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July 2004

## The NADCA Probe, Issue 234

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# Message from the President

Art Smith, President, NADCA

In the last issue of **THE PROBE**, I mentioned some ideas brought up during the NADCA meeting at the Vertebrate Pest Conference in Visalia last spring. I guess I'm a creature of habit because for this issue I'm going to re-visit something else we had in Visalia—Russ Mason's plenary speech. Russ presented a very unique view from within the human-wildlife conflict world, a view I had not thought of myself, but will try and replicate here.

As each of us daily addresses our own particular piece of human-wildlife conflicts, we often forget to realize an overall picture. One view of the overall picture is one of opportunities. Opportunities for commercial enterprise, opportunities for the development of new techniques, opportunities for educating the public, opportunities for bringing a solution to a problem, opportunities for developing new and improved administrative procedures. Whatever the specialty, opportunities abound with human/wildlife conflicts. This is something we all share.

For instance, let's consider raccoons and rabies. Many people like to see wildlife in their backyard, but if an animal could be carrying a disease and is on their porch, to solve their problem they may look in the yellow pages for a nuisance wildlife control company. Here is the opportunity

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Your contributions to *The Probe* are welcome and encouraged. The deadline for submitting materials is the 15th of the month prior to publication. Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of NADCA.

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**September 13-16, 2004 - Bird Strike Committee - USA/Canada Meeting, Hyatt Regency, Baltimore, MD.** See [www.birdstrike.org](http://www.birdstrike.org) or contact Richard Dolbeer, USDA Wildlife Services, 419-625-8465, e-mail: [Richard.a.dolbeer@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Richard.a.dolbeer@aphis.usda.gov).

**September 18-22, 2004 - 11th Annual Conference, The Wildlife Society, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.** Go to [www.wildlife.org](http://www.wildlife.org) or phone 301-897-9770.

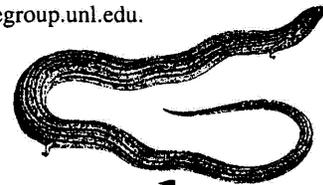
**September 26-29, 2004 - Annual meeting, The Society for Vector Ecology, Double Tree Guest Suites, Boston, MA.** Information at [www.sove.org](http://www.sove.org)

**October 18-22, 2004 - Second National Rodent Summit, Ft. Collins, CO.** Hosted by USDA/APHIS National Wildlife Research Center. For information contact John Eisemann at [John.D.Eisemann@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:John.D.Eisemann@aphis.usda.gov), phone (970) 266-6158

**November 14-17, 2004 - Defenders of Wildlife, Carnivores 2004: Expanding Partnerships in Carnivore Conservation, Santa Fe, NM.** Go to [www.carnivoreconference.org](http://www.carnivoreconference.org).

**January 24-26, 2005 — 11th Annual Wildlife Control Technology Seminar, Circus Circus Hotel, Las Vegas.** Co-sponsored by WCT Magazine and the National Wildlife Control Operators Assoc. Information at <http://nwcoa.com/>

**May 17-19, 2005 - 11th Wildlife Damage Management Conference, Holiday Inn West Bay, Traverse City, Michigan.** Organized by the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group of The Wildlife Society. For additional information, contact Kathleen Fagerstone at [Kathleen.A.Fagerstone@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Kathleen.A.Fagerstone@aphis.usda.gov) or visit the web site, <http://wildlifedamagegroup.unl.edu>.



## Ever Wonder?

*Are there any snake species that fly?*

There are five different species of "flying" snakes. (All belong to the family Colubridae.) These mildly venomous, tree-dwelling snakes are found in Southeast Asia. They hang from a high branch and swing themselves into the air. They then flatten their bodies by widening their many ribs and use side-to-side, S-shaped motions to keep themselves in the air. These snakes cannot fly upward but can glide for a good distance.

—Sources

<http://sience.howstuffworks.com/snake3.htm>

<http://www.flyingsnake.org/faqs/faqs.html>

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# Trap Collecting

*Rex E. Marsh, Specialist in Vertebrate Ecology Emeritus,*

*Department of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology, University of California, Davis*

**T**rap collectors are a diverse group coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, but many, especially the older collectors of steel traps, have in common the experience of trapping fur bearers or predators when they were youngsters. Others are still engaged in trapping for fur or are nuisance wildlife control operators.

