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August 1997

## The Probe, Issue 179 - August 1997

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"The Probe, Issue 179 - August 1997" (1997). *The Probe: Newsletter of the National Animal Damage Control Association*. 267.  
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# The Uneasy Conscience of the Animal Rights Movement

*Stephen Vantassel, NWCO Correspondent, Wildlife Removal Service, Springfield, Massachusetts*

A specter has arisen in the world striking terror in the hearts and minds of everyone who utilizes animals in a consumptive way. This relentless ghost seeks to haunt everyone in the animal trade. Words like “injustice,” “barbarism,” “inhumanity,” and “immoral” comprise the mantra it screams against all who disagree. His motto is, “It doesn’t matter if they (animals) can reason but whether they can suffer.” Nevertheless, like Paul Harvey, he cites numerous stories recounting the kindness of animals toward people such as dolphins saving a drowning swimmer and dogs calling 911. These anecdotes are presented as evidence for the reasoning power in animals. As reasoning creatures ourselves, we should not kill or harm our animal relatives.

What lofty ideals? What can be more wonderful than the Edenic world to which this specter points? — a world where the lion lays down with the lamb and where humans no longer use animals for their purposes.

Despite its utopian ideals, this specter hides a deep, dark secret. It has a guilty conscience. It has a gnawing awareness that these lofty ideals are based on philosophical incongruities, cultural bigotry, and carelessness with the facts. At worst, it realizes that this utopian world is a siren’s call leading to environmental chaos, if not a decline in human rights (i). I contend that the animal rights movement is morally hollow. We need not be terrorized by this specter; rather, we need to turn on the lights and exorcise it from our society.

The first problem that confronts the conscience of the Animal Rights Movement (hereafter “AR”) is its philosophical incongruities. While a coherent philosophical system doesn’t prove that its correct, an incoherent system is surely false. AR proponents claim that humans commit the sin of speciesism if they believe that human concerns always have priority over the animals. They contend that it is arrogant to think that our needs and desires should take priority over other living, sentient, and sensitive beings we call animals. “Since animals can suffer and feel pain, we should do all that we can not to cause or increase their pain and suffering” (Teraspulsky’s addition- “unless it is in their best interest as well” e.g. surgery) (ii) (cf. Peter Singer’s book *Animal Liberation*).

On the surface this moral stand sounds so reasonable. After all, extending rights to animals is just another logical step in the long history of civil rights. Let us consider the thesis that humans are just another form of animal. The question that never seems to be asked is that if we are just another kind of animal, then why can’t we act like one? As I have written elsewhere (iii), I have never seen a coyote worry about his exploitation of a deer fawn. The animals I encounter seem to take advantage of every opportunity afforded them. It would seem, however, that AR proponents want us to operate on a different moral plane than what appears to be found in nature.

My question is “Where do we find the commandments or the instructions by which to live in this new moral plane?” Can this moral doctrine be found in the theory of evolution? I doubt it. My understanding of evolution is that the fittest animals survive. Maybe it’s just my interpretation but that sounds like a pretty violent and uncaring world to me. Another problem is if evolution gave us this moral code, why don’t all humans automatically accept it? Could it be that some humans are more highly evolved than others? I thought only Hitler believed that. Perhaps the AR people believe that this principle no longer applies to animals that have achieved self-awareness. Unfortunately for them, they have yet to explain the mechanics for this change and how this “live and let” theory came to be. Could it have come from the Christian doctrine of loving thy neighbor?

This is very possible. Unfortunately, the God of Christianity, namely Christ, did the terrible thing of helping the disciples kill more fish (John 21:6). I should point out that AR allows the killing of animals for self preservation. Given that Jesus didn’t need the fish to live, he could have chosen to be a vegetarian. His decision to help the disciples kill more fish undermines the AR position. At the very least, we now know that one cannot be a Christian and an AR at the same time.

