



# New Jersey Furbearer Management Newsletter Spring-Summer 2020

## New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife Upland Wildlife and Furbearer Project



### COVID-19

All NJ Hunter Education Classes are suspended until further notice. [Subscribe to the Hunting or Education E-mail Lists](#) to receive updates.

At this point, it's impossible to guess when (or if) conventions for any of the state trapping associations will be held. Consult the *Trapper's Post*, *Trapper and Predator Caller* or check on the internet on the various websites for each state's trapping associations.

#### Remember:

- To trap or use a cable restraints a person must have first passed a Fish and Wildlife-approved trapper education course which included use of cable restraints and carry the certificate while trapping.
- Any person must be at least 12 years of age in order to obtain a trapping license.

**TAKE A KID TRAPPING!**



#### In This Issue:

- Changes in reporting procedures for Coyotes and Gray Foxes
- Identifying Mammal Skulls
- Cleaning Skulls for Display
- Trail Cameras? Something to do outdoors while home-bound?
- Heavy Otter Update
- Hooping a Beaver Pelt

As this issue of the New Jersey Fish and Wildlife's Furbearer e-Newsletter was being written, we are in full swing experiencing the very serious world-wide COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. In these unprecedented times, we should all remember to practice safe social distancing and to think before we act when it comes to simple acts such as grocery shopping, stopping at the gas station, or going through a drive-thru lane. We still have the great outdoors to share, with some exceptions.

By Executive Order 118, Governor Murphy closed all NJ State Parks and Forests as well as all County Parks to the public. All NJDFW Wildlife Offices and archery, rifle and shotgun ranges are also closed to the public, however Wildlife Management Areas remain open for active and passive recreation.

Also, the trout fishing should be outstanding this year. The Division began releasing rainbow trout into the normally trout stocked streams and lakes this spring and has continued ahead of the normal schedule. The trout fishing season was opened several weeks early (catch and release only until April 11) to encourage people to get out of their houses and get out to the brooks, streams and lakes. Yes, we still need to practice the rule of social distancing. A fishing rod distance (6 feet) apart is the rule of thumb.

## Changes in reporting procedures for Coyote and Gray Fox

Coyotes harvested by any method or on a nuisance/damage complaint must be reported to a New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife within 24 hours. Please note that the reporting procedures from past years has changed! Coyote take must now be reported via Automatic Harvest Reporting System (AHRS). To report either a coyote harvest call **1-855-I HUNT NJ (1-855-448-6865)**, or via your computer or Smartphone at [www.NJ.WildlifeLicense.com](http://www.NJ.WildlifeLicense.com). Coyotes should no longer be reported to regional Division Law Enforcement Offices or Division offices. Remember: coyote (but not fox) may be taken opportunistically while spring turkey hunting. Report coyote harvest via the AHRS.

While not yet required by the State Game Code, the Division would appreciate harvest reports for gray fox using the same reporting system as for coyote. There is no need to report red fox harvests.

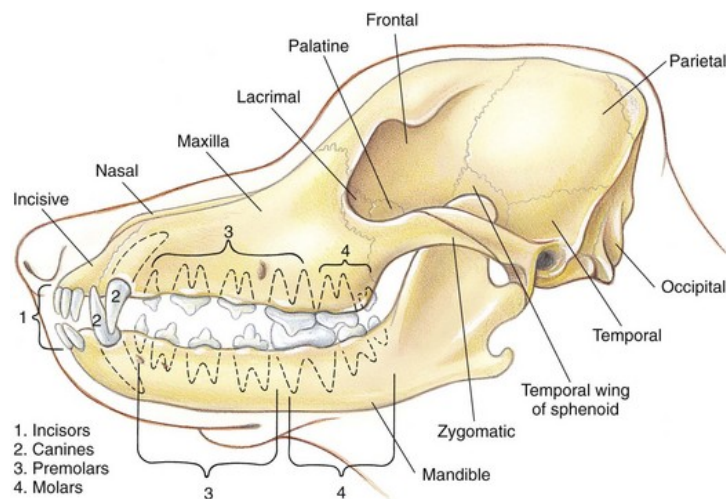
## Identifying Mammal Skulls



Often someone will be out walking the woods, hunting or fishing and find a skull with no other bones nearby. Based on requests to ID the animal and the accompanying skull photo, it seems very often to be the skull of a Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), a very common animal in New Jersey and that is found just about everywhere from urban to suburban to completely wilderness settings.

