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-
tic attitude of those who exploit and waste wildlife and wilderness in the name of entertainment or recreation, carefully avoid the fact, by law, that the outdoors and wildlife belong to everyone. So many people do not trap, so many people enjoy nature as it is, without any desire to kill wildlife, that it is inconceivable that so small a number of pro-trapping persons, in proportion to the total population, can justify the vicious pastime.

On the contrary, federal, state, and local agencies concerned with trapping seem to work to conserve fur-bearing animals for future trapping. In virtually all states, bag limits may be imposed. Many states have laws that ban trapping for children. Here in its worst possible form is the desensitization of young families to the cruelty of trapping.

There are some legal restrictions on the use of steel traps in the United States. The HSUS has studied the game laws of the United States that the trap is a fish is more humane. (In the state of New Jersey, for example, only about 1/2 of all animals killed is probable that no instrument was ever invented that caused more suffering than the steel jaw trap.)

Judging by the front leg; the flesh was entirely gone to the bare white bone and in its struggles to escape upon my approach the bone snapped in much the same manner as a household cat.

There is also the serious form of maleducation of children in family pets like these are often victims of steel jaw traps.

Correspondence to trapping

So-called killer type traps have been developed in the United States and Canada—naturally, the Conibear trap and the Bigelow and Wilkil traps. These traps are designed to kill the animal by catching it round the neck and choking it, or by breaking the neck of the victim with a break-back mousetrap. They are used in American and other countries to encourage development of these new traps.

This kind of trap can easily be used on opossum because that particular species walks readily into any trap baited with egg, meat, or bread and jam. And muskrat, a commonly trapped fur-bearing, can be caught without difficulty even in unconsumed traps baited with young shoots. Also, this kind of trap has the advantage (to trappers) of no twisting or chewing off of legs and no cries 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-leg hold 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 trappers. Also, trap is lighter, very flat for easier carrying, not so great to trap set on poles or cairns. Spring-pole traps are forbidden. It becomes quickly apparent to any organization like The HSUS that has studied the game laws of the United States that the trap the sportsman have had it all on their own, and conservation measures have been largely for their benefit—that is, to preserve species for trapping and hunting. There is little excuse for legislation that affects trapping and that is now there is does not always include humane provisions.

In Massachusetts, there was a total ban on use of leghold traps from 1939 to 1969. Through pressure from trapping interests, the law was modified in 1969 and steel jaw traps now are permitted. It is interesting to note, however, that the former Massachusetts law provided that “all traps must be designed to kill mammals at once.” This is a law that the anti-trap law requires that “Conibear type traps must be completely submerged in water.” (This, of course, ensures a relatively humane death for the taken animal.) Massachusetts law also requires all trappers register and registration numbers be displayed on traps.

There are some legal restrictions on the use of steel traps in Kentucky, Georgia, and Virginia, but local administrative discretion varies. In about 14 states there are restrictions that traps be visited at stated intervals—perhaps 24-hour periods—but, of course, such requirements are hard to enforce. Four states prohibit traps set on piles or cairns. Spring-pole traps are forbidden 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, fewer trappers 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 trappers 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 product that, to this day, is essentially a luxury item. As in the case of the Northern Fur Seal killed religiously every year on the Pribiloff Islands, the wildfur trawlers trapped in pain and suffering by callous and indifferent trappers would not suffer if the demand for their pelts was eliminated. This is the ultimate goal—the end of the needless, and in this age hardly understandable, demand for natural furs. 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 furs, made from modern fibers that provide a beautiful alternative to wild fur. A whole new segment of the textile industry has evolved here to satisfy women’s desire for fur at bargain prices. Artificial furs have progressed to the point where they can produce an excellent facsimile of almost any natural fur at a reasonable price. A short imitation seal, beaver, Persian lamb and ermine are now on sale and doing well. The demand for these synthetic furs is 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. It is a 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 trapping is considered 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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