

Bobcats do not fight traps like other animals

Asked about his most interesting trapping story, Goodland's Mike Hopper said it was probably the first bobcat he caught.

"Trapping cats is a different story," he said. "As you approach most animals, they don't want you near and they sometimes fight the trap, but the cat doesn't fight a set like that. I was within a few feet of the trap before I even knew I had a cat. They are truly the sneakiest."

"I have a respect for all furbearers that college could not give me. I have the most respect for a raccoon because they are one of our most tenacious animals we have in Kansas."

Hopper said the eastern part of the state still hunts coons with dogs, but not out here.

"An old trapper told me if a coon goes in the water, do not let your dog go in after it," he said, "and if you do, bet your paycheck on the coon, because he is going to win."

Another animal Hopper has respect for is the Swift fox.

"Pound for pound, the swift fox is the meanest animal in North America," he said. "When you catch one, you would think you had the devil himself in one of the traps."

— Tom Betz, *The Goodland Star-News*



Mike Hopper, a fur harvester and wildlife officer, showed off two live raccoons he trapped near Goodland. Hopper, who is a state conservation officer, traps in northwest Kansas.

Fur harvesting part of small animal

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With abundant furbearer populations throughout most of Kansas, furharvesting opportunities abound, and while there are few who do this, it is an opportunity to really get close to nature, said Mike Hopper, natural resource officer in northwest Kansas.

"Furbearers are probably one of our most under-utilized natural resources, and the benefits of their harvest are numerous," Hopper said.

Hopper said he has been actively involved in furharvesting for the past six years since he has been in Goodland.

He said he was introduced into fur trapping in Wyoming where he was a police officer before coming back to Kansas. He said he learned a lot about trapping from two old timers who worked on a ranch.

"I did not get started there," Hopper said, "but it did not take long after I became the game warden here that I got lots of calls about nuisance animals and I did not have any traps."

He said most of the calls are about wild cats and skunks.

"I asked around about traps," he said, "and a man from St. Francis who wanted to get out of

fur harvesting said he worked with Mel Madorin, the regional supervisor.

"Mel got me started and he collected traps. When I moved here he was dealing with nuisance animals, coons, coyotes and skunks mainly."

"When I started I would catch the animals and transport them somewhere else to be released."

Hopper said he got into the fur harvesting the fall of his first year and has been trapping coyotes, fox, badger, bobcat, coons and skunks. He said occasionally he gets an opossum.

"Beaver trapping is tough because we don't have the water here," he said, "and it is the same for muskrat and mink. I have trapped for beaver east of here."

Hopper said there is year-round trapping and hunting season for coyotes.

The season for furbearer hunting or trapping of badger; bobcat; gray, red, swift fox; mink; muskrat; opossum; raccoon; striped skunk; and weasel is Nov. 14 to Feb. 15, Hopper said.

The license costs \$20.15 for an adult, \$12.15 for a junior license (under 16) and \$252.15 for a nonresident. A nonresident bobcat permit can be purchased for \$102.15, allowing the hunter to bag one animal.

He said a furharvester license is required to

hunt, trap or pursue (trap) furbearers or to sell their pelts. Those born on or after July 1, 1966, must complete a furharvester education course approved by the Department of Wildlife and Parks. Course information is available by calling a wildlife officer or the state office in Pratt (620) 672-5911 or at www.kdwp.state.ks.us.

Hopper said he put on a couple of furharvester programs last year with one in Sherman County, one in Cheyenne County. He has done classes for the kids outdoor skills programs.

The State Department of Wildlife and Parks sees furharvesting — during the legal seasons — as a primary means of population and damage control.

Hopper doesn't think a lot of people he knows actually make a living out of Furharvesting, and for him it is more of a hobby.

"I generally trap by myself," he said. "It is cool to watch the day come to life. It is neat to watch and observe, and I have an appreciation for all the furbearers. It is great that we still have these animals we can actively pursue in our state."

"It is better to witness the animals in the wild yourself to have an appreciation. Wildlife should be managed as long as laws and ethics are applied. That is where my job comes in when people don't have a respect for wildlife."

Hopper said the number of traps he puts out depends on the amount of time he takes off. He has run as many as 60 to 65 traps a day. Now that he is doing his own skinning and stretching he thinks 45 traps is a bunch.

He said some trappers boil their traps to get all the human scent off and some use a dye to keep the rust off. He said some rust is OK. To set the trap you have to have a stake or a drag.

"The more traps you set the longer it takes to run them," he said. "It doesn't matter if you are not feeling well, you are sick or the weather is bad you have to run the traps everyday."

"If you don't want to do it, pull your traps. I think it is something for the benefit of the wildlife. I play by the rules and if I am sick I pull the traps, or I get someone else who I trust to run the traps who would have a license."

He said the traps have to have a name tag with the owner's name. If a person plans to set a trap they have to check it every 24 hours to be sure anything that is caught does not starve to death or die because of neglect.

The catch will vary from day to day he said, and storms and stuff may affect the animals and you may not catch anything. A weather pressure front or the moon phase has an effect, and also long periods of cold weather.

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