Most trappers are fairly familiar with which skull belongs to which animal, simply because in the process of skinning their catch they get to see the teeth and the shape of the skull up close. They have the added benefit of knowing what animal it is in the first place. Quite a few trappers who collect skulls, clean them and keep them for display. For those individuals who aren't familiar with how to tell one mammal skull from another here's a short tutorial.

The upper (U) and lower (L) jaws, or mandible of any animal/mammal include the teeth types that are included in what is known as a **Dental Formula**. For instance, if you found the skull pictured above, you could simply count the numbers of molars, premolars and incisors in the upper mandible and it would tell you that the animal skull was that of a Virginia opossum. Of course, many related mammals (e.g., short-tailed weasel, long-tailed weasel, mink and striped skunk) share the same dental formulas. In that case the observer would need to use the relative size of the skull to help determine the species of animal. In some cases, it may still be impossible for the observer to determine the exact species (i.e., overlap in size between male short-tail weasels and female long-tail weasels), but the observer would at least know that it is a weasel skull.



	Incisors	Canines	Premolars	Molars	Total U Total L	Total	Common Names
U L	5-5 4-4	1-1 1-1	3-3 3-3	4-4 4-4	26 24	50	Opossum
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	4-4 4-4	2-2 3-3	20 22	42	Coyote, Red and Gray Fox Black Bear
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	4-4 4-4	2-2 2-2	20 20	40	Raccoon
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	4-4 4-4	1-1 2-2	18 20	38	Marten, Fisher
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	4-4 3-3	1-1 2-2	18 18	36	River Otter
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	3-3 3-3	1-1 2-2	16 18	34	Striped Skunk, Mink, Short-tailed and Long-tailed Weasels
U L	0-0 3-3	0-0 1-1	3-3 3-3	3-3 3-3	12 20	32	Whitetail Deer
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	3-3 2-2	1-1 1-1	16 14	30	Mountain Lion, Domestic Cat
U L	3-3 3-3	1-1 1-1	2-2 2-2	1-1 1-1	14 14	28	Bobcat
U L	2-2 1-1	0-0 0-0	3-3 2-2	3-3 3-3	16 12	28	Hares & Jackrabbits Rabbits
U L	1-1 1-1	0-0 0-0	2-2 1-1	3-3 3-3	12 10	22	Woodchuck, Eastern Grey Squirrel
U L	1-1 1-1	0-0 0-0	1-1 1-1	3-3 3-3	10 10	20	Beaver, Porcupine, Nutria, Eastern Chipmunk
U L	1-1 1-1	0-0 0-0	0-0 0-0	3-3 3-3	8 8	16	Muskrat

Some mammals (fisher and some canines) have another skull aspect that might be of interest, the sagittal crest. The sagittal crest is a raised ridge of skull bone on the top rear of the skull. Males of certain species are the only sex that exhibit the pronounced sagittal crest on their skull. A quick internet search for a skull image of the animal you think the skull belongs to may be a help. In fact, there are several internet sites (ex.: [www.skullsunlimited.com](http://www.skullsunlimited.com)) where you can find images of just about any skull from any species of animal or bird that you can imagine.

