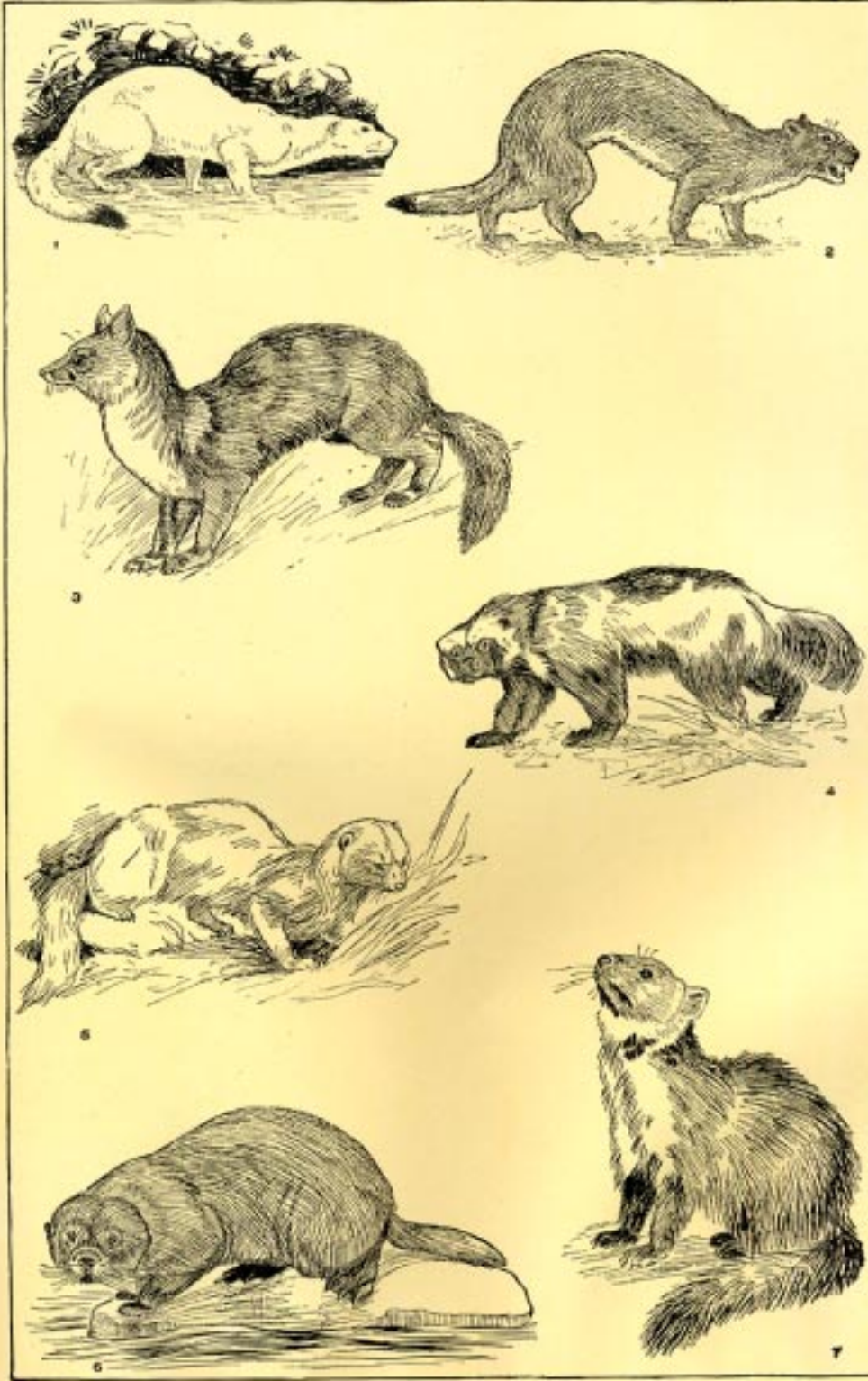


FUR AND THE FUR TRADE (OF. *forre, fuerre*, It. *fodero*, case, sheath, from Goth. *fōdr*, AS. *fōdder*, OHG. *fuotar*, Ger. *Futter*, sheath). Many species of animals, especially those living in cold climates, have a soft, silky covering called fur, which in some animals is mixed with a covering entirely different in texture, long and straight, called the overhair. It is often this overhair which gives the distinctive peculiarity and beauty to the fur. The use of the skins of beasts with the fur still on them, as clothing, is of very ancient origin. The Chinese and Japanese used furs as articles of luxury at least 2500 years ago. Herodotus mentions their use by other ancient peoples. By the Romans furs were much prized, especially during the later days of the Empire. The Saracens also made great use of them, and from them the Crusaders brought furs into general favor in Europe, where so much extravagance was exhibited in their use that in both France and England sumptuary edicts were issued against this fashion. But such laws, like most regulations of the sort, had little effect, and the demand for furs continued among all classes of people. It was to meet this demand that those pioneer explorers, the trappers and traders, penetrated the northern forests of America and established little trading stations which proved the vanguards of civilization. Albany and St. Louis, and many other flourishing American cities, are the outgrowth of these stations. In the early days the most valuable furs could be obtained from the Indians in exchange for glass beads or other trifles. At one time this trade was carried on, especially in Canada, by *coureurs des bois*; but the scandalous practices of these reckless rangers brought the trade into such disrepute that a licensing system was established.

