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## Trapping Iowa Furbearers



IOWA CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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# Trapping Iowa Furbearers

*by*

**TOM BERKLEY**

**District Wildlife Supervisor**

*for the*

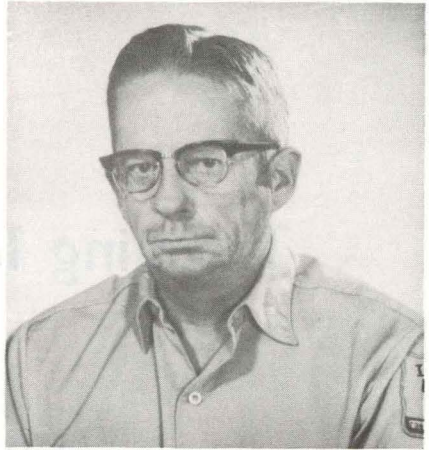
**Iowa Conservation Commission**

**1971**

*Edited by Roger Sparks  
Illustrations by Jim Baldwin  
Photographs by Wayne Lonning*

## by Tom Berkley

Tom Berkley is a district wildlife supervisor for the Iowa Conservation Commission. Since 1949 his wildlife management duties have included field work involving nuisance control and the instruction of classes on predator and furbearer trapping.



The information submitted in the following material is presented for two purposes. It is intended to assist the beginning trapper in taking and caring for the common furbearers found in the State of Iowa; and second, to assist farmers and sportsmen in reducing, through the use of steel traps, the populations of fox and coyotes. The past several years these predators have caused serious damage to poultry and sheep flocks in many areas of the state, in addition to which some losses occurred to desirable wildlife species, especially rabbits.

The actual amount of damage to other wildlife populations is a highly controversial subject. Up to the present time, actual research is lacking relative to predation and its importance in the field of game management. However, there seems little reason to believe that predation in species other than the rabbit is an important limiting factor in overall populations. Food taken by predators, in this case the coyote and fox, consists mainly of the buffer species such as mice and other rodents. With conditions such as exist today, with high populations of both fox and coyotes, there is no doubt that the activities of the predators result in lowered numbers of the said buffer species. The result is that the predator will devote his efforts to taking some other species which might be more easily available. Unfortunately it is often one that is desirable to man as a game species for use as food.

This fact reflects back to the carrying capacities of any given area of land, and to the limitations caused by lack of or general condition of food and cover found in any habitat. It is a known fact that any game bird range, or any given farm has the capacity to carry only a certain amount of game throughout the year, and that any amount of game over this amount will not survive through the year, due to losses through predation, starvation, or through lack of winter cover.

Habitat improvement through tree and shrub plantings, and other improvements in existing cover conditions might be the best answer to the problem of wildlife losses through predation by offering more cover in which game could find safety from these predators. This habitat improvement would also greatly improve the carrying capacities of any given range by reducing the losses from winter and nesting mortality. Known facts prove that any given quail range, for example, with a carrying capacity of 24 quail, would likely carry only that amount throughout the year regardless of natural increase, artificial stocking, or with the presence or absence of predators in the

range. The only way by which the numbers of quail using the range might be increased would be through food and cover improvement so that better food and cover conditions would be provided.

The statements in the past paragraph will apply to all other species of game birds and animals. These facts might be made even more clear by making a comparison using farm livestock as an example. It is an accepted fact that a given forty acres of pasture has the capacity of carrying throughout the year only a limited and predetermined number of cattle. When this number has been reached, it is obvious that it cannot be exceeded for any length of time, due to the losses that will occur from winter kill, disease, or starvation. Thus, it is apparent that natural reproduction in this herd will cause overgrazing of the range, which is capable of producing only a certain amount of food, and would result in losses through disease and starvation, until the numbers of cattle were low enough that the range could again support them. It is again obvious that were shelter provided, and the range improved through fertilization or rejuvenation, the carrying capacity of the range would be increased because of better cover and food conditions. This same picture may be applied to our game management problems, and should show us the answer to higher populations of desirable wildlife species.

While predation does not appear to be the factor which controls the populations of game birds and animals, that fact remains that considerable losses of livestock and poultry have been incurred through the depredations of the fox and coyote during the past few years. The information herein is presented with the hope that it will supplement the work done by the Iowa Conservation Commission the past twenty years to assist farmers and sportsmen to control the damages caused by predators. This work consisted of a series of trapping schools which have been conducted in over sixty counties to date, with additional schools contemplated in the near future. While this program has been of considerable value, it is recognized that it has been possible to reach only a small percentage of these people who desire to learn the techniques involved in successful trapping. It is hoped that the information herein will be available to many of those people interested who found it impossible to attend one of the trapping schools.

In addition to the control of predators, the fur trapping industry is important to the economy of the state. The value of the raw furs taken in Iowa approaches and sometimes exceeds one million dollars annually. Perhaps this information will be of value to the farm boy, the sportsman, the beginning trapper and even to some extent the average or expert trapper, each of whom may be benefited by the information on techniques, baits, and scents that have proved to be attractive in the past.

While there are many methods used in trapping furbearing animals and predators, the information in this booklet will be necessarily quite brief, and will be limited to only a few of the many types of sets that have been used successfully in this area. While covering only a few of the basic principles involved, the information should be used as the ground work for many slightly different sets that will be required by the individual trapper. It is often found that lures and baits, even types of sets will work well on one trap line in one area, but will not produce for another trapper in a different location. Thus it is well to have a variety of sets in each area, with different scents available, so that animals that are spooked by one scent or type of set may be completely fooled by another. It will be necessary for each trapper to work out these problems as they arise, but by following these basic rules, success may come sooner and easier than it would if attempting to begin trapping operations without the knowledge of basic trapping methods.

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## TRAPS

Perhaps the most important single item used by any trapper is the steel trap. A great variety of styles and sizes are available from several manufacturers. While several may be used for each species with success, it might be well to recommend some of the traps and sizes that have proven to be very effective by our state trappers.

**COYOTES** - Victor No. 3N. This trap was especially designed for coyotes.

**FOX** - Victor No. 2 Fox trap - Light in weight, easily concealed.

**MUSKRAT** - Any No. 1 or No. 1½ trap, best with stop-loss device. Conibear.

**MINK** - Any No. 1½ or No. 2 - preferably the latter.

**RACCOON** - Any No. 2 double spring trap.

**WEASEL** - Any No. 0 or No. 1 trap.

**SKUNK** - Any No. 1½ trap.

**OPOSSUM** - Any No. 1½ or No. 2 trap.

**BEAVER** - Either No. 4 double spring, or No. 40 or No. 44 Blake and Lamb, preferably with teeth. Conibear.

It is quite often possible for the beginner to learn from either a fur buyer or experienced trapper the kinds and sizes of traps that have proven to be successful in

his area. The better supply houses also carry a complete line of traps, and usually give recommendations relative to kinds and sizes in their catalogs. The State Conservation officers in the various territories are willing and able to give sound advice in the matter or traps and equipment, and the reader may feel free to call upon these men for advise and assistance.

Contrary to popular belief, both fox and coyote may be trapped successfully with traps that are left untreated, so long as they are free of strong foreign odors such as gasoline or grease, and are kept quite clean. It is well to store traps either outside, or in the hayloft of a barn, or in such place that they will not become contaminated with foreign odors, and where they will not rust excessively. Neither is it necessary to wear gloves while making the sets or while handling the traps, providing the traps are concealed under dry dirt, and the sets are made without leaving evidence of the trapping activities in the vicinity of the trap set.