The next question our ghost needs to answer is how does one properly walk the path of cruelty-free living? Assuming that we don’t want to be speciesist, how does one properly adjudicate suffer-

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# CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

September 21-27, 1997: 4th Annual Conference of The Wildlife Society, Snowmass Village, Colorado. Includes the following symposia: *Over Abundant Goose Populations: An Emerging Challenge in Wildlife Conservation* (chair, Bruce D. J. Batt, Ducks Unlimited); and *Predation and Predation Management: Public Perceptions and Management Approaches* (chair, Terry Messmer, Utah St. Univ.). Also will include annual meeting of the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group (chair, Scott Hygnstom, Univ. of Nebraska). Pre-registration \$160 for TWS members if received by Aug. 25. Contact: TWS, 5410 Grosvenor Ln., Bethesda, MD 20814, (301) 897-9770..

October 4-8, 1997: 51st Annual Conference, Southeastern Assoc. of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, Oklahoma City, OK. Contact: Kim Erickson, PO Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, phone (405) 521-3721.

October 16-19, 1997: 8th Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference, Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, Roanoke, Virginia. NADCA Membership Meeting planned. Contact: Jim Parkhurst, Virginia Coop. Ext., Dept. of Fisheries & Wildlife Sciences, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0321, (540) 231-5573, FAX (540) 231-7580, e-mail: jparkhur@vt.edu

October 19-24, 1997: Second International Congress of Vector Ecology, Holiday Inn Int'l. Drive Resort, Orlando, Florida. Sponsored by Society for Vector Ecology. For registration information, contact: Gilbert L. Challet, Sec-Treas., P.O. Box 87, Santa Ana, CA 92702, (714) 971-2421 ext. 148, FAX (714) 971-3940.

December 7-10, 1997: 59th Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Theme: "Managing Natural Resources: Integrating Ecology and Society." Conference will include sessions on Prevention and Control of Invasive Species, and Managing Overabundant Wildlife. For further information, contact Michael Samuel at (608) 271-4640, or visit website <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/fh/fish/mwfwc.htm>.

March 2-5, 1998: 18th Vertebrate Pest Conference, Doubletree Hotel, Costa Mesa, California. Contact: Sydni Gillette, DANR-North Region, UC Davis, Davis, CA 95616, (916) 754-8491 or visit website <http://www.davis.com/~vpc/welcome.html>

## NADCA Officers' Nominations Needed

If you'd like to more directly participate in the business of *your* organization, why not volunteer to be a candidate for office? NADCA needs you! Consider serving for a 2-year term as Regional Director or one of the board members.

Also, if you know of a fellow member who would be great in a leadership role, give them a call and encourage them to consider serving. Feel free to send any nominations for national officers, or nominate yourself, by contacting Eugene LeBoeuf, NADCA president, at (505) 846-5679.

The Nomination Committee is presently being formed, and will begin its work of putting together a ballot in the next month. NADCA elections will occur this fall, with elected members beginning a 2-year term of office in January 1998.

## Berryman Institute Announces Fellows

The Jack H. Berryman Institute at Utah State University has recognized two outstanding graduate students whose work is directed toward the Institute's goal of enhancing human-wildlife relationships. The two students chosen as Berryman Fellows for 1997 are:

David Choate — David received his B.S. at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and has a broad range of field experience with cougars, raptors, and as a professional safari guide in Botswana. He is seeking his M.S. and Ph.D. at USU under the direction of Drs. Gary Belovsky and Michael Wolfe. He will be assessing the indirect effects of cougar predation on mule deer populations.

Duane Peter Sahr — Peter received his B.S. degree from the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, and has worked with the USDA ADC program. He is seeking his M.S. at USU under the direction of Dr. Fred Knowlton. His research investigates the merits of using tranquilizer devices on leg-hold traps set to capture gray wolves. It is anticipated that these tranquilizers will reduce stress and injuries sustained by wolves which are captured for translocation purposes.

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Your contributions of articles 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.

