



New Jersey Furbearer Management Newsletter



Fall 2023

New Jersey DEP, Fish and Wildlife
Upland Wildlife and Furbearer Project



Deadlines and Dates to Remember

Beaver and Otter Deadlines

Application Period: October 1-31

Award Notification: begins November 2

Beaver and Otter Trapping Season Dates

Dec. 26 – Feb. 9 (Jan. 1 – Feb. 9 on some WMAs)*
*under “Trapping Regulations- 2023 NJ Fish and Wildlife Digest”

Mandatory Pelt Registration: February 24, 2024

Please remember:

- **Successful applicants must claim their permit between November 2 and prior to 11:59 PM on Sunday, November 26. Unclaimed permits will be posted on the Division’s website by late afternoon on Tuesday, November 28.**
- **Unclaimed permits will be returned to the quota and made available for over-the-counter sale at participating license agents or online beginning at 10 AM on Wednesday, November 29.**
- **For additional information please refer to 2023-24 NJ Beaver and Otter Trapping Season Information at the Division’s website.**

2023-24 NJ Beaver and Otter Trapping Season Information

Applying for a Beaver and/or Otter Permit –

Apply in person by visiting any participating license agent or go online at <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/licenses-and-permits/> to log in to the NJ DEP, Fish and Wildlife license sales website. You will be prompted to enter the necessary information. The website accepts most major credit cards and electronic checks as payment, using proven security technologies to ensure that your transaction is secure.

A non-refundable \$2.00 application fee will be charged for each permit you apply for. You must pay the remainder of the fee (\$17.00 for beaver and \$2.00 for otter) when claiming your permit(s). Unsuccessful applicants no longer need to wait for a refund since the only payment made was the non-refundable \$2.00 application fee. If paying via the Internet, applicants will receive their permits by mail (additional shipping charges apply).

Permits awarded via the lottery system may be claimed at participating license agents. Leftover and unclaimed permits returned to the quota will be made available for over-the-counter sale at license agents or online beginning at 10am on November 29.

New Jersey Furbearer Facts:



The Opossum

The Opossum, (*Didelphis virginiana*) is North America's only marsupial and chronologically is the oldest existing mammal on the continent. When Europeans first colonized America opossums did not occur north of New Jersey or Pennsylvania. As time passed, opossums slowly moved north and westward on the Great Plains. In 1890, opossums were introduced to California and their range spread on the west coast. Today they are currently spreading into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Opossums are currently found in North America from Central America and Mexico in the south, through the states of the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, along the west coast of the U.S. and northward up into southwestern Ontario. They are distributed throughout New Jersey and is considered both a game animal and a furbearer. Opossums are highly adaptable and can thrive just about everywhere, being both omnivorous and opportunistic in food habits. The majority of their diet is composed of insects and carrion. Opossums also will eat many types of plants, including various fruits and grains in season.

Opossums have a low, heavyset body that to some resembles a large house cat, or to others a giant sized rat. They have a long head with a pointed snout and a whiskered face. Opossums have scaly appearing, long, tapered tails. The color of the opossum varies by region with northern populations having thick underfur that is white in color and has black tips. The pale guard hairs give the opossum a gray appearance. In the south, the underfur is much sparser. All opossums have white cheek hairs.

Adult opossums generally are between 20 to 40 inches long, including the 10 to 12-inch tail. Opossums will weigh between 4 and 12 pounds and males are larger and heavier than females. Opossums rarely live past 18 months and an opossum that reaches 3 years of age is old indeed.

An opossum's gait is an ungainly shuffle and at top speed they can barely top four miles per hour. They are good climbers and climb using both their feet and their prehensile tails for gripping and balancing. Opossums have five toes on each foot, each with a claw except the long first toe of each hind foot that is capable of grasping, like a thumb.

Opossums generally breed in February and March. After mating the females drives that male away and has no further contact with him. After a gestation of 12 to 13 days and when barely past the embryonic stage, the pink-skinned, hairless, blind newborn opossums "swim" through their mother's fur to the fur-lined pouch on their mother's belly. At this time the young opossums are about ½ inch long and weigh about .005 ounces, the front legs of these newborns are developed with claws and the hind legs are rudimentary.

The litter size can vary from about five to thirteen young and average eight. Female opossums usually have 13 mammarys so any young in excess of this number die. The young grow fast and increase their weight about ten times and doubling their length in seven to ten days. After about eight weeks the young opossum's eyes open. At about this time they start to leave the pouch for short periods and ride on their mother's back gripping her fur with their claws. By three to four months the young begin to look for their own food and soon they will stop nursing and in a short time are on their own. After weaning her first litter, females may breed again and bear a second litter in mid-May to mid-July. Females can breed when they are a year old.

The home range of an adult, female opossum is generally about 270 acres. A female will stay within their home range for their entire lives while males continually shift their home ranges throughout their lives.

Fur Handling

Think of a tough critter with a thin hide and you've got the opossum. Opossum are skinned in the same way as muskrat. Be careful during the skinning process to avoid holes in the thin pelt. Fleshing should be done on a beam with a dull fleshing knife after the fat has set or congealed. Be careful as the pelts of opossum will rip easily during the fleshing process. When fleshing early pelts (not yet prime) be careful of hair pulling through the leather which will mean poor grades and prices.

