



Considerations for Trapping Nuisance Wildlife with Box Traps

Authors: Brian J. MacGowan, Purdue University; Rick Shadel, S & S Wildlife Control Services

Effective control of wildlife damage around the home and yard requires an integrated approach. Trapping animals is rarely the solution by itself given that most problem animals are relatively common. The circumstances that attracted one animal are likely to attract others. In some cases, the visual and olfactory cues left by one animal can attract others too. However, removal of wildlife is often required to curb damage immediately or to eliminate animals from human dwellings and other structures.

Homeowners commonly set box traps to capture and remove wildlife from their home or yard. Despite the simple

design of box traps, many homeowners do not set them properly. Incorrect usage of box traps can decrease their effectiveness and even lead to safety risks to both people and wildlife.

The purpose of this publication is to 1) outline the legal and ethical factors homeowners should consider before setting a trap for free-ranging mammals, 2) review the basic procedure for effectively trapping wildlife with box traps, and 3) help you to determine the fate of the captured animal. This information will help you to increase the box trap's effectiveness while reducing risks for both people and animals.

Before you set a trap

Realistic Expectations

Box traps or cage traps are probably the most common trap homeowners use to capture nuisance wild animals on their property. They are relatively easy and safe to operate. Because of this, people may have false expectations that box traps will not harm animals. Any trap, including box traps and other “live” traps, hold some risk to the animal and the person setting it. Animals captured in box traps can get minor scratches and bruises even when the trap is used properly. In some circumstances, animals can die due to complications from capture myopathy. However, following the common-sense guidelines in this publication can greatly minimize these issues.

CAPTURE MYOPATHY

Capture myopathy is a disease of the muscle that can occur in animals under stress typically from a chase, struggle, capture or transport. Muscle damage results from this exertion. Capture myopathy can result in sudden death or take hours to weeks for clinical signs to develop.

Capture myopathy has been documented in a wide range of mammals and birds. According to *Zoo Animal and Wildlife Immobilization and Anesthesia (2nd. Ed)*, the following factors can influence the likelihood of occurrence. First, some animal species are particularly predisposed to this disease. Any nuisance wild animal captured with box traps are susceptible under certain conditions. However, tree squirrels and particularly red squirrels are the most predisposed to capture myopathy. Second, environmental factors such as extreme temperatures, rain, or high humidity can increase the likelihood of occurrence. Third, how the animal is captured is important. Excessive handling, prolonged restraint, crating, transportation, and exposure to stimuli that cause fear can all predispose animals to capture myopathy.

Legal Considerations

Before setting a trap, you should know the rules and permit requirements for trapping wild mammals in order to avoid fines and legal trouble. Some species of wildlife are legally protected. Since these laws and regulations change, you should verify the current rules with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Indiana classifies wild mammals as either regulated or exempted. Regulated wildlife include species that are listed as state endangered and species listed in 312 IAC 9 (Table 1). All other mammal species are exempted species (Table 2). Exempted wild animals are unprotected and may be trapped or possessed any time of year without a permit. Permits are required to trap some regulated species that are causing damage to property or posing a health or safety risk to people or domestic animals.

Table 1. List of regulated wild mammal species in Indiana (October 19, 2018).

