

Extend Your Trapping Season by Focusing on Big Raccoon
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by Henry Beecher

If any of you have heard me talk about raccoon before, you know that they have different seasonal patterns: spring, summer, early fall, late fall, and winter. Mr. Coon leads a different lifestyle in each one of these seasonal patterns. In order to catch him, the trapper has to adjust accordingly. This article will be about catching raccoon in the late fall and winter patterns.

At this time of year, the raccoon has built up its fat level for winter and has "laid up" at least once or twice. What is "laid up?" This is when a 'coon stays in its den for periods of time. A coon might 'lay up' for days, weeks, or even a month. A lot of people don't understand that once a raccoon has his fat, it will lay up. At times it will be too warm or too cold, and he will not move. This is why it is so important for a 'coon trapper to have most of his raccoon caught before this time slot occurs in a 'coon's time table. I don't care how good a trapper you are, if the raccoon aren't running, you won't catch them.

Okay, let's catch some of these late season runners. Most of the raccoon we will be catching this time of year will be big 2x, 3x, and 4x boars. These big coon will run for food, water, and sows. Knowing that we are after these big 'coon, we will have to plan our late season line accordingly. We will set different areas using different methods and sets, because the raccoon are in a different pattern than early in the season. They are going different places and doing different things than before.

The question is, "What do big bore 'coon eat?" The answer, "Anything they want." They've got their fat and size, so they aren't on a corn diet like early season raccoon. They are looking for sows so they are checking spots that they know sows will be laid up at. Where are these spots? Big den woods with water, ditches with holes where raccoon live, barns, old buildings, and briar patches with holes. Basically any place that an old sow can get in and stay warm, live off fat, and sleep. Something these places have in common is that there is usually a water source close by. At this time of year when they are more active, water, food and mating are their objectives. Water sets and blind sets close to water are very good. But we will talk about sets later.

First let's talk about weather. During this time period of trapping season, the weather man has to be your friend. Watch the weather to the west. See where warm and cold fronts are. A lot of Indiana weather gets into central Ohio in two days. If you are not paying attention, you might do a lot of work for nothing. For example, you might make a lot of sets and the raccoon won't move. Sometimes you have just one night in seven days that they move, so you have to be ready when that night comes. Trap smart! If you don't see any warm up periods, then you can trap mink, fox, or coyotes. But when warm ups look possible, set like crazy for 'coon. A lot of times the temperature will be in the 20's during the day and warm up to 32 or 34 at night. The raccoon will move, so set hard in the 20 degree weather. It will pay off and you'll be glad you froze your hands when you see some of the big 4xs you catch the next day! I have had warm ups last from 6pm until midnight, along with a snowfall, then I caught several nice raccoon in that six hour warm up period. Do the work and be ready for the run, it will pay off.

Another thing you need to know about these "big 'coon" is that very few will be selects at the grading table. These big boys will never be selects. Their select days are over. They have fought to breed sows and have had fleas on them for years! Their hides will show the marks. But a lot of these hides will sell for slights, and they'll still bring you good money. Plus, catching these big boars will not hurt your next year's catch. If you do have long periods of warm, mild winter weather where the sows start running and you start catching bred sows, you better pull your traps. It is much better to quit and trap for something else, because you will hurt your raccoon catch down the road.

I AM A FIRM BELIEVER THAT A GOOD TRAPPER IS ALSO A GOOD FUR MANAGER. IN THAT IF

YOU ABUSE IT, YOU LOSE IT.

Remember that a lot of these “big ‘coon” live by themselves all year and move into these other areas during the breeding season. Catching some of these raccoon is good for the genetics in your area and it’s also a challenge for the trapper to trap during this time period.

Now let’s talk about ways to catch some of these big ‘coon. Snares, foot hold traps, and box traps are good choices at this time. I personally don’t use box traps, but a good friend of mine has had success with them. Lure and bait also work very well at this time of year, but I will cover them later on.

First let’s consider snares. The snare is my number one ‘coon catching tool year round. Snaring at this time of year is a lot different than snaring early in the season. There are weeds and all kinds of vegetation still standing in November when the season starts. This all helps to blend snares in. But at this late period in the trapping season, everything has died off and we usually have had snows to smash a lot of this dead vegetation down. This makes a set snare stick out like a sore thumb. So, we have to pick out spots in paths that are just right, in order to blend the snare in. Use weeds and sticks to guide the ‘coon into the loop, plus blend the looped cable into the surrounding area. These big raccoon aren’t dumb and they have seen a lot. These experienced animals have been dogged, pinched in traps, fought coyotes, and almost been run over by cars, so your snare hanging in the wide open will not fool them for a minute. They will actually play with it and pull it down. So, be sure to take the extra time and blend them in. I like to set snares along creeks, raccoon crossings on roads, around culvert areas, and briar patches that hold ‘coon. These are my favorite spots to catch big boars at this time of year.

Briars +corn + water = “big ‘coon” in Ohio. Lots of times these big boars travel long distances looking for sows and most of the time there are several males or boars around a sow that is close to being ready to breed. I’m saying that to say this – don’t be afraid to set several snares or traps in one area. It will surprise you how many big raccoon will be in one area in one night.

Next, let’s catch some raccoon in the water. Like I said before, these “big ‘coon” don’t have to do anything they don’t want to do. They can run dry ground or water, high country or bottoms. It is what they want to do, so we have to catch them doing what they want to do. Catch them with snares and footholds in blind sets. Or, we can show them something or let them smell something that will make them want to investigate, tricking them into doing what they want to do and what you want them to do. It’s really pretty easy to catch them when you have got their attention.

The blind set is my number one raccoon set...period. Using snare or coil, I have caught thousands of them with this set. They are the quickest and easiest to make and the most efficient set I know you can use in Ohio. But with any blind set, you have to know the pattern or path the animal is going to use. At times, with these “big ‘coon” and the time of year, it’s hard to guess where they will be. If we don’t know where they are running, we can sometimes get them to come to a spot by using sets with eye or nose appeal. This spot could be a hole, culvert, bridge, or a side ditch. Once you get the raccoon committed to one of these, it makes them easy to catch.

My number one set in water is a blind set and my number two set is always some form of a pocket set. The raccoon can see and smell these pockets and they work well. Remember, at this time of year you want to set traps in moving water; not fast water, but moving water. As you know, still water freezes so avoid these places.

Now let’s talk about lure and bait. At this time of year, and for these “big ‘coon,” bait is meat, period. Bluegill, shad, mackerel, and muskrat meat are all good baits. Gland lure and shellfish oil are the only lures I use at this time. Carmans #2 and Blackie’s Boars Delight are good, but any good gland lure will work. A slicked up hole

by itself will draw a coon's attention.

Sometime I will do an article on holes for canine, raccoon, cats, and mink. Then we will go in depth on this type of trapping. I hope this article has given you some ideas on how to extend your raccoon trapping season. I mentioned this earlier in the article, but I will point it out again: "A good trapper is also a good fur manager. If you abuse a resource you will lose it." In closing, I will be at the OSTA Convention this fall doing a demo on raccoon trapping. Come and introduce yourself to me. I enjoy talking to fellow trappers. If you have any questions, Ray, Jeremie, or I will be glad to try and help you out. Ray is my long time trapping partner and Jeremie is my son who has been my trapping partner ever since he was a kid. Both are very good at what they do – catching fur. ###Henry Beecher, 1864 County Road 1035, Route 6, Ashland, Ohio 44805.