

Chapter 12

Important Terms

You should know the following terms:

- Pelts
- Skinning
- Fleshing
- Stretching
- Drying

Learning Objectives

You should be able to:

- Understand that trappers have a responsibility to properly care for the animals they harvest
- Recognize three options for selling pelts: selling animals whole, selling green pelts, selling finished pelts
- Understand the advantages and disadvantages of selling: whole animals, green pelts, and finished pelts
- Learn how to store animals or pelts in a freezer

Chapter 12

Marketing Your Fur

Once you have caught an animal, it is your responsibility to see that the animal is taken care of properly. Remember, conservation means wise use of our natural resources. Letting an animal spoil from lack of attention would be a waste of the resource and an irresponsible act.

Marketing Your Fur

The fur or skins of furbearing animals are commonly called pelts. There are several options for preparing and marketing the fur of the animals you catch. You can sell the animals whole. You could do this at the end of each day, or you could freeze the animals and sell them at a later date. Another option is to skin the animals, store the pelts in a freezer, and sell them later.

The final option is to skin the animals, scrape the fat off the pelts, and dry the pelts on a stretcher. These are called finished pelts. This is how all raw fur pelts are presented when they are finally offered for sale to the large companies that process them for making garments. When a fur buyer purchases the whole animal or a skinned out pelt, he usually offers a lower price to allow for the time and effort it will take to finish the job.

Selling Animals Whole

Selling the whole animal is sometimes called selling “on the carcass” or “in the round.” If you live close to a fur buyer, you could sell the animals you catch at the end of each day. Another option is to freeze the animals whole and store them until you can take them to a fur buyer. The advantage in selling animals whole is you do not have to skin them.

However there are several disadvantages in selling animals whole. You have to live very close to a fur buyer if you are going to sell your animals at the end of each day. You must have access to a freezer to freeze animals whole. Also, whole animals take up a lot of room in a freezer, and you will not be able to store many animals this way. When a fur buyer buys an animal whole, he must complete all the steps to get the animal ready for market. Since this involves a considerable amount of work, the fur buyer will offer less money for animals bought whole.

Selling Undried Pelts

Another option for handling the animals you catch is to skin them and sell the undried pelts. Undried pelts are often called “green” pelts. These pelts can be stored in a freezer for later delivery to a fur buyer. This can be better than freezing whole animals because the pelts take up much less room in a freezer.

The advantage in this method is you do not have to flesh, stretch, and dry the pelts. This work will be left to the fur buyer. Because of this, the fur buyer will offer a lower price for these pelts. This is a disadvantage in selling undried pelts.

Selling Finished Pelts

Finished pelts will give you maximum value from the animals you harvest. There are four steps involved in processing a furbearer to get a finished pelt: skinning, fleshing, stretching, and drying. Skinning is the first step. The pelt must be removed from the carcass. After the pelt is removed, the fat is scraped off the leather side of the skin. This is called fleshing. Stretching is the next step. The pelt is placed on a wood or wire form to give it the proper shape. The final step is drying the pelt on the stretcher. This will temporarily preserve it. After the pelt is dry, it can be removed from the stretcher.

There are several advantages in marketing finished pelts. These pelts require no further processing, and a buyer will be able to give you full value for the pelts. Drying a pelt temporarily preserves it. You do not need a freezer to store these pelts during the cool weather of trapping season. You have many more options for marketing dried pelts. Frozen animals or green pelts must be sold locally, and they must be sold promptly once they are removed from the freezer. Dried pelts can be held for sale at any time. Also, dried pelts can be shipped to a fur buying company or to an auction company. This cannot be done with undried pelts.

The best way for a beginning trapper to learn about handling fur is to seek guidance and assistance from someone who is experienced in the process. Often, local fur buyers are willing to offer advice to a beginning trapper. It is to their advantage to see that the pelts they buy from you are properly handled. You might also seek help from an experienced trapper in your area.

Using Your Freezer

You can use a freezer to store an animal or an undried pelt. To do this, put the animal or pelt in a plastic bag and place it in the freezer. The plastic bag will help to prevent “freezer burn” which occurs when the animal or pelt dries out while it is in the freezer. It will also keep the animals or pelts from soiling the inside of the freezer.

If you have several animals or pelts, make sure you spread them out in the freezer. If you pile them up, the ones in the middle may not freeze fast enough and could spoil. Fur is a very good insulator.

To thaw an animal or pelt, remove it from the freezer and put it in a moderately warm room. Do not place these animals or pelts too close to a stove or other source of heat. The heat could cook the skin and ruin the pelt.

A freezer can be used to store animals or pelts for sale, but it can also be used for temporary storage. If you do not have time to completely process an animal or the pelt, you can put it in the freezer and remove it later to finish the job. This can be helpful if you catch more animals in one day than you have time to process.



