

Fox snares: guidance for the user

Revised June 2011

Why you should read this leaflet

Although snares are an ancient hunting tool, their use to catch canids (dog-like animals) wasn't really possible until the first widespread availability, early in the 20th century, of small diameter flexible steel cable, manufactured for bicycles, aeroplanes, etc. Earlier materials, such as cordage or brass wire, were easily shredded by the teeth of any canid. So it is a mistake to imagine that snaring foxes is a traditional practice perfected over centuries. Furthermore, the use of snares is subject to human legislation as well as natural laws. That legislation reflects the values of society for both conservation and animal welfare. Our experience shows that from both perspectives – efficient practice and the wider interests of society – both the snare itself (the hardware) and the way it is used (operator practice) leave room for improvement. By all means learn from the way others have used snares previously; but remember that you are using them in the 21st century.

Fox-snares are an imperfect tool. They have the potential to catch non-target species, and to cause tremendous suffering in captured and escaping animals. This does not make them bad. Motor cars have a comparable capacity to cause suffering and damage, and harmful side effects, but can nevertheless be used to an acceptable standard. The key is responsible, careful use. This leaflet is primarily intended to help you use snares in a focused and effective way, and to point out working practices that are likely to result in poor outcomes. Our advice draws on two sources: first-hand experience of the authors from the mid-1980s to the present day, and extensive studies involving scores of gamekeepers



who volunteered their help for 12 months at a time during the last 15 years.

Increasingly, legislation regulates what you may and may not do with snares. Some of this regulation is logical and straightforward, some is difficult to interpret or illogical. Nevertheless, it's crucial for all snare users to know and follow the law, because if the regulation is widely perceived to be flouted there will be a strong argument to outlaw snares altogether. In Scotland, snare users

will need to become accredited, and the implication is that sanctions can be imposed on those who break the legal conditions, just as they are with driving licences. In this leaflet we explain the legal requirements, but our real aim is to give you practical advice that will improve your use of snares from all points of view. We want fox snares to be used with professional care and responsibility.



How snares work

Snares are unique, in that they catch only when the animal is completely unaware of their presence. Foxes are highly 'neophobic' - they have a tendency to avoid anything new. A fox which detects a snare will avoid it. It may not be unduly alarmed, but it is unlikely ever to be caught in that particular snare set. This is because it will trot round it, probably examining it by sniffing. It may well scent-mark it, which draws it to the attention of other foxes. They don't know what it is, but it's an odd item in their landscape. There's nothing particularly crafty about this – dogs behave much the same way, they're usually just a lot less acute.

Foxes that have 'spotted' a snare can still be caught in another snare which has not been detected. Indeed it's possible to catch foxes in snares several times over, as we have found when catching foxes for radio-tagging. In one study, we caught the same dog fox on five occasions while trying to catch an untagged fox known to share the same territory; we had to abandon this to avoid catching him again. The action of a snare is not as alien to a fox as one might imagine: being snagged by brambles is probably an everyday experience. The fox just backs off, then carries on. We have watched a fox do exactly this when a snare drew up round its nose. It was clearly not alarmed, and was properly caught the next day after

the snare was re-set a metre further along the run.

So you don't want your snares to have an obvious presence. Physically, all snares are minimalist devices. Some more than others: as with bicycles, if you pay more money, your snare can have better components which are smaller and neater for the same strength. You can colour the snare so that it is almost impossible to see, even when set in an open field. But a central message of this leaflet is that minimising scent cues is also crucial to success. Foxes have an acute sense of smell, so snares must

also have an insignificant scent profile to escape detection. Bear in mind that a dog can trail a man wearing clean boots by following the scent of bruised vegetation, hours after the trail was made. Dogs are amateurs. Foxes are professionals – their lives depend on it.

If you catch your fox quickly, you should end up using your snares less, and will therefore catch fewer non-targets. Most non-target species at risk of capture in snares are much less perceptive of scent cues than foxes are. Therefore if you ignore scent you are likely to catch more non-targets for every fox caught.

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Why snares are considered important

Snares are particularly a tool of spring and summer when other methods of fox control become impractical because of the growth of vegetation cover, especially among arable crops. The breeding season of foxes coincides, naturally enough, with that of their prey. The food demands of growing cubs are far greater than the maintenance requirements of adults. So to protect prey species that are especially vulnerable to fox predation, like ground-

nesting birds, fox control in spring and summer is crucial.

In the UK, the only other legal methods for fox control involve processes of which the fox is fully aware (eg. drives to standing guns, lamping, attraction to a scent lure, flushing/digging-out at the cubbing earth). With these methods we can expect there to be a selection pressure against the naive or bold fox and in favour of the wary fox. The naive

members of the population are the young ones. By the time a fox has survived its first winter and reached breeding age, it has learned a thing or two and is harder to catch or shoot. To control numbers in spring and summer, you need to catch the animals of breeding age. So snares are considered not to have any functional replacement, but they have their problems, which makes them controversial.

Legalities: legitimate use of snares, statutes restricting snare use, and statutory obligations

Responsibility:

Under all legislation relating to wild animals and snares, the responsibility rests with you - the snare operator - not with your employer; your supplier; the snare manufacturer or any advisor. As a snare user it is you that is open to prosecution for malpractice.

Legitimate use:

In all parts of the UK, snares may be set to catch foxes, rabbits and hares, provided you are the landowner or have the landowner's permission. (You can also legally snare a few other species such as rats and mink, though we would generally advocate other methods for controlling these species.)

Statutes affecting snare use:

The Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and *Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985* impose certain conditions (described later) on the use of snares, for conservation reasons, and prohibit their use to catch species of conservation concern that are listed in Schedules 5 and 6 of the Act. These schedules are not fixed: they can be altered by the Secretary of State. As they stand at present, protected animals at risk of capture in fox snares include badger, wild cat, pine marten, otter and just conceivably polecat and hedgehog. *The Deer Act 1991* and the *Deer (Scotland) Act 1996* prohibit the use of snares to take deer.