Regulated Wildlife Species		
Family	Scientific Name	Common Name
Opossums	<i>Didelphis virginiana</i>	Virginia opossum
Bats	<i>Corynorhinus rafinesquii</i>	Rafinesque's big-eared bat
	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	Big brown bat
	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	Silver-haired bat
	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	Red bat
	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	Hoary bat
	<i>Myotis austroriparius</i>	Southeastern myotis
	<i>Myotis grisescens</i>	Gray myotis ^{1,2}
	<i>Myotis leibii</i>	Eastern small-footed myotis
	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Little brown myotis ²
	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Northern long-eared myotis ²
	<i>Myotis sodalis</i>	Indiana myotis ^{1,2}
	<i>Nycticeius humeralis</i>	Evening bat ²
	<i>Perimyotis subflavus</i>	Tri-colored bat ²
Rabbits and Hares	<i>Sylvilagus aquaticus</i>	Swamp rabbit ²
	<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i>	Eastern cottontail
Squirrels	<i>Glaucomys volans</i>	Southern flying squirrel
	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	Gray squirrel
	<i>Sciurus niger</i>	Fox squirrel
	<i>Spermophilus franklinii</i>	Franklin's ground squirrel ²
Beavers	<i>Castor canadensis</i>	Beaver
New World rats, mice, voles	<i>Neotoma magister</i>	Allegheny woodrat
	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	Muskrat
Coyotes, dogs, foxes	<i>Canis latrans</i>	Coyote
	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Red fox
	<i>Urocyon cinereoargenteus</i>	Gray fox
Raccoons	<i>Procyon lotor</i>	Raccoon
Weasels, badgers, otters	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	River otter
	<i>Mustela frenata</i>	Long-tailed weasel
	<i>Mustela vison</i>	Mink
	<i>Taxidea taxus</i>	Badger
Skunks	<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	Striped skunk
Cats	<i>Lynx rufus</i>	Bobcat
Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	White-tailed deer

¹Federally listed endangered species

²State listed endangered species

Table 2. List of exempted wild animals (as of October 19, 2018).

Exempted Wildlife Species		
Family	Scientific Name	Common Name
Shrews	<i>Blarina brevicauda</i>	Northern short-tailed shrew
	<i>Cryptotis parva</i>	Least shrew
	<i>Sorex cinereus</i>	Masked shrew
	<i>Sorex fumeus</i>	Smoky shrew
	<i>Sorex hoyi</i>	Pygmy shrew
	<i>Sorex longirostris</i>	Southeastern shrew
Moles	<i>Condylura cristata</i>	Star-nosed mole
	<i>Scalopus aquaticus</i>	Eastern mole
Squirrels	<i>Marmota monax</i>	Woodchuck
	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	Red squirrel
	<i>Tamias striatus</i>	Eastern chipmunk
	<i>Spermophilus tridecemlineatus</i>	Thirteen-lined ground squirrel
Gophers	<i>Geomys bursarius</i>	Plains pocket gopher
New World rats, mice, voles	<i>Reithrodontomys megalotis</i>	Western harvest mouse
	<i>Peromyscus maniculatus</i>	Prairie deer mouse
	<i>Peromyscus leucopus</i>	White-footed mouse
	<i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i>	Meadow vole
	<i>Microtus ochrogaster</i>	Prairie vole
	<i>Microtus pinetorum</i>	Woodland vole
	<i>Synaptomys cooperi</i>	Southern bog lemming
Old World rats and rats	<i>Mus musculus</i>	House mouse
	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	Norway rat
Jumping mice	<i>Zapus hudsonius</i>	Meadow jumping mouse
Weasels, badgers, otters	<i>Mustela nivalis</i>	Least weasel

When setting box traps, you may unintentionally capture a domestic dog or cat; however, these animals are protected under Indiana Code. Intentionally killing a domestic animal without owner consent is unlawful¹ unless the person reasonably believes the conduct was necessary to:

- a) prevent injury to the accused person or another person.¹
- b) protect the property of the accused person from destruction or substantial damage.¹
- c) prevent a seriously injured vertebrate animal from prolonged suffering.¹

If you unintentionally catch a domestic dog or cat in a trap, you should release it on site unharmed. Simply seeing a dog or cat on your property does not justify its destruction according to Indiana law.¹ Destruction of a vertebrate animal is allowable when the animal is:

- a) endangering, harassing, or threatening livestock or a domestic animal.²
- b) destroying or damaging a person's property.²
- c) observed in the act of killing or injuring livestock and action is taken by the landowner or with the landowner's consent.³

Traps for regulated wildlife must be checked at least once every 24 hours by law.⁴ This trap check law does not apply to mole traps or other exempted species. However, it is good practice to check traps daily when using box traps. Any animal caught in a trap must be removed from the trap when checked. Within 24 hours of capture, animals must be released or euthanized. When on-site release is not desired, trapped animals must be released in the county of capture with **prior** consent from the landowner or property manager where the animal is released; this includes public property.