The traps, however, are subjected to moisture when used in trapping any of Iowa's predators or furbearers, and are therefore subject to rust. It is possible to trap more successfully, and to achieve longer trap life by dyeing and waxing all traps before they are used. This waxing and dyeing is done in the following manner: In the case of old traps, all rust should be removed by the use of a steel brush or buffing wheel. All traps, old and new, should be boiled in a clean tub or boiler. The grease and rust that will be removed, will float to the surface and this will be poured off before the traps are removed. The traps are again placed in clean boiling water, to which is added the bark of oak or walnut preferably, or the hulls of walnuts. A couple of gallons of walnut hulls will give the traps a good dye. This should be added to fifteen quarts of water, and will dye several dozen traps, fewer large ones.

Logwood chips may be purchased from the trapping supply houses, and will do an excellent job of dyeing the traps, when used as directed. The traps should be boiled in this mixture for several hours, after which the surface should again be poured off to remove the grease and other foreign materials. The traps may be used as they come from this treatment, which has eliminated all rust, all foreign odors, and has colored the traps dark so they will be less conspicuous.

Many trappers wax the traps in addition to dyeing them, feeling that this will assist in preventing rust and in preventing the traps from picking up other foreign odors. This is done in the following manner: Generally the container used in boiling and dyeing the traps will be quite large. The traps are often transferred to a smaller container such as a pail for the waxing operations. This is filled with water, traps are placed in the water, and this is again brought to a boil. After it is boiling, either straight paraffin of the kitchen variety or mixture of paraffin and bees-wax mixed half and half, or trap wax that has been purchased from a trapping supply house may be added to the water. The traps should be hooked through the ring with a piece of wire, drawn slowly through the wax, (floating on the surface) and suspended above the container to permit any excess wax to drain back into it. More wax should be added if traps come out only partially covered. The traps should then be stored in a place where they will come in contact with no foreign odors.

If the treated traps fail to operate smoothly or are otherwise in need of adjustment, it is often possible to work them free by operating them with the hands. If this does not loosen them and it is necessary to lubricate them in any manner, under no circumstance should common lubricating oil be used. Clear glycerins does the trick and will not effect the use of the trap as far as the furbearers or predators are concerned.

## ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

The equipment needed in addition to the traps may be very simple and inexpensive, or it may be elaborate and costly depending upon the scope the individual trapper.

The essential tools needed for basic trapping are as follows:

Common hatchet or small axe for digging and driving stakes.

Small narrow trowel for digging and making dirt hole bait sets.

Dirt sifter, made from 10" square piece of hardware cloth 1¼" mesh.

Drag hooks - Made from 28" of cold rolled steel, 7/8ths inch.

Pan covers - 5 x 7", either of clean cloth or waxed paper.

Waxed paper - used for pan covers and for winter trapping.

Scent fold - made of clean canvas for holding various bottles of scent.

Packsack - as desired. Writer is using a war surplus knapsack.

Scent - Commercial scent may be used, or trapper may make his own.

Trap stakes - May be purchased or made by the individual.

Ground cloth - Three foot square piece of canvas to be used in making sets.

Both the hatchet and trowel are used for digging and moving dirt at the trap site. The dirt sifter is used in covering the traps with fine dry dirt, and is very important in making proper sets for fox and coyote. The pan covers may be of either cloth or waxed paper. Cloth is perhaps better for summer and early fall; for winter trapping it will be necessary to use waxed paper both as pan covers and under the traps. These covers are installed in such a manner as to be over the pan of each trap and under the jaws, with a split in one end so the trigger can operate without interference. The waxed paper should be used under the trap during freezing weather to prevent the trap from freezing down and becoming in-operative. The trap may either be staked down, or may be fastened to a drag hook. The drags have the advantage of permitting an animal to pull the trap with him for some distance, thus making the site of the set more natural for a reset.

This also gives the steel of the trap a better chance to bed itself firmly into the flesh of the animal before it becomes firmly fastened. Thus when the animal strains against the trap, he will be much less likely to pull free. Drags are better suited when trapping in sandy soil where stakes are likely to pull out. Stakes should be used when trapping in open pasture country, as fox and coyotes can sometimes travel long distances with the traps and drags, causing the trapper to spend too much time trying to locate his catch and equipment. The stakes and drags may be purchased from the supply houses, but usually it is more economical for the trapper to make up his own. The scent fold is made of heavy cloth or canvas, and is designed to hold several bottles of scent. This offers the advantage of storing the scent so that it will not contaminate the pan covers, the ground cloth, or other equipment.

The ground cloth is used to kneel upon while making the sets, and in transporting dirt to or from the area. It is essential that this cloth be clean, and that it be kept free of the scent used, and of other foreign odors.

Scents and lures are used by all trappers in addition to the fish and meat baits that are found to be attractive to fur-bearing animals. There are many companies in business today that specialize in the sale of animal scents and lures. Many of these scents are very good, and are advertised in many of the outdoor magazines and trapping supply catalogs that are published. The scents and baits found to be effective in taking the various animals, will be further discussed in the sections covering the individual animals.

## COYOTE TRAPPING



The coyote populations have been increasing in the states of the midwest for the past several years. This predator is one that is highly intelligent and has the ability to adapt himself quickly to changes of environment. He seems to be able to adapt himself well to living in close contact with, and often at the expense of man. This is true of both the coyote and fox, both of which are members of the canine family. These animals are mentioned together, as the habits and the habitats used by each are very similar, as are the baits, scents and trapping techniques involved in taking them. This should be kept in mind while studying the following information. Sets made for one will take the other and the same sets will also take dogs.

If there is any real secret in trapping fox and coyote, it is placing the set in the proper place. Both the coyote and fox are very doglike in their habit of establishing scent-posts, or places used for the deposit of urine along their regular routes of travel. These scent posts are used regularly by resident animals, and are also visited by others that are traveling through the area. After depositing urine upon the scent posts, the animals invariably scratch in the ground, not with the thought of covering the scent post, but probably to leave his own scent at the site. This is possibly a means of communication used by the animals. This habit is also the undoing of many a wise predator as sets made at a scent post established by the animals themselves are very effective. These spots may be found at times along the routes of travel by locating the scratches made by the animals after they have urinated, and may at times be located by the smell of the urine, which often is strong enough to be detected by man.

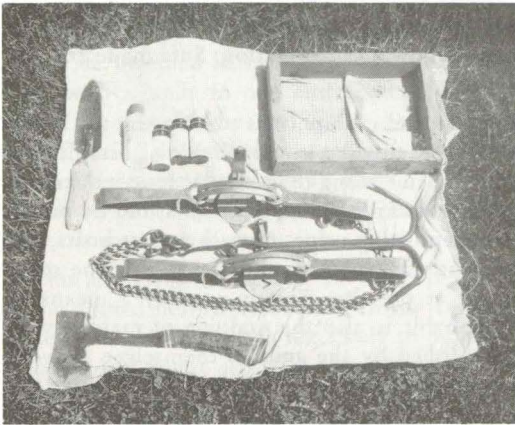
Many times it is impossible to locate a natural scent post, so it is necessary to establish an artificial one. One should be certain that this is made near the travel lane of the coyote or fox, or that it is in an area that is being used by the animal as a hunting ground, a den site, or as a resting area. This may be determined by finding tracks, diggings, dens, or animals that have been killed by the predators, or by seeing the animals themselves. The scent post is established by using the urine taken from an animal or purchased. The method by which the scent post is established is described in the section on the double-trap set for coyote.

