

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Wildlife Management Division

2007-08 FURBEARING ANIMAL REPORT

Prepared by

Blake Sasse
Furbearer Program Leader



Keeping the Natural State natural.

Scott Henderson, Director
David Goad, Deputy Director
Doyle Shook, Chief, Wildlife Management Division

December 2008

Abstract

During the 2007-2008 fur-taking season, 27,609 pelts valued at \$282,265.47 were purchased by licensed Arkansas fur dealers. Compared to the 2006-2007 season, the number of pelts purchased decreased by 5 percent and the total value of the harvest decreased by 21 percent because of a general decline in fur value for most species, with the exceptions of raccoon and gray fox. This was the third year of two surveys designed to track furbearer population trends. Information on relative distribution of bobcat, coyote, gray fox, opossum, raccoon and red fox was obtained from the bowhunter observation survey, which included more than 15,000 hours of data in 2007-2008, and raccoon field trial clubs that were surveyed for raccoon seen while participating in sanctioned field trial events.

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Part 1 Fur Purchases

Introduction

The harvest of furbearing animals is important both recreationally and economically to many Arkansans. The hunting and trapping of furbearers, accompanied by the subsequent marketing of fur pelts, contributes to the state's economy, reduces wildlife damage and helps prevent furbearer populations from reaching unhealthy levels. Fur-takers are an effective and vital tool for managing this renewable resource.

2007-08 Private Land Fur-taking Seasons

Gray Fox, Mink, Red Fox, and Striped Skunk Hunting

Sunrise, Sept. 1, 2007-sunset, Feb. 29, 2008. Day hunting only. Limit 2 per day per species except no limit on striped skunk.

Opossum Hunting

Sunrise, Sept. 1, 2007-sunset, Feb. 29, 2008. Day or night hunting. Dogs required to hunt at night. Limit 2 per day.

Bobcat and Coyote Hunting

Sunrise, Oct. 1, 2007-sunset, Feb. 29, 2008 (Dogs allowed to hunt bobcat and coyote during the day. Coyote may not be hunted at night. Dogs required to hunt bobcat at night. Dogs not allowed in deer zones where a firearms deer season that prohibits the use of dogs is in progress.) From the first day of spring turkey season through the last day of spring squirrel season (Day hunting only. No dogs allowed. Only youths allowed may take coyote or bobcat during youth turkey hunts.) Bobcat limit 2 per day. No limit on coyote.

River Otter Hunting

Sunrise, Nov. 18, 2007-sunset, Feb. 29, 2008. Day hunting only. Limit 2 per day.

Raccoon Hunting

Sunset, July 1-sunrise, Aug. 31, 2007 (Night hunting only. Dogs required). Sunrise, Sept. 1, 2007-sunset, March 31, 2008 (Day or night hunting. Dogs required for hunting at night). Limit 1 July 1-Aug. 31. Limit 2 Sept. 1-Nov. 17. No limit Nov. 18-March 31.

Muskrat, Nutria and Beaver Hunting

Sunrise, Sept. 1, 2007-sunset, March 31, 2008. No limit.

Badger, Spotted Skunk, Weasel Hunting

Closed.

Furbearer Trapping (except beaver, coyote, muskrat and nutria)

Sunrise, Nov. 18, 2007-sunset, Feb. 18, 2008. No limit.

Coyote Trapping

Sunrise, Aug. 1, 2007-sunset, March 31, 2008. No limit.

Beaver, Muskrat, Nutria Trapping:

Sunrise Nov. 18, 2007-sunset, March 31, 2008. No Limit.

Methods

Statewide pelt purchase totals are obtained from Fur Dealer Report Booklets and are calculated each year by county and physiographic region. Each county has been assigned to a specific physiographic region, even though a county may lie in parts of two physiographic regions. This data enables an estimate of the worth of the furbearer resource and, in conjunction with other biological data, helps objectively manage these species.

Fur buyers are required to record all pelt purchases in Fur Dealer Report Booklets. Fur dealers were supplied these booklets and instructed to complete and return them by May 5, 2008, in self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided by the AGFC. During the 2007-2008 fur-taking season, 30 fur dealers were licensed (25 resident and five non-resident), which is a decrease of seven from the previous year (Figure 1). Reports were returned from all dealers. 2007-2008 pelt prices were based on the average of the reported average green pelt sale price at the fur auction in Malvern Feb. 9, 2008. The price usually would be based on an average of the Malvern sale and the other large fur auction held in Russellville, but the prices for green and dried pelts were not recorded separately at the Russellville sale in 2008. The Malvern fur sale amounted to 16 percent of pelt sales in Arkansas and should be representative of overall fur prices. Information on historical pelt prices presented in Figures 8-22 is based on AGFC records and has been adjusted for inflation to represent prices in 2007 dollars using the Consumer Price Index calculator at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Web

site (www.minneapolisfed.org). Information on trapping violations was obtained from the AGFC Enforcement Division; accident information came from the AGFC Education Division.

Results and Discussion

During the 2007-2008 fur-taking season, 27,609 pelts valued at \$282,265.47 were purchased by licensed fur dealers in Arkansas (Table 1). Compared to the 2006-2007 season, the number of pelts purchased decreased by 5 percent and the total value of the harvest decreased by 21 percent (Table 2).

Furbearer harvest pressure is affected by animal population fluctuations, by current prices paid for fur and by weather. Also, harvest pressure changes geographically within the state over time. Any of these factors can increase or decrease the harvest of furbearing animals. With the exception of raccoon and gray fox, purchase prices for all major furbearing species declined this season. Non-residents are required to obtain a Non-Resident Furtakers Permit (\$125). The number of permitted non-resident fur-takers decreased from 140 in 2006-2007 to 35 in 2007-2008, likely because of high gasoline prices (Figure 2).

Furbearer violations remained low (Figures 3-7). For the first time since 1999, there were two furbearer hunting accidents (Figure 8). Dec. 1, 2007, a man was hunting deer from his ground blind. He left the blind to walk back to his deer camp and stopped to look down a power line right-of-way. He saw a bobcat standing in the right-of-way and saw another hunter in orange beyond the bobcat. The other hunter fired

at the bobcat. The bullet grazed the victim's stomach. The shooter fled and wasn't identified. In October, 2007, a coyote hunter accidentally shot and killed himself while he tried to cross a fence with a loaded firearm.

Reported purchases of bobcat and otter by fur dealers are known to under-represent the number of these species taken in Arkansas. In accordance with federal law, pelts of these species must be tagged before they leave the state. Although 1,513 otters and 1,668 bobcats were purchased in Arkansas, 2,121 otters and 2,610 bobcats were tagged in 2007-2008. A similar pattern has been observed since 2003. Although some of these animals may have been taken in previous years, it is clear that the current system of fur dealer reporting is missing a significant percentage of otter and bobcat harvest, which may have a serious impact on assessments of county and regional harvest trends. The actual harvest of other furbearers probably is under-represented by fur dealer purchase records since many trappers and hunters ship their pelts from the state to dealers who are not required to have Arkansas fur dealer permits.

