

Trapping Baits and Lures
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Most of my life I used bait for everything I trapped. As I became older and wiser, I realized that you didn't really need it. There are alternative ways to catch critters besides baiting them. I use those alternatives. I've grown to dislike baits because they are not as necessary as most trappers believe. I've never been a big believer in lure, even though I've used gallons of it. It's a form of bait because it's an attractor. Most trappers use both – often in conjunction with each other. I did for many, many years.

Baits and lures work. They put tons of fur on stretchers. They keep a lot of dealers in business. I sold cases and cases of it when I was a dealer and a fur buyer. I even made my own, which I used and sold. It caught critters too. With all that said, how necessary is it? Can you trap successfully without it? I did and still do. Trail or blind sets eliminate the need for lure or bait. That is primarily how I now trap. I don't need to trap any other way to catch all of the fur I can handle.

That wouldn't be true if I trapped canines. You starve to death if you exclusively set trails for canines. In my younger days, I took plenty of red and gray foxes in trail sets. I know several who snare all the coyotes on trails that they can handle. I've snared canines, but hate to use them. They stress the animal and the fur too much for me. If I can't foothold them, I don't trap them. You need lure for foothold sets. My lure is natural. I use coyote urine and their droppings. I've caught several hundred using it so I know it is effective. Baits used at coyote sets produce too many skunks and opossums to suit me. I seldom catch either using natural coyote "ingredients." The trappers in Arkansas often asked me how I was able to stay away from the thousands of opossums that they had there. I told them that I was just lucky, as I rarely caught any. Throw a piece of bait in a dirt hole like they do and a "smiley" will be waiting. When he gets there ahead of the coyote, predictably your coyote catch will suffer. In my best year I caught 78 coyotes, 17 bobcats, and only three opossums, so I know with that ratio, natural coyote ingredients tend to scare away opossum instead of attracting them like chunk bait does (and Arkansas has more opossums than people by far).

Whenever I look back at my early days of trapping, I have to laugh at how little I knew. All I knew was bait and lure. It was as necessary as the traps I used. I used every bait I could get my hands on. When I fox trapped, chunks of half-rotten groundhog were my favorite dirt hole bait. I buried it in the ground during the summer and let it age. I'd put it in glycerine after digging it up and use a set of tongs or forks to shove it into the dirt hole. Did I catch fox? You bet! Did I catch skunks, cats, and opossums? You bet! I caught whatever got there first. I had no idea that all of that wasn't necessary. I was taught to fox trap by one of Pennsylvania's best at that time. He was a friend of Russ Carmen. You did what you're taught and believe in it as long as it produces fur – which it did.

I guess you could call me a slow learner because it took several decades for me to learn all that hard work making bait and using someone's "magic" lure weren't really necessary. We are products of our educators. Nobody can educate you as well as you can educate yourself. I learned about natural coyote ingredients by accident. I went to Arkansas one year to trap beavers, leaving my coyote gear behind in Ohio. I decided to trap some coyotes because there were so many and the farmers demanded that I do it. I had no lure or bait. Necessity is the mother of invention, so I decided to use coyote feces and urine as attractors. The results are now history. I only ran a short line of a dozen traps because I only had two dozen. In two weeks I took 23 coyotes on my scat and urine. My bait and lure using days were finished. We do, indeed, become too late smart and too soon dumb. There is no better teacher than good old on-the-job training.

I recall taking many old, wise red fox in the glory days of high fur prices, on a buried skunk. Trapping pressure was heavy then and fox were wise. You had to know your stuff. Fox shied away from my fresh dirt, so dirt holes and flat sets were ineffective. Somebody told me to bury a skunk along their travel way and set a couple

of traps around it. I thought they were jerking my chain, but they assured me it was an old time set that worked when nothing else did. I buried a road-killed skunk in a small mound, set two #2 Montgomery's by it, and waited. A week passed without any activity, although I was sure that reds were walking by it every night. I consulted the old-timer who told me about the set, and he told me to be patient. The fox would continue to walk by it until their curiosity got the best of them. He assured me that sooner or later it would happen because they would just have to dig to see what was in there. He asked me if the fox bait was completely covered and I assured him that it was. The old man was right. On the tenth day I had the biggest red fox I'd ever seen. He weighted fourteen pounds and was caught in both traps. That set produced a couple of dozen \$75-\$80 red foxes for me in two seasons and I never told a soul about it. It would lose its effectiveness if everybody used it. It always took at least a week to hit.

