

Trapping

The Inside Story



SHAPLWINE/CORBIS

Four million wild animals are killed in the United States each year by 160,000 part-time trappers supplying pelts to the fashion industry. A decade ago the situation was even worse: seventeen million wild fur-bearing animals were killed by 300,000 trappers. Urban sprawl and the public's revulsion to trapping and wearing fur are responsible for the decline.

Still, four million animals trapped for fashion is four million too many; it's a fact that puts the United States among the top three producers (along with Canada and Russia) of wild-caught animal pelts.

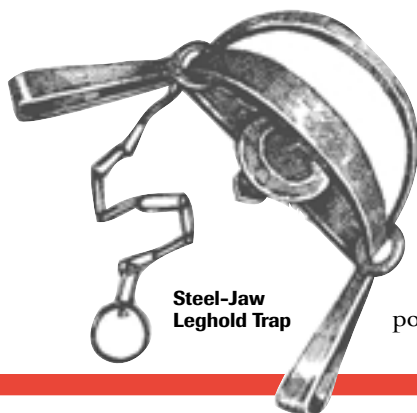
The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is strongly opposed to the commercial and recreational trapping of wild animals for their fur. Trapping uses inhumane devices to inflict pain and suffering on animals.

coyotes, raccoons, and other fur-bearing animals. The trap's two spring-powered, metal jaws slam shut when an animal steps on its trigger. Both the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Animal Hospital Association have declared the steel-jaw leghold trap to be inhumane, yet it continues to be the most commonly used trap in the United States.

What does it do to the animal? Animals caught by the heavy steel jaws of the leghold trap suffer excruciating pain on impact; the trap can tear the flesh, cut tendons and ligaments, and break bones. When the animals struggle to free themselves, they aggravate their injuries. A trapped animal often chews or twists off the limb caught in the trap in an effort to escape—29 percent of the raccoons observed in one study did this. Some traps have “teeth” on the jaws, which add to the physical trauma.

Trapped animals may struggle in pain for days. Dehydration, blood loss, hypothermia, and predation by other animals may claim their lives before the trapper returns. Standard methods of killing trapped animals in-

Beavers caught underwater in a leghold trap take ten minutes to die from lack of oxygen.



Steel-Jaw Leghold Trap

THE MOST COMMON TRAPS

The Steel-Jaw Leghold Trap

What is it? The steel-jaw leghold trap is a cruel, antiquated device designed to capture and hold an animal by a limb so as not to damage the pelt. Also called a foothold or restraining trap by its proponents, this trap is used to capture foxes,

The steel-jaw leghold trap can tear the flesh, cut tendons and ligaments, and break bones.



HELSJÖ/DICK PANDALL

clude clubbing with a shovel or metal pipe and standing on the chest to cause suffocation. A number of state-issued trapping manuals aimed at young and novice trappers recommend these techniques.

Leghold traps are also set underwater or set so that the animal is pulled underwater. Traps set this way are referred to as *drowning sets*. The animals—mostly minks, muskrats, beavers, raccoons, and otters—struggle for several minutes before they die. The AVMA has declared death by drowning to be inhumane.

The Body-Crushing Trap

What is it? The body-crushing trap, also called a body-gripping or Conibear® trap, is used to trap beavers and muskrats underwater and martens, fishers, raccoons, and other fur-bearing animals on land. These traps are made of two metal rectangular jaws hinged at the sides with a spring affixed to one or both sides. When an animal walks or swims through the center of the rectangles and brushes up against the trigger, the trap's jaws close with a scissor-like action on the animal's body.

What does it do to the animal? It is designed to snap shut on the spinal column at the base of the skull for a "quick kill." However, the trap often misses this vital spot or does not close with enough force to kill the animal instantly or even render the animal unconscious. The trap's jaws frequently clamp down on the chest or pelvis, crushing bones, blood vessels, and nerves and causing excruciating pain and a prolonged death.

The Snare

What is it? Snares are the most primitive, indiscriminate, and inhumane traps used legally in the United States. A snare is simply a wire noose attached at one end to a stake or anchor; it catches an animal either by the neck, midsection of the body, or foot. Most snares today are made by the trappers themselves, either from wire or airplane cable. Snares are cheap, easy to make, easy to transport, easy to abandon in bad weather, and easy to replace if stolen or damaged.

What does it do to the animal? As the trapped animal struggles, the snare tightens. As with leghold traps, animals caught in leg snares often injure themselves further as they struggle. Neck/body snares strangle their victims or crush their vital organs, leading to an agonizing and often prolonged death. These traps are particularly cruel to their primary targets—coyotes, foxes, and wolves—because the significant musculature around these animals' tracheas and common carotid arteries slows death.

PROBLEMS WITH TRAPPING

Traps Are Indiscriminate

Each year traps in the United States injure and kill millions of "nontarget" animals—domestic dogs and cats, rabbits, deer, songbirds, raptors, livestock, and even endangered species. According to a former professional trapper, at least two nontarget animals are trapped for each target animal. Referred to as "trash" animals, nontarget wildlife often are simply thrown away. Injuries from leghold traps are often so severe that the injured limb of a trapped companion animal must be amputated. Body-crushing traps, however, kill many of their unintended victims.