In Scotland, extra restrictions and conditions on the use of snares were introduced by the *Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004*, the *Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2007*, and the *Snares (Scotland) Order 2010*. These statutes dictate certain working practices as well as restricting use, and reflect a

mixture of conservation and humaneness concerns. The anticipated *Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill* may make accreditation and training of all snare users a legal requirement in Scotland. (The legal framework in which snare operators in Scotland must operate is described in *Snaring in Scotland – a practitioners' guide* – see References. Scottish law has some subtle but important differences, eg. in the phrase 'needlessly or recklessly' to cause injury or death of protected species like otter, wild cat, pine marten or red squirrel.) It may be an offence to deliberately snare mountain (blue) hares if this disturbs or significantly reduces the local population.

The Animal Welfare Act (2006) and Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act (2006) affect all use of traps and snares. This Act makes the operator responsible to avoid the unnecessary suffering of any captured animal. The Act was not intended to obstruct accepted management practices, responsibly carried out. The best way to demonstrate that you are taking responsible measures to avoid unnecessary suffering is to follow an official Code of Practice.

Codes of Practice:

We urge you to read, understand and follow the relevant Code of Practice (CoP). In England and Wales this is the *Defra Code of Practice on the Use of Snares* (see References). The Defra CoP, published in 2005, is based on the Report of the Independent Working Group on Snares (IWGS), a multi-interest group convened at the request of Defra specifically to construct a CoP. The IWGS included representatives from the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT; formerly The Game Conservancy Trust), the British Association for Shooting and Conservation

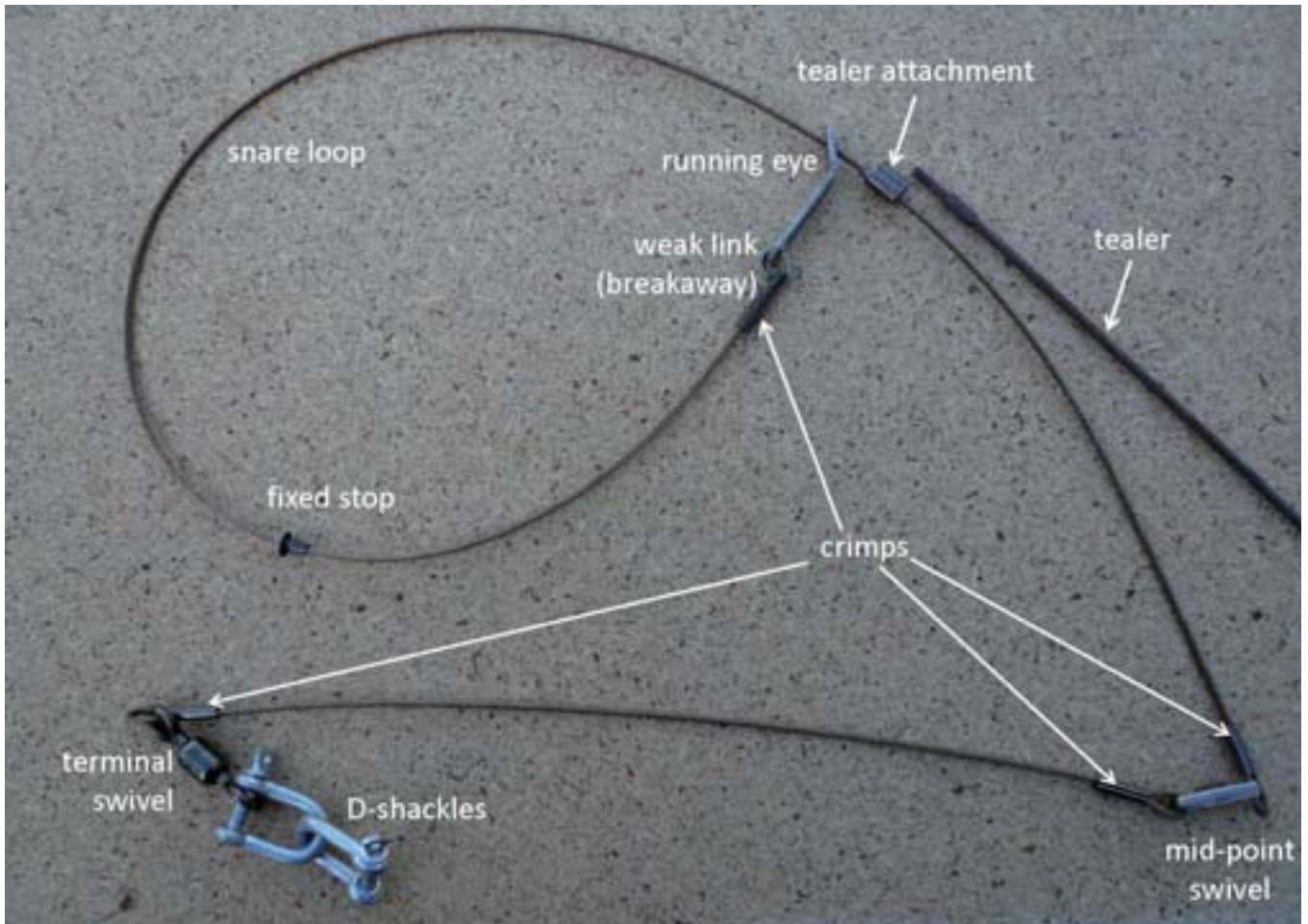
(BASC) and the National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO), alongside vets and animal welfare specialists. The IWGS Report (also available as a download from the Defra website – see References) brought together all the evidence available at that time concerning the use of snares in the UK.

In Scotland, operators should follow the guidelines described in *Snaring in Scotland: A Practitioners' Guide* (which we refer to in this leaflet as the Scottish CoP). This guide was produced by a consortium of bodies including the GWCT, BASC (Scotland) and the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association (SGA) at the request of the Scottish Government.

The CoPs are equivalent to the Highway Code in motoring. It is not mandatory to follow a CoP, nor does it provide indemnity against prosecution - but it will make your position simpler for the police to investigate if they need to, and makes a strong defence should the matter nevertheless come to court. If you deviate from the relevant CoP, you should have a strong justification for doing so because it may well be tested in court.

Besides urging you to follow the relevant CoP, we also recommend that you keep detailed records of your snaring effort (eg. a map of where your snares are set and a diary of how many snares are set each day) and also records of what you catch. Also keep records of any training courses you have attended. These records would be helpful if you were ever faced with an investigation or prosecution.

