

Trapper's Education Course

– A great experience for everyone!

by
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I started this week by attending a Trappers' Education Course, sponsored by the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game and the New Hampshire Trappers' Association. The program was held at Mel Liston's Farm. Just below the crest of a Barnstead hill... Mel's farm is as close to heaven as you can hope to get. There were cool breezes in the shade of old trees and wild flowers surrounding a large field of corn. A contemporary large barn equipped for the trapping professional gave a touch of civilization to this perfect country setting. Mel Liston and Bob McMaster served as our primary instructors. Officer Dave Eskeland of the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game led the session on Rules and added his insight to good trapping practices. It was a long beautiful and informational day.

We started at 9:00 AM. Seventeen of the 20 register participants arrived on time. The last three never showed and missed out. In our class, there were four youthful people and two women. Attendees were there for a variety of reasons. One farmer wanted to learn how to better protect his chickens. Several people wanted to spend more quality time with family members and friends that trapped. We also had Tom Flynn in our class. He is the new Hunter Education Coordinator for the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game. One fellow who came was already a trapper of fisher that had been killing cats at his condo complex. His neighbors asked him to help them stop the fishers and the price the pelts brought really surprised him.



The group enjoys the latest issue of NH Wildlife while waiting for everyone to arrive.

Our text for the day was titled, "Get set to Trap – A Trapper's Education Handbook. Mel led the first session on the history of Trapping. Trapping was essential to the development of new lands as trappers harvested the animals that would interfere with the establishment of small communities. Trading the furs was an industry of the earlier settlers and provided economic support for colonial villages. Trapping like other wild game past times has gone full cycle from thinning large populations, to depleted species situations to restoration and implementation

of conservation policies to protect the balance of all species.



Mel discussing Wildlife Management

The discussion then turned to Wildlife Management. Trappers have been used for centuries to remove nuisance animals. They have been used to secure and transport species from one area to another to help propagate a population. They have also moved species to protect other endangered species that are lower in the food chain. In the big picture, only a few species of animals can be taken by trappers. Trapping is strictly regulated. Trappers pay license and permit fees. They must present land permits to their Conservation Officer before they begin trapping and they must file written reports summarizing their activities each April. Trappers must check their trap lines daily. The sport of trapping requires dedication and commitment to be successful.

Bob McMaster then spoke about ethics. Ethics in trapping is a complex matter. If you accidentally trap a neighbor's dog or cat, you owe it to the animal and the owner to return the animal to the owner. I thought a dog would likely run away, but Bob said, "When you remove a dog from a trap you're likely to become it's best friend and it will probably stay right by your side." When you find someone else's traps in your area the law prohibits you from disturbing the trap. When you set traps, you need to make accurate maps or marks to ensure you retrieve all your traps by the end of the season. When you see poachers you need to report them. Unlike other hunters, trappers are in the woods every day. Guns are used for the dispatch of animals so you should never carry a loaded gun when on your trap line. When you catch something you shouldn't, you need to report it. Honest and forthright communication with your CO (Conservation Officer) is essential to a good working relationship. Ethics and trap selection were emphasized. Trappers have a responsibility to select the best trap and set the trap they select to catch or immediately dispatch the trapped animal. Lastly, if you take too many animals you and everyone else will have no animals for next year so study and observe the wildlife of your area and know how to recognize the strength of the popula-

tion. The professional trapper has all of their traps clearly and properly tagged and the season is not over until every trap is collected.

To close out this Section, Fish and Game Officer Dave Eskeland came and spoke about rules and good trapping practices. We all have a responsibility to the resource, the landowner and our fellow trappers. Courtesy and honesty can go a long way in a quest to become a successful trapper.



CO Dave Eskeland talks to the group.

We also talked about the various animals you can trap in New Hampshire. Mel had some beautiful coyote and other pelts to show us. Some pelts are regulated by the State and or Federal government and have to be sealed as well as tagged. The seal is not removed until the animal is purchased for production into clothing.

Mel and Bob gave a thorough education in trapping equipment. There are a variety of traps. I used to call spring traps: "leg traps." These are actually foothold traps. And, the truth be known, today's traps have tension settings and expanded restraining surfaces that allow for the release of small, young or pregnant animals. Snow and ice can ruin and render traps ineffective. Mel and Bob showed us how they boil their traps in black die and Bee's wax to seal and protect the mechanism



Mel dipping the trap.

When we talked about setting traps, Bob told a few war stories and then showed us how to get out of a Conibear trap with only one arm should the other arm get caught in the trap. Although Bob said it never happened to him, he always carried a short hank of rope for the emergency. I was intrigued by the numerous special tools presented to us in these demonstrations. Most tools looked like they were crafted and welded by hand. Trappers seem to me to be a creative and talented lot.



Bob getting out of a Conibear trap.

Then we talked about handling the catch. This can be very hard work and you need more special tools. One challenge of trapping is you can walk your line for days and get nothing. Then that day at dusk that you trap several animals you then have to go home and prepare the animal. When the hay is dry you have to bail it and you cannot put it off to when it is convenient. Trapping requires a diligent and dedicated sportsman.

Then came the test. I couldn't believe it. It was a closed book test. No goofing off here. Hope I paid attention. It wasn't hard;



Mel (in the background) grading tests.

our instructors were informative and entertaining.

Well, I passed. But more importantly I learned far more than I ever expected about how important trapping is to "BMP's" or Best Management Practices at the local, state and national levels. Trappers play an important role in selective maintenance of the species that can affect all of us. For the dedicated sportsman, trapping provides time alone and together. Mel said though, "When you're on the ice you keep your distance, not because of smell but so that you both do not go down together."

Oh, did I mention Kathi. She lives up on the farm too and her hospitality of providing fruits and crackers and cookies on the classroom tables ensured we all had that extra energy to get a better grade. Thanks Kathi!

If you ever get a chance to attend a Trapper Education Course I encourage you to attend. It is a great learning experience and you will have a greater appreciation of the great outdoors and greater understanding of the role trappers' play in the management of our wildlife resources.

If you have questions about future Trapper Education Courses call New Hampshire Fish and Game today.