Beaver skins were used in New Amsterdam and elsewhere in place of gold and silver for currency, and the figure of a beaver is a conspicuous device on the escutcheon of the city of New York. The search for furs was one of the objects of the daring expeditions of the voyagers of French Canada, as the search for gold was the motive of the Spanish invasion of Mexico and South America. The famous Hudson's Bay Company originated in 1670 and claimed the entire country from the bay to the Pacific, and from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Ocean, except such portions as were then occupied by Frenchmen and Russians. Towards the close of the eighteenth century certain Canadian merchants formed the Northwest Fur Company, having their headquarters at Montreal, their operations being carried on in the districts watered by rivers that flow to the Pacific. This organization soon became a formidable competitor to the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1821 the two companies united. In 1763 some merchants of New Orleans established a fur-trading post where St. Louis now stands, under the management of the brothers Chouteau. For the first half of the nineteenth century the St. Louis trade was from \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year. One of the most famous of early American fur traders was John Jacob Astor, of New York, who began by trading in a small way after his arrival in the country in 1784. By 1810-12 his

FUR-BEARING ANIMALS



1. EUROPEAN WEASEL (*Mustela erminea*), in white winter or Ermine dress.
2. WEASEL (*Mustela erminea*), in brown summer or Stoat dress.
3. SABLE (*Mustela zibellina*).

4. WOLVERINE OR GLUTTON (*Gulo luscus*).
5. EUROPEAN FERRET OR POLECAT (*Mustela putorius*).
6. SEA OTTER (*Latax lutris*).
7. AMERICAN PINE MARTEN (*Mustela americana*).

trade, conducted under the name of the American Fur Company, was enormous. An entirely new field for American enterprise was opened by the purchase of Alaska in 1867, which secured complete control of an important seal fishery. In 1914 the furs shipped from Alaska amounted in value to \$701,511, this figure including other furs than seal. The sealskin industry had early become an important one and national and international action was necessary to prevent extinction of the herds. See under SEAL; SEALING.

Seekers for furs must now go beyond the extreme limits of civilization, especially in America, and the Arctic regions are hunted over to secure the pelts. In more civilized regions the hunter-trapper age is passing, and to meet the increased demand for valuable furs domestication and breeding must be developed. Already fur farming is being undertaken on a large scale in Canada, while the Karakule sheep, from which are obtained Persian lamb and broad tails, have been domesticated in Russia, and attempts have been made in Germany and America to produce by cross-breeding a sheep that will yield similar fur. Skunk farms are also in successful operation, and scientific biologists are being consulted in order to provide for new and valuable furs. Each animal presents special problems in regard to both domestication and breeding.

Collectors and dealers in Canada and the United States usually forward their furs to the seaboard, chiefly to New York, for sale there, or for consignment principally to London and Leipzig. In 1913 the United States government decided to send its sealskins and fox pelts from Alaska to be cured and sold at public auction at St. Louis, and it was thought that this might be the means of developing that city as one of the important fur centres of the world. Previously London had been recognized, even in America, as the great fur-dressing centre and market, and still remains the chief, and the great auctions are held there. To London are sent not only much of the produce of Asia and Europe, but also the fine peltries of Chile and Peru, the nutria from Buenos Aires, the fur seal of Cape Horn and South Shetland, the hair seal from Newfoundland, as well as the inferior peltries of Africa.

To prepare fur skins in a way to endure this long transportation is a simple and easy matter. When stripped from the animal, the flesh and fat are carefully removed, and the pelts hung in a cool place to dry and harden; nothing is added to protect them. Care is taken that they do not heat after packing and that they are occasionally beaten to destroy worms. A marked exception is the case of the fur seal, which is best preserved by liberal salting and packing in hogsheds. All other raw furs are marketed in bales.

Few kinds of animals furnish a pelt of suitable weight and pliability, and all of them differ widely in elegance of texture, delicacy of shade, and fineness of overhair; and these differences determine their place in the catalogue of merchandise. These few animals are not very prolific, and many of them attain their greatest beauty in wild and uncultivated regions, although there are some notable exceptions. Being thus few in kind and limited in quantity, the extinction of the several choice varieties has been threatened through the persistent energy of trappers.

