

Advertising in Trapping

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EVERY successful trapper has in his or her approach to stringing steel a variety of personalized, time-proven techniques that really help to bring in the fur. They are difference-makers; steps that increase the attractiveness of sets or help them blend in with the landscape.

What we're talking about here is whether your set should advertise loudly, or become part of the landscape in which it's planted. Both types of sets have their place in trapping, but depending upon the location and furbearer you're trapping, and the roguishness of your quarry — some raccoons, foxes and coyotes can really surprise you — usually one is considerably better than the other.

If you're trapping an area where someone may happen by a set, it's almost always better to blend it and stay away from the beaten path so your set — or catch — won't be noticed. My preference has always been to set traps where hunting dogs, cats and people typically don't go. But the rule won't keep away other trappers, because, let's face it, a good trapper is apt to visit the same places you're

setting.

So in choosing a set location where people and non-target catches can be a problem, I opt to stay out of view and hunting-dog territory, but close to the furbearer travel way, using a northwesterly wind as the delivery system for whatever lure, bait or urine I'm using as an attrac-



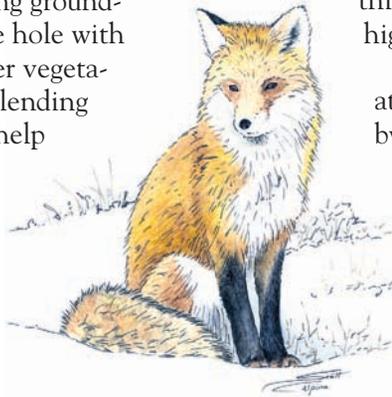
tant. If you have to compromise the nearness of your set location to the furbearer travel way, pass up the location. Consider coming back when it's colder and there's less human and dog traffic in the area. Being on location matters that much in trapping.

In areas where an occasional person may come close to your dirt-hole sets, it's always a good idea to blend the surface of your trap bed to match the surrounding ground-cover and to plug the hole with a wad of grass or other vegetation from the area. Blending the dirt pattern will help camouflage your set, and should keep rabbits from dust-bathing in the bed. The odor of the scent/bait you place in the hole will still pass through the grass wad. Finish the set with a shot of fox urine on your back-stop.

If people and non-target catches are not a problem, use the freshly dug dirt from your dirt-hole to bed and cover your trap and leave the hole open. Freshly dug dirt and a new hole will always spark the attention of a passing furbearer. Add to those advertising tools the odor of another furbearer (gland lure or urine) or food (bait), and most furbearers will come without hesitation.

The same applies to a pocket set for raccoons, minks and muskrats. If you smooth the entrance of a pocket set by slicking down the entrance to

a somewhat glistening, muddy finish that stands out on high bank like new construction, and has a pleasing order emanating from it, everything that swims or walks by likely will investigate. Raccoons are naturally curious. Minks stick their faces in every hole and crevice along a bank. Muskrats are territorial, so they'll investigate to see if someone's trying to move in. That makes this one a very attractive, highly visible set.



“Sometimes you have to break from your standard sets.”

You can increase the attractiveness of this set by using a fish oil trail to draw raccoons running the high bank.

Raccoons run along the water's edge and along the high bank.

If the wind doesn't carry your attractant to the raccoon, and it can't see your advertising, there's a chance it'll slip by. To reduce

the possibility of that happening, mix some fish oil with water in a plastic dishwashing liquid bottle and squirt a stream from the top of the high bank down to your set. Rarely will that raccoon cross that scent trail without following it.

Remember in set advertising that displaying bait visible from the air is illegal. Use a deep hole, or a grass plug to ensure birds of prey are not attracted to your sets. And try to incorporate this technique where farm cats and hunting dogs don't roam.