¹ IC 35-46-3-12

² IC 35-46-3-5

³ IC 15-20-2

⁴ 312 IAC 9-10-11

SETTING UP THE TRAP

Box Trap Basics

Box traps are not appropriate for all types of wildlife, but can be effective in catching many common species of nuisance mammals including raccoon, cottontail rabbit, opossum, gray squirrel, groundhog, and striped skunk. For the purposes of this publication, the term "box trap" includes all box-type traps regardless of size, shape (some are cylindrical), or material. These are relatively simple devices. The sides are made of various gauge wire and a gravity or spring-loaded door is held open by a trigger. The treadle is attached to the trigger with a trigger rod (Figure 1) that may be located inside the trap or outside the trap. The trap is fired when an animal enters and places weight on the metal treadle (Figure 2), pulling the trigger off of the door. Once closed, the door is usually locked in place with a bar and tab. The tab must be pulled up and bar depressed in order to open and/or set the trap.



Figure 1. Close up of the trigger and trigger rod.



Figure 2. View of the trap treadle (sometimes called a pan). Make sure the space under the treadle is clear of sticks, rocks and other debris that may interfere with trap function.

Selecting a Trap

Size

Box traps come in a variety of sizes (Table 3), but no single trap size or type will fit all situations. Even though trap sizes are designed for specific animals, any animal that can squeeze into an open trap may be captured, so this must be taken into account when selecting a size. For example, larger traps with heavier gaged wire are better suited for large-bodied raccoons, which are more prone to damaging traps. However, larger traps give more room for smaller animals to “bounce” around in the trap, which may increase the likelihood of minor injuries. Smaller traps, on the other hand, limit the amount of movement within the trap but surprisingly large animals can fit inside them, increasing the likelihood of bent or broken parts.

Table 3. Typical box traps and sizes for selected wildlife species.

Species	Material	Cross sectional size (inches)	Length (inches)
Skunks, opossum, rabbit	Wire	7 x 7 or 7 x 8	20-24
Skunk, raccoon	PVC	6-10 diameter	24-30
Skunk, raccoon, woodchuck	Poly	12 x 12	32
Skunk	Poly	9 x 9	24
Raccoon	Wire	11 x 12	30-36
Squirrel	Wire	5 x 5 or 6 x 6	18-19

Material

Box trap materials vary. Traps for skunks can be made of 10-inch diameter PVC pipe. Most traps are constructed of various gauged wire. Some box traps have plastic sides, but you should avoid using solid plastic traps at hot locations with direct sun exposure.

Doors

Different traps have different style doors with most closing by gravity. Once the trap is closed, a release is required to open the trap, which prevents an animal from opening the door by rolling the trap. Some traps have doors on either end of the trap (i.e., two trap doors); however, this does not add much in terms of trap function for most situations faced by homeowners. One trap door functions effectively, as animals will eventually find the open end and enter.

An additional door adds to cost and a double-door is more difficult to bait and set; for the novice trapper this often results in animals stealing the bait without triggering the trap. If it is triggered, more moving parts increases the likelihood of something breaking or animal escape.

Release door

Some box traps have a slide release door in the rear of the trap. These are used to transfer animals from one trap to another trap or holding box. Most homeowners will not require this type of feature.

Nose cone

Swing-type doors have the benefit of making it difficult for an animal to escape. They also have the disadvantage of extending beyond the edge of the trap when open. Attaching a nose cone allows the trap to be set flush to a vertical surface (Figure 3). The end of the cone has a sliding front door and there is an opening on the bottom, allowing the trap to be placed directly over an opening or burrow entrance.



Figure 3. Specialty traps or trap accessories can be helpful in certain situations. For catching animals inhabiting burrows, a nose cone changes the position of the entry to the bottom of the trap. Since the nose cone extends beyond the door, the trap with nose cone assembly can be placed adjacent to a building or wall over a burrow entrance. Note that the sliding end door is removed on the pictured trap.