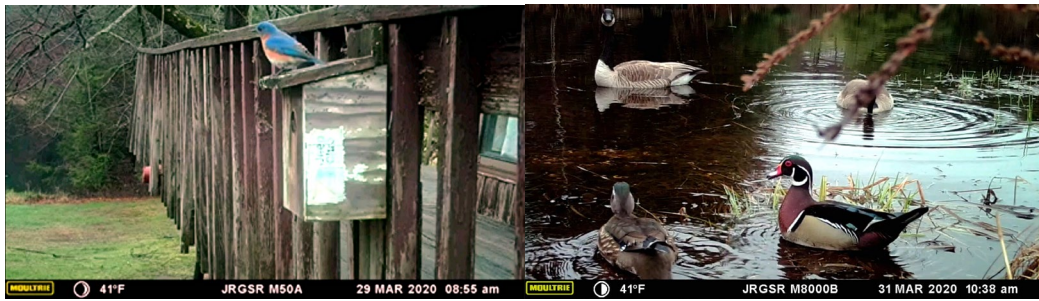
### Cleaning Skulls for Display

In most cases the process of cleaning and preserving the animal skull simply takes time and of course, a place to be able to store the skull while in the process of cleaning. If you were to type “cleaning and preserving animal skulls” into your computer search bar, you would likely come up with numerous sources from which to learn how to clean the skull, most of them with clear directions and pictures. Of course, cleaning skulls is not for everyone and if you wanted to have someone else clean and prepare the skull for you there are taxidermists who will handle the task for you, at a cost of course.

Trappers with an interest in using teeth of their harvested furbearers for jewelry might use their imagination here. The bright orange incisors of a beaver make striking earrings, that is, if your significant other is into this sort of thing!

### **Trail Cameras? Something to do outdoors while home-bound?**

In past issues we have discussed the use of trail cameras and how much you can learn from the pictures that your camera takes. Well, now is a good time to put your camera out there! Even if you do not live near large tracts of wooded or marsh public land you might be surprised what you will find living in your suburban neighborhood. Set up the camera along a small stream near your home and you will likely get photos of many different animals or birds. A couple of drops of beaver castor or other animal scent will have just about any critter stopping to check where the smell is coming from. Set up the camera facing a bird house, or your birdbath. Setting the trail cam to take video and you will learn even more. Use your imagination (within reason, of course). It is recommended that you secure your camera securely and lock it but otherwise a short trip to check your trail camera in the neighbor's small woodlot (with permission of course) can net you some pretty nice photos or videos of common animals or animals you did not have a clue were even there! It is something to think about to get you out of the house and outside.



### **Heavy Otter Update**

In last year's issue, we discussed otter body weights documented since 2005-06. Until this past season, the heaviest otter weighed in at 10.98 kg (24 lbs., 3 oz.) and was taken from Estell Manor in Atlantic County. This past season, an otter weighed in at 11.26 kg (24 lbs., 10.4 oz.) and was taken from Commercial Township in Cumberland County. Male otters are significantly larger than female otters of the same age class.

### **Hooping a Beaver Pelt**

Beaver pelts traditionally were stretched in the circular shape on a wooden hoop by the North American trappers. Those men used the wooden hoop simply because suitably flexible trees (usually willow or birch) were readily available along the beaver flowages, and they laced each of the raw pelts inside the hoops to dry in appropriate round shape. Today, we stretch our beaver pelts by tacking them on a partial sheet of plywood that has been stenciled with the approximate size markings or on a metal hoop that is commercially produced for the purpose.

Most beaver trappers have probably thought about making a hooped beaver pelt for display or even for sale, especially when fur prices are down. It is not a hard job but it does take a bit of patience and some skill with the hands, which, most trappers possess anyway! The tools needed are pretty basic, and you will need:

- Your tanned beaver pelt (a 40" pelt has a 5-6' perimeter; a 70" pelt has a 9-10' perimeter)
- A hand saw of some type.
- A good sharp knife
- A leather punch
- Leather/rawhide lacing (about 20 feet).

