

The Silent Killer:

Can the Code of
Practice Stop Cruelty?



A League Against Cruel Sports
Investigation into Snaring in Britain

Executive Summary

In October 2005, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published a code of practice on the use of snares¹, based on the advice of the findings of the Independent Working Group on Snares. This code of practice is supposed to prevent the worst excesses of snaring cruelty and represents “an important step in ensuring that if snares have to be used they are used as humanely as possible” according to Jim Knight MP, then Biodiversity Minister².

Recent investigations by the League Against Cruel Sports into 68 estates in England, Wales and Scotland have revealed widespread flouting of the code. 78% of estates found to be using snares were doing so in breach of the code. The League believes that this shows that the snaring code of practice is not an effective safeguard of animal welfare, and that these findings add more weight to the call for a total ban on all snares.

The DEFRA Code of Practice

The code of practice clearly stipulates that snares should not be set on fence lines, drag poles nor bridges because of welfare concerns³, but secret visits by League investigators to dozens of shooting estates across the UK between March and August 2006 have revealed that over three quarters of those estates found using snares were doing so in breach of these guidelines.

The use of drag poles

Although the League believes all snaring to be cruel and unnecessary (see *The Killing Game 1: Out of Control Predator Control* report for background material on previous investigations and case studies⁴), the use of drag poles greatly increases the chances of an animal suffering a prolonged, agonising death – chiefly because a strong animal can carry the pole off and suffer in secret, perhaps becoming entangled on an overhang and dying of strangulation. Gamekeepers are potentially unable to check snares once a day- as required by law- as they may have been dragged away by trapped animals.



(Archive picture) Goodwood badger snared on a dragpole.

Previous footage obtained by the League near the Goodwood shooting estate in West Sussex revealed how a badger had become entwined in a snare attached to a large wooden drag pole and dragged it some distance before dying⁵.

What the code says: *snares must be firmly anchored so they can on no account become free (because of the great risk to welfare this would cause). Drags should not be used⁶.*



(Archive picture) Fox hanging from a snare set on a wire fence.

Snares set on fences

Snares set on wire fences or the bottom rung of a wooden fence on a known run, can greatly increase the suffering of a snared animal. The animal can thrash about to escape and tangle itself up in the wire of the snare and the fencing. The animal can also attempt to climb over the fence in a bid to escape and can then hang itself.

What the code says: *snares should not be set alongside fence lines, particularly when they pass through woodland, where deer may travel alongside them. Snares should not be attached to fences as this increases the risk of entanglement and injury⁷.*

Snares set on bridges

The potential suffering caused by snares is strongly linked to the positions where they are set. Snares on bridges are banned by the code of practice, as an animal can hang itself if it falls off the bridge when struggling to escape.



(Archive picture)
Fox hanged and killed by a snare set on a bridge

What the code says: *Snares should not be set on or under footbridges, fallen trees or logs spanning watercourses⁸.*



From left to right:
Snare attached to a dragpole at Longwitton Shoot in Northumberland.
Snare attached to a fence line at Longwitton Shoot in Northumberland.
Frayed snare shows evidence of a struggle at Wintringham in Yorkshire.

Section 1: Methodology

Using the internet, the shooting press and information from members of the shooting industry, a list was drawn up of 68 commercial shooting estates across the country. All the estates were visited by investigators between March and August 2006. The list of 68 estates included re-visits to twelve estates involved in previous investigations.

Section 2: Findings of the League snaring investigation

Investigators surveyed a total of 68 estates located in England, Wales and Scotland⁹ and discovered that of the 23 found to be employing snares as part of their predator control programmes, at least eighteen were using the devices in breach of the DEFRA code of practice¹⁰. This means that 78% of those found to be using snares were doing so in breach of the Government's code.

The findings will prove embarrassing to the shooting lobby which is keen to portray itself as being able to effectively self-govern the activities of gamekeepers and shooting estates. The apparent failure of such voluntary 'best practice' schemes, combined with further new evidence of cruelty and suffering revealed in this report, shows that the code of practice is not working to reduce suffering and underscores the need for urgent legislation outlawing snares completely.

Section 2A: Estates not previously known to investigators

Longwitton, Northumberland

Tucked away in remote countryside near Morpeth in Northumberland, the pheasant shoot based at Longwitton covers a large area of rolling arable fields and purpose built forest coverts. For the casual onlooker, the scene is typical of this part of Northern England, but closer inspection of the estate reveals a large number of snares attached to dragpoles, trees and fences.

Situated directly around one prominent game bird release pen, investigators filmed a total of ten snares, five attached to wooden drag poles¹¹ in contravention of the code. One snare discovered attached to a drag pole was clearly frayed, illustrating a struggle of some type¹².

Kirkwhelpington, Northumberland

Not far from Longwitton at Kirkwhelpington, investigators encountered a similar scene with a snare set on the metal equivalent of a drag pole in long grass adjacent to a game bird release pen¹³.

