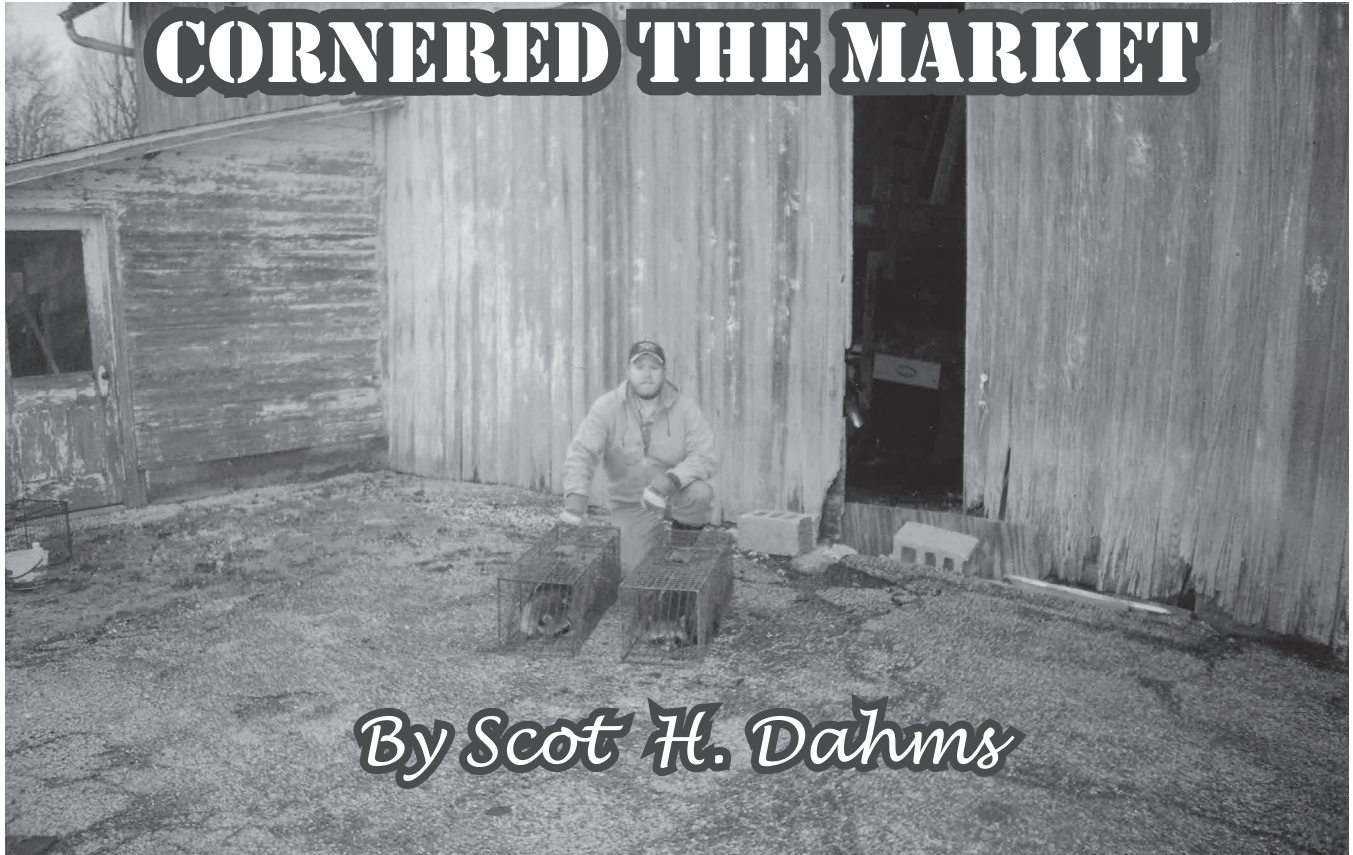


# CORNERED THE MARKET



*By Scot H. Dahms*

“You have cornered the market on possums” I told Zach, a university student conducting depredation studies on opossum and raccoon carcasses. His request that I trap opossums and raccoons for his study was put into motion the previous year when I made contact with another student, Jim, who was leading a crop depredation study in the area where I trapped. Although, I was aware of the study being conducted, I did not know how involved I would be in it a few years later.

One morning during the 2003 season, I caught a large boar raccoon in a 220 Conibear set in a raccoon trail. The animal looked “weird” from a distance. After taking the raccoon out of the trap, I found that it had a radio collar around its neck and ear tags. The ear tags had a phone

number, which I called, and found that the animal was part of a Purdue University research study involving raccoons, turkey, deer, and other animals.

The study was occurring in most of the area where my trapline was, and I caught several ear tagged raccoons that year. I was able to keep all the tags, but they wanted the collar returned. On one trip to my fur buyer’s building, I found that they had another collar from another raccoon.

Jim set a time for him to come and pick up the collar from me at my home. Once he arrived, he was curious in my catches, so I showed him the raccoons and other animals I had caught, my traps and my trapping truck. I told him that I called it my “Tricked out trapping truck.” I said that it should not be confused with a

“trapped out tricking truck.”

He asked if he could check traps with me one morning, and I said that would be great. I always like to have someone along to share my trapping experiences with. I do not remember how many animals were caught that day, but he seemed to be impressed with the number and variety caught.

We were talking about the fur buyer and the radio collar they had taken off another raccoon. I made contact with the buyer and let him know that Jim would be making contact with him. Jim and I also discussed another student who was studying parasites that reside in raccoon’s intestines. I brought up that I did not think that the fur buyer would mind a student cutting the guts out of several raccoons for their study.

