

RACCOONS

In Saskatchewan

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On four trips in 1972, we saw a total of nine dead raccoons on Saskatchewan roads. Since we had not ourselves seen a raccoon, dead or alive, in our many thousands of miles of travel yearly, this suggested an increase in the numbers of this species. Our personal observations were as follows:

1. Three miles east of Leslie, May 20.
2. Three miles east and 7 miles south of Southey, May 21.
3. Between Bulyea and Earl Grey, May 21 (a large pregnant female, three times the weight of the others, had been killed the preceding night).
4. Near Delisle, July 3.
5. Near Hitchcock, August 14.
6. Near Roche Percee, August 14.
7. Two miles east of Redvers, August 14.
8. One mile north of Whitewood, October 17.
9. Three miles west of Wauchope, October 17.

From the late 1920's until the early 1960's, the raccoons seemed largely confined to the valleys of the Souris and Assiniboine river systems. They like to live near water and stream valleys are their favourite habitat. Of the eight roads listed above, six are near these two valley systems, suggesting that these are still their areas of greatest abundance.

Daniel Harmon in 1820 had not encountered raccoons on the Assiniboine, Red River or Saskatchewan Rivers, for he said it is "never found farther north than about latitude forty-eight."⁴ In 1829, Richardson stated that it was found as far north as Red River, in latitude 50°, from which quarter about one hundred skins are procured annually by the Hudson's Bay Company."⁶

The first mention of the raccoon in Saskatchewan, to our knowledge, was in the report of the Saskatchewan Game Commissioner for the year ending June 30, 1919:

"Mr. W. V. Hemingway, of Poplar Grove, reports that a raccoon was trapped in the poultry house of James May, section 3-14-2 west of the 2nd meridian and that the skin is still in possession of the trapper. As this animal is not considered to be a native of the province the record is of scientific interest." (The location was the banks of the Pipestone Valley, about seven miles north and four miles east of Langbank.)

The report of the Saskatchewan Game Commissioner for the year ending April 30, 1925, contains the following statement:

"The raccoon is not recognized as a Saskatchewan fur bearer, therefore it is worthy of note that at least three specimens were taken in the province last year. One at Carlyle, the pelt of which is in the provincial museum; another a few miles from Melfort, and of the third, Mr. S. Lee Fraser of Tate writes, under date of March 31, 1925, as follows: 'One day last week, Mr. W. C. Mackenzie, a farmer living three and a half miles south of here, was shovelling snow from a concrete culvert . . . on looking into the culvert he found a full grown raccoon.'"³

Bradshaw added that "These are very interesting records, and in view of the fact that the pelts were taken at such widely distributed points, it would almost appear that for some reason or other the raccoon is extending its range westward." Thus the raccoon first appeared on the annual "Statement showing the number and kinds of furs bought in Saskatchewan" for the fur

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Decade*	Skins sold per year	Total	Average Per Year	Average Price
1931-1940	5, 14, 16, 26, 19, 3, 2, 5, 4, 1	95	10	\$3.9
1941-1950	0, 0, 8, 1, 6, 9, 55, 174, 2, 8,	263	26	\$3.3
1951-1960	23, 18, 9, 17, 27, 54, 21, 40, 39, 82	330	33	\$1.7
1961-1970	92, 60, 74, 69, 43, 109, 173, 134, 179, 289	1222	122	\$4.0
1971-1972	174, 290	464	232	\$7.0

*Each year begins on July 1 and ends June 30.

year ending June 30, 1925; four raccoons were listed at an average value of \$4.

For the next three years, the Saskatchewan trapping totals were one, five and four, respectively, with the average value at \$5.00 for the latter two years. Totals were not published for the years ending in 1929 and 1930. For the next four decades, raccoon skin sales were as follows:

From 1947 through 1962, prices averaged below \$3.00. The lowest price per pelt was \$1.05 in 1952; the highest was \$9.04 in 1969.

Coincident with the increase in numbers documented above, there has been an extension of the raccoon's range in Saskatchewan. A single record for Meadow Lake was the only record north of the Qu'Appelle Valley mapped by Beck in 1958.¹ (Beck omitted the original records from Tate and Melfort). Harris reported two records for the Saskatoon area, as well as records from Semans and Raymore, between 1967 and 1971.²

In June, 1971, Frank Hough and Scott Hale found a fresh roadkill on Highway 14 where it meets Clarence Avenue just south of Saskatoon, and

they also found raccoon tracks along the river in the summer of 1972. As yet, we have not encountered raccoon predation of nearby bluebird houses, though this is said to be common along bluebird house routes in the United States.

A more northerly record came to me from W. L. Anderson of Christopher Lake. In mid-March, 1972, while returning home from a carnival after midnight, a raccoon ran from the ditch and across the road in full view 20 yards away. He studied its tracks carefully and realized he had seen similar tracks on several occasions in the past two years. He also learned that Bill Crothers had shot a raccoon near his home at Christopher Lake in the winter of 1969-70 and Gilbert Charles had trapped one on the Little Red River, 7 miles west of Northside, the same winter.

Almost as far north was the raccoon seen 3 miles south and 1 mile west of Mullingar on September 15, 1968, by Ralph Cowell.

Since the raccoon is largely a nocturnal mammal, naturalists should learn to recognize its distinctive tracks, with five prominent toes on each foot. The photo shows a raccoon staring (at Christine Skinner) from the bottom of the blow-off of a Case separator near Indian Head



Raccoon

Christine Skinner

¹BECK, W. H. 1958. *A guide to Saskatchewan Mammals*. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. Spec. Pub. Regina. 52 pp.

²BRADSHAW, F. 1920. *Report of the Chief Game Guardian*. In Annual Report Dept. Agriculture Regina. p. 28.

³BRADSHAW, F. 1925. *Report of the Chief Game Guardian*. In Ann. Rep. Dept. Agriculture Regina, pp. 22-23.

⁴HARMON, D. W. 1820. *A Journal of voyages and travels in the interior of North America*. Flagg and Gould, Andover, 432 pp.

⁵HARRIS, W. C. 1971. *Some recent Saskatchewan raccoon records*. Blue Jay 29: 214.

⁶RICHARDSON, John. 1829. *Fauna Boreo-americae, Part 1, Mammalia*. John Murray, London, pp. 36-37.