Wintringham, Yorkshire

Further south, in Yorkshire, at a pheasant and partridge shoot based at Wintringham near Malton, investigators documented at least thirteen snares attached to wooden drag poles adjacent to two release pens¹⁴. Commercial shooting at Wintringham is advertised by the Carter Jonas sporting agency, offering paying guests the opportunity to shoot between 150 and 300 birds in a day¹⁵.



From left to right:
 Snares set on dragpoles at Wintringham in Yorkshire.
 Rusty snare set on a fence line at Ripley castle in Yorkshire.
 Snares hanging on a fence line at Helbeck in Cumbria.

Ripley Castle, Yorkshire

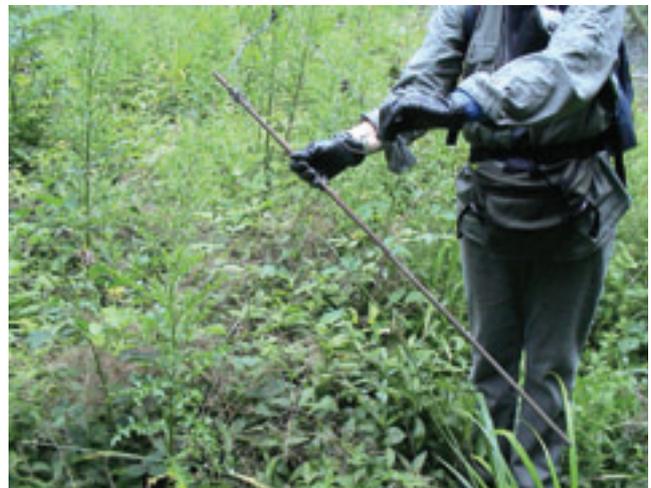
Elsewhere in Yorkshire, both in woodland north of Ripley Castle and near to Duncombe Park, investigations uncovered further disturbing snaring practices. Near Ripley Castle, a significant number of snares were found attached to both drag poles and fence lines¹⁶, one had been baited with the carcass of a dead game bird¹⁷. ‘Keep out’ signs were prominently displayed on fence lines surrounding the copse – gamekeepers here clearly want to avoid the attention of the many dog walkers who use the surrounding area.

Cumbria

In Cumbria, League investigators discovered major snaring programmes in breach of the DEFRA code of practice at two distinct locations: at Ewbank Park, south east of Brough, nine snares set on drag poles were filmed in a purpose grown shooting covert¹⁸, alongside the bodies of two dead foxes, rabbits and a squirrel; at Helbeck, north of Brough, 25 snares were filmed set in woodland including eight on drag poles and fencelines¹⁹. Shooting at Helbeck is advertised by sporting agents Botham and Miller, a joint venture co-founded by Liam Botham, son of former cricket star Ian²⁰.

Berkshire

At a commercial pheasant shoot based at Baydon, in Berkshire, numerous snares were filmed, including one set on a drag pole²¹. West of Baydon, at Mells Park, near Frome, three snares attached to metal drag poles were discovered, alongside the carcass of a fox, dumped nearby²².



Above:
 Snares attached to a metal pole that easily comes loose at Mells Park near Frome.
 Left:
 Snare set next to a fence at a commercial pheasant shoot at Baydon in Berkshire.

Wales

Ten snares were found attached to fence lines near to woodland containing game bird release pens²³ at the Old Hall shoot, based near Llandriddnod Wells and advertised by the *Shooting.sh* commercial agency²⁴.

Scotland

On land used for shooting near Jedburgh, a total of seven snares attached to drag poles were filmed²⁵.



From left to right:
Multiple snares secured to a wooden dragpole at Bradenham Estate in Buckinghamshire.
Snare attached to a dragpole at Sir Edward Dashwood's Bradenham Estate in Buckinghamshire.
Snare attached to a river crossing at Glympton park in Oxfordshire.

Section 2B:

Return visits to estates

League investigations involving return visits to shooting estates previously found to be snaring have revealed that many continue to do so – in breach of the DEFRA code of practice.



Rusting snare set to a fence line at the Old Hall shoot in Wales.

Bradenham Estate, Buckinghamshire

At the Bradenham Estate in Buckinghamshire, owned by Sir Edward Dashwood, previously Chairman of the Countryside Alliance shooting campaign²⁶, investigations revealed significant use of snares on drag poles²⁷. Discoveries included three snares attached to drag poles, one of which was set adjacent to a foot path²⁸.

The estate has a well documented history of wildlife persecution. In 2005, a massive snaring programme ,

including the apparent targeting of badgers, was uncovered²⁹, and separately, following an undercover investigation by the RSPB, two estate employees were found guilty of killing a buzzard³⁰.