Parts of the snare, and related equipment:



Because snares are such minimalist devices, crucial features are very small details with inter-related functions. Here we describe each component in turn.

Wire cable: A cable that is too flexible will form a floppy snare loop that requires a lot of support. Such a soft wire will also abraid easily when fretted against other objects. Cable that is too stiff may cause the snare loop to spring open again (releasing the fox), and will not be durable under repeated flexing by a captured animal. The ideal is a compromise between these two extremes. There are many cable constructions to choose from. Cable thickness is also a compromise: thin cable is less visible but thick cable is stronger and less damaging to the captured animal. The length of cable in a

snare should be kept to a minimum: slack allows a captured animal to run, risking nasty injuries and escapes, and increases the risk of the snare becoming entangled. According to both the Defra CoP and the Scottish CoP snare cable must have a breaking strain of at least 460lbs (208kgs). As far as we know, this is the case for all steel cable of 2mm diameter as normally used for fox snares. If it's less than 2mm you should check the specs from the cable manufacturer:

Crimps: Cable is joined to other components using a crimp of softer or harder metal applied with a press. Crimping can be done effectively using hand tools, but components must be well matched in dimensions with each other and with the dies of the tool. Experience also affects crimp strength.

If a crimp were to give way in use, or if the cable broke, a captured animal might escape with the snare fast around part of its body. Given effective swivels (see below), such breakages are rare in practice, but can lead to prolonged suffering and a slow death in the escaping animal. To avoid this rare but nasty event, the crimp at the noose eye (or the eye itself) can be designed to break at a specified lower force than other crimps on the snare, ensuring that no escaping animal can make off with the noose attached. This is a requirement under the Defra CoP. An extension of this idea is to fit a weak link or 'breakaway' at the eye, designed to open at a predetermined strain.

Swivel: If a captured animal repeatedly rolls in the same direction, the snare cable will either unravel or become over-wound. If the wire unravels, the separated strands of wire are easily snapped or chewed through. If the cable is over-wound, it is weakened by torque and it may snap. To prevent either from occurring, snares should be fitted with swivels. We recommend that snares are fitted with two swivels. The main swivel should be located at the tail-end of the snare where it can be attached to the anchor point (which helps make it turn) using a 'D' shackle. In case this swivel should become fouled with soil or entangled in vegetation, we recommend that another 'in-line' swivel is fitted midway along the snare, thus ensuring the snare always includes at least one functional swivel.

We like neat, small swivels: a bulky mid-point swivel spoils the natural line of the snares and makes an obvious and ugly visual distraction. However, experience



A quality mid-point swivel: small, strong and rotates easily under strain.

tells us that very simple devices made of bent metal plates do not function very well. Small, well engineered 'in-line' swivels,

perfectly designed for this job, are available from a number of retail outlets selling snare components.

Eye: This is the part that slides along the wire to form the running noose. By law it must not be self-locking, as explained under 'What snares to use', but to hold the captured animal the eye must have

enough friction to prevent the snare loop springing open again after closing. This is why definition of the terms 'self-locking' and 'free-running' is so difficult. Pulling by hand on the eye or on the cable near

the eye does not adequately simulate the expanding movement of a breathing animal, which will tilt the eye over at a different angle.

One kind of running eye. This one, the Relax A Lock, is specifically designed to hold the captive animal without strangling it.



From all points of view, it is important that the section of snare cable over which the eye slides does not become rusty, as this will impair the movement of the eye. If rust prevents the noose closing swiftly, a fox might easily withdraw its head from the noose and escape. If rust prevents the eye sliding open easily, it may render an otherwise legal snare 'self-locking' and therefore illegal. We would expect this to happen progressively, rather than overnight, but exactly where the point lies at which the snare should be considered self-locking is not clear. It's something that only the courts can decide. Our advice is to assume that someone will trip you up if they can, and err on the side of caution: replace the snare before it's too late.

Stop: The stop is a very small crimp that prevents the noose closing beyond a predetermined diameter, to prevent injury or death by strangulation, and also to prevent the capture of deer by the foot. Some snares are still sold with a stop that is not fixed allowing operators to choose their own minimum loop size. In practice most operators in the past chose to ignore it, or didn't know what it was for. In England and Wales there is no legal requirement to use a stop, but it is recommended in the CoP, which suggests that the stop should be fixed 'approximately' 23cm (9") from the snare eye. In Scotland a stop must be used (*Snares (Scotland) Order 2010*), and in a sensible clarification the wording says that the stop must be fitted 'at least' 23cm (9") from the eye.

So 23 cm should be regarded as the minimum throughout the UK. However, it turns out that a stop set even further from the eye has other benefits. In a recent field-trial by professional gamekeepers, we compared capture rates of 'off-the-shelf' fox snares against snares with stops fixed at 26cms. In the south of England, where foxes are as small as anywhere in the UK, we measured the head circumferences of adult vixens of various weights which had been collected

Tealer: The snare needs some kind of support. It is usually supported by a rigid stick or wire 'tealer' at one side of the run on which it is placed. The 'old school' approach uses a short stick of hazel or similar wood as a tealer; split at the top to hold the cable. This is a local natural

Copper wire tealer (top) and (below) the snare cable showing one style of tealer-clip. Note the collar on the tealer which prevents the clip sliding down.



One kind of fixed stop, which prevents the noose closing too far.

by night shooting. The smallest noose we could force over the head of the smallest (4.0kg) adult vixen was 25cm in circumference. 95% of adult females down here had heads bigger than this. In practice, it seems that live foxes do not pull as hard as we did, perhaps because their ears get in the way. Given a stop set at 26 cm, the smallest fox retained was a juvenile vixen of 3.3 kg.

Fox escapes were equally rare whether the stop was set at 23cm or 26cm, but hare captures were greatly reduced using the 26cm setting. Additionally, the longer stop position made it much easier to release any badgers caught, because the wire was drawn less tightly against the neck of the animal.

material, after all. The downside is that in cutting, sharpening and planting the stick you can't avoid leaving human scent on the tealer; which has plenty of surface area to hold it. Our infra-red camera studies of fox behaviour have verified that foxes avoid sticks that have been

The ideal stop position will clearly be a compromise between achieving all these benefits and retaining captured foxes. We don't yet know exactly where that is, but we have begun to use snares with even longer stops on a trial basis. Watch this space!

