West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

Furbearer Management Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2009/2010 Wildlife Resources Section

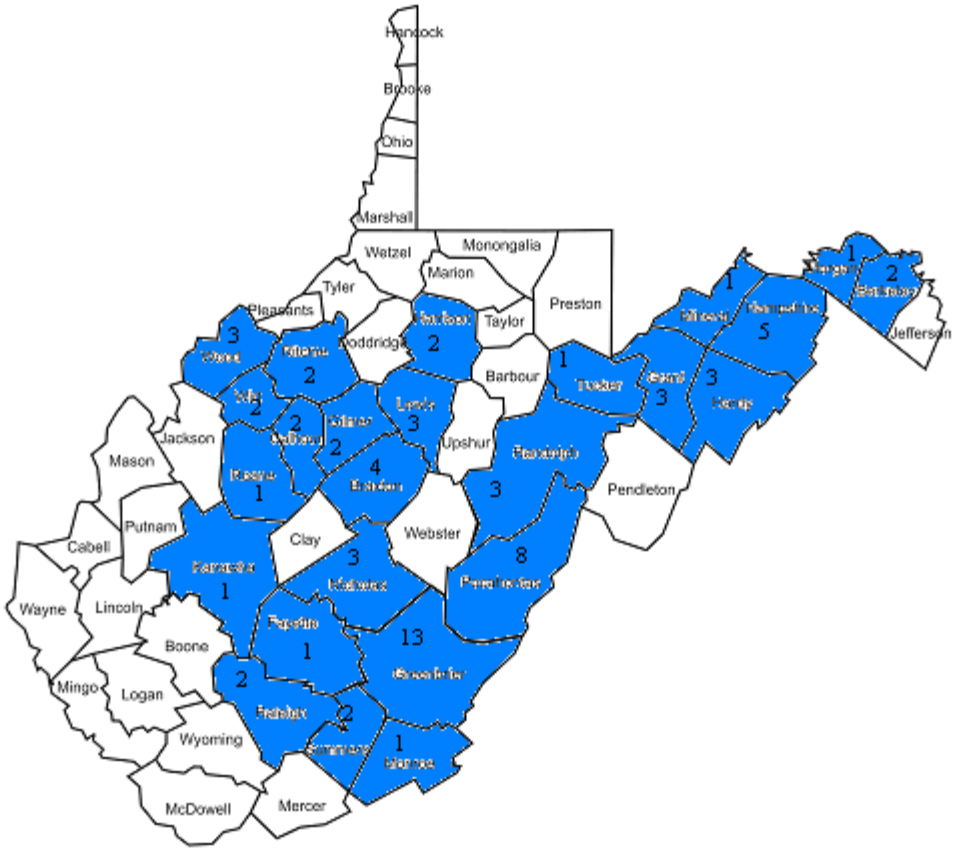
This is the fourth issue of the Furbearer Management Newsletter. We are pleased with the positive response it has generated and will continue to provide timely information and news pertaining to furbearer management in West Virginia. We again hope you enjoy this issue and, as always, would appreciate hearing from you. Please direct correspondence to: Rich Rogers, WVDNR, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757, richrogers@wvdnr.gov.

River Otter Data Collection and Analysis

Analyses of data obtained from seventy-nine otters collected statewide over the past sixteen years is now fairly complete. Because the samples were taken over sixteen years, conclusions may not be an accurate description of current population characteristics. The fact that the some of the data are fairly similar to more rigorously controlled studies in other states, however, gives some credibility to our findings.

Data from our sample indicate a sex ratio of 0.88 males/female. This does not seem to change significantly from young to mature age classes indicating similar survival among the sexes. More females than males may indicate a skewed sex ratio at birth, different survival rates, or something as simple as females being more prone to being caught in traps or killed on roadways. It could more likely mean a few more males being illegally kept as trophies or sold due to larger pelt sizes. Studies from other states indicate more males in samples than what were found in ours.

