

# How to mount your own turkey tail fan & beard



Presentation and photos By Storm W. Usrey  
Conservation Education Manager

# Equipment you will need



**Not pictured:** Electric hand sander or DA sander, needle nose pliers, cardboard, items needed to weigh cardboard down (cans of soda work nicely), Dawn dish soap, plastic zipper bag and straight pins.



# Full list of equipment

- Sharp knife
- One pair of cutters
- One small nylon or wire brush
- One metal coffee can (small to medium-sized)
- Borax
- Auto body filler with hardener (may need paint thinner to clean up spreader)
- Newspapers
- Cardboard
- Hair dryer
- Coleman lantern or camp fuel (white fuel)
- Needle nose pliers
- Electric hand sander or DA sander
- Reusable plastic spreaders (for putting on auto body filler)
- Rubber or vinyl gloves (may want to wear an apron and eye protection as well)
- Sharp pair of scissors
- One set of cutters
- Dawn dish soap (the standard used by taxidermists)
- Straight pins (if needed)
- Ziploc bag
- Items to weigh down cardboard such as unused soda cans or water bottles
- One hot glue gun (may or may not need)

# Remove the beard and tail fan



After you harvest your turkey, cut off the tail fan, leaving plenty of feathers to work with. I cut from the back (near the vent) and cut forward. Picture on the left is a frontal picture of the fan. Picture on the right is the back view of the same fan. Picture in the middle is the beard after it was cut off the gobbler. Make sure to leave enough tissue at the base of the beard as this will keep the beard intact. Personally, I would have left a little more tissue on the beard pictured above. Once the beard is dry you can use electrical tape to wrap around the base to hold it together.



# Start prepping the tail fan



Start by removing meat and fat from the back of the fan using your sharp knife. There is a bone in the center of the fan (see blue arrow); you will need to remove it. You should be able to remove most of it using the pair of cutters, needle nose pliers and your hands. It may break in areas, but just take your time in removing it. You want to make sure to remove this tail bone. **DO NOT** cut through connective tissue/skin in this process. The skin or connective tissue is near the blue arrow.



# Don't remove connective tissue/skin



DON'T remove or cut through the skin or connective tissue that holds the fan together. See arrows showing area of skin to not cut through or remove.



# Back of tail fan as you progress



As you remove flesh, fat and tail bone, the back of your tail fan will resemble the picture. Note: The blue arrow is pointing where the tail bone ran down the back of the tail fan and has been removed. DO NOT cut through the skin close to where the blue arrow is pointing and goes around the fan. This connective tissue or skin keeps your fan together. Removing as much of the fat and flesh will aid in keeping bugs from damaging your mount later on.

# Front of the tail fan



The front of the tail fan will have an oil duct (see blue arrow). Take the time to carefully remove this using your sharp knife.





# Front of tail fan



Using your sharp knife, take the time to start removing fat and meat from the bottom of your tail fan. You want to remove fat from between the bottom of quills. You can use your scissors, sharp knife, nylon/wire brush and your fingers to aid in removing fat from between the quills. DO NOT cut through the connective tissue/skin above the bottom portion of the quills as this skin keeps your fan together. DO NOT cut or damage the bottom of the quills, either.



# Getting close



As you get meat and fat cleaned off, note how your fan will appear (back view). In this picture, we are getting close to having the tail fan ready to dip in Coleman lantern/camp fuel (white fuel). You only need to submerge the tissue part of the fan. The fuel acts as a degreaser and will aid in keeping bugs out of your fan in the future. Submerge fan up to location where arrow is pointing. This will be slightly above any tissue, but will help in getting any oil from feathers, too.



# Submerge tissue in Coleman camp/lantern fuel



Submerge the bottom part of the fan in Coleman lantern/camp fuel (white fuel) for approximately one hour after fleshing the tail fan. Make sure to do this step outside for proper ventilation; be aware that the fuel is flammable. Wearing safety equipment is encouraged.



# Wash and dry



After soaking your fan in Coleman fuel for an hour, wash it in warm water with dish soap. This process should not take more than a few minutes and only wash the area that was in fuel. Then take out and dry using a hair dryer on low/medium heat. You can see in the pictures how the feathers will fluff back out after washing them. Don't get the feathers too hot.





# Option for small frontal feathers if removed from tail fan



The tissue with the smaller frontal feathers may come off or tear off by accident. DON'T worry!

Just pluck them from the patch of skin that tore off and place them in a Ziploc bag that has some Borax in it. Don't zip the bag up and allow air to get in the bag to aid in drying. You just need the bottom of quills in Borax. Once the fan is dry you can strategically glue some of these feathers onto the front of the tail fan before you use your auto body filler with hardener. If they don't tear off, keep attached with fan and dry on your fan in Borax.



# Time to Borax



Find a flat surface and lay down some cardboard and news paper. Cover the back and front of the fan with Borax (see photo). At this time, I will put the beard in Borax as well (next to the fan). Borax where any tissue is located. Dry beard for same amount of time as it takes for the fan to dry.



# Place cardboard on top of the fan. Use pins if needed



After you Borax your fan (front and back), place a piece of cardboard on top of the feathers/fan after you have positioned them how you would like them to dry when fanned out. Place a few unused cans of soda or bottled water on top of the cardboard to keep some weight on them. You can also use straight pins instead of cardboard and cans to help hold feathers in place and where you want them to dry by sticking them through the cardboard you placed underneath the fan.



# Drying your turkey fan

Let your fan dry for one week and then turn it over and let dry at least another week. It may take up to 3 weeks for the fan to properly dry. Once the fan is dry, you can strategically glue any of the smaller frontal feathers in place and then use your auto body filler (w/ hardener) at the base of the fan on both sides. Follow manufacturer instructions for body filler. You can use the plastic spreader to mix and spread the auto body filler and hardener (I found using a spreader cut in half works best). Tail fan pictured on right has body filler on the base. This will help protect and give the tail fan a solid base or foundation. NOTE: The auto body filler will dry quickly with hardener so work quickly and carefully. Once fully dry, feel free to sand down any necessary parts that have been covered with auto body filler for mounting purposes. You can clean up auto body filler residual that is on your spreader with paint thinner. I would do all of this process in an area with proper ventilation and wear any necessary safety items that are needed.





# Then mount using your plaque of choice. THANK YOU!



Follow manufacturer instructions for mounting fan and beard. Beard is usually mounted by pinning through electrical tape (if used at base of dried beard tissue) or hot gluing dried and preserved beard tissue to your plaque. Hang your mount in an area free of moths and other insects.