

Mink

Prepared by the National Wildlife Control Training Program. <http://WildlifeControlTraining.com>
 Researched-based, certified wildlife control training programs to solve human – wildlife conflicts.
 Your source for animal handling, control methods, and wildlife species information.



Figure 1. The mink (*Mustela vison*). Photo by Stephen M. Vantassel.

Species Overview

Conflicts

Mink damage usually centers on predation of chickens or waterfowl.

Legal Status

In South Carolina, mink are legally classified as a furbearer and can be taken by hunting or trapping during the open season. The season for trapping these animals is December 1 through March 1. Hunting season is Thanksgiving Day through March 1 on private lands with a valid hunting license. Anyone planning to trap mink should be familiar with the regulations which govern this activity. Information on these regulations can be obtained online at: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov>.

A nuisance mink can also be taken year-round with a **Depredation Permit**. A

depredation permit is not required when controlling nuisance mink within 100 yards of a property owner's residence. This permit is issued by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. To obtain a permit call your local wildlife management office or law enforcement field office.

For further information: <http://dnr.sc.gov>.

Identification

The mink (*Mustela vison*, Figure 1) is a member of the weasel family.

Physical Description

Adult mink average between 18 to 24 inches in length, including the somewhat bushy 5- to 7-inch tail. They weigh 1½ to 3 pounds. Females are about ¾ the size of males. Both sexes are a rich chocolate-brown color, usually with a white patch on the chest or chin and scattered white patches on the belly. The fur is relatively short with the coat consisting of a soft, dense underfur concealed by glossy, lustrous guard hairs. Mink also have anal musk glands, common to the weasel family, and can discharge a disagreeable musk if frightened or disturbed. Unlike skunks, however, they cannot forcibly spray musk.

Species Range

Mink are found throughout North America, with the exception of the desert southwest and tundra areas.

Health and Safety Concerns

Mink are not considered to pose a disease threat to humans.

General Biology, Reproduction, and Behavior

Reproduction

Mink are polygamous and males may fight ferociously for mates during the breeding season, which occurs from late January to late March. Gestation averages 51 days. Like most other members of the weasel family, mink exhibit delayed implantation; the embryos do not implant and begin completing their development until approximately 30 days before birth.

Nesting/Denning Cover

Mink have a single annual litter of about three to six young born in late April or early May. Their eyes open at about 3 weeks of age. The mink family stays together until late summer when the young disperse. Mink become sexually mature at about 10 months of age.

Mink usually occupy abandoned muskrat dens. However, mink also will use the burrows of ground squirrels and rabbits, as well as cavities available in brush and rock piles.

Behavior

Mink are primarily nocturnal. They remain active year-round, but will den up for brief intervals during periods of low temperatures or heavy snow. Mink can travel between 2 and 7 miles per night in search of prey. Males have larger home ranges than females. Females tend to be relatively sedentary during the breeding season.

Habitat

Mink are shoreline dwellers and their one basic habitat requirement is a suitable permanent

water area. This may be a stream, river, pond, marsh, swamp, or lake. Waters with good populations of fish, frogs, and aquatic invertebrates that also have brushy or grassy ungrazed shorelines provide the best mink habitat. Mink use many den sites in the course of their travels and the availability of adequate den sites is a very important habitat consideration.

Food Habits

Mink are strictly carnivorous. They are opportunistic feeders with a diet that includes mice and rats, frogs, fish, rabbits, reptiles, crayfish, muskrats, squirrels, insects, birds, and eggs.

Voice, Sounds, Tracks and Signs

Mink emit various sounds including defensive screams, squeaks for warning, and hissing. They may chuckle during the mating season. Tracks of mink are subtle but a careful eye can find them in soft soils around waterways.

Damage Identification

Damage to Landscapes

Mink do not damage plants or turf.

Damage Crops and Livestock

Mink do not damage crops.

Mink are exceptional predators, capable of killing animals larger than they are. Mink will attack animals up to the size of a chicken, duck, rabbit, or muskrat. Occasionally mink may kill domestic poultry around farms. Mink can be devastating to chicken producers. They typically kill their prey by biting them through the skull

or neck. Closely spaced pairs of canine tooth marks are sign of a mink kill.

Mink occasionally exhibit “surplus killing” behavior (killing much more than they can possibly eat) when presented with an abundance of food, such as in a poultry house full of chickens. Mink may place many dead chickens neatly in a pile. Mink can eat significant numbers of upland nesting waterfowl or young game birds, particularly in areas where nesting habitat is limited.

Damage to Structures

Mink do not damage structures.

Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Habitat modification

Habitat modification generally is not a feasible means of reducing mink predation problems on farms or other areas mink live. Elimination of potential denning areas, such as around ponds and streams, may reduce their densities.