In Arkansas, Act 1358 of 1997 (Conservation District Beaver Control Program) has resulted in a continued interest in beaver trapping and beaver pelts. Under this program administered by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (formerly the Soil and Water Conservation Commission), about 30,000 beavers are taken annually at a cost to the state of \$150,000 (which is appropriated by the legislature and not the AGFC). The reported purchase of beavers by fur dealers in 2007-2008 was 6,625; the tails of some of those animals also may have been submitted for bounty payment. Although it is clear that bounties have encouraged the taking of beaver, the effectiveness of this program in reducing nuisance problems in counties with many beavers has not yet been evaluated. The distribution of bounty funding among counties is somewhat haphazard.

Table 1. 2007-08 Furbearing Animal Purchases

	Badger	Beaver	Bobcat	Coyote	Gray Fox	Mink	Muskrat	Nutria	Opossum	Raccoon	Red Fox	River Otter	Spotted Skunk	Striped Skunk	Weasel
PRICE*	\$16.00	\$6.57	\$31.80	\$7.10	\$32.88	\$9.38	\$2.03	\$0.57	\$0.78	\$6.63	\$16.24	\$25.89	\$11.00	\$1.71	n/a
DELTA	0	2,874	345	72	95	320	224	41	209	3,102	9	702	0	15	0
GULF COASTAL PLAIN	0	2,186	624	114	525	45	7	330	270	4,729	44	535	0	8	0
OUACHITA MOUNTAINS	0	1,151	385	155	430	57	101	5	519	3,217	34	189	0	10	0
OZARK MOUNTAINS	1	409	309	178	398	25	65	2	295	2,052	14	83	5	48	0
UNKNOWN REGION**	0	5	5	15	3	0	0	0	0	15	0	4	0	0	0
Grand Totals	1	6,625	1,668	534	1,451	447	397	378	1,293	13,115	101	1,513	5	81	0

*Average prices paid for green pelts statewide based on average of green pelts purchased at Malvern fur sales.

**Pelts for which fur dealers did not record the county (therefore a region could not be determined).

Table 2. Estimated Value of Arkansas Fur Purchases, 2007-08

Species	Number	Average Price	Total Value
Badger	1	\$16.00	\$16.00
Beaver	6,625	\$6.57	\$43,526.25
Bobcat	1,668	\$31.80	\$53,042.40
Coyote	534	\$7.10	\$3,791.40
Gray Fox	1,451	\$32.88	\$47,708.88
Mink	447	\$9.38	\$4,192.86
Muskrat	397	\$2.03	\$805.91
Nutria	378	\$0.57	\$215.46
Opossum	1,293	\$0.78	\$1,008.54
Raccoon	13,115	\$6.63	\$86,952.45
Red Fox	101	\$16.24	\$1,640.24
River Otter	1,513	\$25.89	\$39,171.57
Spotted Skunk	5	\$11.00	\$55.00
Striped Skunk	81	\$1.71	\$138.51
Totals	27,609		\$282,265.47

Part 2 Bowhunter Observation Survey

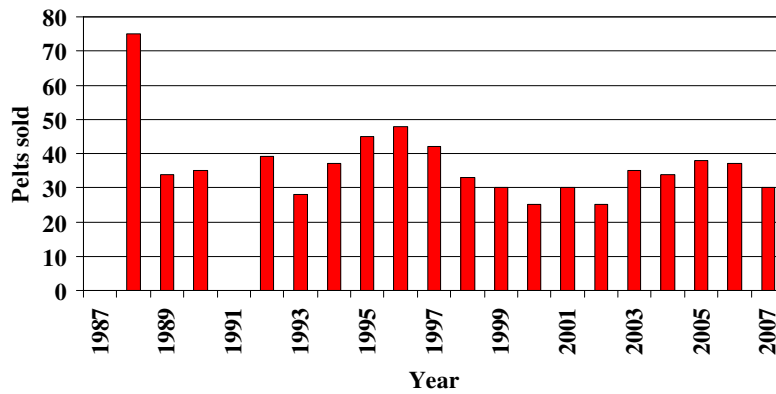
This was the third year in which observations of six furbearer species (bobcat, coyote, gray fox, opossum, raccoon and red fox) were included in the bowhunter observation survey, conducted each deer season. Participants reported dates and times they hunted, along with the number of individuals of each species seen each day. Surveys reporting more than 10 individuals of any one species (except coyote, for which any reported number up to 15 would be acceptable) during the same hunt were deemed to be spurious and not included in the summarized report. During the 2007-2008 season, 15,399.63 hours of observations were reported statewide (Figure 23). Since the survey is three years old, there is insufficient data to evaluate population trends. However, observation rates in Arkansas are roughly comparable to those in states conducting similar surveys. Over time, this should become a useful tool.

Part 3 Raccoon Field Trial Survey

Raccoons are popular game animals found in all parts of the state. Since they usually are most active at night, it has been difficult for wildlife managers to identify patterns of population growth or decline over the years. In cooperation with the Arkansas Coon Hunters Association and many local clubs, a voluntary survey was begun to gather information on raccoon population trends in the state. This year's survey started in April, 2007, after raccoon hunting season and near the time when young are born, and continued through March, 2008. After each field trial, clubs returned forms to the AGFC indicating the county or counties in which the event took place, length of the trial, number of raccoons seen and scored, and number of dogs in the cast. This information allows the AGFC to compare the number of raccoons seen per hour at statewide and regional levels, and over time will demonstrate raccoon population trends.

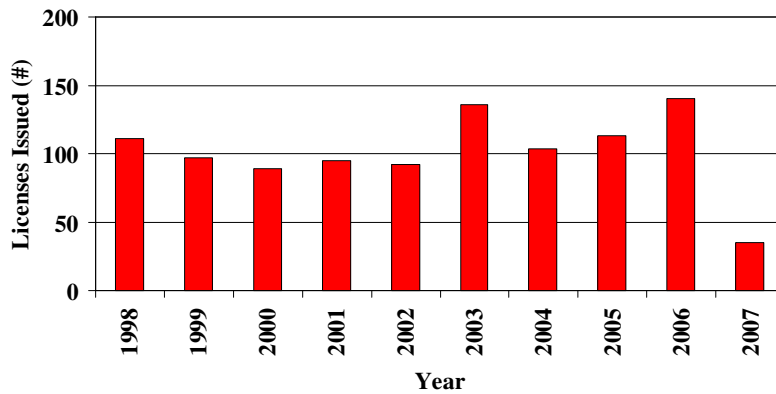
The 2007-2008 survey was similar to the previous year in terms of club participation; 19 clubs submitted information on 266 casts in 2007-2008 and 18 clubs submitted information on 267 casts in 2006-2007. Information came from all seasons and all four furbearer regions (Figures 24-25). For the year, an average of one raccoon was seen per hour of hunting, though this varied by month, ranging from 0.39-1.7 raccoons per hour in months where data was available (Figure 26-27). Raccoons were easy to find – 76 percent of casts saw at least one raccoon (Figure 28) and though the observation rate was higher in the Ouachitas this season, the differences between regions were not large (0.71-1.2 raccoons per hour) (Figure 29). Because of relatively low participation in this survey and the availability of more representative data from the bowhunter observation survey, the raccoon field trial survey will be conducted every three years.

