

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

THE UNREPORTED VICTIMS OF WILDLIFE TRAPPING: CATS AND DOGS

Summary

Each year across Canada, hundreds of thousands of fur-bearing animals are caught and killed in traps for their fur, or because they are perceived to be 'pests' or 'nuisances'. While cats and dogs aren't the targets of wildlife traps, many become injured and killed by them.

Only through periodic media reports does the public learn about the phenomenon of domestic animals becoming captured in traps set for wildlife. These reports detail the horrific accounts of cats and dogs suffering in traps, alongside the trauma and anger experienced by their guardians who find their loved ones injured or killed in these devices. The full scope of this problem is unknown in Canada as there are no mandatory regulations for trappers to report incidences of domestic animals captured by their traps. Similarly, government agencies do not publish statistics they may hold in this regard. Without this data, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of how widespread this problem is and grasp how dangerous trapping is to the general public.

This brief addresses this gap and presents preliminary data on the number of companion animals captured in traps across Canada. Releasing this data aims to spur change to address the risks and harms caused by trapping and protect the public. Through freedom of information legislation, The Fur-Bearers has obtained five years of data from provinces and territories to reveal how many companion animals are being captured in traps nationwide.

In a five-year period from 2017 – 2021, at least 173 companion animals were captured in traps across Canada (note: data from Ontario is not included in this total, see footnote 5). It is crucial to emphasize that these numbers are only incidents that have been reported to governments and the actual numbers are likely to be far higher. A provincial and territorial breakdown of this data is presented in the Methods section.

Background

As a licensed activity, trapping is primarily done to capture and kill fur-bearing animals to sell their pelts in the commercial fashion fur trade. Licensed trappers also trap and kill wild animals for recreation, as a hobby or pastime. Other uses for traps include capturing and killing wildlife that are perceived as pests or threats. Examples include trapping coyotes and wolves to protect farmed animals from predation, trapping urban wildlife deemed 'nuisance animals' such as skunks and raccoons on private property, or government agencies trapping beavers and destroying their dams to protect or build human infrastructure.

Whether traps are set in the remote wilderness or in urban centres, the indiscriminate nature of these devices results in the capture of non-target animals (i.e. animals not intended to be captured by the trapper). Non-target animals can include birds, ungulates, reptiles, endangered species, and the animals subject of this brief: dogs and cats. These animals are the collateral damage of trapping.

In the absence of requirements for trappers to report domestic animals captured in their traps, it is difficult to determine how many cats and dogs are being captured across Canada. Trappers are under no legal obligation to report these incidents to the regulatory authorities that issue their trapping licenses. The provincial and

territorial governments responsible for issuing these licenses do not publish data they may hold, leaving a knowledge gap into the scale of this problem. To provide a glimpse into this issue, The Fur-Bearers regularly compiles media reports of these incidents on our website.ⁱ Sample media reports from 2017-2021 are included in Appendix A. As revealed by the data presented in this brief, the media reports listed on our website comprise only a small fraction of the reported incidents to governments.

As governments issue licenses under their regulatory frameworks for trapping, they have a responsibility to protect the public from harms caused by this activity. This data demonstrates that many governments are failing to adequately enforce trapping regulations to protect the public. The physical and psychological harms to companion animals, and the emotional anguish and trauma experienced by their guardians are real. The risks created by legally and illegally set traps in Canadian communities are real. The dangers of trapping exist across urban, suburban, rural, and remote environments.

This data is a starting point for a larger conversation about the dangers of wildlife trapping, the responsibility of regulatory authorities to protect and notify the public, and the need for increased government transparency to disclose these incidents to the public so citizens can be informed of these risks.

Methods

Provincial and territorial governments do not publish the number of companion animals captured in traps. In their 2021 study, Villeneuve and Proulx attempted to discern this information in their research and noted the reluctance of many provincial authorities to disclose this information.ⁱⁱ We acknowledge these authors' important work in this area, and our data hopes to add to their existing research.

