



Furbearer Management News

Winter 2001



Furbearer Information Accumulates from Bowhunter Sighting Log

by Marie Kautz

Bureau of Wildlife - Delmar

In late October, 2000, log forms for the bowhunter sighting index were mailed to about 7,500 bowhunters across New York. Participating bowhunters recorded their hunting effort and wildlife observations throughout the 2000 archery season and then returned the logs to the Bureau of Wildlife in Delmar for tabulation. We expect this volunteer effort to yield almost a quarter million hours of field observations in the year 2000 alone.

But what good is it, you may ask. How can this information be used? First, it's a relatively **in-expensive** tool to help monitor distribution and long term population trends for a variety of species, including some furbearers. Participants record their observations of raccoon, coyote, red fox, gray fox, bobcat, otter, fisher, and skunk, as well as deer and game birds. We calculate sighting rates per thousand hours of field time and compare the rates to the ones from previous years. The results can be graphed, as shown below, to help identify population trends for these species.

Until now our major source of information about population trends for most furbearers has been harvest. The bowhunter log gives us an ad-

ditional and **different** index. Difference is the second important aspect of the bowhunter sighting log. We all know that harvest in any year depends heavily on fur prices, which affect how many trappers are active and how much effort these trappers put in. Unlike harvest, the index from the bowhunter log is not connected with any of these factors. This eliminates an important source of year to year variation, and enables comparisons over time despite changes in fur prices.

The bowhunter sighting log doesn't use total sightings, but a sighting rate (sightings per thousand hours), which can be compared from year to year, just as you might compare your rate of speed when driving in the city versus the country, or someone's batting average from one season to the next. This **rate** is the third strength of the bowhunter sighting log. By using the log in combination with harvest data and trappers' observations, we will improve our ability to monitor population trends for most species of furbearers.

The sample graphs below are for a pilot areas where the log has been in operation long enough to show trends in sighting rates. In most of the state only two years of data are available, making comparisons tricky. For most species and areas the 1999 sighting rates were not significantly changed from 1998. Where changes did occur, the typical pattern was slightly decreased rates for red fox, gray fox, and coyotes. While decreased sighting rates for these species suggest lower populations, factors such as prey distribution and weather patterns can also affect their activity and sighting rates. Thus conclusions based on only two years of information are premature. However, the

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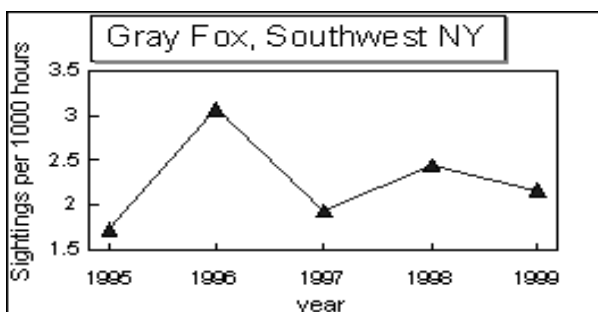
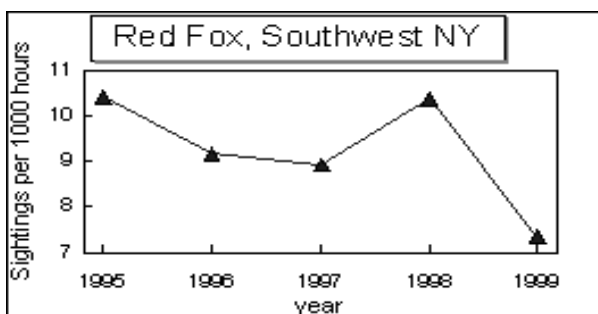
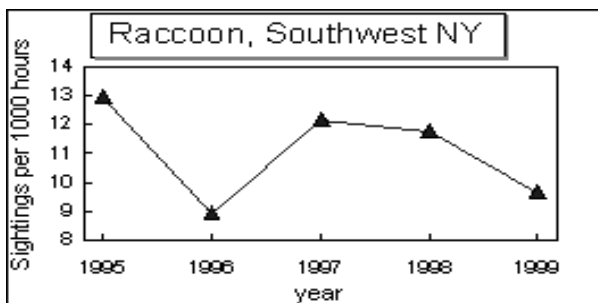
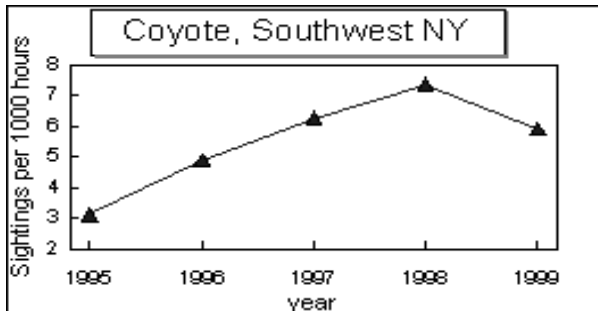
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gradual accumulation of information such as this will improve our understanding of long term trends for furbearers throughout New York.