# Reviews of the Video: "Balancing Nature—Trapping in Today's World"

## *Description of the Video*

What started out as an idea has finally become a reality. The public education video entitled "Balancing Nature—Trapping in Today's World" was completed in 1996. This much-needed educational tool was developed to inform the public, in a professional manner, about the need to manage furbearer populations through responsible, regulated trapping.

The initial fundraising letters and promotional articles were written in May 1993. In summer 1994, Noelyn "Butch" Isom, of the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, joined forces with the National Trappers Association's Public Education Committee to help raise funds for this production through various wildlife agencies and the International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. Without Butch's dedication, this project would not have happened. We estimate the cost of the finished product to be between \$80,000 and \$100,000. This cost was split by the wildlife agencies funding 60% and trapping associations funding 40%.

By July 1995, a level of funding was reached to start production plans, and a planning committee met at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, NE to define specific objectives. Andy Anderson Productions of Omaha, who had previously produced award-winning educational videos for NE Game & Parks, was selected to produce this video. The committee selected our primary target audiences: 1) urban women ages 25-40; 2) state and federal lawmakers; and 3) impressionable youth in grades 4-6. The stated purpose of the project was to "gain informed consent that regulated trapping is consistent with responsible human use of renewable natural resources and an important component of wildlife management."

At the Omaha planning meeting, we also selected our primary messages. They were as follows:

1. *Trappers are some of our best wildlife advocates, and they care about animals.*
2. *Only abundant species are trapped.*
3. *Modern "foothold" traps utilize the best available technology to reduce any pain and suffering to make them humane.*
4. *Trapping replaces other forms of natural mortality.*
5. *Trapping is regulated.*
6. *Animals are resources and are acceptable for human use.*
7. *Death must occur annually, and natural death is more cruel.*
8. *Because humans have altered the environment, we have a responsibility to fulfill our management role.*

9. *Fur is a renewable resource, but synthetics are non-renewable.*
10. *All of society benefits from some aspect of trapping.*

The underlying themes of this video are that wildlife populations need to be professionally managed for their benefit and ours, and that the recreational and economic value of trapping provides the incentive for this management.

In February 1996, the female Senator concept was developed, and script writing began. Filming began by mid-April. A focus group was appointed and was instrumental in shaping the manner in which the messages were conveyed. Because of their essential guidance, the message became a "soft sell." We quickly discovered that high-quality footage of natural mortality of furbearers and urban damage is almost non-existent. To meet this and future needs, the NTA is putting together a bank of Super VHS or Beta Cam film footage on this topic (e.g. mange, distemper, rabies, trees cut down by beaver in city parks and golf courses, raccoons tearing shingles off roofs, badgers digging up cemeteries, coyotes eating animals alive, etc.).

There are two versions of this video. The 30-minute version is suitable for school presentations, or for use in speaking to various groups. There is also a 10-minute, condensed version which is more suitable for legislators and federal, state, and local lawmakers.

To order the video, contact SunDancer, P.O. Box 24181, Omaha NE 68124, phone (800) 827-9929, or (402) 393-8762. The 30-minute version is priced to encourage quantity distribution and use: under 100 copies, \$19.95 per copy; 100-499 copies, \$10.95 per copy; 500+ copies, \$2.25 per copy; plus shipping and handling. A resale price list is available upon request.

Scott Huber, Chairman  
National Trappers Assoc. Public Education Committee

## *Review by Dallas Virchow, Extension Assistant, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Scottsbluff, NE*

This 28-minute presentation is a good overall introduction to many trapping issues today. The dialog and scenes move fast and there is enough wildlife footage to keep even a ten-year-old attentive. The plot is a senator who is on a fact-finding mission among her constituency to uncover various perspectives regarding trapping. Many scenes find her interviewing people and, then, transcribing her thoughts into a Dictaphone as she drives. The conversation throughout is relaxed, casual and to the point.

