(No. 17) -- The Use of Cruel Leghold Traps Can be Eliminated

Humane Information Services, Inc.
Animals suffer from the application of many horrible devices and practices at the hand of man, but it would be difficult to find one as cruel as the steel-jaw leghold trap almost universally used in capturing wild fur animals. The suffering of food animals such as those of humanity is a subject over which the sufferings of animals might be considered by the public. The application of the steel-jaw leghold trap to wild animals involves the severing of their feet, leaving them to struggle in the trap until they are killed.

The Use of Cruel Leghold Traps Can Be Eliminated

The steel-jaw or leghold trap is designed to catch and hold the animal by the paw (see photograph of fox). When the trap is sprung, steel jaws close on the paw with great impact and hold it in a vice-like grip which, aggravated by the animal's frantic efforts to escape, causes terrific pain and suffering (see photograph of paw). The animal may bite frantically at the trap, perhaps injur­ing its teeth, and frequently it chews at or twists its paw until it is severed, the amputated paw remaining in the trap (see photograph of muskrat leg in trap). In trapping circuses this is called a "wring-off". Unless the animal thus escapes, it re­mains in the trap until shock, exposure, gangrene, starvation, freezing cold or the arrival of the trapper brings release or death (see photograph of frozen fox in trap). Even so, many die in the trap for a day or a week or more. In many states there is a law requiring inspection of traps every 24 hours, but it is clearly impossible to enforce such a law. It is the long­drawn-out agony of the leghold trap, espe­cially when the animal is trapped such a mon­strously cruel business.

The steel trap holds the animal's leg in a vice-like grip. (Photograph from Canadian Association for Humane Trapping)

Since the leghold trap frequently is used in areas close to human habitats, many dogs, cats, rabbits and other domestic and wild animals which are not desired by the trapper may be caught in this suffering (see photograph of rabbit). The number of these unwanted animals caught in the traps is said to exceed greatly the number of fur-bearing animals of commercial value. Even small children are endangered.

Many Words—Little Action

Not only is the suffering of the individual animals caught with leghold traps much more intense than for most other animals ex­posed to similar conditions, but the numbers of animals so procured are far greater than those involved in intensive animal husbandry.

The most reliable data on the world produc­tion of fur skins have been those con­tained in a bulletin of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, of Great Britain: "Facts About Furs" (1967). This bulletin is now out of date, but we under­stand that the author, Dr. P. Jean Vinter, has completely revised it, and that it will be published in a revised form at some time in the future.

A wolf caught in leghold trap howls in pain. (Photograph from Canadian Association for Humane Trapping)

The cruelities of trapping have been described, innumerable times, by humane animal welfare organizations in this country and abroad, over a period of many years. Such descriptions, unfortunately, have not led to effective action to outlaw the leg­hold trap, except in a few countries, notably England and Norway. In order to under­stand why this is so, and what can be done (Continued in second column)
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...income grow, or the value of securities declines, people tend to become more careful in their spending. Among the first items to be affected are the luxury items such as fur garments. This had a very important influence on the domestic demand for furs beginning in late 1969.

Reduction in Demand

Not Necessarily a Reduction in Furs

After voicing these developments, the realistic humanitarians must keep in mind that a reduction in the demand for furs may not result in a significant reduction in the number of fur animals procured. When the demand falls off, the first effect is a decrease in the price of furs and fur skins. When the price of furs is reduced, because it now takes a longer time to sell, other women who previously wanted but could not afford to buy furs are brought into the market. We will always be a buyer for the available fur skins, at a price. Only if the price declines sufficiently to cause trappers and other fur skin producers to cease or reduce their operations are the actual taking of fur animals reduced.

Demand for Furs in United States

Affects Trapping Very Little

But even these changes in domestic demand for furs affect the total production of fur skins affecting the price in the United States very little. The reason for this is that a large proportion of the sales of artificial furs used in the production of fur garments for the domestic market is trapped. In this country a reduction in high-fashion, over-styled garments has resulted in the mink garments practically taking over the fur market. Most of the skins of animals trapped in the United States, composed in major part of muskrat and nutria, go to foreign rather than domestic markets.

Thus, all of the propaganda against furs in the United States, even if much more successful, is very little likely to affect trapping in this country. Its effects, if any, are reflected in the production of ranch-raised mink. If fur skins are affected, it is because of a reduction in the size of the annual "crop" and general economic conditions. Variations in the annual production of wild furred animals in Louisiana are largely dependent on weather and other conditions of the ecology. Many animals not wanted by the trapper are caught, including dogs and cats. Even small children may be endangered. (Photograph from National Equine (and Smaller Animals) Defence League, England

Effects on Fur Production

of Fells and Job Opportunities

Fur skin production is affected not only by the price received for skins, but also by costs of production and alternative opportunities for employment of the trapper's or producer's capital and labor. Improved job and business opportunities, and increased costs of trap-making, farm equipment, etc., doubtless were very important factors in...

(Continued in second column)

During the 1968-69 season, Louisiana produced 3,469,040 pelts, of which 1,556,764 were muskrat and 1,754,028 were nutria. These two represented, therefore, about 95 percent of the total, the remaining 195,040 representing, in order of importance, raccoon, wild mink, opossum, otter, skunk, fox, beaver and lynx. In the 1967-68 season, production of muskrat was about 20 percent of the world's supply, and of nutria about 95 percent. During the early 1960's, the production of muskrat and nutria goes to foreign countries, which provide a ready market for all trapped skins, although at prices which vary widely with the size of the annual "crop" and general economic conditions. Variations in the annual production of furred animals in Louisiana depend largely on weather and other conditions of the ecology.