Like most collectors, those who have an interest in traps get seriously caught up in their hobby and frequently spend in excess of \$800 to add a single rare antique mousetrap to their collection or \$10,000 or more for a rare bear trap. Others accumulate significant collections for little money by diligently searching garage, estate and farm sales, flea markets, etc. Some collectors specialize in traps used for a particular animal, i.e. mouse, rat, mole, pocket gopher, bear, birds, etc. Some may restrict their collection to those produced by a specific manufacturer. Still others have an interest in any brand or size of leg-hold or kill trap used for taking furbearers or mammalian predators. Collectors recognize some 25 different categories of traps.

Although nostalgia may be one major reason give for supporting such a hobby, there are other wide-ranging reasons. Collectors of antique mouse or rat traps may simply take to the hobby as a result of a fascination with various patented mechanical devices having practical use and visual appeal. All collectors seem to have a great appreciation for mechanical devices with functional designs and the more intricate or novel the mechanism, the better.

Traps fill a definite need and inventors are truly problem solvers. The early steel traps, many of which were hand forged, are historical artifacts of the wilderness fur trappers, many of whom opened the way for further development, particularly in the far west. Trappers and their traps played a major roll in the country's development, and the same is true for Canada. Traps reflect not only a way of life but also the historical significance of the fur and hide trade in early America.

Changes in trap development and manufacturing processes parallel the advances made by a young country during the industrial revolution. Trap developments, manufacturers, and manufacturing techniques have continued on this path, even to the point that many traps are outsourced today and are being manufactured in other countries for U.S. firms. This is why collecting traps and studying the developmental differences over time is so intriguing and accounts for the multitude of different manufacturer's models. Collectors, as a rule, are simply not satisfied with

having a specific trap but must know its age, inventor (patent holder), manufacturer, and any other details that make that particular example unique.

Traps and how they have changed over the years are also a reflection of the development of social conscience in how wildlife is utilized for food, fur, etc. In the early 1900s a strong movement toward wildlife conservation began and has evolved into not only conservation but also into the preservation of all wildlife by some groups. Man traps, yes, those constructed to catch that two-legged chicken thief, have long disappeared, as have the steel leg-hold traps developed to take predator hawks, deer, and wild horses. These traps, now seen only in the possession of a museum or collectors, are representative of some true relics of the past. At one time or another, trap collectors are queried by someone who is bemused by such an interest or even dismayed that one would want to collect such dreadful, inhumane devices. It is then that you talk about and display the live capture mousetrap portion of your collection.

There are many more trap collectors than one might imagine, as the North American Trap Collectors Association (NATCA) Membership directory is filled with 1,250 names of collectors from every state in the union, throughout Canada, and from 10 European countries, plus Australia. In fact, it is a British collector, David Drummond, a retired internationally recognized government researcher on the control of rats and house mice, who has published prolifically on rodent traps and surprisingly has, to date, written more on U.S. mouse traps and their history than any other individual.

The Collectors Association (NATCA) publishes a 24 to 32 page bimonthly magazine called TRAPS, as well as sponsors numerous annual trap collectors' swap meets throughout the U.S., as well as at least one in western Canada. Both sellers and numerous annual trap collectors' swap meets throughout the U.S., as well as at least one in western Canada. Both sellers and buyers advertise in the newsletter. You, too, can become a member by mailing the nominal fee of \$25.00 per year to NATCA, P.O. Box 94, Galloway, OH 43119. Web site: [www.usedtraps.com/natca](http://www.usedtraps.com/natca).

It's never too late to start trap collecting, as old traps of many kinds are constantly being sold or traded at trap swap meets. The on-line market place, eBay, has become an excellent source of traps for both the beginner as well as long-term collectors. Common or moderately hard to find traps

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## President's Message

for the private operator to solve the problem, make some money, and perhaps educate the homeowner to simply put pet food inside the house and the problem may never occur again. Other people may prefer to solve the problem on their own but need a little help so look for answers through their local county or university extension office. Here is a more formalized opportunity for educating the public on solving a conflict situation.

