

A CLUE TO SPRING MOLT IN RACCOONS AS REVEALED IN ANALYSIS OF SCATS

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In a study of the food habits of the raccoon in Kansas, 705 scats were collected over a two-year period. The occurrence and abundance of hair of the raccoon found in each scat were recorded. Hair probably was taken internally when the animals groomed themselves. Most of these scats were collected in the fall of 1952 and 1953 with lesser numbers after these seasons (Stains, 1956:42). The sample size from

December through July was small, ranging from 1 to 22 scats per month (average, 8), but the two years of data revealed similar trends.

Raccoon hair in the scats was recorded as absent, trace, few, common, abundant, or very abundant. Each of these categories was given a numerical value from 0 for absent to 5 for very abundant. Each scat then was given a numerical value according to the abundance of rac-

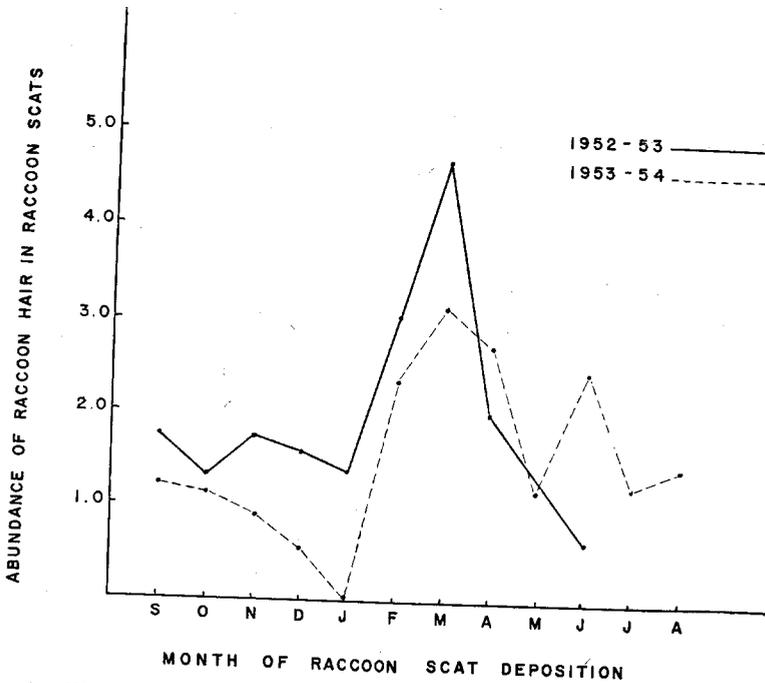


FIG. 1.—The abundance of hair in raccoon scats collected in different months.

coon hair found. An average monthly numerical value was computed and plotted (Fig. 1). The curves obtained show the peak of occurrence of hair in seats being reached in March in both years. This peak probably reflects the spring molt of hair from the body of the raccoon and illustrates that the molt occurring in the spring is a more rapid one than any occurring at other times of the year. The peak of the birth of litters occurs in late April and early May so that excessive grooming preparatory to litter birth may increase amount of hair in seats from females. The smaller peak shown in June may be the result of

grooming the young, but a sample of two seats for this month in 1953 is too small for such conclusions. These curves also show that loss of hair is occurring throughout the year. The least loss of hair probably indicates that the raccoon pelt is in prime condition in late December through January. Seemingly the molt to winter pelage is a slow continuous process with the absence of any distinct peak.

LITERATURE CITED

- STAINS, HOWARD J. 1956. The raccoon in Kansas, natural history, management, and economic importance. Univ. Kansas, Misc. Publ. No. 10: 1-76.