

is they can be used to make sets away from the otters' travelway, but will still be effective for beavers.

Of all the tools available to Ohio's trappers, the snare, when properly set for a beaver, is least likely to take an otter. For regularly snaring beavers, a loop diameter of 9 to 10 inches is recommended. With this 9- to 10-inch loop, most otters will pass through a snare without being captured.

Alternate Beaver Sets

The beaver sets that show the greatest potential for otter captures are blind sets made in beaver travelways described earlier. Foothold traps, and especially bodygrip traps, set in these travelways where otters are present have a high potential for taking otters. Many times a set made nearby off the travelway can be very effective in taking beavers, yet avoid the vast majority of otters.

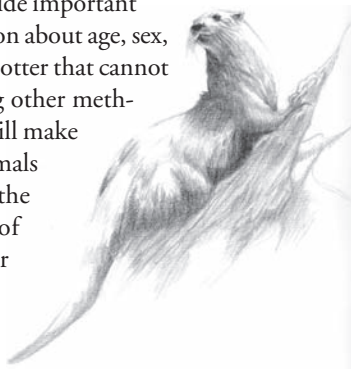
Beavers are highly susceptible to lure and visual attractors, but otters are rarely attracted by beaver sign or odors. Making a castor mound set near the travelway allows you to take the beavers while avoiding otters. Baited sets for beavers that employ peeled sticks and beaver food lures hold almost no attraction for otters.

If You Catch An Otter

While Ohio trappers must make an effort to adjust traps and trap types and use sets that avoid catching otter, it is still possible for an accidental capture to occur. If you catch an otter, and it is alive, carefully release it without causing injury to yourself or the otter.

If the otter is dead, leave it in the trap and immediately contact the wildlife officer assigned to that county, or the district wildlife office to determine what course of action to follow.

Incidentally-trapped otters may be necropsied by the Division to provide important biological information about age, sex, and reproduction of otter that cannot be determined using other methods. The Division will make best use of these animals to help determine the health and status of Ohio's growing otter population.



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Techniques to Avoid Trapping River Otters

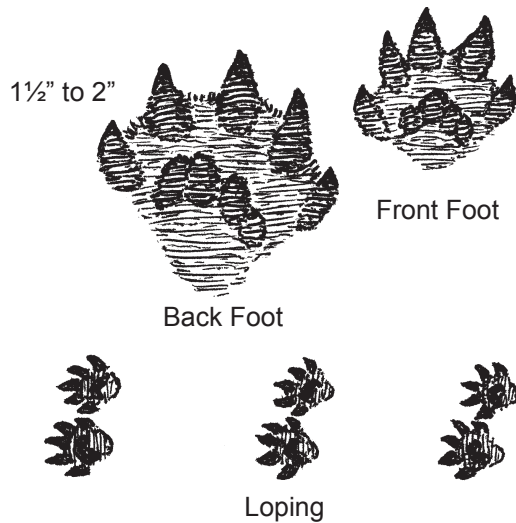


River otters have become more common in Ohio waters following their successful reintroduction from 1986 through 1993. Evidence exists to show that otters are reproducing and expanding their range throughout Ohio. While a limited number of river otters may now be taken in certain areas of the state, trappers who have reached their otter bag limit, or those trapping for beaver in areas closed to otter trapping may still need to employ otter avoidance techniques.

Since otters and beaver utilize the same habitat, there is an increasing potential that Ohio trappers may encounter otters as their numbers and range continue to expand. This pamphlet has been produced under a cooperative agreement between the Ohio State Trappers Association and the ODNR Division of Wildlife to help educate trappers on the best techniques for avoiding accidental otter catches, with a minimal impact on their beaver trapping success. Continuing education will help trappers become more effective in these efforts and improve the Division of Wildlife's ability to manage both beaver and otter populations in Ohio.

Otter Sign

The first step to avoid trapping an otter is to learn to recognize when otters are present on your trapline. Otter tracks resemble those of a mink, but they are much larger, usually two to three inches across. Other signs of otters are toilet or latrine sites. These are typically found on high points along the banks of streams. The vegetation is usually flattened out, and the area may contain flat, runny piles of otter vomit. This vomit is greenish black in color and usually contains a large number of fish scales or crayfish parts. Otter droppings themselves are indistinct clumps of undigested fish bones, fish scales, and crayfish parts. These droppings may be flattened by the otter walking on them. Both vomit piles and otter droppings deteriorate quickly.



