

KEEN COMPETITION AMONG SILVER BEAUTIES

Methods Employed In Pelting Foxe

(Continued from page 10)

way to kill a fox, as learned from Sir Charles Dalton, is the best way, and that is to "step on it!"

Cooling Time

It is conceded that it is not entirely practical to remove the pelt immediately after the kill. Many hold the belief that unless the animal heat is permitted to leave the body, the fur will deteriorate or even "slip" from the leather. It has been demonstrated time and again that this theory is fallacious. However, it is generally agreed, that for the best results, a cooling time of two or three hours should be allowed in moderate temperatures. The carcass should not, in the writer's opinion, be permitted to freeze before skinning. After a two-hour cooling period, the body is still sufficiently flexible to be easily workable. Grasping the fox between the pelt's knees, or placing it on the pelting table or bench, the feet and legs are first skinned out, giving particular attention to the toes, removing all tissue and fat, and severing the bone at the joint next the outer or nail section, leaving all claws intact on the skin.

The Skinning Yoke

Although not in universal usage,

the writer has always found a skinning yoke a most convenient accessory in removing pelts of any sort. The yoke consists of a short length of oak about an inch square, and twelve inches in length. An inch from each end the wood is cut half-way through with a saw, and triangular chip from the upper end edge to the bottom of the cut is removed. On the bottom edges a half-inch is whittled away upward, and the sides and corners rounded off to leave a notch at each end of the yoke. A swivel is then attached to the upper edge of the oak piece, by wire, bolt or clamp. To this swivel a short length of chain leads to any convenient support which will bring the yoke at a level with the operator's eyes.

The legs being skinned out, a short cut is made down the base of the lower side of the brush, an inch in length, and the skin is loosened from the rump and lower back for a distance of an inch or two. The carcass is then hung on the skinning yoke, the ends of the oak piece being inserted through the ham strings. The tail bone is easily and more quickly and safely removed by using a small block of wood on both sides of the bone at the base, grasped tightly and held firmly with one hand, and the bone stripped out by a strong,

steady pull with the other hand. After the skin is removed completely, the brush should be then opened its entire length either by using a knife guide, or by slipping the knife inside the tail and carefully cutting outward to make a clean, straight opening cut.

The legs and brush being loose, it is then the work of but a few seconds to strip the skin down to the shoulders and neck. Sliding the thumb along the receding edge of the skin and working it down the body, will aid in removal and will prevent an excessive amount of fat from adhering to the skin. Use of the knife may occasionally be necessary along the belly and across the shoulders. Pull the skin well down the neck, without stretching it, until the base of the ears is reached. At this point remove the carcass from the yoke and place it across the pelting table, with the head just over the edge. By throwing the pelt under the operator's arm it can be held while the head is skinned out. Cut through the ear gristle, holding the head with the muzzle up, so that any blood which accumulates will drain back on the carcass and will not soil the skin. A few deft touches with the knife, along the skull and under the eyelids, along the lips and a slash to sever the snout, and the skin is off. Correctly executed, there should be no blood on the skin and very little fat, after the above described operations have been carried out. However, any blood or moisture adhering to the skin should be wiped away with a cloth. If the operator has worked carefully there will be no grease or taint on the fur or on the brush. Any unusual amount of fat coming off with the skin may be removed at once.

Fleshing

Removal of meat tissue and heavy fat may be best accomplished by using a regular fleshing board. However, on the small ranch with but a few pelts to be handled, fleshing may be done satisfactorily by slipping the skin over a small drying board, with rounded edge. The fat is then scraped away with a blunt, straight, or slightly curved edged instrument. Hard wood scrapers have been used, and regular fleshing knives or blocks. The writer has come to use an ordinary broad, blunt double edged kitchen spatula, more easily and with less effort than anything else. Held edge-ways by both hands, the spatula is drawn down the skin always in the one direction, with just enough pressure to remove the fat and any tissue which may have adhered to the skin. Best results have been obtained by delay-

ing the fleshing process for twelve hours after killing. The fat, before complete cooling time, tends to run and soil the fur and brush. As soon as completely fleshed, slip the pelt, leather side out, over the suitable size of drying board and fasten in position with a few laces. One at the nose, two or three at the base, and one at the tip of the tail are sufficient. The skin should not be stretched tightly, but simply spread firmly down the board to its natural length.

