Special Report on the Cruelties Involved in Wild Animal Trapping

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The Humane Society of the U.S.

presents a special report...

ON THE CRUELITIES INVOLVED IN WILD ANIMAL TRAPPING!

Great numbers of Americans who buy and wear the furs of wild animals are unaware of the enormous cruelty and suffering that goes into producing them.

These animals are caught in a steel jaw trap which holds the leg in a crushing, painful grip. So intense is the pain and terror the animals feel that they often twist or gnaw off their own legs to free themselves from their nightmarish agony. After getting free at such a cost, many of the animals later die a slow death of gangrene, or in their weakness from shock, loss of blood and infection are preyed upon by other animals.

Those that do not escape usually die slowly, suffering hunger, thirst, pain, freezing and, always, fear. They often undergo this torment for days and, sometimes, for weeks.

This is the cruel method by which most trapping of furbearers is done in our country. Although there are comparatively few full-time trappers — about 2,000,000, of whom great numbers are men and boys trapping in their spare time — trappers estimate 30,000,000 furbearers are trapped and killed annually in the United States and the total may be as high as 100,000,000. And, worse, a large proportion of trappers are schoolboys.

The suffering is not confined to wild furbearers. The steel jaw trap does not discriminate. Reports flow into the offices of The Humane Society of the United States complaining of clogs, cats, clucks, songbirds, deer, domestic stock, and valuable (often imperiled) species of animals being caught and killed. There is even the danger that small children, unattended in an unguarded moment by their parents, might step into traps and become seriously injured.

Trappers Claims

But trappers continue to argue the need for catching furbearing animals. They claim they help to keep the balance of nature by removing the surplus of certain species. Actually, far more unwanted animals and birds are caught in traps than desired furbearers. Often, strong and healthy animals are caught rather than the ill or weak.

Trappers argue, too, that they are engaged in "wholesome outdoor recreation" which is a "source of additional income for farm youngsters that has been popular since the founding of our country." In reality, no recreation that involves such brutal mistreatment of wildlife can be termed "wholesome" and few farm youngsters today need this exploitation of animals as a means of additional income.

The trappers, in a somewhat characteris-
household cats (shown beside trap that crushed her paw.

Research on other trapping devices has been considerable. So-called killing traps have been developed in the United States and Canada—notably, the Conibear trap and the Biglow and Wilkil trap. These traps are designed to kill the animal by catching it round the neck and choking it, or by breaking the back of the neck, so that the animal can be used as a brake-back mousetrap. Money prizes have been awarded in America and other countries to encourage development of these devices.

This kind of killer trap can easily be used on opossum because that particular species walks readily into any trap baited with newt, meat, or bread and jam. And muskrat, a commonly trapped furbear, can be caught without difficulty even in unacclimatized traps baited with young shoots. Also, this kind of trap has the advantage (to trap) of not twisting or chewing off of legs and no cruel to attract predators to the trapped animals.

The humane advantage to Conibear and similar "killer" traps is that, if properly set, it kills instantly most species and thus eliminates the terrible suffering of animals chewing or twisting their feet off to escape the conventional steel jaw-leghold trap. Animals killed instantly do not suffer, of course; they also do not thrash around and tear up the trap set and this appeals to all operators. Also, meat trap is lighter, very flat for easier carrying, not much more expensive than the common steel jaw, and its action does not damage the pelts of the captive animals. In all, therefore, it is possible, use of the Conibear or similar killer-type traps is far more humane than the conventional trap.

Many fur-bearing animals trapped are aquatic. These include the beaver, muskrat, mink, and otter. Many of them are caught in "drowning sets" which are often described as humane. Properly set, they are, perhaps, relatively humane; for example, a beaver may take from 30 seconds to 20 minutes to drown, depending on how much air he takes into his lungs before diving (assuming he actually dives under water). While this is obviously better than the slow and lingering death of most land animals, it can hardly be classified as truly humane.

Stapen by trappers

No matter how we look at the so-called sport or recreation of trapping, it is impossible to justify use of the steel jaw trap. It is amazing, in view of what has been said by some trapers, that so little legislation is left out this device and control trapping in general. Here, for example, are some traits that has been said by trapers:

"It is probable that no instrument has ever been invented that caused as much suffering as the common steel trap."

