

2012-13 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #12-3

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 up to 2 reminders by first class mail and another by certified letter.

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. Trappers who captured a river otter were required to purchase an Otter Registration Permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits to trappers.

Results and Discussion

The Department issued 152 permits to fur buyers during 2012-13. Based on a 97% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 200,913, an increase of 11.4% from 2011-12 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers increased 62.1% to \$2,553,199.30. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 86% of the total harvest and 80% of its value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 2% for striped skunk to 64% for coyote; they were intermediate for opossum (17%), red fox (17%) and gray fox (29%). Hunters accounted for the same proportion of the raccoon harvest in 2012-13 as 2011-12 (49%).

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.

Favorable global markets lifted pelt prices to levels not seen since the late 1970's and early 1980's. Sales of trapping licenses increased accordingly (from 4,996 in 2011-12 to 6,384 in 2012-13). This was the greatest number of licenses sold since 1988-89. During 2011-12, approximately 10,100 raccoon hunters spent 104,000 days afield and 31,000 coyote hunters spent 293,000 days afield (Alessi et al. 2012).

The first modern season for trapping river otter occurred in 2012-13, with a harvest of 2,002 pelts (approximately 13% of the statewide population). Trappers targeting river otters also captured beavers, which contributed to a 67% increase in harvest of this species.

Pelt sales during 2012-13 were similar to long-term averages (since 1975-76) for striped skunk (99%), raccoon (77%) and badger (127%). Sales exceeded historic averages for beaver (203%) and coyote (165%) but lagged for muskrat (23%), mink (15%), opossum (23%), red fox (21%), gray fox (4%) and weasel (16%).

Literature Cited

Alessi, M.G., L.K. Campbell and C.A. Miller. 2012. Results of the 2011-12 Illinois hunter harvest survey. Job Completion Report, Project W-112-R-21, Study 101, Job 101.1. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2012-13 vs. 2011-12.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2011-12 ^b		Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2011-12 (dollars)	
	2012-13	2011-12			2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12		
Muskrat	32,453	22,303	+10,150	(+45.5)	9.65	6.80	313,171.45	151,660.40	+161,511.05	(+106.5)
Mink	1,193	2,910	-1,717	(-59.0)	16.80	13.00	20,042.40	37,830.00	-17,787.60	(-47.0)
Raccoon	139,879	138,705	+1,174	(+1.0)	12.30	8.85	1,720,511.70	1,227,539.25	+492,972.45	(+40.2)
Opossum	3,833	4,648	-815	(-17.5)	1.35	1.25	5,174.55	5,810.00	-635.45	(-10.9)
Red fox	923	694	+229	(+33.0)	29.95	19.80	27,643.85	13,741.20	+13,902.65	(+101.2)
Gray fox	87	47	+40	(+85.1)	22.90	15.85	1,992.30	744.95	+1,247.35	(+167.4)
Beaver	9,708	5,817	+3,891	(+66.9)	13.95	11.90	135,426.60	69,222.30	+66,204.30	(+95.5)
River otter	2,002 ^c	0 ^d	na	na	73.30	na	146,746.60	na	na	na
Striped skunk	544	670	-126	(-18.8)	3.30	2.95	1,795.20	1,976.50	-181.30	(-9.2)
Weasel	7	13	-6	(-46.2)	0.85	1.15	5.95	14.95	-9.00	(-60.2)
Coyote	10,246	4,572	+5,674	(+124.1)	17.60	14.45	180,329.60	66,065.40	+114,264.20	(+173.0)
Badger	38	27	+11	(+40.7)	9.45	10.00	359.10	270.00	+89.10	(+33.0)
Total/mean	200,913	180,406	+20,507	(+11.4)	12.70	8.70	2,553,199.30	1,574,874.95	+978,324.35	(+62.1)

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by the Illinois Trapper Survey, 2012-13 (Wildlife Harvest and Hunter Opinion Surveys, W-112-R).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

^cBased on sales of Otter Registration Permits.

^d2012-2013 was the first modern season for trapping river otter.