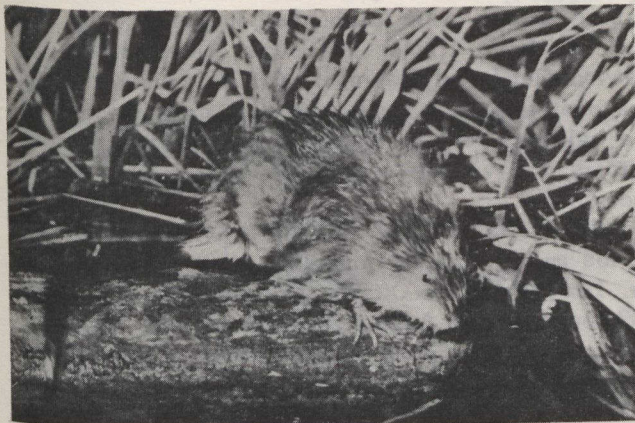


CANADIAN FURS - THE MUSKRAT



For many years the coming of autumn brought the appearance of muskrat coats in such numbers that it almost seemed no other fur existed.

Owing possibly to this over-exposure, as well as a trend towards "slim-line" wear, the popularity of muskrat declined sharply during the Sixties. Today, however, muskrat fur, available in attractively-styled natural and dyed coats and jackets, is regaining its popularity.

During the 1967-1968 season, Canadian trappers marketed 1,825,896 muskrat pelts valued at \$1,661,582. This ranked the muskrat second in importance only to the beaver among wild fur-bearing animals.

Muskrat fur is warm, durable and, from the point of view of serviceability compared to other furs, reasonable in price. Its fur is nearly as fine and dense as that of the beaver.

The muskrat is an aquatic rodent with a thick, waterproof under-fur and a protective coat of long, glistening guard hairs. Its 20-inch length includes a scaly, nine-inch tail. It has small eyes, ears almost concealed in its fur and large partly webbed hind feet. Its name is derived from a musky odor coming from its glands.

The muskrat is found throughout Canada wherever there are marshy ponds, lakes and slow-running streams. Its habitat extends to the delta of the MacKenzie River, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. It may live in a bank burrow or a lodge built largely of twigs and mud. The muskrat digs a tunnel into the structure under the water and excavates until it has a living chamber, with generally two entrances to facilitate escape from danger. The bank burrows will sometimes be 40 to 50 feet long and the entrances are always in deep water where there is little danger of freezing. The space used for living quarters is always above water level.

Generally speaking, furs taken in the northern regions are denser and silkier than those from southern areas. But this is not always true of muskrat pelts. In the Far North, the muskrat spends as many as seven months in some areas under the ice, and very often food runs short before the spring breakup provides access to greener pastures. The muskrats that are frozen in for a large part of the year, therefore, might be less densely furred than their southern cousins who spend only two or three months under the ice, and this is why some of the finest quality Canadian muskrats are produced in the more temperate zones of southern Ontario, southern Quebec and New Brunswick.

The muskrat produces two or three litters a year, usually with five to seven kits in each litter. The gestation period is about 30 days. The young animals are able to fend for themselves by the time they are about four weeks old, and those born in spring will breed in the autumn. This high reproduction rate is kept in check by the muskrat's many natural enemies mink, otter, foxes, wolves, large owls and other animals. Disease, drought and flooding also keep the muskrat population in hand.

(This article is one of a series on the Canadian fur industry and fur-bearing animals.)

CANADIAN STAMPS FOR EXPO 70

The Canada Post Office will release four 25-cent stamps on March 18 to commemorate Expo 70. The 40 x 24-mm. stamps will be produced by six-color lithographic printing, an innovation in Canadian postal issues.

The designs, by E.R.C. Bethune of Vancouver, British Columbia, depict Canada's fourfold participation in the world fair at Osaka, Japan. Canada, which is one of some 76 nations taking part in the exposition, is represented by four pavilions - one erected by the Federal Government and the others built by the Provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec.

Three designs will show the appropriate pro-