"The animal I find that suffers the most in a leg-hold trap is the fisher. This is a powerful animal, and very few have killed for his size, and when in the trap he puts up a terrific battle, and being so heavily built and strong, it takes 2½ to 3 days for him to win a leg trap off."

"I once saw a large beaver caught by the front leg; the flesh was entirely gone to the bare white bone and it was hopping about like a snapper-crack with a snickering crack.

With these traps, even people who are within the trapping community itself, it is clear that the steel jaw trap should be outlawed.

Laws affecting trapping

It becomes quickly apparent to any organization like The HSUS that has studied the game laws of the United States that the trapper and the sportsman have so far had it all their own way, and conservation measures have been largely for their benefit—that is, to preserve species for trapping and hunting. There is little effective legislation that affects trapping and that is because there is no one who has knowledge of how much air he takes into his lungs before diving. In New York and New Jersey, trapping is limited in National Parks and State Forests. Bear trapping is restricted in Wisconsin and the state of Missouri has especially well defined and specific laws relating to this activity.

Alternatives to trapping

There are, of course, few trapers today who depend upon this activity for a living. The modern trapper is normally a full-time wage earner carrying on his activities on weekends or off season. In fact, there has been a decline in the number of trapers that has been attributed to the availability of more lucrative employment.

The problem of trapping is only a part of the over-all problem of cruelty and exploitation of animals for a producer that, to this day, is essentially a luxury item. As in the case of the Northern Fur Seal killed religiously every year on the Pribilof Islands, the wildlife trapper in pain and suffering by callous and indifferent trapers would not suffer thus if the demand for their pelts were eliminated. This is the ultimate goal—the end of the sickness and, in this age hardly understandable, demand for natural fur. There are other sources, less cruel, to satisfy the vanity of women and others in their demand for things to wear. The fur farms are here and that fur can be worn instead of wild fur. Unlike the wild-fur coat, it does not involve the cruelty of the leghold trap.

Then, too, there are the simulated fur, made from modern fibers that provide a beautiful alternative to wild fur. The new segment of the textile industry has evolved here to satisfy women’s desire for fur at bargain prices. Artificial fur has gone on to the point where they can produce an excellent facsimile of almost any natural fur at a reasonable price. The imitation seal, beaver, Persian lamb and ermine are now on sale and doing well. The demand for these synthetic fabrics has been so great that some furriers who used to carry both man-made and natural furs are now handling only the former.

The whole subject, in other words, needs re-evaluation—with the definite view of abolishing the steel jaw trap throughout the United States. This view that would be consistent with the national moral code and eliminate one of the most serious abuses of animals in our society. It is a view that would recognize that humane traps might be somewhat more laborious and yield less return in some cases than leghold traps, their use would be morally mandatory, just as they are in Britain and other countries where humane traps are governed as an essential part of society’s responsibilities to the other life forms with which man is necessarily involved.
Here is how you can help to eliminate use of the steel jaw trap and thus end one of the worst cruelties inflicted upon our wildlife:

1. Don't buy natural furs yourself and urge your friends and relatives not to buy them. Since the natural fur trade is the cause and source of trapping, a reduced demand will effectively curtail trapping.

2. Write letters to fur manufacturers and retailers in your state urging them to stop advertising and promoting natural furs and encouraging them to begin promoting synthetic fur products.

3. Whenever you see natural fur products advertised, write to the magazine or newspaper involved and ask that such advertising not be accepted in the future.

4. Write to your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representative and ask them to introduce bills to stop use of the steel jaw trap by trappers on U.S.-owned, public lands. (The HSUS will provide any interested person with a model law designed for this purpose.)

5. Get in touch with your state and local legislators and protest trapping by the leghold trap within your state and community. Tell them of the cruelty that is involved and the great need for legislation to stop this method of taking wildlife.

6. Support strongly any legislative measure that is introduced to curb trapping or eliminate use of the leghold trap.

7. Write letters to local newspapers about cruel trapping methods and serious psychological harm being done to children who are encouraged and allowed to trap.

8. Order a quantity of this leaflet from The HSUS and distribute them.

9. Encourage your local humane society and civic groups and women's clubs to adopt a resolution against the steel jaw trap and send copies to legislators at the federal, state, and local levels of government.

10. Send a contribution to The HSUS to help in its campaign against use of the steel jaw trap and other cruel trapping practices.

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