Data from practising gamekeepers suggests that with any type of snare you can expect 5-10% of captured foxes to escape, perhaps because the noose didn't draw up behind the ears. Don't worry about this: provided you leave no scent or other clues around your snares, you will re-catch those escapees. We are confident about this, because of the ease with which we can re-capture foxes that have already been snared, handled and radio-tagged.

rubbed with human scent, so we favour a wire tealer, 2-3mm thick, which can be boiled with the snares to remove scent and is easily pushed into the ground and bent to the required shape. Our ideal is copper wire. Copper acquires an oxidised surface colour that blends in magically almost anywhere. It is more easily bent to shape than steel wire. Although initially expensive, copper tealers last a lifetime.

Various materials have been used to hold the snare to a wire tealer. These include spiral plastic cable-wrap ('Spirawrap', available in several colours), or a simple twist of gardener's wire. Ideally, though, the snare can be lifted off the tealer easily. This makes it easy to set the snare, or to 'un-set' it for a night off, leaving tealer and anchor in position. It also means that the captured animal cannot get the snare cable entangled with the tealer. Tealer-clip components that attach the snare to the tealer; but still 'pivot' freely, also allow the snare to 'reset' itself if something brushes underneath.



Two kinds of anchor: angle iron stake (below) and corkscrew (above). The man-hole cover lifter (centre) makes an excellent extraction tool for both anchors.

Anchor: The snare anchor must be effective at holding not only a fox, but any non-target animal that might be caught. There is no single anchor type that will suit all ground conditions. For the majority of conditions, we recommend a 450mm x 25mm length (18" x 1") of 5mm thick angle-iron, driven into the ground. An 8mm hole should be drilled 50mm from the top, in the middle of one side of the angle iron. Connect a 50mm diameter welded ring to a D-shackle, and fix the shackle to the stake via the drilled hole. The snare should be attached to the ring, with another D-shackle. This arrangement acts almost like a universal joint and is unlikely to foul the anchor. Whenever you use D-shackles, make sure they are tightened using pliers.

Corkscrew and spiral ground anchors are also effective, but expensive. The length needs to be chosen to suit local ground conditions. Some operators report single-use earth anchors (eg. Duck-Bills) as useful in certain ground conditions, such

as on moorland. We do not recommend the use of smooth metal rods – these can easily be pulled out, especially when the ground is wet. Whatever type of anchor you use, the top of it should be more or less flush with ground level, to prevent



Angle iron anchor stake in position.

the captive winding the snare around it. Do not attach snares to posts or natural objects such as trees or saplings – this encourages entanglement which may result in injury or death.



Corkscrew anchor in position.

Stake puller: This can be a purpose-made lever to extract stakes from the ground, or some other device that can be used to the same effect. In light soil you can get stakes out after a few knocks with a lump hammer; and this is neater in grass or in a standing crop. But carrying a stake puller ensures you never have to leave a stubborn one behind. We have found that a single, long-handled man-hole cover lifter works brilliantly for this purpose. The lifter we use has a J-shaped hook on one end, and a D-shaped handle on the other. The hook-end is used to tap and loosen the stake. Then hook through the

welded ring, and pull vertically upwards using the handle. For particularly stubborn stakes, pass the hook-end through the welded ring, and lever upwards, pressing the D-shaped handle into the ground. The man-hole cover lifting tool is also very effective at inserting and extracting corkscrew-type anchor stakes.

Terminal loop: Ideally the snare terminates in a crimped loop which can be attached to the anchor using a D-shackle. Some snares are sold with unfinished cable ends, intended to be pushed through the anchor point and

It has formerly been common practice to fasten a snare to a 'drag': a heavy weight such as a log which allows the captured animal to move away from the capture site until it becomes arrested by entanglement. The main arguments proposed in favour of the drag were that it allowed the animal to find cover where it will feel less stressed; that it causes less physical injury than the dead resistance of a ground anchor does; and that it preserves the capture site undisturbed for re-use. The use of drags has now been prohibited in Scotland. In England and Wales, we recommend you do not use a drag, chiefly because you cannot fulfil your obligations under the *Animal Welfare Act* towards a captured animal if you don't know for certain where it is. There is no guarantee that the captive animal on a drag will ever be found. Also, even if the animal is reassured by gaining cover, entanglement greatly increases the risk of physical suffering before dispatch. A drag which can be moved by a fox may allow a stronger non-target species to travel a considerable distance. NB – The 2009 edition of the Scottish CoP recommended that an anchor weight should weigh more than 45lb (20kg). We believe this is too light to form an immovable anchor for the whole range of species that might be caught, while heavier weights would really be unmanageable. Drags have now been prohibited in *Scotland by the Snares (Scotland) Order 2010*. New editions of the Scottish CoP will reflect this and will recommend only the use of immovable ground anchors such as metal stakes.

fastened back to the snare using a special fastening plate with two slots. If these are used, the two parts of the cable in each slot MUST be fed through in opposite directions, as shown on the packaging. The cable should also be deliberately kinked where it passes through the plate to prevent any risk of slippage. Even when properly fitted in this way, we think the risk of slippage is too high, and we see far too many cases of incorrect fitting. Also, a snare with unfinished ends has no terminal swivel, which we regard as essential. So we strongly favour a crimped loop end and D-shackle.

What snares to use

It is your responsibility, as the operator, to ensure that each and every snare you use complies with the law. Do not rely on the shop that sold it to you, or the manufacturer, or your headkeeper. The following table lists the requirements for snares used, depending where you are. Note that the CoP recommendations are more demanding than the minimum legal requirement. Our own recommendations, given after the Table, are more demanding still.