For more information or to participate, call (518)478-3023, or check out our web-site: <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/wildlife/bowlog.htm>.



Notes on Otter Management

by Marie Kautz
Bureau of Wildlife-Delmar

Over the past four years many trappers in eastern New York have received letters asking for jaws from harvested otter. We develop a simple and effective mail-in system for otter harvesters. Following three years in which we received only small numbers of jaws, 175 jaws were received in the 1999-2000 trapping season, achieving an adequate sample in several parts of northern New York for the first time. The collections have been voluntary, but we do need a sample of at least 75 jaws annually from each area of the state where harvest occurs.

Teeth from these jaws have been x-rayed, and the x-rays are being analyzed at the present time. The technique allows us to assign animals taken during fall and early winter to either a juvenile or adult age class. Assignment to age class becomes less certain late in the trapping season, as juveniles approach one year of age.

Now that we are at full speed, with adequate samples in some parts of the state, we will be looking for year-to-year variations in the percent of juveniles versus adults in the harvest. In combination with other trend indicators, a harvest that's weighted too heavily to adults could indicate either poor reproduction or overharvest of adult animals.

Why are we doing this? A study conducted recently for a committee of state wildlife biologists established baseline information needs for managing otter populations. The study identified juvenile-to-adult ratios as critical information for successful and defensible otter management. We began New York's effort to secure age ratio information, through voluntary submission of otter jaws by trappers.

More jaws are needed, especially from any otter taken in southeastern New York. To submit jaws from otter you harvest, please request a special mailing envelope and instructions, by calling 1-800-898-0698.

The Fur Market in 1999-00

by Robert F. Gotie
Bureau of Wildlife - Cortland

The fur market began its rebound during the 1999-00 season as stocks of wild fur offered on the world market reached record lows. The market is still considerably lower than the euphoric days of 1996-97, but market analysts forecast a robust economic return for trappers in the coming 2000-01 season. This is good news to both trappers and biologists alike, since a strong world fur market is the key to successful modern day population management of several important furbearers.

Except for raccoon, fisher, marten and bobcat, all other species advanced in value during the 1999-00 fur season. The largest year to year increase in relative value was recorded for muskrats (\$1.59 to \$2.65 or 67%) and coyotes (\$9.12 to \$13.45 or 47%). Of the top five species harvested in New York (raccoon, beaver, muskrat, red fox and gray fox) only raccoon lost value in 1999-00. Market forecasters predict a continued weak market for raccoons again this year. Weasel pelts equaled the value of muskrat pelts for only the third time in 21 years of record-keeping. Pelt values for the past three seasons are given below. These averages represent a compilation of averages from 23 auctions reported in *The Trapper and Predator Caller* magazine during the 1999-00 season.

Many trappers believe that the more prime a pelt is, the more they will receive for the value of that pelt. In times of a weak fur market trappers call us more frequently to express displeasure with the timing of proposed season openings. They reason that if we open later, the fur will be more prime, and they will receive more value for their pelts. In general this commonly held belief is true. However, questions important to trappers remain: (1) When does a particular species' pelt reach primeness? and (2) How does market demand affect the value within and between seasons?

To answer the first of these questions, the chart below depicts data collected on mink values through the first four weeks of the 1984-85 season. These data were provided by several trappers and furbuyers from northern New York and were reported by Frank Phillips of the DEC. The results basically demonstrate that the value of mink pelts increases significantly between the third and the fourth week in October, reaching over 90% of the maximum value paid in a season. Very little would be gained by opening the mink season any later than the fourth Saturday in October (around October 25). In discussions with New York City fur dealers, we also learned at this time that mink pelt quality declines rapidly by mid-winter. Therefore, there may be a penalty for a delay in the opening of the mink season extending the harvesting period late in the season. Mink pelt primeness and value increase the later into October the

