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ANNUAL WILDLIFE CONTROL ISSUE: Using Trapping Devices For Wildlife Control

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In order to solve human conflicts with urban wildlife, the pest management professional must first be an efficient investigator and not just someone who goes out and sets traps. The successful "problem-solving process" starts with interviewing the property owners. From there it is necessary to make a thorough on-site inspection, determining the wildlife species of concern, identifying conditions present that are causing the concern, estimating the number of offending animals, determining the movement patterns of the animal(s), evaluating the best solutions available for solving the concern and then implementing a program that is efficient and successful.

Taking the time to obtain as much information about the wildlife pests and completing an initial on-site evaluation will often directly affect the time required to successfully complete a job. Simply educating a customer and eliminating the "contributing conditions" that are attractive to a specific wildlife species will sometimes be all that is needed to solve "a wildlife conflict." Having homeowners feed their pets during the day and remove food bowls during the evenings or trimming back a few tree limbs are just a few examples of modifying "contributing conditions." Ideally effective solutions such as these can be found without having to remove or relocate offending animals.

Unfortunately, in many situations, offending wildlife pests must be removed and the effective use of trapping devices is required to solve a problem.

In this article we'll take a look at some commonly used trapping devices that are available for the management of urban wildlife, some of their uses and several actual case studies that illustrate proper (and improper) trap selection and program implementation.

EQUIPMENT. In order to be able to effectively trap and remove offending wildlife, you must have a good working knowledge of the various types of trapping devices that are available, when to use which type of trap and how to properly use them. You must also be knowledgeable of local, state and federal regulations governing the use of trapping devices and removal of wildlife in your area.

CAGE TRAPS. These devices are designed to capture and hold individual or multiple animals. They typically have a hinged door that closes when an animal depresses a raised pan that acts as a triggering mechanism.

Proper size selection for the target animal species is important! If an animal escapes from a trap of the improper size or one that is in poor working order, the chances of successfully removing that

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individual animal is greatly reduced. There are many brands of cage traps that are available. Remember that investing in quality cage traps that will work efficiently and "hold up" may be the least expensive route for you and your company in the long run.

ONE-WAY DOOR TRAPS. These devices are often used over den or building entrances. "Excluders" allow animals to exit a structure without re-entering or trap the exiting animal after the animal pushes up the excluder "door" to exit. "Excluders" can be used as excellent control devices for removal of multiple tree and flying squirrels from the attic spaces of homes.

FOOT-HOLD TRAPS. There are many different types of foot-hold traps. In many states the use of foot-hold traps is no longer legal or closely regulated. Several keys to success in using foot-hold traps include making sure you have the proper size trap in good working order; using an appropriate anchoring device; and setting foot-hold traps in locations that will minimize the potential to capture domestic pets or other non-target wildlife.

Foot-hold traps can be used as an effective management tool for removal of muskrats and beavers. One style of foot-hold traps is known as the "egg-type trap." This style of trap has been manufactured specifically for capturing raccoons and requires the animal to reach down into the baited trap. This type of construction eliminates the potential for capturing domestic pets and may have some application in addressing specific raccoon concerns. There is also a depression pan foot-hold trap available that incorporates the use of a snare loop vs. a conventional steel jaw-type configuration. This type of foot-fold trap may have some potential for use in trapping urban wildlife. Always keep in mind that in most cases the use of foot-hold traps in "land trapping" urban wildlife is limited.

BODY-GRIPPING TYPE TRAPS. There are several brands and styles of body-gripping traps available. These trapping devices are designed to deliver a lethal blow to an animal as it passes through the trap opening. In certain situations these traps can be efficient in removing offending animals, such as raccoons or ground hogs, from structures. They also can be excellent control tools for the removal of beavers and muskrats. Once again, good judgment must be used when determining when and where to use a specific type of trapping device.

SNARES. Snares are simple and lightweight trapping devices that can be effective in capturing a wide variety of wildlife. Modern snares are typically made from lightweight aircraft cable and have a relaxing or locking slide that is used to form a loop of an appropriate size for the targeted animal species to pass through. As the animal steps through the wire loop that has been set on a travel path of the animal, the loop tightens and restrains the animal. In my home state of North Carolina, the use of snares is restricted to trapping and removal of beavers.

SNAP TRAPS. Most people in the pest management industry have extensive experience using snap traps for mouse and rat removal. Even though rat-size snap traps can be used to capture flying squirrels and some species of tree squirrels, I strongly suggest concentrating on exclusion and using non-lethal traps whenever possible to solve these concerns. When providing wildlife removal services, one should be aware that many calls of squirrels in the attic result in finding rodents. In these cases, snap traps can be useful rodent population reduction/control tools that will allow recovery of trapped animals. By using snap traps initially on a site prior to the use of a rodenticide, the likelihood of responding to a call of a "dead animal smell" is greatly reduced.

GLUEBOARDS. In my opinion, the use of the sticky-type glueboards is not an effective tool for the removal of tree or flying squirrels from structures and should not be used for this purpose. However, glueboards are effective in removing snakes and lizards from structures. Snakes or lizards that have been trapped on glueboards can often be removed for relocation by applying cooking oil around the trapped animal and slowly working the animal free from the glue.

TRAP PLACEMENT. One of the keys to successfully removing animals that are causing damage

to a structure or property is getting the proper type of trapping device set in a location that will allow you to capture the offending animal(s). Small cage traps can often be secured on gutter lines by placing a lightweight bungee cord around a gutter nail. Larger cage traps can be secured to plywood when set on roofs to prevent roof damage and trap rollover. Keep in mind that you are in business to solve wildlife concerns and generate income for yourself and your company. Use enough trapping devices to get the job done as efficiently as possible.