Possession	England and Wales		Scotland	
	Statutory requirements	Code of Practice	Statutory requirements	Code of Practice
Possession	Not restricted	Not restricted	Only if not self-locking. On land only if have owner's permission	Only if not self-locking. On land only if have owner's permission
Eye	Not self-locking	Not self-locking	Not self-locking	Not self-locking
Stop position (measured from eye)	–	Approximately 23cm	At least 23cm	At least 23cm
Inspection regime	At least once every day	At least once every day before 09:00, and preferably again in late afternoon	At least once a day, at intervals of not more than 24 hours	At least once a day, at intervals of not more than 24 hours
Cable strength	–	At least 460lbs (208kg)	–	At least 460lbs (208kg)
Swivels	–	Two good swivels, one at tail of snare, one near mid-point	–	Include a strong swivel
Weak point	–	At eye	–	–
Anchor	–	Stake, not drag	Fixed to stake or other immovable anchor	Fixed to stake or other immovable anchor
Accreditation/training	–	Training recommended	Accreditation likely to become obligatory	Accreditation likely to become obligatory; prior training recommended
ID Tags	–	–	Likely to become obligatory	Likely to become obligatory
Record keeping:	–	Recommended	–	Recommended

Self-locking versus free-running snares:

You must not use a 'self-locking' snare. The term 'self-locking' is not defined in the *Wildlife & Countryside Act (WCA)*, and there has been no successful prosecution in a Court high enough to clarify the law by legal precedent. So 'self-locking' remains a vague term. Broadly, it means

that the snare tightens progressively as the animal struggles, through a kind of ratchet effect of the eye on the snare cable. The opposite concept, 'free-running', did not appear in the WCA, but is in common use and has been introduced onto the statutes by the *Snares (Scotland) Order 2010*. Unfortunately 'free-running', too, is

undefined, and one must use common sense. The Scottish Order obliges the operator to check that each snare is free-running at each daily inspection (see below). There is no authority that can certify a particular snare as self-locking or free-running. For spring traps, Defra has the responsibility to test and approve

designs as appropriate for use in the UK; this is not the case for snares.

The intention of the legislators in outlawing self-locking snares in 1981 was apparently to eliminate the death by strangulation of accidentally captured non-target species. If so, they were probably misguided in addressing the 'eye' of the snare rather than the 'stop' (see above), but we have to live with the law as it stands. By implication, the legislators intended snares to be used in the UK as a 'restraining device' rather than a 'killing device' (these are terms recognised by the International Standards Organisation). This differs totally from their current use (where allowed) in the USA and Canada, where the objective is to kill the captured animal quickly and humanely, and where extra devices (springs and winches) are used to ensure a rapid death by strangulation. DO NOT use snares or ancillary devices designed for the North American market unless you are certain they comply with our legislation.

Snare length

Mistakenly, some people choose to use a long length of snare cable, reasoning that

because the anchor can be fixed further from the run, the fox will be less likely to detect the anchor, and therefore the snare. But so long as the anchor has been fully knocked into the ground, and the snare and site are free of foreign odour, there should be little chance of the fox detecting and avoiding the snare. On the other hand, the longer a snare is, the greater the risk of the captive injuring itself. An animal that is allowed a longer 'run' in the snare will build up greater momentum, thereby increasing the risk of an impact injury when brought up short, besides increasing the risk of a break-out. Also, long snares increase the risk of the captive becoming entangled, either in the snare, or around some obstacle. Entanglement greatly increases the risk of captive injury, so snares should be kept as short as possible. We recommend that snares should be approximately one metre in length, from the outer edge of a fully closed snare noose, to the end of the anchor swivel.

Inspection

In England and Wales, the law requires that snares must be 'inspected at least

once every day'. Although the intention of this is clear, a literal interpretation could leave the captive animal for almost 48 hours before the next inspection. The Defra CoP goes a little further in recommending you to check every snare at least once every day 'while the snare remains in position'. In Scotland, the law requires you to check every snare at least once a day at intervals of no more than 24 hours. Since most fox captures are made at night, we recommend that you make your check early in the day, ensuring that the fox is dispatched promptly and that you don't risk losing it. We recommend that you also make a second check in the late afternoon. This second check further reduces the risk of poor welfare in any captured animal, and gives an opportunity to reset snares that have been knocked during the day. Do not set more snares than you are able to check and remove those that are unset. In Scotland, it is an offence to fail to release or remove an animal, whether alive or dead, while carrying out such an inspection of snares.

Preparing snares for use

Weathering: Wire manufacturers add a 'shelf-life lubricant' to their product to prevent rusting. To eliminate the eye-catching shine of the wire and to remove the smell of the lubricant, you need to remove this before use. Coil the snares and place them in a large pan with plenty of water. Add a small cupful of automatic (low froth) washing powder or washing soda crystals. Boil for at least an hour. The lubricant will collect on the water surface as globules. Do not pour off the water or lift the snares out until you have first removed these surface globules with a spoon.

Once degreased, the snares can be coloured to reduce the shine. The wire will darken and dull by oxidation if the snares are left outside in the weather or buried, but it takes a long time, and rust formation will interfere with the free-running properties of the snare. It's quicker and better to boil snares again in water containing plenty of chips of oak bark, oak leaves or tea (save old tea bags/leaves!). Bring to the boil, simmer for five minutes

and leave to stand in the liquid for 24 hours if they need darkening. When dark enough, hang up to drain and dry. The resulting brown colour blends beautifully with natural vegetation, and the boiling process serves to remove human scent. Plastic or rubber components will probably not survive boiling, one reason why we don't favour them.

We advise that you regularly repeat the boiling and colouring process for snares in use. Snares that you regularly handle to reset them are easily detected by foxes, and snares detected for this reason or because they are visible are often marked by them with urine, making them still more obvious. When catching foxes for radio-tagging in our research work we re-boil snares every 10-14 days. After colouring, it's a good idea to bundle snares in fives or 10s, using a twist of gardening wire, to prevent tangles. After this handle the snares as little as possible, and keep them away from sources of scent from humans, dogs, dead animals, petrol, cigarettes, scented soap and aftershave.

Lubrication: Some types of snare run best when lubricated. We think this step is unnecessary in a well-designed snare, but if you wish to re-wax your snares after boiling, we suggest you use paraffin wax which has very little odour. Waxing also helps to allow raindrops and condensation to run off. Do not use any mineral oil or aerosol lubricant.

