New Jersey Furbearer Management Newsletter

Fall 2020

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife
Upland Wildlife and Furbearer Project

Important Upcoming Dates:

Trapper Education courses are scheduled. Call 877-2-HUNT NJ for registration and further information.
October 11 (Tuckahoe WMA, Lenape Farms Section, Atlantic Co.) and October 25 (JBMDL Range 14, Burlington Co.).

- **October 1-31 – Application period for beaver and otter permits.**
- **Monday, November 30 – Last day to pick up beaver and otter permits.**
- **Thursday, December 2 – Beaver and otter OTC permit sales begin 10:00 AM.**

- To trap or use cable restraints a person must have first passed a Fish and Wildlife-approved trapper education course which included use of cable restraints and carry the certificate while trapping.
- Any person must be at least 12 years of age and successfully pass a Trapper Education Course in order to obtain a trapping license.
- **TAKE A KID TRAPPING!**

In This Issue:

This year is going to be a very different and trying time for trappers, sportsmen and women, and everyone in general. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we interact with each other as humans, and it will changing our approach on how we are going to enjoy our time hunting, fishing and trapping.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife has modified the way Hunter and Trapper Education classes are conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Division's webpage will contain information needed on this as conditions continue to change. The new plan is that students will complete the study and written portions online prior to the field portions. Outdoor sessions will be divided into small groups with social distancing practiced, and students are required to bring their own mask. No walk-ins will be accepted.

Reporting Coyote and Gray Fox

As in past years all harvested coyotes must be reported within 24 hours. COYOTE harvests should be reported through the Division's online harvest report system:

- Reports can be made via mobile phone or computer at: www.NJ.WildlifeLicense.com or calling: 1-855-I HUNT NJ (1-855-448-6865).
- Hunters should use the same location information used for deer hunting, found at: www.NJFishandWildlife.com/ahrs_deer_viewer.htm
- *While not required, the Division requests that all GRAY FOX harvests be reported as well*. Red fox harvests SHOULD NOT be reported.

2019-20 NJ Trapper Harvest Survey Results

Trapper license sales remained relatively stable despite low fur prices and market uncertainty from auction house closings. Mail questionnaire surveys were sent to 1,210 licensed trappers (1,144 2019 NJ Trapping License buyers and 66 previously licensed Youth trappers). The response rate (35%) was good. Most respondents (55%) actively trapped at least one day.

An estimated 672 active trappers expended 25,414 recreation-days during the 2019-20 trapping season and harvest estimates were 820 mink; 10,460 muskrat; 3,576 red fox; 168 gray fox; 5,279 raccoon; 604 opossum; 114 striped skunk; and, 18 weasel. In addition, 728 beaver, 51 river otter, and a record 248 coyotes were reported. The raw fur value of the 2019-20 harvest is unknown due to auction cancellations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020-21 Fur Market Forecast

The fur market and fur prices have not changed, so expect a tough outlook for fur prices for 2020-21. Be sure to trap when fur is prime (*see Trapper's Tips*) and spend some extra time to handle your fur. Low grade and unprimed furs have little value. The prices listed below are averages based on recent data.

Beaver - As anyone who has ever trapped and handled beaver pelts well know, the effort required to put up a beaver pelt is time consuming. With beavers, the work starts as soon as you get out of the truck. Pelt prices for beaver should be about what they have been in the last few years: $10 to $15 for a good prime blanket.

Raccoon - Like beaver, they take more effort to prepare than other pelts. Expect the usual $10 to $15 for a good, big, heavy pelt. However, that market suggest that there has been some change for the better, at least some of the past year's collections have sold and we may see more demand for heavy, prime raccoon pelt with (hopefully) some increase in prices.

Foxes - Expect similar prices as last year; around $15 to $20 for a good prime red and around $15 for grays.

Muskrat - Expect around $3. Cheaper ranch mink furs has hurt the prices of muskrat.