The Brush and Legs

The appearance and value of many skins have been deteriorated by the handling of the brush after drying. If not thoroughly dried, the brush will taint and the hair slip while handling. If the cut opening the brush has been carefully made, when laid open the leather of the tail will prevent two straight outside edges without any irregularities, and there will be no loss of fur. The brush being held by the one tack at the tip, should be spread evenly and smoothly down the base of the drying board, with the fur spread well out at the sides. Two narrow strips of wood, such as lengths of lath, are then nailed to the board along the fur at the edges of the brush, but the nails should not penetrate the tail leather.

Two somewhat wider thin stripes of wood are then used, on which the front legs are then spread and tacked at intervals, and the paws inverted to permit drying thoroughly up to the claws. The hind legs are spread and tacked out in a similar manner on the drying board. In good drying weather only two or three days are required in which the skin will dry sufficiently for turning fur side out and replacing on the board. At this time all irregularities in shape should be corrected, so that when completely dried after another short period, the pelt will retain its perfect shape until marketing time. Upon being removed from the board, the pelts may be hung in bundles, classified as to color, size and quality. Each skin should be marked on the leather with indelible pencil when placed on the board, tagged, and a record sheet endorsed as to pen and pelt number, for future reference, and identification.

Cleaning and Drumming

Since cleaning and drumming facilities are now available without the considerable expense which attached to these operations in days gone by, little attention need be paid to this phase of pelt handling. Skins taken and handled as above outlined require little or no cleaning or drumming. If oil or grease has in some manner accumulated on some of the fur it may be absorbed with good, clean hardwood sawdust, and shaken from the pelt before packing. Dust settling on the skins and the cleaning sawdust may be readily removed by reversing an ordinary household vacuum cleaner with hose attachment and a narrow flat nozzle. With the pelt hung up, the blast of air blown upward and against the fur will drive out the dirt and dust particles, and fluff and liven up the fur. Careful packing for shipment will further safeguard poor appearances of the skins, when offered for sale. It should be a needless warning, that pending shipment all skins should be carefully guarded against heat, moths, beetles, mice, or damage from other causes.

It is realized at this writing, that many of the foregoing suggestions will appear superfluous to some old-time fox men. The fact is also recognized that many will disagree with the technique advanced in this article. However, it is offered in the hope, and with the conviction, that some who may read what is here written, will obtain some advantage from it, as taken from the memory notations of a rather old time breeder of silver foxes whose ranch has operated on a pelt basis from a considerable number of years.

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J. D. JENKINS

Why Not Try And Produce More Silvers

Even today, after many years of silver fox breeding, many breeders continue the old methods with no thought of experimenting or changing.

Most breeders mate their foxes for life. If these matings produce pups they are satisfied even if half or a quarter of the litters are blacks. A good breeder is never satisfied. He is always trying to produce better results. I believe there are a good many male and female combinations on ranches that can be made to produce good silvers.

Why not try some mating experiments every year and see if you cannot make combinations that will produce silvers

To produce good silver foxes you must have a starting point, that is,

one good pair of foxes. Now if you are lucky enough to get this pair to produce say, 6 pups, all silvers and not 2 silvers and 3 blacks you are all set. If you get darks you might as well stop right there.

If you get all good silver pups in a litter the next step is to determine whether the male or female side is responsible. To do this you must in-bred, mother to son or father to daughter. Then select the pups from the first combination that is, silvers, if you are fortunate enough to produce all good silvers out of one of these combinations.

You are then on the right road and your foxes should produce silvers. Try and get these combinations that will produce silvers and then mate together and you can soon build up a good herd. Be careful however to see to it that the silvers are good quality before in-breeding.

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