Muskrats thrive on prolonged wet cycles with mild winters. But great storms inundate the marshes with salt water for prolonged periods of time, as with the fur-bearing. When weather conditions are very favorable, the natural levees become so perforated by marsh water that the prime muskrat habitat turns into "a soupy mass of decaying vegetation". The muskrat population then declines when conditions become favorable once more.

Because of these fluctuations in the ecology, the muskrat hunts in Louisiana have varied between 8,337,411 in the 1942-43 season and 203,300 in the 1964-65 season. Other ecological conditions affect production in other states.

Propaganda Alone Not Effective

Thus, a great variety of both demand and supply conditions affect the number of animals trapped, in other countries as well as in the United States. Of these, the propaganda designed to persuade consumers not to buy furs is a very minor item. If carried on effectively over a long period of years, it will have some effect. But humanitarians should be cautious of any method which appears to approach elimination of the cruelties of trapping without accomplishing its objective in the foreseeable future. Such a method of clubbing, when combined with a much more direct approach to the trapping problem.

In our Report to Humanitarians No. 4, issued in 1966, we tried to analyze the situation and suggest a number of more direct approaches, which would help the cooperation of humane societies. We received a flood of letters from our readers agreeing with these suggestions. But the humane movement in the United States has given no indication whatever of a desire to pursue such a constructive and practical approach to trapping.
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Tears and Big Eyes

It would have been difficult to drum up all the sympathy of the public for an industry based on few physical facts and deep-seated emotional reactions. The baby seals in Canada are killed to supply the fur market. The white-coated animals red on this white background it seems much more gruesome than, for example, on some dark background. Even a great number of actual cruelty were involved, such bloody sights, appearing on color TV and in color photographs. It should rouse the indignation of the public.

And the Canadian seals receiving this at­
tenance, as the Immunological Sciences and the seal­
pealing big eyes, with unbelievably soulful
expressions. Moreover, the mother seals, who were unable to care for their young, were killed on the Canadian ice are seldom present

when the less mobile baby seals are killed, are

are said to shed genuine tears when they see

their babies done away with. One could hardly find, in the whole animal kingdom, anything better tailored to evoke the emotions of tenderhearted humans than babies and mother-love. Unfortunately, those en­
gaged in the fur industry against ice seals, seal hunt

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response.

The difficulty with the Conibear trap, as will be seen from the discussion of

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The NAHL has taken the position that a com­
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REPORT ON EUTHANASIA POSTPONED

As mentioned in our last issue, we had extended to include in this one a full re­port on euthanasia in the United States, with its insidious and un­
lucky progression around the country. We reiterated our call for the elimination of all live trap­ing, and for a humane death of all animals that deserve our very best efforts to bring about it. We have added a second section on the subject of lethal injection, as we believe that this method is the only humane and practical trap available.

RANCH MINK MUCH MORE IMPORTANT

Even the ranch or farm-reared mink are much more important than seals in any well-planned effort to eliminate the suffering of fur-bearers.

During the 1969 season the number of ranch mink killed in the United States was 5,455,000, and in Canada it was over 1,000,000, a total for North America of about seven million. The number of hair seals (including the "baby"

seals) taken in Canada was only 139,180 (32,000 or less), and in the United States approximat ely 60,000 seals killed in Alaska, and we have a total for the two countries of approximat ely 200,000. In comparison with seven million ranch mink.

These Reports to Humanitarians have car­
ried an invitation to all members of the humane movement to join in the continuing program designed to develop a hu­
mane trap. (Photograph from Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals, Canada)

Voluntary Shift to Humane Traps

In Canada, efforts to deal with the trap­

ning problem have been much better directed and more fruitful than in the United States. The main problem has been the drive to produce a more humane type of trap. These efforts have been drawn out over a long period of time, with no unique, (suitable to all species of fur bearers), reasonably effective, low-cost, and humane trap yet available.

The Canadian humane societies, for which

we have constantly-increasing respect, have gone about this in a sensible, business-like way. A number of these societies, including the Canadian Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals, the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, the Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals, British Columbia, and others have worked on this project for over a hundred years. They are volunteer organizations, relying on the generosity of the public for support.

We believe that you will find the report on the subject of humane traps to be of interest and importance. It is available from the National Association for Humane Legislation, Inc. as our next issue.

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TRAPPING LEGISLATION

would be done is to force these people to use humane methods of trapping, and end the horrible cruelties of the leghold trap. Once the humane trap is well established and accepted, many trappers would find the humane traps such as the Conibear to be better for them than the leghold. Instead of trapping trappers who have made the transition, for example, say that the Conibear is better in nearly all respects.

Trappers primarily seeking some particular species might have some cause for dis­satisfaction, but there is no doubt that the hu­mane traps will not be further improved for the trapping of these particular animals. Reference to the Broomfield-Bayh bill should encourage all humanitarian organizations that there is little doubt success will be achieved within the four-year period allowed by the Broomfield-Bayh bill. In the meantime, the trapping of the latter will result in breaking down the wall of indifference to efforts to perfect the humane trap for all species. Once the industry realizes that it must get behind the efforts of the humane societies, a crash program will begin.

In any event, the Conibear trap now available is suitable for trapping the species most commonly taken in the United

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States, such as muskrat. It is ready to go now.

There is one apparently legitimate but not so convincing objection to the use of a killer instead of the leghold trap in the comparatively mild climate of the United States. The objection is that the killer trap may begin to decompose, and suffer damage to the meat and pelt, unless the trap line is visited more frequently. But this problem is not present when the suffering of the animal taken by the leghold trap provides, in effect, a substitute for regular visits.

The sale of meat from the otherwise unused carcasses in the 1950-60 season brought Louisiana trappers, on the average, as com­pared with six million from the pelts. It is the letters received from members and contributors that largely govern the posi­tions taken by most societies in such mat­ters.

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