The Fur-Bearers submitted freedom of information requests to every province and territory in 2022 to obtain the number of companion animals captured in traps. The request description was:

Seeking the number and type of domestic/companion animals (cats, dogs, etc.) captured, injured, or killed by traps in [province/territory]. Please provide a summary of the number of incidents reported to the provincial government sorted by year for the past five years (2017-2021). Should this data not be available, provide any records directly related to the issue of companion animals being captured in traps such as policy/information briefs or reports.

The responses were analyzed and compiled. The table on the next page presents the number of incidents included in the responses. To reiterate a point made earlier, these are only reported incidents that governments know about. The real numbers are expected to be far higher. In cases where we received incident reports as part of the response to the request, almost all reports were made by the guardians of the animals or concerned citizens, rather than the trappers who set the traps. Details for each jurisdiction's response is provided in the corresponding footnote.

Companion animals caught in wildlife traps in Canada

PROVINCE /TERRITORY	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TOTAL
BRITISH COLUMBIA ¹	11	11	9	10	15	56
ALBERTA ²	6	5	4	6	9	30
SASKATCHEWAN ³	2	3	10	12	4	31
MANITOBA ⁴	3	5	3	11	2	24
ONTARIO ⁵	No data available					
QUEBEC ⁶	1	3	4	2	2	12
NEW BRUNSWICK ⁷	0	0	0	1	3	4
NOVA SCOTIA ⁸	3	2	0	0	2	7
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND ⁹	0	0	3	1	2	6
NEWFOUNDLAND ¹⁰	0	0	0	0	0	0
YUKON ¹¹	1	0	0	0	0	1
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ¹²	0	1	0	0	1	2
NUNAVUT ¹³	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	26	30	33	43	40	173

1 British Columbia provided comprehensive tables with data and statistics which included incident regions, monthly breakdown, type of animal, type of land the incident occurred on, condition of animal, and type of trap. The province also included details of each incident from Conservation Officer reports.

2 Alberta provided full copies of incident reports.

3 Saskatchewan provided a list of each incident which included the date, type of animal, and whether the animal died. The province included the following statement in their response: "Records do not exist pertaining to the number of domestic/companion animals captured, injured, or killed by traps in Saskatchewan, rather, the Ministry has records on the number of complaints it has received of domestic/companion animals captured, injured, or killed by traps in Saskatchewan. However, this does not include all complaints and events associated with domestic animals being captured in traps in Saskatchewan as municipalities, resort villages, etc. keep their own records. Please note that complaints can be unfounded and therefore, these numbers do not accurately depict the number of domestic/companion animals harmed in trapping activities. Furthermore, complaints are not necessarily linked to commercial trapping operations but can also include individuals using traps/snares for nuisance wildlife or for other purposes."

4 Manitoba provided a table with the number of reports sorted by fiscal year and the type of animal.

5 Ontario provided a range of records including emails, briefing notes, media clippings, and various communications. The records did not include information about the number of incidents. In March 2023, The Fur-Bearers contacted the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to request the data. The following was the ministry's response: "The ministry does not have data available to address your research question below. The ministry does not track incidents of domestic animals caught in traps, however these unfortunate incidents are very rare. Regulations under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997 do require trappers to report the number of furbearing mammals taken under the authority of their licence but these requirements do not apply to domestic animals (the reporting is intended to support wildlife management planning)."

6 Quebec provided a table of incidents sorted by year.

7 New Brunswick provided a statement of the incidents, year, and type of animal.

8 Nova Scotia provided a table of incidents sorted by year, whether the animals died, and if the trap was a snare or not.

9 Prince Edward Island provided a table of incidents which included the date, type of animal, location, and type of trap. The province also included the corresponding reports for each incident.

10 Newfoundland provided one email with bullet points about trapping and snaring, and a complaint report of a dog trapped in a bear cage; this incident is not included as bear cages are outside the scope of this issue.

11 Yukon noted one incident of a dog captured in a snare in 2017.

12 Northwest Territories provided copies of two incident reports.

13 Nunavut provided a briefing note from 2018 with fully redacted content except for the headings.

Discussion

These figures represent the total number of reported cats and dogs captured in traps, irrespective of the type of domestic animal, whether they were injured or were killed, what type of trap was used, and whether the trap was legally or illegally set. Due to the variation in responses to this request, this specific information is not included here but needs to be the subject of further research (governments proactively disclosing this information is a primary recommendation).