Clarendon Estate, Wiltshire

In Wiltshire, at the Clarendon estate, League investigators discovered snares continuing to be set on drag poles, including in the vicinity of a documented badger sett³¹.

Previous filming at the estate during 2004-05 exposed significant snaring and the discovery of hare and tawny owl carcasses³².

According to reports, there has been a recent change of ownership at Clarendon, which could lead to a change in predator control practices at the estate.

Glympton Park, Oxfordshire

League investigations at Glympton Park, near Charlbury in Gloucestershire revealed widespread breaches of the Defra code including snares set on dragpoles and gates³³. A snare was also discovered set on a bridge over a stream³⁴ in clear contradiction of the code and posing the risk of an animal hanging itself if it fell from the bridge in a struggle to escape. Two other snares set on logs adjacent to the stream were also discovered³⁵.

Return visits in 2006 to three further UK shooting estates previously found to be snaring – Manderston in the

Scottish borders, Stutton Hall in East Anglia and Hicknahan Farm in Buckinghamshire – revealed the continued presence of snares attached to drag poles despite the introduction of the new code in 2005³⁶.

Conclusions

The findings underscore the ineffectiveness of codes of practice for snaring and illustrate many estates' continued defiance of guidelines designed to minimise suffering and improve animal welfare. Taken as an illustrative snapshot of national snaring practices, the evidence obtained strongly suggests that many estates have no intention of adhering to the Government's code of practice – even those previously condemned for wildlife persecution, irregularities and illegality. Even if the code were statutory, it would be almost impossible to prove who had set an individual snare on a shooting estate and hence secure a conviction.

The League Against Cruel Sports believes that only legislation banning snaring completely will effectively address this problem.

- 1 Code of practice document at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates/snares/pdf/snares-cop.pdf>
- 2 Defra news release at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2005/051019b.htm>. New snares code of practice emphasises animal welfare, 19 October 2005
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 <http://www.league.uk.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1591>
- 5 Archive National Anti Snaring Campaign footage.
- 6 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates/snares/pdf/snares-cop.pdf>. Page 7, How to set snares to capture foxes, bullet point 5
- 7 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates/snares/pdf/snares-cop.pdf>, page 11, How to avoid capture of non-target animals, deer.
- 8 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates/snares/pdf/snares-cop.pdf>, page 12, How to avoid capture of non-target animals, otters
- 9 Estates and locations visited were researched using the Internet, the shooting press, and from information provided by members of the shooting industry.
- 10 Other estates may also be breaching the code of practice – this report is based on evidence uncovered during specific visits on specific dates.
- 11 Snares set on drag poles were filmed at the following locations, amongst others: GPS: NZ 08641 89431, GPS: 08615 89452, GPS: NZ 08599 89434.
- 12 Frayed snare filmed at: GPS: 08615 89452
- 13 Two snares filmed at: GPS: NZ 01177 83814
- 14 Snares on drag poles filmed at (amongst others): GPS: SE 89435 71990, GPS: SE 89368 71937, GPS: SE 89367 71875, GPS: SE 89979 73224, GPS: SE 89934 73194 and GPS: SE 89955 73094.
- 15 Carter Jonas agency: tel: 01904 558 209 charles.hardcastle@carterjonas.co.uk
- 16 Snares discovered at (amongst others) : GPS: SE 28536 62521, GPS: SE 28558 62330, GPS: SE 28561 62330
- 17 Pheasants filmed GPS: SE 28558 62330
- 18 Snares filmed in covert at GPS: NY 86172 10505,
- 19 Snares filmed surrounding release pen situated at: GPS: NY 81560 18348
- 20 www.bothamandmiller.co.uk
- 21 Snares filmed set around release pens at location: GPS: SU 28381 7605
- 22 Snares filmed at release pen situated at: GPS: ST 70482 48359
- 23 Snares filmed at locations GPS: 1645 6705, GPS: 1647 6705, GPS: 1642 6702, GPS: 1649 6700
- 24 www.shooting.sh
- 25 Snares filmed at locations: GPS: NT 71457 21523 and GPS: NT 70600 21325
- 26 <http://www.league.uk.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1591>
- 27 Snares filmed at locations (amongst others) GPS: SU 84393 96089, GPS: SU 84256 95517 GPS: SU 84155 95526
- 28 Snare adjacent to footpath found at GPS:SU 84393 96089
- 29 <http://www.league.uk.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1591>
- 30 "Gamekeepers fined over killing trapped buzzard", *The Scotsman*, 21 / 04 / 05.
- 31 Snares on drag poles filmed at: GPS: 17049 31095 and GPS: 17019 31063
- 32 Archive LACS film, 2004 – 2005
- 33 GPS: SP 43953 22498, SP43845 21892, SP 43815 21786
- 34 GPS: SP 43766 21729
- 35 Ibid
- 36 Footage obtained between March and August 2006 at various locations.



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