Tealers: As discussed earlier, we think the best tealers are made of copper wire of 2 to 3mm thickness. Copper rods can be bought from some snare suppliers, from metal distributors or, sometimes found at scrap dealers in the form of powerline cable. Copper oxidises to a very unobtrusive brown colour. If you buy from scrap dealers, make sure they haven't burned off the insulating material, as heat weakens the wire. Boil tealers periodically, in the same way that snares are prepared.

Where to set snares

Location:

In setting a snare, you are trying to outline with the cable the exact space in the landscape through which a fox's head is going to pass. That's a pretty extraordinary skill to acquire. Of course, sometimes a passing fox has its head down, and sometimes it has it up - you can't accommodate all these chance variations. But you can choose places where foxes are likely to travel through quite fast, and conversely avoid places where foxes hesitate or loiter to sniff things. So if a run crosses a woodland edge or the edge of a thick hedge, don't put your snare right at the edge: it's here that the fox pauses to sniff or look about. Put the snare several yards back into the wood (avoiding clutter – see below), or if you are confident which way the trail goes, several yards out in the open.

Avoid snare sites cluttered by obstacles where there's a strong risk of a captured animal getting the snare entangled. This often leads to considerable suffering and/or death. Alternatively, the snare swivels may become inoperative, leading to cable breakage and loss of the captured animal, often with the snare noose fixed around its body. Fences and gates carry a special risk of fatal entanglement and an increased risk of non-target captures. Do not set snares around the edges of release pens if there is a risk of entanglement occurring, for example with electric fencing equipment. In Scotland, the *Snares (Scotland) Order*

2010 made it an offence to set a snare in a place where a captured animal caught by the snare is likely to become fully or partially suspended, or drown. This prohibits the setting of snares on, over or very near to watercourses, ditches, fences or scrub 'clutter'.

The humaneness and non-target issues associated with entanglement are completely avoidable without loss of efficiency, because open sites are equally good or even better for catching – provided you have chosen and prepared your snares as described in this leaflet. Snares coloured as above and mounted on wire tealers will catch successfully even when set in open places without any vegetation cover. Foxes unthinkingly follow existing tracks if they offer easier walking. So try vehicle tracks even when they are just a pale stripe on the grass. You can even make your own track deliberately. If you have a fussy-footed dog that dislikes getting its feet wet or walking on stones (collies, whippets, and terriers are useful for this), watch where it trots: often it will indicate the nearly invisible route that foxes too will instinctively follow. Once you gain an appreciation of the kind of routes all foxes will instinctively take, there needn't even be a run visible. We have caught foxes on a newly drilled field by judging where a fox would trot to go around a projecting bramble.

We try to leave the snare standing in a natural-looking arc, and we have the impression that the snares that best mimic

a natural curve like a grass stem are the ones that are most likely to catch - but we have no objective measure of this.

Public access:

Do not set snares close to a public right-of-way. Even though you check snares daily, there's a chance that a member of the public will find a captured animal before you, or that their dog will get caught. Though you would be within your legal rights, there is no need to inflame public sensitivities like this and there will typically be plenty of locations where you are just as likely to snare a fox. In Scotland, given open access, the placement of snares relative to public use requires some careful judgement by the operator.

Near misses:

If you have a near miss with a fox (snare knocked or drawn up, but fox fur left behind), don't give up. Although the fox may have spotted the snare, you know you are on the right trail. Remove the snare and put a fresh, scent-free one two or three yards along the trail. This often results in a capture within a few days.

Expectations:

Bear in mind that foxes do not walk every track every night. Give a new snare every chance to catch for a week or so. After that, begin to consider whether the snare might have been 'spotted' and should be reboiled and set in a new site.

When and how many

When to snare?

Every snare in operation will increase your chance of catching foxes, but it will also increase the risk of accidental capture of non-targets. For this reason we recommend you concentrate your use of snares to periods when gamebirds are vulnerable (eg. pheasant release time, wild bird nesting season) and when snaring will best contribute to your fox control effort (eg. when vegetation cover prevents use of a rifle). From an efficiency

point-of-view, we do not recommend using snares as semi-permanent devices because they are more efficient if regularly cleaned and reset (see above).

How many snares?

If you set snares when there isn't a fox to catch, you will catch only non-targets. For this reason, we do not recommend that you use snares as your first means of detecting an incoming fox. Rather, we recommend you spend time looking for

fresh fox signs (smell, tracks, fur, droppings, prey remains) and set snares where you find them. This strategy increases your chances of catching a fox quickly, reduces the amount of time spent checking otherwise 'redundant' snares and decreases the likelihood of catching non-targets. This approach requires intensive fieldwork, but will involve you in far fewer snare checks per fox caught. From our experience, on a lowland estate you may need only 20 snares and five nights per fox.

We recognise that many gamekeepers use snares as their first means of detecting an incoming fox. Sometimes you can't find fresh fox sign, but experience tells you that there is bound to be one

somewhere. This approach may be defensible where the risk of non-target captures is low, but in the majority of circumstances this is not the case. Experience will give you a 'feel' for good

snares and you should concentrate on these. But again, don't leave your snares there permanently - move them around, especially to locations where you detect fresh fox activity.

How to set a snare

Preparation:

Ideally your snares should be prepared in such a way that they require minimal handling to set them up. Just prick in the tealer; attach the snare to the anchor; make final adjustments and leave. We colour our snares in bundles temporarily fastened with wire, which avoids them tangling during transport. The more you handle snares between boiling and setting them, the greater the risk of the fox detecting the snare.

Height and dimensions:

A snare loop measuring 9" across by 6" deep (23 x 15cm) is about right for most circumstances – a larger loop requires less accuracy in placement but is heavy and floppy, and is more likely to catch non-targets. On level ground, the bottom of a loop this size needs to be about 7-7½" (18-19cm) above the ground. On banks this height should be increased because the fox will usually hold its head up to look ahead, not at its feet. You could also increase the loop size slightly in these circumstances to make up for the loss of accuracy. Where badgers are common, the risk of catching them can be reduced by increasing the height of the loop to 8" (20cm) or more above the ground (BASC recommend 9"/23cm). This will have a small negative impact on your fox capture rate.

Plant your wire tealer at a slight incline, to one side of the run. Now anchor the swivel end of the snare before you forget, and before making fine adjustments. If necessary, bend the tealer slightly to allow the snare loop to form a natural-looking curve at the right height.

