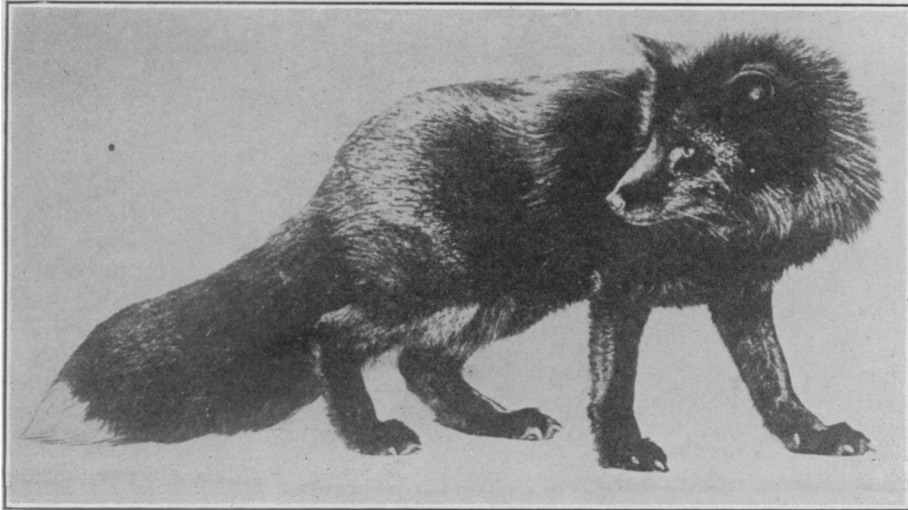


Fur Coats Come from Foxes, Calves and Rabbits



THE KING OF THEM ALL—a dark silver fox of the finest type. (Photo by U. S. Biological Survey.)

By MARJORIE MACDILL

In no sense is it truer that Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's lady are sisters under their skins, than when all said sisters are under the skins of fur coats. No woman is quite completely happy, be she college professor's wife or ten-cent store clerk, until she has amassed the two hundred dollars' worth of cash or credit, plus or minus, that will shut out cruel Boreas' breath with pelts of real or pseudo-sable, muskrat or mole. It can be safely said that there is no material under the sun that woman buys about which she knows less, than this that she pays the most for.

Christmas brought a fuller realization of the great feminine ambition to American women than ever before. The recent announcement of the U. S. Biological Survey that our fur wearers are increasing faster than our fur bearers is bolstered up by figures that show how our annual import of furs jumped from \$87,000,000 in 1924 to \$115,000,000 in 1925. And this does not include the \$60,000,000 or \$70,000,000 worth that come annually from within our own borders and Alaska. Milady must have fur! In fact fur is being worn more this season in the United States than anywhere else south of the Arctic circle or north of the Antarctic.

Where do all the furs come from that supply the luxurious demands of these prosperous United States? The Siberian tundras, the pampas of the Argentine, the Himalayas of India and the barnyards of our own farms all contribute. According to a recent estimate, 55 countries sent furs to

America in the first three months of 1926.

The fur trade has always called to the adventurous spirit, and the high value set upon the stakes since the time when the wearing of fur was restricted by law to the aristocracy, though not to the gentler sex alone, have made the risks worth while. Though the difficulties of travel are considerably less, there is still a plentiful element of the uncertain in the life of the trapper and fur trader in many of the remote corners of the world where their calling takes them. The Yukon is traversable part of the time by motor boat and a railroad has been built into the Kyber Pass of Kipling fame. Camel caravans, however, still transport furs 800 miles over the Gobi desert from Urga to Kalgan, the nearest railroad station. This long trek can be cut down to two days by motor but between brigands, the Soviets, and Chinese generals it is not likely to lack variety.

The fur trade includes men of all nations, most of whom are in the game for business first and its sporting chances next, but in many hardy spirits the motives may be reversed. In this country by far the bulk of the trapping clan is made up of farm boys. About 100,000 divide up the sixty to seventy million dollars' worth of raw fur profits of America between them. One cause that swells the ranks of the boy trappers is the fact that in an agricultural country like ours vermin control is necessary for the protection of live stock, poultry and many crops. Larger animals that used to prey on the little ones have

become extinct, so that the smaller ones have continued to multiply in spite of the advance of civilization and consequently furnish material that starts many a farm boy's first bank account.

Though the primitive institution of barter plays an important part in fur buying in the Far North and sparsely settled places generally, Young America does business on a cash basis. The itinerant fur buyer haggles in the woodshed annex of the farmhouse over the price of skunk, muskrat, raccoon and whatever other skins the local streams and woodlands produce. His youthful adversary is usually as well posted as he on prices through the catalogs gotten out by the fur buying mail order houses, and the bargaining is likely to be both long and lively.

Sometimes the young trapper sells his catch to the receiving houses directly. Here there are plenty of disappointments in store for him for skins that are regal looking enough in the woodshed do not seem so impressive on the warehouse floor. On the whole, however, the reputable houses base their business on fair treatment, and good will is recognized as a valuable part of the stock in trade. Each individual skin is rated by experts according to its kind, size and quality and paid for proportionately.

