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Learning To Trap Again

Find water and you'll find furbearers

The smell of fall is hard to describe but unmistakable. Those who spend time outdoors in the fall hunting, fishing, trapping or just exploring know exactly the scent that I'm talking about. It's the crisp, cool air combined with the leaves falling, and that means trapping season has arrived. This month, my Learning To Trap Again journey focuses on common furbearers found in and around the water. While all furbearers naturally gravitate toward water, furbearers like muskrat, mink, beaver and raccoon live most of their lives in or near the water.

For any trapper who lives close to water, muskrats were probably the first species they ever trapped. Muskrats are a rodent, averaging 18 - 24 inches in length with a long, scaly, black tail. They are found wherever there is water in nearly every corner of the United States.

Targeting their houses or dens is one of the most effective ways to trap muskrats. Ponds, lakes and backwaters often have houses protruding above the surface, and streams and rivers will have bank dens. Feedbeds are another great place to find muskrats. They eat all types of aquatic vegetation including cattails, sedges, rushes and water lilies, but also snack on clams, mussels, crayfish and small fish when they can find them. Find the food source and you'll find muskrats. Some of the best traps to use are #1 Longsprings and #110/#120

Conibears.

Mink are vicious carnivores, with a long sleek body roughly two feet long, and will kill anything they think they can handle. They especially love muskrats. Though #1 Longsprings and #110/#120 Conibears also work great for mink, my personal favorite is the #1 and #1 1/2 Collspring simply because it has a little more holding power if a big 'coon comes along.

Blind sets work great for mink. Follow a creek, stream or pond edge and you'll eventually find something that will funnel mink and other animals. When you find it, you have the perfect mink set. If you're unable to find the right blind set, a baited set also works great. Any meat or fish will cause the mink to search and creates an ideal trap set.

Although raccoons can be found virtually anywhere there is food, you'll almost always find them along water. Blind sets and bait sets work well for raccoons, but box sets and live traps can also be very effective. Meat and fish will surely work but so does anything sweet as many of us have discovered with campground bandits. The important thing to understand with raccoons is that they are strong. Stake them well and make sure you have a trap that will hold them.

Nature's engineer, the beaver, is the
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largest rodent in North America with some weighing well over 60 pounds. Everything about them is made for life in the water, and you'll rarely find them far from it. Like muskrats, they can be targeted near their houses. On ponds, small lakes and marshes you'll find large beaver lodges made of sticks and mud along with dams and food caches. All of these are excellent places to start. Rivers and larger streams are a little trickier because they often create bank dens. However, even in these areas you'll see clear indicators of where they're eating with well-worn paths in the trees they're cutting. Nearly all of my beaver have come from these areas where they

leave the water on trails in search of their next meal. Because they are so large, beavers require heavy-duty traps like #330 Conibears or #4/#5 Collsprings or Double Longsprings.

There are countless ways to trap muskrats, mink, raccoon and beavers, and this is just a drop in the bucket to get you started. The great thing about trapping is that it's a personal evolution as you find your niche.

Up next for Learning to Trap Again: Snaring Predators and Willy Weasels.

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