Figure 1
Arkansas Licensed Furdealers,
1987-2007



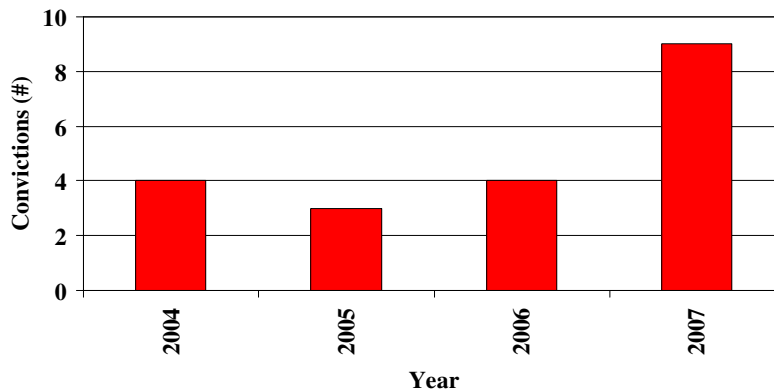
Residents and Non-Residents, data not available for 1987, 1991

Figure 2.
Non-Resident Furtaker Licenses in
Arkansas, 1998-2007



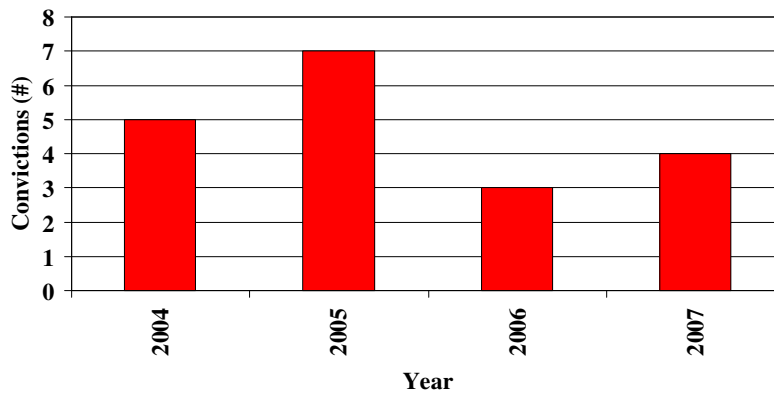
Each year represents licenses active July 1 to June 30 of the following year

Figure 3. Citations Issued (including warnings) for Furbearer Season Violations (Code 02.07) in Arkansas, 2004-2007



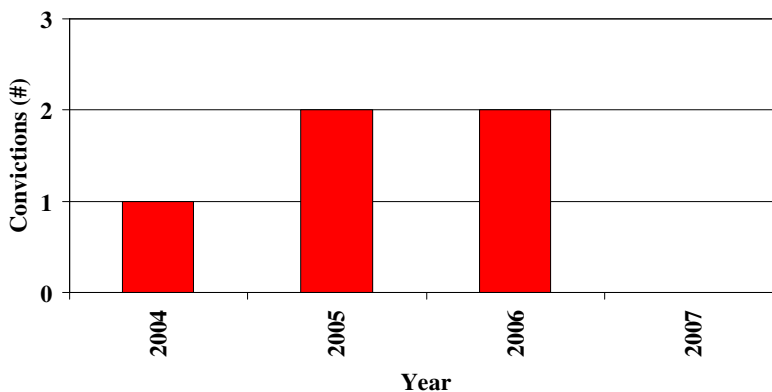
Information provided by Enforcement Division for fiscal year (July – June)

Figure 4. Citations Issued (including warnings) for Regular Furbearing Season Trap Violations (Code 10.02) in Arkansas, 2004-2007



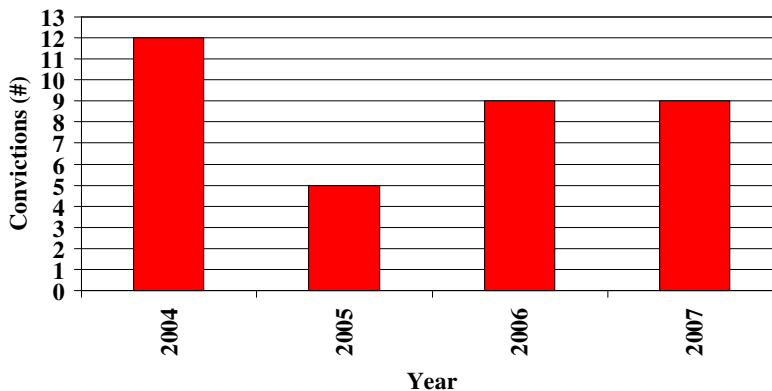
Information provided by Enforcement Division for fiscal year (July – June)

**Figure 5. Citations Issued (including warnings)
for Trap Checking Violations
(Code 10.06) in Arkansas, 2004-2007**



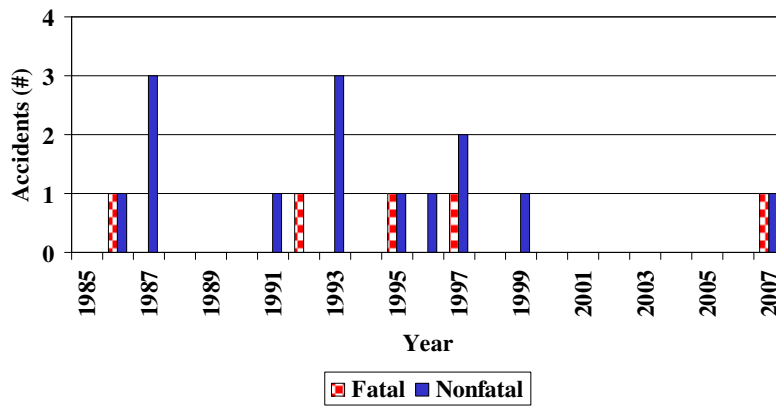
Information provided by Enforcement Division for fiscal year (July – June)

**Figure 6. Citations Issued (including warnings)
for Trap Identification Violations
(Code 10.07) in Arkansas, 2004-2007**



