

THE TRAPPING PROFESSION

I believe Canadian trappers have developed the most efficient and humane trapping methods in the world today. We are generally concerned with wildlife conservation. We have a good record and should be proud of it. This does not prevent us from trying to improve and we are constantly working at it. We must remember that the sealers were not defeated because they lacked any of this. They were defeated by public opinion, manipulated by the same people who were out to get us. The key to our survival is making it known to the general public that we use humane methods and that we are concerned about the way trapping is done. The person buying a fur coat must be convinced of that. It can only be achieved by public information through communication. (Art Lalonde, Executive Manager, Canadian Trappers Federation, Issue 25:21; 29-5-86)

Trapping in Canada Today

One of the most misunderstood facts about the Canadian trapping industry is its use of the leghold trap. Many of the pamphlets and films used by animal rights activist groups in promoting their viewpoint show a frightened animal struggling to free its mangled and bleeding foot from the jaws of a steel-toothed leghold trap. These images, though very powerful, are not representative of the method by which animals are trapped in Canada today. Unfortunately, however, the majority of North Americans and Europeans are unaware of this.

Steel-toothed leghold traps are no longer used by Canadian trappers and have not been manufactured in North America for well over a decade. The Committee was informed by Mr. Ken Seabrook of the Canadian and Ontario trappers' organizations that in most Canadian provinces, trappers had successfully sought legislation to ban the use of traps with teeth or serrated jaws.

The modern leghold traps have either rubber-covered or off-set jaws which do not cause any abrasions, tear skin, or cut off blood circulation. Mr. Seabrook and other trappers with whom the Committee spoke firmly believe that this leghold trap, if properly set, is not inhumane. Two witnesses clearly demonstrated to the Committee that the trap is designed simply to hold the animal, not to cause it injury; they voluntarily released the trap on their own fingers, something they would have been reluctant to do with the old steel-toothed trap. Mr. Seabrook elaborates on this demonstration:

I have a presentation I do in schools and wherever I can. I have a number three leghold trap with long springets; it is one of those traps you see on television. This hand, I would say, has been stuck in it at least 2,000 times and it still works. It is meant as a holding device; properly used, properly set, the right size of trap for the target animal.⁽¹⁾

Use of even this modern leghold trap is limited. Ontario and British Columbia have banned its use as a land set except for trapping lynx, coyote, wolf and fox. For these animals, an effective alternative to the leghold trap has yet to be developed. Across the country, trappers themselves, committed to doing their jobs as humanely as possible, have severely limited its use on their own initiative. Of the total number of animals trapped for fur in Canada, 65% are caught by a quick-kill trap such as the Conibear or the neck-snare. The remaining 35% are caught by a leghold trap; however, two-thirds of these animals are semi-aquatic and are taken in the water, the leghold being used as a quick-kill drowning set. These figures clearly indicate that in fact 88% of the furbearing animals trapped in Canada are taken by a quick-kill trapping method and only 12% are trapped on land by a modern