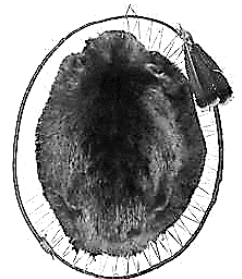
There are several ways to construct hoops and if you search on the internet or have seen ads in trade magazines you have seen the different designs. One of the most important things to know before starting is that willow works best for hoops, as it is very flexible when freshly cut. Some of the methods of making the hoops can be quite time consuming and several require quite an array of different tools to construct the hoop. The following design is fairly easy, and the finished product is very attractive for display.

*How to bend the hoop:*

1. Cut two green  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch diameter willow branches. Try not to get them too much thicker as bending is then more difficult. A bit of trial and error figuring for length of each branch may well be a part of the initial guesswork. You will need to cut them long enough so the ends overlap one other by about 4 to 6 inches so when joined end-to-end will make a hoop about 6 or 7 inches larger than the oval beaver pelt you are hooping. Always keep in mind that the proper size hoop should have a clearance of about three inches between the pelt's edge and the hoop.
2. Carefully peel the bark off the sticks. Placing them in a tub of water until they are soft enough to bend easily into a half-circle may help in this case.
3. Match the thick end of one branch to the thinner end of the second branch portion of the hoop you are constructing. Whittle and flatten 4" or so from end of each section so they can rest against each other flat side to flat side.
4. With the flat ends together, tie one end of a 12-inch strip of the leather lacing around the two ends, making sure to evenly lace tightly around the two pieces. Keep the wraps laced tightly against each other. Slip the last two inches of the lace end under the final several wraps and pull tight to lock the wraps in place. A bit of experimentation may be in order here on your first attempt. Keep in mind the size of the beaver pelt for which the hoop is being constructed! Pay attention to this step so you can see that the size of your hoop is right for the size of the pelt.
5. Hang the finished loop out to dry in your garage, fur shed or somewhere it will not get wet for about a week. The hoop will be ready for lacing when it feels dry and hard, and does not twist easily.

*Lacing on the beaver pelt:*

1. On your leather punch, find the punch hole that matches your lace diameter and punch holes through the pelt about  $\frac{1}{4}$ " and spaced about 3" apart completely around the pelt. Use your best judgement in this case. A bit of planning before you begin punching holes will ensure that the holes are evenly spaced. Punching holes too close to the edge may cause the lacing to rip through the pelt.
2. Place pelt fur side down inside the hoop. Run one end of the lacing through one of the punched holes in the pelt and pull the end out and around the hoop. Tie the end of the lacing to the hoop.
3. Loosely thread the lace through the punched holes in the pelt and around the hoop. There is a bit of experimentation at this point as well. Take your time and be patient.
4. Adjust the pelt so it sets evenly in the center of the hoop by loosening or pulling up the lace until there is an even spacing between the pelt and hoop.
5. Lastly, begin tightening the lacing by starting at the beginning knot and pulling the lace snug all around the hoop - making sure to keep the spacing between the pelt and the hoop nice and even completely around the pelt. Remember, do not pull the lace too tightly or it could rip out the punched holes in the pelt. Pull just snug enough to take the wrinkles out of the pelt. Once you have completed the full circle around the hoop, simply tie the end of the lace to the hoop. Take time with you knots and lacing and make them neat. Your hooped beaver pelt is finished!





### **Bobcat and Fisher Capture Reporting**

Remember to report any bobcat and/or fisher captures ASAP! It is mandatory to report any and all bobcats that were trapped incidentally within 24 hours by calling **1 (877) 927-6337**. However, please report any bobcats caught in a cable restraint as soon as you find in it! It's important for the survival of the animal as well as the image of trapping in New Jersey. A Division staff member will come and immobilize, tag, take DNA samples and assure that the animal is healthy prior to release.

*The New Jersey DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife is the professional, environmental agency overseeing the protection and management of the State's fish and wildlife resource to maximize their long-term biological, recreational and economic value of all New Jerseyans*



NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF  
**Fish and Wildlife**