Chapter 12 Study Guide

Review Questions

1. Furs can be sold on the _____, _____, or fleshed, stretched, and dried.
2. If you store your animals in a freezer, they should be put in a _____ to prevent damage.

Chapter 13

Important Terms

You should know the following terms:

- Vent
- Case skinning
- Gambrel
- Tail puller
- Tail slitter
- Disposable gloves

Learning Objectives

You should be able to:

- Identify the tools used in skinning animals
- Understand that animals must be clean and burrs must be removed before skinning
- Learn how to skin an animal

Chapter 13

Skinning

Skinning is the process in which the animal's pelt is removed from the carcass. This is probably the most familiar step in fur handling. Animals should be cleaned and the burrs combed out of the pelt before you start skinning them.

Most Ohio furbearers are skinned following the same procedure. A cut is made from the heel of each back foot, along the inside of each leg, to the vent. Then a cut is made up the tail and around each side of the vent or anus. Next the pelt is cut free at the ankles. The skin is then pulled off the animal down towards the head, like pulling off a sock. The front legs are worked loose and cut free at the ankles. The head is carefully skinned out with cuts at the ears, eyes, and jaws. Finally, the pelt is cut free at the nose. This method of skinning is known as "case" skinning.

On raccoons, mink, skunk, fox, and coyotes, you have to skin out the tail. To do this, you make a cut about one-third of the way up the base of the tail. Pull the skin away from the tailbone until you reach the end of the cut. Then put a tail puller over the tailbone and pull the bone out of the skin. The tail skin must then be slit open so it will dry. Muskrats and opossum have a scaly tail that is of no value. The pelt can be cut away from the tail where the fur stops.

Tools for Skinning

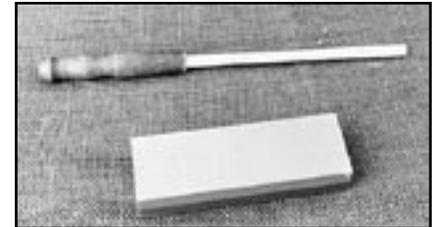
You need a few basic tools to help you in skinning your animals. A good knife should be the first item on your list. Select a knife with a narrow blade for skinning your animals. You will also need some kind of a sharpener to help you keep a sharp edge on your knife. You cannot do a good job of skinning an animal with a dull knife. Remember to be very careful when handling a sharp knife. A comb or brush will help you remove burrs from an animal's fur. A bent dinner fork can also be used to remove burrs. A "gambrel" is used to help you hang animals up to skin them. There are a couple of tools that can help you in skinning an animal's tail. One is called a "tail puller" which will help you pull the bone out of the tail. The other is called a "tail splitter," and is used to split the tail skin open.

Tools for Skinning

A knife is one of the most important tools for the skinning. Any of these knives would work. Try to select a knife that has a narrow blade.



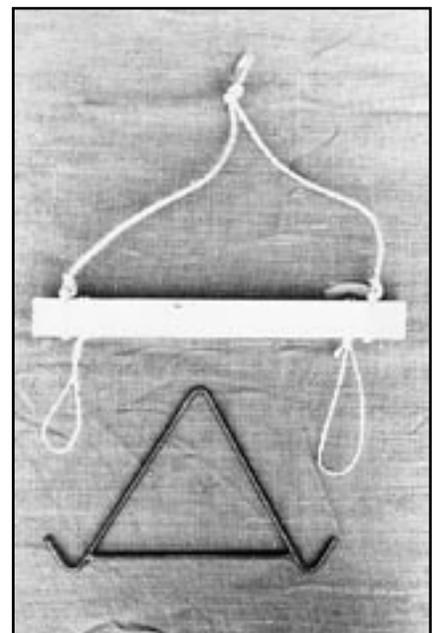
It is important to keep your knife sharp. These are two types of knife sharpeners. At the top is a stick sharpener made of ceramic. At the bottom is a whetstone. There are other types of sharpeners you can use.



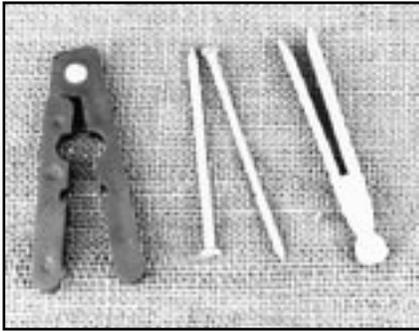
Combs and brushes are used to remove dirt and burrs from an animal's fur. At the left is a real fur comb. In the center is a pet brush. At the right is a bent dinner fork. The bent fork will do a good job of removing burrs.



