

Briefing Note

Animal Welfare and use of snares in Europe:

Prevalence of hunting rabbits with snares for food

February 10th, 2009

1. Use of snares in Europe for hunting

1.1 Introduction

The United Kingdom is one of only five countries within the European Union which permits the use of snares, the others being Ireland, France, Spain and Belgium. In the other EU countries where snaring is permitted there is a more stringent regulatory regime than is the case in the UK¹. However, it has proved impossible to get any information on the use of snares in hunting of rabbits for food in any of the countries requested.

A report on the use of snares in Europe, compiled by the Euro Group for Animals, is in appendix 1. However, there is relatively little detail on the legislative aspects of snaring and the report is not specifically related to hunting rabbits with snares for food.

The following sections outline the information that could be established for each of the countries. In addition, there is a section on commercial rabbit production to give an indication of the extent of rabbit farming. Although there are no figures for the numbers of rabbits caught by snares and intended for consumption, the figures for rabbit farming may indicate that the majority of rabbits intended for consumption are farmed and *not* caught in snares.

1.2 Hunting rabbits for food with snares

Spain – The rabbit population in Spain was decimated by myxomatosis in 1953 with mortality rates of 95-100%. In the 1980s as the rabbit population was beginning to recover a second disease, Rabbit Haemorrhagic disease virus, again decimated the rabbit population. In many areas rabbits have yet to recover². This may indicate that snaring of rabbits for food is not as prevalent as it was when the rabbit numbers were much higher. According to the Euro Group for Animals permission for the use of snares can be granted although very few applications actually take place³. No specific information can be sourced about the prevalence of hunting rabbits for *food*.

¹ Consultation on Snaring Practices in Scotland: Analysis of responses (2006)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/23111220/6>

² <http://www.iberianature.com/spainblog/category/mammals/rabbits-in-spain/>

³ Eurogroup for Animals. Short report on MS laws concerning the use of snares – September 2004

1.3 Belgium – No information could be sourced on hunting of rabbits for food using snares.

1.4 France – Hunting in France is broadly divided into three sectors⁴:

- Ordinary hunting on foot or horseback perhaps with the use of dogs. The trend is towards belonging to and using the dogs of a co-operative hunting dog association (*societe de chasse*).
- Deterrage – the hunting on foot or horseback of game that swells underground, principally fox or badger. There is an estimated 1750 underground hunting packs.
- Venerie – the pursuit of game by large packs of dogs followed by mounted hunters who use no firearms. Game includes boar, hare, rabbit, red deer and roe deer.

This information suggests that hunting with snares is not one of the main hunting sectors however no specific information could be sourced on hunting of rabbits for food using snares.

1.5 Scotland

The Scottish government, after public consultation, decided not to ban snares but instead to focus on attempting to eliminate bad practice. The package of measures is as follows⁵:

- The compulsory fitting of crimped safety stops to prevent the noose closing too far and inflicting damage, which on its own has the potential to bring about a huge improvement in the welfare of animals restrained by snares
- The compulsory fitting of ID tags on snares which will allow identification of their owner by the authorities, but will not allow identification by casual passers-by
- The action of a snare must be checked before it is set
- Any snare which is not staked in place must be fixed with an anchor that cannot be dragged away
- The setting of snares on posts, over water courses, on planks or fences will be prohibited as this can cause unnecessary suffering to the target
- Areas where snaring is taking place will be clearly marked with signs
- The way in which a new offence of tampering with a lawfully set snare could be created will be considered - this is required both in terms of good governance and because tampering with snares, even for the best of reasons, can sometimes (even unwittingly) make their effects more deadly and cruel.
- Legal status for a new land management industry accreditation scheme, which aims to ensure that within a fixed period everyone who sets a snare will

⁴ <http://www.howtobooks.co.uk/abroad/france/hunting.asp>

⁵ Use of Snares. News Release. The Scottish Government.
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/02/20125138>

require to have received training in best practice and the law - eventually no one without such training will be allowed to set a snare

The relevant legislation is The Snares (Scotland) Order 2010⁶ and comes into force on 11th March 2010.

1.6 Republic of Ireland

Wildlife in Ireland is protected by a piece of legislation known as **the Wildlife Act, 1976** as amended. The purpose of this legislation is the conservation of the wildlife (flora and fauna (including game)).

Section 34 of the Wildlife Act prohibits the use of traps or snares to hunt or capture *protected* wild animals. Rabbits are *not* a protected species. However, no specific information could be sourced on hunting of rabbits for food using snares.