Meanwhile, agency and university researchers may be examining specific components of the raccoon-rabies relationship, investigating vaccines, delivery systems, animal population behaviors, or disease vector characters. Opportunities for increased knowledge, student degrees, and published papers. Agency managers and administrators are called to develop solutions to the raccoon-rabies issue for typically large areas, often coordinating with multiple agencies and personnel. Again, opportunity for introducing new policies or statutes enabling quick and efficient responses to the human-wildlife conflict. No matter what you do for a living, all opportunities. You have probably noticed that I am conveniently avoiding discussion on what traps, bait, how to cover overhead or insurance premiums, or equipment maintenance concerns the NWCO faces, or the presentations, media development, printing, distribution, or budgetary constraints extension specialists deal with. These are, quite frankly, details, and this article is not about details. This article is about opportunities.

Most of my waking hours over the past month have been spent addressing prairie dog control issues in South Dakota. This issue had all of the details (the "good things") attributed to conflicts like this — irate homeowners, multiple agencies with varying responsibilities, multiple layers of state and federal regulations, unhappy preservationist groups, and lawsuits. If I had forgotten about the opportunities this project presented, I'm certain the intensity and overwhelming number of details associated with addressing each of the "good things" listed above, would have sent me over the edge. During my daily struggles, many times I brought Russ's original presentation to mind.

So when the phone rings again, it would behoove each of us to realize, and take advantage of, an opportunity presenting itself and to not get consumed by the details. The details will take care of themselves. We need to take advantage of them as they show up on our doorsteps.

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The editor of *THE PROBE* thanks contributors to this issue: Rex Marsh, Dexter Oliver, and Art Smith

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## Trap Collecting

frequently appear for sale and occasionally extremely rare traps show up. For example, must recently a very rare mouse trap was purchased on eBay for \$5,201. The seller was totally unaware of what a gem of a trap he had and put it up for sale at a starting bid of \$9.95; ardent collectors recognized its value and the bidding war began. The seller had purchased this trap along with two other items at a garage sale for \$5.00 and realized a truly amazing profit. Sales of this magnitude are exceedingly rare, however, and a modest collection of wooden-based snap mouse traps can easily be assembled for relatively little money. A beginner without a large investment can also collect plastic or cardboard mouse traps of recent vintage. A collection of this type may pique the interest of a young collector, occupying time and helping to develop a keen eye while you peruse the items offered at yard sales and flea markets. The search and sometimes a great find represent a significant portion of the fun of collecting.

Based on the experiences of other collectors, I have yet to find anyone who has lost money when their quality trap collection was sold, regardless of the type of traps collected. Most long time collectors feel that it is a very good investment, however one can only speculate on what the future may bring. As with any type of collecting the condition of the item is very important in assembling a superior collection. For those currently involved in trapping or in the nuisance wildlife control business, it may well pay off to keep an eye out for old, odd, or unusual traps of any type, as it may be worth far more than you think. The more you know about traps the better the chance of spotting those more rare ones. The book, *The Steel Trap in North America*, authored by Richard Gerstell in 1985, is one of the best trap references for beginning collectors.

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### From the Editor

When I first assume editorship of *THE PROBE*, I came up with the brilliant idea to incorporate a regular feature called "Ever Wonder?" I thought it would be interesting, educational, and fun(yeah, sure) to pose wildlife-related questions and provide answers. This would be especially appropriate if I could also relate the subject to some aspect of damage management.

Well...I've managed to come up with something for almost ever issue. I'd say some were pretty good and some were pretty lame (see the one in this issue). But all were about as tough to come up with as bird poop in a cuckoo clock. I get everything ready for an issue and then it's, oh, no, I need an "Ever Wonder!"

So I'm asking for some help here. Either say "forget it, I'd miss it like a bellyache" or send me some materials—preferably question AND answer. And please cite your source(s).

Come on. I know there's a wealth of important trivia out there. You can send stuff to me at: [sullivan@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:sullivan@ag.arizona.edu)

Bring it on!

Larry Sullivan,  
editor of *The Probe*

## Tips from the Trapline

to a trap rig for nuisance wildlife control operators, for public relations reasons as well as the animal's benefit. They can be found in most trappers' catalogs.

