

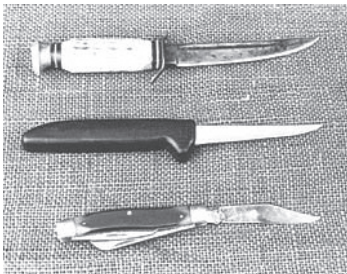
## Chapter 16

# Handling Fur



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Fur Handling Tools  
Comb, Brush, & Fork



Knives



Knife Sharpeners

**Content Standard** - *Students demonstrate an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and equipment needed to safely skin animals and prepare the pelts for market*

### Introduction

Proper fur handling is the key to getting a good price for the furbearers you worked so hard to trap. Furbearer carcasses can spoil quickly, especially in warm weather. If you don't know how to skin and prepare pelts you may want to consider selling your furs unskinned on the carcass. To avoid spoilage, a good rule of thumb is to sell unskinned animals daily if the outside temperature is above 40 degrees, every two or three days if below 40 degrees. Selling your pelts on the carcass is less work for you and more work for the buyer. You will receive a lower price for unskinned furs. If you do decide to skin your own catch, proper fur handling begins at the trap site.

If a furbearer is trapped in water it should be removed from the trap and rinsed clean of any dirt, mud, or vegetation. Shake excess water from the animal, and stroke it from head to tail with your hand to remove as much water as possible. If dry snow is available, the animal can be rolled in it to absorb water. If it is below freezing don't lay a wet animal on ice or a metal surface. The guard hairs of the pelt will freeze to ice or metal, damaging the pelt when you pick it up. If an animal's fur is still wet when you get home, hang it up by the head or forelegs in a cool place to dry. Circulating air with a fan will decrease drying time. Generally, pelts should be dry before being skinned and placed on a stretching frame.

If a furbearer is trapped on land and is already dry, simply brush or comb the pelt to remove any burrs or dirt. Land furbearers may have external parasites such as fleas, ticks, or mites, so keep the carcasses in a place where they won't contaminate your house, clothing, or vehicle.



### ***Explain the importance of wearing latex gloves when processing furbearers***

Furbearers should be skinned as soon as possible after they are trapped. The pelt is easier to remove and less likely to be damaged when the animal is fresh. Before skinning, remember to put on a pair of latex gloves. The gloves will help protect you from any diseases the animal might be carrying.

### ***Explain the terms “cased furs” and “open furs”***

Pelts are prepared for the fur market by skinning in one of two ways: cased or open. Except for beaver and sometimes badger, all furbearers should be skinned cased.

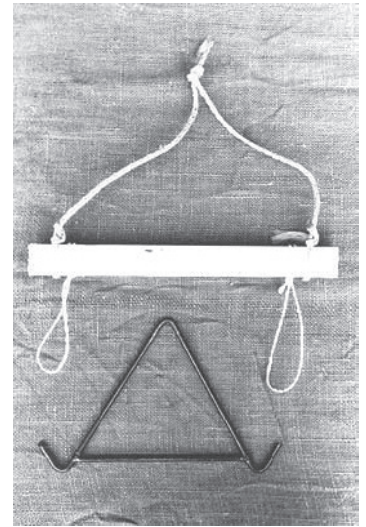
Case skinning is much like removing a sweater or sweatshirt by grasping the bottom and turning it inside out as you pull it up over your head. To do this with a furbearer pelt, make a cut from the top of the foot pad along the inside of one back leg to the top of the foot pad of the other back leg. Then simply remove the pelt from the carcass by turning it inside out, skinning down over the back legs, forelegs, and head.

To skin a beaver or badger using the open method, make a cut on the underside of the animal from its chin to the base of its tail. Removing the fur this way is much the same as you would take off a coat.

### ***Explain the terms “market fur in” and “market fur out”***

Fur buyers want cased-skinned, dried furs presented to them either “fur in” or “fur out,” depending upon the furbearer species. “Fur in” means that the fur side of the pelt is on the inside when the pelt is sold. “Fur out” is just the opposite; the fur should be on the outside of the pelt, the skin on the inside. Check with your local fur buyer to see how he wants each species of furbearer pelt prepared for market.