The travel lanes of the coyote are most often open ridges, meadows, and open pasture lands. In traveling over these areas, the animals commonly use trails of cattle or sheep, farm work roads, or dry washes and ditches. It is in these places that sign indicating the animals presence may be located. This may be droppings, tracks, or possibly scent posts. It is in open areas such as these that sets of the scent post set should be made.



## DOUBLE TRAP SCENT POST SET

Perhaps the most effective set for coyotes is commonly called the double-trap set. After evidence has been found that the animals are using the area, the first step is to pick out the exact spot for the set. Walk directly to the site, spread out the ground cloth, kneel upon it and stay there as much as possible during the operations involved. Next dig a flat bottomed trench eight inches wide, 1½ inches deep, and 36 inches long. Be sure that all dirt and vegetation removed is placed upon the ground cloth. Place the drag in the center of the trench. If the traps are to be staked, drive the stake flush with the bottom of the trench, after wiring the traps to the stake. The traps are then set, and one is placed in each end of the trench, so the trap is about ½ inch below ground level. During freezing weather it is necessary to place waxed paper under each trap so that it will not be frozen down. Using fine dry dirt, fill in around the traps, covering the springs, the chain, and the drags. Be sure that the traps are firmly bedded, so they will not tip under the animal's weight. Place dirt around the jaws, using care that none of the dirt gets under the pan of the trap. Place the 5 x 7 pan cover over the pan and under the jaws of each trap. The slit in the end of the cover permits the trigger to be free of the cloth or waxed paper, and insures positive operation of the trap when the



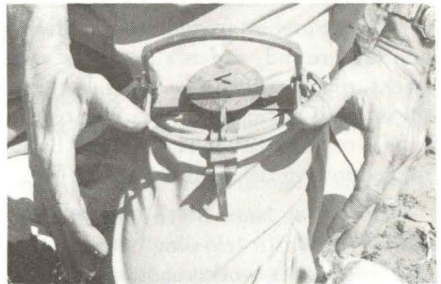
1. Basic equipment needed for double trap scent post set.



2. Ground cloth is spread and an eight-inch by 36-inch trench is dug (1½ inches deep).



3. The drag is placed in the center of the trench.



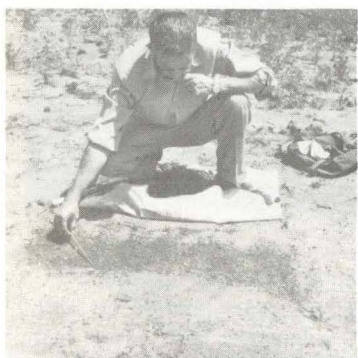
4. The proper way to set a double spring trap.

trigger is depressed. Under no circumstances should the pan cover be permitted to cover the jaws of the trap. Next, cover the entire set with fine dry dirt, using the sifter to remove any clods or vegetation that might be in the dirt. This is smoothed over with a small twig, and when completed the set should be covered by not more than ½ inch of the sifted dirt. During summer and early fall, the dirt that has been removed from the trench may be broken up, sifted and used to cover the traps. But during cold weather it will be necessary to remove the excavated dirt, taking it completely away from the site of the set, and bringing in dry dirt to cover the traps. The ground cloth is used for these operations. Care must be exercised so that as little human sign as possible is left in the area. It is well to collect a supply of dry dirt in early fall for winter trapping operations. This can be sacked up and stored in a hayloft or other places where it will remain free of foreign odors and absolutely dry.

The scent post itself may be a chunk of rotton wood, coyote droppings, or dry horse or cow manure. It must be dry so that it will absorb and hold the scent. This scent post is placed between the traps, and 8 to 10 drops of scent is placed upon it. Then, after a careful check to see that no human sign has been left and that the set looks natural, tracks should be brushed out as well as possible, and the scent post set may be left to do its work. This set should be rescented every other day.



5. The traps are placed at each end of the trench.



8. A small stick smooths the set.



6. A five by seven-inch pan cover is placed over each pan in this manner. It is split on one end to free the trigger.



7. Fine, dry dirt is sifted over the entire set.



9. A chunk of rotton wood with eight to ten drops of scent placed on it completes the set.

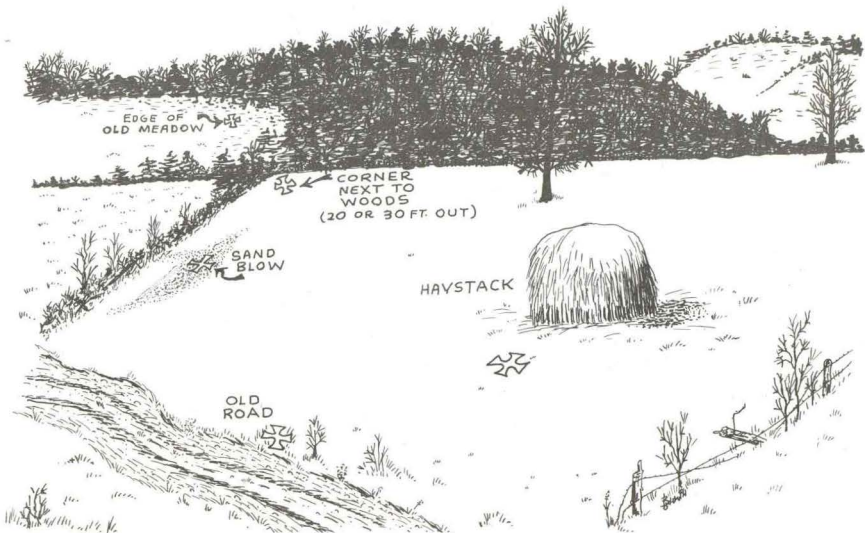
## TRAIL SET

Another set that is effective for coyotes is the trail set, using either one or two traps and concealing them in the trails used by the animals. Places such as breaks in fences, gates where animals are more or less forced to travel are the best places for this set. Quite often the animals will travel the dead-furrows left by fall plowing operations, and the dead-furrow set may be used successfully for both coyote and fox. In making this blind set, the traps are handled exactly as described in the double trap set just mentioned. However, no scent is to be used with this set, and the traps should be placed so the animal will step over the hinges of the trap, rather than over the side of the jaws. This is done so the jaw of the closing trap will not throw the animal's foot out of the trap. While quite effective, the trail set does have the disadvantage of catching any animal that might use the trail or dead-furrow, as well as the predator. This set should be made only when signs indicate that the creatures using the trail are predominately that of the species desired.

Several of the sets in the following section on fox trapping may be used to take coyotes, such as the campfire set and the dirt hole bait set. The sets differ only in that sets for the coyote should be larger than those described for the fox. It might be worthy of note that coyote urine attracts both coyote and fox, while coyotes are not much attracted by the urine of the fox. The other baits described in the chapter on fox trapping are quite attractive to coyotes and dogs.

