

These **Trapper's Tips** were developed by Dan Lynch for publication in **Pennsylvania Game News** magazine in an effort to further educate and improve the success of trappers everywhere. Please read on. There's something here for everyone, regardless of your level of experience or familiarity with trapping furbearers.

The key to success

Everyone wants to know the "secret" to being a successful trapper. Is it that special lure or a special bait that puts some trappers on top as far as the number of animals harvested? Most successful trappers will tell you that the key to success is . . . **location, location, location**. The best baits and lures will not work if you don't have your traps set in the proper location. Look for the travel ways, the areas that the animals use most often. A good location for fox or coyote sets is along paths or roads through fields or at the intersection of several crop changes.

Setting up your vehicle for trapping

No matter what kind of vehicle you use for trapping, properly setting up your gear in it will help you become more efficient and usually speed up your technique. These tips may help you do just that. Before you head out on your first day of setting, make sure you have all the gear you'll need for the animals you plan to target organized in either buckets or boxes somewhere in your trunk or pickup bed. Keep your lures and baits in a separate container from your traps and setting gloves, if you use them. This will lessen the chance of contaminating your already cleaned and prepared traps. Make sure you have enough anchors or stakes for the number of traps you plan to put out. Having the needed but sometimes overlooked equipment such as pliers, cable cutters, a snare pole and s-hook tool handy in your vehicle is crucial to an efficient day on the trapline. If you need dry dirt or some bedding material, make sure that is in its own stable container. It is also a good idea to plan ahead for where you will put your catch. The animals may be wet and muddy and some have very interesting odors. You will also want to keep them out of sight, to deter theft and possibly offend the non-trapping public.

Trap modifications

There are probably as many different trap modifications as there are trappers, everything from "night latches" to laminated jaws. The one thing to remember is that you should check each of your traps before every season to make sure that they are working properly and that your pan tension is adjusted to limit unwanted catches. If you are trapping coyotes the pan tension should be around four pounds, two pounds for fox, and you need little or no pan tension for species such as mink and muskrat. Find what works best for you in the areas you trap.

Anchoring Traps

One of the most important tools in trapping is your anchoring system. How are you going to keep your catch from running away? The anchoring system you use depends a lot on what species of furbearer

you're trying to catch, the soil conditions and the weather. Anchoring systems include, but are not limited to: rebar stakes, wooden stakes, various types of drags, staking or tying off to immobile objects like trees and the relatively new disposable/cable stakes. Generally speaking, fox can be held using 15-inch rebar stakes, coyotes may require 24-inch stakes or double staking to hold securely. Two- or three-prong drags are often used for mink and raccoon. Whatever you use, make sure it is sufficient to securely hold the species you plan on catching.

Doubling your odds with two traps

Once you find an ideal location for your fox or coyote sets, why not increase your odds of catching more animals by putting two trap sets at each location? If you are confident that the set is a good one, then having two critters waiting for you in the morning is better than just one. Many times two foxes or coyotes are traveling together. Because of this, take the time to place two sets within 15 to 20 feet of each other. Sometimes a skunk or opossum may end up visiting your set first and if the fox or coyote shows up later then he cannot get caught if you don't have a second set in place.

Building a streamside cubby for raccoons

Raccoons are curious animals. They have a tendency to want to investigate shoreline structures like rock formations and hollow logs. As a trapper you can use this curiosity to your advantage. Take some time to build a small rock cubby by building the sides and back with rocks and cover the roof with a large flat rock. Leave the opening facing the stream or pond, in this way the raccoon has to enter the water to investigate, and this will help to eliminate most domestic cats and dogs from this set. The cubby does not have to be wide, six to eight inches is ideal. This set works great with fish as a bait. The bait can be put in the back of the cubby, and a second lure —fish oil or a fruity paste bait — can be smeared on the top edge of the rock roof. An ideal trap for this set would be a No.11 double longspring foothold or a No.1 or No.1½ coil spring trap. The trap can be set right in front of the cubby under a half to one inch of water. The trap can be anchored to a heavy rock, log or grapple hook, and this anchor can be left out in the stream.

