

The 2003 Mercer Advanced Trappers Workshop
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by Mike Bruns

First a little history of the Mercer Wildlife Area. It is located on the Southwest corner of Grand Lake St. Mary and lies in Mercer County. It consists of 1,408 acres and is primarily managed for waterfowl. There are seven ponds, which were constructed for waterfowl nesting and utilization. Approximately one-fourth of the wildlife area is in cropland and meadow. Part of the wildlife area is in the lake itself and includes a number of small islands.

Looking at the different types of habitat, it is easy to see why many different furbearers make this area their home. These include muskrat, mink, raccoon, opossum, skunk, fox, both red and grey, coyote and beaver. There is also a pair of bald eagles that reside in the area.

The Mercer Wildlife Area is a great place to hold a trapping Workshop. As mentioned earlier, it has a good variety of furbearers to pursue. It also is very accessible to any of the trapping areas. There is a need to control the population of these furbearers in order to increase the nesting success of the ducks and geese.

On November 1 and 2, 2003 a Trapper's Workshop was held under the direction of the head instructor, Harry Kinnison. Other instructors included Harold Weismiller, Jeff Irwin and myself. We had five students who were very eager to broaden their trapping knowledge. Several of these students had been here before and realized the advantage of hands on experience.

Harry started Saturday morning off with introductions and an explanation of the schedule of events. He then proceeded to talk about basic trapline principles. This included the different types of traps, matching the correct trap to the right animal, trap anchoring, drowning rigs and dispatching your catch; should it be needed.

I then took the students outside and showed them trap preparation. This included the dye and wax method, the trap dip with gas method and the water trap dip. Advantages and disadvantages were pointed out. It was stressed how important it is to take good care of your traps in order to make them last many years.

Next, Harold did a demo on trapping raccoon with box traps. This was very informative as Harold has some neat baiting tricks to limit non-target animals. We then followed Harold to a pond for a water-trapping demo.

I then put on a canine trapping demo, since two of the students wanted to learn predator trapping. A standard dirt hold was explained along with trap bedding, and trap blending, along with baiting and luring variations.

After taking a dinner break it was finally time to go out and set some traps. This was what everyone was looking forward to. Harry, Harold and Jeff took three of the students to the marsh area to make sets for muskrats while I took the other two with me to look for some good locations for fox. Kyle and Jacob were the two trappers with me. We had enough time and traps for each student to make three dirt sets. These were varied between standard dirt holes, mouse holes and one flat set. We then went to the ponds to find Harry and his crew just finishing up.

Now came the hard part, waiting for the Sunday morning check. We all agreed to meet at 8:00 a.m. the next day.

The next morning everyone was eagerly waiting to see what the sets would produce. I took Kyle and Jacob with me and headed out to check our fox sets. The first set we came to was Kyle's and was untouched. This set was at a drive coming out of the prairie grass and given more time would have surely produced.

The second set was Jacob's and was put in by an island of trees and brush, making for an ideal canine hunting spot. As we approached we could see that the trap was snapped and laying out of the trap bed. Upon closer examination it was easy to see that a deer had trampled this set.

Set number three was Kyle's and was located along the edge where mowed grass met up with prairie grass. This set was not disturbed.

The fourth set was Jacob's and was put in at an outside corner of some fencing. This set was messed with. The lure stick had been worked out of the hole. It looked like the animal had worked the set from the side, but we couldn't find any tracks to know for sure what did it. Although fox do this, many times I find raccoons to be the culprit.

The fifth set was also Jacob's and it too was disturbed. This set had been put in at a gate opening between the fence. It wasn't possible to find any tracks in the grass to indicate what we were dealing with.

This left us with only one remaining set. This was Kyle's third set and was also located at a gate hole further on down the line. As we walked over towards the last set I explained that patience was a big part of predator trapping and that one shouldn't expect too much in a single night. As we crested a small hill, the final set was in view, but still a little ways off. As the morning was somewhat foggy I couldn't see anything moving around and figured that set was also empty. But as we approached I could start to make out an immobile form and was starting to tell Kyle that I thought he had connected with a "grinner" when all at once a grey fox started jumping around. Man were we all excited. After congratulating Kyle and taking some pictures, we dispatched the fox and headed back to the main area to see how the water trappers had done. These trappers were also very happy, as they had connected with nine muskrats.

After taking some pictures, it was time to demonstrate proper fur handling techniques. The young trappers then tried their own hand at putting up fur.

It ended up being a very enjoyable weekend for both the inspiring young trappers and also the instructors. I would like to thank the Ohio Division of Wildlife and also the people at Mercer Wildlife Area for letting us use such a fine facility. I can't say enough good things about a program such as this and the opportunity for learning through hands on experience. It makes me wonder, if I would have had something like this years ago, maybe it would not have taken me over a year to catch my first fox? ### Mike Bruns, OSTA District 2 Director, 5130 Karafit Rd., Celina, OH 45822

Editor's Note: I would like to personally thank Mike for taking time out of his busy trapping season to write this article for the BT. Starting with the Nov/Dec 2003 issue we have been featuring stories relating to OSTA events which are benefits to our members. It is our hope that these articles will give members information on these events, which they may not be too familiar with. Hopefully, members will take advantage of them in some way, either by reading or by attending one of them first hand.