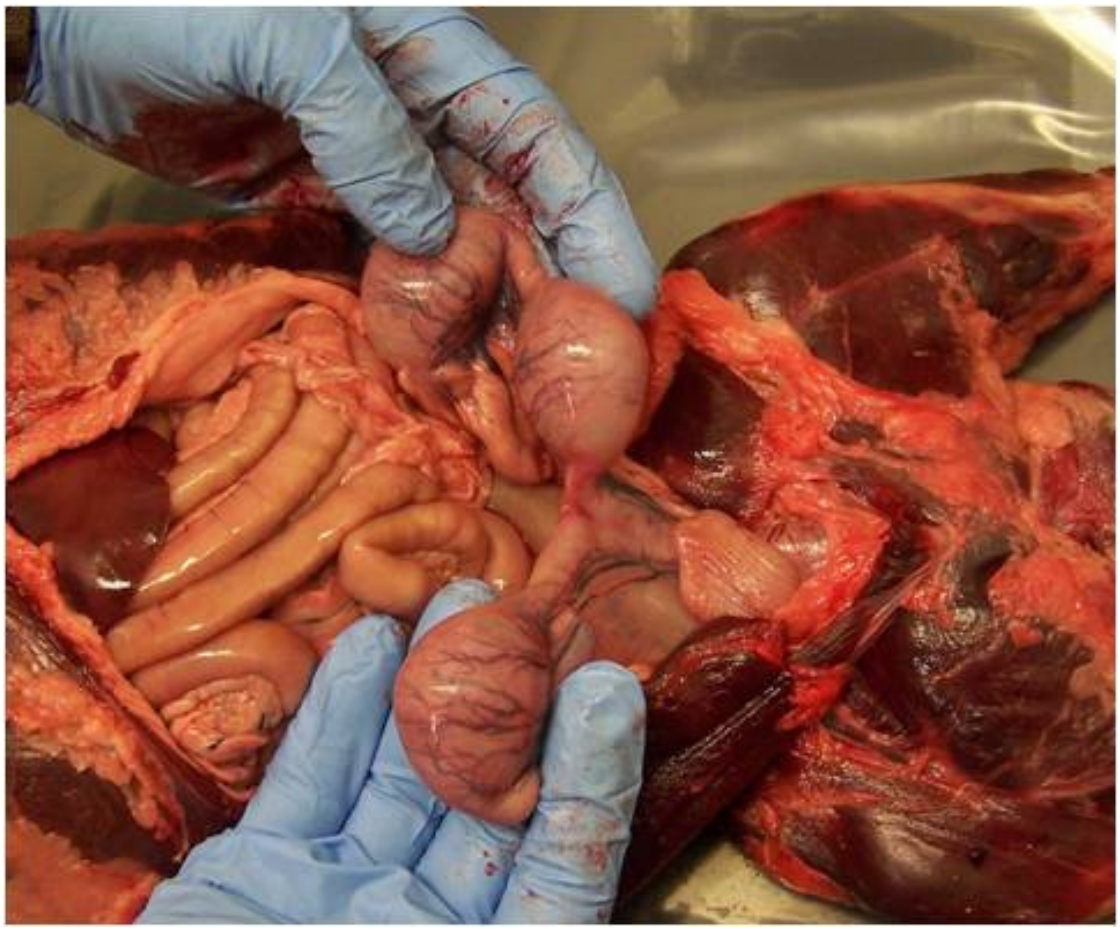
Results indicate 0.36 young/adult and, more importantly, 0.68 young/adult female. Young are defined as any otter less than 1 year old. This result is similar to what has been found in Virginia's recent samples.



Counties where otter carcasses were collected from 1993-2009. Number in black represents the number of carcasses from a particular county.

Corpora lutea are light colored bodies in ovaries indicating that an egg has passed and a female did come into heat. Since otters are induced ovulators, it is also an indication that a female has been bred. Of 44 female reproductive tracts examined, 21 had corpora lutea. Eight of the tracts (all taken from adults) contained fetuses. In all cases the number of fetuses was equal to the number of corpora lutea found in corresponding ovaries. This indicates good fertilization and implantation in this particular sample. There were an average of 3.38 fetuses/female.