Proper fur stretching

You've now caught lots of animals. You've taken the time to skin them without making any noticeable cuts. Now what? Well, it's time to stretch them on wire stretchers or wooden boards. Don't cut any corners here. If you aren't sure exactly what you are doing, stop. Take the time to call your local fur-buyer and ask questions. Go on-line to the many chat rooms or trapping websites and ask some questions. Contact your local WCO and ask him or her to give you some names of experienced local trappers who may be able to help you. You seem to have done everything right up to this point, make sure you stretch your furs properly and show the fur-buyer your animals at their best. You owe it to the resource and you will usually get the best price with properly put up fur.

Selling your fur

Now that you have caught them, where can you sell your furs? Many times trappers wait too long to think about this part of the trapping experience and end up disappointed. To start with, most trappers are not going to get rich by trapping. The fur market today is definitely experiencing a low point in its history. However, a trapper has options. The first thing to consider is who is going to skin and stretch your catch? If you can't do it, contact another trapper and be willing to pay him or her for doing it for you or for at least teaching you how. If you sell your furs in the round or without first skinning them, you will not be paid much for them, because the fur-buyer has to then pay someone else to do the job you didn't do. If you plan to sell your fur, contact your Game Commission region office and ask for a list of fur-buyers in your area. These buyers may buy your furs based on the market price at that time. You may also want to take your furs to one of the many winter and spring fur sales held by the local chapters of the PA Trappers Association. You can also look into selling your furs to the North American Fur Association or the Fur Harvesters of America organizations. A final option is to have the furs dressed and tanned for your own personal use, to be used as gifts or to be sold to a taxidermist for mounting.

Choosing baits and lures for raccoons

Raccoons are opportunistic omnivores. This means they will eat almost anything they may encounter on their nightly forays. Selecting a bait or lure to entice them to check out your set is usually pretty simple.

If there is a slim chance that a wandering dog or cat will be in your trapping area, then canned sardines, fish oil or fish are great bait choices. If you want to be more selective, try a fruit or sweet smelling bait, like jams or jellies. Marshmallows dipped in a fruit paste or even chocolate syrup has been known to put a few raccoons in the fur shed as well. Commercially made lures and baits are available and will work wonders on your trapline. Make sure your baits are not visible from the air, and set them up so that the raccoon has to hang around your set awhile to try and figure out how to get to them. The longer they stay at the set, the better your chances are at catching them.

Using your camera on the trapline

Taking a small digital camera when you're out on the trapline is a good idea. Wildlife sign is everywhere, and taking snapshots of it will make you a better observer of animal characteristics as well as make a better trapper. Keeping a photo album of sign, sets and animals caught is also a great way to share your experiences with others. One thing to remember is to take photos that show respect for the animal and portray trapping in a positive light. Make sure the sun is to your back and that no shadows are present in the photo. If you have a person in the photo, make sure they are not wearing any clothing with any offensive advertisements. Dead animals or ones that have tongues sticking out or hair with blood on it need to be cleaned up to make a better picture. Harvesting of animals is a part of trapping and nothing that needs to be apologized for. However, just like in taking good quality hunting photos, planning and preparation is the key to getting the best shots.

Essential tools on the trapline

Many times I run a mixed trapline, making sets for both land and water species. Because of this I carry an assortment of tools to make my limited trapping time as efficient as I can. I carry a five-gallon bucket that has a tool apron attached to it, with pockets to carry both lures and tools. On a normal day I carry at least one s-hook tool for attaching traps to anchors. I also carry tongue and groove pliers (crescent wrench) to adjust the dogs on some traps so the pan lays as flat as I want it to. I carry a flat and Phillips head screwdriver for adjusting pan tension in my foothold traps. I usually carry a small file in case I have to file some of the trap dog (trigger) or edges of the jaws to eliminate any sharp edges. If beaver trapping, I also carry a body-gripping safety catch to make sure I'm safe if my trap should go off before I am clear of the jaws. One of the most used tools in my bucket is my three-in-one tool, which is a hammer, digging claw and hole puncher. I drive my trap stakes, dig my trap beds and excavate any holes needed to place baits with this tool. Trappers have many tools, but on a normal day you would definitely find these with me.

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