2. Commercial Rabbit Production in Europe

Although no comparable statistics are available it is likely that the farmed production of rabbits for food in the EU far exceeds the number of rabbits caught for food by snaring. In the Netherlands and Belgium there are also significant commercial rabbit production which together amounts to 30, 000 TEC (tonnes equivalent carcasses)⁷. Table 1 shows the volume of rabbit meat production in the EU.

⁶ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2010/ssi_20100008_en_1

⁷ Colin, M. and Lebas, F. (1995) Les lapins dans le monde. Association Française de Cuniculture quoted in 'The Impact of the current housing and husbandry systems on the health and welfare of farmed domestic rabbits'. European Food Safety Authority – Animal Health and Welfare Panel 2005

Table 1 Rabbit meat production in Europe in 2003⁸ (TEC – Tonnes Equivalent Carcasses)

Country	Rabbit Meat Production	
	(TEC)	(%)
EU Countries		
Italy	222,000	40.2
Spain	114,732	20.8
France	85,200	15.4
Czech Republic	38,500	7.0
Germany	33,800	6.1
Hungary	10,800	2.0
Greece	5,000	0.9
Poland	3,600	0.7
Slovakia	3,500	0.6
Malta	1,350	0.2
Austria	850	0.2
Lithuania	185	0.0
Estonia	20	0.0
EU (25)	520,367	100.0
Non-EU Countries		
Ukraine	15,000	2.7
Russian Federation	6,000	1.1
Bulgaria	5,000	0.9
Romania	4,000	0.7
Moldova, Republic of	1,500	0.3
Switzerland	1,100	0.2
Total Europe	552,137	100.0

(FAOSTAT data, 2004).

⁸ FAOSTAT (2004) Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
 Providing research and information services to the Northern Ireland Assembly
 Dr Kevin Pelan

Appendix 1

Short report on snares – Eurogroup for Animals September 2004



Short report on MS laws concerning the use of snares – September 2004

According to the EU habitats directive, non-selective trapping methods are prohibited. However, exceptions can be made under certain circumstances. Snares belong to the category of these non-selective methods. A snare is a sort of wired string or chord that is set up with a loop on the ground. When an animal steps into the loop, the snare tightens. The more the animal will try to escape, the tighter the snare becomes. Because this trap is placed in an area and then left alone for a period of time, undesired animals, and in some cases humans, may be caught, and potentially, may die.

The use of snares as a trapping method is prohibited in the following countries: Estonia, Denmark, and Hungary. In Estonia, the hunting law of 2002 stipulates that snares may not be used at all. Denmark's legislation prohibits the use of any kind of snare. In fact, the only methods allowed for hunting pests that may pose problems to crops, farm animals, or buildings, are guns, including the use of a bow and arrow, and traps that do not harm animals. In Hungary, the 1996 act, under article 55, bans the use of snares. However, snares have been banned for the past 30 years because they are considered to be fatal traps.

There are several countries where the use of snares is permitted under certain circumstances. These countries include Spain, the United Kingdom, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Spain abides by the EU habitats directive concerning the use of snares. Although permission can be granted, very few people ever try to obtain authorisations to use non-selective trapping methods. In the United Kingdom, the laws concerning snares are not very clear. Firstly, snares are interpreted differently than traps. In fact, the Berne convention lists these two terms separately. Additionally, interpretations vary between Scotland and England and Wales. Under UK legislation, the use of 'self-locking' snares is prohibited and snares are only prohibited for the capture of deer. Snares are permitted for game animals such as foxes or rabbits, provided that the hunter verifies his snare at least once a day to ensure that no endangered animal has been caught by mistake. Earlier this year,

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Poland passed the Nature protection act, which bans the use of snares for 'animals under the partial species protection' and 'game animals.' The minister of environment does have the authority to allow the use of snares, but does so in most cases only for the capture of protected animals for scientific research. Finally, the Czech Republic passed the AP act, which stipulates that the use of wire snares is prohibited. However, there is no law against other types of snares.

The use of snares as a trapping method is permitted in the following countries: Malta, and Latvia. The use of snares is not common in Malta, but it is not illegal either. In Latvia, there is no law that prohibits the use of trapping of any kind. These matters are left to the ministry of forestry, who controls all legislation concerning hunting methods.

COUNTRY	ARE SNARES PROHIBITED?	CAN EXCEPTIONS BE MADE?
Estonia	yes	no
Denmark	yes	no
Hungary	yes	no
Latvia	no	yes
United Kingdom	sometimes	yes
Spain	yes	yes
Czech Republic	yes	yes
Malta	no	yes
Poland	yes	yes