



The Humane Society  
of the United States

## Special Report On Trapping

# The steel jaw trap is one of the cruelest devices invented by man.

Every year several million American wild animals are killed for their fur by trappers. Most of them die slowly and painfully, after having a leg or a paw caught in a powerful steel jaw (or leghold) trap.

The steel jaw trap is one of the cruelest devices invented by man. It can be hidden under grass along a well-trodden animal path, under water, or among the leaves of a tree. When triggered by an animal's weight, the heavy steel jaws spring shut over a paw or a leg with such force that bones are sometimes broken. Some leghold traps contain sharp steel teeth that pierce all the way through flesh and muscles.

As the animal realizes he is trapped, his fear mounts to the point of panic. He bites frantically at the trap, often breaking his teeth. He twists and pulls his leg to free himself, increasing the pain even more. As the pain becomes unbearable, many animals completely chew or twist off their own legs to free themselves. They then face death from loss of blood, gangrene, or infection. At best, they will spend the rest of their lives at the mercy of predators because of their reduced mobility.

For the ones that remain in the traps, hunger and thirst soon set in. Because most animals are trapped in winter when their furs are in prime condition, the victims are exposed to the cold and often soaked by rain and snow. Their



tongues sometimes get stuck against the cold steel as they try to free themselves. And, in his helpless situation, the trapped animal often finds himself at the mercy of a predatory animal, who soon senses his victim's inability to flee or defend himself.

A trapper who checks his traps frequently at least offers an end to his victim's misery. But few people work at trapping full time today, and, although 16 states require

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checking traps in 24 hours or less, such laws are almost impossible to enforce. Consequently, the suffering drags on until the animal loses consciousness or is killed by a predator.

On top of all this, the steel jaw trap is not selective. It will spring shut on a non-target animal as quickly and as painfully as on the animal desired. For example, ducks often use ponds built by beavers as feeding grounds and, consequently, get caught in beaver traps that crush their legs or break their necks. Dogs and cats are often caught in the traps, too, especially near urban areas. The Humane Society of the United States assisted in the rescue

of a German Shepherd who had caught two legs in a trap set for muskrats outside Washington, D.C. One leg and part of a second one had to be amputated. The number of non-target animals caught is often as high as double a trapper's total useable catch. These "trash animals," as trappers call them, are merely discarded, having been tortured and killed for no reason.

Furthermore, the catching of a mother in a trap is likely to result in the starvation of an entire litter. And, because there are no seasonal limits to trapping, pregnant animals are often killed, resulting in the useless destruction of many unborn animals.

Forty-eight of the 50 states



An animal left part of his paw (arrow) when he escaped from this leghold trap.

still permit this barbaric method of catching animals. With the opening of new territories in the early 19th century, the steel jaw trap was introduced as an expedient method of obtaining food and building a base for commercial trading. This practice is as unjustified in the 1970s as the use of a torture chamber or a guillotine.

The Humane Society of the United States believes there is no justification for the taking of any wild animal when the motive is merely fashion or decoration. The synthetic fur industry has developed fabrics that look so much like the real thing that only the experienced eye can tell the difference. And mink ranchers have demonstrated that they can raise and kill animals in



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captivity without causing suffering or fear.

Yet there are enough Americans still buying the skins of wild animals to maintain a market for any American who wants to earn a few extra dollars by trapping. Sadly, a large percentage of trappers today are students, who find the irregular hours required for trapping convenient to their schedules.

Many trappers claim their work is necessary to reduce surplus populations of certain wild animal species and to



With one paw caught in a steel jaw trap, this badger dug frantically into the ground until he had made a hole the size of a pond. To have accomplished such a feat, he must have been in the trap for many days.

48 of the 50 states still permit this barbaric method of catching animals.

control disease. The Humane Society can find no justification for such statements. On the contrary, trapping often *causes* infection and disease when animals twist or chew off their paws to escape.

Most trappers regard themselves as lovers of nature, including the very animals they trap. Veteran trappers are eager to teach trapping to their children at an early age.

