

# 2023-24 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

## *Wildlife Diversity Program Note #24-3*

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 34 permits to fur buyers during 2023-24. Based on an 68% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 42,612, a 30% increase from 2022-23 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers increased 78% to \$374,009. Muskrat, raccoon and beaver accounted for 90% of the total harvest and 72% of its value. The sale of raccoon pelts was slightly higher in 2023-24, despite low prices. Beaver saw the biggest increase in harvest and bobcat pelt prices increased the most of any furbearer.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 0 for skunk to 31%

for raccoon; they were intermediate for opossum (11%), red fox (11%) and coyote (9%).

Today, pelt values remain mostly low with beaver and bobcat making the biggest increases. 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 2023-24 because of economic conditions in major markets and a surplus of goods from past seasons. Pelt values were up modestly for beaver, otter and bobcat, but remain very low for raccoon, muskrat, mink, skunk and coyote. Beaver, river otter and bobcat prices made the most notable increases. Overall, prices and harvest remained at low levels.

Sales of resident trapping licenses increased to 7163 in 2023-24, up from 6932 in 2022-23. Estimates of coyote and raccoon hunters for 2023 were not yet available from the Illinois Natural History Survey. In 2022-23, 4,596 raccoon hunters spent 52,087 days afield and 16,434 coyote hunters spent 118,937 days afield (Walberg et al. 2023). Based on the number of pelts sold in 2023-24, the number of coyote hunters and effort were likely down, and raccoon hunter effort and harvest were likely similar for 2023-24.

Pelt sales fell short of historical averages during the 2023-24 season.

### LITERATURE CITED

Wahlberg, E. M., C.A. Miller, L. J. Stephens and B.D. Williams. 2023. 2022-2023 Illinois Trapper Report: Harvest, Effort, and Marketing Practices. Job Completion Report, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration W-112-R-32. INHS Technical Report 2024 (10). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, IL. 62pp.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois<sup>a</sup>, 2023-24 vs. 2022-23.

Species	Number of Pelts Sold <sup>a</sup>		Change in Sales <sup>b</sup>		Average Price Per Pelt (Dollars)		Total Value to Fur-Takers (Dollars)		Change in Value	
	2023-24 (#)	2022-23 <sup>d</sup> (#)	Δ (#)	Δ (%)	mpv (2023-24)	mpv (2022-23)	value (2022-23)	value (2023-24)	Δ (#)	Δ (%)
Muskrat	7,815	4,745	3,070	64.7	2.56	2.39	\$11,340.55	\$20,006.40	\$8,665.85	76.4
Mink	384	194	190	97.9	4.27	4.04	\$783.76	\$1,639.68	\$855.92	109.2
Raccoon	20,946	17,443	3,503	20.1	3.93	3.48	\$60,701.64	\$82,317.78	\$21,616.14	35.6
Opossum	758	669	89	13.3	1.33	1.22	\$816.18	\$1,008.14	\$191.96	23.5
Red Fox	122	197	-75	-38.1	7.14	7.34	\$1,445.98	\$871.08	-\$574.90	-39.8
Gray Fox	0	4	-4	-100.0		25	\$100.00	\$0.00	-\$100.00	
Beaver	9,738	5,642	4,096	72.6	20.23	14.28	\$80,567.76	\$196,999.74	\$116,431.98	144.5
Otter <sup>c</sup>	1,399	980	419	42.8	29.27	25.76	\$25,244.80	\$40,948.73	\$15,703.93	62.2
Skunk	287	419	-132	-31.5	2.38	4.79	\$2,007.01	\$683.06	-\$1,323.95	-66.0
Weasel	1	1	0	0.0	1	8	\$8.00	\$1.00	-\$7.00	
Coyote	783	2,098	-1,315	-62.7	5.75	5.81	\$12,189.38	\$4,502.25	-\$7,687.13	-63.1
Badger	9	14	-5	-35.7	6.33	12	\$168.00	\$56.97	-\$111.03	-66.1
Bobcat <sup>c</sup>	370	367	3	0.8	67.5	40.71	\$14,940.57	\$24,975.00	\$10,034.43	67.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,612</b>	<b>32,773</b>	<b>9,839</b>	<b>30.0</b>			<b>\$210,313.63</b>	<b>\$374,009.83</b>	<b>\$163,696.20</b>	<b>77.8</b>

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

<sup>b</sup>Numbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

<sup>c</sup>Based on sales of Temporary Pelt Permits.

<sup>d</sup>Corrected 2022-23 harvest based on % Fur buyer return