

TRAPPING USING SOFT NET TRAPS (GEN003) STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

BACKGROUND

Soft net traps (such as the Ecotrap®) consist of a flexible metal frame and netting and/or bag which collapses over the animal when triggered. Soft net traps rely on entanglement to secure and hold the targeted animal, potentially reducing the risk of injury. Soft net traps are used to trap feral and nuisance domestic cats and dogs, foxes, birds and rabbits as well as native animals such as small wallabies, bandicoots and possums. Although soft net trapping is considered an ineffective tool for control of large populations, it may be useful in urban/residential or where numbers have already been reduced and individual animals need to be targeted.

Soft net traps are easy to camouflage, with no floor and only one visible wall when set in position, and provide an alternative to catch animals which are cautious or reluctant to enter the enclosed space of a cage trap. This type of trap is preferred over leg hold traps and cage traps as fewer injuries are sustained, non-target animals can be released unharmed and trapped target animals can be transported away from the area for euthanasia.

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is a guide only; it does not replace or override the legislation that applies in the relevant state or territory jurisdiction. The SOP should only be used subject to the applicable legal requirements (including OH&S) operating in the relevant jurisdiction. Please note that this is a generic guideline for the use of soft net traps, further detailed information on specific species can be found in the relevant SOPs on trapping.

APPLICATION

- Trapping is time-consuming and labour intensive and is therefore an inefficient method for large-scale control in Australia. It can be effective in controlling problem individuals in urban and semi-urban areas.
- Soft net traps can provide an alternative to animals which are reluctant to enter the enclosed space of a cage trap.
- Traps have the potential to cause significant suffering and distress so should only be used when there is no suitable alternative.
Selection of appropriate traps and trap sites will maximise chance of capture and minimise the distress caused to target and non-target animals.
- Every effort must be made to avoid target and non-target deaths from factors such as exposure or shock.
- In the case of cats and dogs, before euthanasing any trapped animal it must first be established that it is feral, rather than an owned stray. Look for a collar and identification/ registration tag or scan for a microchip when possible.
- If a trapped animal is to be destroyed, it should be euthanased in a humane manner. This can be performed either by an authorised person at an animal shelter, council pound or veterinarian or by shooting while still in the cage at an appropriate site away from urban/residential areas.
- Traps must be used in accordance with relevant state and territory legislation (see Table 1). In some states, for example Western Australia, a permit may be required to trap within certain municipalities.
- Shooting of trapped animals should only be performed by skilled operators who have the necessary experience with firearms and who hold the appropriate licences and accreditation. Storage and transportation of firearms and ammunition must comply with relevant legislation requirements.

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ANIMAL WELFARE CONSIDERATIONS

Impact on target animals

- Trapped animals are likely to suffer distress from being confined in a trap and they can sometimes be injured while trying to escape, however the soft walls and minimal tension in soft net traps is likely to reduce the risk of significant injury.
- Traps must be inspected at regular intervals (at least every 4 to 8 hours) to prevent suffering and possible death from exposure, dehydration, starvation and/or shock.
- It is preferable to set traps at sites where vegetation can provide shade and shelter, although the area in the immediate vicinity of the trap needs to be clear of low vegetation to ensure the smooth operation of the spring mechanism of the trap.
- Where possible, trapping should be avoided when adverse weather conditions threaten the welfare of trapped animals. The design of the trap does not allow for the provision of a sheltered area for protection from cold winds nor does it allow for water to be provided during hot weather.
- Captured animals must be approached carefully and quietly to reduce panic, further stress and risk of injury.
- Trapped pest animals must be killed as quickly and humanely as possible.
- If transporting a trapped animal away from the capture site to be euthanased, the animal should be placed in a cage which should be covered with hessian or a blanket to provide shelter from direct sunlight, wind and rain and to minimise stress from visual threats. They must not be transported in enclosed car boots.
- To minimise the animal welfare implications of leaving dependent young to die a slow death from starvation, it is preferable not to undertake trapping when females are lactating.
- If lactating females are caught in a trap, efforts should be made to find dependent young and kill them quickly and humanely.

Impact on non-target animals

- Traps are not target specific, therefore other species such as birds and reptiles may be caught.
- Traps must not be set near areas that are regularly frequented by non-target species.
- Live non-target animals caught in traps must be examined for injuries and signs of illness or distress and dealt with as follows:
Animals which are unharmed or have only received minimal injuries such as minor cuts or abrasions should be immediately released at the site of capture.
- Animals which have more severe injuries or which are suffering from thermal stress should receive appropriate attention. An animal suffering from thermal stress can initially be placed in a suitable quiet holding area which provides warmth or shade to allow recovery before release. Animals with treatable injuries that cannot be immediately released or those failing to recover from thermal stress should be presented to a veterinarian or a registered wildlife carer for treatment.
- Animals that have injuries which are untreatable or which would compromise their survival in the wild should be euthanased using a technique that is suitable for the species. For more information on euthanasia techniques refer to GEN001 Methods of euthanasia.
- If a domestic pet is caught, it should be taken to the nearest animal shelter, council pound or veterinarian where it can be scanned for a microchip and the owner contacted, or assessed as to suitability for re-homing.

