

4-1-1974

Trapping Small Predators

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, "Trapping Small Predators" (1974). *Historical Documents of the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service*. Paper 24.

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trapping

Small Predators

Prepared by U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Agriculture Administration Building, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, in cooperation with State agricultural, conservation and health agencies.

Small animals such as raccoons, skunks, opossums, and foxes at times kill domestic stock and cause other damage. Trapping is an effective control method.

Trapping Equipment

Materials needed are knapsack, No. 2 traps, canvas for trap covers, dirt sifters with 3/16 to 1/4 inch screens, trap stakes, canvas gloves, hammer with straight claws, and scent.

Trap stakes can be made from 1/2 inch steel rod, 12 inches long, with a knob-shaped end, the other end pointed. Trap covers are used to prevent dirt from getting under the trap pan. A sifter is used to remove rocks and small sticks from the dirt when covering the trap.

No. 2 jump, coil spring, or long spring traps are adequate for most small predators. Trap pans must work freely and there should be no broken swivels or chains. Traps can be boiled in a solution of oak bark, hemlock bark, or logwood crystals to darken, prevent rust, and remove grease.

Gasoline, oil, or tobacco smoke will contaminate equipment. Boil contaminated traps in a lye solution. It is advisable to handle equipment with gloves which will be used only for trapping.

A fetid scent can be made by rotting animal carcasses or rough fish. Small amounts of pulverized beaver castor or skunk musk may be added, but the trapper will have to experiment with it to obtain the best results.

Trapping Locations

Tracks, droppings, scratching in the dirt, disturbed leaves or overturned rocks are "signs" of small predators. By close observation, a person can recognize them.

Small game trails connecting with other trails or back roads are good trap sites if animal sign is present. Sets can be made in animal trails, but if they are occasionally used by livestock or people, the sets should be a few feet to one side of the trail.

Animals will repeatedly use the same place to crawl under a fence. These places can be identified by hairs caught on the wire or poles and the depression used in going under the fence. A "blind" set works well here.

In open fields, a single small bush or other conspicuous object will attract many animals, especially foxes. These are usually good sites for "dirt hole" or "urine" trap sets.

Trapping

A trap is more efficient if positioned to close on the sides rather than the front and back of an animal's foot.

For a "dirt hole" set, select an object such as a stump, rock, bush, or clump of grass as a background for the trap. About 6 inches in front of this object, dig a 6-inch hole, 2 or 3 inches in diameter, and sloping away from you at a 45 degree angle. Starting about an inch in front of this hole, cut out the soil in the

general shape of the trap, but slightly larger. This trap bed should be about 1-1/2 inches deep. The trap stake, with chain attached, should be driven down flush with the bottom of this depression. Replace a small amount of loose soil for trap bedding. Set the trap so that the pan is level with the jaws and work it firmly into the bedding.

Lay the chain alongside the trap and pack dirt firmly over the springs and around the trap. Cover the trap pan and the area within the jaws with a trap cover. Sift fine dirt over the trap until it is covered to the original ground level, and blend with the sides of the set. Scatter or carry away any excess dirt. Pour about a teaspoonful of scent in the "dirt hole". Brush out any unnatural marks around the set.

"Blind" sets can be made in the middle of narrow animal trails. Do not disturb the ground more than necessary. The trap set should be nearly invisible. A small stick placed across the trail at each end of the trap breaks an animal's stride, and makes the set more efficient. Keep human odors to a minimum. This set can be used where animals crawl under a fence. Set a trap on each side of the fence in the crawl space.

Skunks can be taken by setting a trap directly in front and about 6 inches from the entrance to the hole. Dig a depres-

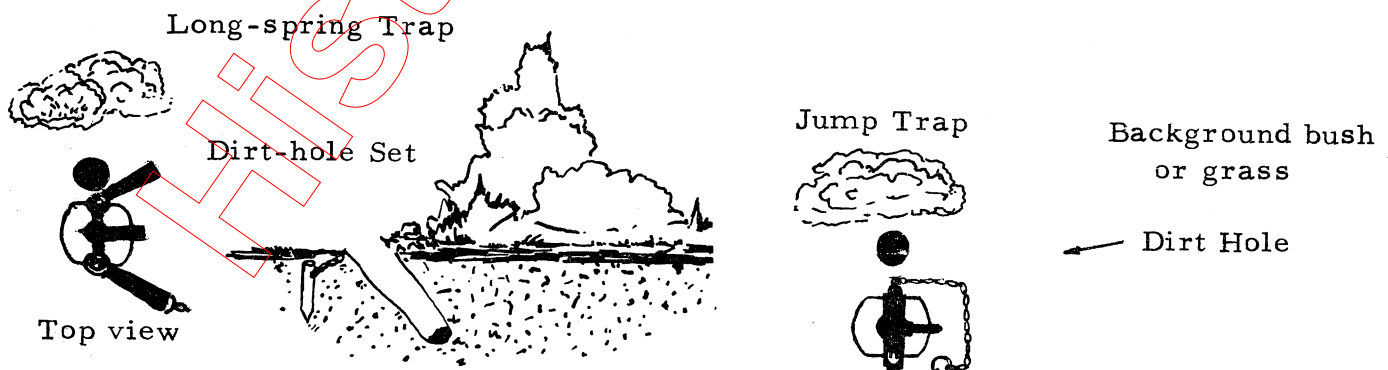
sion to fit the trap, make the set, and cover it lightly with grass or leaves. Skunks may release their scent when trapped around buildings. Drive them from these sites with repellents and trap them in outlying areas.

A "urine" set is basically a "blind" set except that urine is used as an attractant. It can be made where signs of scratching show that animals, especially foxes, are using a bush or stump as a "scent post". The trap should be set 8-10 inches from such an object, with the jaws positioned as indicated in the sketch. Sprinkle fox urine on the stump or bush. Artificial scratch marks add to the value of such a set.

Examine trap sets daily. Approach the trap site from the same direction each time, going no nearer than necessary to determine if it has been disturbed. If an animal is caught, reset in the same place.

Trapped raccoons, opossums, or foxes can be immobilized quickly by a blow across the nose with a heavy stick or hammer handle. They can then be carried away and dispatched without contaminating the immediate area.

Cage live traps are advisable where steel traps present a hazard to domestic animals and children.



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