

The Use of Snares and Fur Trapping in Wales

WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2020

Key Points

- RSPCA Cymru is opposed to the manufacture, sale and use of all snares or any trap which causes suffering. Snares are cruel and indiscriminate in what they catch – and the RSPCA supports an outright ban on their use in Wales. Animals caught in snares can suffer a slow and agonising death due to injury - heightening RSPCA Cymru calls for the Welsh Government to implement an outright ban.
- The RSPCA believes wearing fur is unnecessary and a vast majority of the UK public agree. Fur farming was outlawed in England and Wales in 2000 but importing and exporting fur is still legal. We support any campaign to bring in tighter controls on the trapping, exporting and sale of fur animals in Wales.

Snaring is a method of wildlife management which can cause immense pain and suffering to animals. Victims of snares may die of strangulation or they may weaken, stop struggling and starve to death or be killed by predators, if left unattended. The use of snares is still widespread - and as many as 51,000 fox snares can be active in Wales at any one time¹. The use of fox snares in Wales is subject to legal restrictions, principally through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Deer Act 1991. The use of self-locking snares which tighten with a ratchet-like mechanism is illegal as is the use of snares to catch certain protected animals like badgers and otters. The Welsh Government has also introduced a code of best practice on the use of snares in fox control and users of legal free-running snares must take all reasonable precautions to prevent them catching or causing injury to protected animals like badgers, and to check set snares at least once per day.

- **Snares are indiscriminate in what they catch - and cause suffering**

Snares are indiscriminate, and any animal that moves through the noose is a potential victim. This can include domestic pets and sadly, RSPCA officers regularly respond to incidents where pets have become injured as a consequence of getting trapped in a snare. Even with adherence to good practice, estimates suggest the number of non-target species caught by a snare is unlikely to drop below 40 percent². This illustrates a major problem with snares - that it is near impossible to limit the species or type of animal that will become trapped in them. The indiscriminate nature of snares was further highlighted by the National Assembly for Wales' Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, who noted that snares pose "a risk to the welfare of target and non-target species"³.

¹Written Assembly Question - WAQ66377, February 2014. This outlined estimates which state the number of fox snares set in Wales are at a maximum in March at 51,641.

²Report of the Independent Working Group on Snares, Defra, August 2005

³Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee - Report on the use of snares in Wales, p5, June 2017

- **An updated voluntary code of practice was introduced in 2015**

RSPCA Cymru has engaged with Welsh Government efforts to improve practice regarding the use of snares, and associated dangers with them, through the introduction of a [voluntary Code of Practice](#) on the use of snares in fox control - that exceeds minimum statutory requirements. However, as a voluntary code, there is no legal obligation on any individual setting a snare to follow the guidance within. Unfortunately, the RSPCA all too often witnesses the use of snares which are either set illegally - or against the voluntary code of practice. The Welsh Government is continuing to determine the effectiveness of the Code and whether further measures - including legislation - are required to better regulate the use of snares in Wales⁴. While a ban on the use of snares remains the RSPCA's priority, a statutory code would be welcome steps in the right direction.

- **New Wildlife Act could encompass action on snares and traps**

A multitude of laws presently exist in Wales governing the nation's wildlife. Much of this law is complex, fractured and outdated. The current legislation has been labelled 'out of date, confused and often contradictory' by the Law Commission⁵. RSPCA Cymru believes a full review of the law in Wales regarding snares - and, it is hoped, an outright ban on their use - could be explored as part of a new Wildlife Act. This could transform Wales' current wildlife legislative framework into a modern and accessible piece of law, clearly highlighting to the public their responsibilities for Wales' wildlife - including with regards to the use of snares. Should snares be banned, complementary regulation of other traps would be required to avoid shifting the problem onto other methods of trapping. A complete review and consolidation of wildlife legislation would provide the opportunity to do this.

- **Ethical principles for wildlife management**

The RSPCA believes that any wildlife management plan needs to follow a clear and transparent process, such as that described in the paper entitled 'International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control'⁶. The seven principles described in this paper include a need to define clear objectives for such control and how success will be measured. The RSPCA considers that ethical consideration for wildlife management should be included in any review of wildlife legislation.