Scent has proven to be very successful in Iowa, and would be a good bet for the beginner, who later may wish to make up his own from animals that he has taken. The trapper can make up his own scent if he desires to do so, by taking the urine from the bladder of a freshly caught animal. To this urine, add four tablespoons of glycerine per pint of urine, and the gall bladder and the anal glands from the carcass may be added to increase the calling power of the scent. The skinning and handling of the coyote pelt will be described in the section of this booklet on skinning and handling pelts.

## GOOD LOCATIONS FOR COYOTE AND FOX SETS



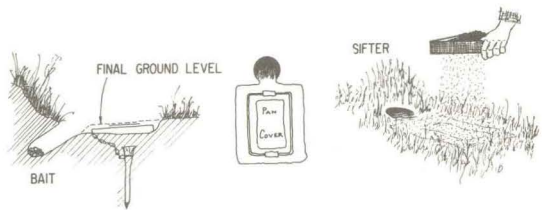
# FOX TRAPPING



There are many types of sets that are used successfully in trapping both the red and grey fox, including several more or less standard sets, such as the double trap scent post set described for coyotes. The only changes might be that for fox it should be made only 30 inches long, rather than 36, the set might be located in a slightly different location. Also the location should be nearly adjacent to heavy cover, or in smaller openings in heavy timber or brushy areas. The same principles are involved, such as using clean traps, leaving no sign, using dry, fine sifted dirt.

## DIRT-HOLE BAIT SET

Of all the fox sets used, perhaps the most effective of all and the one that takes as many animals as all other sets put together, is the "Dirt Hole Bait Set". This set is used with both scent and bait. It will also be found to be quite effective for coyotes when made on a slightly larger scale.



The fox spends much time hunting mice and other rodents in old meadows, pastures, open fields, along hedge rows and weed patches. He also uses the work roads, stock paths, and dry washes through these fields for his travel lanes. Signs such as tracks, diggings, or droppings such as may be found indicating the animal is using these areas. This set should be made adjacent to a gopher mound, a very low bush, or a

clump of grass. This is done to insure the fact that the animal will approach the bait over the trap, rather than to come to it from the rear and miss the trap. A fox will always walk around an obstruction, rather than over it.

The set is made as follows: spread the ground cloth, exactly as for the scent post set. With the trowel dig a hole at about a 45 degree angle to the ground 2 inches wide and 5 inches deep. This hole should be dug at the base of the grass clump or gopher mound. Then make an excavation directly in front of the bait hole large enough to take the trap and stake or drag, whichever might be used. Secure the stake or drag in the center of the excavation. Set the trap and place it in the excavation so that the pan will be 6 inches from the bait hole. The jaws should be placed so that the animal will step over the hing of the jaws, and not over the outside of the jaw, which would be lakely to throw his feet from the trap. The ground under the trap should be firm and level and deep enough so that the trap will be flush with the surrounding ground. Use waxed paper under the trap in freezing weather, and waxed paper over the pan and under the jaws of the trap. Using the sifter, cover the trap with ½ inches of fine dirt. Smooth out with a twig, and the set is ready to bait. This set may be improved by making fox tracks in the dirt, and by adding scratches to the hole and to the dirt, so the completed set will look as if an animal had been digging there.

The bait itself is pushed into the hole, and is covered by a handful of dry grass. This will prevent the animal from learning too much about the bait until he stops upon the pan of the trap when attempting to dig the bait from the hole. In addition to the bait, scent such as fox urine is used to act as a suspicion remover, and to attract the animal from a greater distance. This scent is placed at the side of the excavation, using a cow chip or small piece of rotten wood to absorb and hold the scent. As a rule, the predator does not wish to eat the rotten bait, but is very curious and will often play with it, like a dog. In any event, while attempting to dig and bait from the hole, the fox will step on the pan of the trap.

While almost any meat baits, either fresh or tainted are attractive to all carnivores, the baits that have the greatest appeal to the fox seem to be flesh taken from the housecat, muskrat, rabbit, mouse, chicken and several others, with the house cat apparently providing the greatest appeal to the fox. Also attractive are the cheese baits, prepared catfish baits, honey, coagulated chicken, pork or beef blood and bait made from fish oil.

The meat baits such as mentioned may be prepared in the following manner. Parts of the carcasses of chickens, muskrats or rabbits may be used in the bait sets, such as the heads or quarters of same. The innards may be used. These baits may be used fresh, but better results are sometimes achieved by permitting the meat to decay. An effective method is to cut the meat into two inch squares, hide and all, and place these chunks in a clean dry fruit jar. The lid should be either loosely fastened, or batter, with several holes poked through the lid to prevent a rather substantial explosion. This jar may be placed in the sun, or buried underground, until the meat is well tainted. One or two of these two inches squares is all the bait needed in the dirt hole set.

Another bait that is attractive to both fox and coyote is made up from the flesh of one of our oilier fish, such as carp or buffalo. This will give the trapper a chance for a different type of bait and will assist him in using a variety of baits on his trap line. This bait is prepared by cutting the fish into two inch chunks, placing the pieces in a clean fruit jar, covering the top with cloth. Several of these jars are placed in a wooden

box and buried under ground for a month or two. When the jars are recovered, it will be found that only a very strong smelling liquid remains. This fish juice may be used in the dirt hole set with the campfire set, or it may be placed on the scent post with the urine in the double trap set.

## OTHER FOX SETS

Trail sets may also be used for foxes. This again is a blind set, using no bait, as for coyotes. The double trap scent post set may be used, reducing the size to 30 inches long.

Another set used by many is the gopher mound set, in which a trap is placed in the top of a gopher mound, (either a natural mound, or one that is made from a pile of dry earth hauled to the area). This is scented with urine, and might be made more attractive if a meat bait such as a whole dead chicken would be placed about six feet from the mound. Foxes like to step up on a mound to look around before they approach the bait.

The campfire set will sometimes take both fox and coyote that have become wise to the bait hole and the scent post sets. In this set a pair of traps are buried in the ground as for the double trap set for coyotes. A small fire of grass, leaves or chaff is built over the traps. After it has burned out, several chunks of any of the meat baits described may be placed in the ashes (cracklings or bacon might be used). Stir these in the ashes, place a few drops of scent at the edge of the ashes, and another set is ready to go.

These sets are for early fall trapping, but will also work well in the winter, except when snow is too deep, or when the sets are frozen down by thawing and freezing conditions.

# WINTER TRAPPING

## FOX & COYOTES

While the constantly changing weather conditions with wide changes in temperatures and freezing and thawing conditions make winter trapping in Iowa rather difficult, it is still possible to trap both coyotes and fox successfully, provided that the trapper is willing to put forth some extra effort to cope with the changing conditions.

It will be found that with changing snow conditions, freezing and thawing, freezing rains, trap sets are quite often covered by either ice or frozen ground, thus causing the trapper extra work in keeping his sets operative. For these reasons, it is necessary to have a supply of dry dirt on hand. Both the dirt hole bait set, the scent post set, the trail set, may be used during freezing weather. It is necessary of course, to remake each set after thaws or freezing rains, when the traps will be frozen down. Several other materials may be used successfully to cover the traps, but will be found satisfactory only if the traps are cleaned, waxed, and dyed. Some of these materials are chaff from straw, chicken manure mixed with the peat litter from the floors of chicken houses. These materials must be completely dry, or they too will cause the traps to become frozen in. The chicken manure and litter has the advantage of covering up any foreign odor that might be on the traps, and the odor of the chicken manure appeals to both fox and coyotes.