Colony traps

Colony traps are designed to catch many animals at once, since wildlife may be present in groups. Doors on both ends are spring loaded so animals may enter but it is difficult for them to leave.

Approaches to Trapping with Box Traps

Applying a common-sense approach when trapping wild animals can increase efficiency while minimizing risk of capture myopathy. Avoid or minimize disturbing a captured animal. If you trap animals during extreme temperatures, rain, or high humidity, check the traps 2-3 times per day rather than just once. Remember, checking the trap simply means to verify visually if an animal is caught. For box traps, this can often be done from a distance. If the trap is open, resist the urge to readjust it frequently.

Trap function

Prior to setting a trap, be sure to check its functionality. Does each door close completely? Does the treadle pan trigger the door to close? You can test if a trap will trigger by tapping firmly on the side of the trap. The most common problem with traps is parts being bent by trapped animals, particularly the treadle pan and the trigger rod. Most manufacturers sell replacement parts that can be purchased online from the manufacturer or a trapping supply company. Bending the parts to their original state is also an option; however, it can be challenging to repair them so that the trap functions acceptably.

Location

Where you set your trap is important. Obviously, you want to set the trap where you observed the animal or see signs of one, such as along trails, natural pinch points, bottlenecks, or near dig outs and burrow entrances. Avoid placing the trap on or near plants, turf grass, or materials you do not want damaged, since captured animals can pull materials into the trap or even roll it. Place the trap in a mulch bed to prevent damage or on a piece of plywood to protect turf grass. The plywood should extend beyond the trap 5 to 6 inches on all sides. Raccoons have a long reach, especially when captured by inexpensive traps that use 1- by 2-inch wire, which are the type sold at most hardware stores. If purchasing a box trap you should invest in a professional model. These will cost more but for most people this is well worth the reduction in frustration.

Staking the trap

Driving a couple of stakes through the floor of the trap can stabilize it and prevent captured animals from rolling the trap (Figure 4).



Figure 4. A metal rod pushed through both the side and base of a box trap (top). Staking a trap on both sides (bottom) in this manner will prevent trap rolling.

Covering the trap

Consider covering the sides and top of the trap with cardboard (Figure 5). Attach the cardboard to the trap with a couple pieces of wire or duct tape. Trap covers conceal captured animals from others and offer trapped animals protection from the elements. Do not use plastic, metal or roofing paper to cover traps during warmer weather because these materials hold in heat and may kill the captive animal. Instead, use cardboard, which breathes more and allows for better air circulation.



Figure 5. A box trap covered with cardboard to protect captured animals, facilitate animal entry, protect and prolong your bait and lures, help with skunk release or transfer, and minimize your exposure to the animal. Note modifications or “cut-outs” of the cardboard would be required to stake the trap or for traps with external trigger bars.

