

2003-04 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #04-4

The Fur Harvest Survey provides estimates of (1) numbers of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, (2) value of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, and (3) distribution of the harvest among resource users. This project is supported in part by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program (Project W-99-R, Study X, Job 16).

Methods

State law requires licensed fur buyers to maintain records and submit reports of all raw furs purchased. We mailed report forms and written instructions to licensed buyers about 15 days before the opening of the muskrat trapping season. Buyers who failed to report by the deadline were sent up to 2 reminders by first class mail and another by certified letter.

Buyers provided estimates of (1) raw fur purchases from Illinois hunters and trappers, (2) average pelt prices for all sizes and grades, and (3) percentages of pelts taken by fur hunters. We corrected estimates for non-response and out-of-state pelt sales.

Results

The Department issued 84 permits to 83 fur buyers during 2003-04. Based on a 98.8% response, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 200,443, an increase of 9% from 2002-03 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers during 2003-04 increased 40% to \$1,647,041.35. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 87% of the total harvest and 86% of its value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 5% for striped skunk to 73% for coyote; they were intermediate for opossum (20%), red fox (29%) and gray fox (32%). Hunters accounted for the same proportion of the raccoon harvest in 2003-04 as in 2002-03 (61%).

Discussion

Markets for long-haired furs like raccoon, fox, and coyote were relatively strong during 2003-04. At \$8.90, the average pelt value for raccoon reached its highest point since 1997. The last time the average pelt value for coyote exceeded \$13.15 was in 1986. A weaker dollar helped support prices because most articles were destined for China, Hong Kong, Greece, and Russia.

Sales during 2003-04 were greater than long-term averages (1975-76 through 2003-04) for beaver (111%), striped skunk (126%), coyote (132%), and badger (133%). Sales of muskrat, mink, red fox, and gray fox were \leq 30% of their respective long-term averages. Sales of raccoon (76%), opossum (36%) and weasel (48%) were intermediate compared to long-term averages.

Sales of trapping licenses decreased from 3,110 in 2002-03 to 2,888 in 2003-04. During 2002-03, approximately 13,500 raccoon hunters spent 192,900 days afield and 26,400 coyote hunters spent 311,100 days afield (Miller et al. 2004). Estimates were not yet available for the 2003-04 season.

Literature Cited

Miller, C.A., W.L. Anderson, L.K. Campbell, and C.B. Colligan. 2004. Results of the 2002-03 hunter harvest survey. Human Dimensions Program Report HR-03-02. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2002-03 vs. 2003-04.

| Species | Number of pelts sold ^a | | Change in sales from 2002-03 ^b | | Average price per pelt (dollars) | | Total value to fur-takers (dollars) | | Change in value from 2002-03 (dollars) | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---|----------|----------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|--------------|--|-----------|
| | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | | | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | | |
| Muskrat | 34,860 | 21,555 | -13,305 | (-38.2) | 2.55 | 2.60 | 88,893.00 | 56,043.00 | -32,850.00 | (-36.9) |
| Mink | 2,911 | 2,552 | -359 | (-12.3) | 7.70 | 8.85 | 22,414.70 | 22,585.20 | -170.50 | (-0.8) |
| Raccoon | 129,101 | 153,640 | +24,539 | (+19.0) | 7.20 | 8.90 | 929,527.20 | 1,367,396.00 | +437,868.80 | (+47.1) |
| Opossum | 5,849 | 7,340 | +1,491 | (+25.5) | 1.30 | 1.50 | 7,603.70 | 11,010.00 | +3,406.30 | (+44.8) |
| Red fox | 1,270 | 1,330 | +60 | (+4.7) | 19.45 | 18.65 | 24,701.50 | 24,804.50 | +103.00 | (+0.4) |
| Gray fox | 101 | 114 | +13 | (+12.9) | 12.75 | 16.25 | 1,287.75 | 1,852.50 | +564.75 | (+43.8) |
| Beaver | 4,026 | 4,947 | +921 | (+22.9) | 8.15 | 10.05 | 32,811.90 | 49,717.35 | +16,905.45 | (+51.5) |
| Striped skunk | 547 | 636 | +89 | (+16.2) | 2.80 | 4.35 | 1,531.60 | 2,766.00 | +1,235.00 | (+80.6) |
| Weasel | 11 | 25 | +14 | (+127.3) | 0.50 | 0.60 | 5.50 | 15.00 | +9.50 | (+172.70) |
| Coyote | 5,460 | 8,268 | +2,808 | (+51.4) | 11.75 | 13.35 | 64,155.00 | 110,377.80 | +46,222.80 | (+72.0) |
| Badger | 25 | 36 | +11 | (+44.0) | 10.10 | 13.15 | 252.50 | 473.40 | +220.90 | (+87.5) |
| Total/mean | 184,161 | 200,443 | +16,282 | (+8.8) | 6.35 | 8.20 | 1,173,184.35 | 1,647,041.35 | +473,857.00 | (+40.4) |

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by the Illinois Furbearer Trapping Survey, 2002-03 (Wildlife Harvest and Hunter Opinion Surveys, W-112-R).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.