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High-Tech Wolf Trapping

Dexter K. Oliver

Here’s a thumbnail historical sketch from the Southwest: Sometime around 1880 domestic cattle were introduced into the region and an immediate battle began between livestock owners and large predators, most notably Mexican gray wolves. The wild canids became adept at acquiring beef as a main source of food. And the fact that they were more intent on eating than killing enhanced their evil reputation. They were as apt to cripple a cow’s hindquarters and start eating the animal alive as they were to kill it first.

In the twentieth century the federal government stepped in to help with the problem. Employees of PARC (Predator and Rodent Control), the precursor of ADC and APHIS/Wildlife Services, spent a lot of time, effort, and money trying to exterminate the wolf in the southwest USA. Trapping was common, but it was toxicants like strychnine, Compound 1080, and the cyanide in M-44 “getters” that were the final blow. By 1970 the wolves were gone from our country and there were few to be found in Mexico.

Then the Endangered Species Act of 1973 suddenly changed the wolves’ status. A recovery plan was initiated and Texas trapper and houndsman Roy McBride was commissioned to capture some breeding stock in Mexico to provide future generations of wolves that might eventually re-stock areas of the Southwest. By 1998 there were so many Mexican gray wolves in captivity, some could be considered a “nonessential, experimental” population. They were released into areas of Arizona and New Mexico. Problems started immediately. Some wolves couldn’t care for themselves. Some were illegally killed, and others were too prone to association with people. But some managed to revert to the old, wild ways and took care of themselves. They sometimes did so at the expense of the few remaining cattle growers in the area.

When this happened, the guiding agency of the reintroduction program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, needed help. They got this from Alan Armistead, an APHIS/Wildlife Services trapper who had been on the scene even before the first wolf was released. I was lucky enough to spend nine days and eight nights with Alan on the Mexican gray wolf trapline and see the changes that were taking place in trapping procedures.

We were in a remote spot on the San Carlos Apache Reservation below the Mogollon Rim. But we had access to the outside world via a satellite telephone, and twice a week fly-overs of a small plane monitoring radio-collared wolves. Since some of these (as well as uncollared wolves) were our quarry, we also used telemetry receivers to find where they were roaming. Four-wheel drive trucks and ATVs were the means of transportation. Immobilizing drugs were on hand in case any wolves needed to be tranquilized.

The traps were double longsprings, steel footholds with thick serrated rubber jaws that allowed better blood circulation to the paw or toes below the pressure points. Roy McBride’s Livestock Protection Company, in Alpine, Texas, made them especially for catching wolves without inflicting much damage. Thin steel tabs supported the pan and kept smaller animals like bobcats or coyotes from tripping the trap. Bite tabs with petroleum jelly impregnated with a tranquilizing agent could be attached to one jaw, although they were often spit out or swallowed whole so the effect was negated.

But the most important addition to the usual arsenal of trapper’s equipment was an electronic transmitter that gave notice when the trap had been sprung. This allowed around the clock surveillance from a distance, and often the comfort of a pickup truck or camp trailer. The transmitter was housed in an aluminum box the size of a pack of cigarettes. Two small magnets were used, one to activate the signal, and another, attached to the trap chain by a

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At right, a specially designed wolf trap
CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS


May 15-17, 2003 - The Seventh Mountain Lion Workshop, Virginian Hotel, Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Oral and poster presentation will include the following subject areas: Population monitoring/management; Livestock/mountain lion interactions; Food habits Ecology; Human/mountain lion interactions; Genetics/DNA/diseases; and State/provincial status reports.

June 13-16, 2003 - National Goose Management Training Academy, Holiday Inn Select North at the Pyramids, Indianapolis IN. A one of a kind comprehensive training opportunity providing the hands on experience to create and manage comprehensive goose control programs. For additional information contact: Kirk La Pierre 201-933-9700 kirk.lapierre@verizon.com or Tim Julien 317-895-9069 tjulien@iquest.net

August 18-21, 2003 - Bird Strike 2003, The Westin Harbor Castle, Toronto, ON, Canada. For information e-mail Bruce MacKinnon at mackinb@tc.gc.ca.

September 9-12, 2003 - 4th European Vertebrate Pest Management Conference, University of Parma, Parma Italy. See website http://www.biol.unipr.europest

December 1-5, 2003 - 3rd International Wildlife Management Congress, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. For information see www.conference.canterbury.ac.nz/wildlife3003 or e-mail wildlife@cont.canterbury.ac.nz


Important Publication on Feeding Wildlife Is Available Again

The Wildlife Management Institute’s booklet, Feeding Wildlife... Just Say No!, is back in stock. This popular publication address the multitude of problems associated with the feeding of wildlife — particularly emergency feeding of big game animals. The subject is especially relevant and timely because of increasing evidence of potentially devastating diseases, such as chronic wasting disease and tuberculosis, found in white-tailed deer and elk herds. Other possibly devastating diseases may be caused by the concentration of animals near and at artificial feeding sites.

