

2022-23 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #23-3

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, Job 102.7 and 102.8).

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 classmail or by email.

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 21 permits to fur buyers during 2022-23. Based on an 86% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 28,754, an increase of 9% from 2021-22 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers increased 44% to \$192,307. Muskrat, raccoon and beaver accounted for 84% of the total harvest and 69% of its value. The sale of raccoon pelts was higher in 2022-23, despite low prices. Beaver also saw higher prices and harvest in 2022.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 0 for skunk to 34%

for coyote; they were intermediate for opossum (9%), red fox (12%) and raccoon (31%).

Today, pelt values are low across the board. Demand from foreign markets in Russia and China are volatile due to world events. Economic conditions, monetary exchange rates, political events and severity of winters in overseas countries shape fur markets in North America and contribute to their extreme volatility.

Overall, demand for wild furs remained poor during 2022-23 because of economic conditions in major markets and a surplus of goods from past seasons. Pelt values were up slightly for raccoon, opossum and badger, but down for muskrat, mink, skunk and coyote. Beaver and river otter prices made the most notable increase. Overall, prices and harvest remained at low levels.

Sales of trapping licenses increased to 6932 in 2022-23, up from 6580 in 2021-22. Estimates of coyote and raccoon hunters for 2022 were not available from the Illinois Natural History Survey at the time of writing due to circumstances beyond their control. In 2021-22, 5,437 raccoon hunters spent 60,502 days afield and 19,550 coyote hunters spent 178,409 days afield (Walberg et al. 2023). Based on the number of pelts sold, the number of coyote and raccoon hunters, effort and harvest were likely down for 2022-23.

Pelts sales fell short of historical averages during the 2022-23 season.

LITERATURE CITED

Wahlberg, E. M., C.A. Miller, L. J. Stephens and B.D. Williams. 2023. 2021-2022 Illinois Trapper Report: Harvest, Effort, and Marketing Practices. Job Completion Report, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration W-112-R-28. INHS Technical Report 2023 (34). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, IL. 78pp.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois^a, 2022-23 vs. 2021-22.

Species	Number of Pelts Sold		Change in Sales		Average Price per Pelt (Dollars)		Total Value to Fur-Takers (Dollars)		Change in Value	
	2022-23 (#)	2021-22 (#)	Δ (#)	Δ (%)	mpv (2022-23)	mpv (2021-22)	value (2021-22)	value (2022-23)	Δ (#)	Δ (%)
muskrat	4,110	5,622	-1,512	-26.9%	\$2.39	\$3.12	\$17,540.64	\$9,822.90	-\$7,717.74	-44.0%
mink	168	267	-99	-37.1%	\$4.04	\$5.45	\$1,455.15	\$678.72	-\$776.43	-53.4%
raccoon	15,110	12,432	2,678	21.5%	\$3.48	\$2.66	\$33,069.12	\$52,582.80	\$19,513.68	59.0%
opossum	580	474	106	22.4%	\$1.22	\$1.15	\$545.10	\$707.60	\$162.50	29.8%
red fox	171	133	38	28.6%	\$7.34	\$8.40	\$1,117.20	\$1,255.14	\$137.94	12.3%
gray fox	3	0	3		\$25.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$75.00	\$75.00	
beaver	4,887	3,374	1,513	44.8%	\$14.28	\$7.39	\$24,933.86	\$69,786.36	\$44,852.50	179.9%
otter ^b	1,165	911	254	27.9%	\$25.76	\$20.49	\$18,666.39	\$30,010.40	\$11,344.01	60.8%
skunk	363	264	99	37.5%	\$4.79	\$6.35	\$1,676.40	\$1,738.77	\$62.37	3.7%
weasel	1	0	1		\$8.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8.00	\$8.00	
coyote	1,817	2,592	-775	-29.9%	\$5.81	\$9.25	\$23,976.00	\$10,556.77	-\$13,419.23	-56.0%
badger	12	6	6	100.0%	\$12.00	\$9.00	\$54.00	\$144.00	\$90.00	166.7%
bobcat ^c	367	290	77	26.6%	\$40.71	\$36.25	\$10,512.50	\$14,940.57	\$4,428.07	42.1%
Total/Mean	28754	26365	2389	9.1%			\$ 133,546.36	\$ 192,307.03	\$ 58,760.67	44.0%

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

^c Based on sales of River Otter and bobcat Registration Permits.

^d Corrected formula error in 2021-22 mean pelt value.