

rat-trap skunks

wildcare admits a shocking number of nontarget rat-trapped animals



From June 14 through August 24 of 2019, WildCare admitted 16 skunks and two raccoons caught in rat snap traps. We also had five opossums, multiple squirrels, and even birds fall victim to these indiscriminate traps this summer.

Compare this to seven skunks caught in snap traps during the entire year of 2018.

This significant increase in the number of trapped skunks may indicate that people are hearing our messaging and no longer using rodenticides (rat poisons). This would be good news! However, we are now working hard to spread the word on how to properly use traps to prevent this unintentional suffering of nontarget wild animals.

Our local backyard wildlife species such as skunks, opossums and raccoons are excellent rodent hunters, spending their active hours clearing your neighborhood of rats and mice, along with slugs and snails, insects, and other undesirable pests.

An inquisitive animal will smell the bait on a rodent snap trap and approach it as an easy meal. Imagine the shock and pain when a hungry skunk reaches her paw toward the trap and—*snap*—suddenly her paw is in agony! These traps, designed to quickly snap the neck of a rat, are strong enough to break bones in paws and cause terrible crushing injuries.

delayed injuries from traps

In response to many customers telling their pest abatement companies that they do not want them to use poison, many companies are now using a snap trap known as a T-rex, which is what is trapping our wildlife patients (see photos).

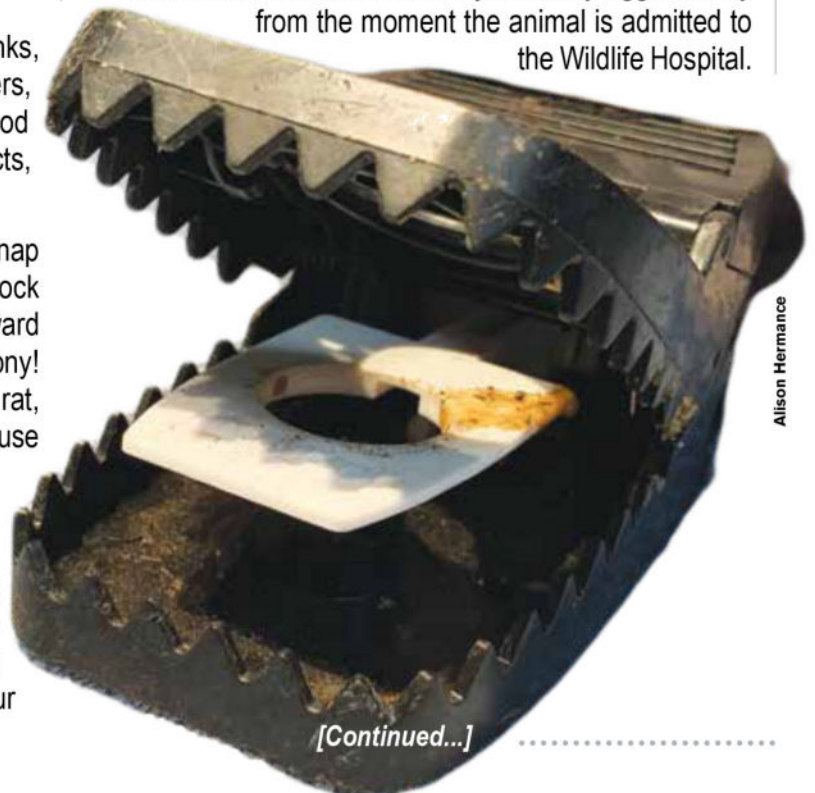
If you encounter an animal with his foot stuck in a snap trap, your first impulse is to remove the trap and let the animal go. While the trap should be removed immediately, it is imperative that the animal not be released but brought to WildCare right away for treatment, *even if the affected limb looks okay!*

Snap trap injuries involve several kinds of damage to the affected limb. The injuries that are often (but not always) immediately apparent can be lacerations to the skin, fractures to the bones, and bruising and tearing of the muscles, tendons and ligaments.

Less obvious injuries result from limbs being tightly constricted by the trap for extended periods of time. Injuries resulting from restricted bloodflow are called ischemic injuries, and their symptoms can take days to weeks after removal of the trap to become fully evident.

During the period of time an animal's limb is caught in the trap, the soft tissues are compressed by the jaws of the trap, leading to decreased blood flow in the limb which means that oxygen is not being delivered to the tissues. If this lasts longer than an hour or two, tissues can start to become necrotic, or die. This dying tissue is highly susceptible to infection, since it is cut off from the body's normal immune system surveillance.

Because of the severe consequences to the affected limb, WildCare treats all of these injuries very aggressively from the moment the animal is admitted to the Wildlife Hospital.



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Treatment always includes pain medications, anti-inflammatories, antibiotics to prevent infection when the wounds finally open, and medications that help encourage blood flow in the limb by making the blood cells more pliable and by making the vessels larger. Wound treatments to the affected area vary greatly, from daily wound cleaning and bandage changes to those that require surgery to amputate dead digits.

As you can imagine, handling wild skunks twice a day to administer injections, oral medications, wound treatments and bandage changes does not go over well with our patients! With so many skunks in care from rat trap injuries, WildCare (and medical staff) are, shall we say, strongly scented.

how to properly use snap traps (don't use them outdoors!)

First, please recognize that the only way to ever eliminate a "nuisance" rodent problem is to remove what is attracting the rodents: This is usually food, water, protected travel-ways and housing/shelter.

Trapping may eliminate a few rodents, but there will always be more until you get rid of what is inviting them to your home and property. Learn more at discoverwildcare.org/rodents.

Snap traps are not to be used outdoors! Rodents are part of the environment outside, and it is not possible, nor is it desirable, to eliminate all rodents from the outdoor areas of your property. Get rid of what is attracting rodents to your yard, and you won't need traps.

If you are allowing traps to be set be aware that you, as the customer, have a role and a responsibility to make sure that any lethal trapping done on your behalf is done correctly.

All traps, whether inside the home or in a garage, under the house or in a crawl-space **MUST** be secured tightly inside a bait box. The bait box used must be designed with a long tube for rodents to enter the box, which prevents the curious paw of a skunk or raccoon from reaching in and being snapped. Traps (in bait boxes) must be placed well away from children and pets, and the box itself must be secured in place with a chain or a cement block.

The pest control company will typically only come to check the traps every few weeks. This is much too long for any injured animal to wait in the jaws of a trap. **NEVER** use sticky or glue traps, as those products' method of killing is to trap the animal and cause him to remain stuck until



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Wounds from rat traps can be severe, and often take several days to manifest. Any animal, like this skunk whose paw was caught in a rat trap, needs immediate care, even if a wound isn't immediately obvious.

he dies of starvation and dehydration. An unchecked snap trap is just as bad. It is up to you to inspect traps daily for nontarget wildlife, or for rodents that have been injured but not killed (An injured rodent will need care or humane euthanasia. Bring the injured animal to WildCare, your veterinarian or, in Marin County, you can call Marin Humane.)

Horrible, and avoidable, things happen to wildlife all the time. WildCare sees these animals, and the excruciating injuries inflicted on them by snap traps, all too often in the Wildlife Hospital. Please make sure you are properly removing rodent attractants before considering trapping, and please make sure that lethal traps placed on your behalf are indoors and are checked daily, and in appropriate bait boxes to prevent harm to nontarget wildlife.

Learn more at discoverwildcare.org/rodents



Allison Hermance