

Executive summary

BVA and BVZS position on the use and sale of snares for the control of free-ranging wildlife

Introduction

BVA and BVZS recognise that it may be necessary to control free-ranging wildlife in certain circumstances where there is a negative impact on human and animal health, food, agriculture, property, or the environment.¹ Any control should, however, follow recognised ethical principles², first apply prevention and deterrents, and where lethal control is shown to be necessary methods which are as humane as possible must be used.

Snares significantly compromise the welfare of caught animals, in some cases over a considerable length of time.

BVA and BVZS are therefore calling for:

- An outright ban on the use of snares, including homemade or adapted snares, by both the general public and trained operators.
- An outright ban on the sale of snares to both the general public and trained operators.
- Further research and development into alternative methods for the deterrence of free-ranging wildlife where it is considered necessary
- Further research and development into more humane methods of trapping and killing of free-ranging wildlife where it is considered necessary.

Types of snare

As used in the UK, a snare is usually a wire loop, although other materials can be used, designed to catch animals around the neck and 'hold' them until they can be killed by other means. Modern snares are usually made of flexible steel cable for foxes or stranded brass cable for rabbits.

Self-locking snares continue to tighten via a ratchet action as the caught animal struggles, often resulting in death by strangulation or by dislocation of the neck. Self-locking snares are illegal throughout the UK under section 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Free-running snares, which are currently legal throughout the UK, with some additional restrictions in Scotland, also restrain the animal by the neck, but are intended to relax when the animal stops struggling. A 'stop' is required on all snares, either by legislation (in Scotland) or in non-statutory codes, to be set at a specified distance to prevent the diameter of the wire loop from becoming smaller than the diameter of the neck of the target species. Variation in the diameter of the necks of target species and the possible capture of non-target animals, with different body conformation, can make the stop ineffective³ and result in increased injury and death by strangulation.

Legislation and codes of practice

The UK is one of the few European countries that permits the use of neck snares for mammals. Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Malta, either prohibit the use of snares or have no tradition of using them in this way. Only Belgium, Ireland, Latvia and the UK use snares.⁴

¹ BVZS Position statement on the control of free-ranging wildlife. Available at: <https://www.bvzs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BVZS-Position-Statement-on-the-control-of-Free-ranging-Wildlife-Final-Feb-2021.pdf>

² Dubois S, Fenwick N, Ryan E, Baker L, Baker S, Beausoleil N, Carter S, Cartwright B, Costa F, Draper C, Griffin J, Grogan A, Howald G, Jones B, Littin K, Lombard A, Mellor D, Ramp D, Schuppli C and Fraser D, 2017. International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control. *Conservation Biology* 31: 753-760.

³ Frey N, Conover M, Cook G, 2007. Successful Use of Neck Snares to Live-Capture Red Foxes

⁴ <https://onekind.scot.archived.website/uploads/publications/OneKind-and-LACS-report-on-snaring.pdf>

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 prohibits the use of any trap or snare for the purposes of killing or taking or restraining any wild animal listed at Schedule 6 or 6ZA (including badgers, wildcats, and red squirrels). It is also an offence to set in position a snare such that it is calculated to cause bodily injury to any wild animal included in the Schedules (England and Wales) or likely to cause bodily injury to any such wild animal (Scotland).⁵

The four UK administrations have separate legislation and non-statutory codes of practice covering snaring.

Extent and use of snares

Between 2008 and 2010 a Defra-funded research project 'Determining the Extent of Use and Humaneness of Snares in England and Wales' took place, aiming to quantify the scale of use and associated welfare impacts.

Following 2,861 telephone surveys with landowners/tenants, further detailed discussions with snare users for 130 landholdings, and 16 field visits, extrapolation on the basis of country, landholding size class and user suggested that, at any one time and depending on the season, between 62,800 and 188,300 fox snares were in use in England, and between 17,200 and 51,600 fox snares in Wales.

