

# New Jersey Furbearer Management Newsletter



Winter 2012-2013

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



## DEADLINES AND DATES TO REMEMBER

### BEAVER AND OTTER TRAPPING SEASON DATES

DEC. 26 – FEB. 9 (JAN. 1 – FEB. 9 ON SOME WMAS)\*

*\*SEE "TRAPPING REGULATIONS- 2012 NJ FISH AND WILDLIFE DIGEST"*

### COYOTE AND FOX SPECIAL PERMIT SEASON DATES

JANUARY 1 THRU MARCH 15, 2013

### NJTA FUR AUCTION AT SPACE FARMS, BEEMERVILLE NJ, MARCH 24

FURS WILL BE COLLECTED ON MARCH 23.

### PLEASE REMEMBER- BEAVER/OTTER CHECK STATION DATE:

FEBRUARY 23, 2013

## River Otter Pelts - What is Singe?



River otter fur is valuable, beautiful and wears well, but it is very delicate and the guard hairs may be susceptible to singe. Many trappers blame singed otter pelts for low prices by the graders at the sale or auction, yet almost always (other than in the case of naturally singed otters) it's the trapper/pelt handler who causes/creates the fur damage. Nearly all singe in otter pelts can be avoided with a bit of knowledge and care by the trapper.

It's best to start by describing what singed otter fur or hair is. Basically, singe is the curling of the tips of the guard hair that occurs naturally as winter turns to spring. Singed guard hairs reflect different wavelengths of light causing them to appear different in color compared to normal guard hairs. Harvested otter pelts can also be singed by excessive exposure to high temperatures associated with artificial heat sources, excessive handling and stroking of dry fur, coming into contact with very cold, frozen metal or lying in sunlight for an extended period. What is important to know and remember is that singed otter hair cannot be removed during the dressing process and this eliminates the pelt from being used naturally, although singed otter pelts can be sheared or plucked for other uses. Singe reduces pelt value by about 70%, depending on the amount of singe and possible uses for the singed pelt. Thus, the otter trapper would do well to remember that otter fur is easily singed and should always be careful when preparing the otter fur for sale.

Following a few basic rules below will help keep your otter pelts in good condition and maximize their value.

1. Make sure to keep otters (unskinned carcasses and raw pelts) away from all direct sources of heat whether that source is sunlight or artificial.
2. Never let the fur of the otter completely dry out prior to pelting and fleshing. Make sure to always keep the fur damp or moist during those times.
3. Always dry the pelt slowly in a cool spot with good air circulation.

## Wire Stretchers versus Wooden Boards

Should you use wood or wire? What are the differences between the two? For one, a wire stretcher stretches a pelt or continually has tension on a pelt whereas a wooden board is a frame where the only stretch is what you put on the pelt when you board it - the stretch is in the pelt, not the stretcher. The use of wire or wood is also a matter of personal preference or for a specific use for the particular type of pelt being dried.

Wire stretchers and wooden boards each have their advantages and disadvantages. Below are some comparisons for use of wire versus wood.

### Wire Stretcher:

#### **Advantages:**



1. They are relatively cheap.
2. For stretching raccoon, muskrat, mink, foxes, coyotes, they are very quick and efficient.
3. They are very labor and cost-effective and generally easier to handle and store than wood.
4. Wire stretchers are not as bulky as wood.
5. Wire stretchers are readily available in trap supply stores.