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## Uneasy Conscience of Animal Rights Movement

ing claims made between a human and an animal? If we have to stop being speciesist certainly there are guidelines to help us make non-speciesist decisions. Take for example, the conflict between a town and the local beaver population. The town is suffering property damage due to flooding and tree cutting, and now the water sources are in danger of beaver pollution. Beaver, on the other hand, have a moral right to eat to survive. The question that the animal rightists need to answer is, whose suffering is greater? Of course, AR will claim that the needs of both parties can be met as with beaver baffles etc. However, as the town of Chelmsford, Massachusetts discovered, AR (specifically, The Friends of Animals) are not too quick to help end human suffering (iv). AR have also failed to provide moral justification for actions that resists the beaver's innate desire to expand its territory. Who gives us the right to decide that a beaver only needs a certain depth of water?

A third incongruity stems from the way human moral freedom is restricted. AR allows the freedom of animals to eat other animals under the belief that this cruel activity is "natural/or necessary." Yet the human animal for some reason doesn't have the same freedom. The difficulty with this position is how do the AR know that trapping is not a human instinct? Humans have been trapping crop-damaging animals and otherwise utilizing animal flesh as far back as we can accurately see. One need only consider the prehistoric cave wall drawings in France (dated to 25,000 years ago) that depict human stick figures hunting and trapping animals that resemble deer. Granted history doesn't prove an activity morally correct, e.g. slavery. However, just because something is traditional or ancient doesn't mean that it is wrong.

A fourth incongruity is how AR claim that their actions protect wildlife/animals. What is surprising about the pro-animal rights agenda is that it has the opposite effect on the public. In areas where animal rights has created legal restrictions on wildlife use, people tend to view the protected animals no longer as valuable resources but as a pest species.

Take New Jersey, for example, where deer populations have exploded in one sanctuary, causing a great deal of damage. One resident called the deer nothing more than "rats with antlers." Given that the public still holds a speciesist view about rats, I would surmise that to call a deer a "rat" means that deer have dropped in this person's value estimation. Of course, this change in the public's perception takes time. Nevertheless, the change does occur. The AR position fails to compensate for human self interest. Humans, on the whole, will always work for their self interest to the expense of animals. By providing financial or environmental reasons for protecting wildlife, traditional wildlife management utilized this human trait to benefit the species/environment. Landowners may tolerate a little more property damage knowing that a trapper would be legally able to remove the beaver during the coming season. Another benefit to waiting was that the resource would be utilized rather than wasted.

One more area of inconsistency in AR's pro-animal philosophy is that they conveniently forget how trapping predators such as fox, coy-

ote, raccoon and mink actually helps the survival of various nesting birds, some of which are endangered. Footholds have been used to thin out predator populations so that prey populations could bounce back to a more secure population strength. Their gospel of "hands off the animals" ignores the fact that human activity impacts animal dynamics. They seem to assume that people are bad and animals are good. Thus the AR by their actions are saying that some species are more important than others and therefore don't deserve our protection.

Another key reason why the AR movement has such an uneasy conscience rests on its inherent cultural bigotry. You may be shocked to think that people supposedly so kind and thoughtful could be considered culturally bigoted. But the fact remains that a consistent AR philosophy requires one to reject and condemn the lifestyles of native Americans or Faeroe Islanders. If killing animals is wrong, then these native cultures need to be prevented from killing animals.

The irony for the AR movement is while they may admire the idea of harmony with Nature, they cannot swallow the idea that harmony with Nature includes killing and eating it. I would even go so far as to suggest that not all the animals the Indians killed were for food. I believe that some of them were killed to demonstrate the bravery and skill of the warrior. Sure they were probably eaten, but that wasn't the primary purpose for the animal's death. I should also point out that I have yet to find an AR activist make his/her living off the land and live consistently with their radical AR agenda. It is more convenient to talk about animal rights while sitting aloft in the downtown penthouse of your law firm than it is from the window of your farm house.