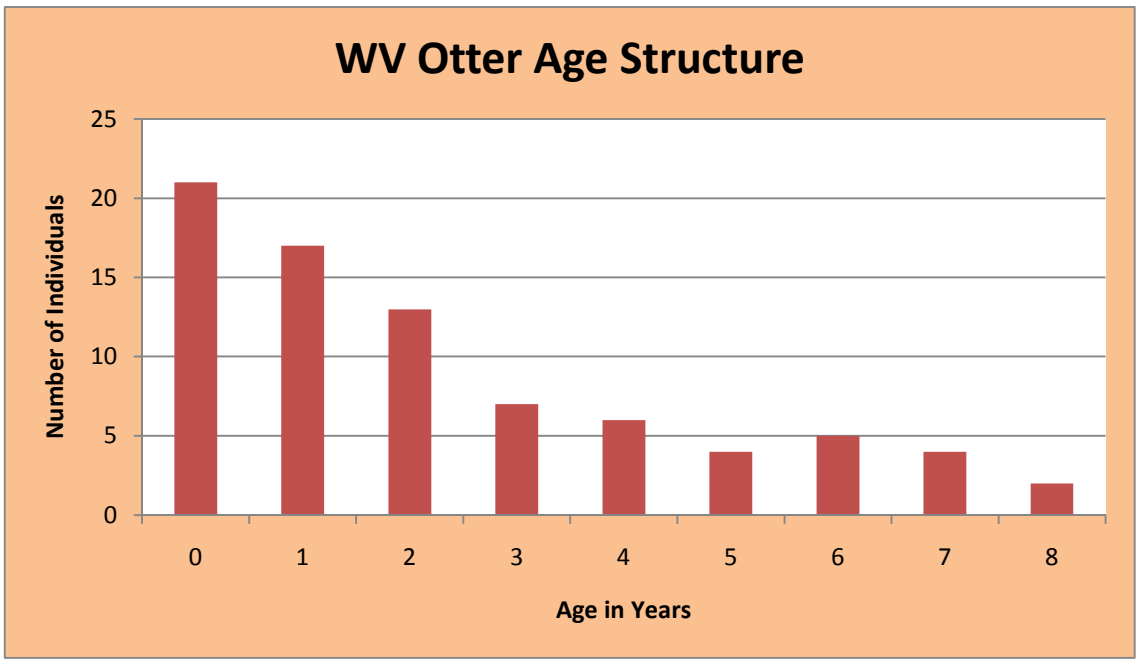
All except one female greater than 3 years old were pregnant. At this age, all females are capable of producing litters and usually do. Interestingly, 3 of 11 (27%) females that were less than a year old showed active corpora lutea. These females were probably at least 12 months old and had in all probability been recently bred. Eight of 21 (38%) of 1-2 year olds, and 5 of 10 (50%) of 2-3 year olds had active corpora lutea all showing increasing fertility with age as supported by past research.



Female otter reproductive tract. Swellings are individual fetuses.

Measuring crown-rump lengths has been suggested as a means of determining date of parturition (birth). Using this method indicated dates of parturition ranging from mid-March to mid-April in West Virginia.

Although caution is urged, if we consider the data collected as truly representing a snapshot of the otter population today, they indicate a healthy, growing population. Fortunately, the range of data between individuals in different years is not that different, so it is not so farfetched to consider the data as such. Trappers and others are encouraged to continue to send sighting and incidental catch reports to the address at the beginning of this newsletter. This will continue to expand our data base and help us to make wise decisions regarding this valuable resource. Trappers accidentally catching otters should turn carcasses in to their nearest District wildlife office.



Raccoon Field Trial Survey

Our staff will be making a renewed effort to make it out to the West Virginia Coon Hunters Association state championship hunt and youth championship hunt as we have in past years. We look forward to meeting with many of the hunters again, being available to answer questions and address concerns, and encourage clubs to participate in the WV Raccoon Field Trial Survey which many have been faithfully contributing to for 17 years.