Exclusion

Prevent mink predation on domestic animals by sealing all openings larger than 1 inch with wood or tin and by using 1-inch mesh poultry netting around chicken yards and over ventilation openings. Mink do not gnaw like rodents do, but they use burrows or gnawed openings made by rats, so be sure to manage burrowing rodents.

Frightening Devices

None have been found to be effective.

Repellents

None are available.

Toxicants

None are available.

Shooting

Legal hunting season on private lands in South Carolina for mink is Thanksgiving Day through March 1. A free depredation permit for nuisance mink may be issued to landowners who do not possess a hunting license.

If a mink is raiding poultry and is caught in the act, shooting is a quick way to solve the problem. A variety of firearms are effective including the .22-caliber air rifle and shotgun with No. 5 or 6 shot.

Mink may be hunted at night; however, they may not be hunted with artificial lights except when treed or cornered with dogs and no buckshot or any shot larger than #4, or any rifle ammunition larger than a twenty-two rimfire may be used. Devices that amplify light using any type of power source are considered artificial light (including night vision or thermal imaging equipment).

Trapping

Trapping is the most efficient way to control problem mink.

In South Carolina, the legal trapping season is December 1 – March 1 for licensed trappers, however a private landowner may apply for a free depredation permit outside of the regular trapping season or if they do not have a trapping license. Permits can be obtained from any South Carolina DNR office or conservation officer.

Furbearer Trapping regulations can be obtained online at www.dnr.sc.gov.

Obtain training on the use of traps to ensure your safety and that you use the equipment responsibly. For best results, use enough traps to cover ideal locations and be prepared in case you trap or encounter a skunk.

Box/Cage Traps. Mink are suspicious of new objects and are difficult to capture in cage/box traps. Single-door cage/box traps (6- x 6- x 24-inch) may be effective if baited and placed in dirt banks or rock walls prior to being set to make mink comfortable with their presence. Use cage or box traps around a farmyard if there is a high likelihood of catching pets.

Bodygrip Traps. Conibear-style body-gripping traps equivalent to No. 110 or 120 traps may be used. “Blind sets” are very effective for mink if suitable locations can be found. These sets do not require bait or lures and are placed in areas along mink travel lanes where they are forced to travel in restricted areas. These include small culverts, tiles, narrow springs, muskrat runs, and areas under over-hanging banks or under the roots of streamside trees.

Another blind set is the “bottom set.” These involve the placement of conibear-style traps on the bottom of streams where the bank is steep (Figure 2).

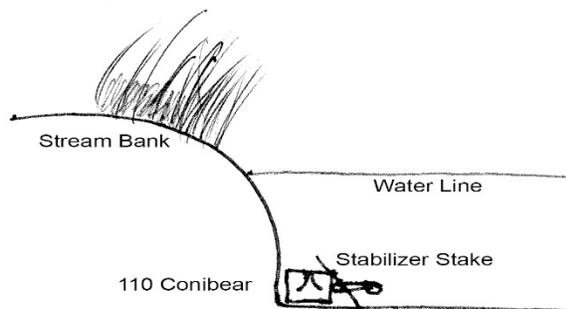


Figure 2. Bottom set edge trapping. Image by Stephen M. Vantassel.

To use No. 110 traps in baited sets, place one inside a box large enough to enclose it (Figure 3). Drill a 3-inch diameter hole and position the

trap so that the mink must pass through it to



get to the bait in the rear of the box.
Figure 3. A box holding a No. 110 conibear-style trap for mink. Photo by Stephen M. Vantassel.

Foothold Traps. Mink can be captured in foothold traps (No. 11 double long-spring or No. 1 or 1½ coilsprings). In addition to blind sets, the “pocket set” using bait is another excellent set for mink. This set is made by digging a 3-inch diameter hole horizontally back into a bank at the water level. The bottom of the hole should contain about 2 inches of water, and it should extend back at least 10 inches into the bank. Place a bait (fresh fish, muskrat carcass, or frog) in the back of the hole above water level and place the trap underwater at the opening of the hole. Stake the trap solidly and connect to a drowning wire leading to deep water, as this set will attract raccoons.

Disposition

Relocation

Relocation of mink in South Carolina is not permitted.

Translocation

Translocation of mink in South Carolina is not permitted.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia by carbon dioxide is suitable for mink.

Disposal

Check your state regulations regarding disposal of carcasses.

<http://icwdm.org/>

<http://wildlifecontrol.info>

Resources

Government or private agencies, universities, extension service.

Web Resources

<http://intranet.dnr.sc.gov>

<http://wildlifecontroltraining.com>

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