Sets may be kept working through winter weather by using one quart of calcium chloride well mixed with eighteen quarts of dirt. This should only be used with well treated traps, as it is one of the salts, and will cause untreated steel to rust badly. It may be used with waxed and dyed traps with good results, and is an effective anti-freeze.

So long as dry cold winter weather prevails, it is often possible to trap coyote and fox using only snow to cover the traps

### WINTER SCENT POST SET

It is quite easy to locate the natural scent posts in the snow, and a trap set at one of these posts will be found to be effective. The trap is located in the tracks made by the animals. The trap bed is made by removing enough snow so that the trap will be covered by two inches of snow. Waxed paper is used under the trap, and also over the pan and under the jaws. After the set has been made, human tracks should be brushed out for a couple of rods from the set. Clean shingles can be used as a base for traps in deep snow.

(Some of the sets that will take both foxes and coyotes using this snow cover are as follows:)

### WINTER TRAIL SET

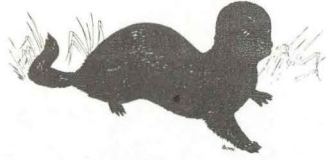
When a trail that is used by either fox or coyote has been found, the blind trail set might be in order. This trail should be approached from the side, and the traps placed as described in the trail set for coyotes, using waxed paper and covered with two inches of snow. Tracks should be brushed out near the trail.

### WINTER WATER SET

Foxes spend considerable time in hunting and traveling along small streams, and hunting in the cover usually found along these streams. It is often possible to use water sets for fox when land sets are either buried under heavy snow or frozen down under ice. Perhaps the most effective water set to be used where open water is found is made by placing a large meat bait such as a whole rabbit on a rock or other object that is located from 12 to 18 inches from the shore of the stream in the water. Place the trap upon another rock between the bank and the bait. The trap should be flush with, or just above the water level, and should be covered by moss or other material natural to the area, and should appear to the fox a natural stepping stone, which he will use to avoid getting his feet wet. The drag may be used in making this Set, and would be concealed under water.

The sets that have been described for foxes and coyotes are just a few of the possible sets that can be used. It will be necessary for each and every trapper to make the minor changes that will adapt them to the varied conditions that are to be found on every trap line.

# MINK TRAPPING



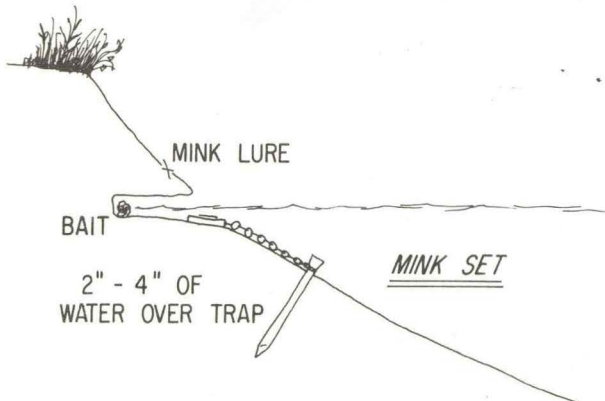
It will be found that mink are as difficult to take as either fox or coyotes, and that considerable care must be used to keep the traps clean and well concealed.

Three sets that have been proven effective will be described in this section. First, when tracks indicate that mink are traveling on land or across a sand bar, regular dirt hole bait sets (see fox trapping) are very effective. Unlike fox trapping, fresh bloody meat baits, such as a chunk of fresh rabbit or muskrat, or a fresh chunk of fish should be used for mink. Mink scents are available from the commercial scent outfits and may be used. The baits used in trapping mink should be replaced with fresh every three days.

Mink are often found near springs or farm tile outlets and will often use these small streams as travel lanes. The traps should be placed in these small streams in such a manner that the mink will be forced to travel across the trap pan. It may be possible to find a spot where the stream narrows; or sticks may be placed in the stream to make a rather narrow lane through which the animal must travel. The trap is staked down and placed at the spot where the animal will travel and should be under from one to two inches of water. Traps used for this set should be dyed and may be covered by moss or other natural cover so they will not be seen by the mink.

One of the most effective sets for mink is a bait set made in a cut bank where there is a shelf covered by two or three inches of water. A bait hole with the entrance level with the water line, one half above and one half below, is dug slanting uphill into the bank for about six inches. A chunk of fresh bait, either meat or fish, is placed up in the hole and a trap is concealed under water in front of the entrance to the hole.

Other sets may be used, such as blind trail sets made on travel lanes. Small cubbys may be made from rocks with the bait placed in the center and a trap set at each end. Sets may be worked out for brush piles and log piles in which mink may be found. Number 2 traps are recommended, as they usually will kill a mink, and will reduce losses from ringoffs (the cutting or chewing off of the trapped foot).





## MUSKRAT TRAPPING



The muskrat makes up the bulk of the fur taken in Iowa and is widely distributed in nearly every stream and marsh area. Rats feed primarily on roots, aquatic vegetation and tender twigs on stream and pond banks. It is quite easy to locate the travel lanes used by the animals as they leave the water or to find logs which the animals use when going out on the bank. It is in these places that the animals may be taken. The trap, No. 1½ preferably with the stop loss device, should be staked out in deep water so that the animal will drown when trapped. It is illegal in Iowa to disturb the muskrat houses but they may be trapped effectively by placing the traps in the runs and entrance ways.

The muskrat sized Conibear trap works very well. This trap catches the rat behind the head causing instant death. Sets are made at the entrance to dens or on runways.

Animals caught in this trap will usually be in very good condition, as they are unable to fight this trap as they are the regular steel traps.

## RACCOON TRAPPING



The raccoon can be taken in almost any of the sets used for taking fox and coyote, if they are made in areas frequented by the coon. The water set described for the fox will readily take any coon that passes by, as will the dirt hole bait set.

In addition to these described sets, any number of sets may be made around mud or sand bars where the animals are traveling or hunting. The water bait hole set described for mink will also take raccoon. If the trapper will study his area and find where the coon is living and traveling, he will find it very easy to adapt one of these sets that have been described and will find that Brer Coon can be very easily taken. Sets are very effective when placed near den trees or near dens in the ground or bluffs.

## OPOSSUM TRAPPING



The opossum is attracted by almost any rotten meat bait and the information from paragraph on the coon will also apply to the opossum.

## SKUNK TRAPPING



Skunks, both striped and spotted, are also readily taken in the sets described for foxes and coons and may be easily taken at the entrance to their dens. To make the set in the mouth of the den, merely scoop cut enough dirt to permit the trap to sit flush with the ground and about 6 inches in front of the hole. The trap may be covered with grass or dirt. The dirt hole bait set with take skunk well when baited with either rancid meat or with the fish oil scent. Skunk scent is also sold by the trapping supply houses and will increase the chances of making a good catch of these animals.