Write to the address at the beginning of the newsletter for a copy of the latest survey or if you would like your club to participate. **Participation is sorely needed and validity of the survey is being hurt by lack of participation.**

Furbearer Harvest Statistics

Final figures for the 2008-09 season are now available. Beaver, bobcat, and fisher totals are from all animals checked at game checking stations. All other species numbers recorded are numbers of pelts that have been sold and moved through the market. Harvests of all major species are down except for opossum and coyote. This is in all likelihood due to a drop in fur prices experienced during this and the past year. Harvest results tabulated from checking tags and fur dealer transactions through the 2008-09 season are presented in the following table:

WEST VIRGINIA FUR HARVEST

Season	Beaver	Bobcat	Fisher	Gray Fox	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Raccoon	Red Fox	Skunk	Coyote
1998-99	1616	554	45	1111	211	2833	1201	9939	671	40	29
1999-00	988	644	27	933	97	1734	504	4283	359	33	43
2000-01	1140	705	26	1213	183	2857	463	4350	334	31	49
2001-02	1829	943	45	2147	448	5785	922	7733	747	130	169
2002-03	849	891	26	1533	267	4160	1048	6148	610	51	149
2003-04	917	1090	50	1480	374	3210	1277	11160	957	160	539
2004-05	1247	1447	72	1238	382	2523	2506	15794	969	159	467
2005-06	1589	1682	105	1316	325	2978	1358	8641	1117	124	613
2006-07	1839	1902	98	2115	335	3293	1925	11726	1683	235	360
2007-08	1487	1976	108	2164	331	3477	2704	19189	1746	225	108
2008-09	1107	1456	84	1631	318	2331	2866	8949	1472	222	624

Fur Dealer Transaction Forms

Thanks to all the fur dealers who used the new transaction reporting forms this year. There were a number of fur dealers who filled out the forms improperly, but all the mistakes were

rectified. Please remember to read the instructions carefully and fill out the form completely. It is important that you circle either SALE or PURCHASE and use that form accordingly. Remember, this is the only means available to us of determining harvest of many of the furbearers in the state. Accuracy is critical.

USDA Wildlife Services Studying Coyote Movements

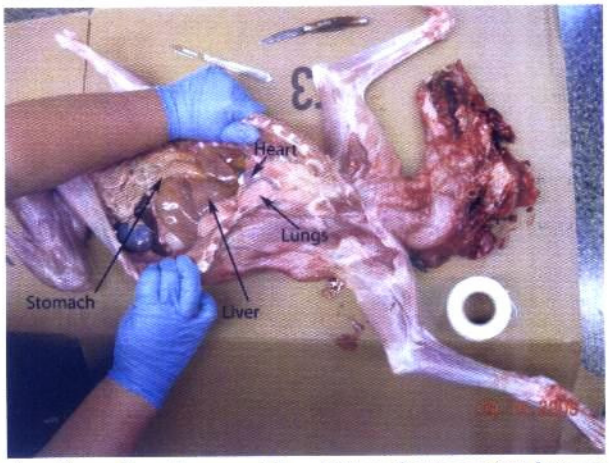
As noted in the previous newsletter, USDA Wildlife Services is conducting a coyote movements and home range study in West Virginia and Virginia. The purpose of the study is to help biologists and managers better understand coyote movements to assist in removal of nuisance animals. The study involves radio-collaring and tracking movements of coyotes. Trapping is currently underway and four coyotes have been collared to date. One animal was collared with cooperation from WVDNR personnel on the Stonewall Jackson Wildlife Management Area in Lewis County. The other three animals were collared in Lewis, Pendleton and Randolph Counties. **To return a collar from a trapped or shot coyote, or for additional information, contact: Lauren Mastro, USDA Wildlife Services, Elkins, WV, 26241 (304)636-1785.**