Most fur buyers are glad to explain proper fur handling techniques and preparation to you since it means more profit for both of you. Don't be afraid to ask.



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Gambrels



Silvertip Productions

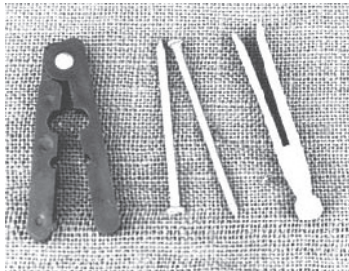
Skinning Beaver



Raccoon - cased pelt, fur in

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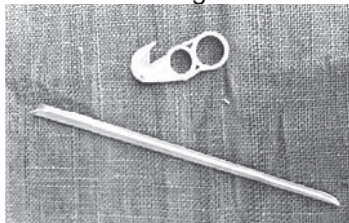
Tailbone Pullers



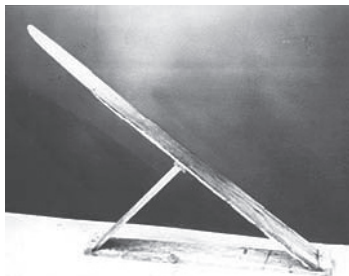
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Commercial model, nails, clothespins

Tail Slitting Tools



Top - Slitting Knife  
Bottom -Metal Guide



Fleshing Board

Muskrat Tools



Muskrats do not have a lot of fat. They can be pulled over a scraping board and fleshed with a butter knife or a spoon

## ***Explain why the tails of some furbearers are split and left on the pelt while the tails of others are removed***

Furbearers with furred tails should have their tails split from the underside with a knife and the tail bone removed. A tail-stripper comes in handy for this purpose. The de-boned, furred tail should remain attached to the pelt. Tails of furbearers that are not furred should be cut from the pelt at the hairline during skinning and discarded.

## ***Know the purpose of a fleshing board and fleshing tools***

Once you've skinned a furbearer the next step is fleshing. A fleshing board is a narrow wooden or fiberglass beam that holds a pelt when removing meat or fat still on the skin. If not removed, this meat or fat could rot and spoil the pelt.

Once pulled onto a fleshing beam (skin side out), the pelt is scraped with a double-handled draw knife, a single-handled scraper, or other type of fleshing tool.

Draw Knife (below)



Spoon Scraper (right)



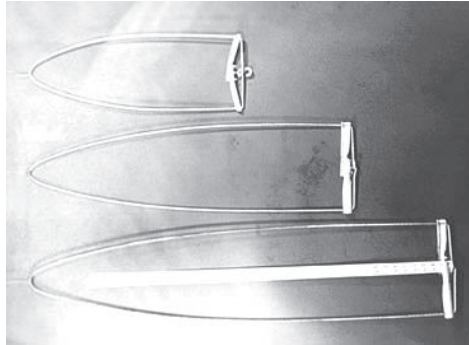
## ***Describe the proper use of wire and wooden stretchers***

The final step in preparing furs for market is to place the skinned, fleshed pelt on a wire or wooden stretcher. The term "stretching" may be a little misleading, as the pelt is not being stretched at this point in the process. Rather, it is simply being held in place as it dries so that it does not shrink or shrivel. Most cased-skinned furs should first be placed over a stretching board or wire frame fur-side in. Remember to center the pelt on the board or frame, meaning that the forelegs and belly of the pelt should be on one side of the frame and the eye holes, ears, and back should be on the other side. Pull the pelt snug, but not too tight. If you are using a wooden stretching board secure the pelt in place with a few tacks or push pins near the base of the tail and back legs. Wire frames usually have two metal arms with prongs that hold the base of the pelt taut.