Species	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	Difference '98-99 to '99-00
Muskrat	\$5.48	\$3.33	\$1.59	\$2.65	67% increase
Mink	\$18.63	\$11.17	\$9.02	\$10.24	14% increase
Beaver	\$24.13	\$20.20	\$12.82	\$14.26	11% increase
Otter	\$40.42	\$42.36	\$30.95	\$37.17	20% increase
Raccoon	\$15.39	\$11.33	\$6.58	\$5.14	22% decrease
Bobcat	\$25.50	\$41.87	\$31.33	\$29.57	6% decrease
Coyote	\$20.59	\$13.08	\$9.12	\$13.45	47% increase
Red Fox	\$18.62	\$13.44	\$9.27	\$10.80	17% increase
Gray Fox	\$12.88	\$10.42	\$5.56	\$6.94	25% increase
Opossum	\$2.01	\$1.17	\$.71	\$.83	17% increase
Skunk	\$3.67	\$2.54	\$2.47	\$2.51	2% increase
Marten	NDA	\$20.50	\$25.33	\$23.23	8% decrease
Weasel	\$2.60	\$1.98	\$2.17	\$2.62	21% increase
Fisher	\$38.70	\$30.42	\$21.90	\$17.40	21% decrease

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season opens, but peak values are reached much sooner than most trappers realize.

To answer the second question, let us look at muskrat pelt prices for the most recent years in the 1990s when pelt values were highest (1996-97) and then again when pelt values were near their lowest ebb (1998-99). During both years the trapping seasons were the same throughout the various management units in New York. An inspection of the two tables of harvest information below for the 1996-97 season shows prices declining through the March/April auctions by \$2.41. This period of time is supposed to be when muskrats are fully prime and reputedly reach their top value. During the 1998-99 season muskrats gradually increased in value through these later auctions, as one would expect, but only by a margin of 42 cents. If one closely examines price differences between seasons (\$4.32), one can see that the widest price differential is between years, not within the season.

The volume of muskrats' pelts produced and presumably sold between these seasons helps clarify why prices paid in 1996-97 fell during the peak of primeness, while there was a slight increase during the 1998-99 season. In 1996-97, 178,475 muskrat pelts were reported taken in New York, while in 1998-99 only 91,965 were taken. This is a harvest difference of nearly two to one. In the 1996-97 season market demand was significantly higher than in 1998-99, so the price paid was considerably higher. As demand was met, the prices paid for pelts at March/April auctions declined, despite the fact that these later pelts were more prime.

In summary, these data support the premise that market demand plays the greater role in fur prices from year to year than peak primeness. Frequent changes in a season opening date to capture that elusive economic advantage of a prime pelt during weak market years seems to offer little return to the trapper for the confusion it would certainly cause. Thanks are in order to the New York Trapper's Association for sending me summaries of their auction results over the years.

Harvest of Pelt Sealed Species

SPECIES	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Beaver	14,958	23,754	21,892	16,645	19,645	13,223	15,982	13,544	21,107	31,611	26,556	31,075	23,382	14,266	18,864
Fisher	1,524	1,003	1,217	807	666	452	498	639	673	758	1,228	1,368	2,099	1,230	1,506
Otter	674	895	1,003	818	991	736	873	889	1,214	1,707	722	1,826	1,035	640	1,005
Bobcat	221	199	224	199	139	167	205	209	193	256	225	292	274	285	264
Coyote	1,270	1,503	1,678	1,248	856	753	1,403	1,133	1,315	1,899	2,114	2,500	2,571	2,203	2,349
Marten	120	57	93	16	44	50	33	44	71	11	82	31	183	14	131

Harvest of Species Not Pelt Sealed

SPECIES	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Raccoon (Hunted)	202,543	135,351	108,958	158,615	125,554	109,769	89,004	60,444	148,397	46,566	53,528	91,055
Raccoon (Trapped)	65,015	27,754	25,172	29,274	29,975	22,715	27,135	17,512	35,485	40,990	29,806	18,173
Red Fox (Hunted)	10,683	7,540	6,776	8,183	5,190	4,742	5,462	6,160	17,576	7,597	14,247	28,005
Red Fox (Trapped)	14,170	8,076	5,776	6,534	5,636	5,079	9,411	8,918	9,543	7,861	8,751	8,686
Gray Fox (Hunted)	7,863	3,876	1,858	10,817	1,584	2,802	1,821	6,044	11,029	5,260	16,079	27,044
Gray Fox (Trapped)	6,117	3,653	2,549	2,999	2,744	1,636	3,187	3,202	4,794	6,016	3,865	5,385
Mink	13,279	9,232	9,433	10,526	10,551	8,153	10,726	8,031	14,834	17,333	10,571	12,443
Muskrat	193,720	105,388	106,362	122,751	110,133	120,883	186,358	95,701	178,475	192,382	126,544	106,251

All Estimates based on Telephone Survey (1989-1999) or Mail Survey (2000) of licensed hunters/trappers.