Otter - Expect $30, possibly more. Demand seems to be increasing as is price.
Mink - The availability of ranch mink drives the wild mink market. It is much easier to buy ranch mink pelts that are identical for the garment industry. Prices for ranch mink have dropped and a good portion of the ranch pelts remain unsold. It's hard for the wild mink to compete. Expect possible $8 to $15 for your best pelts, with males seeing higher prices than females.
Skunk - Expect $6 to $8 for a good one, possibly as much as $10 for a very good one.
Opossum - Expect $3 or less.
Coyote - The bright spot in the fur market. Prices have increased as has the demand for this item for garment trim. Prices were good in late 2019 and early 2020 sales with skins in prime condition going for a high of about $60. Expect less for average pelts and much less for poor ones.

Gray Fox Grading in North America

Gray fox pelts from the United States are sorted into two main sections, Eastern and Western. Within each section, three pelt groupings are recognized based on the weight of the fur—Heavy, Semi-heavy and Light.

Eastern Section — Includes US states east of the Mississippi River and Canadian pelts (few gray foxes are harvested in Canada). The finest pelts come from Pennsylvania and southern New York, and these are often kept separate from the other pelts. The fur is heavy in weight. The underfur is very dense, producing a thick cushion; and, the long, dense guard hairs are considered to have excellent color. Pelts from Ohio, Kentucky and Virginia yield semi-heavy pelts with dense underfur, while pelts from the southeastern states are light in weight and are darker in color.

Western Section — Includes US states of the Mississippi River. The better pelts from this section are produced in Arkansas, western Texas, western Oklahoma, and Arizona. Pelts from Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota are heavy in weight. Semi-heavy pelts are produced in Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, California, northern Arizona, and northern New Mexico. Lightweight pelts are produced in Texas, Oklahoma, southern New Mexico, and southern Arizona.

Western pelts are flatter as a result of a less dense and less developed underfur, but the fur tends to be silkier than in Eastern pelts. Western pelts are generally paler than Eastern pelts on both the back and belly. Colors tend to be brighter, and the pelts have a more silvery color. The subterminal band in the guard hairs of Western pelts is whiter than in Eastern pelts. The underfur of Western pelts is creamy yellow at the tips, whereas the underfur of Eastern pelts is orange-yellow at the tips.

Size

Gray foxes may be sized using the regular red fox size categories. However, gray foxes often are simply sized by eye and divided into two groups: XL/L: ≥ 28 inches; M/S: < 28 inches.

Grades

#1: These are fully prime pelts. The underfur is heavy and fully developed and the guard hairs are fully developed and complete. The underfur is about 1.5 inches long and the guard hairs are about 2.5 inches long. The leather is generally fully prime and creamy colored, but it can be slightly blue (sometimes called *slate*).

Grades #2 and #3 are fully prime pelts that did not finish as well as the top grade. The guard hairs are sparse or thin and slightly weak on the flanks (known as open flanks). The leather is usually prime and creamy colored but can be slightly blue.

#2: Pelts in this grade may be prime pelts that did not appear as good as those in the top grade. This grade also includes slightly early and slightly late pelts. Early-caught pelts in this grade have blue leather. The underfur is low in density and underdeveloped, about 1 inch long, the guard hairs are about 2 inches long and the flanks are open. Late-caught pelts have creamy leather, but the guard hairs are beginning to loosen. Pelts from heavy sections are woolly and fur is sparse in this grade, but pelts from light sections are short and flat.

- *Slight Damaged.*—These are top-quality pelts with minor damage such as small holes, tears, or sews, possibly one or two bullet holes are allowed. The bellies of gray fox pelts are used in garments, so damage to the belly must be minor.
- *Damaged.*—These are lower quality pelts with minor damage, or top-quality pelts with more extensive damage than allowed in slight damaged (such as large tears or sews). These pelts are often rubbed or have damage to the belly.

