

Snaring: Cruel and Indiscriminate

Snares are thin wire nooses set to trap animals perceived to be a pest or threat, usually foxes and rabbits. They are intended to catch animals around the neck like a static lasso. Although most people in the UK think this archaic form of trapping was outlawed decades ago, it is still legal to use free-running snares in all of the UK.

Snares are cruel and indiscriminate and cannot be regulated effectively. The UK is one of only five countries in Europe where they are still legal.

It is time for a complete ban on the manufacture, importation, sale and use of snares to end the suffering of millions of animals caught in them every year.

X-Ray of a snared badger



Free-running snare set in a woodland

Snare types and usage

Free-running snares are so-called because the design is intended to allow the free movement of the wire in both directions. The snare should tighten as the captured animal struggles, but relax when the animal stops pulling. This type of snare is intended to hold the animal alive until the snare operator returns to kill it, usually by shooting.

Self-locking snares, which are intended to kill captured animals by strangulation or cervical dislocation, are banned in all of the UK. Any snare where the wire only runs in one direction, tightening as the animal struggles but not easing off when the victim stops pulling, is classified as a self-locking snare. **Legal free-running snares can easily become illegal self-locking snares when kinked or rusty.**

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Snaring takes place primarily on private land out of public view, making it extremely difficult to monitor. It was not until the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published its 2012 report: *Determining the extent of use and humaneness of snares in England and Wales*¹, that the true scale of snaring was discovered. And what it revealed was shocking.

According to the report, 260,000 snares are in use in England and Wales. However, the full picture only emerges when this number (260,000) is multiplied by the number of days each snare is used per year (an average of 206); **there is a staggering total of 53.5 million snare days in England and Wales every year.** Despite this immense scale of snare use, the practice is not widespread. Defra's report reveals that more than 95% of landholdings do not use snares, with the use of both fox and rabbit snares being far more likely on landholdings with game bird shooting. In other words, **a small number of landowners with connections to the shooting industry are snaring intensively** while the vast majority of landowners – including the RSPB, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Woodland Trust and more than 250 principal authorities in England and Wales – never use these primitive devices in their land management regimes.

All snares are cruel

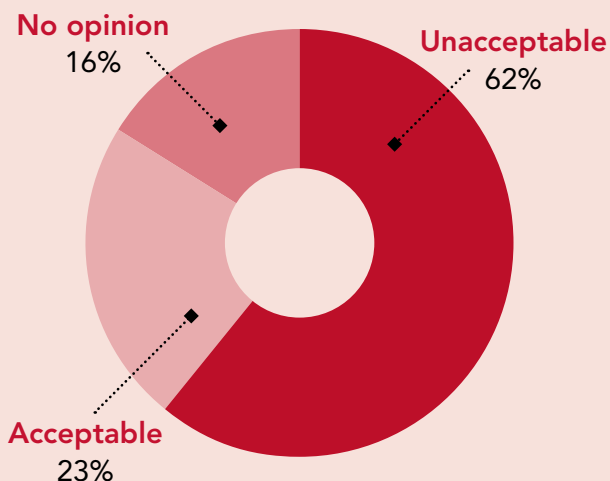
Numerous investigations by the League Against Cruel Sports^{2/3/4/5}, have documented the suffering caused by legal free-running snares. Animals have been found that were snared around a leg with the wire cutting through to the bone; some have had snares tighten around their abdomen almost cutting them in half; many have been found dead in snares meant to simply restrain them – most died of strangulation but others from predation, exposure to the elements or dehydration.

Our findings are corroborated by testimony from experts in veterinary medicine and animal welfare science (see *box on right*). The government also acknowledged the welfare problems associated with snaring in 2005 when it introduced a voluntary Code of Practice on the Use of Snares which was designed to reduce the suffering caused by snares through the adoption of best practice. Even former Environment Secretary Owen Paterson, the Conservative MP responsible for sanctioning the controversial badger culls in Somerset and Gloucestershire, has stated in the House of Commons⁶:

"I am completely convinced that trapping and snaring are hideously cruel."

Snares are primarily used by gamekeepers to increase shooting industry profits, yet most people in Britain are opposed to shooting live animals for sport.

How acceptable do you find shooting live animals for sport? YouGov poll, 2011



“From the veterinary perspective, snares are primitive indiscriminate traps that are recognised as causing widespread suffering to a range of animals. At their least injurious, snares around the neck can result in abrasion and splitting of the skin. However, being caught in a snare is extremely distressing for any creature and vigorous attempts to escape are natural. These efforts cause the snare wire to kink, thereby changing a free-running snare to a self-locking one. Strangulation and choking follow.

It is commonplace for snares to lodge around the chest, abdomen or legs rather than the neck. In such instances, the stop restraint is ineffective and the wire cuts through skin and muscle and, eventually, bone. Badgers may be eviscerated when the abdominal wall is cut through. Amputation of the lower limb and foot by a snare is well-documented in deer. These unfortunate animals suffer immensely.”

Professor Ranald Munro

Leading veterinary pathologist in testimony to the Scottish Parliament⁷

“Some pest control methods have such extreme effects on an animal’s welfare that, regardless of the potential benefits, their use is never justified. Snaring is such a method.”

Centre for Animal Welfare, University of Cambridge in a 2010 report on the impacts of snaring⁸.

