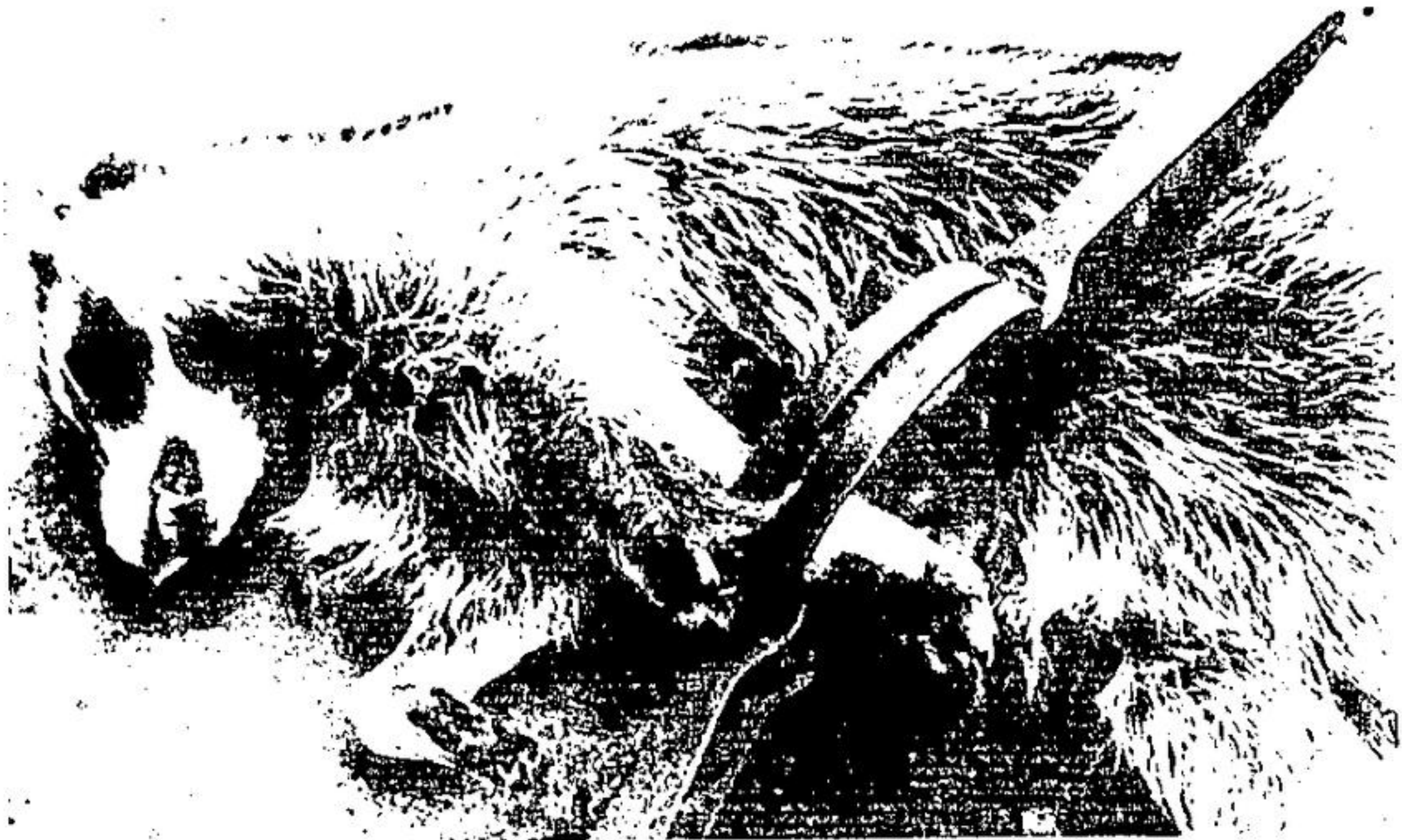


Pros and cons of the leg-hold trap

An overview of trapping controversy



Raccoon, dead in a leg-hold trap; photo submitted by APFBA

Trappers' own responsibility means animals don't suffer

Trapping was Canada's first industry according to the history books, and even today contributes to a multi-million dollar world-wide industry. Even though Halton Hills appears part of a highly-urbanized section of Ontario, there is sufficient wildlife remaining to support trapping; the Ministry of Natural Resources listed 29 trappers working in the area during the 1978-79 season. A total of \$14,265 worth of beaver, mink, muskrat, raccoon, fox and coyote furs were trapped here during the past year. Just as progress has been made over the centuries in so many industries, so trapping has undergone many changes, one of the most important of which involves restrictions in the issuance of trappers' licences.