Regional Coyote Food Habits Study Underway

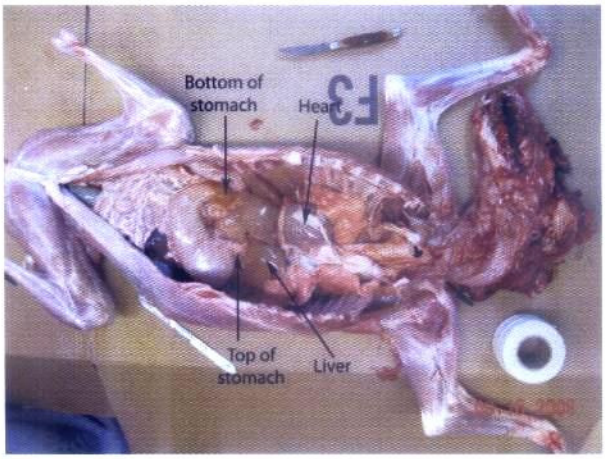
The West Virginia University coyote food habits study is currently underway. Many of you may have already met with the graduate student, Geriann Albers, at the September WVTA fall convention. Geriann will be collecting stomachs and skulls from harvested coyotes for the next year to document food consumed. She will be comparing food habits between different regions of the state and changes between seasons. Anyone wishing to help should salvage the stomach and skinned head of harvested coyotes as described below and contact or bring them to the nearest WVDNR office. Stomachs and heads may be frozen until a convenient time. **For further information, contact Geriann Albers at (304)293-0050, galbers@mix.wvu.edu, or Rich Rogers, WVDNR Furbearer Program Coordinator at (304)822-3551, richrogers@wvdnr.gov.**

Collecting Coyote Stomachs and Heads

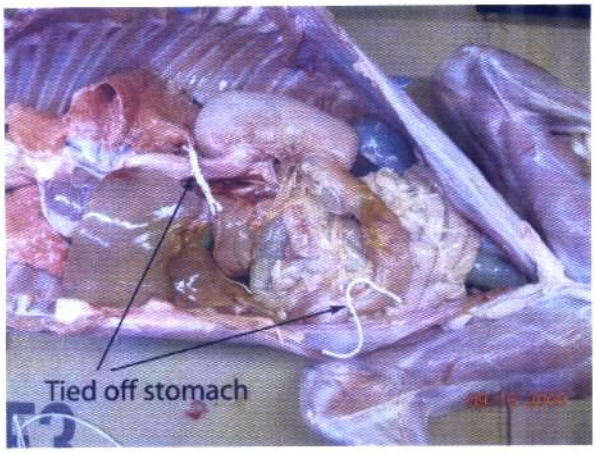
For this study, we ask that you collect the stomach and head of each coyote you trap. After removing the stomach as shown below, place in a one gallon sealable bag. Then, detach the head from the spinal cord and place in a bag as well.



Coyote skinned and opened by slitting from center between front legs to center between back legs, cutting through the ribs, and gently cutting the diaphragm between the liver and heart.



View of open animal with liver pushed aside and diaphragm cut to show beginning and end of stomach



Liver and other tissue are gently cut away to expose stomach. Both ends of stomach are tied off with string. Then the stomach can be cut on the side of the string away from the stomach and removed. When removing, you'll have to cut through some fatty tissue to free the stomach.

Removed Stomach

Labeling is very important. Please label each bag with your name, sex of animal, location trapped and date trapped. This is crucial to us getting the best information possible so please write down as much as you can. It is also important that individual heads and stomachs be kept together so we can keep accurate records. Thank you!

Links

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources	www.wvdnr.gov
West Virginia Trappers Association	www.wvtrappers.com
Guide to State Game Depts.	www.identicards.com/links/statednr.html
Assoc. of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	
Furbearer Resources	www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html
National Trappers Association	www.nationaltrappers.com
Fur Takers of America	www.furtakersofamerica.com
Conserve Wildlife	www.conservewildlife.org
Furbearers Unlimited	www.furbearers.org
CITES	www.cites.org