Regulations on Snares

Snares are regulated in many jurisdictions, but are illegal in other jurisdictions, such as in much of Europe.

Neck snares regulation in Europe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally permitted in 5 EU states</th>
<th>Either banned outright or not used in 10 EU states</th>
<th>Strictly regulated and limited in six Member States</th>
<th>Position in 6 EU states is not yet confirmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium, France, Ireland, Latvia and UK</td>
<td>Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Malta</td>
<td>Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden</td>
<td>Bulgaria, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Switzerland (not in the EU) also has a complete ban on the use of snares

Humaneness as applied to animal welfare

The term ‘humaneness’ is described as ‘the quality of compassion or consideration for others (people or animals)’ [http://www.wordreference.com/definition/humaneness](http://www.wordreference.com/definition/humaneness) and ‘humane’ as ‘marked or motivated by concern with the alleviation of suffering’ [http://www.wordreference.com/definition/humane](http://www.wordreference.com/definition/humane). When used in relation to animals, humane is often taken to mean ‘inflicting the minimum of pain’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary) and this is the normal meaning of the word when humane slaughter of farm animals, or humane killing of companion or laboratory animals, is referred to in legislation or codes of practice. A humane control method is best defined as having little or no negative effect on the animal’s welfare, and an inhumane method as having a significant negative effect on the animal’s welfare such that it is considered unacceptable and/or cruel. The term ‘humane killing’ means that the welfare of the animal just prior to the initiation of the killing procedure is good, and the procedure itself results in insensibility to pain and distress within a few seconds (Broom 1999). When evaluating the humaneness of a control method, its effects on all animals, non-target as well as target, should be considered (Mason & Littin 2003, Iossa et al 2007).

Regulation on mechanical properties of traps

The detailed assessment of mechanical properties of traps is described in two documents published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), one for killing traps (ISO 1999a) and another for restraining traps (ISO 1999b). Despite efforts by the ISO, no consensus could be reached on key thresholds for animal welfare standards such as time to unconsciousness for animals caught in killing traps, or levels of injuries for animals in restraining traps. Other legislation includes two international documents signed by the European Union: the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards signed between the EU, Canada and the Russian Federation (Anonymous 1998), and the Agreed Minute

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between the EU and the USA on humane trapping standards (see Harrop 2000). Since the initial main aim of these Agreements was to facilitate the trade of fur among participant countries, many commonly trapped European mammals (such as the fox and rabbit) are not included (Iossa et al 2007). The International Humane Trapping Standards Agreement lists criteria that killing and restraining traps should meet for a limited number of species (Anon 1998).

Injuries from snares, such as pressure necrosis of tissues, can be difficult to detect because they may not be obvious until several days after an animal is released. The authors note that while neck snares are commonly used in the UK because they are cheap and require minimum effort to set and maintain, reports of misuse are frequent. Even when neck snares are set and used correctly, they commonly catch non-target species and these can have high morbidity and mortality.

**Killing traps**

The humaneness of traps that are designed to kill is usually evaluated on the basis of the time it takes for the trap to render an animal unconscious and insensible to pain, most often measured by the loss of the palpebral (blinking) reflex. A commonly used criterion for a humane trap is that at least 80% of animals become unconscious and unable to recover within up to 6 minutes (e.g. in the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards between the EU, Canada and the Russian Federation).

The documents that set criteria fail to address what happens to the remaining 20% (or fewer) of trapped animals who take longer to die. Even if the criterion of 80% is met, the killing method cannot be considered to be humane if the remaining animals experience a lingering and painful death with very poor welfare.

No trapping method is completely species-specific and certain, including endangered, species may be caught, injured and killed in killing traps set for other species.

**According to the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards between the EU, Canada and the Russian Federation:**

Indicators and time limits (for killing) are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time limit to loss of corneal and palpebral reflexes</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45 seconds</td>
<td>Mustela erminea (горностаи)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 120 seconds                                          | Martes americana (американская куница)  
 Martes zibellina (соболь)  
 Martes martes (лесная куница) |
| 300 seconds[1]                                       | !!! All other species set out in paragraph 4.1. |

[1] The Committee will evaluate the time limit at the three-year review referred to in Article 9(b), where data warrant such action, to adapt the time limit requirement on a species-by-species basis, with a view to lowering the 300 second time limit to 180 seconds, and to define a reasonable time-frame for implementation.