Our analysis of government incident reports provided in response to this request and the media reports on our website indicates that these incidents range across various environments, from urban to remote, affect both cats and dogs (dogs being more common), cause both injuries and deaths, result from both illegally and legally placed traps, and occur in all types of traps: snares are the most common, but leg-holds and Conibears are also responsible for capturing companion animals.

Despite the limitations with this data and the fact that the country's most populous province, Ontario, is unaccounted for in these statistics, there is a notable increase in incidents over this 5-year time period. This data indicates not only that this problem exists, but that it is also getting worse. There is an urgent need for regulators to act to protect the public from the risks and harms caused by trapping.

Governments need to implement stronger regulations to protect the public; our recommendations are provided in the next section. However, strengthening trapping regulations will only go so far. Reports of these incidents include both legally and illegally set traps, resulting in cases where trappers disregard and ignore trapping regulations. While each province has its own set of regulations with various similarities and differences, a common feature of them all is that they are difficult to enforce. This is due in large part because the number of enforcement officers tasked with ensuring compliance is inadequate. Laws are made, but they are rarely enforced. In most cases, it is unrealistic for the regulatory authorities and enforcement agencies to monitor the activities of all licensed trappers in their jurisdictions (let alone any unlicensed trappers who willfully set traps illegally). Despite this, stronger regulations are essential starting points. But they are just that: a start.

Commercial and recreational trapping needs to be situated within current social attitudes towards the practice. A 2022 national public opinion survey found that 79% of Canadians oppose killing animals for their fur.ⁱⁱⁱ The question needs to be asked: who benefits from this practice, and who pays the price? Governments that issue trapping licenses are liable for the harms to the public caused by trapping. They have a responsibility to protect the public, and so too, a responsibility to engage the public over the future of trapping.

Recommendations

The recommendations below cover three separate elements. The first is regarding government transparency of these incidents and the need for official, publicly accessible data. The second pertains to the strengthening of regulations that would mitigate the harms caused by trapping. Trapping is a provincially/territorially regulated activity and each jurisdiction offers varying regulations. However, the recommendations below provide a minimum standard that all jurisdictions should follow, regardless if they are in place already in some form or not. In most jurisdictions, there are key standards that are not in place such as mandatory warning signage for live traps, mandatory reporting requirements for domestic animals, ID tags on traps, and mandatory setbacks. The final element relates to citizen engagement and input over the future of trapping, as this is an activity that not only poses a harm to the public, but is also overwhelming opposed by Canadians. Our recommendations are as follows:

1. Government regulatory agencies implement systems for the mandatory tracking and reporting of domestic animals captured in traps.
2. Government regulatory agencies publish official data on their websites. Information about each incident should be published and include the following details: location of the incident, the occurrence date, the type of animal, whether the animal died or not, what kind of trap was used, whether it was

legally or illegally set, whether the trapper was licensed or not, and whether the crown placed charges against the trapper.

3. Create a legal requirement for trappers to report all domestic animals they trap.
4. Create a legal requirement to post warning signs when traps are set. These signs will include the trapper's license number, name, and phone number for accountability and enforcement purposes. A similar requirement exists for recreational shellfish harvesting in Canada, where the name and phone number of the operator must be displayed on buoys attached to traps.
5. Create a legal requirement for trappers to attach ID tags to their traps that include their license number, name, and phone number for accountability and enforcement purposes.
6. Implement mandatory setbacks for traps in public areas. Villeneuve and Proulx recommend a 1 km buffer zone between urban/suburban residential properties and trapping sites.^{iv}
7. Municipalities and regional districts implement trapping restrictions within their jurisdictions. While trapping is regulated provincially, municipalities may have the authority to protect the public by regulating and restricting dangerous body-gripping traps within their communities. There are several examples of Canadian municipalities who have already taken this step, including the City of Winnipeg^v and the City of Niagara Falls^{vi}. Municipalities can provide education and resources to citizens, businesses, and public agencies for non-lethal, humane, and safe approaches for the management of urban wildlife.
8. Governments begin public engagement processes inviting the public and stakeholders to comment on the future of commercial and recreational trapping in their jurisdiction. Engagement should be limited to trapping as a licensed activity regulated by the Crown and would not include nor interfere with Indigenous rights protected under section 35 of the Constitution Act.