Thus the AR philosophy undermines the legitimacy of the way of life for many indigenous cultures. Aboriginal peoples in North America rely on the fur trade or sea mammals to support their lifestyle (v). Sure, the Indians could find other work by moving to the city, but they don't want to. Let us remember the outrage over the Canadian seal hunt. At no point were these seals ever in danger of extinction. But that didn't concern the AR movement. They wanted to end the seal hunt because it was, in their words, "barbaric" to kill such a "cute" baby seal. Granted, the killing method of choice, clubbing, is not pretty. However, would the AR people have permitted the seal hunt if the hunters used lethal injection? What was the result of this vicious campaign? Newfoundlanders lost their jobs and seal populations are now rising to dangerous levels. One could add even more examples from the vicious assaults on the livelihoods of the Icelandic peoples (vi).

The final problem with the AR movement is the way they distort facts to support their causes. Considering its philosophical vagaries and inconsistencies coupled with their lack of public accountability, we shouldn't be too surprised. Nevertheless, we should highlight a few of their misleading characterizations of the facts.

Consider how the AR movement portrays trapping. Trapping is presented as a blood sport where animals suffer in a seeming never-ending torture. Time and time again they drag out photographs of some animal caught in a foothold which subsequently had to have its foot amputated (vii). While I have no doubt that this tragic event does

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## Ineasiness of Animal Rights Movement

in fact happen, what they don't tell people is how often it happens with illegally set traps and/or unethical trappers. Their usual response is, "How would a legally set trap have prevented the damage?" (viii)

The answer to that is simple. Legally set traps are checked at the required times, set in appropriate locations and baited with appropriate baits. Is this foolproof? No. But state laws and trapping ethics would significantly reduce the incidence. The problem is, however, that the AR movement has a zero tolerance threshold. If it can happen once then that is unacceptable. Funny how they don't require veterinary workers to also abide by a zero pain tolerance. I have seen a veterinary technician forced to inject a raccoon twice (in order to kill it) because she missed injecting the right spot the first time. Just because she tried to do a good job isn't enough. I know trappers try to do a good job but sometimes they make mistakes. Funny how one person is forgiven, and the other isn't.

## New Product Available

### "Scarecrow" by Contech Deters Mammals, Birds

A sprinkler device, activated by a motion detector, is apparently proving successful in scaring a variety of wildlife away from gardens yards, to the delight of homeowners. The "Scarecrow" device, first developed and marketed in early 1996 by Contech Electronics, Inc. of British Columbia, is being marketed in a variety of garden supply and hardware retailers in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain.

The "Scarecrow," made of aluminum and plastics, resembles a cross between a robot and a toucan. Mounted on an 18-inch stake, it attaches to a garden hose. The motion detector is controlled by two 9-volt batteries. The motion detector has an arc of 100 degrees, and is reported to protect an area up to 35 ft. deep and 45 ft wide, depending on the sensitivity setting chosen. When the unit senses an animal, it releases a 3-second burst of water through a rapidly-pulsating, oscillating sprinkler head. The manufacturers claim a high level of effectiveness against such species as deer, dogs, cats, raccoons, and even pigeons.

The "Scarecrow" has a suggested retail price of \$129, but can be found on retailers' shelves for around \$90 to \$100. The manufacturer provides a 30-day money-back guarantee, and a 2-year warranty on the device's operation.

Contech Electronics, Inc. is a business operated by Klaus and Erik Djukastein, who have been manufacturing and marketing a product called ScatMat since 1988. ScatMat is an electronic device designed for homeowners to use indoors in training dogs or cats to stay off furniture or kitchen counters.

For further information on the company and its products, or to search out local suppliers, call (800) 767-8658, or visit the company's web site at <http://www.scatmat.com>.

*Editor's Note: This article will be continued in the September issue of The PROBE.*

### NOTES

(i) One need only read various quotes from AR leaders to verify that AR could easily result in a loss of human rights.

