

# Chapter 14

## Important Terms

You should know the following terms:

- Fleshing knife
- Fleshing beam

## Learning Objectives

You should be able to:

- Understand the need for fleshing a pelt
- Identify a fleshing knife and fleshing beam as tools used for fleshing animals with heavy fat
- Understand that muskrats and mink can be fleshed on a small board
- Learn about fleshing fox and coyote
- Learn how to flesh a fatty animal like a raccoon
- Learn how to flesh a muskrat or mink

## Chapter 14

# Fleshing

After the pelt is skinned from the animal, the fat must be scraped off the leather side of the pelt. This is called “fleshing.” This term can be a little misleading because there is usually very little muscle tissue or flesh left on the pelt. If the fat is not scraped off the pelt, the skin will not dry properly. If the skin does not dry properly, the hair roots may loosen and cause the fur to fall out. This would ruin the pelt.

Fleshing is one of the more difficult parts of fur handling to master. All the fat should be scraped off the leather side of the pelt so that only the clean leather remains. Animals like raccoons, opossums, skunks, and beaver have a heavy layer of fat and are difficult to flesh. To flesh these animals, you will need a two-handled fleshing knife. This can be obtained from a trapping supply dealer. You will also need a fleshing beam. This is a tapered board with a round top. The round top gives you a surface on which to scrape. The pelt is slipped over the end of the beam and the fleshing knife is used to scrape away the fat. It is very helpful if you can get another trapper or a fur buyer to show you how to use a fleshing knife and fleshing beam.

Mink and muskrats do not have too much fat, and they are fairly easy to flesh. You can flesh these animals by pulling the pelt over a small tapered board. For a fleshing tool, you can use a butter knife or an old soup spoon. Mink and muskrat pelts have a red membrane on the shoulders and most of the way down the back. Scrape the fat off these pelts but do not scrape away the red membrane.

Red fox usually have very little fat on the pelt. It is often possible to flesh this animal just by pulling the fat off with your fingers. Gray fox may or may not have a lot of fat. If a gray fox is very fat, you can scrape it on a fleshing beam. Coyotes usually have quite a bit of fat, and it is easiest to flesh them on a fleshing beam.

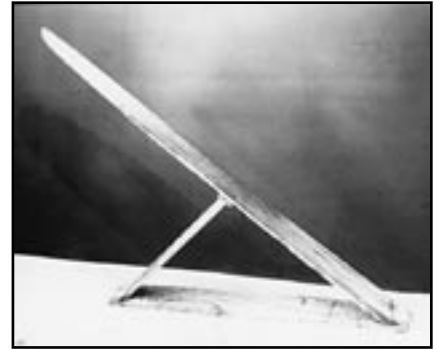
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### Fleshing a Pelt

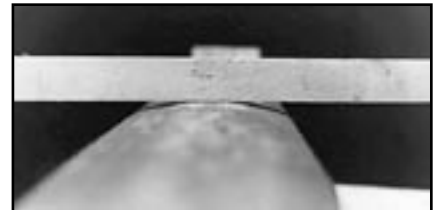


“Fleshing” is to scrape the fat off the leather side of the pelt. Above is a fleshing knife. This tool is used to scrape animals that have heavy fat like opossum and raccoon.

This is a typical fleshing beam. The pelt is slipped over the fleshing beam to hold it while it is being scraped.



The top of the beam is curved to accept the curved blade of the fleshing knife.



To begin, slip the pelt over the beam and place the animal's nose on the end of the beam. Hold the pelt in place by pushing your stomach against the beam. A rag will keep the pelt from slipping. Start scraping away the fat just behind the animal's ears.



As you work down the pelt, keep pulling the pelt up on the beam. Here the trapper is fleshing the stomach area of the pelt.



Flesh all the way down the body, then flesh each of the legs and the tail. Be careful not to tear off the tail.

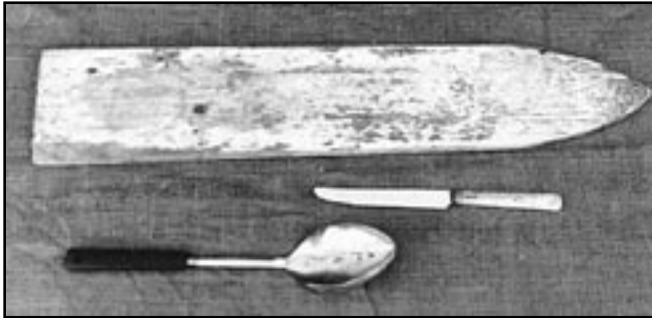


## Chapter 14 Study Guide

### Review Questions

1. To flesh out your pelts you will use what two tools:

1. \_\_\_\_\_, 2. \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Fleshing means to remove the \_\_\_\_\_ from the inside of the pelt.