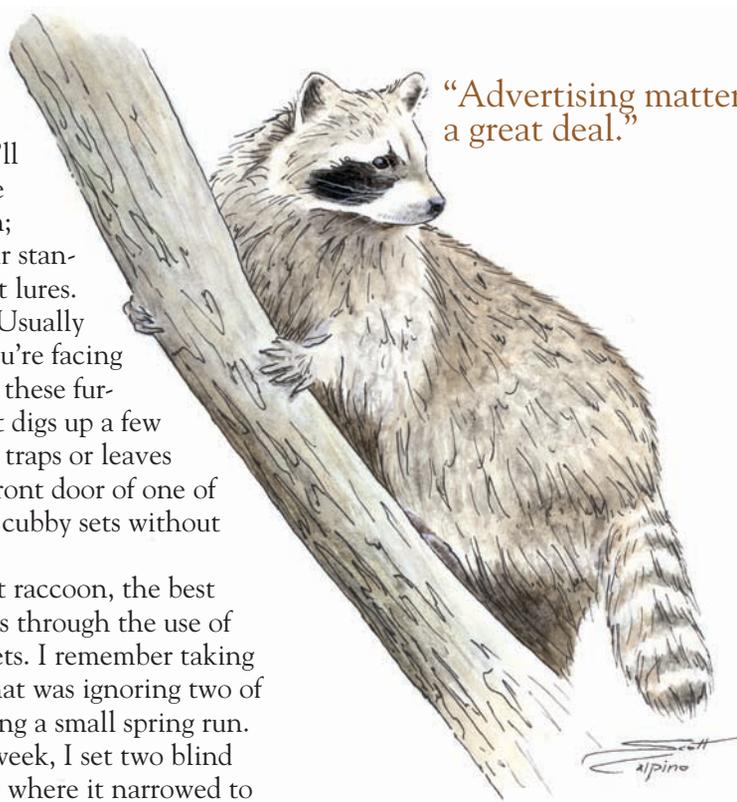
Sometimes trappers have to match wits with trap-wise furbearers. And in

these cases, advertising is never the way to go. You'll have to change your game plan; break from your standards. Different lures. Different sets. Usually you find out you're facing off with one of these furbearers when it digs up a few of your bedded traps or leaves tracks on the front door of one of your pocket or cubby sets without visiting.

If it's a smart raccoon, the best way to take it is through the use of blind or trail sets. I remember taking one raccoon that was ignoring two of my cubbies along a small spring run. After about a week, I set two blind sets in the flow where it narrowed to about 6 inches. The next morning that raccoon was waiting for me. It carried the scars of two previous trap escapes. An educated furbearer, but it still behaved like other raccoons.

Red foxes can be equally troublesome. If one starts flipping traps at your dirt-holes, there are two basic approaches I've used to reel them in. Sometimes they work; sometimes they don't. In both cases, I leave the set(s) with which it tampered because that fox's scent near the set instantly makes it more attractive to other foxes passing through. My preferred response is to put in a urine-post set that blends in with the groundcover like it's been there forever. I use an unopened bottle of fox urine to ensure I don't tip off the fox. The set should be placed about 15 feet away from the disturbed set so the wind will

“Advertising matters a great deal.”



waft that urine odor toward it. Wear rubber gloves and footwear.

Another approach—although only moderately successful—is to try planting another trap about 5 inches in front and off-center of a bedded trap in a new set in the same area. The idea is to catch the trap-flipper while it's in the act of fishing for the trap in the new set's bed. The dirt-hole set should have a bed sifted with dirt from the hole. The blind set's bed should be blended with surrounding groundcover and the trap must be bedded solidly so it doesn't move if the fox steps on the spring or a jaw. If you do it right, you'll have trouble seeing the blind set the next day. The rest is up to the fox and, of course, the weather.

These are just a few ideas for

bringing in furbearers. There are many more. Advertising has been used in trapping for centuries, and under the right conditions it can make almost any trapline more productive. But it's knowing when to use it—and when not to—that will make you a better trapper, because being more noticeable does occasionally attract more attention than you may want. In some cases, much more! So advertise wisely. And when you need to, blend your sets into the countryside. And don't forget, you can advertise loudly in places well traveled so long as people cannot see your sets from the road or path they

travel. Tuck it into a creek bend, where the bank hides your set, or under a multiflora rose bush that crowds the bank. Learn to work with what you have. Just don't risk a non-target catch. Move on if you can't be sure.

Every trapper becomes better in this sport whenever he or she learns that trapping is a pursuit that requires participants to fit into the outdoors and to understand their quarries implicitly. When that happens—that light bulb goes on, everything becomes easier; except for the work. Few outdoor pursuits ask more of anyone than trapping. But there are few as exciting and rewarding.



NATHAN STAIRS with his two sons, **BROCK** and **BRODY**, and their first catch—this big raccoon and an opossum—during the 2013 trapping season.