

The Young Mink Trapper

Written and Illustrated by Bonnycastle Dale

WE were paddling home from putting the Mowich, our little bundle of troubles called a motor boat, away. We were skirting the north side of the Island of the Beaver, when Laddie Jr., called from the bow, "Look at the big muskrat!"

"It's a mink!" I called. We had just arrived in time to interrupt a tragedy, for up out of the weeds ahead leaped our old lone grouse and whirled away. Mr. Mink just missing a fine November dinner.



Look at those now.

"Run ashore," the boy pleaded. I grounded the canoe and we leaped out in chase of the long lithe dark brown member of the Marten family. It was impossible to have dug the beast out, as it ran into a bank burrow under a shore growing cedar.

"I'll stay here and you hustle to camp and get half a dozen traps. 'Off up the steep island's bank scrambled Laddie Jr., while I remained on guard.

We most carefully examined each path in and out of the burrow and set the traps in each likely spot, and covered them with leaves and dry cedar spines; but that bright eyed rascal stepped cautiously out of there that night without springing a trap. Now Laddie Jr. built nice little fish baited pockets in the bank, made very attractive sets along the shore edge with whole wild ducks as bait. The clever mink just reached out and lifted the duck clear over the trap, and carried it to the bank edge, and pushed it far back into a hole. Just in front of the hidden duck the lad set a trap; but the fur bearer was too clever. Each morning, after we had sat behind the decoys for an hour the boy would run off and examine his traps, returning with a face plainly marked, "No mink."

By this time twelve traps were out on the Beaver and he had also set three on Sugar, the neighboring island, on which he had permission to trap. (Just a word here, boys, if you will ask the owners of the various places you will usually get permission to trap. The sneak along and drop your trap, the owner ain't home style is getting played out, and trapping grounds are being shut up.)

About two weeks later I saw the boy returning from his mink traps with a wholly different expression written all over his face. It said, as plain as if it was printed there, "I've got him," and, indeed, he had, a fine old dark brown adult, 22 inches from head to tail, and the very next visit he made to Sugar he came back with a 20-inch one.

There are more mink and foxes too, than I have ever known. While our boys were smoking the Big Skunk out of Europe the fur bearers had a chance to multiply, and if it had not been for the terrific winter of 1917-18 they would have been in still greater numbers. Still a great number were caught, as the last St. Louis fur sales had one hundred thousand mink, and almost as many Japanese mink.

It is wonderful how the traps cover the earth, and how the tiny dribbles of fur form the mighty stream that centers in St. Louis from the northern

Aleutians to Terra-del-feuge, and right across the wide earth is some trapping ground. And the total value of one day's sales goes away over a million dollars, and the sale continues for nine days. The mink are the most numerous of the Marten family. I must tell you of the last Marten I saw in B.C. There are quantities of them out there, but if they live below the foothills they are very pale and yellow. You have to go up into the central Rockies to get the fine darkish pelts. Near my shore built bungalow there was a sandpit piled high with old ocean's debris. Often while seated shooting at the flight of wild fowl over the spit have I seen the dark yellow head and bright eyes of a Marten watching me. And only once did I kill one, as the pelt is so light colored. But I always wanted to picture one, so one day, as I was seated in the bow of the treacherous old log canoe with the lad paddling ever so gently in the stern, I saw a commotion in the water ahead. "Stop," I whispered. A rapidly darting brown figure had driven a sunfish into a tiny cove and promptly grabbed it with its sharp teeth, and was just about to emerge and eat it when it spied us. The red granite boulders of the shore line were smooth and steep and he nosed that fish viciously ahead, watching us all the while, pushing, bunting and swimming, he finally got the fish up on the rock and scrambled out himself, seized it and scampered up the sunny slope like a long lithe shadow.

"Got a good picture of him?" questioned the boy.

I was ashamed to answer. There I had been for two full minutes with a set camera in my hand, all too interested to snap the action, and although we often saw the Marten we never did get a picture of one. They are much more plump than a Mink; there is a Marten which is a tree climber, but you all know it as the Fisher. It is bigger than the common Marten.

There is no limit save exhaustion to the killing powers of a Mink. Hornaday tells of one in the Beaver pond in the big New York park that killed six wild geese in one night, and of another that slaughtered ten herring gulls. I have seen a pile of dead frogs, with the hearts torn out, just a neat slit in the neck of each; fully fifty titbit hearts had this epicure demanded.

The shy mother and the nimble tripping tumbling youngsters are a sight of wonder if you happen across them on some summer dry creek. They all copy the head of the family—the Otter—in their fishing and hunting. Do not get this small Land Otter mixed up with the big three-foot Sea Otter. The land one is only a bit bigger than the Fisher, who is a bit bigger than the Marten, who just overtops the Mink. But the Sea Otter is a magnificent animal. What do you think of the captain of a sea-going sealing schooner, with a large crew of hunters aboard reporting "a good catch" to a passing sealer, when he had but ten skins in skin room? Yea! but they were then lawful prey and



Proud of his aim.

worth five hundred a piece. Now none but Indians may kill them, and they are worth three times the figure I mentioned.

It used to instil a feeling of awe in our land born bodies to see two or three coast Indians start off with the tide for the migrating pelagic seal. These by law cannot be killed off the Inibillofs and breeding islands with firearms; but

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