Permit me to cite a few quotes: "I don't believe human beings have the 'right to life'. That's a supremacist perversion. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Ingrid Newkirk as quoted in Richard Conniff, "Fuzzy-Wuzzy Thinking about Animal Rights," *Audubon*, November 1990, p.126.

"Surely there will be some nonhuman animals whose lives, by any standard, are more valuable than the lives of some humans." Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* 2nd Ed. 1990. P. 19.

"If it were a retarded baby and a bright dog, I'd save the dog." Tom Regan *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs*, "speech given at University of Wisconsin, Madison, October 27, 1989. He said this in response to a question from the audience which said, If you were aboard a lifeboat with a baby and a dog, and the boat capsized, would you rescue the baby or the dog?"

(ii) My thanks to Peter Teraspulsky for this quote. He clearly wishes to distinguish animal rights from eco-feminism a distinction I was previously unaware of.

(iii) "A Christian Minister Explains Why He Can Morally Trap God's Little Creatures" *The Probe*, Issue 160, Nov. 1995, pp. 1,6.

(iv) Christopher Scott "Chelmsford Beaver Sanctuary Proposed" pp. 13,15. *The Sun*, Lowell Mass, Nov. 20, 1991. *Animal Rights Group Plans to Tackle Beavers: Humane Control Would Serve as Model*, by Sharon Weitz, p.1ff, December 24, 1991. "Beaver Solutions Elude Local Boards," Sharon Weitz and Steve Hand, *Chelmsford Independent*, Aug. 20, 1992. Tom Hayes, "Trapper responds to Friends of Animals President," *Chelmsford Independent*, Aug. 5, 1993.

(v) Additional information can be found in Calvin Martin's book *Keepers of the Game*.

(vi) For further information about the peoples of the High North consult Dr. Martin Regal's two videos "Survival in the High North with Leif Blaedel" (Mega Film, 1992) and "Reclaiming Paradise" (Mega Film, 1993).

(vii) My personal dialogue with an animal rights activist. Peter Teraspulsky showed me a list of about 2 dozen animals that had been severely injured in Massachusetts by non-box traps. This list, however, was compiled over three years and didn't distinguish between legally and illegally set traps.

(viii) This issue is not hypothetical. This was the exact answer I received while debating an animal rights activist on radio.

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*The Editor thanks the following contributors to this issue: Mike Conover, Robert Schmidt, Dallas Virchow, and Stephen Vantassel. Send your contributions to The PROBE, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449.*

## Video Reviews: "Balancing Nature..."

The video begins with the senator interviewing a husband-wife sheep ranch team. Predation losses related to the sheep industry are discussed as are the economic benefits of the fur industry. The rancher has accolades for the trapper that he has hired.

Next, the senator interviews an urban homeowner with a wildlife damage problem, a conservation officer with a state game agency, and the trapper who is dealing with the homeowner's problem. The trapper is depicted as part-time and is shown setting conibear and leghold traps.

The senator then interviews a wildlife biologist who further enumerates the kinds and extent of wildlife damage. He also describes disease, trapping regulations and basic wildlife population and natural resource concepts. Lastly, the senator interviews a veterinarian and they discuss diseases like canine distemper, rabies, and giardia and the wildlife-pet transmission routes. Near the end of the video, the senator dictates into the mike and recaps the issues.

The target audiences for the video are urban women ages 25 to 40, state and federal lawmakers, and youth in 4th to 6th grades. It appears that the production is tailored for the first two groups, although elementary students will find the wildlife footage appealing. The woman senator and her affection for her own pet dog, who rides with her, is contrasted nicely with her final decision to favor regulated trapping. Her sentiment was illustrated as part of her decision process and most women in the target audience may identify with her.

A condensed version is targeted to lawmakers. I have not seen this version so I cannot recommend it but its short format should be attractive to this group. I have used five to ten-minute segments of the long version for high school workshops. Prefacing the video with an admonition that it is not to entertain but to instruct is important with high school students. Although the video uses all nonprofessional actors, it is still very well done and this does not detract from the instructive points.