The receiving houses usually dispose of their collections in lots to raw fur dealers. This dealer sorts his purchases and finds a market for each grade and kind, for each manufacturer specializes, first in either coats, neckwear or fur trimmings, then in the kind of skin, as muskrat, raccoon or beaver, and finally in price, such as popular, medium priced or costly garments. Catering to these numerous specialized factors is the function of the intermediate fur merchant. After going through all these hands only the best furs eventually reach the manufacturers since the inferior pelts are thrown out by the eliminating process in each selective buying. Auctions in raw furs are held by sales corporations from Seattle to St. Louis and New York to Winnipeg, as well as in London, Leipsic and Paris.

Though trapped over in some parts for nearly 200 years, the Mississippi basin still is a prolific source of small fur animals, Being an ideal section

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for wild life, it might reasonably be expected to harbor muskrat and opossum for years to come if it were adequately protected by wise conservation measures. Sensible laws in Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland and Louisiana have helped maintain miles of marsh land as homes for muskrats that turn out millions of pelts every year. A prominent authority in the fur industry, in a survey of the fur situation in the *Journal of Home Economics*, says that, "We must look to the conservation of natural resources as our guarantee of an adequate future supply. The fur trade and the various state and national agencies interested in national resources are working toward this end, and, I am happy to say, working harmoniously. Waste of wild life will eventually be eliminated and for it will be substituted intelligent 'conservation with use.'"

Fur farming is a development of recent years which will undoubtedly help to keep fur from becoming an extinct fashion. Nearly 2,500 farmers in the United States and Alaska are raising animals for their fur at the present time, and over \$15,000,000 is invested in this infant industry.

The production of silver foxes by breeding started as far back as 1887 and brought great wealth to the pioneers in the business. One consignment of 25 skins brought \$34,175 in and brought great wealth to the pioneer London market and at the height of the boom the top price for a single pelt reached \$2,700.

Since a great many people went into the business who had very little practical experience, a great deal of money was lost and illicit practices on the part of unscrupulous dealers did a great deal of harm in the new industry. The World War put a kink in the boom by killing the demand and breeding in this country has settled down to a sound stock raising basis with results less sensational but more stable.

According to Frank G. Ashbrook, in charge of fur bearing resources at the U. S. Biological Survey, fur farming is best carried on as a side line with general farming.

Mr. Ashbrook ventures to prophesy that in the future the majority of farmers in the northern tier of states will be raising some fur bearing animals on scrubby hillsides that will not grow wheat or oats.

Silver fox farming when carefully and intelligently managed makes money. Rabbit farming both for meat



CALVES RIVAL MUSKRATS and raccoons as a source of supply for chic sport models. This latest thing in black and white was once the everyday costume of a Holstein heifer.

and for fur has met with a measure of success in the West, particularly in southern California. Muskrat farming that is really not fur farming at all brings in a comfortable revenue. What is called muskrat farming is really regulated trapping with legal protection of marsh lands that result in perennial crops of this most prolific species for the fortunate owners of the swamp lands the muskrats love. Beaver and martin farming is still in the experimental stage and though mink reproduce rapidly in captivity they have not as yet proved money makers. Skunks and raccoons have been raised on farms, but the fluctuating prices of their pelts, dependent on such uncertain quantities as the whims of fashion and the financial manipulation of the market, have stood in the way of attempts to rear either animal on a large scale.

The aristocrats among furs like silver fox and mink do not receive

all the attention in the fur trade by any means. The lowly lamb, kid, pony, dog, house cat, and this season the barnyard calf, are all important sources of adornment for lovely woman. Persian lamb and caracul have long stood on the feet of their own appearance in general popularity, but sheared goatskin with leopard spots stenciled on it makes a striking substitute for the skin of the exotic feline from the tropics.

Furs are not made to masquerade for purposes of deception but to put them within the reach of all classes of society. In consequence we have American broadtail that originated on the back of a South American lamb. The wool next to the skin is particularly wavy and the close shearing produces a moire effect that exercises a strong appeal to the fur coat wearing share of the public. If you don't believe it, just stand on a busy corner and pick out all the moired lambs that go by!

Rabbit and muskrat skins masquerade as seal after a dye bath and their long guard hairs have been removed. Nutria, otter, beaver and real seal are other furs that are "un-haired" before they are made up into million dollar garments for movie princesses and bootlegger's brides.

On the other hand in some furs additional hairs are put in instead of taken out. Pointed fox is made by adding white hairs to red fox dyed black. White badger hairs are dipped in a special cement and stuck in wherever the desired effect demands their presence. The worker usually sits with the fur she wishes to copy in front of her as a model. Sometimes inferior dark silver fox skins are whitened by this same tedious hair by hair process. Nature's handiwork is further touched up by brushing dye into stripes with a feather or a fine brush, and old furs are renovated and light ones darkened by the same methods.

This season the farmyard has come into its own, for pony and calfskin are the favored choice of stenographer and debutante. The red-brown that reminds you of the heifer calf tied to the apple tree by the summer roadside back home is met with most frequently on the boulevards, but occasionally one sees a black and white Holstein tripping along above chiffon hose and alligator shoes. The last word comes from Europe where the Paris salons are showing flat haired skins decorated with hand painted flowers!