

The Norwegian Fur Trapper Award 2018 (John S. Opdahl-prisen)

is awarded Tom Aurebekk Udø

24th February 2018

The Norwegian Fur Trapper Award 2018 (John S. Opdahl-prisen) is awarded Tom Aurebekk Udø for his trapping efforts on the American mink. His work has been of outmost importance to reduce the population density of this invasive carnivore species, having been a threat to the indigenous Norwegian fauna for about 90 years.

The award

The award will honour trappers, hunters, clubs and/or associations, nationally and/or internationally, who have made a notable contribution to, or are particularly noted for their work. This include the management and practice of hunting and/or trapping in a humane, efficient, socially beneficial and/or sustainable way from an environmental management point of view. The award also aims to encourage those who keep trapping traditions alive.

The award consists of a bronze sculpture of John S. Opdahl, created by sculptor Ole Mauseth (www.olemauseth.com), an award certificate and trapping equipment, value NOK 5000.

The award has been created by Anne C. Nesje Bjerkenås with permission from John S. Opdahl. The ceremony will take place Sunday March 18 2018, at 2 pm at the Wilderness Fair (Villmarksmessa) in Melhus, Norway. The prize was awarded for the first time in 2016.

The jury

The jury consists of Jury Chairman Kjetil Bevanger and Hans Christian Pedersen from the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), Arnulf Møllerstad, former host of the NRK radio programme on nature and the outdoors Friluftsmagasinet, and hunter and trapper Tommy Holden. John S. Opdahl acts as advisor and consultant.

Jury statement

One of the most serious threats against biodiversity in Norway and several other countries is invasive alien species.

The Norwegian Fur Trapper Award 2016 was honored Dolf Moerkens and Henk van der Steen in the Netherlands for their efforts to fight the spread of muskrat and nutria, two invasive species from North- and South-America. In 2017 to Per-Arne Åhlén, and Fredrik Dahl, the Swedish Hunters Association (Svenska Jägareförbundet) for their raccoon dog trapping efforts. This year the jury has decided to follow up, and once again honor fight against alien species.

The American mink originates in North America; however, the species was introduced to Norway in 1927 as a fur farming animal. Unfortunately, mink individuals soon escaped from the farms and within about 30 years, the species had established populations within vast areas of the country. Before the turn of the century, the species had colonized the entire Norwegian mainland. Research from other European countries that have experienced the same as we have in Norway, has revealed that it is more or less impossible to completely eradicate the species when first established. However, it is possible to reduce the numbers and even eradicate the species within restricted areas when huge efforts and resources are invested.

Although the mink has spread all over Norway, it has its stronghold connected to wetland habitats, not at least along the coastline, in areas with islands, inlets and skerries. Unfortunately, these areas also are the most attractive nesting habitats for several ground nesting sea bird species. The mink has actually preyed some of these birds to an extent that their populations have decreased dramatically, and in some areas contributed to their disappearance.

The Norwegian Biodiversity Information Centre has listed the species within the SE category in the Norwegian Black list from 2012, which means that it has the potential of severe ecosystem impact. In an action plan focusing mink, the Norwegian environmental authorities in 2011 decided that one of the focal management actions is to reduce the mink population in priority-protected areas. This should be made by trapping and hunting efforts. An important additional technique to ordinary trapping pinpointed in the action plan is to train dogs for mink outtake. In this connection the report refer to a methodology based on experiences made by Tom Aurebekk Udø in his efforts to get rid of the mink in coastal areas.

Udø is the only person in Norway having made the mink hunting and trapping to a living. Not only is he a professional

mink hunter but also the third generation in the family that has specialized in mink hunting. Udø has been working on his own, but largely also together with employees in the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate (SNO), both in southern, central, and northern Norway. Due to his trapping efforts it has been possible to lower the mink population density to a minimum in several areas, and he has even succeeded in eradicate it from some highly sensitive and important bird nesting areas.

The jury will particularly emphasize how Udø over the years has refined his efforts and acquired knowledge on both the species' biology and trapping techniques. He has also been travelling to various places in Norway and arranged courses in mink trapping. Not at least has his dog training strategy proved very efficient, indicated by a steadily decline in the number of observed and trapped animals. However, it is still necessary to keep the trapping effort at a high level. Udø's mink trapping efforts is from the jury point of view highly impressive and makes him to a well-merited winner of this year's Norwegian Fur Trapper Award.

John S. Opdahl

John S. Opdahl is a living legend in the world of trapping, both in Norway and in Europe. Since 1986, he has headed the Norwegian Trappers' Association (Norsk Fangstmann) and edited the annual membership magazine of the same name, which eventually was re-named "Hunter and Trapper" (Jeger og Fangstmann) and "Fur Trapper" (Pelsjeger). This periodical can rightly be called a trade journal, with key topics including hunting, trapping and predator and deer calling.

The association that John established has been a success thanks to his unique interest and idealistic approach to hunting and trapping. But John is more than just a dedicated hunter. His joy and respect for the diversity and beauty of nature, combined with his ability to tell a good story, rub off on the rest of us and transform us. John's love of nature and interest in hunting started as a small boy. He dedicated his first book Fangst og Feller to his father Jens. He wrote: "As the only son, I inherited his old back-up equipment. That can no longer be used, but I inherited something more from him. The ability to listen to the long wind that blows from the east over Lake Daltjønnna in Ogndalen Valley. For that, I am eternally grateful."