If the loop is floppy, you may usefully add a second tealer of fine florists' 'stem' wire (the uncoated, very malleable stuff) on the opposite side of the run. Prick this lightly into the ground, but only just enough to support the loop, or it will interfere with loop closure. Finally adjust surrounding vegetation to look undisturbed and to disguise the outline of the snare loop. We often like to set the snare beside a long grass stalk, which we use to disguise the snare outline.

Some operators prefer to hang the noose from a longer tealer which arches slightly over the run, so that the eye is quite high (about 11 o'clock or 1 o'clock, taking the snare loop as a clock face). This makes the snare 'go off' like a trap, the noose closing at a light touch under the weight of the cable and running eye. This sensitivity can be a nuisance though: a passing deer or even a breeze may cause the noose to drop and hang there, partially closed and appreciably lower than originally set. In this state it will not catch the fox, but it may catch a badger. The other approach is to have the noose emerge from the top of the tealer; so that the eye is at one side of the noose (ie. 3 o'clock or 9 o'clock-ish; the precise position will depend on how soft or self-supporting the cable is.). The top of the tealer will require a slight bend to make it grade naturally into the curve of the noose. A snare set like this needs a more prolonged tug to make it draw up.

Footwork:

While you are setting the snare, stand or crouch in the run itself, but try not to broaden it. Do not stand to one side of

the run, as a fox will also diverge from the run to see what you did there, thereby missing the snare. You can put a snare on a track even if you must walk there daily. If you do this, place your feet along the track but close up to the snare on both sides. This keeps the track trodden. If you regularly take a wide step over the snare, foxes too will leap over it. On no account walk round the snare, even when setting it. Foxes have a tendency to follow the easiest path, so if the run is particularly wide, such as along a field edge, use small stones and twigs to subtly guide the fox towards the noose.

Scent:

Attention to scent helps enormously. We recommend that you set snares in the morning so that any human scent left on the snare, or at the snare set, has the greatest chance of dissipating before nightfall. Keep water and scent-free soap in your vehicle and wash your hands thoroughly when you first arrive at your snaring site. Before handling or setting snares, but well away from your first snare site, rub your hands with freshly exposed soil (but not from somewhere a fox may have peed, such as a molehill!). This will help to prevent your scent getting onto the snare or surrounding vegetation. To minimise scent, wear rubber boots when setting snares, and keep them clean. Do not kneel in the run when setting the snare - crouch only. Your scent is readily transferred from your trouser knees to the ground, but not from rubber boots. You may find all this concern about scent tedious. We regard it as essential.

Checking snares and avoiding non-target species

Equipment:

Always carry: wire rope cutters (capable of cutting snare cable in single-handed use), a garden fork, shotgun or rifle, hook stick. The use of the garden fork and hook stick are described below. If you do a lot of walking on hill ground, the garden fork may seem an encumbrance - before you reject it, be sure you understand why we recommend its use in handling non-target captures (below). To save your time later, it's also sensible to carry spare snares and anchors, and some means of getting anchors out of the ground.

Avoiding non-target species

The *Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981* didn't address the questions posed by accidental non-target captures, so your position in law is rather uncertain. If you follow the guidelines in this leaflet, we believe you will have taken reasonable precautions to avoid the capture of non-targets.

As already stated, the use of snares fitted with a stop to prevent the noose closing tightly should be regarded as mandatory. It allows any animal that steps into a snare to pull its foot straight out again, and prevents the capture of small protected mammals like polecats and pine martens. It also helps prevent strangulation. If placed relatively far from the running eye, it can also allow the escape of brown hares, which may legally be caught by snares, but when caught are usually an unintended victim of fox snares.

Roe, fallow and red deer carry their heads far higher than a fox - except where they creep under obstacles. So avoid setting snares where runs pass under obstacles like fences and all animals must squeeze through with their heads at the same height. The use of wire tealers and coloured snares frees you from the need to use such places to disguise the snare. If there are muntjac in your area, either select prime 'foxy' sites away from dense cover, or avoid the use of snares entirely. We do not recommend you place poles or branches over snares to encourage deer to jump over snares. Foxes are likely to walk around obstacles, rather than underneath them. By creating a deer 'jump' you provide the perfect obstacle in which a captive might become entangled and injure itself.

Badgers are now abundant in most parts of Britain, so avoiding their capture is a necessary consideration for most gamekeepers. Badgers are far more habitual trail-users than foxes, so avoid snaring on obvious well-used badger runs, and avoid setting snares close to a badger sett. Badgers are usually caught only in low snares, so do not set snares lower than recommended above.

The Defra CoP states that snares must be set only at sites likely to be used by foxes, and not at sites where there is evidence of regular usage by non-target species. There is no indication of the geographical scale at which 'site' should

be judged. Our understanding is that 'site' really equates to 'run' (after all, there can hardly be a land-holding in Britain without evidence of regular usage by badgers or deer or hares). The recommendation simply seems to require that you are careful to select runs where you have a strong chance of catching a fox rather than a badger or deer. If there is evidence of recent use by badgers (e.g. latrines, or badger hairs where the run passes under barbed wire) then you should not set snares on that run.

This will still leave you plenty of places to set snares. If you find fresh fox sign, but also fresh non-target evidence nearby, you need to find snare sites in the vicinity that give you a much stronger chance of catching the fox rather than the non-target. Look for faint runs leading between food-rich parts of the estate that are of interest to foxes, or alongside more regular runs but avoiding minor obstacles like low branches or puddles. You can even create your own new runs as described above.

Do not set snares close to rivers where otters are found. Do not set snares in capercaillie woods.

Keep farm workers and residents informed when you are running snares, so that they keep their dogs under control. It's possible that signage may be required in Scotland under future legislation, reflecting the more open access by the public.