Information provided by Enforcement Division for fiscal year (July – June)

Figure 7
Furbearer Hunting and Trapping Fatalities and Injuries in Arkansas, 1985-2007



Information provided by AGFC Hunter Education Program

Figure 8
Badger Purchases, 1987 - 2007

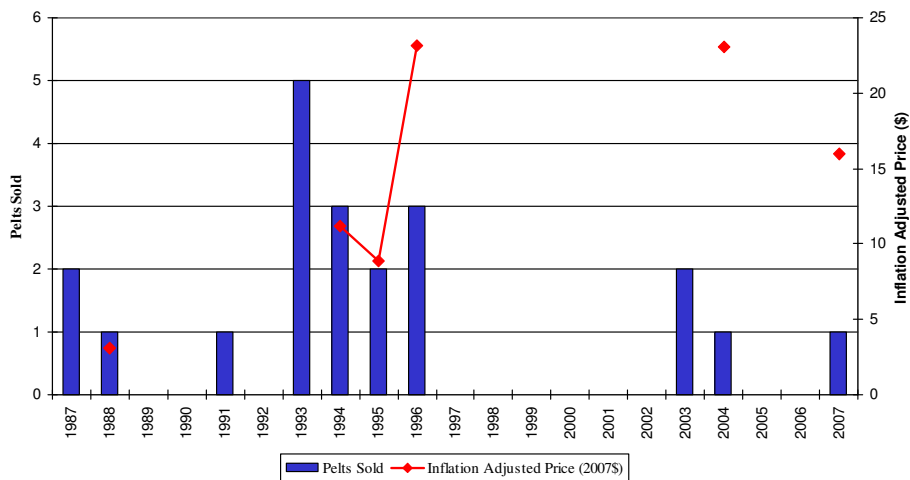


Figure 9
Beaver Purchases, 1987 - 2007

