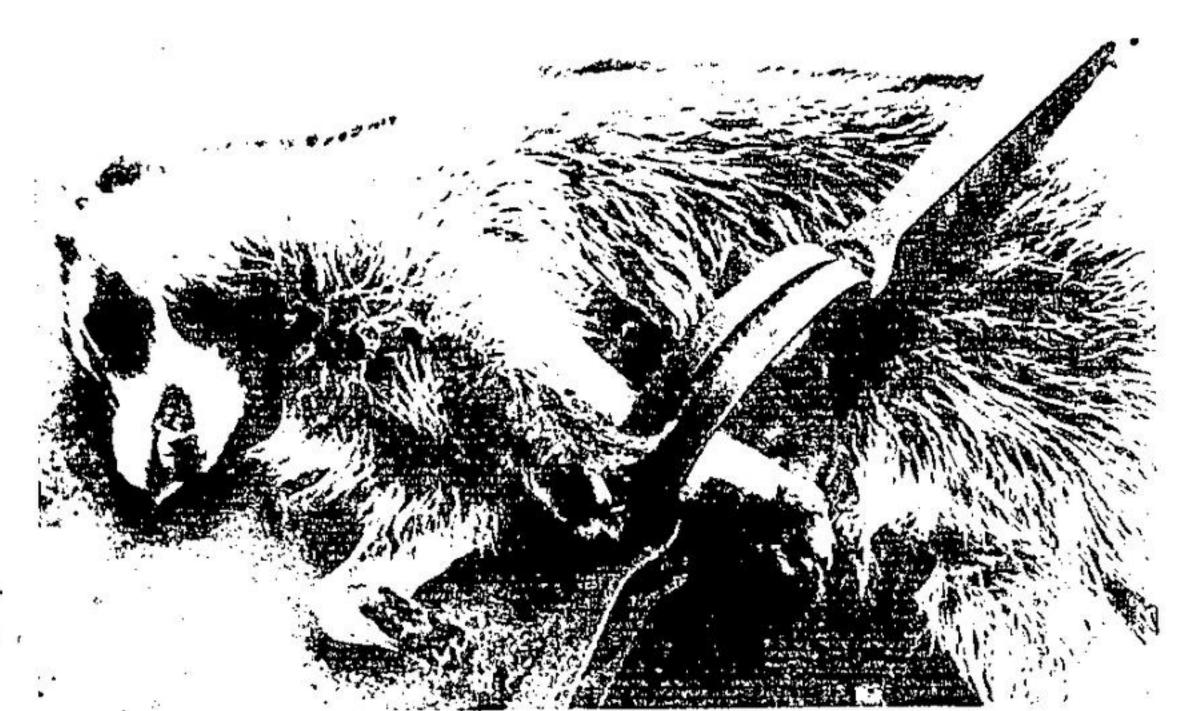
Pros and cons of the leg-hold trap

An overview of trapping controversy



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

By MAGGIE HANNAII Herald staff writer

In a telephone interview with The Herald, ministry of natural resources wildlife management officer Bruce Backland has reinforced comments by local trappers that just anyone can't start setting traps and messing around with Ontario's tur-bearing animals.

In order to get a trapper's licence an applicant must first complete a Hunter's Safety Training course. A trapper's beence includes permission to carry a gun so the ministry won't accept an application until he can safely handle a

Trapper's heenees won't be issued to anyone under 16, Mr. Buckland said. The ministry also encourages anyone seeking a trapping beence to take a 10-week trapping course which teaches trapping ethics, techniques on setting traps, techniques in handling and grading the pelt and shipping it, as well as giving information on the habits and diseases of the animals which may be trapped. The course is not mandatory yet, but he hopes it will be by next year.

death results from a broken

neck, crushed rib or similar

"I know of a woman who was

walking her German Shep-

herd," 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

Mr. Hawes pointed out that

leg-hold traps have been modi-

fied in recent years, easing

serious than a bruised paw."

In response to the many letters and phonecalls The Herald has received concerning the recently-approved use of leg-hold traps in Halton Hills, staff writer Maggie Hannah has attempted to weigh the comments and defences of local trappers and a ministry spokesman against the emotionally charged appeals of anti-trapping groups. One such group, the Association for the Protection of Fur-hearing Animals, has forwarded copies of its pamphlets to The Herald, portions of which are re-created here, including Frank Conibear's "testimony of a trapper".

As well as the trapping course. Mr. Buckland said the ministry has suggested that in future, new trappers will be issued with temporary licences the first year. Then they will be required to bring in all their pelts to be checked so a close watch can be kept on how well the beginners have learned and applied the material taught in the course.

SPOT CHECKS At present, spot checks are conducted by conservation officers throughout the area. Trappers are given no warning when an officer is coming to check on him. The officer simply arrives to accompany him as he goes over his route. There are signs on a pelt that indicate if an animal was in a trap too long, Mr. Buckland said. If any problems are spotted, the trapper will be watched "very, very carefully". It is usually the brand new trapper who has trouble,

Mr Buckland said that although the trapper's licence entitles the trapper to carry a gun most trappers prefer to club the animal over the snout if it's still alive because they don't want to put a hole in the pelt by using a bullet. A clout on the nose of most animals is just as effective as a bullet, he said.