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HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- Trapped animals can be dangerous to handle. They will be nervous and aggressive and can inflict serious injuries. If these animals are killed whilst still in the trap, there should be no need to handle them directly. However, if handling is necessary, leather gloves and a catching pole, or a crush should be used. Operators must be protected by tetanus immunisation in case of infection of scratches and bites. Bite wounds often result in serious infections and should be treated by a doctor.
- Firearms are hazardous. All people should stand well behind the shooter when the shot is fired. The line of fire must be chosen to prevent accidents or injury from stray bullets or ricochets.
- Care must be taken when handling live animals and carcasses as they may carry diseases that can affect humans and other animals. Routinely wash hands after handling all animals.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Traps

- Soft net traps (eg Ecotrap®) comprise of a flexible metal frame and netting and/or bag that collapses over the animal when triggered by a tripwire, relying on entanglement to trap and restrain the animal. They are easy to camouflage, with no floor and only one wall being visible when set in position. This type of trap is lightweight, and easy to move and store.

Lures and Baits

- A variety of olfactory, visual or auditory stimuli may be used to lure targeted animals into the trap.
The attractiveness of these lures will vary with season and location.
- Species-specific bait can be placed inside the trap behind the trip wires.
- Capture efficiency may be improved by using bait that reflects the animal's staple diet for the area rather than being novel.
- Attractiveness and palatability of the bait will vary with season and location.
- Firearms and ammunition (when required for euthanasia of feral/pest animals)
- Smaller calibre rifles such as a .22 rimfire or .22 magnum rimfire with hollow/soft point ammunition should be used for euthanasia.
- The accuracy and precision of firearms should be tested against inanimate targets prior to the commencement of any shooting operation.

PROCEDURES

Selection of trap sites

- Traps should be set in areas where the targeted animals are known to be active.
- The location of all trap sites must be accurately recorded. This information should be readily available to others in case the trapper is unable to return to check the traps.
- Do not place traps in areas where they may be interfered with or damaged by livestock or humans.
- The trap requires approximately 1 metre in diameter to trigger successfully.

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Placing and setting the trap

- Before setting each trap ensure that it is functioning properly.
- The trap should be pegged to the ground to prevent the trapped animal or some other animal from moving it or tipping it over when trapped.
- The trap should be placed to ensure the surrounding shrubs or debris will not interfere with the spring mechanism before setting the trap.
- Place any bait inside the trap behind the trip wires and any lures in suitable positions inside and outside of the trap.
- The best time to set the trap will be dependent on the target animal. Traps set at the end of each day should be checked early the next morning.
- When traps are open during the day there is a greater risk of non-target birds, such as magpies and currawongs, entering and triggering the trap. If traps need to be left open during the day, they should be checked regularly (every 4-8 hours).

Euthanasia of feral/pest animals

- Trapped feral animals (eg feral cats, foxes) should be killed humanely using the methods detailed in the relevant Standard Operating Procedure for example:
 - CAT002 Trapping of feral cats using cage traps
 - CAT003 Trapping of feral cats using padded-jaw traps
 - FOX005 Trapping of foxes using padded-jaw traps
 - FOX006 Trapping of foxes using cage traps
 - GEN001 Methods of Euthanasia

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Table 1: Relevant State and Territory animal welfare and related legislation relevant to the use of traps

Jurisdiction	Relevant legislation	Description
NSW	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979	Use of steel-jaw traps is prohibited. Trapping with padded-jaw traps, cage traps and treadle snares is permitted.
QLD	Animal Care and Protection Act 2001	Steel-jaw traps are not prohibited traps.
ACT	Animal Welfare Act 1992	Use of steel-jaw traps is prohibited. Trapping with padded-jaw traps, cage traps and treadle snares is permitted.
NT	Animal Welfare Act 2000	Use of steel-jaw traps is prohibited. Trapping with padded-jaw traps is permitted.
TAS	Animal Welfare Act 1993	Leg-hold traps and snares are prohibited.
SA	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985	Small steel-jaw traps are prohibited. Large steel-jaw traps are prohibited in most areas except for wild dog control along the dingo fence and for research purposes. The large steel-jaw traps are required to be bound with cloth soaked strychnine or modified.

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VIC	<p>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986</p> <p>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2008</p>	<p>Mandatory features of traps, conditions of use, inspection periods and where traps may be set are specified for all trap types. All steel-jaw traps are prohibited. Padded traps are permitted for wild dogs, foxes and rabbits. Confinement traps, net traps and rodent kill traps are permitted. Lethal snares are illegal. Non-kill snares and kill traps require Ministerial approval.</p>
WA	<p>Animal Welfare Act 2002</p> <p>Agriculture and Related Resources Protection (Traps) Regulations 1982</p>	<p>Steel-jaw traps are permitted for wild dog control. The jaws must be bound with a cloth soaked in strychnine. Only padded steel-jawed traps are permitted for fox control and use in research programs. Permits are required to set traps in metropolitan areas. Neck snares are illegal.</p>

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