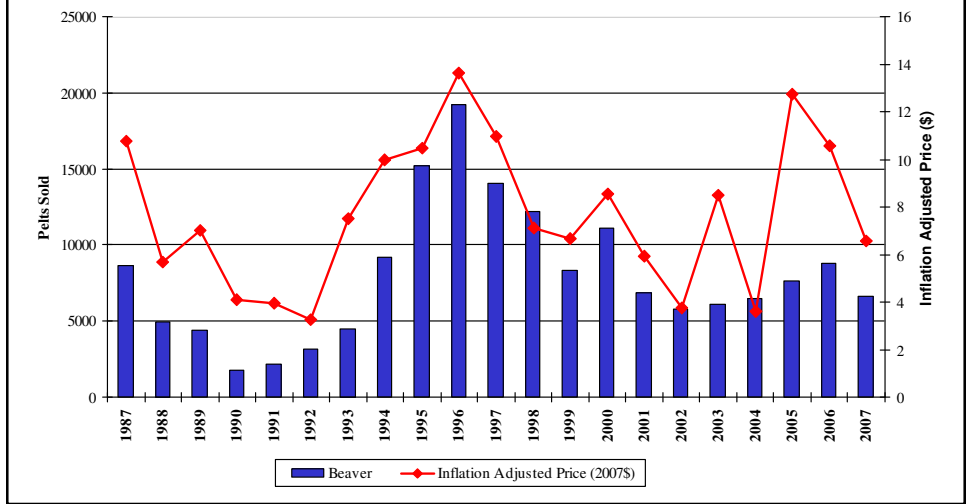


Figure 10
Bobcat Purchases and Tags Issued, 1987 - 2007

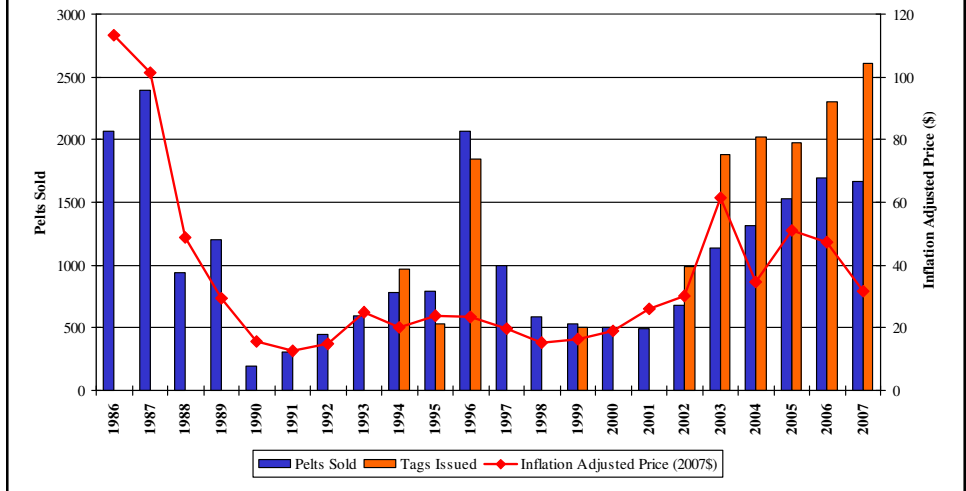


Figure 11 Coyote Purchases, 1987 - 2007

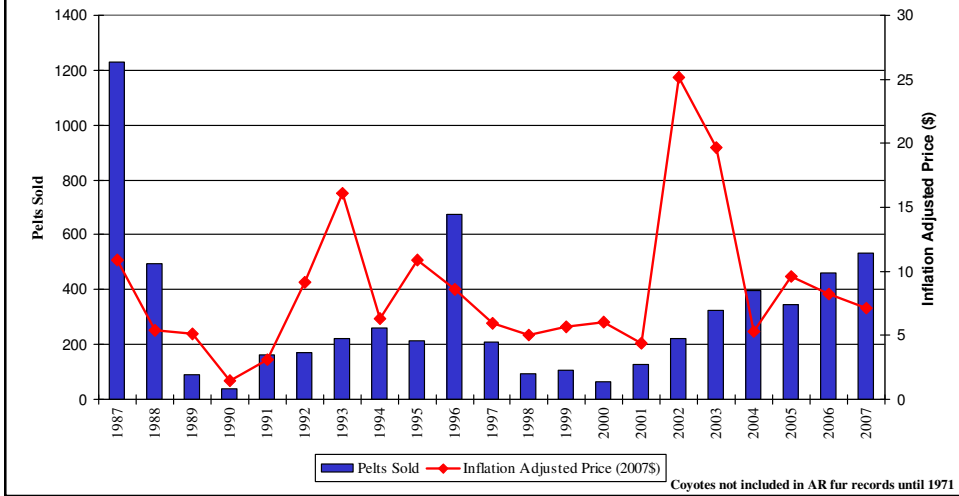


Figure 12 Gray Fox Purchases, 1987 - 2007

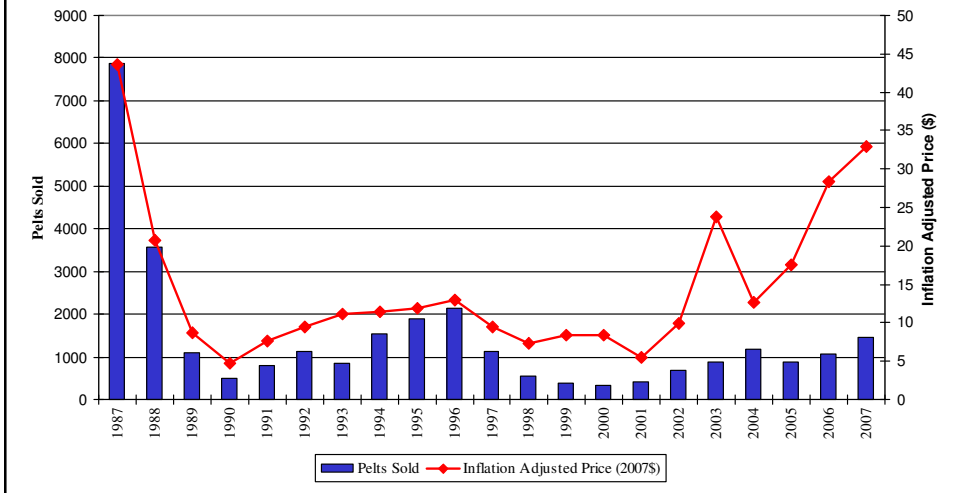


Figure 13
Long-tailed Weasel Purchases,
1987 - 2007

