

February 10, 1984

sound-off continued

Feature a malicious attack on trapping

Dear Editor:

The centre-spread "blurb" on trapping in the February 3rd edition of the Brunswickan can only be perceived as a malicious and unfounded attack on trapping from a totally misinformed viewpoint. I must question the accuracy of the survey and also if one could make a sound judgement on such a small number of traplines. Did you research this story or simply receive a colorful pamphlet in the mail, comprising an official-looking letterhead, a first class advertising format and a little request at the end asking for a donation? The pictures look more than a little like the ones used by a radical American preservationist group for an intensive mail-out campaign in the late 1970's. If these acts of cruelty are so common as your figures suggest, why do the same photographs turn up year after year?

I have trapped in this province for over five years and I have caught several hundred animals using various traps and methods. Only one time did I catch an animal that I was not trapping for. The animal was a feral housecat that I caught in a Conibear (instant kill) trap in the woods six miles from the nearest house. This was not a grave accident as it is the Department of Natural Resources' policy to kill domesticated animals -turned-wild so natural predators do not have unnecessary competition for wild food sources. My trapping friends report similar low catches of non-target animals which makes the survey seem very unrealistic. If the survey is accurate, doubtfully so, then the two traplines were run by two of the most inept trappers in continental North America. The list of non-target animals seems to indicate that the two lines were muskrat and mink lines run in a marsh several acres in size. Why did the researcher follow the two traplines for five years while a year on several different lines would be more scientifically accurate?

I was particularly dismayed by your overstated opposition to the leghold trap. This trap should more appropriately be called the foot gripping trap, as the only time the trap grips the leg of an animal is if an untrained trapper uses a trap that is too large for the intended animal. The leghold trap is intended merely as a restraining device. It does not have large steel teeth as such as the bear traps of the 1930's. Those traps were outlawed with laws drafted by trappers themselves.

Manufacturers have been improving the leghold trap over the past couple of decades by the urgings of various trappers associations. A design is produced with off-set jaws which allow greater blood circulation to the trapped limb. Also the trap can be bought with a stoploss device which keeps the animal from chewing on its foot. In the last few years tests are being made with traps that have hard rubber pads on the jaws. Tests are also being conducted on a collapsible foot snare that has received good reviews from western coyote trappers.

The problem lies with a few untrained trappers who use leghold traps that are too large for the intended animal and may cause breakage of the limb. This could lead to wring-off (twisting) and the animal escapes, leaving part of its foot behind. The animal will usually die from infection. Nothing makes me more angry than to hear of a case such as this because I cannot condone cruelty to any animal, even under the guise of ignorance. I have pets and farm animals and you would have to walk many, many miles to find someone who loves animals as much as I do. The same can be said for many trappers I know.

A realistic approach to humane trapping is increased trapper education as to methods and proper trap use. Mention has to be given to the excellent trapper education programs run by the Ontario Ministry of

Natural Resources and the Ontario Trappers Association, an organization that operates nation-wide. As a member of the O.T.A. some of my money goes to support the education programs and the Federal-Provincial Committee of Humane Trapping. This organization is a government-chaired board that is committed to find and develop more humane trapping methods in Canada. The general public is encouraged to submit trap designs and methods for scrutiny.

Several years ago a friend asked me to trap some skunks near his house. His pet beagle had been bitten by a rabid skunk and had to be destroyed. At first I contemplated using instant kill traps but I noticed that his neighbour's dogs regularly travelled through the area. I resigned myself to using number 1 and 1 1/2 size leghold traps. Over the course of four days I caught five skunks, two dogs and one of the boldest and cutest, juvenile red foxes I have ever seen. The dogs and the fox I released virtually unharmed. Four of the five skunks showed rabies symptoms and the fifth was also destroyed to be on the safe side. the moral of this story is that

the leghold trap obviously has its applications. If only a killer type trap were used, I would have had needlessly killed two dogs and a fox. A killer trap cannot discriminate what is should kill and what it shouldn't. This type of set-up was also used in the posh Beverly Hills area in 1981 when certain urban coyotes were killing and eating neighbourhood pets. The residents were violently opposed to trapping until their pets started being killed.

The leghold trap is no where near being perfect and I think that there is much room for improvement. I am optimistic that it can be replaced with a more humane restraining-type trap in the future through continuing research. Used properly, it is certainly not the evil monster you portray it to be. As for laws having an array of conditions governing its use, ethics has to govern those conditions that are not realistically enforceable in the bush.

Contrary to popular belief, I don't enter the woods with blood and dollar signs in my eyes and mayhem in my heart. Neither do my friends. We simply are lawfully taking part in proven and accepted wildlife management techniques. As to trapping for economic reasons, I

have made minimal profit for two of the years and the other three I broke even.

I will continue to support the work of fur biologists and the wildlife management principles of all the Natural Resources Departments. Wildlife is a renewable resource and I subscribe to the conservation doctrine that stresses the wise use of resources whereas preservation stresses the non-use of resources.

I hope you will do something constructive also. Being a university paper I hope you will push for education. By printing a completely biased article that offers no solutions or alternatives to an exaggerated problem, you have helped drive a wedge between trappers and the general public. The only real loser is wildlife.

Yours truly,
Kevin Craig
Forestry III

P.S.: I know this letter is excessively long but it is a nowhere near long enough or detailed enough to answer the trapping question in a comprehensive manner.

If you feel as strongly about this as you suggested in your February 3rd article, then I hope you will print this letter without editing.

Apology for incident

Dear Editor:

We, the undersigned, would like to apologize to the following groups for our behavior on Sunday, February 5, 1984 at the Lady Dunn/Tibbits Dining Hall:

Beaver Foods (Tibbits and McConell)
The Ladies of Lady Dunn Hall
The Men's Residences.

We assure you that the incident will not be repeated. We hope that this will not reflect on all of Tibbits Hall as just a few of us were involved.

Linda Banks
Sarah Mallory
Karen Kingston
Donna Woodworth
Vivian Lounsbury

Linda Scholten
Carole Arseneault
Faith Douglas
Jennifer Snell

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