Animal welfare

The field trials as part of the Defra study 'Determining the Extent of Use and Humaneness of Snares in England and Wales' found that most snares in use were not Code of Practice-compliant and snares were frequently set at sites where entanglement leading to poor welfare was a risk. The study concluded that while it was conceptually possible to combine the survey and field trial results to predict the overall impact of fox and rabbit snaring on the welfare and conservation status of target and non-target species throughout England and Wales, confidence intervals would be very large, and predictions misleading.⁶

The lack of data on the welfare aspects of snaring makes it challenging to accurately assess the cost/benefit of the use of snares for wildlife management. However, when considered in the context of the Five Domains model for animal welfare assessment⁷, it is evident that the use of snares compromises several of the domains used to inform the overall picture of animal welfare.

Potential welfare harms

Due to the nature of snares and the duration of time animals may legally be held in snares even when best practice is followed, the potential negative animal welfare impacts are significant and may include:

- dehydration and hunger / starvation (of caught animal and any dependent young)
- exposure to the elements
- fear and distress⁸ (manifesting as escape behaviour which may include self-mutilation and, in rabbits, tonic immobility⁹)
- external and internal injuries¹⁰
- asphyxiation from strangulation¹¹
- exhaustion
- predation¹²

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

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<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14689>

⁷ Mellor DJ (2017). Operational Details of the Five Domains Model and Its Key Applications to the Assessment and Management of Animal Welfare. *Animals*, 7, 60

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<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14689>

⁹ McBride, E.A., Day, S., McAdie, T., Meredith, A., Barley, J., Hickman, J. and Lawes, L. (2006) Trancing rabbits: Relaxed hypnosis or a state of fear? <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/54860/>

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<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14689>

¹¹

<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14689>

¹²

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- exertional or capture myopathy¹³

The speed at which welfare begins to be impacted is rapid (seconds from the moment of restraint) and suffering can be prolonged even in instances where legal requirements to check at least every 24 hours are adhered to. Further, accompanying instructions for snares frequently fail to explain the need to kill the caught animals or how to do this humanely. Snares can also be indiscriminate and may result in the capture and suffering of non-target species.

Responsible use of the most humane methods of pest control available

We recognise that it may be necessary to control wildlife where there is a negative impact on human and animal health, food, agriculture, property or the environment. If a problem is identified, we support the responsible use of the most humane control methods available, which first requires consideration of whether it is necessary to control pests at all. Before lethal control is considered, prevention methods or deterrents should be implemented, and finally, if lethal control of pests is considered necessary, methods that minimise suffering, fear and pain should be used.¹⁴

Recommendation 1: Pest control should apply responsible use of the most humane methods available, with a focus on prevention and deterrents before lethal control

Alternatives to snares

Alternatives to using snares for fox control include good management techniques to prevent access to livestock, including removing fallen stock promptly to avoid attracting foxes, baited live cage traps (followed by shooting), or free-shooting (known as lamping if carried out at night¹⁵).¹⁶ Guard animals such as llamas, alpacas, and dogs are also used in Europe, South Africa and the US to protect livestock from predation.¹⁷

For rabbits, Government suggested alternatives to snaring include prevention methods such as fencing. Alternative lethal methods including gassing, trapping, ferreting, and shooting.¹⁸ all of which have potential welfare harms.

It is important to recognise that other methods of wildlife control may also compromise welfare. It is paramount that additional research is carried out into the development of alternative methods for the exclusion and deterrence of wildlife, and more humane methods of killing.

Recommendation 2: Further research should be carried out into the development into alternative methods for the exclusion and deterrence of wildlife, and more humane methods of killing.

We consider that there are sufficient alternative means of prevention and deterrence and lethal control available, including cage-trapping and shooting, such that there is no justification for the use of snares even under a licensing regime. A ban should encompass the use of homemade snares.

Recommendation 3: The UK Governments should introduce an outright ban on the use and sale of snares to both the general public and trained operators.

<http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14689>

¹³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18957653/>

¹⁴ Dubois S, Fenwick N, Ryan E, Baker L, Baker S, Beausoleil N, Carter S, Cartwright B, Costa F, Draper C, Griffin J, Grogan A, Howald G, Jones B, Littin K, Lombard A, Mellor D, Ramp D, Schuppli C and Fraser D, 2017. International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control. *Conservation Biology* 31: 753-760.

¹⁵ <https://basc.org.uk/codes-of-practice/night-shooting/>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foxes-moles-and-mink-how-to-protect-your-property-from-damage#foxes>

¹⁷ <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=icwdmsheepgoat>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rabbits-how-to-control-numbers>

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