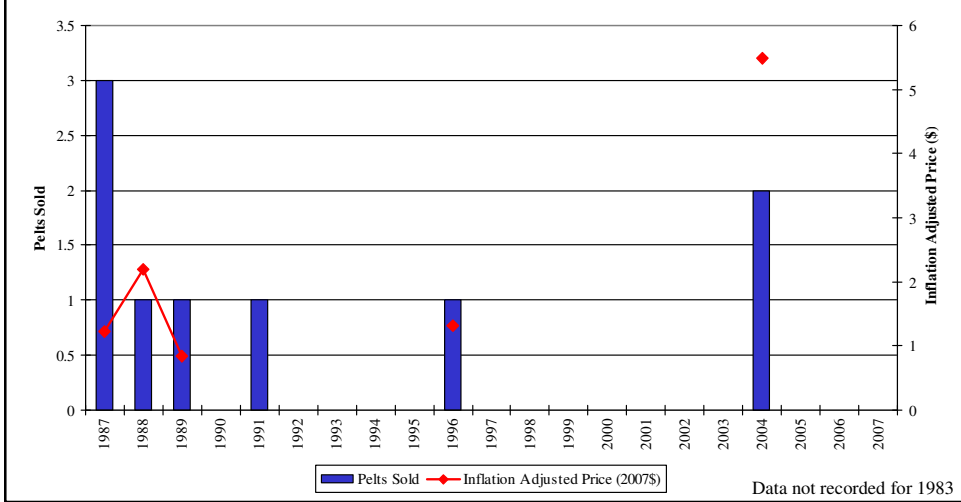


Figure 14
Mink Purchases, 1987 - 2007

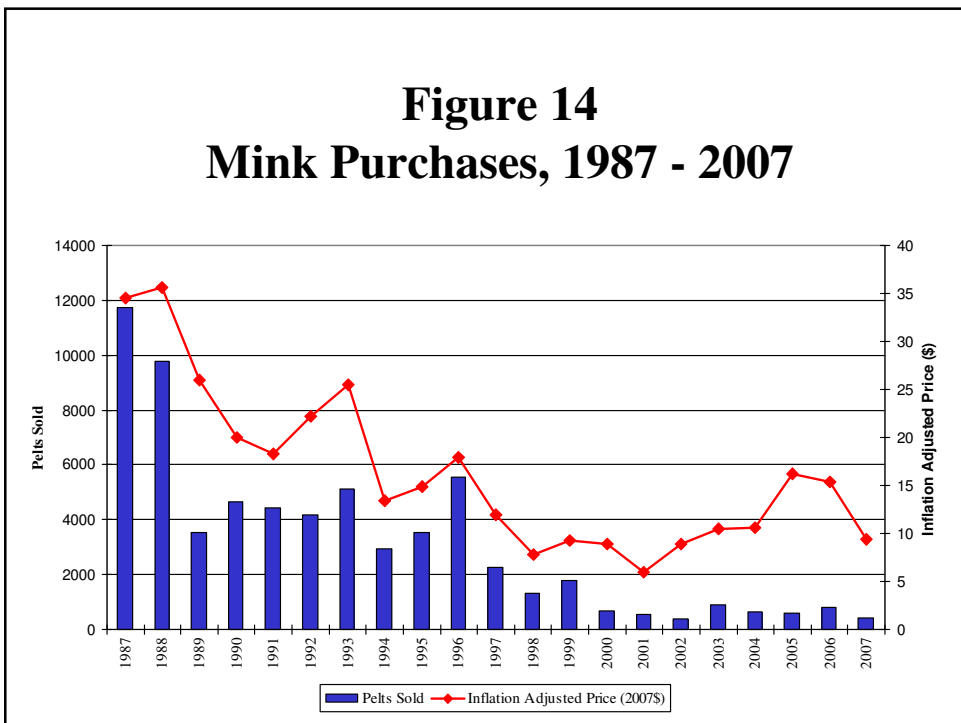


Figure 15
Muskrat Purchases, 1987 - 2007

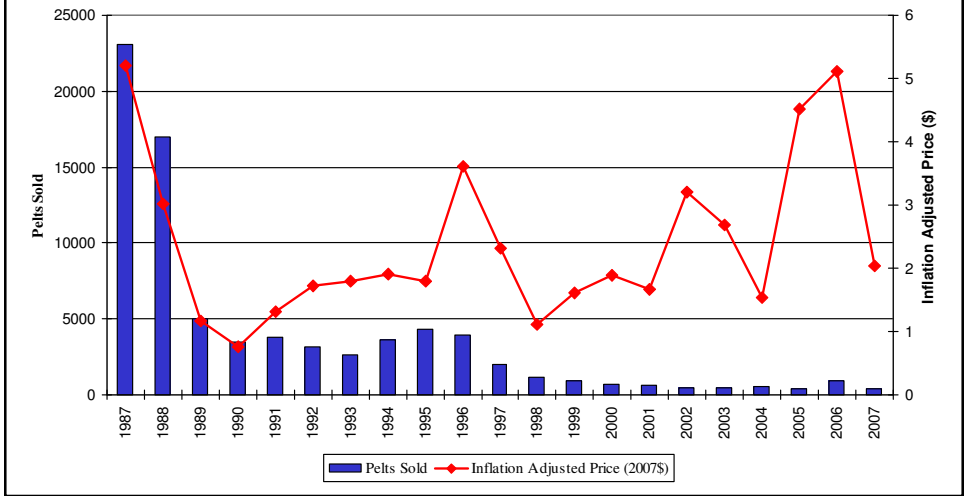


Figure 16
Nutria Purchases, 1987 - 2007

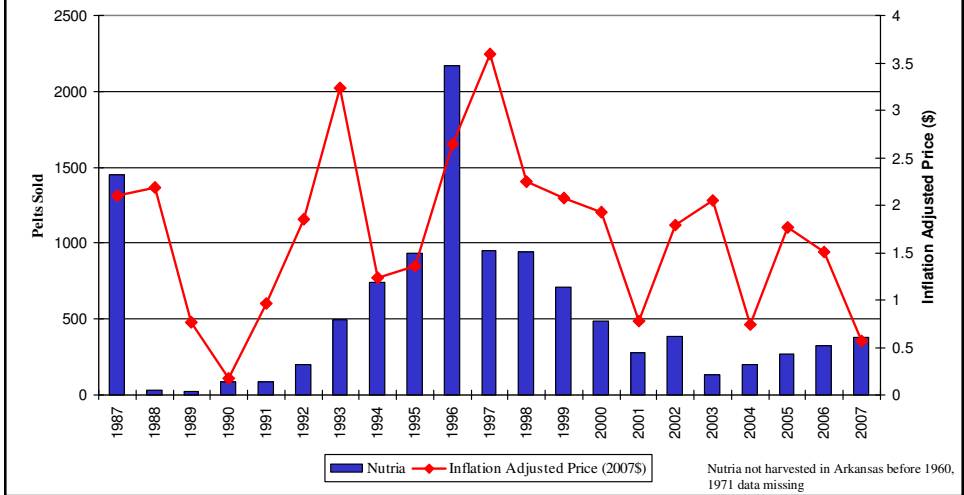


Figure 17
Opossum Purchases, 1987 - 2007

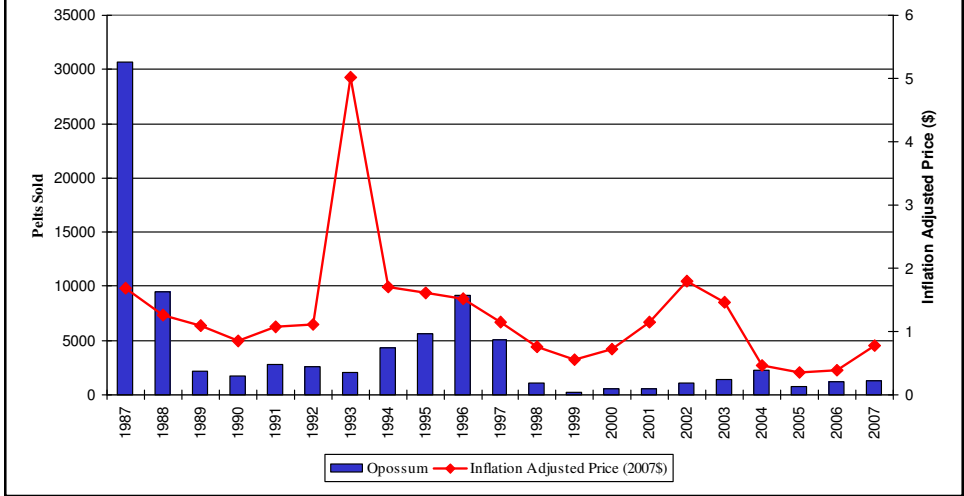