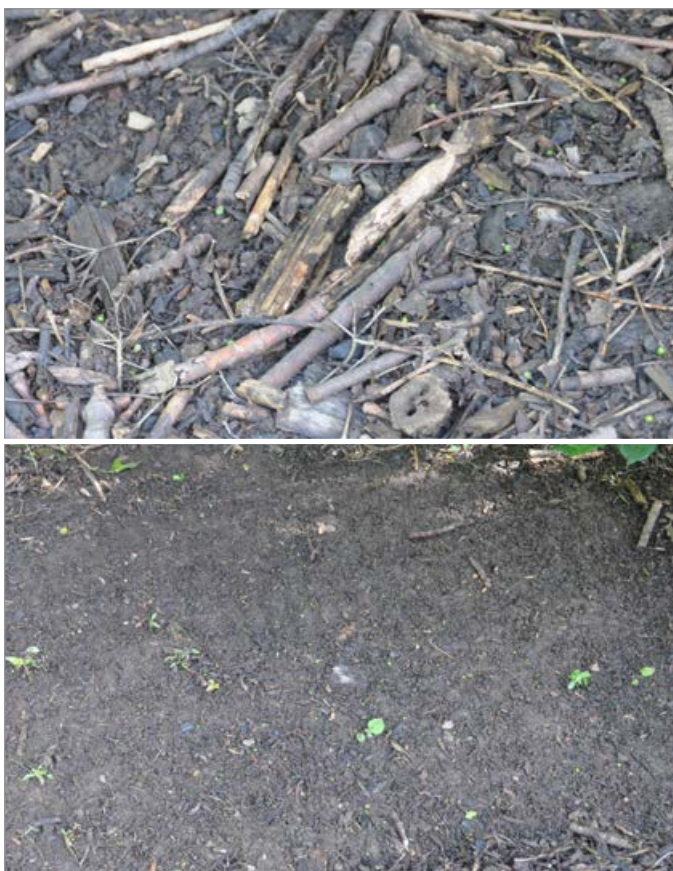


Figure 6. Sticks, mulch and other debris under a trap can impede proper trap function (top). Prior to setting a trap, remove any debris for a firm trapping bed (bottom). Work the trap back and forth so the trap does not wobble.

Placement of the trap

Prior to placing the trap, clear the area underneath of rocks and debris that will prevent the treadle pan from functioning properly (Figure 6). This will also create a smooth, flat surface, which stabilizes the trap. Finally, rock the trap back and forth on the ground while you place downward pressure and set the trap. This will bed the trap in its location. Even a slight wobble to a trap may deter an animal from entering. When placing a trap on uneven hard surfaces or dry ground you can stabilize a trap by shimming it with wood or stone. Placing grass or mulch debris on the trap floor may make the surface more appealing; however, avoid disrupting proper trap function (e.g., debris under the treadle or preventing complete door closure).

Baiting

Different animals are attracted to different types of food (Table 4) and there are also commercial baits available. Even animals not enticed by the bait may be caught if they can fit in the trap. Using a preferred bait reduces, but does not eliminate, the likelihood of capturing a non-target animal.

You should avoid placing large amounts of bait in a trap, since the goal is to attract them into the trap, not feed them for days. Large amounts of bait will not increase effectiveness and can be difficult to clean out of a trap. For a one-door trap, place the bait in the back, rear of the treadle, but as far away from the sides of the trap as possible. For two-door traps, place the bait near the center of the trap either on the treadle or hung above the treadle. Two-door traps are more complicated to operate and are not recommended for new users. It is best to set only one door and force the animal to go over the treadle to get the bait.

Pre-baiting can increase the capture rate of some difficult-to-trap species (e.g., tree squirrels, rabbit) or animals that are trap shy. To pre-bait a trap, lock the door of the trap into the open position using a stake, wire or zip tie (Figure 7). Apply a small amount of bait outside of the trap near the entrance and just inside the trap. After observing signs of feeding (typically after 1-3 days) set the trap with the bait as directed above and remove the wire or zip tie that prevents the door from closing.



Figure 7. Using a stake or similar device to hold the trap door open is helpful when pre-baiting a trap or releasing a captured animal.

Table 4. Common bait types for select wildlife species. All baits should be placed rear of the treadle for one-door traps.

Species	Bait item	Notes
Small rodents (mice, voles, chipmunks, squirrels)	Nut meats	You can mix with just <u>barely enough</u> peanut butter or soy nut butter to stick together. Too much can make it oily and difficult to clean or freshen.
Woodchuck, groundhog	Apple; cantaloupe; pear; alfalfa	Rub on sides of trap and on the ground by the door.
Raccoon, skunk, opossum	Marshmallows; marshmallow cream; donuts; grape jelly; canned cat food; meat baits	May have to hang on a wire to reduce ants. Place jelly or marshmallow cream in small dish or plate.

Trap shyness

Animal behavior contributes to trapping success. Just like dogs and cats, wild animals act differently from one animal to the next. Some animals are “trap happy” and eagerly enter traps. Repeated captures of a non-target animal released on site would be an example of this behavior. Animals are usually more easily trapped when other food sources are exhausted. “Trap shy” animals are more difficult to trap. Regardless of whether you are dealing with an experienced, wary adult or a previously-captured animal, it can be a challenge. Patience is the key when faced with an animal that will not enter a trap. A newly placed trap is a foreign object in an animal’s environment and causes some wildlife to act cautiously.