## BEAVER TRAPPING



While originally a native of the State of Iowa, the beaver was for many years totally extinct in the state. Some years ago, the beaver were found in the northwest part of the state where they had moved in from Nebraska and South Dakota. In a rather short time, the animals increased and spread out, and made their way inland, where they set up housekeeping in some of the many drainage ditches located in the relatively flat areas in northwest Iowa. Through the dam building activities and damage done to the drainage ditches and tile outlets, it was necessary to remove some of the beaver from the area.

This was done by live trapping them and transporting them to other sections of the state. Beaver find Iowa to their liking, with an abundance of softwoods along stream beds, great cornfields spreading over the river bottoms that furnish them abundant food and many cut banks that provide an excellent place for them to build dens. At the present time, we find beaver in every county in the state, with several counties having enough beaver to cause rather serious damage to tile outlets and drainage systems. The State Conservation Commission recognized the fact that we could have no more beaver than would be quite compatible with our great agricultural industry and so opened the season for beaver trapping. The once extinct beaver is again adding to trapper's income each year; and with proper management will continue to do so in the future.

An efficient trap for beaver is the Conibear. This trap works very well when trapping under ice and is placed in front of the beaver den opening or in a run.

The Conibear is designed to catch a beaver behind the head, with adequate impact to usually cause instant death. If a beaver should live following the impact of the trap jaws, drowning follows quickly. This trap is the most humane trap devised to date. However, sets should be made to drown beaver whenever possible, to avoid as much loss as possible. Almost all sets for beaver should be made at the slides that the animals are using, as sets made on dams and in den entrances, will often spook the animals and cause them to leave the immediate area. The slides are very easy to find and are the places used by the animals when leaving and entering the water in search of food. These slides are plainly marked, sometimes being as much as 6 inches deep from long use.

If one can find a slide that enters water at least three feet deep, a set may be made that will drown any beaver that is taken. The equipment needed for a good drowning set consists of a drowning wire, such as telephone wire or smooth No. 9 wire, a locking device, an anchor and a pair of traps.

After locating a good slide above deep water, fasten one end of the running wire to a strong root or stake it solidly near the spot that the slide enters the water. The wire is then threaded through the hole in the short end of the locking device and an anchor such as a rock, piece of metal, or a sack filled with sand weighing from ten to twenty pounds if fastened to the end of the running wire, and tossed into the deep water. The two traps are wired to the long end of the locking device as shown. The traps are set and placed in the water below the slide, under water from 4 to 8 inches, with the jaws parallel to the direction of the slide. It is not necessary to cover the traps with any material. However, it may be of help if the traps are dyed, so they will not be too bright. The operation of the set is quite simple; when the steel hits the beaver's foot, he will turn and attempt to dive into deep water and escape but will find that after he has reached the end of the running wire situated in the deep water, the locking device prevents his returning to the surface. The traps should be attached to the locking device as close to the trap as possible.

Baits that may assist the trapper in taking the beaver are tender twigs of willow, cottonwood or other vegetation that the beaver might find attractive. This bait should be placed at the slide just above the water line.

Scent that might be used is the beaver castor. This gland is found on beaver of either sex and is found in the two greenish white wrinkled musk sacs found just under the hide near the vent. These should not be confused with the oil sacs which when pressed, yield a yellowish oil. The pair of castors from one beaver will make enough scent for many trap sets and are handled as follows: Place the pair of castors, from

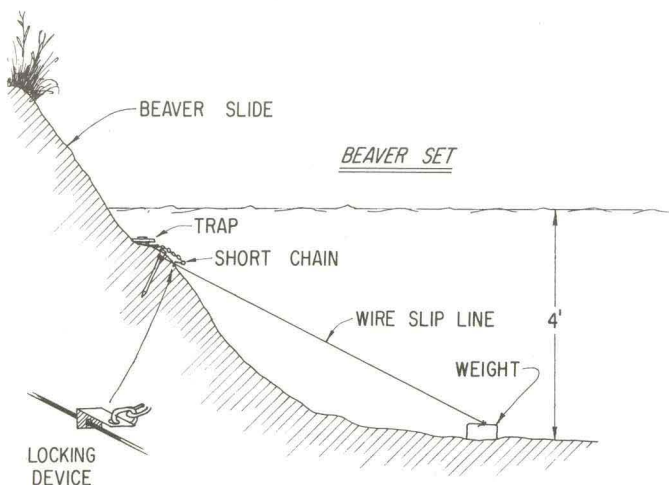
which all flesh and tissue possible has been removed in a clean glass jar. Then add two ounces of clear glycerine and 1/8 teaspoon of corrosive sublimate. (Handle with care, dangerous chemical). These materials will act as a preservative and as an anti-freeze for the castor.

This scent is best used on the end of a stick one inch in diameter that has been smashed by hitting it with a hatchet. This stick is then pushed into the beaver castor mixture and twisted around, the castor that remains on the mashed end of stick is sufficient. This stick is stuck in the slide about six inches above the water line, with the end that contains the castor sticking out above the traps.

Some trappers make sets at the dam proper, and others make sets in the entrance of the dens. Both methods will produce beaver but there is some risk that the beaver will be spooked away from the immediate area. The beaver will sometimes dig several feeder dens and sets may be made at the entrances to them, without disturbing the resident animals. In trapping at the dam, if the trapper will make a small break in the top of the dam so that the water levels will be slowly lowered, and set a pair of traps, one at each side of the break. The beaver will be taken as he attempts to repair the break which they will invariably do. The same drowning arrangement may be used to good advantage here, as the water just above the dam will almost always be deep enough.

In the event of shallow streams or considerable beaver activity on the banks above sandbars or other shallow areas, beaver may be taken in the described traps by solidly staking the traps and placing them in the water at the bottom of the shallow water slides. It might be necessary to remove enough river bottom at the trap site so that the trap will be under from six to eight inches of water, as this will permit the beaver to swim over the trap with his front feet, and be caught by the hind foot. The No. 44 Blake and Lamb trap will often catch the hind foot of the beaver which will make it impossible for the animal to ring out or to chew his leg off. When making these shallow water sets, it will be necessary to check the traps as early as possible in the morning and possibly once during the night to avoid losing animals.

The beaver is not difficult to trap but it is necessary to use heavy traps to hold the large animals and all sets possible should be made to drown the beaver.



## PREPARATION OF PELTS

After spending much effort and time in catching predators and furbearers, Iowa trappers lose from ten to twenty percent of the real cash values of their pelts through careless skinning and preparation. The most common mistakes in handling are in skinning, poor stretching, or improper fleshing, with resulting grease burns.

In considering the skinning and preparation of the pelts that are taken in Iowa, we need only to consider two methods of skinning and stretching. These two methods are cased and open-handled. In consulting the Wildlife Section of the Conservation Commission, which has close contact with fur buyers of the state, we are informed that all Iowa furs should be cased, only the beaver should be open-handled.

The first to be discussed will be the animals that are cased with the tail skinned out and left on the pelt. These are the mink, raccoon, fox, coyote, weasel and skunk. These animals should all be cased and it will be found that the work will be easier and the pelts nicer if the skinning and stretching is done as soon as possible after the furbearer is taken.