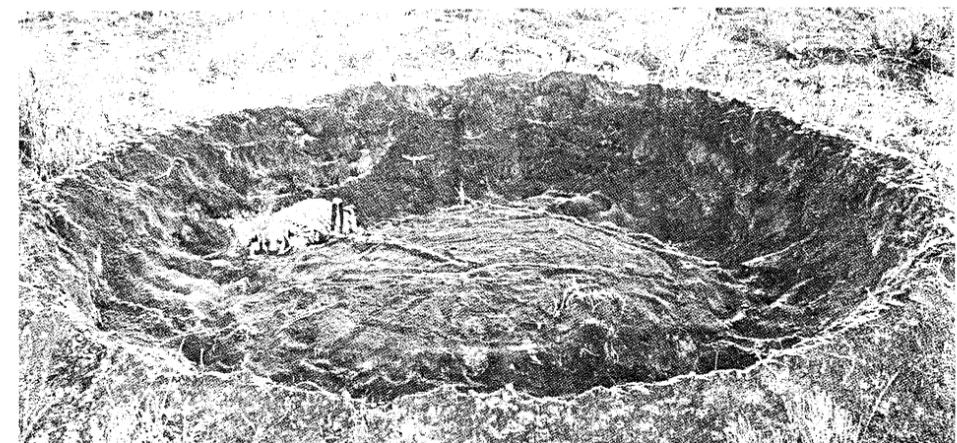
The Humane Society believes that exposing children to the torture of animals will desensitize them to the feelings of other living creatures. It deplores the U. S. Department of the Interior's telling youth, in *Trapping Tips for Young Trappers*, that trapping is "wholesome outdoor recreation" and a "deep-seated American Tradition."

The Humane Society has placed a high priority on obtaining a total ban on the steel jaw trap in the United

#### A Year's Catch

Almost 6.5 million wild animals were trapped in 1971 in the 42 states that voluntarily reported to the U. S. Department of the Interior: 7,941 badgers, 12,245 ringtail cats, 85,944 beavers, 12,235 bobcats, 47,563 coyotes, 2,431 fishers, 123,989 foxes, 218 Canadian lynxes, 764 martens, 114,453 minks, 3,714,988 muskrats, 1,253,066 nutrias, 100,394 opossums, 15,954 otters, 930,050 raccoons, 11,423 skunks, 5,073 weasels.

States. To accomplish that goal, it is supplying data to concerned legislators on both the federal and state levels to assist them in enacting a ban. The recent action of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission suggests an alternative to legislative action, however. The commission banned the use of the leghold trap throughout the state purely on its own administrative authority. On the other hand, Hawaii banned the trap through the



Ed Park



legislative process, and, with the assistance of the HSUS New Jersey Branch, the New Jersey legislature in 1972 banned the trap in parts of that state.

Although The Humane Society advocates trapping bans in all states, it is most eager to see bans in the states where trapping is most prevalent: Louisiana, Maryland (by far, the two most active states), Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Ohio, Montana, Washington, and Alaska.

Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.) and Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) are expected to introduce bills in the U.S. Congress that would prohibit the use on public lands all traps that do not painlessly capture or instantly kill their victims.

Additional copies of this report are available at 2¢ each from The Humane Society of the United States, 1604 K. St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

## You Can Help

1. Urge your friends, neighbors, and fellow club members not to buy anything made from the skins of wild animals. Give them copies of this report (available from HSUS at 2¢ each).

2. Whenever you see natural fur products advertised,

write to the publication carrying the ad to object. If the ad is sponsored by a store that doesn't deal exclusively with furs, write to the president of the store to object.

3. Write the editors of your local papers urging them to do an editorial or a column on the cruelty of trapping. (Enclose a copy of this brochure.) If you don't get a positive response, write a letter for the "letters to the editor" column explaining the cruelty.

4. HSUS will furnish a copy of a model trapping law to anyone interested in getting a bill to ban the leghold trap introduced in his state legislature.

5. If a bill is introduced in your legislature, notify HSUS.

6. Send a contribution to HSUS to help in its campaign to educate the public about the cruelty of trapping.

### A Trapper Recalls

*"The thrill of catching the animals was somewhat marred by the utter cruelty of the steel trap and the snare. There are unpleasant memories of the mounds of debris built up around the base of a tree where the trap was anchored, clawed in a heap by the animal reaching vainly with a free front foot to escape and dragging dirt, twigs, brush, leaves and snow into a sickening monument to its pathetic struggles. There are recollections of broken, swollen legs of animals far too long in a trap."*

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North to Cree Lake