#3: These are very early pelts. The fur is extremely flat and sparse with underdeveloped, low density underfur. The underfur is short – less than 1 inch long as are the guard hairs (< 1 ¾ inches). Late pelts are also included in this grade. These are badly rubbed or are beginning to shed.

#4: These pelts have little value. Early pelts are extremely flat; the guard hairs have begun to develop, but there is no underfur. Very late badly rubbed pelts are also included in this grade, as are poor quality pelts with extensive damage.

Gray fox pelts can be separated by color pattern of the belly, although this is not often done. If pelts are sorted by belly color, the following categories are used (*see illustration, right*).

Wide Track.—These pelts have a wide stripe of white fur on the belly.

Narrow Track.—These pelts have a narrow strip of white fur on the belly.

No Track.—There is no white stripe on the belly. These pelts have a reddish tint all over the belly.

Trapper's Tips: Pelt Quality

Buyers prefer to purchase bundles of furs, called lots, of uniform quality, size, and color because this simplifies the process of matching the furs to be used in a garment. Pelts arrive at auction houses in wide variety of conditions due to location of harvest (regional fur density and/or color variations) and the manner of handling (grade). The auction house sorts raw furs into groups according to species, size, grade (a combination of the degree of primeness and quality of handling), and color; whereas a smaller, local auction will first sort the furs into bundles by individual trapper, fur condition and size. These groupings are then subdivided into convenient-size lots in order to be attractive to the buyer. The size of a lot may be based on the number of pelts needed to make a garment, or the number of pelts in an easily handled bundle. Because auction houses operate on a commission, it is to their advantage (and also the trapper's) for pelts to be in the most uniform and attractive lots possible.