Art Hawes, however, said he preferred to shoot an animal in the ear since this eliminates the hole in the pelt but still kills

effectively. Mr. Buckland said that anyone seeing snares or traps improperly set or tended should report them to the ministry. An answering service mans the phone 24-hours a day. An officer will be dispatched to investigate a complaint and, if necessary, eatch the culprit. Anonymous calls aren't attended to, however, since trapping lends itself to erank calls.

Unless the caller actually saw someone setting a trap, he won't find himself in court once the offender is caught. He simply helps the officer with information on where and when the trap was seen. ZENITH NUMBER

For those in the Herald coverage area, from Georgetown west, the ministry office to call is Cambridge, using the Zenith number is 25000. For Herald readers in Peel, the office to call is Maple at Zenith

Responding to some popular misconceptions about trapping, Mr. Buckland agreed that lynx do have big feet, and raight well be caught by only a few toes. However, this past year, leg-hold traps have been used both in the Cambridge area and farther north in order to live trap some animals for an experiment in captive

any damage, he said. Contrary to what Mr. Conibear's notes say, the animals don't struggle. They simply curled up by the trap and waited. Officers: didn't even have to tranquilize them to remove them from the traps, he said.

The assertion that freezing is painful is directly contrary to his own experiences, Mr. Buckland said He froze his face badly once and as a result, it is especially susceptable to the cold. Yet freezing itself doesn't hurt. It is the thawing out process when circulation is restored that is painful, he said.

The new foot-snare currently being tested as an alternative to leg-hold traps apparently has a locking device on it to prevent it from cutting off circulation, he said

The Humane Trapping committee is testing a number of designs for new traps, he said, but none of them is yet ready for the market. At present, there is nothing

as effective as the leg-hold trap for fox and covote, since these animals are too smart to be caught consistently by any other method.

Mr. Buckland said he has trapped his father's property for several years and he finds it a worthwhile form of relaxa-

"You learn a lot more about wildlife while you're trapping than you do just out there observing it," he says.

breeding to see if they can be farmed like mink and fox None of the animals suffered 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 racoon trappers in Terra Cotta Conservation Areas.

Hunters and trappers are warned that if apprehended, they can be charged and all firearms or equipment can he confiscated.

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 highlyurbanized 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'

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, professignally, 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 natur-

John Tyres of Rockwood traps in Halton Hills and Milton and is equally unhappy, for a different reason.

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

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."

BAMBLIMAGE "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

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 be would recommend the trappers' course from Conestoga to

By FRANK CONIBEAR

I will tell you about some of

the animals we caught on one

of our trips. 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 pres-

sure of the laws of the trap,

and the swelling of the leg

from pain, the circulation of

blood stops and the foot be-

comes 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 tew hours or a

day, depending mostly on the

weather. After the foot be-

comes numb or frozen, the

mink , desperately 'savage

Sometimes it will chew off the

toes underneath the jaws of the

trap and be able to pull the foot

at the leg itself above the jaws

of the trap, and by chewing

and twisting, (if it does not

freeze to death first) some-

times 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

out. At other times it will chew

with pain will chew at, it.

anyone hoping to enter the

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

Trappers and hunters are concerned over the number of raceoons taken by irresponsible hunters who hunt before the fur is prime and continue to hunt even after the breeding season has begon. This form of hunting could wipe the species out locally, the tran-

pers 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

Experienced trapper's

testimony recounts

pain and mutilation

this way. In warmer climates,

the loss must be greater, and

to prevent it, the diabolical

spring pole set is sometimes

resorted to. This is a supple

tree, bent over, and the top, to

which a trap has been fast-

ened, 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 de-

Our next trap has a lynx.

When we first come up it

struggles violently and then, at

the length of the chain, crou-

ches 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

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

time the whole of the caught

foot is usually froxzen, so the

lyax 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.

By that

got there, but very, very thin.

to 12 hours, and it takes much longer than that, he contended. for any animal to die of starva-

Mr. Tyres said he uses leghold 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.

ALWAYSFATAL The Conibear trap, billed as humane, is always fatal and Mr. Tyres questions whether those who worry about their pets straying into a Jeg-hold trap understand the difference

between the two types. Conibear traps can be used for land sets as well as in the water. They eatch the animal by the neck and chest so that

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, swol-

len and frozen leg-and let no

one tell you freezing is not

The next trap is a mink. It

is dead-died in the trap. The

pen we built has been knocked

down, and there are teeth

marks on all the sticks and

branches within range. There

are signs of a terrific struggle

from experience I know the

mink lived about three or four

days and then died of hunger

and pain. The foot is lacerated,

swollen and covered with

blood. The stump of the leg

above the trap is swollen four

times its normal size, and

frozen. The shoulder, too, is all

swollen. When we skin it we

will find that all that area will

be a mass of blood-coloured,

sickly, gelatine-like substance,

indicating the terrible suffer-

ing it has gone through before

death released it. The trap is

slowly severing the last shreds

of the sinews, and then, with

escape only a few hours away,

the mink died. It is stretched

out as it threw itself in the last

spasm, and frozen hard and

stiff. The fur is fine and glossy;

it will make some woman a

lovely neckpiece!

Prinful.

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.

injuries.

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, be

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

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 pell 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' Assocration booklet claums that the greatest danger to animal po-

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