

Briefing on proposed snaring ban - exceptions

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We fully welcome the Scottish Government proposal to prohibit the use of snares 'or other type of cable restraint' for the same reasons as the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission. Snares branded as "humane cable restraints" have been in use since 2015 therefore are included in the period of the Commission's evaluation - which recommended an outright ban.

The possibility of using snares under permitted exceptions such as research is considered in this briefing. Our experience is that snares are intrinsically harmful and indiscriminate and that users knowingly push the boundaries of legal use so only a clearcut ban with no exceptions will be workable.

Some stakeholders claim an animal in a snare or cable restraint is relaxed and can be handled for research or other purposes. But this is an incorrect interpretation of animal behaviour.

To understand this reaction requires knowledge about neurophysiological processes. Here is what is happening -

Being restrained is a threat and triggers the 'freeze, fight or flight' reflex. Enzymes are released, and nerve pathways activated that cause changes in heart rate, breathing and other vital functions. When flight is not possible stress hormones are activated which, we now know can cause long lasting damage to nerve synapses and the cardiovascular system.¹

Neck restraints exacerbate the above clinical condition through compression on the vagus nerve where it passes through the neck as the animal pulls against a restraining cable or cuff. Compression stimulation of the vagus nerve triggers changes in the heart, respiratory and visceral systems. If compression stimulation continues this progresses to unresponsiveness, inability to move large muscles, vocalise or focus the eyes – a serious clinical condition known as tonic immobility.²

Ultimately the heart's electrical system fails.. Unfortunately, before the animal reaches this end-state they remain conscious, so the victim is fully aware of pain, distress, and helplessness.

It is incorrect to state that animals are 'none the worse' when found in this state or to describe them as 'relaxed' - this is to misunderstand what is in fact a serious clinical condition and significant distress.

Some state that snares can be used safely so should be permitted for specific purposes such as research. History demonstrates however that the snaring community utilises any loopholes available and has failed to self-regulate.

In Scotland the WANE(S) 2012 Act changed the law so that snares should not be "so placed as to be likely to cause bodily injury to a Schedule 6 protected animal" which includes badgers and wildcats. Snare users have stubbornly persisted with placing snares in badger territories including close to badger runs and foraging areas, even when advised of the risk by police.

There is no offence in positioning an anchor; an offence occurs only when the noose is attached. This has been exploited in badger snaring incidents where the snare users have carried on knowingly, suggesting deliberate targeting of badgers.

Scottish Wildcat Action 2015-2020 identified snare use as one of the top 3 threats to wild cats.³ Domestic cats are particularly at risk and incur significant injuries as a result.⁴

We urge you to reject any move to place 'research benefit' over the welfare of animals. On the whole snares are used for killing. Where research is concerned, we have new techniques such as air sampling of DNA that can identify species and individuals providing tracking and mapping data.

Any exceptions or permitted uses under licence would provide loopholes, and so make the job of law enforcers more difficult and potentially unworkable.

If you require information on any of these issues, we are happy to provide it. Thank you.

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Sources

¹ Moskowitz AK. "Scared stiff": catatonia as an evolutionary-based fear response. *Psychol Rev.* 2004 Oct;111(4):984-1002. doi: [10.1037/0033-295X.111.4.984](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.111.4.984). PMID: 15482070.

² Howland, R.H. Vagus Nerve Stimulation. *Curr Behav Neurosci Rep* **1**, 64-73 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40473-014-0010-5>

³ Scottish Wildcat Action (2023) Final Summary Report
<https://nms.iro.bl.uk/concern/reports/c7851625-737f-439b-8113-77cda2bc697c>

⁴ Aberdeenshire cat snaring 2023 <https://news.stv.tv/north/calls-for-ban-on-snares-after-pet-cat-found-with-horrific-injuries-in-st-cyrus-aberdeenshire>