**Thresholds**

A killing trapping method would meet the Standards if:
the number of specimens of the same target species from which the data are derived is at least 12; and

at least 80% of these animals are unconscious and insensible within the time limit, and remain in this state until death.

4.1 The Standards apply to the following species:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coyote</td>
<td>Canis latrans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>Canis lupus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver (North American)</td>
<td>Castor canadensis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver (European)</td>
<td>Castor fiber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobcat</td>
<td>Felix rufus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otter (North American)</td>
<td>Lutra canadensis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otter (European)</td>
<td>Lutra lutra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynx (North American)</td>
<td>Lynx canadensis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynx (European)</td>
<td>Lynx lynx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marten</td>
<td>Martes americana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher</td>
<td>Martes pennanti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sable</td>
<td>Martes zibellina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Marten</td>
<td>Martes martes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badger (European)</td>
<td>Meles meles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ermine</td>
<td>Mustela erminea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raccoon dog</td>
<td>Nyctereutes procyonoides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskrat</td>
<td>Ondatra zibethicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raccoon</td>
<td>Procyon lotor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badger (North American)</td>
<td>Taxidea taxus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Additional species will be included in the future as appropriate.

Restraining traps

The humaneness of restraining traps is most often assessed by the extent of the physical trauma caused by the trap to the captured animal, and injury level is equated with welfare (severe injury = poor welfare). Scoring systems for injuries are ubiquitous in the literature (Olsen et al 1986, Onderka et al 1990, Phillips et al 1996, Hubert et al 1997, ISO 1999b). However, there is much criticism of such systems because a quantitative injury score is not a direct measurement of an injury level, nor of the level of suffering that is likely to be associated with such injury.

The ISO methods for testing restraining traps (1999b), which rely on the scoring of injuries, are considered by some researchers to be the best currently available scoring system for assessing the humaneness of restraining traps (Harris et al 2006). They improve on earlier injury scales in three ways: they have a larger number of categories, incorporating examination of all body areas including areas previously not covered (e.g. ocular injuries), they advocate examination of injuries by veterinary pathologists, thereby reducing any individual bias, and, being international standards they allow for better comparative assessment. Nevertheless, they have the following failings:

- they do not account for the compounding effect of multiple lesser injuries
- some injuries receive a low or moderate injury score but are capable of causing severe pain (e.g. permanent tooth fracture with exposure of pulp cavity)
• they do not take into account for how long the injury is present before the animal is killed
• they do not require testing of traps with non-target animals
• they do not take into account the long-term impact of some injuries in animals that escape or in non-target animals that are released
• they do not give guidelines on how to avoid capture of non-target species

Criteria for injuries sustained by animals in restraining traps were not set by the ISO, but a draft ISO agreement indicated that no more than 20% of tested animals could have an injury score of 75 or greater (Talling JC, personal communication). This again raises concerns about the welfare of up to 20% of animals restrained in traps who may sustain severe injuries, such as limb amputation or spinal cord damage, or die from their injuries.

The extent of injuries and distress experienced by a trapped animal is strongly influenced by the length of time it is restrained in the trap. A long restraint time is a factor in the development of dehydration (Powell 2005, Marks 2010), starvation, effects of exposure (e.g. hypothermia), and capture myopathy (see further). It can also cause stress by disrupting natural behaviour and motivational systems (Schütz et al 2006, Sharp & Saunders 2008). Females may be prevented from returning to their offspring, who will subsequently die of starvation. Current guidelines state that restraining traps should be checked at least once every 24 hours but even this may be too long, and lead to considerable worsening of welfare, for most animals. Powell & Proulx (2003) recommend that restraining traps should be checked at least twice daily, and more often if weather conditions are poor.

According to the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards between the EU, Canada and the Russian Federation, for restraining snares thresholds are:

2.4. Thresholds

A restraining trapping method would meet the Standards if:

(a) the number of specimens of the same target species from which the data are derived is at least 20; and

(b) at least 80% of these animals show none of the indicators listed in paragraphs 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

2.3.1. Behavioral indicators recognised as indicators of poor welfare in trapped wild animals are:

(a) self-directed biting leading to severe injury (self-mutilation);

(b) excessive immobility and unresponsiveness.