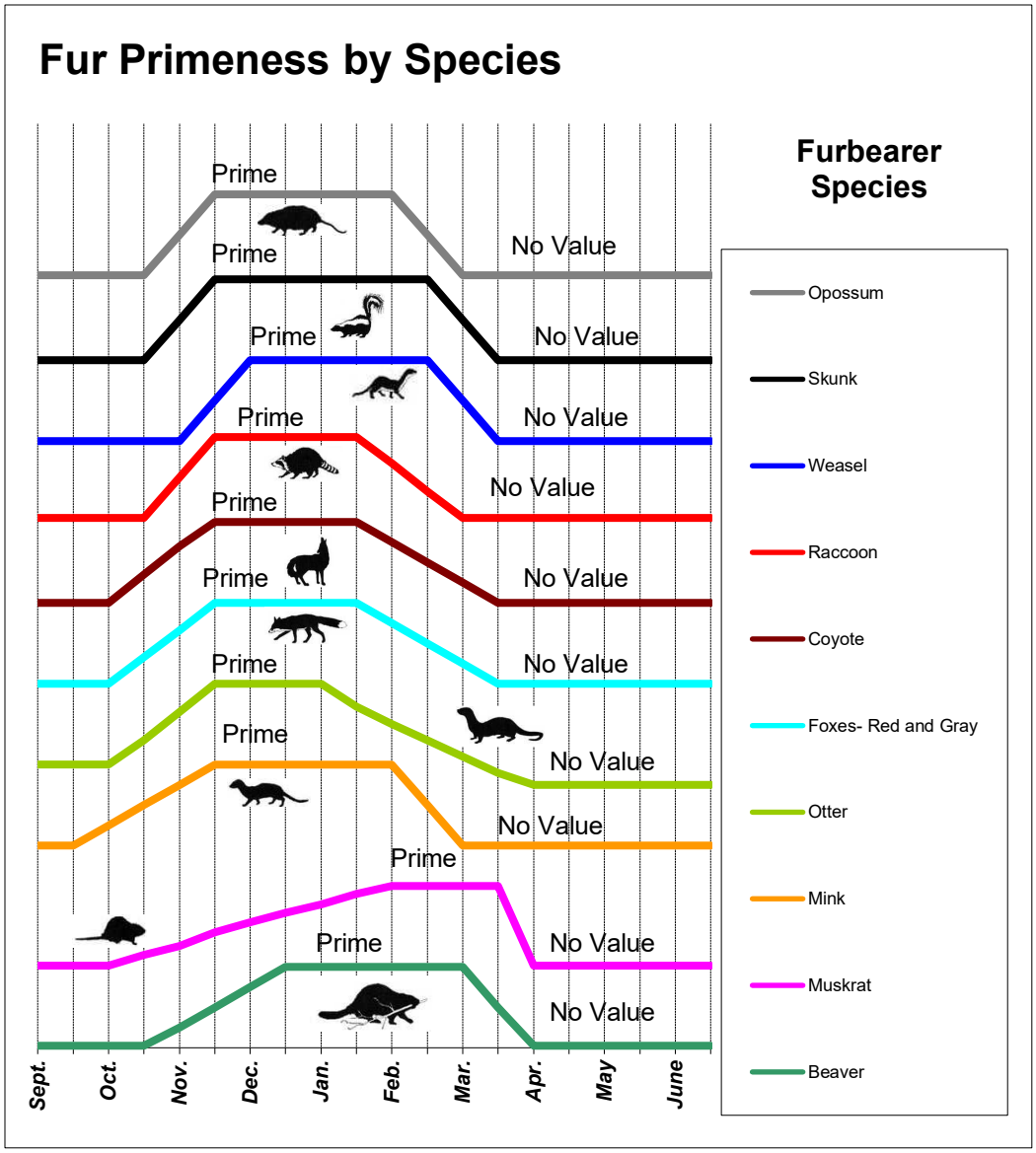
Priming Cycle

The quality and desirability of pelts varies seasonally according to the priming cycle. In a fully prime pelt, both the guard hairs and the underfur have reached maximum quality as dictated by color, hair length and density. On the leather side, the roots of the new hairs have moved towards the outer surface of the skin, the blood supply to the hairs has decreased, and the pigment-containing cells in the hair roots have stopped producing the pigment and have contracted, resulting in a skin that is soft, flexible, and creamy white. In a sub-prime pelt, the underfur and guard hairs are not fully developed and are at low density, and the leather is bluish to black as a result of active pigment production in the hair roots (what a fur grader would call a blue pelt).

Many terrestrial furbearers such as raccoons, mink and weasels have two molts each year- in the spring and fall, to replace the winter and summer coats respectively. During both molts the previous coat is shed and replaced by new hairs. Other terrestrial furbearers such as the red fox and striped skunk have a visible molt that begins in the spring or early summer each year and extends into the fall. The red fox has one visible period of molt in spring, during which the winter coat is shed, and all new guard hairs and some new underfur hairs develop. A second period of hair growth occurs in fall, during which the rest of the underfur develops to produce the denser winter coat. Aquatic furbearers such as the muskrat, beaver and river otter undergo only one molt each year.

The mink and red fox which are active throughout the year have a significantly greater density of underfur during winter compared to furbearers that may spend colder, snowy weather in a den. For example, underfur is 10 times denser in the red fox than a badger, and five times denser in the mink than in the red fox. The sea otter has the densest fur of any furbearer. The fur of the winter coat is longer and denser than that of the summer coat, and the fully prime winter coat is, of course, most desired for garments.

In New Jersey, as in the rest of North America, open seasons for harvesting furbearer species overlap the period when pelts will be in their winter prime, however, seasons are long enough that they may extend beyond the period of peak prime, meaning that sub-prime pelts may be encountered early or late in the season. Also, variation among individual animals may also mean that pelts taken at the same time in the same area may be at slightly different stages in the



priming cycle. Other natural factors will affect the value of the pelt apart from the regular priming cycle. In a number of species, notably river otter and mink, the tips of guard hairs tend to curl and become singed soon after becoming prime. In other species especially red fox and coyote, the flanks and shoulders become worn late in the season and guard hairs and underfur are lost from large areas of the pelt. Pelts in this condition are considered “rubbed”. In some other species, notably mink, the fur undergoes undesirable color changes as the pigment in the outer edge of the underfur oxidizes and changes to a less desirable reddish brown. Pelt value is also affected by its size since larger pelts generally have greater value.