Best Management Practices on Track

Research continues in New York

by Gordon Batcheller
Bureau of Wildlife - Delmar

The Department of Environmental Conservation is continuing its involvement in the development of best management practices (BMPs) for trapping in the United States. The Department has not only been actively involved in the field research, we also have had a leadership role in guiding the work at the national level.

In 1996, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) began a program to develop BMPs for trapping wildlife in the United States. A BMP is a method to improve an activity by developing recommendations based on sound scientific information while maintaining practicality.

Once completed, the BMPs for trapping furbearers will be provided to state agencies and trappers for incorporation into trapper education and wildlife management programs. In addition to improving wildlife management in the United States, the research and resulting BMPs may be used by other countries to improve their programs. BMPs will also be used by the United States to address international commitments to identify and promote the use of humane traps and trapping methods for capturing wildlife.

New York has been involved in this initiative from the very start. The fourth year of field work has now been completed. For the first three years, we concentrated on trapping Eastern coyotes with several types of conventional and non-conventional foothold traps. During the fall of 2000, we focused our research on the red fox. In both cases, we worked with Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Maine to coordinate the field work and to compare information.

New York had an excellent field season in 2000. Four research teams worked for the first three weeks of the fox trapping season. They

trapped in the Catskills, near the Adirondacks, east of Albany, and in the western part of the State. Four different types of traps were evaluated. Besides standard No.1.5 coil-springs, we also tested two No.1.5 coil-springs with different types of padding, and another No. 1.5 modified with a laminated jaw.

The total take during New York's 2000 research season was 73 red foxes, 16 gray foxes, 17 Eastern coyotes, 24 raccoons, 26 opossums, and 7 skunks.

All animals captured in this research are sent to laboratories in Georgia and Wyoming where the entire animal was examined. Statistical analyses will be completed to compare the performance of each trap. In addition to any injuries, we also will compare capture efficiency, and selectivity.

An analysis of data has already been completed for the first three years of research, an evaluation of different traps for capturing coyotes. That information has now been used to draft the first BMP...*Best management practices for trapping coyotes in the eastern United States*. An extensive review of the draft is now underway. Once completed, this BMP will be mailed to New York trappers, probably early in 2002.

Updates on the BMP project may be found on an internet web-site set up especially for this purpose. Be sure to check this out. See <http://www.furbearermgmt.org/index.html>.

River Otter Releases Completed

by
Bruce Penrod
Bureau of Wildlife - Bath

On November 22, 2000, the last river otter scheduled to be released by the river otter restoration project slid into the waters of Central and Western New York. It's debatable whether the very last animal was released on the Genesee River in Allegany County or at West River in Yates County as animals were liberated by different project staff at both locations on the same cold and blustery November day. A total of 279 animals have been released in Allegany, Broome, Cattaraugus, Cayuga, Chautauqua, Cortland, Livingston, Monroe, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties. With the liberation of these last animals the long-sought project goal of releasing adequate numbers of otters to create reproducing wild populations at nine locations has been accomplished. Without doubt this is a great achievement for the many individuals and organizations that have partnered together. As DEC's project coordinator it is even more amazing how many different New Yorkers of all ages, values, and interest have got us to that goal, often without knowledge of each others' efforts.

We released 68 otters this past fall at a number of locations. This is the largest number of animals released in any year. Four females were released at Mud Creek in Steuben and Schuyler Counties to supplement last years' release of 21 males and 8 females. Twenty animals were released at Bear Swamp Wildlife Management Area in Cayuga County, and another 10 some ten miles south of Ithaca. Thirty animals were released in four locations at the southern end of Canandaigua, Honeoye, and Hemlock Lakes and on the upper reaches of the Cohocton River. Originally this last release was scheduled to occur on the Canisteo River in southern Steuben County. The change was made because we found that radio-transmitted otters prefer wetlands over streams and rivers. Animals for release at these locations were not available until late November. Given the early and sig-

nificant ice up, placement in high quality wetlands with rich food resources was a good move. Four of seven animals released at Honeoye were instrumented with radios by staff at the Seneca Park Zoo and are being followed by natural resource students from the Finger Lakes Community College. To date, those otters appear to be doing very well and are not moving far. Finally, three otters were released into the Genesee River near the Pennsylvania border in Allegany County.