My concern is that although the production is on target for urban women, the venues may be limited. Many of us in the animal damage control industry do not have many opportunities to address groups of women. A few of us can address groups of students when the opportunities arise.

To alleviate these inherent drawbacks, Butch Isom, one of the producers at Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, has seen to it that bulk orders of the video get a significant price discount (as reported in June 1997 *The Probe*). Thus far, many state and federal agencies and state trapper associations have taken advantage of these discounts.

In the tradition of Vantassel, I give the video an "A" for production and content.

*Review by Robert Schmidt, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-5210*

Trapping, especially with leghold or foothold traps, is controversial. This controversy is measurable. Public attitude surveys indicate that a broad spectrum of American society believes these traps are in-

humane and cruel. Popular films ("The Fox and the Hound," "Rescuers Down Under") link the bad guy with trapping. Many animal activist groups have regional or national campaigns to eliminate traps and trapping. Some states have banned or severely limited trap use through the initiative petition process. There are international trade issues revolving around a pending European ban on the importation of fur captured with foothold traps.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, along with most state wildlife departments and the National Trappers Association, believe that this trend is not in the best interests of society and their organizational mandates, and have developed a multifaceted program to reverse the negative image of traps and trapping. One product of this effort is the development of a half hour video entitled "Balancing Nature: Trapping in Today's World."

The video revolves around a fictitious Senator Beck, who is researching the issues involved in LB 584, a bill to ban trapping. Senator Beck confesses her personal leanings toward an animal rights philosophy, including not wanting to see any animal needlessly hurt or killed. She talks with sheep producers who are concerned about coyote predation, a homeowner dealing with a basement flooded by beaver activity, a conservation officer, a wildlife biologist, a trapper, and a veterinarian. Senator Beck concludes that trapping does have a place in today's world, declaring that "Responsible trapping is pro-wildlife."

Early drafts of the script and the video were reviewed by a number of representatives of state and federal wildlife agencies, as well as members of trapping organizations. The credits also note that six women (presumably between the ages of 25 and 40) participated as a focus group to provide input into the video's message.

The video is well-done, and Pam Witt certainly is the star in her role as Senator Beck. She asks important questions, is focused on the issue, and is reflective of the broader ramifications of traps and trapping to society.

I have viewed this video a dozen times, in the company of trappers, non-trappers, women aged 25-40, grade school children, and university students. In spite of the video's quality, I find the weaknesses to be overpowering and puzzling. These weaknesses leave the video susceptible to criticism, and this criticism makes the video a useful tool for those opposed to trapping! Let me explain.

First, I have to admit that I believe trapping (again, focusing on the foothold trap in particular) is controversial in our society for three reasons: 1) the perceived nature of pain and cruelty involved with its use, 2) the concern that traps catch too many nontarget or "innocent" animals, and 3) the use of furs as status symbols that simply are not needed in a modern society. I come to this conclusion by analyzing the content of anti-trapping and anti-fur publications and advertisements. Thus, I have always believed that trap proponents must address these issues in order to get at the crux of the controversy. However, the video is very weak on these issues.

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## Video Reviews: "Balancing Nature..."

The issue of pain and suffering associated with the trapping process is completely ignored except for the example of a 200-pound man putting his hand in a number 1 1/2 coil spring trap for 5 seconds. Notice that my hand still works, he says! This demonstration is such a poor simulation of pain and damage to the feet of small animals that I shudder every time I see it. Foothold trap opponents use this demonstration to their advantage because it demonstrates trapper ignorance in understanding the physical impacts and consequences of the tools trappers themselves claim expertise in using. I am amazed also that the video's producers did not take advantage of the large body of research that clearly demonstrates trap injuries can be reduced as a function of trap design and use. The argument that traps do not cause injury, pain, or suffering is whittled away when a single photo is shown of a three-legged dog, a trapped house cat, or a raccoon with a broken leg. However, pan-tension devices, rubber and off-set jaws, shorter chains with stakes, shorter trap-check intervals, and other techniques can reduce injuries dramatically. Trap tranquilizer devices and remotely monitored traps are on the horizon. Where is this discussion? Where is the hint that trappers even care about this issue?