Muskrats do not have a lot of fat on their pelts. They can be scraped with a spoon or a butter knife. The pelt can be pulled over a small tapered board to scrape it. Mink can be scraped the same way using a smaller board.



# Chapter 15

## Important Terms

You should know the following terms:

- Stretcher
- Wire stretcher
- Wood stretcher
- Over-stretching
- Rodent damage

## Learning Objectives

You should be able to:

- Identify two types of stretchers: wood and wire
- Understand that pelts should not be overstretched
- Learn how to stretch a pelt on a wire stretcher
- Learn how to stretch a pelt on a wood stretcher
- Understand how pelts are dried
- Learn how to dry pelts that are sold fur side out
- Learn how to store pelts to prevent rodent damage

## Chapter 15

# Stretching and Drying

To prepare a pelt for drying, it must be put on a form to give it a certain shape. This is called “stretching” a pelt, and the forms are called “stretchers.” There are two kinds of stretchers, wire and wood. Wire stretchers are available from trapping supply dealers. Wood stretchers can be purchased, or you can make them yourself from scrap lumber. Stretchers come in different sizes for different animals. Select a stretcher that fits the animal you are processing.

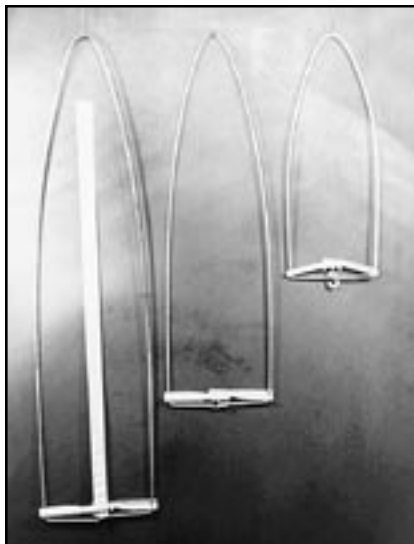
Stretching is another term that can be confusing. You should not try to stretch a pelt like a piece of rubber. The pelt should not be stretched beyond its natural size. It is true that larger pelts usually bring a higher price. However, a small, overstretched pelt will not be as valuable.

Put the pelt on the stretcher with the leather side out. Most animals are marketed this way. As you pull the pelt on the stretcher, make sure that the back of the pelt is squarely on one side of the stretcher and the belly portion is squarely on the other side. Pelts that are misaligned will be devalued. Draw the pelt down on the stretcher and pull it taut, but do not overstretch it. Wire stretchers have metal hooks for holding the pelt in place. Pelts are fastened on wood stretchers with pins or small nails.

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## Stretching a Pelt on Wire

Wire stretchers are the most common type of fur stretcher. They are available from trapping supply dealers.



1. To start, the pelt is slipped over the wire stretcher. After the pelt is on the stretcher, make sure the pelt is adjusted squarely so all the back of the animal is on one side and all the belly of the animal is on the opposite side.



2. Use one hook of the stretcher to fasten the tail of the pelt in place. Use one or two teeth on the hook.



3. Use the other hook to fasten the back legs. Fasten both legs to this hook.



4. After the hooks are in place, pull down on the edges of the pelt to stretch it to length. Do not pull hard on the hooks, or they may tear out of the pelt. The stretched pelt should then be hung up to dry. Under good conditions, a pelt will dry in four to seven days.



## Stretching a Pelt on Wood



Wood stretchers can also be used to stretch a pelt. You may be able to make them yourself. If you make your own stretchers, be sure to round off the edges.



Steel pins or small nails are used to hold the pelt. The tail is fastened on one side of the stretcher.



The feet are fastened on the opposite side of the stretcher.

A wedge must be placed under the belly side of the pelt on a wood stretcher. When the pelt is dry, the wedge is pulled out to allow some slack in the pelt so it can be removed from the stretcher.