Wildlife Disease Facts: Canine Parvovirus (CPV)

When canine parvovirus first emerged in 1978, it started a global pandemic that's thought to have killed hundreds of thousands of dogs. It was not known that raccoons could be infected with the virus until researchers began to investigate and found outbreaks at wildlife rehabilitation shelters all over the country. The College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University's examinations of raccoon tissue and specimen genetic signatures from the entire east coast were the first indication that the virus was widespread in raccoon populations. Genetic sequencing revealed that viruses from one type of host were closely related to one another, a strong indication of ongoing transmission in certain species like coyotes and raccoons, and that they are natural hosts for the viruses.

The fact that canine parvovirus is so prevalent among wild carnivores is making researchers aware of how the virus might have first emerged in the 1970s. Since CPV is so closely related to feline panleukopenia virus, researchers thought that canine parvovirus must have crossed over from domestic cats into dogs, adapted, and triggered the pandemic. Wildlife species that can be infected with parvoviruses include coyotes, wolves, foxes, raccoons, mink, and bobcats. Parvoviruses can also infect domestic cats and dogs. Be aware that humans ***cannot*** contract CPV.

Transmission of parvovirus occurs when it is shed through the feces of an infected animal and then ingested by another animal. This is most likely through ingestion of the virus from the environment or by feeding on an infected prey animal. Environmental contamination is usually due to viruses that have been shed 4-10 days after infection.

Parvoviruses are very hardy and can survive for months in cool, moist conditions protected from sunlight and will remain viable when frozen. Clinical signs in animals include lethargy, depression and pronounced decrease of appetite four or five days after exposure followed by fever, vomiting, and diarrhea. Feces may range from soft to liquid consistency but are typically foul-smelling and may contain mucous or blood.

Diagnosis is made based on the symptoms associated with parvoviruses. The virus can be detected in feces by ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) tests or by virus isolation in tissue culture, by identification of lesions within the intestines, brain and spinal cord, or lymph tissue during necropsy.

There is no treatment for parvovirus infections, only supportive care. Young animals between the ages of two and four months are most at risk, while adults often have developed immunity against the virus. Mortality may be significant in populations where the virus had not been found but epidemics have rarely been reported. Preventative vaccines for domestic cats and dogs help control the spread of parvovirus.

Bobcats and Fishers in New Jersey

Remember to report any bobcat and/or fisher captures ASAP! It is mandatory to report any and all bobcats that are trapped incidentally within 24 hours by calling **1 (877) 927-6337**. However, please report any bobcats caught in a cable restraint as soon as you find in it! It is important for the survival of the animal as well as the image of trapping in New Jersey Fishers are returning to most of their historic range in the northeastern United States both on their own accord and accelerated through reintroduction efforts in New York and Pennsylvania. Fishers have been documented in several northern and southern New Jersey counties.

- **There is no open trapping season for bobcat or fisher in NJ; possession of legally harvested animals from other states is permitted.**
- **If you encounter a live bobcat or fisher captured on your trapline, do not disturb the animal or the set, but immediately notify Fish and Wildlife by calling (877) WARNDEP (877-927-6337).**

A Fish and Wildlife technician will provide further instructions. Call the same number for a dead bobcat or fisher on your trapline; a Fish and Wildlife technician will arrange to pick up the animal. Biological samples will be taken from all bobcat and fisher carcasses. The data collected will be instrumental in understanding the status of the populations of these furbearers.

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife is *the* professional, environmental agency overseeing the protection and management of the state's fish and wildlife to maximize their long-term biological, recreational and economic value for all New Jerseyans.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Fish and Wildlife