Another sign of otters are wallows, or 'scratch ups'. These occur along stream edges and consist of an area three to six feet in diameter where the grass or other vegetation has been raked or scratched into the center of the circle. Often, droppings or vomit will be found there. In snow, flattened trails can be observed where otters slide down the bank on their stomachs.

Locations

Otters can be found almost anywhere. They usually follow streams and other small watercourses, but they will also travel across dry land. However, there are certain places they like to visit more than others.

Otters like to travel from one small watershed to the next looking for food. Any small ditch, creek, or stream that connects to another body of water is likely to be an otter travelway. This is especially true of small drainages that lead to or from a marsh, swamp, or pond where the otters like to hunt.

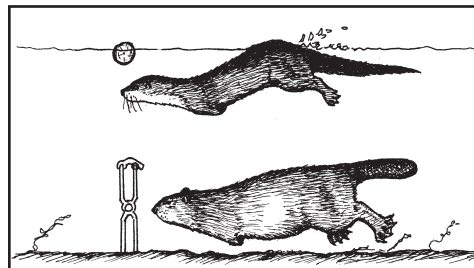
In a beaver flowage, the entrance and exit to a beaver pond are prone to otter travel. The inlet to a beaver pond has a high potential for otter capture as does the crossover on a beaver dam. While this may be a good place to catch a beaver, it also has a high potential for otter capture. This holds true for most crossovers along a beaver travelway, like crossovers near culverts or across manmade levees. Beavers often have well worn trails here, and it's likely that otters will follow the same path on their way through.

Another situation to avoid is an abandoned beaver lodge or bank den. Otters will check these regularly and often use them for temporary shelter when beavers have moved out. These abandoned dens and lodges are not particularly good beaver sets anyway.

Traps

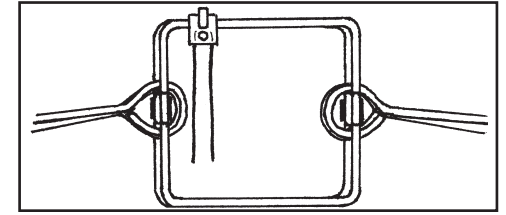
The large #330 bodygrip traps commonly used for beaver trapping have the highest potential for capturing an otter.

You can reduce the otter-capturing potential of a #330 by setting it deep under water. Choose locations that are 2 1/2 to 3 feet deep, or deeper. Put your trap on the bottom and float a dive pole over it. Generally, when a beaver encounters the pole, it will dive all the way to the bottom and get in the trap. An otter, on the other hand, will tend to just duck under the pole and pass over top of the trap.



Setting bodygrip traps deep under water may allow an otter to go over the top of the trap, while most beaver will dive to the bottom and be caught.

Another way to reduce the otter capturing potential of a #330 is to move the trigger wires all the way to one side of the trap and point them straight down. This will give a slender otter the chance to get through the trap, while a beaver will probably fire the trap. You can also add a second trigger to a #330, placing one trigger on each side of the trap, with the wires pointing straight down. An otter will tend to hug one side of the trap and hit only one trigger. Whereas, a beaver will probably hit both triggers.

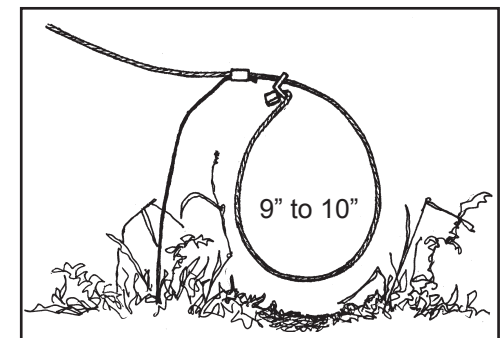


Moving the trigger completely to one side of a bodygrip trap can leave room for an otter to get through.

There are also some new #330 triggers available in which the tension can be adjusted with a bolt. Tightening the tension on the trigger and setting the trigger to one side can help preclude otter captures.

Still, the #330 in any configuration has a high potential for taking otters. If otter sign is present, you should avoid using #330s at key otter locations.

Foothold traps are less susceptible to catching otters, provided they are set deeply under water. However, foothold traps that are set shallow in trails that may be frequented by otters have a high potential for taking one of these animals. The main advantage of foothold traps



A snare set with a loop of 9 to 10 inches will allow an otter to pass through, but will still catch beaver.