We tried to squash some of the horror stories. I see this as possibly becoming an election issue and I think it's unfortunate that the whole issue may one day be decided by people who know nothing about it. BAMBINO IMAGE "People in cities and towns have a Bambi image of all animals," Mr. Tyres commented, "but it isn't like that when you get out in the bush. They don't come all neatly parcelled up in brown paper bags like the week's groceries. They may feel we're committing murder and yet these animals live and die in a lot worse conditions than they suffer from a few hours in a trap." Mr. Tyres began trapping six years ago. Although he took no course he had an Acton trapper teach him how to set traps and handle his catch, and he would recommend the trappers' course from Conestoga to

anyone hoping to enter the business. Canada leads the world in humane trapping, he said, and also in the development of new, more efficient trapping techniques. Most of these new methods have been developed by trappers and a limited season has been put on raccoons as a result of pressure from the Ontario Trappers Association. Trappers and hunters are concerned over the number of raccoons taken by irresponsible hunters who hunt before the fur is prime and continue to hunt even after the breeding season has begun. This form of hunting could wipe the species out locally, the trappers warn. Since most of the animals Mr. Tyres traps are nocturnal, he checks his trapline each and every morning. This means any animal caught will be in the trap for a minimum of six

to 12 hours, and it takes much longer than that, he contended, for any animal to die of starvation. Mr. Tyres said he uses leg-hold traps for water sets where he can kill his catch quickly by holding it under water. Ministry tests show that animals rarely struggle and death occurs in one to three minutes. The animal doesn't drown as is commonly understood: carbon dioxide builds up in the blood stream and the animal becomes unconscious very quickly. ALWAYS FATAL The Conibear trap, billed as humane, is always fatal and Mr. Tyres questions whether those who worry about their pets straying into a leg-hold trap understand the difference between the two types. Conibear traps can be used for land sets as well as in the water. They catch the animal by the neck and chest so that

death results from a broken neck, crushed rib or similar injuries. "I know of a woman who was walking her German Shepherd," Mr. Tyres commented. "She heard him yelp and by the time she walked over the hill to where he was, he was dead. If that had been a leg-hold trap she could have stepped on it and released him with nothing more serious than a bruised paw." Mr. Hawes pointed out that leg-hold traps have been modified in recent years, easing pressure in the jaws so that a small space remains when the trap closes. The jaws have also been rounded on the edges so there is less danger of an animal breaking its skin if it struggles. The incidence of injury to animals caught in leg-hold traps is so low that it is the preferred type of trap among naturalists seeking to catch an animal live for research or transplant purposes, he noted. Mr. Tyres said that stories of animals losing a leg in a trap or chewing a leg off to free themselves from a trap stem from inexperienced or careless trappers. A trap should be matched to the size and type of animals the trapper is after, he said. Mr. Tyres and Mr. Hawes both use leg-hold traps with stop-loss devices, special guards activated by struggling movements which keeps the animal's leg straight and pushes its head back from the trap.

MOVE TRAPS Mr. Tyres said he knows how many animals he can trap in any portion of his territory without depleting the average population there. He moves his traps every two or three days as soon as he has taken what he knows to be the proper quota in that location. Since half the value of a beaver pelt depends on the way the trapper prepared and treated it, licences to trap beaver won't be issued until the trapper proves he knows how to treat his catch, Mr. Hawes explained. Trappers who want to take beaver are issued a quota. Mr. Hawes may have 15,000 acres, most of it containing prime beaver country, on which landowners permit him to trap, but his quota is set at 28 for this season unless he finds more lodges in his territory. Trappers are permitted to take 50 per cent of the animals in a live lodge. In order to determine his quota, a trapper will go over his territory to locate the live lodges, then report the size and location of these lodges to the ministry. Ministry employees take no chances on how accurately the trapper reports his findings and fly over areas to check for themselves. An Ontario Trappers' Association booklet claims that the greatest danger to animal po-

While there was a time when anyone with a yen to set a trap could simply drop the device in a likely spot, trappers must now obtain a licence from the Ministry. Trappers who have been at the job for many years and follow acceptable methods get their licence without trouble, but new people starting out in the business are expected to take and pass a 10-week course on trapping offered at Conestoga community college. Since most trappers carry a gun, they must also have a hunting licence and by present regulations, this will mean the trappers must be 16 years old or more. Trappers must also obtain written permission from the landowner on whose property they are working. PUBLIC OUTCRY For those who trap, professionally, the recent public outcry over the use of leg-hold traps is incomprehensible. "There is no such thing as a humane death in nature," according to Art Hawes, an experienced trapper who works in Halton Hills, Erin and Eramosa townships. "Anyone who isn't aware of that should watch a cat kill a mouse. There's nothing humane about that, but it's perfectly natural."