On a subsequent visit to the



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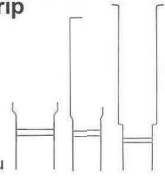
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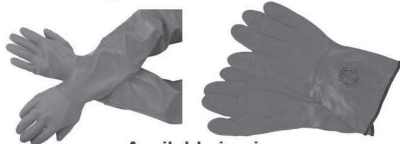


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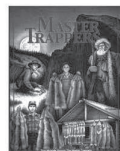


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fur buyer, the student was there removing the innards. He was removing each set of intestines and individually bagging them. In later discussions with the fur buyer, he said that student bagged several hundred raccoon guts.

Before the 2007 season started, I received a call from Zach. Jim had told him about me and Zach wanted to buy all the raccoons and opossums I could catch. I asked him what he was offering. The price for opossum was better than what I was getting which was nothing and I told him that he had cornered the market on opossums and could purchase everyone I caught. His raccoon prices were lower than what I was getting for the larger ones. Zach said that I could sell the larger ones elsewhere, and I said he could have all the small and medium ones.

I was running a pure 220

Conibear line using no bait or lure. All traps were set in pre-existing trails. The animals were already using the trail, so no other attractant was needed. I was catching about one opossum for every three raccoons I caught. The only baited sets I used were in cage traps in barns.

Zach had two requirements for the carcasses. They had to be fresh, not rotten, and there could not be any blood on them. I had freezer space and whenever they were full, I would call, and he would come and pick up the animals.

Based on the price he paid for possums, I wanted to make sure I had a way to dispatch the ones in cage traps as well without getting blood on them. This meant shooting them was out of the question. Running an all 220 Conibear line was perfect though as the animal is quickly dispatched without and blood.

My technique was to open the cage trap with a 220 at the entrance, when the possum came out, it would get caught and be quickly dispatched. I could not use this technique for raccoons though. Well, sometimes, I do not think things out the best and although my intentions were good, the results were not as good as I had hoped. The method was improved with time.

Maybe you have noticed, that after you catch a few animals in a cage trap and shoot the animal in the same trap, your catches dramatically dwindle. I think it is because the following animals smell the blood in the trap and do not want to enter. My method was to use a separate dispatch cage to transfer the raccoons to and then shoot them in that. There was still a lot of smell from a captured animal in the trap, but not the blood.

Well, the 220s worked for the captured possums until I caught this large, grizzled veteran in one barn. He was moving slowly in the cage as I placed the 220 over the entrance and slowly opened the door. Once the door was open, I have never seen a possum move so fast, especially for a large one. Before I knew it, the possum was mostly through the 220. What I would usually do is move the 220 to either side as the animal is passing through it, so the trigger will be tripped earlier, especially if the possum was trying to miss it.

This possum had to be part snake as it slithered around the trigger. I saw this happen and moved the trap and trigger to the



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side, but he was so fast, the trap closed on his tail. So imagine if you can, a possum with a 220 on its tail running as fast as I have ever seen one run with me running as fast as I could behind trying to get a hold of the trap. Well, just as I was able to get a hold of the trap, it popped off of the tail and the possum made it safely under some stored lumber.

Boy, was I disappointed, but I reset the cage trap. I had a second cage trap in the hay mound on the second level which had not caught anything. Both traps were using the same bait. The next day, the possum was in the other trap. He was smart enough not to go back in the same trap, but not smart enough to equate the similar trap and bait as trouble.

This time I used my dispatch cage as part of the equation. I continued to use this method until Zach would not pay me for possums anymore. The cage traps I use have a locking bar which will not allow the door to open even if rolled upside down. A person just pulls up on the bar to open the door when in this position. So each cage trap is rolled on its top and the dispatch cage is placed over the door with its door open. If it was a raccoon, I would pull on the bar, releasing the door to drop or open. Usually, raccoons will cooperatively move into the dispatch cage, where they would be shot.

With the possums, I use the same technique, except that I would place a set 220 between them. This way, even if a possum



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made it through the trap without tripping it, the animal could not escape. This meant less chances of me running through barns at full tilt.

As time went on, I improved my technique and cut down the amount of time and equipment needed. When I caught a possum in a cage trap. I would set the cage trap up on end with the door up, keeping the possum at the bottom, I would slowly open the door. I used a T rebar stake to pin the head of the possum down, I then grabbed it by the tail. After pulling the possum out of the trap, I allowed it to be on all fours while still grasping its tail.

I would place the rebar stake at the base skull where it connects to the neck. Pushing the animal to the ground and placing my feet on either side of the skull on the stake, I pulled up on the tail. This dislocates the neck from the skull resulting in a quick dispatch.

Note that I do not recommend this technique if you are not familiar with handling live wild animals. I also wore

thick leather gloves and had protection for other parts of my body that could come in contact with each animal.

For Zach's study, the carcasses were anchored to the ground with camera's focused on them. The resulting animals which visited each carcass and the amount of time they spent around each carcass was recorded. He shared some of the video with me. One interesting visitor was a weasel. I had not caught a weasel in Indiana up to that time, but since have.

I was able to sell possums and raccoons to Zach for two seasons, I was happy to make more from possums and small raccoons than I normally would have. These lower grade furs were kept out of the fur market while they were used for research purposes that will hopefully help some wildlife manager in the future. Several research papers have been published along with several extension brochures for the public. Too bad there isn't more cornering of the market for these type of fur resources.

-Scot