Figure 18
Raccoon Purchases, 1987 - 2007

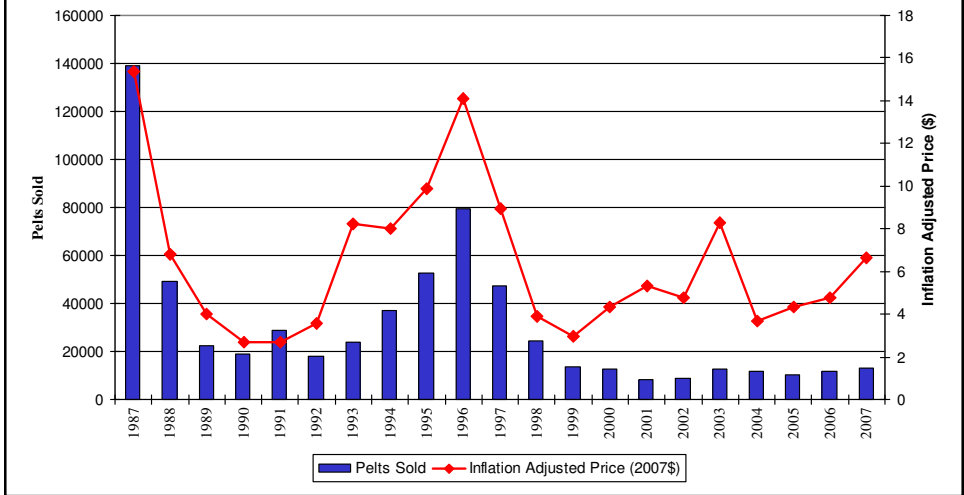


Figure 19
Red Fox Purchases, 1997 - 2007

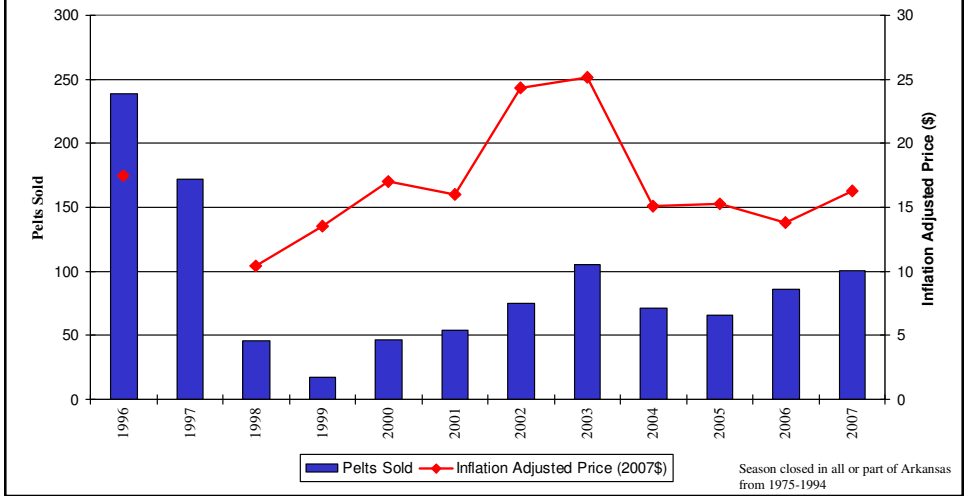
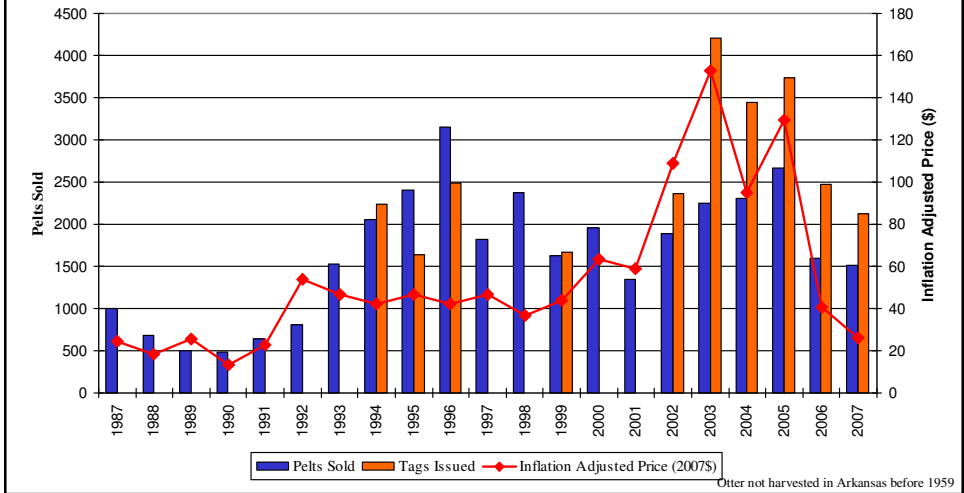


Figure 20
River Otter Purchases and Tags Issued, 1987 - 2007



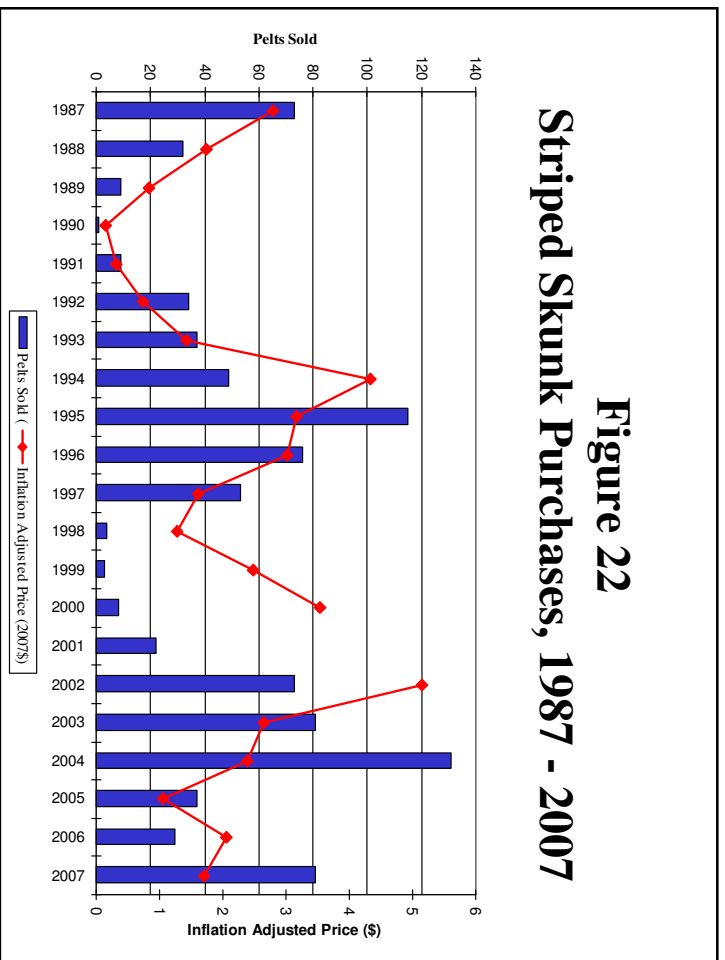
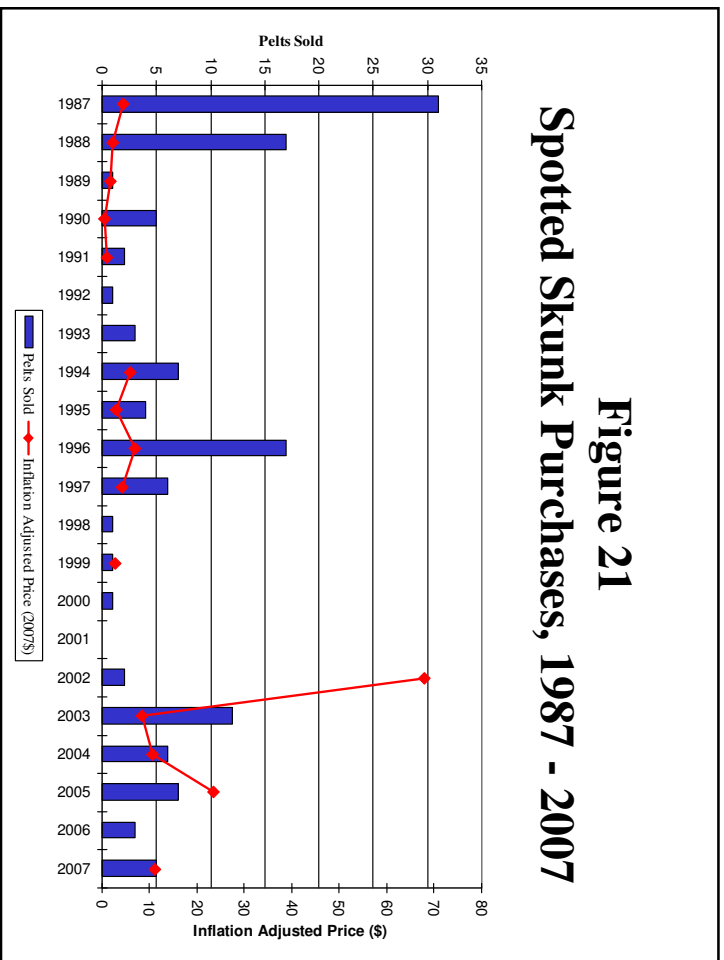