I add about six feet of chain and a drag to new traps, along with swivels at both ends and in the middle. Some of these are legal requirements where I live, others just common sense. Most nuisance wildlife control work will be done in some vicinity to people. Even if a trap is to be staked or tied off to an immovable object, I like having a drag just in case an animal pulls free from the other restraints. It's a simple backup and a lot of swivels help keep the animal from getting too wrapped up in the chain or applying too much direct pressure that could cause it some damage.

I boil traps in water, dogwood lye, and some trap wax, which helps season and protect them from rust and rids them of any human scent. After that I always use cotton gloves when handling them.

Actually setting the trap requires digging a hole big enough and deep enough for the trap to fit in and, when covered, be level with the earth around it, or even a little lower. I always try to set traps so the animal has to step down into it a bit, thus putting more weight and pressure on the pan to ensure a catch. The trap needs to be solidly bedded, so it does not move at all before it is covered. Do this with the loose soil that came from the hole. Some folks use foam rubber under the pan, some put waxed paper or fiberglass screen on top of the pan before covering the trap. They all work; the main point is that you don't want anything like a tiny pebble or dirt under the pan, which could keep it from dropping far enough to fire the trap. Then, using a sifter (quarter inch sized screen openings), cover the trap lightly with whatever sand, soil, or duff will blend in with the area surrounding the trap.

At this point, of course, the main objective is to avoid catching your own fingers in the trap. This usually happens when a person either sifts too much material onto the pan or gets too artistic trying to blend the trap in. And I have seen a couple people go to stand up by pushing off the ground with one hand, directly into a trap. Black and blue fingernails are not unusual on new trappers, but they need not occur if you constantly think about what you're doing.

Before placing a trap you have to decide how you want to attempt to capture an animal. There are basically two ways: either using lure, baits, and other attractants; or blind sets that have none of these. Since lures can often attract unwanted animals like a neighbor's dog, it pays to think

about these things in advance. As a grizzled trapper once told a friend of mine, "a little knowledge with steel traps can be a dangerous thing."

Talk with any fur trapper and they will mention three basic sets: the cubby, dirt hole, and flat sets. The first set involves constructing a small, partially enclosed nook with the trap guarding the entrance. The second is a hole, dug in the earth such as a rodent would do, with a trap in front of it; and the third is simply a buried trap with a bush or a tuft of grass behind it. These all have enticements of one kind or another to bring a target animal to the trap. The visual, olfactory, or audio attractant will be placed in such a way that an animal must step on the trap in order to get close to the lure/bait/scat and urine/electronic squeaker, whatever is being used to get its attention.

Blind sets, or walk-throughs, as they are also called, rely on the animal using a certain path of travel, either a natural one like a deer trail or one contrived by the trapper. You can funnel a lot of animals onto a trap by using tree limbs, brush, or even boards. In urban and suburban settings wildlife tend to travel along buildings, fences, and walls, or where vegetation such as hedges or flower beds offer hiding places. Blind sets in such spots are effective and not apt to catch unwanted animals.

No matter which type of set is used, it must be located where the target animal, or animals, is most likely to encounter it. If a relatively small area, such as around a chicken coop or in a suburban backyard, is involved, fewer, more concentrated sets may be used. If a larger space is being impacted, like a sheep impoundment, more traps, set farther apart, may be needed. Always try and assess how and where the problem animal is gaining access to the area where it is causing damage. Then set traps accordingly.

Public sentiment about steel foothold traps, in general, is based on erroneous assumptions on how they are constructed and operated. There is no doubt, however, that these traps are a useful tool for a nuisance wildlife control operator to know about. I have worked for a number of federal and state wildlife agencies on projects involving threatened and endangered species where foothold traps had to be used. The target animals simply could not be caught in cage-style traps. As wildlife such as coyotes and wolves continue to expand their range, it is inevitable that there will be more nuisance calls about them. What's that old Boy Scout's motto? Be prepared.



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## Membership Renewal and Application Form

NATIONAL ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL ASSOCIATION

Mail to: Nicki Frey, FRWS, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322-5230

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Home

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Office

Additional Address Info: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Please use 9-digit Zip Code

Dues: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Class: Student \$10.00 Active \$20.00 Sponsor \$40.00 Patron \$100 (Circle one)

Check or Money Order payable to NADCA

Select one type of occupation or principal interest:

- |   |   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator | <input type="checkbox"/> University             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe) _____             |   |