Until regulations are updated and these recommendations implemented, the public will continue to be at risk and domestic animals will continue to be injured and killed by traps, creating liability for governments and suffering for Canadians and their companions.

i The Fur-Bearers. [Trapping Incidents](#).

ii Villeneuve, K and Proulx, G. (2022). [Impact of wild mammal trapping on dogs and cats: a search into an unmindful and undisclosed world](#). Mammal Trapping Wildlife Management, Animal Welfare & International Standards.

iii Research Co. (2022, April 8). [Most Canadians Oppose Trophy Hunting, Fur Farming and Rodeos](#)

iv Villeneuve, K and Proulx, G. (2022).

v City of Winnipeg. [By-law No. 92/2013](#).

vi City of Niagara Falls. [By-law No. 2019 - 35](#).

Appendix A

The following is a sample of news articles about trapping incidents that involved companion animals across Canada from 2017-2021. The Fur-Bearers compiles these incidents on our [webpage](#) and are added on an ongoing basis.

December 4, 2021. [CBC News: After dog is caught in snare by the roadside, woman pushes for change](#)

February 12, 2021. [Global News: B.C. man issues warning after family pet caught in leghold trap](#)

January 26, 2021. [CBC News: Be careful with animal traps, dog owner pleads after tragic death of her pet](#)

December 30, 2020. [CBC News: Hunting trap that snared cat 'totally irresponsible,' says St. John's man who helped save animal](#)

July 26, 2020. [CBC News: Two kittens euthanized after leg-trap set in north Edmonton](#)

February 4, 2020. [Town And Country Today: Dire warning of local dogs being caught in snares](#)

January 16, 2020. [SaskToday: Illegally placed snare kills family dog](#)

January 9, 2020. [CTV News: Traps near Parry Sound area trail removed after killing dog](#)

January 3, 2020. [Cranbrook Daily Townsman: Kimberley resident warning dog owners to leash up after dog almost dies in conibear trap](#)

December 17, 2019. [CBC News: 2 dogs get caught in snares near White Hills trails](#)

December 13, 2019. [Langley Advance Times: Cranbrook man calls for ban after dog caught in leg hold trap](#)

March 27, 2019. [Vernon Morning Star: Salmon Arm dog killed by coyote snare within city limits](#)

February 20, 2019. [CBC News: With snare around his neck, missing dog returns home to Mount Carmel a month later](#)

February 3, 2019. [Castanet: Dog choked by snare](#)

November 30, 2018. [CBC News: They heard a 'scream,' then found their puppy dying in a legally set trap](#)

September 4, 2018. [Saltwire: Cat loses leg after being caught in rabbit snare in town limits](#)

June 18, 2018. [Global News: Calgary dog owners warn public about alleged snare trap in Fish Creek Park](#)

February 10, 2018. [Chek News: Nanaimo dog walker calling for trappers to put up warning signs](#)

January 10, 2018. [Prince George Citizen: Dog nearly loses life to trap set up in popular snowshoeing spot](#)

January 30, 2018. [Infotel: Young cat injured by trap set in downtown Kelowna](#)

January 26, 2018. [Maple Ridge News: Shepherd chewed off foot to escape trap](#)

January 24, 2018. [Surrey Now-Leader: Maple Ridge pooch spends agonizing minutes in wildlife trap](#)

January 2018. [CTV News: Pet dog found dead in baited snare trap in Manitoba](#)

January 30, 2017. [Global News: Pierrefonds-Roxboro man claims animal trap killed dog in park](#)

January 24, 2017. [TVA Nouvelles: Chat retrouvé coincé dans un piège: une femme lance un appel à l'aide](#)

January 23, 2017. [MyKawartha.com: Pet dog killed in trap along trail in Trent Lakes](#)

January 10, 2017. [CBC News: Hay River woman speaks out over trapping in town after dog caught](#)