The principal North American fur-bearing animals are beaver, muskrat, hare, and squirrel; the mink, sable, fisher, ermine, weasel, raccoon, badger, and skunk; the lynx, northern and southern; bears of several kinds; foxes of three or four varieties; two wolves; and, most valuable of all, musk ox, seal, and sea otter. Of foreign fur-bearing animals the most highly prized are the chinchilla, coypu (nutria), and various monkeys, marsupials (opossum, kangaroo, etc.), and cats. (See articles under their names; also, FUR-BEARING ANIMALS.) Many of the animals, however, enumerated in the American list are also natives of northern Europe, whence their pelts come to market under other names. In fact, there is a wide diversity of name between the trade designations of the various furs and the actual animals.

For manufacturing purposes furs are classified into *felted* and *dressed*. Felted furs, such as beaver, nutria, hare, and rabbit, are used for hats and other felted fabrics, in which the hairs or filaments are made so to interlace or entangle as to form a very strong and close plexus. The quality of the fur is better when the skin is taken from the animal in winter than in any other season, giving rise to the distinction between "seasoned" and "unseasoned" skins. The removal of the fur from the pelt is a necessary preliminary to the preparation of fur for felting purposes. The long hairs are cut off by a kind of shears; and the true fur is then removed by the action of a knife, requiring much care in its management. In some sorts of skin the long hairs are removed by pulling instead of shearing; in others the greasiness of the pelt renders necessary a cleansing process, with the aid of soap and boiling water, before the shearing can be conducted; and in others both pelt and fur are so full of grease as to require many repetitions of cleansing.

Furs have their felting property sometimes increased by the process of *carroting*, in which the action of heat is combined with that of sulphuric acid. The chief employment of felted furs is described under HAT, *Manufacture*. See also FELT.

Dressed furs are those to which the art of the *furrier* is applied for making muffs, boas, and fur trimmings for garments. The fur is not separated from the pelt for these purposes; the two are used together, and the pelt is converted into a kind of leather to fit it for being so employed.

The process of dressing furs, while in its general outlines the same, differs in its details with the character of the fur. The fur of the seal is prepared as follows: The salt used in packing is first thoroughly washed out, and every particle of flesh is carefully removed from the inside of the hide, after which the skins are stretched on frames and slowly dried. The process of thorough washing, this time in soapsuds, is repeated, and while the skin is still moist the long overhair is removed with a knife, leaving only the short soft fur. This process is a delicate and tedious one. The skin side of the pelts, after being subjected to moist heat, is shaved down until a smooth, even surface is obtained. When the skin is again dry, it is placed in a tub filled with fine hardwood sawdust, which absorbs any moisture remaining, and is softened and rendered flexible by treading with the bare feet. It is now ready to be dyed. The coloring matter is applied with a brush to the tips of

the fur and distributed by shaking the fur. It is then dried and brushed. The process of dyeing, drying, and brushing is often repeated as many as 12 times.

Statistics. The Thirteenth United States census in its report on manufactures, published in 1913, deals separately with fur goods and furs dressed. Under the former classification the manufacturers making various articles of apparel such as fur sets, overgarments, fur hats, caps, and gloves, were considered. These firms usually purchased their material in a dressed condition, but occasionally certain establishments dressed the furs themselves, so that the two divisions in the trade may overlap. The largest part of the manufacturing is done in New York City, it being the centre both of the industry and of the fashions. The production in 1909 amounted to about \$40,000,000 of furs, or 71 per cent of the total for the United States, and in 1912, of \$17,000,000 worth of fur skins imported into the United States, the metropolis used \$15,000,000. In 1909 there were 1241 establishments in the United States engaged in the manufacture of fur goods, with an average number of 11,927 wage earners, who received in wages \$7,787,845 and produced a product valued at \$55,937,549. This may be contrasted with the similar figure for 1889, when there were 484 establishments employing 6547 wage earners, who received in wages \$3,477,148 and produced a product valued at \$20,526,988. In addition, in 1909, products valued at \$532,781 were reported by establishments engaged primarily in the manufacture of gloves and men's clothing. Under the classification of "dressed" furs where the pelts are scraped, curried, tanned, and bleached, hatters' fur, dressed hair, and brush manufacturers' supplies are also included. It was reported that in 1909 there were 93 establishments engaged in this industry, with a total average number of 1241 wage earners and a product valued at \$2,390,959, which could be compared with the annual product of 1904, which was \$2,215,701, and 1899, when it was \$1,400,455.

The foreign trade in furs fluctuates greatly. The imports of furs and fur skins into the United States was in 1912 \$17,399,000 and in 1914 but \$8,840,000, and of furs dressed on the skins in 1912 \$5,346,000 and in 1914 \$3,204,000. The exports in 1913 were \$18,390,000 and in 1914 \$14,969,000. The value of raw seal skins exported in 1914 was but \$27,199. The imports are chiefly from Germany, England, and Canada, the exports chiefly to England and Germany. Consult Petersen, *The Fur Traders and Fur-Bearing Animals* (Buffalo, 1913), and Werner, *Die Kürschner Kunst* (Leipzig, 1914).