2.3.2. Inquiries recognised as indicators of poor welfare in trapped wild animals are:

(a) fracture;

(b) joint luxation proximal to the carpus or tarsus;

(c) severance of a tendon or ligament;
major periosteal abraison;
severe external haemorrhage or haemorrhage into an internal cavity;
major skeletal muscle degeneration;
limb ischaemia;
fracture of a permanent tooth exposing pulp cavity;
ocular damage including corneal laceration;
spinal cord injury;
severe internal organ damage;
myocardial degeneration;
amputation;
death.

In practice all the above listed indicators may occur for far more than 20% trapped species, and first of all - death and amputation

PROBLEMS:

Snares are indiscriminate (!!!)

They may be set to trap foxes, rabbits or hares but in reality any animal is at risk as it is impossible to set a snare that will only catch the intended species. The report by academics at Cambridge University, *The Impact of Snares on Animal Welfare*, found that 'Snares are inherently indiscriminate and commonly catch non-target, including protected, species.' The proportion of non-target species caught and held in snares set for foxes has been calculated as ranging from 21-69%.

The number and diversity of animals that fall victim to snares is immense. It is not possible to control which animals will be caught in a snare. A snare set to catch a fox is just as capable of catching other species. Cats, dogs, badgers, otters, deer, hares and livestock have all suffered terrible injuries or been killed by snares.

The 2007 Scottish SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) released a report on snaring compiled from the evidence of Scottish SPCA inspectors, wildlife crime police officers and vets. It showed that of the animals caught in snares - ranging from badgers and deer to pet cats and dogs - only 23% of the animals reported were the intended foxes or rabbits. Therefore a massive 77% of animals caught were of other non-target species.

In July 2016 Parliamentary hearings were held in the UK on snaring which uncovered the following myths:

1. Myth about a "better code of practice" as a solution

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The predominant legislation in this matter covering all parts of the United Kingdom is the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*, which prohibits the use of self-locking snares, lays out the requirement to inspect the snare once in every 24 hours, and prohibits the use of snares to catch various protected mammals, including otters and badgers.\(^3\)

In 2005, Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs introduced a Code of Practice on the use of snares. The Code sets out best practice in the use of snares, including guidance on where and how to set snares for different species and possible steps to take to avoid trapping ‘non-target’ species. It should be noted that compliance with the Code is voluntary. In 2012 Report DEFRA found that although 95% of gamekeepers surveyed were aware of the code of practice and some - 38% - had also been trained in the use of fox snares, not a single fox snare operator visited during the study was fully compliant with the code of conduct a full 7 years after it had been introduced.

Among farmers there is a lack of knowledge of the code of practice, with a shocking 36% of farmers unaware of its existence. It was clear from the report that, whether people were aware of it or not, the code of practice was not being adhered to. Most snare operators use snares which are not compliant with the code of practice.

League Against Cruel Sports has provided further evidence that the code of practice cannot prevent animals from suffering in snares. In February 2015 investigators captured graphic scenes of foxes and rabbits caught in snares. Despite Government guidelines stating that snares must be used only as restraining rather than killing devices, all the animals filmed were dead when found.

2. Myth about applicability of snares for target animals

Although their purpose is to immobilise target animals, most snares cause extreme suffering to animals and often lead to a painful, lingering death. Animals caught in snares suffer huge stress and can sustain horrific injuries. Snares can cause abdominal, chest, neck, leg and head injuries to animals. Some animals get their legs caught in snares and end up with the wire cutting through to the bone. Such animals may attempt to escape by gnawing off their own limbs. Others are caught around the body.

In 2012 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) produced an extensive report on snaring in England and Wales, which suggests that up to 1.7 million animals are trapped in these primitive devices every year, which equates to almost 200 animals caught each and every hour. Moreover, because snares capture any animal that happens to step into them, little more than 25% of the animals trapped were found in DEFRA’s field studies to be foxes, the intended victims. The other ~75% included hares, 33%; badgers, 26%—both of which are protected species—and a further 14% described as “other”. That is almost 1/4 of a million animals, including deer and domestic pets such as cats and dogs, captured every year. That goes to the heart of the inefficiency of snares as a device for animal control.

