

2019-20 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #20-3

The Fur Harvest Survey provides estimates of (1) numbers of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, (2) values of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, and (3) distribution of the harvest among resource users. This project is supported in part by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program (Project W-99-R, Study X).

METHODS

State law requires licensed fur buyers to maintain records and submit reports of all raw furs purchased. We mailed report forms and written instructions to licensed buyers about 10 days before the opening of the muskrat trapping season. Buyers who failed to report by the deadline were sent 2 reminders by first class mail.

Buyers provided estimates of (1) raw fur purchases from Illinois hunters and trappers, (2) average pelt prices for all sizes and grades, and (3) percentages of pelts taken by fur hunters. We corrected estimates for non-response and out-of-state pelt sales reported by Conat et al. (2016). Individuals who captured a river otter or bobcat were required to purchase a permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Department issued 44 permits to fur buyers during 2019-20. Based on a 73% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 93,647, an increase of 43% from 2018-19 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers increased 47% to \$644,883. Raccoon, beaver and coyote accounted for 86% of the total harvest and 90% of its value. Coyote pelts were just over 14% of the total harvest and comprised 44% of the total fur value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 1% for striped skunk to 42% for raccoon; they were intermediate for opossum (10%), red fox (17%)

and coyote (27%). Hunters accounted for 42% of the raccoon harvest in 2019-20.

Today, pelt values are driven mainly by demand from foreign markets such as Russia and China. Economic conditions, monetary exchange rates, political events and severity of winters in overseas countries shape fur markets in North America and contribute to their volatility. Overall, demand for wild furs remained poor during 2019-20 because of economic conditions in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Pelt values were still good for western coyote and bobcat but overall, prices remained at very low levels.

Sales of trapping licenses increased to 6718 in 2019-20, up from 6463 in 2018-19. During 2018-19, approximately 5,041 raccoon hunters spent 83,632 days afield and 22,631 coyote hunters spent 188,764 days afield (Williams et al. 2019).

Pelts sales fell short of historical averages during the 2019-20 season.

LITERATURE CITED

Williams, B.D., L.K. Campbell, C.A. Miller and L.J. Stephens. 2019. 2018-2019 Illinois Trapper Report: Harvest, Effort, and Marketing Practices. Job Completion Report, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration W-112-R-28. INHS Technical Report 2019 (37). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, IL. 61pp.

Wahlberg, E.M., B. D. Williams and C.A. Miller. 2019. 2018-2019 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Technical Report 30. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2019-20 vs. 2018-19.

| Species | <u>Number of pelts sold^a</u> | | <u>Change in sales from 2018-19^b</u> | <u>Average price per pelt (dollars)</u> | | <u>Total value to fur-takers (dollars)</u> | | <u>Change in value from 2019-20 - 2018-19</u> | |
|---------------|---|-------------------|---|---|---------|--|-------------------|---|--------------------|
| | 2019-20 | 2018-19 | | 2019-20 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2018-19 (dollars) | | |
| Muskrat | 9,234 | 4,615 | (+100) | 2.77 | 2.87 | 25,578.18 | 13,245.05 | +12,333.13 | (+93) |
| Mink | 818 | 594 | (+38) | 3.13 | 3.71 | 2560.34 | 2203.74 | +356.60 | (+16) |
| Raccoon | 55,070 | 44,889 | (+23) | 4.03 | 4.35 | 221,932.10 | 195,267.15 | +26,664.95 | (+14) |
| Opossum | 630 | 295 | (+114) | 0.33 | 0.63 | 207.90 | 185.85 | +22.05 | (+12) |
| Red fox | 462 | 380 | (+22) | 6.97 | 7.44 | 3220.14 | 2827.20 | +392.94 | (+14) |
| Gray fox | 5 | 4 | (+25) | 7.00 | 13.67 | 35.00 | 54.68 | -19.68 | (-36) |
| Beaver | 12,177 | 3,749 | (+225) | 6.47 | 6.70 | 78,785.19 | 25,118.30 | +53,666.89 | (+214) |
| River otter | 1174 ^c | 1060 ^c | (+11) | 17.02 | 22.05 | 15,300.98 | 23,373.00 | -3391.52 | (-15) |
| Striped skunk | 501 | 355 | (+41) | 4.31 | 5.61 | 2159.31 | 1991.55 | +167.76 | (+8) |
| Weasel | 0 | 0 | (-) | - | - | 0 | 0 | - | (-) |
| Coyote | 13,255 | 8994 | (+47) | 21.20 | 18.13 | 281,006.00 | 163,061.22 | +117,944.78 | (+72.3) |
| Badger | 15 | 37 | (-60) | 9.27 | 5.30 | 139.05 | 196.10 | -57.05 | (-29) |
| Bobcat | 306 ^{cd} | 306 ^{cd} | (-) | 30.32 | 30.62 | 9277.92 | 9369.72 | -91.80 | (-1 ^d) |
| Total/mean | 93,372 | 65,278 | (+44) | | | 644,882.61 | 436,893.56 | +207,989.05 | (+48) |

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by Conat et al. (2016).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

^cBased on sales of Temporary Pelt Permits.

^dThird bobcat season – data not comparable