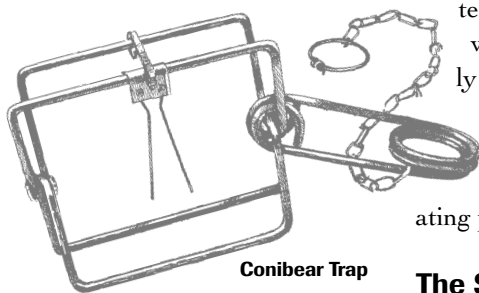
ROBERT KINNY

Trapping Is Poorly Regulated

Trapping is largely unregulated, and where restrictions do apply, they are poorly enforced. Most states require that a trap be checked every twenty-four hours, but eight states (Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming) allow a lapse of two or three days; five states (Alabama, Alaska, Kansas, Michigan, and North Dakota) have no trap-check requirements. It is not uncommon, in states with regulations and in states with none, for an animal to be left in a trap for weeks because the trapper does not check the trap. (Very

The jaws of a Conibear trap snap shut on the head and face of a domestic dog.

In one study an average of 10.8 nontarget animals were trapped for each trapped target animal (coyotes).



Conibear Trap

It can take a beaver more than six minutes to die in a body-gripping trap on land and up to nine minutes underwater.

few people trap full time; most trap in their spare time.) In most cases trappers do not leave identification on their traps, so trappers cannot be traced or fined for neglecting their traps. Many trapping regulations clearly benefit trappers. It is legal to set traps near schools, neighborhoods, and hiking trails, where they clearly are a safety hazard. In many states it is illegal to disturb a trap in any way, even to release a trapped dog or cat. Only fifteen states require any form of trapper education.

Trapping Does Not “Help” Wildlife

Supporters often claim trapping can be used for wildlife management and to control disease and “nuisance” wildlife. These claims are false.

Trapping is not wildlife management. It does not ensure stable, healthy wildlife populations. Trappers claim that they are simply “harvesting”

those animals who would die anyhow. However, natural ecological factors such as weather and food supply, as well as wild animals’ innate ability to limit their populations through natural means, are sufficient to create a balance between wildlife populations and their habitats. Nonetheless, trappers are permitted in some states to catch some species, such as the lynx and river otter, whose populations are low.

Moreover, there is some indication that healthy animals—who are more active than diseased or otherwise weak animals—are more likely to be caught by traps. Thus, trapping is harmful to animal populations because it removes healthy animals and leaves behind those who are sick.

Trapping does not control disease. It has never been shown to suppress rabies and may in fact actually facilitate the spread of the disease. Studies show that when trappers reduce the number of animals in an area, other animals fight to establish territories in that area, and fighting spreads disease. In addition, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Con-

trol and Prevention do not support trapping as a form of disease control. The best way for humans to protect themselves against rabies is to make sure their companion animals are vaccinated and to use reasonable caution around wildlife.

Trapping does not control “nuisance” wildlife.

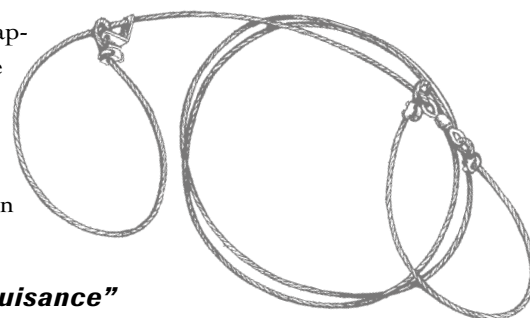
As the human population expands into wildlife habitats, our encounters with wildlife become more frequent. Tolerance and understanding for the animal members of our communities should be our guides in solving problems between humans and wildlife. Many types of nonlethal humane solutions are available; animal-proof trash containers, chimney caps, hardware cloth, one-way doors, and scare balloons are just a few. The indiscriminate nature of traps makes them dangerous to use in urban and suburban areas.

THE FUTURE OF TRAPPING

Trapping is truly a dying industry. Eighty-nine nations have already banned leghold traps, and a nationwide public opinion poll in 1996 found that 74 percent of Americans want leghold traps banned in the United States. Colorado, Florida, and Massachusetts ban both leghold and body-crushing traps. New Jersey bans the manufacture, use, and possession of legholds. Arizona prohibits snares and does not allow trapping on public lands, which make up 80 percent of the state. Oklahoma bans snares and body-crushing traps. Alabama, Connecticut, Hawaii, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont prohibit snares.

YOU CAN HELP

- Don’t buy clothing made of fur, lined with fur, or trimmed with fur. Don’t buy fur toys or fur decorations.
- Solve wildlife conflicts in a humane manner. Encourage others to do the same.
- Urge your elected officials to support trap bans or restrictions in your state or community.



Snare

Animals killed in neck snares are often referred to as “jelly-heads” because of the thick, bloody lymph fluid that swells their heads and necks.

The fur trade has nearly caused the extinction of fishers, martens, and several species of wild cats.



LEON HEVILY

The steel-jaw leghold trap was declared inhumane by the American Veterinary Medical Association.



Fur-Free Century™ is a consumer-driven, activist-oriented campaign designed to bring an end to the use of animal fur in the new century.

Materials Available from The HSUS

Trapping—The Inside Story

Caged Fur—The Inside Story

The Chart of Death

Flyer for Activists

The Decline of the Fur Fashion Industry

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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