DEFRA’s independent working group on snares concluded in 2005 that it would be difficult to reduce non-target catches to less than 40%. According to DEFRA’s 2012 report, 260,000 snares are in use in England and Wales. The report reveals that 95% of landholdings do not use snares.

The League Against Cruel Sports reports that 69% of animals caught are not the target species. Hares, badgers and even cats and dogs, even Scottish wildcats - Britain’s rarest mammal - being killed in snares. It is illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to set a trap or snare intended to injure a

\(^3\) UK Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs
protected animal such as a badger, otter or red squirrel. **It cannot be right that people can escape prosecution simply by arguing that they lacked the intention to catch those animals, when the likelihood of a protected animal, rather than the intended targets, being caught is so high.**

3. Myth about pest control

*Neither the Wildlife Trusts nor the Woodland Trust use snares. Utility companies, local authorities, Network Rail, Natural England, Highways England and the Forestry Commission all manage their land without using snares for pest control.* 95% of large landowners do not use snares, nor do 250 municipal authorities.

*It is important to look at the behaviour of foxes. They are very competitive and territorial, so if space is vacated because a fox has been killed, other foxes will move into that area and breeding will increase to fill the space. That has been proven over 40 years, with our fox community remaining consistent at 250,000 adults.*

4. Myth about technical "improvements"

Up to 30% of free-running snares become rusty or getting stuck. **They are then no longer free-running, but dysfunctional and the cause of additional animal cruelty.** We have also heard that catches are indiscriminate because snares do not identify the animal about to put its head, body or part of its body through the noose. Only 25% of snared animals are foxes; 33% are hares; 26% are badgers, and 14% are deer, otters and domestic animals such as cats and dogs. It is a criminal offence to harm domestic pets, but they also fall foul of snares. **So do humans—fell runners and ramblers get caught up in and injured by snares.**

Even if a snare remains "free running" it causes immense suffering and deaths:

> From the veterinary perspective, snares are primitive indiscriminate traps that are recognised as causing widespread suffering to a range of animals. At their least injurious, snares around the neck can result in abrasion and splitting of the skin. However, being caught in a snare is extremely distressing for any creature and vigorous attempts to escape are natural. **These efforts cause the snare wire to kink, thereby changing a free-running snare to a self-locking one.** Strangulation and choking follow. It is commonplace for snares to lodge around the chest, abdomen or legs rather than the neck. In such instances the stop restraint is ineffective and the wire cuts through skin and muscle and, eventually, bone. Badgers may be eviscerated when the abdominal wall is cut through. **Amputation of the lower limb and foot by a snare is well-documented in deer. These unfortunate animals suffer immensely.**

5. Myth about non-support of the ban

According to a 2014 Ipsos MORI poll, 77% of British people think snares should be banned. According to a Dods poll taken in 2015, 68% of UK MPs would support a ban. Veterinary opinion also firmly supports a ban on these cruel and indiscriminate traps. A 2015 poll of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses across the UK found that 87% of respondents believed that snaring is not a humane method of pest control. The figure was even higher - 92% - among those who had experience of treating animals that had been snared.

**Summary of snares' drawbacks/Reasons for their ban:**

- Snares do not operate humanely, either as restraining or as killing traps
- The mortality and morbidity of animals caught in snares is higher than with most other restraining traps
• Snares are inherently indiscriminate and commonly catch non-target, including protected, species
• Snares can cause severe injuries, pain, suffering, and death in trapped animals (target and non-target species)
• Stopping of snares cannot prevent injury or death in trapped animals (target and non-target species)
• The free-running mechanism of a snare is easily disrupted and likely to fail, resulting in injury, pain, suffering, and death in trapped animals (target and non-target species)
• Animals can legally be left in snares for up to 24 hours, exposing them to the elements, to thirst, hunger, further injury and attack by predators
• It is difficult to assess the severity of injury in an animal when it is caught in a snare
• Animals that escape, or that are released, may subsequently die from their injuries, or from exertional myopathy, over a period of days or weeks
• The monitoring of correct snare use is difficult, if not impossible
• Neck snares are open to abuse because they are cheap and require minimum effort to set and maintain
• Methods used to kill animals caught in snares are not regulated, and may not be humane
• The use of neck snares is seen as the least favourable option and the least humane of all legal trapping methods by the public