back side of ear):



An ear turning tool:



Insert the closed end of the tool into the pocket you just created between the ear cartilage and back of ear skin and while grasping the ear with one hand, squeeze the tool, opening the ear to about 5 mm from the edge of the ear.

It is very easy to 'blow' or rip the ear by using too much force or opening the toll too wide.

A Deer ear will take about 2 -5 minutes depending on your experience.



Turn the ear inside out. (You might need to cut some membrane here and there to help).



Now you can finish turning the ear right to the edges or as close as possible.

Place the tool or a spoon in the ear to keep the skin tight if you like.

Carefully, and without too much force, run your knife along the white cartilage separating the skin from it.

If you see hairs poking in - stop - the ear is blown. It can be repaired, continue with the next step.



Clean the meat from the ear butt/bowl and salt the ear well with a fine salt.

A completely turned and cleaned ear ready for salting:



Lips:

What you are aiming to do here is opening the lips for salt penetration and you create extra skin that the taxidermist 'tucks' into a lip slot when mounting the animal.

Run your knife blade under the rim of skin left around the lips when you removed the skin from the animal:

Sambar lips: (own pictures 1 & 2)



Try and get as close to the edge as you can. The edge usually darkens as you get near it and may see hair follicles. If you begin cutting too many holes you might need to angle you knife in toward the chin a bit more. The successfully turned lip skin should roughly lay flat. Some taxidermist like to have the cheek skin in the corners of the mouth, while others don't mind if it's cut off.

Fully split lips: (next 2 pictures)



Note the dark edge where the lip would normally be just inside the mouth?



Eyes.

The eye work is similar to the lips area. It is important that the eyelid work is done with large game animals with medium to thick skin like red & sambar deer and very important on animals like cattle or buffalo. You are aiming to thin the skin here to allow proper salting, while creating extra skin for the taxidermist to 'tuck'. A common symptom, showing this was not done either thoroughly or at all is epidermal loss on the outer skin.

This picture shows the eyes as they appear just after caping.

The trick to having plenty of eyelid skin is while skinning, put a finger in the eye and pull the skin tight as you cut the skin away from the eye socket.

The dots show what area needs to be thinned, aka split/turned.

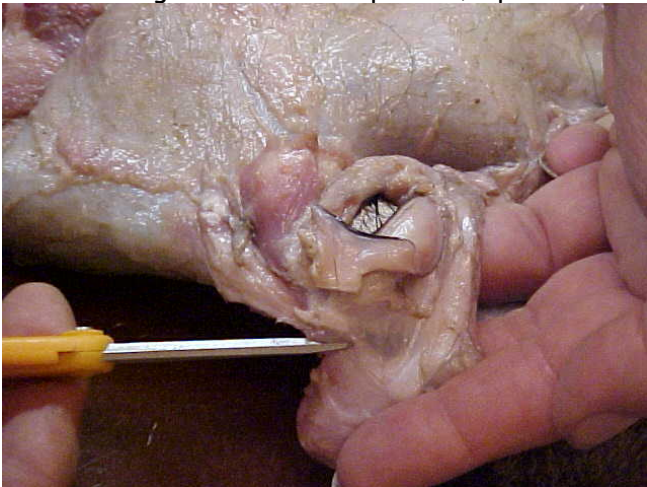


Just like the lips, you need to separate or 'lift' the flesh and eyelid skin from the head skin. Notice the nictating membrane or inner eyelid. (Centre. Creamy colored skin with black edge).

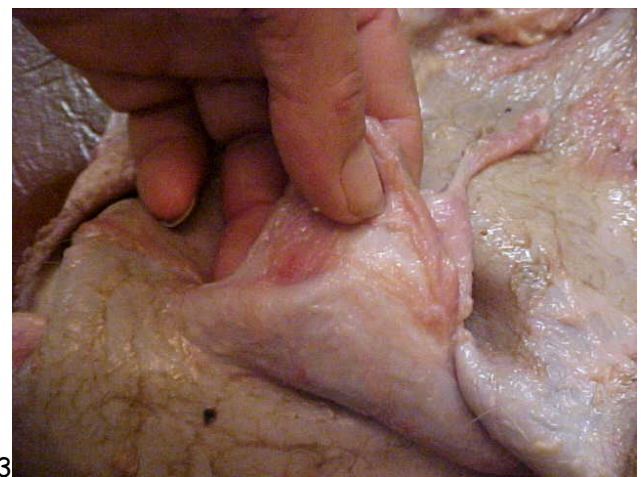
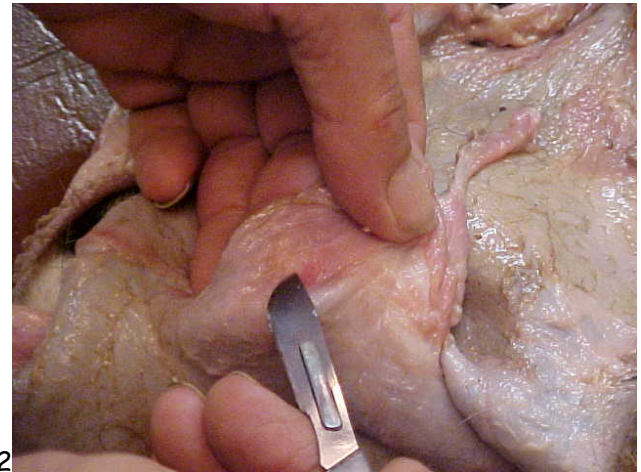
If this is present you have skinned the eyes properly.

From the area dotted in the picture above, run your blade just under the flesh and move toward the eye opening in the same fashion you did with the lips.

Glenn is using scissors in this picture, I prefer a scalpel:



Keep turning over this thin fold of skin until you get close to the eyelash bases. (Next 3 pictures).



With the skin pulled tight you should see a fine, creamy line. This is the fat at the base of the eyelashes. Stop here and trim skin to about 1 inch.

The taxidermist will thin this area even more after tanning.



The split eyelid skin.

The eyes can now be salted well with fine salt.



Nostrils.

The nostrils need to be split, separated or opened up before salting. Salt cannot get into the nose pad unless this is done.

You should have cut off the nose with enough skin containing the cartilage or septum running between the nostrils.



With a sharp blade make a cut in the centre of this cartilage the full length. (Red line). Be careful not to cut through the nose pad underneath.



This action will result in the nostrils separating as shown in the picture below. Notice all that flesh that should be removed?



In this photo you can see a finger pointing to that area under and between the nostrils that you should trim away excess flesh from:



This picture shows the nostrils cleaned of extra flesh:



Trim off the excess flesh, (and cartilage that you will have), making sure you retain at least 1/2 inch of inner nostril skin:



A cleaned up nose pad and nostrils ready for fine salt:



The main thing is ask your self,

Do I have a freezer to fit the cape into?

- No - the above must be done and the cape well salted.
- No, I don't have a freezer and I cant manage all that - get it to a taxidermist as soon as possible.
- Yes I do have a freezer - put the folded cape into a plastic bag without salting and freeze it.

*Simple message: Do not put salt onto any head skin without carrying out the steps above.*