Wire stretchers come in many sizes, and are most commonly used



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Beaver skinned open

### ***Explain the process of drying pelts and why it is important***

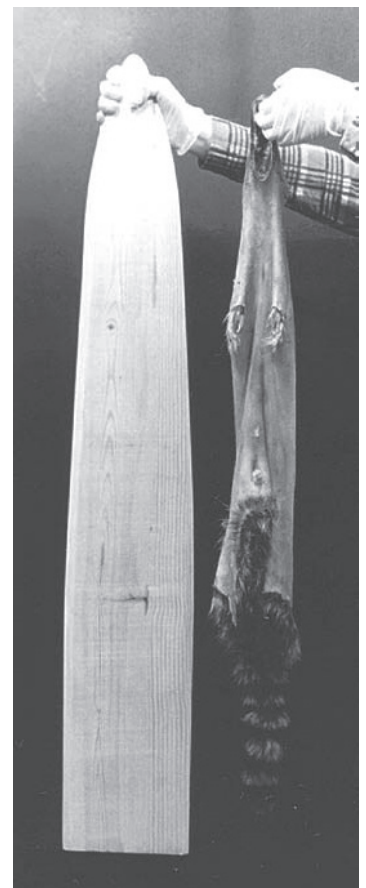
Once a pelt has been properly placed on a stretching board or wire frame it should be hung up and dried slowly in a room with a temperature of about 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Use a fan to circulate air throughout the room to decrease drying time. Pelts of wolves, foxes, bobcats, fishers, marten, weasels, and coyotes should be turned fur side out.

You must check the pelts as they dry fur side in. Once the skin is dry to the touch, remove the fur from the stretcher and turn it fur side out. Place the pelt back on the stretcher fur side out and pin it in place to finish drying. The skin may be dry to the touch in as little as one hour for weasels, to as long as 10 hours for wolves.

Complete drying of a pelt may take anywhere from just a few days to a week or more depending upon the temperature and air flow. Regardless of how long it takes, a pelt should be completely dry before removing it from the stretching board or wire frame. If not, the pelt could rot, and all the effort you put into catching, skinning, fleshing, and drying the fur will be lost.

### ***Explain the process for freezing pelts***

An alternative to stretching skinned pelts is to quick-freeze them. Care must be taken if you choose this method or the pelts could be ruined. Always freeze the pelt flat, fur-side out, with no exposed flesh. Do not roll furs, and never freeze or thaw your fur in plastic. Animals with heavy flesh such as coyote, raccoon, beaver, and badger should be thawed out for 5-6 hours in a cool room before selling. Never allow frozen green pelts to thaw for so long that the grease melts, or the skin gets slimy. Muskrat pelts should be frozen flat and not thawed at all before selling.



Wooden Stretcher



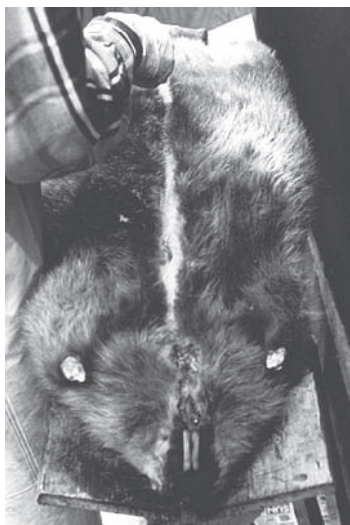
Turning a Canine Pelt

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Stretching Canine Fur Out



Preparing to Skin a Beaver



Beaver on Board

Small furbearers such as mink and muskrat can be frozen whole, without skinning. Allow whole frozen animals to partially thaw before selling. In the case of selling whole frozen muskrats, only the feet need to be thawed when presenting to the buyer.

Individual furbuyers may have different instructions for freezing pelts or whole animals. If you know where you intend to sell your fur, check with the buyer for more specific directions on freezing fur.

