



Position statement: Snares

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Snares
- ◆ Wildlife Law and Protected Species
- ◆ The Problem
- ◆ The Woodland Trust's view
- ◆ References

Introduction

The use of snares as a means of pest control is the subject of current and lively debate. This follows a report by the National Federation of Badger Groups (NFBG) (June 2002). There have been a number of press releases from both sides of the debate in the national media. This statement sets out the Trust's reasons for supporting a ban on the use of snares and therefore concentrates on the conservation issues rather those to do with animal welfare. The Trust prohibits the use of snares on its own property.

Snares

Snares are wire nooses set to trap wild animals. In the UK, snares are largely used by gamekeepers to control foxes and to a lesser extent by farmers and other landowners to control rabbits. Snares are set in a variety of circumstances, but are usually placed along runs or pathways thought to be used by the target species.

There are several types of snare used in the UK. These include free-running snares, self-locking snares and dual-purpose snares. Free-running snares are designed to tighten when the animal struggles and loosen when it relaxes, self-locking snares are designed to tighten but do not loosen when the animal relaxes, and finally dual-purpose snares which can be set up to achieve either free-running or self-locking functions. There are however a number of snares on the market that do not fit into these categories and are considered neither free-running nor self-locking.

The use of free-running snares is legal in the UK while the use of self-locking snares is illegal. There is evidence to suggest that illegal self-locking snares are still widely used in the UK (NFBG 2002) moreover current legislation does not provide a legal definition of a self-locking snare, so there is disagreement over the legality of a number of snares available on the market. Free-running snares also have to be checked at least once a day, which is clearly difficult to prove or disprove. However evidence of carcasses found in snares shows that regular checking does not always take place (NFBG 2002, Scottish Executive 2002).

Wildlife law and protected species

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (Amendment 1991) bans the use of self-locking snares and the use of any snares in such a way as to be calculated to cause injury to any animal listed in Schedule 6 of the Act. Furthermore the Act prohibits the killing or taking, or knowingly causing or permitting the killing or taking, of any animal listed in Schedule 6 of the Act using a snare. Schedule 6 includes a number of species of conservation concern including wildcat, pine

marten, otter and red squirrel as well as commoner species such as badger and hedgehog. The WCA also prohibits the killing or taking of any bird using a snare.

The Conservation (Natural Habitat &c.) Regulations 1994 (which are the national implementation of the EU Habitats and Species Directive) protects species of animals listed in Annex IV of the Habitats and Species Directive whose natural range includes any area in Great Britain. The regulation gives full protection to European 'protected' species listed in Schedule 2, including wildcat and otter and regulates use of various specified methods of taking or killing wild animals listed in Schedule 3. Prohibited methods include *"traps which are non-selective according to their principle or their condition of use"*. Schedule 3 includes species such as pine marten and mountain hare.

The Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitat, to which the UK Government is a signatory prohibits the use of *"all indiscriminate means of capture or killing"*.

The problem

Five main problems are identified by NFBG (2002), although two are of particular relevance to the Woodland Trust's view:

1. Snares are indiscriminate.

In 1968 MAFF (Humane Traps Panel) conducted a trial to compare the efficiency of types of snare. Results of snaring included 155 foxes and 132 non-target animals (Forestry Commission 1997). The Burns Inquiry also reported *"...about half of the captures made by snares are of non-target species..."* (Burns et al 2000).

There is a large body of solid evidence that demonstrates that species of conservation concern are regularly caught in snares (NFBG 2002, Mammal Society 2001). These include otters, wildcats, pine martens, red squirrels, mountain hare, owls, black grouse and capercaillie (SSPCA 2002, RSPCA 2000, Cosgrove & Oswald 2001). Other non-target wild animals which should enjoy legal protection from being snared include badgers and hedgehogs (RSPCA 2000)

2. Free running (legal) snares are equally dangerous.

Studies have shown that both free-running and self-locking snares inflict extensive life threatening injuries. The 1968 MAFF study concluded that neither type of snare was significantly more efficient or less effective. External inspection of animals killed by snares suggested that self-locking snares caused more damage, but *post-mortem* examinations showed there to be no significant difference caused by the two types of snares (Forestry Commission 1997). Indeed the Burns Inquiry into fox hunting briefly addressed the snares issue *"Although experience suggests that snares with a 'stop' carry less risk, even in the case of legal snares, where the stop is required, there is still the possibility of strangulation or serious injury. There is the important point, too, that other animals are commonly caught in the snares set for foxes"* (Burns et al 2000)

The Woodland Trust's view

The Woodland Trust believes that government policy across the UK should promote biodiversity by enabling the widest range of our native habitats and species to survive and evolve. The

Woodland Trust therefore believes that the use of all snares should be banned.

We believe that national governments have an obligation under both national and international law to address the issue of death of legally protected species in snares and that the only way to ensure full compliance with this legal obligation is to ban their use. This view is one which is widely shared, as demonstrated by the fact that since June 25th 2002 105 MPs from across the political spectrum have signed a House of Commons motion calling for such a ban to be put in place (House of Commons EDM No. 1502, 2002-2003).

We believe that national governments should ban all snares because they are indiscriminate and that species of conservation concern, as well as many other more common non-target wildlife species, are killed and injured in them. This view is further supported by evidence that demonstrates that neither free-running nor self-locking snares are significantly more efficient than the other, suggesting that free-running snares are just as dangerous to non-target species as self-locking snares.

References

- Burns et al (2000) *Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales*. HMSO.
- Cosgrove P & Oswald J. (2001) *Western Capercaillie in snares*. *Scottish Birds*. Vol. 22: Part 1.
- Forestry Commission (1997) *Foxes and Forestry*. *Technical paper 23*.
- House of Commons Early Day Motion No 1502, 25 June 2002.
- Mammal Society (2001) *Mammal Fact Sheets: Endangered British Mammals*.
- NFBG - National Federation of Badger Groups (2002) *The case for a ban on snares*.
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2000) *Submission to the Hunting Inquiry*.
- Scottish Executive (2002) *The Nature of Scotland: A Policy Statement*, Annex B. Working together to fight wildlife crime (B16).
- Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2002) Field experience and information provided for the NFBG report 2002.