## Sizes for Wood Stretchers

**D** = Measurement down from the nose of the stretcher.  
**W** = Width at measurement "D".



(Animal) (Shape) (Dimensions in inches)

Mink **B** **D=** 1½ 3 7 15 36  
 (male) **W=** 1¼ 2 2½ 3 4  
 (female) **W=** 1 1¾ 2 2½ 3

Fox **D** **D=** 6 9 18 35 52  
 (large) **W=** 4 5 6½ 7 7  
 (small) **W=** 3¾ 4¾ 6 6½ 6½

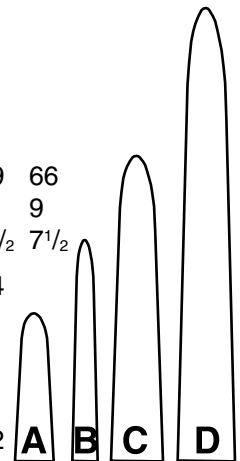
Raccoon **C** **D=** 11 30 48  
 (large) **W=** 6 8 9  
 (med.) **W=** 5½ 7½ 8  
 (small) **W=** 5 7 8

Coyote **D** **D=** 7½ 12 17 39 66  
 (large) **W=** 6 6¾ 7¼ 9 9  
 (small) **W=** 5½ 6¼ 6¾ 7½ 7½

Muskrat **A** **D=** 3 5 6 24  
**W=** 2 5 7 8

Opossum **C** **D=** 8 20 36  
**W=** 5 6½ 8

Skunk **C** **D=** 3 12 22 42  
**W=** 3 5¾ 7 7



Shapes

# Stretching Muskrats

Animals like muskrats and opossums do not have hair on their tails. It is not necessary to skin out the tails on these animals. The pelt can be cut from the tail at the hairline.



With muskrats, fasten the tail flap to one of the hooks on the stretcher.



To fasten the belly side of the pelt, place the flap of skin in the middle of the belly on one of the hooks.



This pelt has not been squared on the stretcher properly. Note how the eye and ear holes are not centered on the stretcher.



This pelt is properly squared. If the nose tends to slip off the end of the stretcher it can be held in place with a clothes pin.

# Drying

After a pelt is placed on a stretcher, it should be hung up to dry. It is best to dry pelts at a moderate temperature. A temperature of 50 to 60 degrees is about right. Do not hang pelts close to a stove or other source of heat to dry. This could damage the pelt.

Pelts can be dried in an unheated building as long as the temperatures remain above freezing. It will take longer to dry pelts this way. Using a fan to blow air across the pelts will speed up the drying process.

Under moderate conditions, a pelt will dry in four to seven days. It may take longer in an unheated building. When a pelt is dry, the leather will be stiff like cardboard. You can remove the pelt from the stretcher once it is dry.

Most animals are sold with the leather side out. Fox and coyotes are sold with the fur side out. With these animals, you must first dry the pelt partway with the leather side out. Start by fastening the pelt on the stretcher with the leather side out. Dry the pelt until the surface of the skin is dry to the touch. This may take 12 to 48 hours depending on the temperature. Remove the pelt from the stretcher, carefully turn it fur side out, and put it back on the stretcher to finish drying it. If you leave one of these pelts leather side out too long and it gets too dry to turn, wrap the pelt in a damp towel and leave it for an hour or two. This will soften the leather and allow you to turn the pelt.

After the pelts are removed from the stretchers, they should be stored in a safe place until you are ready to sell them. Rodents, especially mice and rats, can damage dried pelts by chewing on them. To prevent rodent damage, hang the dried pelts from a rafter or from the ceiling where rodents cannot reach them. Use a piece of wire to hang the pelts up. Rodents cannot climb up and down a piece of wire.

Fox and coyote are sold fur side out. The animals are first placed on the stretcher skin side out and allowed to dry overnight or until the skin feels dry to the touch. The pelt is then removed from the stretcher.



## Chapter 15 Study Guide

### Review Questions

1. You can use either \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ stretcher to dry your pelts.
2. Pelts are hung until they are stiff like cardboard. True or False.
3. You should hang your fur near a hot stove to dry. True or False.
4. Dried pelts should be hung from a piece of wire hanging from a rafter to prevent \_\_\_\_\_ from damaging your fur.



The pelt is turned inside out. Then it is replaced on the stretcher, fur side out, and allowed to finished drying.



When pelts are dry, they should be hung up with a piece of wire. This will prevent rodents, like mice, from chewing on the pelts and damaging them.