Many years later I caught a skunk in a coyote set in Arkansas and decided to use it as buried bait. I made a small mound, set two #2 Montgomery's, and only waited one night for it to hit. The next day I had a small bobcat; I was elated. That set was there another month and produced nothing. Later that season I caught another skunk on another farm (by the way – skunks in Arkansas are not very plentiful). I buried the skunk, set my two traps, and it rained hard all night. I drove to the set on a four-wheeler in a pouring rain to find that both traps had hit: The both held skunks. I couldn't stop laughing. I recall thinking, "Use a skunk for bait and you shouldn't be surprised to catch a skunk." That was over ten years ago and is the last time I ever used a buried skunk for bait.

While on the subject of skunks attracting skunks, I remember the best call lure in the glory days of trapping: Hawbaker's 600 call lure. You put a few drops up high near your trap and a fox could smell it a mile away. Its dominant odor was skunk essence and it was powerful in any kind of weather. If it didn't draw a fox to your set, it would draw a skunk. I caught every skunk within smelling distance and never associated the high numbers with the call lure. Ohio always seems to have plenty of skunks and it took a lot of years for me to make the connection. Sometimes you can be as dumb as a box of rocks. I was.

Nothing beats big, dead baits like cattle, sheep, deer, or some other big critter during the dead of winter. Food is scarce then and every coyote in the area will be attracted to the carcass. That's when snare-men have a field day. The coyotes make trails or paths to the carcass, which they use nightly. Such baits are most effective when placed in a field of high weed because they become obvious and are easier to hang snares in because they are kind of like a funnel. Ohio coyotes are smart, but hunger makes them lose a lot of their smarts. Snares stay effective and operational in all kinds of weather that would put footholds out of commission. That's one reason that Ohio legalized them. They are a great tool for controlling coyotes, but some Ohio coyotes are snare-shy and will go around them. Been there and saw it. When they see pack mates get snared, they associate snares with danger and avoid them.

Trappers are a gullible lot whenever it comes to lures for the critters they trap. Some are always looking for that perfect, irresistible lure that will take every critter that gets near it. They have no idea that there is no such lure. The only one that even comes close is pure beaver castor. It's used primarily for attracting beavers, but is also attractive to every animal that walks. Your cat or dog will even find it irresistible. Beaver castor is it; nothing beats it. I've caught every critter that walks and has fur on it. Use a dab or a spoonful in a dirt hole for canines and it works. I have no idea why so many animals are attracted to it, but they are. I grind my castors, mix it with beaver grooming oil or pure glycerine, and store it in capped gallon jugs. I usually grind several hundred castors at a time. The more you have, the better the castor is. It drives beavers crazy. If there is a better lure, I've never seen or smelled it. Why is it so effective? Only the critters know. Watch how every animal in an area will visit every beaver lodge there. Their big attractor is the smell of castor coming from the lodge. It's amazing. Coyotes, bobcats, otters, mink, fox, you name it; they all visit beaver lodges. Check the snow and you'll see their tracks.

If you've used some lure maker's lure for years and gotten the results you wanted, by all means continue to

use it. I know trappers who enjoy using different lures and keeping records of their results. It's part of their trapping enjoyment. How can anyone tell them that they are wrong? They're doing what they enjoy. That's what trapping and life are all about. Most successful lure makers use tons of natural ingredients in their lures. They blend them so each one will emit its own odor. That should make it appeal to most animals. I'd be the last to tell them that they don't know what they're doing because they do. I've had some ask me to try their lures. I refuse. That doesn't mean that I don't believe the lure won't work – I know it will. I don't want to restrict myself to making sets that require lure. I've had bottles of my own lure for years that I know worked. They remain unopened because I don't use them. Someday, if I decided to use it, it's there. I don't need anyone else's lure. When I make my own lure, I know what's in it and what it will attract. I don't know that about someone else's lures. When it comes to lures and baits, trappers are unique. We truly are individuals with our own personal beliefs. That's the only way to be. Only you know what a lure or bait does for you. It might not do that for me or some other trapper. A good lure is like a good wife: You're comfortable and at ease with either.

Most baits are used to attract animals that want to eat them. In the case of canines, that's not always true. Stink baits are used so they can dig them up and roll on them, masking their own scents. Canines rarely eat any bait that they dig up unless they're the one who buried it. When you use fish for raccoon or mink or some other bait, they intend to eat it. The same is true of apples, carrots, or some other vegetable for muskrats. Mink generally like to kill their own food. Fresh twigs or sticks for beaver make great bait if you make them look like another beaver has cut them. The effectiveness of any bait for food often depends upon the scarcity of food in the area. That, in turn, often depends upon the time of winter and the type of weather. There are also other factors. Some animals will not eat what some others of its species will. Baiting isn't always a sure-fire thing that'll guarantee you success. Often, the sight of bait draws an animal to it because it's curious to see what it is. I've caught many mink in pocket sets atop muskrat houses baited with apples. The mink wasn't interested in eating the apple. It was curious to see what it was. I've done the same with muskrats caught in pocket sets for raccoon baited with fish – and muskrats aren't fish eaters.

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