Like muskrats, raccoons and skunks, opossums are stretched leather side out. An inspection window may be cut in the belly similar to what is done with raccoons. With female opossums, the pouch should be cut out as part of forming the window. Opossums can be stretched on small raccoon stretchers or boards.

OPOSSUM Pelt Sizes:	
SIZE	LENGTH
4XL	Over 26"
3XL	24"–26"
2XL	22"–24"
XL/LGE	18"–22"
M–SM	Under 18"



Please Remember to Report Your Coyotes and Gray Fox!

Coyotes harvested by any method must be reported to a New Jersey DEP, Fish and Wildlife. So, regardless of whether you are trapping, hunting canines, deer or turkey, all coyote harvests must be reported by 8:00p.m. on the day of harvest via the Automated Harvest Report System (AHRS).

Although it is not required, please report any harvest by trapping or hunting of **gray fox**.

By phone: by calling (855) 448-6865

Via mobile phone or computer at: <https://nj.aspirafocus.com/internetsales>

Red Fox harvests do not need to be reported.

Some Interesting Facts About Our “Native” Furbearers?

The New Jersey Hunting and Trapping Digest lists raccoon, skunk, opossum, weasel, mink, muskrat, red and gray fox, coyote, beaver, otter, and nutria as species that have open seasons for trapping in the State of New Jersey. However, if we look back in time, we will find that several of the species listed above were not here historically or have had some help over the years with re-introduction.

The long-tailed (*Neogale frenata*) and short-tailed (*Mustela richardsonii*, also known as American ermine) weasels are native to New Jersey and have probably never been introduced or their populations supplemented at any time. Neither have the striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) or gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*). However, a few of our furbearers have interesting histories.

Not too long before the mid-twentieth century, the coyote or more properly, the eastern coyote (*Canis latrans* var.) didn't exist in New Jersey. In fact, coyotes were never native to New Jersey until the past fifty or so years. There are several theories why we have coyotes in New Jersey and DNA sampling agrees that within the last century the western coyote moved up through the mid-western and Great Lake states and through Lower Canada. During their moving through the Great Lake states and Canada, at some point some of the western coyotes mated with gray wolves (*Canis lupus*), moved eastward through Lower Canada and down through the New England states and into the Mid-Atlantic States. Now the eastern coyote is here to stay. Also, note that up until about the mid-1850s there *were* gray wolves in New Jersey. There are now no wolves in New Jersey outside of zoos.

Many sources question whether the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) was a native of New Jersey. If the species was native there weren't many, as there are several references regarding the introduction of red foxes from England for the purpose of hunting with horses and hounds. It appears that the English foxes were introduced to the Long Island area and eventually crossed into mainland New York State and into New Jersey.

The mink (*Neogale vison*) is a native to New Jersey. However, there is a very good possibility that escapees from mink farms have interbred with wild mink.

The fisher (*Pekania pennanti*) is again present in northern New Jersey although they are few in number. Re-introduction of fisher by New York and Pennsylvania in the last decade have established enough of a breeding population in those states that New Jersey Fish and Wildlife is beginning to receive sighting reports and trail camera photos of fishers in Morris, Sussex and Warren Counties. Also, the marten (*Martes americana*) was present in New Jersey historically, but the species has been extirpated since the mid to late 1800s.

By the late 1800's beavers (*Castor canadensis*) had almost disappeared from Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Mercer, and Burlington, Ocean, Salem, and Warren counties. Some of the last sites with active beaver colonies were in the Great Egg Harbor, Machesautuxen, Nescochaque, Big Timber Creek, Wading River, Sluice Creek, Toms River, Raccoon Creek, and the Assunpink waterways.

Beaver activity was described in 1902 around the towns of Roseville and Two Bridges in Andover Township, Sussex County. At that time those beaver represented almost all the activity in the state. It is possible that these beaver in the northern areas were the results of escaped beaver from the Rutherford-Stuyvesant game preserve in Allamuchy, Warren County. Apparently, these escaped beavers were able to gain a foothold and spread across the Delaware River from Sussex County to Monroe County, Pennsylvania.

Historical reports note that a bill before the state legislature in 1902 gave total protection to beavers. In fact, the beaver was afforded complete protection in 1903.

In the first half of the twentieth century, New Jersey, as well as other northeastern states began augmenting the few remaining beaver colonies with beaver obtained from Wisconsin, Michigan, Wyoming, and Minnesota. This restocking enabled the beaver to re-establish itself by the mid-20th century.

Another large furbearing rodent that *may* be but hopefully *is not* present is the nutria (*Myocastor coypus*). There are records of two nutria trapped in the salt marshes of Delaware Bay back in 1980. Presently the New Jersey DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife has not received any valid report of nutria nor have any been reported by trappers via the annual trapper harvest survey.

On another note, the raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) is, was and has always been a native of New Jersey. The Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) was thought to be numerous in much of the state in the late 1860s but not in the northern counties.

In the last hundred years or so the northern-most boundaries of the range of both of these species has extended. In fact, the raccoon has extended its range into parts of Canada where there are no Native American names for it!



Please report any fisher or bobcat captures!
Call: 877-WARNDEP (877-927-6337)



The New Jersey DEP, Fish and Wildlife is a professional, environmental agency dedicated to the protection, management and wise use of the state's fish and wildlife resources.