Figure 23
Statewide Bowhunter Observation
Data, 2005-7

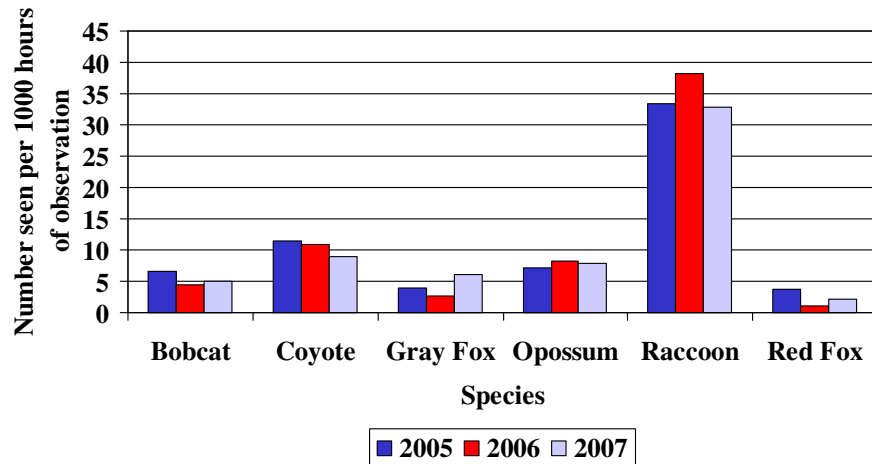


Figure 24
Number of Raccoon Field Trial
Casts by Month, 2007-8

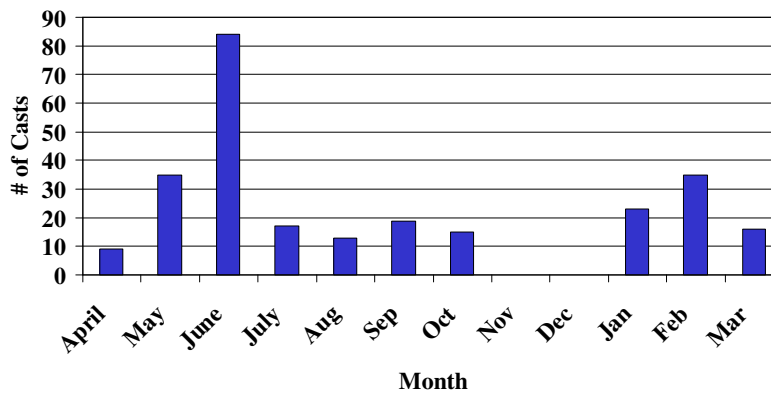


Figure 25
Number of Raccoon Field Trial
Casts by Region, 2007-8

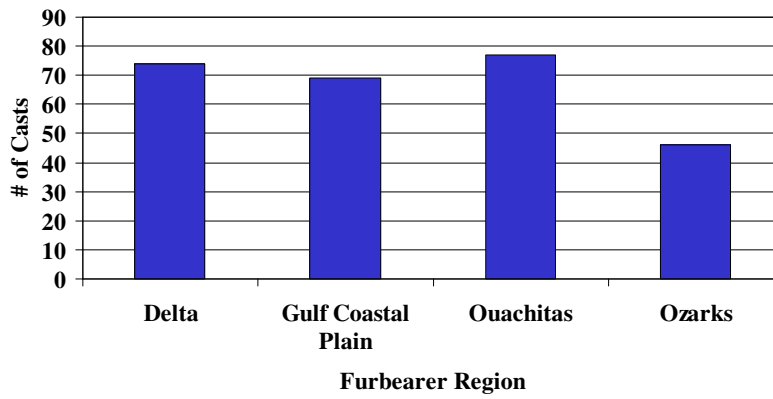


Figure 26
Raccoons Observed/Hour (Statewide),
2005-7

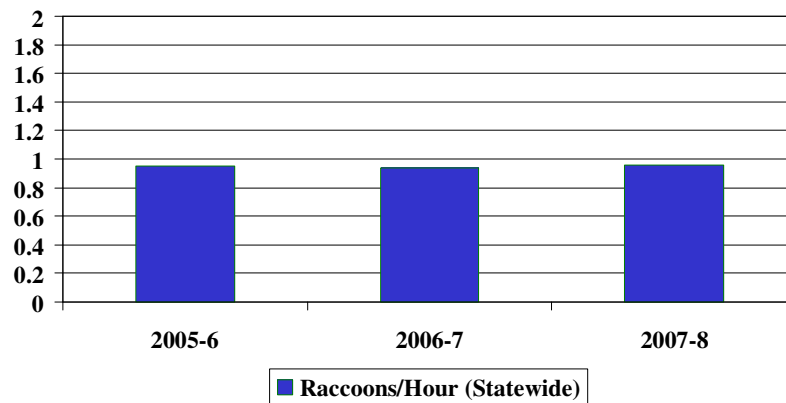


Figure 27
Average Number of Raccoons Observed Per Hour By Month (Statewide), 2007-8

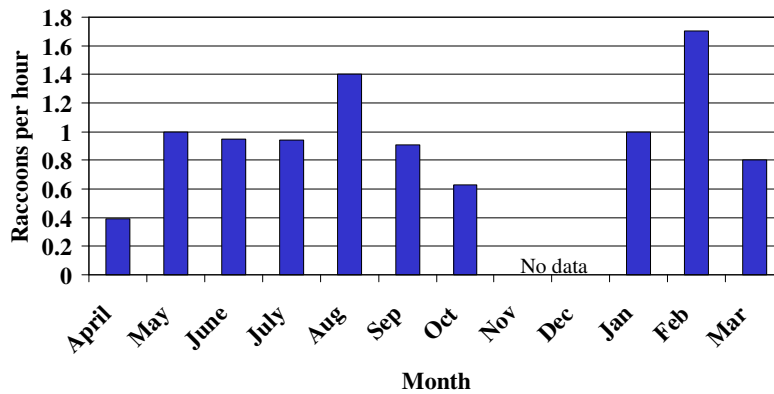


Figure 28
Percent of Casts with Raccoons Observed, 2005-7

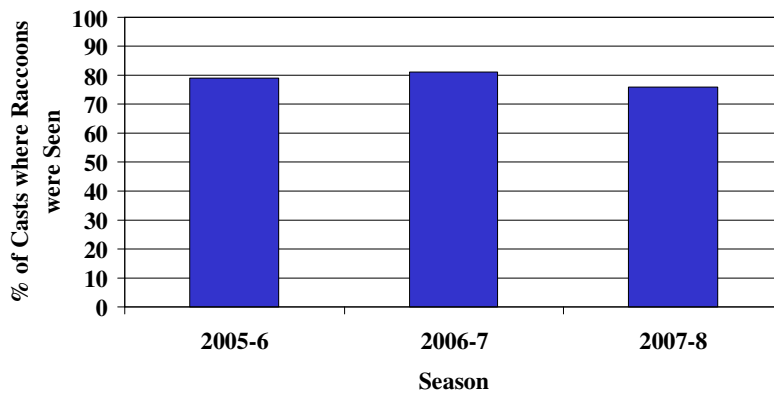


Figure 29
Average Number of Raccoons Observed
per hour by Region, 2007-8