All snares are indiscriminate

The number and diversity of animals that fall victim to snares are immense. Defra’s 2012 report outlines two field studies using fox snares where a total of 62 animals were caught in 1,915 snare days, a capture rate of one animal in every 31 snare days. Assuming a similar capture rate for the 53.5 million snares days in England and Wales, **around 1.7 million animals are trapped in these primitive devices every year.** Moreover, because snares capture any animal that happens to step into them, **little more than a quarter of the animals trapped in Defra’s studies were foxes** – the intended victims. The other three quarters included hares (33% of all captures), badgers (26%) and a further 14% described only as ‘other’. Media reports and public testimony show that the ‘other’ species regularly caught in snares include cats, dogs, deer and even otters.



Tiggy - victim of a snare

The shooting industry claims that snaring can be made more selective with the use of ‘breakaway’ snares – a new design which includes a weak point in the wire noose that, in theory, enables heavy animals like badgers to break out of the trap. However, their own research shows that the advantages of this new design have been greatly overstated.

In two field trials conducted with ‘breakaway’ snares⁹, foxes – the target species – accounted for less than a third of the animals caught, while brown hares made up more than half of the captures in both trials. Deer and badgers were also caught in both trials. More importantly, **only a third of trapped badgers escaped via the ‘breakaway’ device while an equal number were killed** – either by the snare or the snare operator (due to severe injuries). **Hares fared equally poorly.** Although a third escaped from ‘breakaway’ snares in trial one, half of those who didn’t were killed – some found dead but the majority killed by snare operators who wanted to reduce hare numbers.

The results from this industry funded study are not surprising. Defra’s Independent Working Group on Snares concluded in 2005 that **it would be difficult to reduce non-target captures to less than 40%**¹⁰.

Snaring cannot be regulated effectively

The League believes that no amount of regulation can reduce the suffering snares inflict - or increase their specificity - to an acceptable level and they must therefore be banned.

Gamekeepers have already shown themselves to be incapable of complying with Defra's recommended Code of Practice on the Use of Snares. In its 2012 report, Defra found that although 95% of gamekeepers they surveyed were aware of the Code of Practice, **not a single fox snare operator visited during the study was fully compliant with the Code** – a full seven years after it had been introduced. Furthermore, in the shooting industry's study into 'break-away' snares¹¹, less than half of the gamekeepers involved in the study had even read Defra's Code of Practice.

It's time for a ban

More than three quarters of British people want to see snares banned¹³, as do the majority of MPs¹⁴. It is time for the government to act. A complete ban on the manufacture, importation, sale and use of snares is the only way to end the suffering of millions of animals caught in these primitive traps every year.

- **77%** of British people think snares should be banned¹³
- **68%** of MPs would support a ban on snares¹⁴

A recent investigation by the League provides further evidence that a Code of Practice cannot prevent animals from suffering in snares. In February 2015, investigators captured graphic scenes of foxes and rabbits caught in snares¹². Despite government guidelines stating snares must only be used as restraining rather than killing devices, all of the animals filmed were dead when found.



The footage exposed a large death pit – a purposely dug pit filled with carcasses of dead livestock and wildlife – designed to lure foxes into snares set along the edge. A dead fox was found hanging from one of the snares, clearly strangled to death. Placing snares alongside a pit or hole violates the government's Code of Practice on the Use of Snares, yet the snare operator admitted that he catches 50 to 100 foxes this way every year – demonstrating that

attempts to regulate a clandestine activity which takes place primarily on private land in remote locations are futile. At a second location, the soaking wet bodies of several rabbits were discovered in snares. Two of these were trapped in snares set along a fence in which the rabbits had become heavily entangled during their struggle to escape. These animals probably died from their injuries. Again, the placement of these snares violates the Code of Practice.

At the same location a snare was deliberately used to catch a pheasant. This is illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) which restricts the methods that can be used to trap birds. The snare operator told our investigators that he places corn on the ground around the snare to attract pheasants. The dead pheasant was also entangled in the fence and soaking wet.



This expose adds to the wealth of evidence demonstrating that the Code of Practice on the Use of Snares is regularly flouted and not fit for purpose. Only a total ban on the manufacture, importation, sale and use of snares can end the suffering that wild animals and domestic pets endure in these cruel and archaic traps.

¹ Defra (2012) Determining the extent of use and humaneness of snares in England and Wales. <http://tinyurl.com/bmkqbpk>

² League Against Cruel Sports (2009) War on Wildlife.

³ League Against Cruel Sports (2010) Tightening the Noose.

⁴ League Against Cruel Sports (2010) Blood Still on the Wire.

⁵ League Against Cruel Sports (2015) Death pit in the Countryside: 2015 investigation. <http://tinyurl.com/oqtutwc>

⁶ Hansard (2001) 17 January 2001: Column 429. <http://tinyurl.com/cxmosej>

⁷ Scottish Parliament (2011) Rural Affairs and Environment Committee Official Report. 12 January 2011. <http://tinyurl.com/cb8lt2s>

⁸ Rochlitz, I. (2010) The Impact of Snares on Animal Welfare.

In: The OneKind Report on Snaring. <http://tinyurl.com/oaot3sw>

⁹ Short M.J., Weldon A.W., Richardson S.M and Reynolds J.C.

(2012) Selectivity and injury risk in an improved neck snare for live-capture of foxes. Wildlife Society Bulletin 36(2):208–219.

¹⁰ IWGS (2005) Report of the Independent Working Group on Snares. <http://tinyurl.com/phbb4sm>

¹¹ Short M.J., Weldon A.W., Richardson S.M and Reynolds J.C.

(2012) Selectivity and injury risk in an improved neck snare for live-capture of foxes. Wildlife Society Bulletin 36(2):208–219

¹² League Against Cruel Sports (2015) Death pit in the Countryside: 2015 investigation.

¹³ 77% according to a 2014 Ipsos Mori poll commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports.

¹⁴ 68% according to a 2015 Dods poll commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports.

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