To case a pelt, remove it from the animal in the following manner: For the species on which the feet are to be left on the pelt (coyote, fox and mink) the cut is started in the middle of the foot pad of the hind foot and continued all the way along the back of the leg to the vent. The same is done with the other back leg. Skin each hind foot out by peeling the fur of the leg loose with the fingers and pulling the skin off the foot until the second toe joint is exposed. It is quite often wise to use a knife to remove the fur from the foot and toes. After reaching the second toe joint, cut through the joint with a knife. The feet will then be skinned out with the skin retaining only the first toe joint and the toenails. It is necessary to remove the feet, as any meat left would cause the fur to rot. The next step is to cut around the vent and up the bottom side of the tail for an inch or more until the base of the tail can be worked free. Then grasp the exposed part of the tail at the base and pull the hide from the tail bone.

The tail of fox and mink may be left as skinned, the tail of skunk and raccoon should be split from the base to the tip. An old umbrella rib may be used to insure a straight cut.

Next pull the skin off the carcass toward the head, using the knife when necessary. When the front legs are reached, start to free them from the hide at the body, working the skin off from there down. The skin of the front legs should be split from the elbow to the foot pads to permit the removal of the leg and foot bones of fox and coyotes.

It is difficult to pull the skin of the front leg over the foot (unless this is done the front feet are then skinned out as were the back feet, with the toes cut at the second joint).

The hide is then worked down to the head. Using the fingers expose the base of the ears which are cut off with the knife close to the head. Using the knife, carefully cut the hide free of the head, using care to cut under the eyelids so that the openings are not enlarged. The lips should be cut from the jawbones close to the teeth and should remain attached to the pelt. The pelt is completely removed when the cartilage is cut through at the base of the nose.

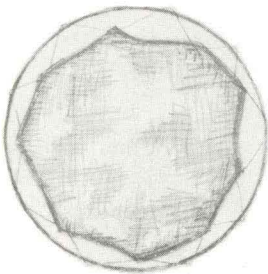
Surplus meat and fat should then be removed from the hide using a rounded knife or an ordinary tablespoon, using care to avoid puncturing the hide. The pelt is then ready for the stretching process.

The other furs that are to be cased, such as the muskrat and opossum are handled in the same manner, the only difference being that the tails and feet should be left on the carcass, the skin is cut at the hair-line at both tail and feet.

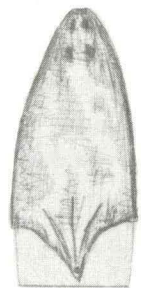
The beaver is open-handled and stretched round. A single slit is made from the vent to the tip of the lower jaw. The feet and tail are cut from the carcass at the hair-line. The hide is removed, using the knife to loosen it. It is impossible to pull the hide from the body, as it is secured very firmly by muscle and gristle. When skinning out the legs, it will be unnecessary to do any further cutting there, merely work the pelt over the stumps of the legs. It is often recommended that considerable meat and fat be left on the hide, as it must be fleshed after skinning and it is sometimes easier to do a neat fleshing job when there is more meat on the hide to hold on to while fleshing. All possible meat and flesh should be removed from the hide before stretching and all possible grease should be removed, using a dull scraper or spoon.

The round effect is given the pelt by stretching, not skinning. The pelt is stretched on a board large enough to handle it, or it may be done on an inside wall, where temperatures will not be excessive. The furs should be dry before placing upon a wall or board. Dampness might cause the fur to mold. Drive four nails through the edge of the head or upper part of the pelt about one inch apart. Stretch the pelt lengthwise as tight as possible and drive several tacks along the bottom edge. Then stretch one side of the pelt and tack, then stretch the other side tightly. The balance of the edge is stretched, attempting to keep the hide well stretched, yet maintaining as nearly a perfect circle as possible. The hide should be tacked at one inch intervals all the way around. It helps to some extent to draw a circle on the board a little larger than the pelt to serve as a guide for stretching. Some of the grease remaining may be removed by scraping after the stretching has been completed.

In stretching the other hides, stretchers of wire may be purchased from the trapping supply houses, or very satisfactory ones may be made from boards, cut to the shape desired. These stretches should be of various sizes, to fit various sized pelts. The pelts should only be stretched to natural size as overstretched pelts will be thin and of lower quality. The furs are pulled over the stretching boards fur side in to permit the skin to dry properly. The edges are secured with tacks, as are the back legs and the lower jaw. After drying, the pelts of skunk, muskrat and raccoon are left skin side out, but after partially drying, being almost dry but still flexible, the skins of the raccoon, fox, coyote should be turned fur side out and replaced upon the stretcher until completely dry.



**OPEN-HANDLED**  
(Beaver)



**CASED**  
(Muskrat)

## TRAPPING TIPS

1. Wash bloody traps before resetting, the scent of fox or coyote blood often spooks other animals when they approach the trap.

2. Sets are much more effective after a catch has been made. The animal taken will scent up the area around the set and it will be unnecessary to add scent for several days.

3. Skunks may be removed alive with little trouble and little or no odor by the use of two poles, each ten feet long. Twist a piece of wire (barbed) around the end of one pole, approach the skunk slowly and cautiously. The skunk's attention will be centered around the steel attached to his foot and little notice will be given the approaching trapper. Twist the barbed wire on the end of the pole in the hair of the skunk's tail, twisting the tail securely under the animal's rump, between his hind legs. Place the other pole across the animal's neck, lay both poles side by side on the ground and walk up the pole remove the trap from the animal. The skunk will be unable to release his spray with his tail twisted under him and the other pole holds him in such a position that he will be unable to bite. After the trap has been removed, back down the poles, untwist the wire from the tail, jerk it free and the animal is on his way. Both the striped and the spotted skunks are valuable on any farm for both their pelts and for the great value as rodent killers. However, this operation must be done at the trapper's own risk, the writer will not be responsible for accidents.

4. While running a trap line, avoid as much as possible walking in the trails used by the animals, as this will leave tracks in the trails, and wild animals depend upon their eyes as well as their noses. Do not smoke or spit around the trap line, as these habits only leave more evidence of trapping activities.

5. Iowa law requires a person to have a trapping license and to have the traps tagged when trapping fox and coyote on land other than that owned by the trapper.

6. When prepared as described in the text, carp caught during July and August will make effective bait for fox, coyote, mink and raccoon during the fall trapping season. This is an excellent use for a rather undesirable species of fish which is rather easily obtained.

7. Mice and rodents normally make up over 80% of the fox's diet; therefore, two or three dead mice used as bait in a dirt hole bait set, will be very attractive to the fox.

8. Use the blind trail set only when sign indicates that the bulk of the traffic on the trail is that of the animal wanted. If sign indicates heavy use by other furbearers, do not set in the trail, as nothing is gained by trapping and damaging or killing other furbearers during the closed season.

9. In establishing a trap line in any area that is used by hunters using dogs, it is well to notify the dog men of the fact, as dogs are attracted to the fox and coyote sets described in the text. Notify the landowner that you are going to trap the area, so that he will refrain from taking his own dogs into the area.

10. Run the traps daily. This will permit the release of unwanted animals with the minimum amount of damage to them.

11. Many farmers will find it possible to run their trapline from horseback. This makes travel easier for them and will leave much less human sign.

12. Fox do much less damage to wildlife populations than most people realize and afford very fine sport for many Iowa hunters. Therefore, with the exception of the individual animals which have changed their habits so that they are living at the expense of man and thus must be removed, it might be well to give the fox the credit that he truly deserves as a great game animal. Limiting the take to the surplus in the various areas and leaving a breeding stock, will insure a supply of the animals for the following winters sports. As a hunter regards the fox as Iowa's big game animal that is available to any and all that wish to seek him out.