December brings on beaver season in central and western New York and the chance that an otter might be accidentally caught in a beaver trap. Although both trappers and the DEC have done a lot to reduce the likelihood of incidental otter captures, we still have some work to do. Thus far, three otters have been killed by trappers, including two female otters. It's extremely important that trappers notify the Department if they come upon a dead otter. Examination of accidentally trapped otter and also those killed by vehicles is very important to documenting whether reproduction is occurring in our newly established population.

It's also important that trappers let wildlife staff in Regions 7, 8, and 9 know **when and where they have seen otters or the sign they might leave**. Over the next three years we will need help documenting how otters are doing. That help will come from all New Yorkers as they help document otter restoration. The trapper is afield not only during the trapping season but is continuously watching over the areas they cover. The trapper is also much more familiar with wildlife and their signs than most of the public, and thus can provide highly reliable information. So give us a call or send an e-mail if you or friends locate an otter. We are very interested in your observations, and **we need your help!**

Attention Trappers

Otter accidentally caught outside of the open season or in a closed area cannot be legally possessed. Be prepared for potential otter capture in the areas you trap. Most trappers who have accidentally caught an otter over the past few years had no idea an otter was in their trapping territory. If you catch an otter in a WMU that is closed to otter trapping, get in touch with an Encon Officer or call the Regional Wildlife Office nearest you as soon as possible to arrange for pickup of the specimen. Below are recommendations for avoiding accidental otter capture.

- **Be alert for otter sign, toilets and play areas.**
- **Avoid channel sets, especially main channels.**
- **Stay away from dams and other crossover locations.**
- **Use baited sets where possible.**
- **Use castor mound sets with traps set 8" to 10" deep for hind foot catches.**
- **Avoid using # 220s and # 280s to catch beaver.**
- **When trapping under ice, set baited traps near feed piles.**
- **Avoid trapping bank holes that beaver are using.**
- **Avoid use of blind sets since it only requires an animal to pass through, while baited and**

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lure sets actually attract the target animal.

- **Male otters move a great deal in early spring, they may be attracted to castor sets at that time.**
- **Have a catch pole and other appropriate equipment on hand if using sets that might catch a live otter.**
- **Catch the beaver in an area quickly and get out. Don't leave your traps set hoping to catch the last beaver.**
- **Modify # 330s by pinching the wires together and moving the trigger to one side.**

Not This



Websites of Interest to Trappers

DEC

<http://www.dec.state.ny.us>
<http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/wortrap.html>
<http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/classlist.htm>

Other Government

<http://www.furbearermgmt.org/index.htm>
<http://www.wadsworth.org/rabies/index.htm>
<http://www.fws.gov/>
<http://www.wcmc.org.uk:80/CITES/english/index.html>

Trapping Organizations

<http://www.nationaltrappers.com/>
<http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/4075/>
<http://www.furbearers.org/>
<http://www.wlfa.org/>

Fur Auction Houses

<http://www.seattlefur.com/>
<http://www.furharvesters.com/>
<http://nafa.ca/nafa/index.htm>

Fur Industry

<http://www.fur.ca/index.html>
<http://www.fur.org/>
<http://www.furcommission.com/>
<http://www.iftf.com/>
<http://www.furs.com/>

Nuisance Wildlife

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws/index.html>

<http://texnat.tamu.edu/ranchref/predator/pred.htm>

Furbearer Conservation

<http://www.nyotter.org/>
<http://www.net-link.net/~vaneselk/muskrat/trapping.htm>
<http://www.xmission.com/~drudy/amm.html>

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Trapping Section
Sportsman Education Course Listings
Statewide listing of Trapping, Hunter, Bowhunter, and Waterfowl ID courses

I.A.F.W.A - Fur Resources Technical Subcommittee - BMP information
New York State Department of Health Rabies Lab
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

National Trappers Association
Fur Takers of America
Furbearers Unlimited
Wildlife Legislative Fund of America

Seattle Fur Exchange
Fur Harvesters Auction, Inc.
North American Fur Auction

Fur Institute of Canada
Fur Information Council of America
Fur Commission USA
International Fur Trade Federation
Furs.com

U.S. Dept of Agriculture - Wildlife Services
Excellent source for information on nuisance and destructive wildlife
Predation- Procedures for Evaluating Predation on Livestock and Wildlife

New York River Otter Project
Everything Muskrat
Mountain Men and the Fur Trade

NYS DEC
Wildlife Resources Center
Game Farm Road
Delmar, NY 12054