The considerable artistic talent coursing through John's veins, with Kristofer Uppdal and Jakob Weidemann as close relatives, surfaces on a number of occasions. His lyrical approach to nature, hunting and trapping are also evident in his many books, such as *Der langvinden blåser* and *Balladen om Ullin*.

His books have brought John both national and international acclaim. His latest book *Håndbok for en Pelsjeger* has been translated into English as *Fur Trapper Hunter's Manual* and has been widely acclaimed, even beyond the trapping world.

When, as the first Norwegian, he received the title Master of Predator Hunting from the Fur Takers of America in 1984, John had come a long road from his life as a sailor and rabbit hunter. And he has come even further to where he is today. Just like all of us who hunt, John has been challenged many times about the ethical aspects of hunting. For some, the Norwegian Trappers' Association has become controversial, partly because the association has a stated goal of encouraging and disseminating knowledge about trapping and hunting of species such as corvids, foxes and raccoon dogs, i.e. important predators of small game. That predators should and must be harvested just as game animals is naturally incomprehensible for many. But we don't think it is right or natural to put an end to our hunting and trapping traditions. Norway has a trapping history dating back thousands of years, where both game animals and fur have been keys to our survival. The guiding principle for all hunting and trapping today is that hunting and trapping must take place in an ethical and sustainable manner, and that the animals must be useful, either as food, fur or other raw materials .

John has managed to establish a venue for exchanging of views on hunting and trapping. The variety of articles and topics discussed in his trade journal over the years shows that the initiative he took 30 years ago was both right and important. Both young and old, well-established trappers have been brought together. The material presented in the membership magazine shows high tolerance for a variety of views and strong professional expertise. As editor, John has never omitted material because it was critical of the Norwegian Trappers' Association. On the contrary, speaking either for or against issues related to hunting and trapping has always been allowed. It has also been a discussion forum for those who have been critical of the aspects of Norwegian environmental management that affect trapping. John has paid special

attention to certification schemes for different types of traps. Humane and efficient trapping are issues close to his heart, and when fly-by-night people have put equipment on the market that does not measure up and is not or should be legal, John has always told them so. This made him an effective watchdog in relation to key environmental and wildlife management issues as well as in relation to suppliers on the fringes of the trap market, focused solely on profit. Peik Bendixen, a hunting and trapping specialist and veteran of the former Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management, had a permanent column in the membership magazine – Peik's Corner. He kept everyone up to date on topical and important issues related to trapping from the perspective of the environmental authorities.

Strangely enough, some have reacted to articles in the magazine that described trapping customs in the old days. Countless trapping techniques have seen the light over the years – including countless traps that are, of course, illegal today, even the use of poison. But in all such articles, John has always been careful to emphasise that these techniques are prohibited today. Hopefully, no one wants a society that underestimates historical realities which may be unpleasant to think about today. Much of our cultural history contains traditions that we should not necessarily continue or be proud of, but the reason we do not continue with those traditions is that we have been through an open debate about why one thing or another can be considered negative culture and therefore should be stopped. This is also one of the most important tasks of the Norwegian Trappers' Association.

John studied in the USA and received the title Master of Predator Hunting from the Fur Takers of America in 1983, with a mink course in Illinois, specialisation courses on otters, wolverines and lynx in British Columbia and bobcats in Nevada, as well as live trapping of bobcats in the Texas Panhandle. John has met and learned from a number of the biggest fur trappers of our age. He has held courses in trapping and calling, both at home and abroad, for over 40 years. Along with Siv Bøklep, John runs Opdahl Hunting and Trapping Shop (Opdahl Jakt og Fangstbua) in Steinkjer, specialising in trapping and traps, www.pelsjeger.no and www.langvind.no.

For his work, John S. Opdahl received the Helge Ingstad Award in 2015.

Published works:

- Fangst og Feller. First Published 1988. 7th edition. Published in paperback 2008–2010–2011.
- Fortellinger. Published 1990. 3rd edition.
- Min Autotrapline for mår. Published 1991. 4th edition.
- Jakt-, fiske- og fangstjournalen. In cooperation with Erling Koldaas. 1st edition. Published 1992.
- Hva de gamle fangstmenn fortalte. (Fangst og Feller 2). Published 1993. 2nd edition.
- Bakom Åsene. (Fortellinger 2). Published 1994. 2nd edition.
- Gaupejeger. Published 1996. 2nd edition. Published in paperback 2010.
- Levende fangst av gaupe, rev og grevling. Published 2001. 3rd edition. Published in paperback 2010.
- Der Langvinden blåser. Mokal I. Published 2004.
- Mokal II – Arving til ei elv. Published 2006.
- Liss-Jakob Weidemann fra Påssåbyn. Published 2007.
- Balladen om Ullin. Published 2008.
- Audio book: Der Langvinden blåser. John S. Opdahl reads himself.
- Audio book 1–10: Humøristiske fortellinger. John S. Opdahl reads himself.
- Instructional DVD on calling predators and ungulates. Now also translated into German.
- Audio book: Gullplata. 13 utvalgte fortellinger. Read by John S. Opdahl.
- Audio book: Platinum, after 15,000 copies sold.
- Håndbok for en Pelsjeger. Published 2013. 2nd edition 2014.
- Scandinavian Fur Trapper Hunter's Manual. 1st edition 2014.

John S. Opdahl also publishes the trade journal Pelsjeger (previously Jeger og Fangstmann/Norsk Fangstmann).

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