### ***Explain the procedure for “boarding beaver”***

Beaver and sometimes badger are skinned open rather than cased. The pelt is then either tacked onto a plywood board, or sewn onto a wooden or metal hoop frame for drying. If tacked onto a plywood board (this should be done skin side up), use nails at least two inches long. Place the nails no more than one inch apart. The pelt should be shaped to form either a circle or oval. Once the pelt is tacked in place, raise it off the board up to the head of the nails in order to allow air circulation between the pelt and board. If sewing the beaver pelt onto a hoop, make your stitches about an inch apart. Regardless of whether you tack or sew, the four leg holes on the pelt should be closed, either by nails or stitching.



Tacking beaver to board



Lifting beaver pelt from board

Note: Experienced beaver trappers sometimes skin a beaver partly open, and partly cased. This makes it easier to hold the beaver on a fleshing beam. After fleshing they finish cutting the belly so they can board the beaver.

The following pages cover the steps taken to skin, flesh, stretch, and dry a raccoon pelt.



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1. Brush and comb the fur.



2. Lines show where to cut.



3. Cut both legs from ankle to vent, then around the ankles.



4. Cut bottom side of tail. Start about 1/4 of the tail length down. Wear latex gloves when skinning. Keep your knife sharp.



5. Pull the pelt off the legs, down to the crotch. Work it loose with your fingers, then cut it away at the crotch.



6. Pull the pelt off the hips then pull it away from the back and part way down the tail.



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7. Remove tail bone with puller.



8. Once the tail is free, you can use the tail splitter, or the tip of a sharp knife to split open the tail.



9. Pull the pelt down to the animal's shoulders. Use a rag to get a good grip.



10. Work your fingers through the pelt at the armpit and pull the skin off the leg.



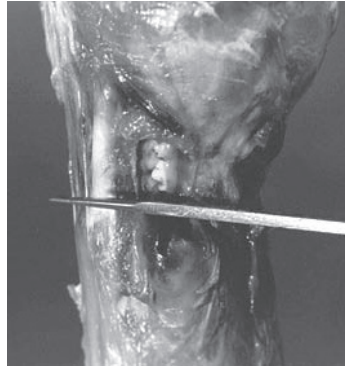
11. Pull the skin down to the ankle.



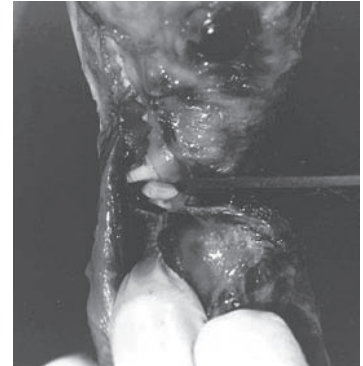
12. Pull the pelt down over the neck. Cut through the ear cartilage at the skull without cutting the fur.



13. Pull the pelt down to the eyes. Work your knife around the eyelids without cutting the fur.



14. Cut the pelt free at the jaw hinge, and then follow the lips without hitting the teeth. The teeth will dull your knife.



15. Cut through the bottom of the lip and free the pelt. You don't need to skin all the lower jaw. Cut lip half way up.



16. Raccoons have a lot of fat. Work the pelt over the fleshing beam. Put a rag over the nose of the pelt and press your stomach against the beam to hold the pelt. Start scraping just behind the ears, working down the pelt and away from your body using a pushing motion.



17. Pull the pelt up on the beam as you work further down the skin. This picture shows the fleshing knife working the raccoon's stomach area.



18. When you finish fleshing the body, do each leg and the tail. Be careful around the tail so you don't tear it off.



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19. Slip the pelt over the wire stretcher and adjust it.



20. Hook the tail in place.



21. Hook the back legs.



22. Pull down on the edges of the pelt to stretch it to length. Do not pull hard on the hooks, or they may tear the pelt. Hang the stretched pelt up to dry. Under good conditions this will take four to seven days.



23. Tacking pelt - If using a wood stretcher.



24. Wedge - When using wooden stretchers use tacks to hold the tail and feet in place. Use a wedge between the belly and the board so that you will be able to remove the pelt when it dries and shrinks.