The 36-page booklet was produced to help citizens understand why feeding big game is often futile, frequently counterproductive, and always expensive. In addition, emergency feeding usually is in response to political pressure prompted by public misunderstanding of the consequences of such "seemingly humane" feeding.

Drafted by WMI’s Scot Williamson, with input from a number of prominent biologists, and entertainingly illustrated by artist Dale Crawford, Feeding Wildlife... Just Say No! Has proven to be very helpful to municipal, county, state, provincial, and federal agencies that need to explain to their constituencies the principles, practices and problems of feeding certain wildlife. It also is used as a text for educational classes in the conservation sciences.

Feeding Wildlife... Just Say No! is is available at the original (2000) price of $3.25 per copy, postpaid from the The Wildlife Management Institute, 1101 14th Street NW, Suite 801, Washington, DC 20005. Bulk order prices are available on request; contact Jennifer Rahm or Carol Peddicord at 202-371-1808.

—Source - Outdoor News Bulletin, Vol. 56, No. 11
Owl Next Boxes & Rodent Control
Robert H. Schmidt, Associate Professor, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Utah State University

Editor’s note: A recent news article on PCT on-line reported that a Novato, California wine grape vineyard was planning to install barn owl nest boxes to attract owls as a means to control rodents. This article prompted the following response from Dr. Schmidt.

Although this has been hashed and rehashed throughout the USA and beyond, I submit that, when it comes to owls and rodent control on farms, these questions need to be answered:

1. Is there any evidence (any studies) that demonstrate that there are more rodents in fields without owls than in fields with owls?

2. Is there any evidence (any studies) that demonstrate that there is more rodent damage in fields without owls than in fields with owls?

3. Is there any evidence (any studies) that demonstrate that there is more harvestable crop in fields with owls than in fields without owls?

Obviously, owls do eat rodents. However, I am unaware of studies that demonstrate a reduced rodent population when barn owls are introduced or encouraged. The most recent evaluation, from proponents of this theory in regards to pocket gophers, is “The findings provide little evidence that barn owls are effective in controlling gophers” (quote from abstract, Moore, T., D. Van Vuren, and C. Ingels 1998, Are barn owls a biological control for gophers? Evaluating effectiveness in vineyards and orchards. Proc. Vertebr. Pest Conf. 18:394-396).

A critic of the concept has this to say: “Without supporting facts, it is time to abandon this erroneous belief that native predators, such as barn owls, can provide meaningful control of pest rodent species such as pocket gophers or voles” (quote from summary, Marsh, R. 1998. Barn owl nest boxes offer no solution to pocket gopher damage. Proc. Vertebr. Pest Conf. 18:414-415).

There are positive reasons to promote barn owls and owl nest boxes, but rodent control is not one of them. Barn owl management is a stewardship function of wildlife management on the farm or ranch. It is not rodent control. It is time to put this particular myth out to pasture. However, you know how you are never supposed to say never in science? I’ve been told:

Some other studies include:
Yoav Motro is completing (or has completed) a PhD thesis on barn owls used in agriculture in Sde-Eliyahu, a Kibbutz in North-Eastern Israel, and worked on the factors affecting the home ranges and diet of owls in agriculture.

Dr. Gila Kahila wrote her Master's degree on “The barn owl as a biological pest control in agricultural fields”. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Mr. Eitan Aram wrote his MSc on “Dynamics of rodent populations in agricultural fields”. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, none of this has been published in English (anybody read Hebrew?). So perhaps there is more to this tale.

Call for Nominations

The terms of office for all the current NADCA officers and directors expires this year and an election must be called. NADCA president, Mike Conover, is asking for nominations to fill these positions. If willing to serve, NADCA members are encouraged to nominate themselves. Nominations for yourself or other candidates should be e-mailed to Mike Conover at conover@cc.usu.edu or snail mailed to Dr. Mike Conover, The Berryman Institute, 5210 Old Main Hill, NR 206, Logan, Utah 84322-5210.

The positions for which nominations are sought are:

**OFFICERS**

President
Vice President (West)
Vice President (East)
Secretary
Treasurer

**REGIONAL DIRECTORS**

Western (AK, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA)
Southwest (AZ, CO, NM, UT)
Northern Rockies (ID, MT, WY)
Southern (AR, LA, OK, TX)
Northern Plains (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)
Great Lakes (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)
Northeastern (CT, PA, RI, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, VT)
Centraleastern (DC, DE, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV)
Southeastern (AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, TN)

Call for Papers

21st Vertebrate Pest Conference
March 1-4, 2004
Visalia California

Abstracts due May 31, 2003
For submission procedure and format contact Paul Gorenzel at Ph: (530) 752-2263 or Email: wpgorenzel@ucdavis.edu
Wildlife Damage Management in the News

Britain Considers Eradicating Ruddy Duck Population

The British government is considering wiping out one species of duck to save another.