After a time, from the pressure of the jaws of the trap, and the swelling of the leg from pain, the circulation of blood stops and the foot becomes numb, but the pain above it in the swollen leg and shoulder must increase, and the mink must be in great agony. The foot will freeze. This may be in a few hours or a day, depending mostly on the weather. After the foot becomes numb or frozen, the mink desperately "savages with pain will chew at it. Sometimes it will chew off the toes underneath the jaws of the trap and be able to pull the foot out. At other times it will chew at the leg itself above the jaws of the trap, and by chewing and twisting, (if it does not freeze to death first) sometimes after several days, especially if the bone has been broken, sever the last sinew holding leg and foot together, and escape. On a long line we lose about a third of the mink

the loss must be greater, and to prevent it, the diabolical spring pole set is sometimes resorted to. This is a simple tree, bent over, and the top, to which a trap has been fastened, hooked down so that when an animal is caught, its struggles release the tree which draws the trap and the animal up into the air. The animal dangles, struggling, in the air, the whole of its weight hanging from one foot. There is probably no greater agony than this. Its sufferings are quite beyond power to describe. Our next trap has a lynx. When we first come up it struggles violently and then, at the length of the chain, crouches down. By the signs I judge it has been caught about ten days. A lynx lives much longer when caught in a trap than other animals. I have known two to live for three weeks in the traps and be alive when I got there, but very, very thin. The feet of the lynx are so large that unless it steps fairly in the middle of the trap, it is caught by only one or two toes, and, as the days go by, the jaws of the trap squeeze tighter till they separate the joints of the bones. Sometimes the sudden jerks of the lynx break the last shreds, and it is free. By that time the whole of the caught foot is usually frozen, so the lynx must die from a rotting foot. Of all the deaths caused by trapping, I think that from a foot thawing out and rotting is the most awful.

The next trap has a silver fox. It has "died in the trap—curled up in a ball, its tail covering its feet. It had sought refuge from the cold by curling itself up, and had died in its sleep; if that comatose condition can be called sleep, that does not obliterate the penetrating cold that goes to the very marrow of the bones and the pit of the stomach, and the pain of a wrenched, swollen and frozen leg—and let no one tell you freezing is not painful.

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No trapping on CVCA lands

The Credit Valley Conservation Authority issued a reminder this week that hunting and trapping is forbidden in its conservation areas under Ontario Regulation 580-77. Several of the conservation areas in the Credit River Watershed have been posted "No Hunting" and plans for extending the posting to all areas are presently being formulated. In spite of posting, problems have specifically arisen with deer hunters in Silver Creek and raccoon trappers in Terra Cotta Conservation Areas. Hunters and trappers are warned that if apprehended, they can be charged and all firearms or equipment can be confiscated.

Experienced trapper's testimony recounts pain and mutilation

John Tyres of Rockwood traps in Halton Hills and Milton and is equally unhappy, for a different reason. "I trap mainly for pleasure," he told The Herald recently. "I love to hunt, fish, trap, anything to do with the outdoors, and I feel it's very wrong that someone who knows nothing about it should try to take that privilege away from me." "Trappers do provide a very necessary service," Mr. Hawes added. "We can't transport animals to other habitats for ever. There is only so much area suitable for a species and when that's used up, what do we do with them? The animals have to be controlled or they'll use up their habitat and die of starvation, and that's not pleasant. Trapping gets a lot of bad publicity and it's time

By FRANK CONIBEAR I will tell you about some of the animals we caught on one of our traps. On the twelfth day we start back over our line to look at the traps we set almost two weeks ago. In the first trap we find a mink's foot. The area about the trap is all bashed about and chewed up by the mink in its effort to escape. The mink is a tough animal that struggles violently attempting by jerks and pulls to get loose. It writhes and twists desperately, and bites at everything within reach, and continues until it is exhausted. After a time, from the pressure of the jaws of the trap, and the swelling of the leg from pain, the circulation of blood stops and the foot becomes numb, but the pain above it in the swollen leg and shoulder must increase, and the mink must be in great agony. The foot will freeze. This may be in a few hours or a day, depending mostly on the weather. After the foot becomes numb or frozen, the mink desperately "savages with pain will chew at it. Sometimes it will chew off the toes underneath the jaws of the trap and be able to pull the foot out. At other times it will chew at the leg itself above the jaws of the trap, and by chewing and twisting, (if it does not freeze to death first) sometimes after several days, especially if the bone has been broken, sever the last sinew holding leg and foot together, and escape. On a long line we lose about a third of the mink

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Advertisement for the Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals. It features a large image of a raccoon and text that reads: 'This CRUELTY MUST STOPPED... P IS NEEDED', 'PLEASE HELP US TO BAN THE LEG-HOLD TRAP NOW!!', and 'THE PRIMITIVE LEG-HOLD TRAP IS THE MAIN METHOD OF CATCHING OUR FUR-BEARING ANIMALS IN CANADA.' It also includes a small image of a trap and a skull.