13. Some of the animal calls that are now on the market, such as those available from S. V. Higley, Burley, Idaho, and the Pied Piper Animal Call, made by A. L. Lindsey of Texas have proven to work well in calling coyotes and fox, and offer some thrills for those who learn to call predators.

14. The best method to use in killing either a coyote or fox in a trap is to tap the animal a sharp blow across the bridge of the nose, stunning him. The hatchet handle makes a good tool to do this with. After the animal has been knocked unconscious, turn him on his side and bring the heel of one foot down hard on the animal's side, just behind his front leg, and stand with all weight on that foot for a couple of minutes. This will stop the animal's heart action, is quick and humane, does not bloody up the pelt or the trap site, and leaves the animal in better condition for carrying.

15. The dry dirt collected in the fall for winter trapping operations may be made more freeze-proof by the addition of calcium chloride at the rate of one quart to eighteen quarts of dry dirt. Chloride, however, is one of the salts, and will cause untreated traps to rust.





## CONCLUSION

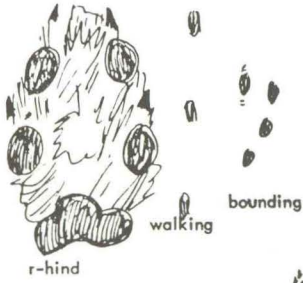
In conclusion, perhaps the quickest and best method to become a first class trapper is to first be very careful to leave as little possible human scent and sign in the area that is to be trapped. Second, make the sets with a minimum of disturbance and leave the area as much like it was before the set was made. Third and most important, study the animal that is to be trapped until you know all of his characteristics and all of his habits. It is impossible to do any work, or to handle any machinery until one learns the details involved. This is true of the trapping business as well. Until one studies the details involved, and learns quite a bit of the habits and habitats of the various furbearers he should not expect success to be immediate. This statement is not meant to discourage any trapper from starting out in the sport, but is intended to stress the importance of study and research to learn all possible facts about the furbearers and their habits.

Therefore, one should take to the field with necessary equipment prepared not to take all furbearers the first season, but with the possibilities of perhaps making a few catches, and with unlimited possibilities of learning a great deal about predators, furbearers, and all of our game animals. It will be found that some time must be spent afield before one becomes an expert in any one field of trapping. But when looking back on the experiences enjoyed while attempting to take predators or furbearers, it will be agreed by all that each moment in the field produced some information, or some little detail of interest that will be remembered for a long time.

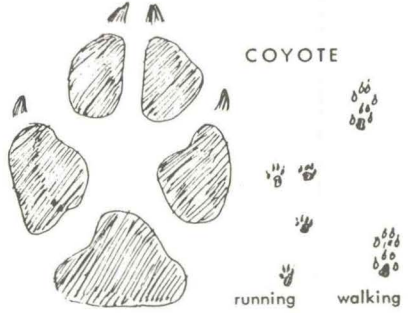
Lots of luck on your trapline, whether you be a mink specialist, or a farm boy in quest of the muskrat!!!

# COMMON TRACKS

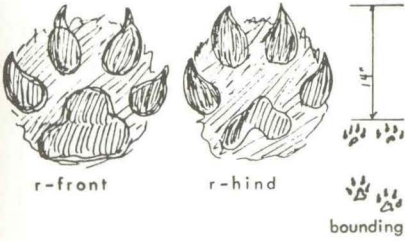
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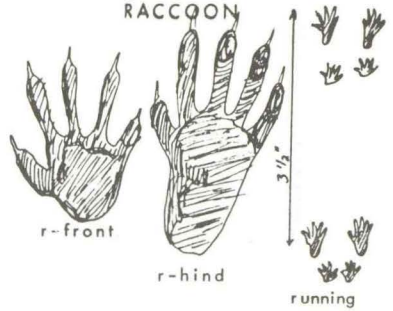
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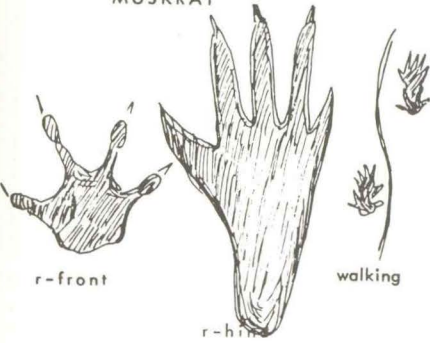
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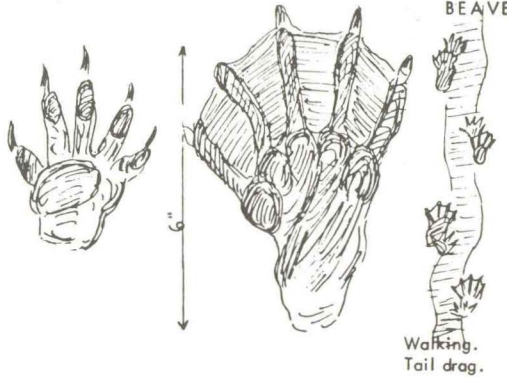
RACCOON



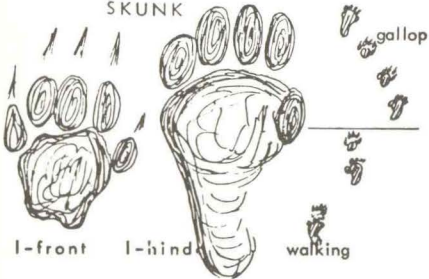
MUSKRAT



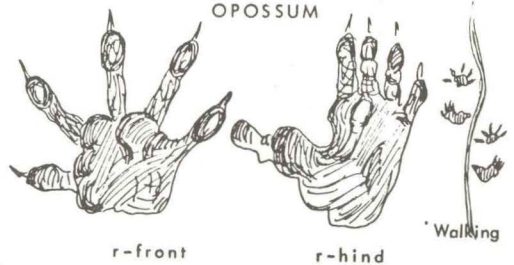
BEAVER



SKUNK



OPOSSUM



## HELPFUL TABLES

KIND	CLASS	TRAP	BAIT	LURE	PELTING
Coyote	Long-Haired predator	Victor - 3N Double spring	Fresh meat Spoiled meat Fish oil Rotten eggs Mice	Urine, Coyote	Cased
Red and Grey Fox	Long-Haired predator	Victor - No. 2 Underspring	Fresh Meats Spoiled meat Fish oil Rotten eggs Mice	Urine, Coyote or Fox	Cased
Mink and Weasel	Short-haired	Any No. 2 trap Any 0 to 1½	Fresh fish Fresh meat	Commercial	Cased
Muskrat	Short-haired	No. 1 or No. 2½ trap with stop-loss  Conibear	Apples or Carrots Tender twigs	Anise oil Commercial	Cased
Beaver	Short-haired	No. 44 Blake and Lamb, with teeth No. 4 double spring Conibear	Tender Willow or cottonwood twigs	Beaver Castor Commercial	Open and round
Raccoon	Long-haired	No. 2 double spring	Meat or fish	Commercial	Cased
Opossum	Long-haired	Any 1 to No. 2 trap	Spoiled meat or fish	Commercial	Cased

# NOTES

# NOTES

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