BAIT SELECTION. When using a number of different types of trapping devices, the proper use of food, gland, visual or odor attractants can be essential to the success of trapping offending wildlife. I once set five cage traps with a meat-based bait to remove raccoons at a home with “no cats in the neighborhood.” The next morning I arrived to find a cat in every trap. Switching to a sweet bait resulted in removal of several raccoons from the property — and no more cats.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION. Addressing urban wildlife concerns can be an emotional issue for the public. One neighbor feeds the squirrels and the other wants you to “kill them all.” Trapping devices should always be set where they are “out of sight” whenever possible and checked regularly. During the summer you should also consider covering cage-type traps for shading if they are going to be set in unshaded areas and even provisioning them with water. Treat all wildlife pests with respect and as humanely as possible. To do otherwise is likely illegal in your state plus this is a disservice to the animal, your customers, the public and your company.

CONCLUSION. The proper use of trapping devices is an important component in managing urban wildlife concerns. Have sufficient numbers, types and sizes of trapping devices necessary to handle the volume of jobs that you are involved with at any one time. Also keep in mind that trapping is just one component of the service that should be provided for your clients to fully address calls relating to urban wildlife concerns.

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INTERESTED IN BREAKING INTO THE WILDLIFE CONTROL MARKET?

If you are in the professional wildlife control business then you know the importance of a good inspection. By conducting a thorough inspection you will be able to properly identify the target animal and place your traps where they need to go for optimum results. This allows you to perform your job in the most professional, efficient and economical manner. The better the inspection process, the less time it takes to perform the service and the happier the customer — plus it's more money in your pocket.

To start you must have the proper inspection tools. The basics include the following:

- A durable rechargeable flashlight with a minimum 30,000 to 40,000 candlepower. Another good tool is a mini-flashlight that you can carry with you at all times. This mini-light also acts as a backup light. Also handy is a headlight since this keeps your hands free while crawling around in attics or crawlspaces.
- Ladders are a must and you will need anywhere between a stepladder and a 40-foot extension ladder. You need to be able to access the problem areas easily and in a safe manner.
- To prevent injuries during inspection of crawl areas and attics, you need a pair of leather work gloves to protect your hands, a bump cap for your head and knee guards. Safety glasses, coveralls and a proper respirator with a HEPA filter are also recommended.
- Binoculars are a great (and underused) tool that allow you to inspect areas more thoroughly from the ground that would normally require a ladder. A small durable pair (similar to those used for hunting or sporting events) are best.
- Vials or plastic baggies to collect insect or feces samples for identification.

- A multi-purpose Leatherman® tool is useful.

KEY QUESTIONS. Now that you have the proper equipment you need to get as much information from the customer when he or she phones you with the wildlife problem. This information will possibly help identify the target animal but don't make the common mistake of selling the job over the phone based on what the customer tells you. Many times what the customer describes and what you find once you conduct an on-site inspection are very different. Too often, what they thought was a squirrel in the attic turns out to be a mouse or a raccoon.

Some key questions you can ask the customer during the phone interview process that will aid in identifying the problem are as follows:

- Where do you hear the animal activity and what type of noises are they? • What time of day or night is the animal active?
- What wildlife have you seen on your property?
- Have you noticed any unusual damage or disturbances on the property such as when skunks dig up the lawn looking for grubs, animals raiding the garbage pails or something eating the dog or cat food outside?
- Have there been any previous wildlife problems? By asking these questions on the phone you are able to narrow down which animal is the problem and where the problem exists on the property. This will allow you to focus and perform your on-site inspection in the most efficient manner and least amount of time.

Editor's note: This article was written by Mike Goldstein of Woodstream Corp. Information about Woodstream can be found at www.woodstream.com.

THE CASE OF SETTING THE TRAP WITH THE BROKEN DOOR Our company received a call from a homeowner who had a raccoon that had been feeding on pet food left on the back porch. For several days after the homeowner had removed the pet food the raccoon had returned each night scratching at doors and windows in an attempt to gain entry into the home. A technician placed several cage traps at the home to remove the animal only to find a thrown and empty trap the next day. The homeowner told him that the raccoon was in one of the traps and later that evening, when he went back out to check on it, the trap was empty. Unfortunately, the technician had picked up one of several traps that had been set aside at our office for repair of the door locking mechanism. The raccoon was able to push open the door and escape from the trap. Fortunately, the next evening the technician made a great "comeback" by setting a cage trap that was in proper working order inside an overturned trash can, covered the floor of the trap with a few bits of trash and used a different bait as an attractant. The next morning he found the offending animal in the "trash can set" and the homeowner had no further problems.

LESSON: Remember to always check to see that trapping devices are in proper working order prior to setting them. — Scott McNeely

THE CASE OF THE ITSY BITSY POSSUMS

I received a call one day from a homeowner who had a bad odor coming from under his house. He said that he was also hearing an animal noise in the crawlspace at night. After further discussion he mentioned that his crawlspace door had been left open and he had closed it about a week earlier. Once on site we were greeted with a characteristic "dead animal odor." Further investigation resulted in locating and removing a dead possum from under the home. Several cage traps were also set in the crawlspace since the homeowner had reported recently hearing "animal noises" under the home. For several days we found that our cage traps were unthrown and our bait was missing from the traps. Our initial thought was that rodents were removing the bait. A second inspection resulted in finding no evidence of active rodents, but small animal droppings that appeared to be slightly larger than rat droppings. Switching to small squirrel-size cage traps resulted in capturing and removing four juvenile possums from the home.

LESSON: If the initial inspection had been more thorough it is likely that we would have saved several unproductive "trap nights" by setting the proper size cage traps and this service would have been profitable. — Scott McNeely .

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