#### **Disadvantages:**

1. Worn non-galvanized stretchers and those galvanized stretchers where the galvanizing has worn off, particularly if they are cleaned too much, get rusty when wet. A rust stain in the fur or leather which will lead to dressing problems where the rust was formed resulting in a possible loss in value. This is a problem on fur-out articles with wet leather against the metal if turned too quickly. Fur-out pelts must be glazed over before turning.
2. The stretcher in many instances is not uniform. Not all stretchers made by different companies make them to the same sizes and shapes or the same materials. This results in a variety of widths, from narrow to very wide.
3. Thin, cheap-quality steel can cause pelts to be "bowed" in or out as the pelt dries.
4. Size loss: a 30" Raccoon pelt can/will shrink about 1" if not secured to the frame. A wire stretchers' pressure is outwards, therefore the pelt is forced to "shrink" up from the bottom. Size loss on Raccoon can result in significant reduction in pelt value.
5. Stretchers MUST correctly-shaped before being used or fur density can be affected. A further grade reduction may result, particularly if the stretch is too wide and the fur density becomes weak or thin.
6. Improperly-dried tails may rot if not spread which can be avoided with wood boards. Poor drying conditions can worsen tail drying problems.
7. Holes cannot be closed with pins as easily. Holes left unsewn or poorly-closed may affect pelt quality.

### Wooden Boards:

#### **Advantages:**



1. If properly used; (nailed or pinned in the "skirt" or bottom of the pelt), excessive pelt shrinkage is eliminated.
2. Wood frames are much more uniform than wire if proper width measurements are followed for board type for each variety of fur.
3. Holes can be pinned much more easily.
4. Push pins are easy to use with a board which makes tail spreading and drying simpler.
5. Can be made fairly easily by the trapper. (For board dimensions go to pages 43 thru 50 of "NAFA Wild Fur Pelt Handling Manual, 2009" at: [http://www.nafa.ca/wp-content/uploads/NAFA\\_PeltHandlingManual\\_2012-02.pdf](http://www.nafa.ca/wp-content/uploads/NAFA_PeltHandlingManual_2012-02.pdf))
6. Tails can be spread open, nailed/pinned, etc. for proper drying.
7. A pelt stretched on wood generally looks better. The pelt looks "fuller" without the "sharp" look when wire is used. It is easier to grade well-put-up fur and the uniformity makes sizing easier.
8. Some moisture and oils will be absorbed into the wood. It is not a huge amount, but it does help.
9. Wood-stretched fur will generally retain more length in all sizes. Wooden frames do not have the outward stretcher pressure being exerted by the frame on the pelt (which happens with wire stretchers). Pelts can be stretched longer and secured at the base of the pelt with ease.

#### **Disadvantages:**

1. Wood boards do take up space, especially if large quantities are involved.
2. Added costs? When boarding lots of pelts proper staple guns and staples can be expensive and most trappers don't like added expense.
3. Over a period of time, split or shattered boards will result in board loss when too many nails or staples take their toll.

## New Jersey Furbearer Facts and Fur Handling Tips:



### The Striped Skunk

The Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) a member of the family Mephitidae has only recently become recognized as a separate mammal family from the family Mustelidae. In the past, the striped skunk was classified with Weasels (family Mustelidae) and these two families - Mustelidae and Mephitidae are closely related. The Striped Skunk is the most common member of the genus *Mephitis*. The striped skunk is generally a shy, non-aggressive mammal found throughout New Jersey.

The geographic range of striped skunks increased in North America after colonization by Europeans as habitat increased for skunks with the clearing of the forests. The striped skunk's distribution ranges throughout most of the United States and northern Mexico to southern Canada from British Columbia, Hudson Bay, and Nova Scotia.

Striped skunks are easily recognized by their black and white striped markings but can be nearly all white or almost completely black. Usually the markings are a white triangular shape on the top of the head that fork into two stripes that travel down the sides of the back and merge again near the base of the tail. A white stripe also runs along the base of the nose between the eyes and ends on the forehead. The length and width of the white stripes vary between individuals. The tail can be striped, too, but more often is composed of both black and white hairs intermixed. Adult striped skunks are about the size of a domestic cat, with a small head, small ears, short legs, and a long, fluffy tail. The feet of the striped skunk are plantigrade with five partially webbed toes and claws longer on the front feet to aid in digging.

