

Chapter 17

Learning Objectives

You should be able to:

- Recognize good sets for beaver including the castor mound set
- Learn how to handle beaver pelts
- Understand that beaver traps and beaver trapping can be hazardous
- Recognize problems associated with canine trapping
- Learn methods for dispatching animals

Chapter 17

Special Considerations

Beaver Trapping

Beaver are one of the largest furbearers in Ohio. Trapping beaver is very similar to trapping muskrats except that the traps used to catch them are much larger and stronger.

The runway set is a good set for beaver. Beaver carve channels or runways in shallow water just like muskrats. Dens and lodges are also good places to catch beaver, as are the “climb out” spots where beaver leave the water.

Another good set for beaver is the castor mound set. This is sometimes called the “mud pie” set. To mark their territory, beaver make a small mound of mud, leaves, and other bottom debris on the shoreline. They deposit a scent from their glands, called castor glands, on the mound.

If you find a natural castor mound, this could be a good place to set a trap. The trap is placed under water where the beaver are climbing out. You can also make an artificial castor mound by placing a small pile of mud on the bank and adding some beaver lure to the mound.

Beaver pelts are handled differently than other furbearers. The best way to skin a beaver is to lay it on its back on a bench or table. Start by cutting off all four of the beaver’s feet at the ankle joint and making a cut all the way around the tail at the hairline. Then make a cut from the chin, straight down the center of the belly to the base of the tail. Cut around both sides of the vent. Remove the pelt by working it sideways off the animal. You will have to use your knife frequently because the pelt sticks tightly to the beaver. When you come to the legs, pull them backwards out of the pelt.

To stretch a beaver pelt, use a plywood board. A board 32 inches wide and 48 inches long will do. Use small nails to tack the pelt on the board. The beaver pelt is stretched in a round or oval shape. Start with one nail in the nose, then pull the sides of the pelt out with a nail in each side. Then put a nail in the tail. Keep adding nails to the pelt as you form it into an oval shape. Keep the nails about one-eighth of an inch from the edge of the pelt. Use enough nails so that there is no more than an inch between the nails when you are done.

Beaver trapping is not recommended for beginning trappers and especially not for younger trappers. Beaver traps are quite heavy, large, and powerful. They can present a hazard. A certain degree of physical strength is required to handle these traps. Beaver trapping itself can be hazardous, especially trapping them under the ice. The danger of falling through the ice always exists.

Beaver Trapping

Beaver make piles of mud and debris on the shoreline to mark their territories. These are called castor mounds.



You can make a set for beaver by placing a trap underwater at a castor mound. You can also make an artificial castor mound to attract beaver.



Beaver carve channels where they swim much like muskrats do. You can make a good set for beaver by placing a bodygrip trap in the bottom of the channel.



After you have placed the trap in the channel, lay a pole on the surface of the water directly above the trap. This will make the beaver dive into the trap.



Beaver are skinned differently than other animals. Cut off all four of the beaver's feet, cut around the hairline at the tail, then cut from the chin to the tail going around the vent. Do not make cuts out to the beaver's legs.



The pelt is removed from the beaver working from the belly toward the back of the animal. When you come to the legs, work them out backwards through the holes left when you cut off the feet. It is helpful to have some kind of trough to lay the beaver in while you work on it. Beaver are very fat and require a lot of fleshing.

A piece of plywood makes a good beaver stretcher. Beaver are stretched in an oval shape and tacked on the board with small nails. Be sure to use a few nails to close up the leg holes on the pelt.



Canine Trapping

Ohio's canine furbearers include the red fox, gray fox, and coyote. There are some problems associated with canine trapping that can be of concern to a beginning trapper and especially to a younger trapper.

It is well within the means of beginning trappers and younger trappers to catch and handle fox. Coyotes, however, are much larger and can be much more aggressive than fox. Trappers who target coyotes should be sure of their ability to handle these animals.

Another problem with trapping canines is the possibility that you could catch a dog in a canine set. Since dogs are canines too, they are susceptible to canine sets. The more experience you gain in trapping, the easier it will be to avoid catching dogs. For this reason, it may be a good idea for beginning trappers to steer away from trapping canines.

Catching someone's pet dog can cause problems for the trapper and the sport of trapping in general. This can be avoided to a large extent by not setting traps close to occupied dwellings. However, there are a number of free roaming and feral dogs in Ohio. It is possible to encounter these dogs almost anywhere. Some of these dogs can be quite large and quite aggressive. Releasing a large, aggressive dog from a trap requires some degree of strength. Younger trappers may not be able to handle large dogs.

Dispatching Animals

Bodygrip traps are designed to dispatch, or kill, the animals they catch. Foothold traps used in or near the water can often be rigged to drown the animals that are caught in them. In other instances, animals will be held alive in the traps.

It is a trapper's responsibility to dispatch these animals quickly and humanely. Shooting the animal through the brain with a small caliber bullet is a good way to accomplish this. A .22 caliber firearm is suitable for dispatching animals. However, you must be at least 16 years of age to carry a firearm in the field without adult supervision.

Another humane method for dispatching an animal is to strike it at the base of the skull with a heavy, blunt object. This blow will render the animal unconscious. In this condition, the animal cannot feel pain. If this blow is delivered with sufficient force, it may dispatch the animal. If not, a subsequent blow to the skull will dispatch it while it is still in an unconscious state.

A heavy stick makes a good tool for dispatching animals. The stick must be large enough so that it does not break, and heavy enough to deliver a fatal blow. A broom handle would be too light, but an old shovel handle would work well. If you drill a hole through one end of the stick and attach a loop of cord, it will be easier to carry as you check your traps. It also makes a handy walking stick to help you get around on your trapline.



Chapter 17 Study Guide

Review Questions

1. Beaver trapping can be hazardous and should be done by experienced trappers or with the help of an adult. True or False.
2. Beaver pelts are skinned differently from other Ohio furbearers. True or False.
3. A common beaver set not used for other furbearers is the _____ mound set.
4. To humanely dispatch a trapped furbearer, a heavy blunt object can be used to strike the animal at the base of the _____ with as much force as possible.