Dispatching foxes. Handling non-target captures

Dispatching foxes:

A captured fox should be killed swiftly without alarming it unduly. This is not purely a compassionate recommendation: a desperately struggling fox may manage to break free at the last moment. Where it is possible to get a long view of a captured fox, a rifle can be used at a distance without the fox being aware of the operator's presence. The Scottish CoP recommends approaching the fox from downwind, presumably thinking of an approach on foot in an open landscape. In the lowlands, a long view is rarely

possible and we think the more important consideration is to do the job quickly and efficiently. So in general, we favour a shotgun at a distance of no more than 20 metres, and aimed deliberately at the head or chest. Always load two cartridges, in case a follow-up shot is necessary. In thick cover, it may be necessary to get rather closer to see the fox at all, but still aim deliberately at the head or chest. Bear in mind that after dispatching and removing a fox from a snare, you will be covered in fox smell. Make sure you clean your hands and boots thoroughly before you walk up

to or touch any other snares that need checking, otherwise you will contaminate them all with fox odour. It's not that fox smells are deterrent, just that you want the next fox to run through the snare, not stop and sniff.

Non-target species:

If you accidentally catch a protected species, you could be liable to prosecution on the matter, even if it is released alive. In court, the prosecution would need to show that you wilfully set a snare with the intention of catching a protected species.

It would be a convincing defence if you could demonstrate that you followed best practice guidelines (ie. CoP) and advice from other responsible organisations such as ourselves. Likewise, evidence of training courses you have attended and detailed records of your snaring activities should be helpful in such circumstances.

Releasing non-targets:

If, despite following the guidelines above, you catch a non-target animal, you have no guidance from the law and should choose the most humane solution. Unless the animal is injured and unlikely to survive, you should probably release it immediately. You remain open to prosecution for catching it in the first place, but you have a good defence and have demonstrated your intentions.

Releasing non-target animals from snares can be difficult. The basic principle is to use the snare wire itself to restrict the animal's movements, then if possible to open the noose with a hook stick, or else to snip the wire at the noose with wire cutters. A hook-stick is simply a length of broom handle or other pole with an offset hook fastened into the end. You can form the offset hook out of a twisted nail, after fixing it in the stick, or by distorting a stout screw eye sideways in a vice. If you do need to release a badger, and you have other snares set in the area, we suggest that you remove any nearby snares on the same run, in case others are using it. You don't want to have to repeat the release procedure!

Badgers:

A badger caught by the neck is relatively easy to handle. In most circumstances all you need to do is insert your hook into the noose and pull the running eye towards you, thereby opening the noose. As the noose is being opened the badger will typically shake its head aiding release. If this does not work drop the tines of

your garden fork over the snare wire and run it out along the wire until you come up close to the animal, then push the fork down into the ground. (Don't use your foot to stamp it in, as that will bring your foot too close to the badger's teeth! Also be careful to avoid the badger's feet with the fork tines.) Use the fork to pin the snare still; but avoid tightening it, which will cause the cable to tighten and be lost from sight in the animal's fur. The badger is now pinned down by the neck and will usually keep its head down. It's often possible to slip the hook between the noose and the badger's neck as described above. This is obviously easier if the snare is properly free-running and the stop position has been set such that the noose is not tight. If the hook stick cannot be used, snip the NOOSE of the snare with wire rope cutters. NEVER cut the snare anywhere else in the hope that 'the noose will fall off later'. Do not underestimate a badger's power, or the damage it can do to your hands.

The same principle holds with all other similar sized non-target species caught by the neck. A badger, dog, or cat caught by the middle is harder to handle, because the distressed animal may be able and eager to bite you. Offering the animal a stick to bite will often keep it occupied long enough to release it. Again, restrict the movement of the snare, then pull the loop open, or cut the cable of the loop itself.

Hares:

Using snares with longer stop positions (26cm or greater) will allow more hares to escape from snares by allowing them to 'back out'. Although snares are a legal method of catching brown hares, most snare operators regard brown hares as a non-target species, would prefer not to catch them at all, and want to release them unharmed if caught. The deliberate or accidental capture of mountain hares in snares is a grey area of legislation because

of European protection for this species; the intention of the legislation is clearly to protect the conservation status of the mountain hare, but precisely how this affects the use of fox snares is unclear in advance of case law. In the spirit of the legislation, we suggest that fox snares should never be used in such numbers that they could significantly impact the local abundance of mountain hares.

Both species of hare are highly athletic animals with massive leverage in their hind legs (hence their ability to occasionally pop a breakaway that would hold a fox). If you choose to release a hare, you must accomplish it quickly because once alarmed by your close presence the hare can do itself a lot of damage by jumping around. Shorten the snare cable using a fork as described above, or by treading along the cable with your foot. Now restrain the hare, by pinning it down (not by picking it up), to prevent it from kicking out with its back legs. Quickly decide whether the hare is fit for release. If it is obviously injured in some way, you may decide to dispatch it now, by dislocating its neck. If the hare appears fit and well, snip the noose, release the hare and watch it away, guiding it away from other snares in the vicinity.

Injured non-target animals:

If you follow our guidelines for siting and setting snares, there should be no risk of serious injury to non-target species. However, if the worst happens, the *Wildlife & Countryside Act*, *Badgers Act* and other statutes face you with a legal dilemma: to release or humanely dispatch? You may feel that rapid dispatch of the animal is the more humane option, but this may expose you to prosecution for illegally killing (as well as catching) a protected species. Arguably, reporting the incident to the police yourself should remove any doubt as to your intentions, but equally it might provoke an uncomfortable investigation. You must judge for yourself.

Wire rope cutters. (Right) Close up of the head.



Contact us

This leaflet is based on the combined experience of research and advisory staff at the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust. We welcome feedback from snare users about the advice given - please contact the GWCT Advisory Service (phone 01425 651013; email advisory@gwct.org.uk).

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Advisory Service has a professional team of regional advisors specifically to assist with technical advice on predator control, including the proper use of snares, and on all other aspects of shoot management and game conservation.

We also run training courses on

snaring and other aspects of predation control, plus general training courses covering a wider range of topics, suitable for all levels of ability. Please contact our Advisory team on 01425 651013 for further details, or visit our website www.gwct.org.uk

References

Legislation governing the use of snares can be read or downloaded at www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation

Defra Code of Practice on the Use of Snares in Fox and Rabbit Control – www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/management/documents/snares-cop.pdf

Report of the Independent Working Group on Snares (2005) – www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/management/documents/snares-iwgs-report.pdf

Snaring in Scotland – a Practitioner's Guidel – www.gwct.org.uk/documents/2009_snaring_guide.pdf

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