Striped skunks are nocturnal for the most part, and do all their foraging on the ground. Almost everyone has smelled the skunk's characteristically strong musky odor on a spring or summer night. The skunk has one of the most widely known systems of defense in the animal world but striped skunks usually do not discharge their foul-smelling musk unless seriously threatened. When faced with danger they arch the back and erect the tail and hair. The musk is emitted in two streams of fluid from scent glands located just inside the anus. Once discharged, the streams will meet after travelling about a foot, finally spreading into a fine spray that will travel up to about 10 or 12 feet. A direct hit causes considerable discomfort to the eyes and sinuses and can cause nausea. The mist of aerosol spray floats in the air, and even if the skunk does not score a direct hit the target animal (or human) will carry a strong odor of the musk on their fur or clothing.

Adult striped skunks are usually from about 20 to 30 inches in total length (which includes the tail) and weigh between 4 and 10 pounds. Male skunks are usually about 10% larger than females.

Striped skunks are not climbers and do all of their foraging on the ground. Striped skunks produce one litter of young (usually 5-6) per year. Mating takes place from mid-February through mid-March. Gestation is between 59 and 77 days. This variance in gestation time suggests that delayed implantation is probably involved. At birth, striped skunks are blind and deaf. Eyes open at between two and four weeks, they can hear at about three weeks and they are capable of discharging musk at about four weeks. Young skunks nurse for about a month and a half in the natal den, and when fully weaned they continue to follow the mother for about a year after birth. Dispersal from the natal area occurs once young reach adult size.

Striped skunks will den for long periods during cold weather from November until March but are not true hibernators. In fact, in the southern portions of their range striped skunks remain active year round. In the northern areas though, females may stay in their winter dens for the entire duration of cold winter periods, but males usually come out to forage during milder

temperatures. Females with their young of the previous year may den together during winter. Some males may den with females, but most males, especially juveniles, den alone.

Striped skunks prefer fairly open areas with a mixture of cover types such as grasslands, and agricultural clearings and/or woodlands and they are always found within two miles of water. Striped skunks are often found in suburban and even fairly urban areas because of the many sheds, garages or other buildings that they may live in or under.

Home range size for a striped skunk is dependent on the habitat type in which the animal is living, with urban skunks using a much smaller area, about .25 square miles. Animals in a rural area may need an area of from .4 to 1.5 square miles. This home range size is much smaller in more urban environs due to the greater availability of food and den sites.

A true omnivore and opportunist, striped skunks eat a wide variety of food items both plant and animal, including insects, small mammals, fish, crustaceans, fruits, grasses, leaves, buds, grains, nuts, and carrion. The skunks diet changes depending on the time of year and available resources.

### **Fur Handling**

The majority of trappers, and New Jersey trappers are no exception, just don't bother to skin and put up their incidental catches of skunks. It seems that smell alone is the biggest deterrent; the average trapper doesn't want to stink up his or her vehicle or clothing for what they view as a too low price for too much work. However, a reasonable demand for skunk fur exists. On average, pelt prices ranging from \$4 to \$6 can be expected while prime skunks pelts that have been handled well may command a bit more.

**Skinning:** The initial cut is similar to mink due to the presence of the scent glands. Cut from heel to heel and well below the scent gland and make two cuts towards the tail, one on each side of the scent gland leaving a triangle shape of fur over the scent gland area. Split the tail fur and skin out the hind legs and around the base of the tail. Now, remove the scent gland by cutting close to the body under the gland *before* removing the tail bone. As with many other furbearers, the front feet can be cut off part way up the foreleg and the skinning of the animal completed. Skunks can be best fleshed on a beam with a two-handled knife. As with a raccoon, the pelt leather should be completely clean of grease and fat. Skunks should be stretched/boarded and dried leather-side out. Depending on the size of the skunk, you can use a small raccoon board, or a fox board. On the board, the pelt should just fit nicely. Be sure there are no folds or wrinkles at the neck from using a board that's too wide, or the pelt may be too loose at the butt from a too-narrow board. If you are using wire stretchers use a size #23 (7 1/4" X 42") - or the old #2 stretchers if you can find them.

