

Misadventures in Weasel Trapping

by Scott Dahms

mouse in the box as one of the weasel's primary food sources are small rodents.

I decided to pull one of the boxes and move it to another area. I opened the box to find all of the bait eaten and the trap frozen in place. It was hard to tell whether rodents or a weasel had eaten the bait, but I moved it anyway.

As I approached a box to check it, I knew something was wrong, as the box had been moved. I found that the bait had been pulled on, and was forced into the trap, firing it. It was probably the work of a raccoon or possum. I reset the trap and hoped that whatever set it off would not be back.

After many miscues, my hopes of catch-

"Look at this roadkill!" my friend said as he showed me the weasel he had found. Weasels were the only legal furbearer in Indiana that I had not caught. Seeing that weasel was enough for me to set one of my goals for the trapping season at catching one.

I had one very real problem though as I knew nothing about weasel trapping. I read over the NTA Handbook and through old magazines to get some ideas on locations and sets. I found an article on weasel boxes and my technique was set. Based on what I read, I had plenty of areas on my trapline where a weasel was sure to be found.

Weasel boxes are small wooden boxes that hold the trap and bait. They have a small diameter hole (around two inches) so weasels can get in the box and get captured, but other critters cannot get into the box. The trap to use was a number one long-spring, and it should be set so the pan is right under the hole with the spring positioned away from the hole. This way when the weasel enters the hole and sets off the trap, it is caught as it walks between the jaws. If the weasel had to go over a jaw, the weasel could be flipped out of the trap by the jaw and not be caught. Weasels are usually dispatched by this trap as they have short legs and the trap grips around the

chest area. The boxes have to have some type of door so a person can tend to the trap.

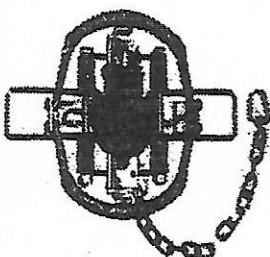
I purchased some one-by-six inch lumber from the lumber yard. I spent a couple of nights making the boxes and had four ready to set when done. Even though the trap was in the box, I wanted to anchor it down. I imagined a raccoon putting his paw through the hole, into the trap, getting caught and walking away with box and all. I drilled a hole through the top and bottom of the box for a 3/8 inch T-bar stake to anchor the box to the ground.

I scattered the four weasel boxes out on my trapline in areas I suspected weasels traveled. The boxes were mostly along streams in marshy areas.

I was checking one of the weasel boxes after a snow. I could see some fur when looking in the entrance hole, but it did not look like a weasel. I opened the box to find a field mouse had been caught by the longspring. I reset the trap and left the dead



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ing a weasel were dwindling. I decided it was best for me to cut my losses and make the best out of the situation. It was late in the season, there was snow on the ground, and most of the streams were locked in ice. I decided to convert my weasel boxes into mink boxes with an opening large enough for a 110 bodygripper. I kept one weasel box for future use if I ever thought an area could produce a weasel, and made two mink boxes out of the other weasel boxes.

I set one of the mink boxes in a small driftwood pile along a small stream. I had seen mink tracks on the ice earlier in the season and my sets in that area had failed to catch it. I baited the box with half of a muskrat and set the trap at the entrance of the box. I thought for sure that the mink could not pass up a free meal this late into winter. To check the trap, I would look for the set spring on the side of the box from

the bank. When I checked the trap, the mouth of the box would be facing away from me so I could not see inside the box. If the spring was not in its usual place, I would know that I would have a catch.

For the first few days, the spring was in its usual spot. After about a week, I noticed the spring was not in the usual spot. I thought I had caught the mink. I found that the trap was tripped with nothing in it. The bait was still in place, but it had small teeth marks on it. I thought rodents were getting in the box and one had tripped the trap. The extra rodent activity would surely increase the chances of the mink getting caught as a good part of their diet is made up of small rodents as well.

The next day the trap was tripped and the bait was still in place. I reset the trap and spread the trigger wires a little further apart to give the rodents extra room to get through the trap without tripping it.

In the past, I had put those extra light wires between the trigger wires so mink could get their head through the trigger but their chest would set it off. Mink will avoid sticks and other small hazards during their nightly ventures and this is a good way to make sure they get caught.

I have changed from the small wires as they seem to wear out and get broken when mink are caught. I now put 220 triggers on my 110s and form the wires into a circle or triangle. Mink are able to get their heads through the triggers, but their chests set off the traps. The 220 triggers are more durable than the old light wires and will last as long as the trap. Some newer styles of 110s come with longer trigger wires and these are long enough to be made into circles or triangles.

The next day I could see that the spring was again missing from its usual spot. I was trying to think of how to set the trap so that the rodents could get through it without tripping it. As I came around the driftwood pile, I could see I had made a catch, but the catch was not a mink and it was smaller.

It was my first weasel! The weasel had been going through the right side of the trap between one of the trigger wires and the jaws. When I moved the trigger wires apart, I decreased the size of the opening he was using, resulting in him tripping the trigger with his side.

I marveled at the little creature that had caused me so much trouble. I already had plans to get the weasel tanned as I do with

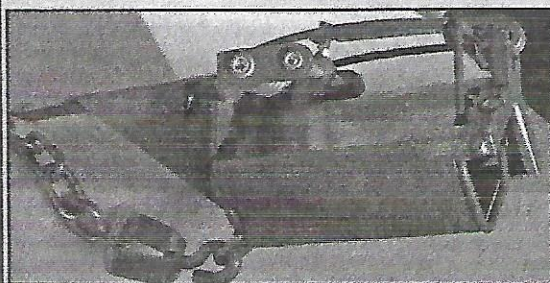
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all unique, first and largest animals I catch. When I was younger, I was more interested in the dollar signs, but now I find I want to get everything I catch tanned. Because of the expense, I definitely can not do that. I do have my first coyote and largest beaver tanned along with numerous other furs and mounted furbearers.

I am glad I caught the weasel as I can mark that species off my checklist and not put any more effort towards it. I see nothing wrong with the concept of the weasel box, as I know large numbers are caught with them. But if you really want to catch a weasel, I recommend cutting your losses and focusing on another species. Then you are sure to catch one.

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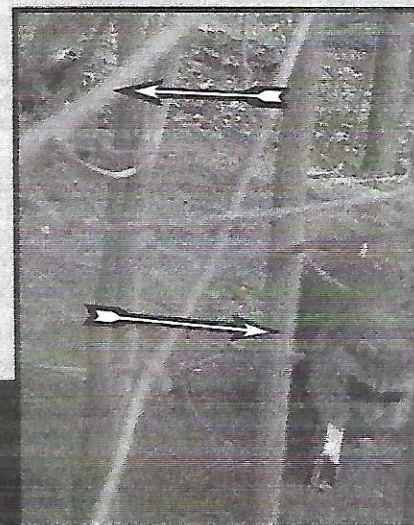
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