People are often eager to move a trap after a day or two of no success. This is a mistake. Do not move the trap or change the stimuli around the trap area. If you have no success after two days, try rebaiting the trap with the same bait (Table 4) you used when you first set the trap. Repeat 2 to 4 days if necessary. Sometimes it takes a while for an animal to become habituated to the trap. Once you move a trap or change the bait, this “familiarization” process starts all over. Only after a week of no success should you consider moving the trap or using a different bait. This is relatively uncommon, but if you encounter another week of no success, consider using an alternative trap type or another legal method. A box trap is not effective in all circumstances.

Avoiding non-targets

It is impossible to eliminate all non-target catches. However, when using box traps, three things can reduce non-target catches: trap size, bait choice, and set location. Trap size limits what animals can fit in a trap, but many common nuisance animals are similarly sized so this only works to a certain point. Bait type is also not a guarantee; not all animals prefer the same foods (Table 4), but there is overlap among some species. The most common non-target species people want to avoid trapping is the neighborhood cats and skunks; dogs are not a concern because they rarely enter a box trap. The best approach to minimize the chance of catching these species is to avoid cat food and other meat-based bait items. While meat may work on raccoons, meat baits are also attractive to cats, skunks and opossums.

Lastly, where and how you set the trap can be important in avoiding non-targets. Skunks are poor climbers. Elevating traps can eliminate access by skunks or rabbits while allowing access to climbing species such as raccoons and opossums. When elevating a trap on a table or other surface, be sure to secure the trap to the platform. There are many options for doing this, but affixing the trap to the surface with screws and brackets works well. You may want to screw the trap to a piece of plywood or similar material, then clamp or affix the plywood to the raised platform. Never place traps on surfaces and tables where people eat. Animals carry many diseases and pests that can affect people.

FATE OF THE CAPTURED ANIMAL

Prior to setting any trap, you should have a plan for what you are going to do with captured animals. This plan should include all potential animals you might catch, not only your target animal. Even if it is unlikely that you will catch a skunk, for example, you have a responsibility to prepare for that contingency.

The biggest decision is whether to euthanize the animal or relocate it to another site. Both choices are legal if done appropriately (see “legal considerations” above). People who relocate trapped animals might do so out of convenience or morality. However, there are consequences to both choices that must be considered. What happens to relocated animals? What are humane choices for euthanizing animals?

Translocation

Translocation is the movement of an animal outside of its home range. Researchers have investigated the fate of translocated animals by capturing nuisance animals, anaesthetizing them, affixing radio transmitters, releasing them to a suitable “natural” habitat, and then tracking their movements and fate. Movements and survival are sometimes compared to resident animals within the release areas. Data from these studies indicates that translocated animals rarely remain where you release them, even if the habitat is relatively large and of perceived good quality. Nuisance wildlife are often relatively abundant. Moving these animals to other locations likely places them in direct competition for resources with resident animals of the same species. Newly-translocated wildlife may be moving to find available resources or attempting to return to their natal area.

While releasing animals may seem more humane, post-release mortality is often high. Predation is the most common cause of mortality, although other causes likely exist that have yet to be determined. Since researchers are experienced and use anesthesia to reduce the risk of released animals dying from capture myopathy, the rate of mortality is likely higher than indicated by research studies.

The translocation of wildlife can also contribute to the spread of diseases. Wild animals may carry a particular disease or parasite, but may not show any clinical signs. By moving animals to areas not affected, you can unknowingly spread disease. This is why there are often legal restrictions on where or how far trapped animals may be released.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is derived from the Greek words *eu* meaning good and *thanatos* meaning death. It is generally interpreted as a death that minimizes or eliminates pain, although the rapidness of death, the degree of stress involved, and the justification may also be a consideration. This article will not debate the moral and ethical questions surrounding the euthanasia of animals or what methods of euthanasia are acceptable; however, there are resources available that may help you.