- **Robust data collection and monitoring is key - but information is lacking**

Between 2014 and 2018, the RSPCA received 106 reports in Wales where the caller specifically referenced a snare⁷ - though the precise number of reports is likely to be considerably higher. As previously outlined to a committee of Assembly Members, the extent of the use of snares in Wales is 'hard to determine'⁸ given a lack of data. Should a full ban on the use of snares not be forthcoming, exploration on how data can be better collected is key - on snaring practices, compliance with the Code and the impact of use on non-target species.

- **Welfare-friendly wildlife management could be a feature of new farm payments**

The Welsh Government is currently considering the shape of a support package for farmers,

⁴ Written Assembly Questions - WAQ79243, December 2019 and WAQ78378, June 2019

⁵ Law Commission - Modernising wildlife law, 15 October 2013

⁶ Dubois, Sara, Nicole Fenwick, Erin A. Ryan, Liv Baker, Sandra E. Baker, Ngaio J. Beausoleil, Scott Carter, et al. 2017. "International Consensus Principles for Ethical Wildlife Control." *Conservation Biology: The Journal of the Society for Conservation Biology*, January. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12896>.

⁷ RSPCA call statistics - incidents logged in Wales via the RSPCA's National Control Centre, between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2018.

⁸ Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee - Report on the use of snares in Wales, p5, June 2017

following Wales' withdrawal from the European Union, and the subsequent need to replace the Common Agricultural Policy⁹. The RSPCA has encouraged discussions that would potentially provide payments to farmers who use positive, welfare-friendly wildlife management methods on farms¹⁰. This could include ensuring the use of code-compliant snares on farm land, or, preferably, moving away from the use of snares as a tool of wildlife management completely.

- **Any efforts to tighten restrictions on fur trapping are hugely welcome**

Fur farming has been banned in Wales for almost two decades under the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000. The RSPCA believes wearing fur is unnecessary, and is heartened by strong public support on this issue - with surveys demonstrating that 95% of people would refuse to wear real fur¹¹. Fur trapping of certain species, however, can still be legally carried out in this country - with recent reports highlighting the ongoing nature of this activity in Wales. The RSPCA supports any efforts to tighten controls and restrictions on the trapping, exporting and sale of fur animals in Wales.

RSPCA Case Studies

As noted, RSPCA inspectors and officers regularly respond to reports where snares are set illegally, are not compliant with the voluntary Code of Practice, or have caught domestic pets. Examples of such sad incidents in Wales include:

- **Fox snare in Cardiff prompts Code reminder**

RSPCA Cymru rushed to the aid of a Cardiff fox trapped in a snare in December. The snare was set at the foot of a tree, which is not compliant with the Code. Due to the likelihood that setting a snare in this way could cause an animal suffering, setting a snare in this way may also have constituted an offence - [info](#).

- **Two badgers found in snares in matter of days**

A dead badger was found in a snare in Pontgarreg in April 2019, while, only five days later - in a separate incident - a badger was found alive in a snare in the Neath area. It is an offence to set snares to catch badgers - [info](#).

- **Dog's horrific injuries linked to snare**

A dog was picked up in Princetown, Tredegar, with horrific injuries, and a leg hanging off. It is suspected the dog's right hind leg has been left hanging off after getting trapped by a snare, which had gone right through the bone - highlighting how indiscriminate and cruel these devices can be - [info](#).

- **Cat's lucky escape from home-made snare**

A Milford Haven cat had a lucky escape after getting caught in a home-made snare in June 2017. Female grey cat Molly returned to her Hubberston home with a free-running snare around her neck. While free-running snares are not illegal, it is an offence to cause suffering to a protected animal and an example as to the indiscriminate nature of snares - [info](#).

⁹ Welsh Government consultation - Sustainable Farming and our Land

¹⁰ RSPCA Cymru consultation response: Sustainable Farming and our Land, October 2019

¹¹ The study was conducted in Great Britain via TNS PhoneBus, a telephone Omnibus survey. A representative sample of 2004 adults aged from 16 and above were interviewed between 24 September and 3 October 2010.