The government and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds say the ruddy duck—imported to Britain from the United States half a century ago—is threatening the white-headed duck by breeding with it in its Spanish habitat. Some conservationists fear the hybrid species will eventually replace the white-headed duck altogether.

A cull last year of some 2,600 ruddy ducks failed to stop the problem and there are still an estimated 6,000 ruddy ducks in Britain. The government says there are only about 2,700 white-headed ducks in Western Europe—all in Spain—and just 10,000 in the world.

Britain’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs says it had approved in principle the eradication of the ruddy duck, but would carry out more research and consultation before taking any action.


Mysterious Tick Disease Hits Montana

Scientists believe an undiscovered, Lyme disease-like illness is being transmitted by wood ticks throughout Montana, particularly in the Yellowstone River area from Livingston to Forsyth.

The bull’s-eye rash, fever, body aches and lingering exhaustion caused by the illness have stumped doctors for at least a decade, says State Epidemiologist Todd Damrow. Local, state and federal scientists are now launching an effort to crack the mystery.

The state says it receives a “handful” of reports each year of unexplainable illnesses believed to be caused by a tick bite. The cases have been clustered in the Yellowstone River drainage, but reports have also come in from both Helena and Missoula. In each instance, Lyme disease has been ruled out, as has Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

Antibiotics have been successfully used to treat recent cases reported to the state. Damrow says he doesn’t know whether the illness has ever caused any deaths.

Continued in next column

Source - PromED-mail (promed@promed.isid.harvard.edu) March 5, 2003

Hood Ornaments With Crosshairs

Want to make $250? Hit a deer. A Missouri lawmaker wants the state’s Department of Conservation (DOC) to compensate drivers $250 when they hit a deer in the state. The lawmaker says the DOC’s deer management policies have led to the increased deer/vehicle collisions and that it should be held responsible for damage caused. Opponents of the plan say paying drivers won’t solve the problem, arguing the money could be better used for deer population management.

Source - North American Hunter, April/May 2003

EVER WONDER?

How many humans, worldwide, die from rabies each year?

Worldwide, there are more than 50,000 human rabies deaths reported annually, with about 30,000 deaths in India, and the rest occurring primarily in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Most cases are due to dog bites.


Twentieth Proceedings Available

Copies of the Proceedings for the 20th Vertebrate Pest Conference are available for $25.00 plus $5.00 postage and handling (overseas postage additional, California residents add 7.25% sales tax) Send requests to Vertebrate Pest Conference, c/o T.P. Salmon, WFCB, 1 Shield Ave. University of California, Davis, CA 95616-8751
Hi-Tech Wolf Trapping

length of string, set off an accelerated beeping when disturbed. Since the wolves were being trapped for relocation or removal to a captive facility, they were not to be harmed if at all possible. In cold weather, frostbitten toes were a worry, as well as torn muscles or dislocated joints from fighting the trap. The electronic signals allowed for an immediate response, so the wolves could be removed from the traps and placed in portable kennels. The receiver was the size and shape of a cell phone, and could handle numerous signal codes.

The Mexican gray wolves may well be on their way to repopulating the Southwest. And just recently one of the northern wolves released into Yellowstone National Park was trapped in northeast Utah. The animals are definite nomads, and wanderers from different distant packs will probably overlap some day in the not too distant future. The necessity for more wildlife damage control involving western wolves seems to be just a matter of time.

And when the chips are really down, even high-tech bells and whistles don’t help as much as hard-earned trapline experience. You still have to know how and where to set those traps up so they’ll actually catch any animal as intelligent as a wolf.

Dexter K. Oliver is currently a wildlife field technician with the U.S. Forest Service, as well as a licensed nuisance wildlife control operator in Arizona. He has trapped professionally in Arizona and New Mexico for over sixteen years.
Membership Renewal and Application Form

NATIONAL ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL ASSOCIATION

Mail to: Art E. Smith, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks, 523 E. Capitol Avenue, Pierre, SD 57501

Name: ___________________________________________ Phone: (_____) ____-______ Home

Address: ___________________________________________ Phone: (_____) ____-______ Office

Additional Address Info: ____________________________

City: ______________________ State: __________ ZIP __________

Dues: $ ______ Donation: $ ______ Total: $ ______ Date: __________

Membership Class: [ ] Student $10.00 [ ] Active $20.00 [ ] Sponsor $40.00 [ ] Patron $100

Check or Money Order payable to NADCA

Select one type of occupation or principal interest:

[ ] Agriculture
[ ] USDA - APHIS - ADC or SAT
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[ ] Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator
[ ] Pest Control Operator
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[ ] ADC Equipment/Supplies
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[ ] Trapper
[ ] University

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