The American Veterinary Medical Association produced and regularly updates the AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals. These recommendations are intended for veterinarians “who must use their professional judgment in applying them to the various settings where animals are to be euthanized.” While these guidelines have a section on free-ranging wildlife, it recognizes the difficulty in meeting these standards in these situations. “Free-ranging animals may need to be killed quickly and efficiently in ways that may not fulfill the criteria for euthanasia established by the [AVMA].” Since these guidelines are written for veterinarians, some of the acceptable methods are not possible for most people due to a lack of expertise or the availability of drugs and specialized equipment.

The American Society of Mammalogists published a document titled, “Guidelines of the American Society of Mammalogists For the Use of Wild Mammals in Research.” The ASM wrote these guidelines for individuals conducting research involving wild mammals so some of their recommendations are not applicable or possible for the general public.

Other Considerations When Trapping Animals

Capture Myopathy

Actions taken around a trapped animal should focus on minimizing the risk of capture myopathy. Reduce loud noises and other stimuli as much as possible, and if you move an animal to release it at another location minimize sudden movements of the trap. You can reduce or eliminate visual stimuli for the animal by covering the trap with cardboard or even an old blanket or towel. Although wild animals are frequently around the yard and house, they are not generally accustomed to being face-to-face with people. You should be extremely quiet and cautious. Remember that gray squirrels and red squirrels seem particularly susceptible to capture myopathy.

Safety

Although this article has focused mainly on animal welfare, trapping wild animals always poses risks for people. Many wild animals appear cute and cuddly, but all animals are capable of biting or scratching. How an animal behaves is not necessarily indicative of their state of health. Otherwise healthy looking animals can carry diseases, viruses, worms, and other pathogens that create health issues for people and pets. To reduce risks, you should always wear heavy leather gloves when handling traps that hold animals. Never poke your fingers inside the trap or let a body part touch the outside, even if you are wearing gloves or other protective equipment. Be particularly aware of this rule when picking up a trap or releasing a trapped animal.

If translocating an animal, avoid placing caged animals in areas of a vehicle that people can occupy (e.g., on the back seat). Wild animals may evacuate themselves during transportation, leaving behind waste that can carry diseases transmittable to people or pets. Ideally, animals should be transported to the release site in the cargo bed of a pick-up truck.

Cleaning traps between uses will minimize the transmission of various disease pathogens. Heavy disposable gloves are highly recommended when cleaning the capture location or handling traps that have held wild animals. You should inspect the trap after each use for visible debris, hose the trap off, and allow it to dry outside. Use a pressure washer to remove stubborn debris. Once all of the visible debris is removed, you can use a solution of bleach and water to disinfect the trap, but never assume that all pathogens have been removed. The use of an open flame applied to the trap or capture area will destroy pathogens more effectively but creates additional hazards. To disinfect the traps, thereby destroying or killing most germs, a solution of one quarter to three quarters cup of bleach to a gallon of water is necessary. A solution of 1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 gallon of water will only sanitize the traps. Commercial disinfectants are also available, but some may not be appropriate for all species of animals; always read the label before using. With a brush and bucket, scrub all the surfaces of the trap, rinse, and allow to dry. Avoid storing and cleaning traps in the living space of the house or apartment.

Skunks

A common question of homeowners is what to do if you catch a skunk. Covering a trap with cardboard as described previously is strongly recommended if you think you may catch a skunk. Remember, many skunks are caught when people are attempting to catch a different species of animal. To release a skunk from a trap, approach the trap slowly and calmly, avoiding loud noises or sudden movements. In most cases, the skunk will be asleep or resting in the trap so you do not want to surprise it. Gently open the door and slide a piece of rebar, pipe, stake or similar item through the side so it keeps the door open; then walk away. The skunk will find its way out of the trap. If the skunk stomps its forelimbs or arches its back, immediately stop what you are doing and back away a step or two. Usually it will settle down and you can continue. Younger skunks tend to be more eager to spray than older skunks, but that is not always the case.

Summary

Most people can set and capture animals easily with a box trap; however, it is your responsibility to understand the many legal, ethical, and technical considerations before ever setting a trap. This will ensure the most effective and humane experience for the animal, while protecting you and your domestic animals from danger and disease.

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