My second concern is that the video seems to promote the concept that 1) trapping is primarily a tool to prevent wildlife damage, and 2) trapping prevents or controls wildlife diseases. I would hate to be in a position to defend the disease-prevention idea, and trapping is primarily a tool to harvest fur for recreational and economic gain. Although trapping has proven itself to be a valuable tool in wildlife damage management, professional wildlife damage management has not become and should not be a recreational sport. So I find it peculiar that trapping is being defended as a wildlife damage management issue, and not a fur production issue. Fur is a by-product? This seems like defending deer hunting as a method to reduce damage to alfalfa and corn, and defending duck hunting as a grain protection technique, rather than describing them as traditional hunting sports.

Finally, trap defenders had gotten a great deal of benefit in criticizing anti-trapping propaganda by claiming that the videos were staged, that the photos were old, and that the results were exaggerated. What will trap opponents say when they find that some of the scenes in this video were not taken from the wild, and that some of the people in the video were government employees but not identified as such?

Why doesn't someone take the higher ground and discuss the real core issues? I do not believe this video accomplishes its stated purposes, convincing people that regulated trapping is consistent with responsible human use of renewable natural resources. There are too many missing pieces: when I use this video in a presentation, I have to make multiple clarifications, as well as too many excuses.

Of course, even with my concerns, I have seen this video a dozen times. I have used it with students and adults to discuss the trapping question. And I do realize that it is easier to criticize than to produce a professional quality video! There was obviously a lot of time and effort put into the production of this video, and I regret that this one missed the chance to address the pain and suffering issues.

Perhaps we will learn more from an evaluation of how the designated and other audiences react to it in both the short- and long-term. I do believe a video discussing the trap issue in an intelligent and sensitive manner is important and timely. For a discussion of the issues fundamental to the controversy, however, it looks like I need to wait for the sequel.

*Editor's Note: Do you have an opinion of this video that you'd like to share with other NADCA members? Send it to Probe editor Bob Timm, and it will be printed in a future issue, space permitting.*

## New Product Available

### Garlic Repellent Device for Deer, Rabbits

A former U.S. Forest Service researcher has developed and marketed an odor repellent device which claims effectiveness against deer, elk, and rabbits. The plastic devices, which are 3 1/4 inches long by 3/8 inch wide, resemble a fat golf tee, and have a clip allowing them to be attached to branches of plants or to fences. The active ingredient is garlic oil, combined with chili pepper and carriers. When activated by being punctured, the device is said to release a strong garlic odor for 6 to 8 months. An internal cone which is impermeable to air prevents rapid oxidation of the garlic compound while in use.

The "Plant Pro-Tec Garlic Unit" was first registered by EPA in May 1994. Product literature recommends placing the units "about four feet apart or closer where animal damage is intense." It is suggested that roses may require 3 or 4 units per bush to discourage browsing, and that fewer units are required to prevent damage than to stop it once it has begun. The company notes that no repellent will cause an animal to starve; thus, there must be alternative foods available for the animal for a repellent to be effective.

The "Plant Pro-Tec" units were developed by Dr. Jerry Walters, who grew tired of deer and other wildlife ruining his forestry research plots, and sought a better solution. He markets the units for home and garden use in quantities of 25, 50, and 250. A packet of 25 units sells for \$16.95. For further information, contact Plant Pro-Tec Inc. at (800) 572-0055, or visit the company's web site at <http://www.hoyle.com/plantprotec>.

*Editor's Note: If any NADCA members have personal experience with these products, either pro or con, please send a note to The Probe, and we'll share your observations with our membership.*

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## Membership Renewal and Application Form

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