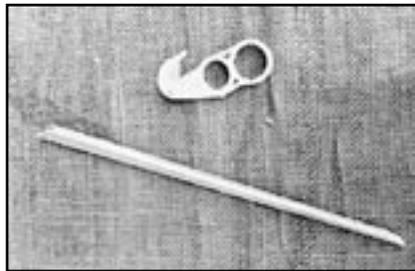
These tools are called "gambrels." They are used to hang up animals for skinning. At top is a homemade gambrel. Below is a gambrel that can be purchased from a trapping supply dealer.



These tools can be used to pull the bone out of a tail. At the left is a commercial tail puller. In the center are two large nails. These can be placed on either side of the tail bone, and squeezed with your hand while the bone is pulled between them. The clothespin works the same way.



These tools are used to slit the tail open after the bone is pulled out. At the bottom is a hollow metal guide. At the top is a commercial tail slitter.



Comb out all the burrs and other material that may be lodged in the animal's fur. This will be easier to do if the animal is dry.



This photo shows how to use a bent fork to remove a burr.



Getting Ready to Skin

Before you skin an animal you should clean any dirt, mud, or blood from the fur. If the animal is very dirty, it is best to wash it before you skin it. Comb all the burrs out of the animal's fur. Burrs could hurt your hands. A pelt that is dirty, or holds burrs, will not bring maximum value.

Animals sometimes carry diseases that can be transferred to humans. It is a very good idea to wear rubber gloves while skinning an animal. This is especially important if you have cuts or scratches on your hands. Germs could enter your body through these cuts. You can buy thin, disposable gloves at any drug store.

Disposable gloves can protect your hands as you skin. You can buy them at any drug store.



Getting Ready to Skin

If an animal is muddy, you should wash it. If there is a source of clean water on your trapline, it is good to wash the animal shortly after you catch it, before the mud has a chance to dry.



Skinning a Raccoon

The following series of photos shows how to skin a raccoon. Most other animals are skinned following the exact same procedure. On muskrats and opossums, the tail is not skinned out. The pelt is cut off at the fur line.

Skinning a Raccoon

1. The white lines show the first cuts to be made in skinning the animal. Here, a raccoon is used as an example, but most other animals are skinned using the same cuts and the same methods.



2. Hang the animal up by one leg. Holding the opposite leg, insert your knife just under the skin and cut to the bottom of the vent. Then cut the pelt free at the ankle. Repeat this procedure for the other leg.



3. Hang the animal up by both legs and cut up the bottom side of the tail. Start the cut about one-fourth of the way down the tail. Keep the point of your knife just under the skin. It is not necessary to cut the entire length of the tail.



4. Cut around the vent on both sides until the cut at the tail connects with the cuts on the legs.



5. Pull the pelt off the legs and down to the animal's crotch. Work your fingers around the crotch area and cut the pelt loose here.



6. Pull the pelt off the hips on both sides of the animal.



7. Work your fingers around the animal's back near the tail and pull the skin away from the back and partway down the tail.



8. Clamp a tail puller around the tail bone. Pull backward on the tail puller to pull out the tailbone.



9. Use a tail slitter to cut the tail open. This can also be done carefully with the point of your knife.



10. After the tail is free, pull the pelt down to the animal's shoulders. A rag can help you grip the pelt better. Don't be afraid to pull hard, there is little chance of damaging the pelt.



11. Work your fingers through the pelt at the armpit and pull the skin off the leg. If you pull upward on the leg as you pull down on the pelt, the leg will come out easier.



12. Pull the skin down the leg to the ankle. Cut the leg skin just below the claws. You do not need to leave long flaps of leg skin on the pelt. In fact, long legs can detract from the value of the pelt.



13. Pull the pelt down over the neck. You will notice the ear cartilage as a white lump on the side of the head. Cut through the cartilage close to the skull. Do not cut into the fur.



14. When both ears are cut, pull the pelt farther down on the head to cut the eyes. Follow the natural opening of the eye lids and do not cut into the fur.



15. After the eyes are done, cut the pelt free at the jaw hinge. Follow the lips to maintain the natural opening in the pelt. Try to avoid hitting the teeth. They can quickly dull your knife.



16. Once you have cut the upper lips and cheeks free, cut the nose. Cut through the nose cartilage close to the skin. Leave the actual nose on the pelt.



17. Finally, cut through the bottom lip to free the pelt. It is not necessary to skin out the entire bottom jaw. Cut the lip about halfway up.



Chapter 13 Study Guide

Review Questions

1. Name five different tools needed to skin your furbearers:

1. _____, 2. _____,
3. _____, 4. _____,
5. _____.

2. Ohio furbearers are skinned in what is known as _____ skinning.

3. _____ should be worn when skinning your furs.

4. You should have an experienced trapper or fur buyer show you how to skin your furbearers. True or False.