### ***Please Remember to Report Your Coyotes!***

*Coyotes harvested by any method must be reported to a New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife Regional Law Enforcement office within 24 hours.*

#### **Regional NJ Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement Office phone numbers:**

Northern Region Office 908-735-8240  
 Central Region Office 609-259-2120  
 Southern Region Office 856-629-0555



## Some Tips on Skinning Beavers



There are a number of ways to skin a beaver, and it seems that every trapper with any experience skinning beavers has a method that works best for them. After reading this I'll bet that there are a bunch of experience beaver trappers who disagree with what I've written here. I haven't listed the all the steps for skinning a beaver, but have tried to list a few of the good tips that make the job quicker and easier. Again though, experience is the best teacher. Learning by process of elimination is time consuming but what you learn isn't easily forgotten. Do what works!

1. Cut the feet off first. This makes the skinning process faster and easier. Use a pruning/lopping shears for this- although I've seen trappers use hatchets or just a big knife.
2. Lay the beaver to be skinned on its back. Start your initial cut at the base of the tail straight up the belly to the chin. Use a regular pointed skinning knife for this. Get a sharp, round tipped knife for skinning the remainder of the beaver once the initial cut is completed.
3. It is important to CLEAN skin the first inch or so all the way around the hide. This step makes it easier during the boarding process - it'll be clean, no scraping will be needed in this area of the pelt which you'll be nailing it to the board.
4. How big will the stretched pelt be? Hang the pelt by the nose and measure from nose to tail. This distance plus half this distance plus 2 inches, totaled and divided by 2 should give you the diameter of the circle into which the pelt should stretch. An example is given below:

**Pelt length 30"+15" (1/2 pelt length) = 45" + 2" = 47" ÷ 2 = 23.5" (Circle Diameter)**

5. Flesh the pelt. There's only one way to learn how to do this correctly and cleanly, and that's to do it. However, if you talk to a few experienced beaver fur handlers I'll bet they'll tell you who does the best job. It may be time well spent to at least watch an expert flesh a beaver and see what works best for them. Or, pay that trapper to help you do it. The more pelts that you flesh the better you'll get.
6. Boarding. The proper shape of a finished beaver pelt is oval, not round. Start with a finish nail at the nose and then one at the tail, then one on each side of the pelt. Keep dividing these areas back and forth from alternate sides by pulling the pelt out toward the line and putting in nails around the pelt between the nails that are already in place.
7. Use lots of nails. Place the nails no greater than 1" apart. A distance of 1/2" is better. A general rule of thumb is to place the nails the thickness of your index finger apart.
8. Important. Leave 1/4" to 1/2" of air circulation space under the pelt on the board to allow the pelt to dry from both sides.



## Looking for New Jersey Fishers

Although the first confirmed photo of a fisher in New Jersey was taken by Montclair University graduate student Charlie Kontos in 2006, it wasn't until July 23, 2012 that the Division collected its first fisher carcass in over 100 years when a 4.4 pound female was struck by a vehicle in High Point State Park. After age, reproductive and DNA samples are taken from the animal for further analyses, it will be mounted and displayed at the Pequest Natural Resource Education Center in Oxford, NJ.

Do you or anyone you know have any trail camera pictures of New Jersey fishers? We at the Division of Fish and Wildlife hear many second hand stories of hunters and trappers who have trail camera photos of fishers but we rarely ever get contacted by these individuals. We are very interested in seeing those photos and recording the site locations and dates. Please contact us and send any New Jersey fisher photos to: [joseph.garris@dep.nj.state.us](mailto:joseph.garris@dep.nj.state.us)

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***Please report any fisher or bobcat captures!***

***Call: 877-WARNDEP (877-927-6337)***

