

NEW SNARE TECHNOLOGY

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BACKGROUND

In the past, the improvement of snares was primarily focused on developing the snare's efficiency at catching. The Code of Practice Report 2005¹ by the Independent Working Group on Snares (IWG) has highlighted that when assessing the performance of the snare the target catch rate is not the only function of importance, others include:

- The non-target involvement (i.e. the unintended catching of non-target species such as deer and badgers etc); and
- The welfare of captured animals.

According to the IWG Report the total performance of the snare greatly depends on the skills and practices of the operator, who is also held responsible for the welfare of the captured animal.

With this in mind, one recommendation of the IWG Report was to investigate alterations to the snare that might reduce non-target captures and lessen the risk and severity of injuries for captured animals.

There is clearly a need to update snare designs to ensure that their use and operation fall in line with the more humane practices stipulated in current legislation under the Nature Conservation Act 2004², and the more recent Snare Order³, which came into force on the 11th of March 2010.

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (G&WCT) “new” snare (The break-away snare)

G&WCT have been developing and testing a new design of snare over the last few years. The main features of the new snare are as follows (these can be viewed in Figure 1):

1. Break-away devices

The aim is to release non-target species such as badgers and deer easily (hence the name “break-away snare”), and to retain foxes reliably.

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/management/documents/snares-cop.pdf>

² [The Nature Conservation Act 2004](#)

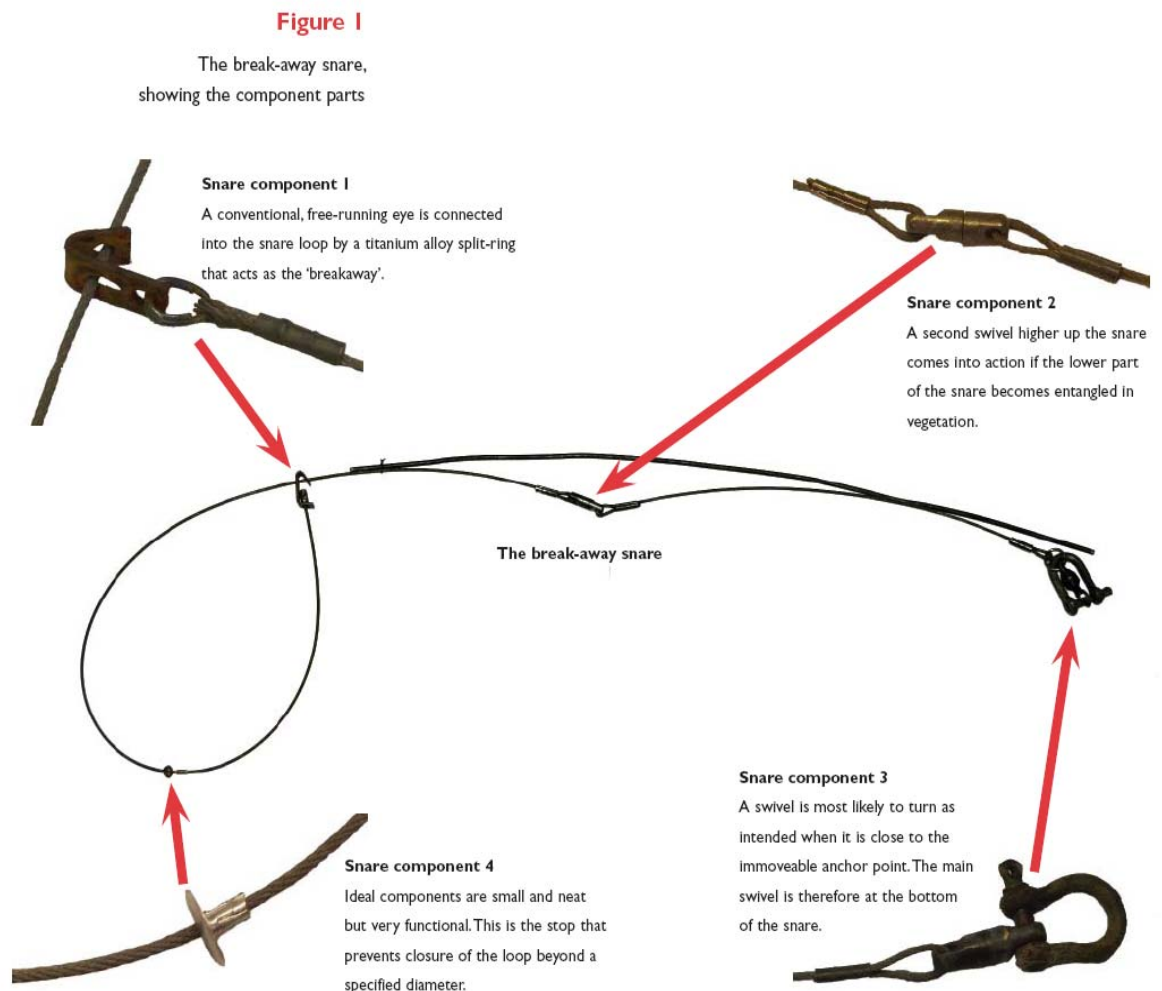
³ [The Snare \(Scotland\) Order 2010](#)

The problem is that the distinction between target and non-target species may not be that clear cut (for example, badgers can be a similar size to foxes due to variations of size within each of the species). Also, there can be variation within a species on the force exerted on the snare as this does not just depend on size and build, but the motivation of the individual caught.

2. Cushioning springs

These help to ease the physical pressure and strain experienced by captured animals when struggling against the force of the snare.

The problem is that foxes can vary greatly in size and strength, therefore a spring may be too weak or too strong depending on the individual caught, and may be inoperable most of the time. According to the G&WCT the best way to overcome this problem would be the use of a spring that is progressive in action. This adds to the complex nature of the device as spring strength must be chosen so that it does not kick into action under the strong pulls exerted by larger non-target animals.



Source: [G&WCT website](#)

According to G&WCT; the achievements of their research and development to date are:

- the development of the design for effective break-away snares to allow non-target animals to break free;
- the development of the design for a cushioning spring to avoid injuring the caught animal; and
- the achievement of high capture rates, compared with averages from gamekeepers (see figures below)

On the website of the G&WCT⁴ it states that the development of the new snare took patience and time as each prototype was handmade. They began producing prototypes at the “weak” end of the spectrum (in relation to spring strength) to investigate which species broke free and which were restrained. This meant developing a mechanism that would retain the animal even though it had broken free from the restraints of the snare. This was considered to be a handicap, as one of the main qualities of any snare is its simplistic and minimalist design. Therefore the components had to be small and discrete but also strong.

Despite this, the new design achieved high capture rates of 27.5 foxes per thousand snare-days compared with average figures from two previous gamekeeper studies (1.1 and 3.5 foxes per thousand snare-days).

Jonathon Reynolds (one of the researchers on the development of the snare, and the co-author of the information published on the G&WCT website⁵) supplied information explaining that:

- the new design of snare will be available for sale later this summer;
- the sale is a commercial venture in which G&WCT will have no part in;
- the results of the field trials are currently being written up, and are intended to be submitted to a scientific journal during March or April for possible publication in the next 12-18 months; and⁶
- **Mr. Reynolds is not aware of any other new design of snare available from UK suppliers**

According to Mr. Reynolds, G&WCT are currently involved with FERA (The Food and Environment Research Agency) in a research contract for Defra looking at the extent of use and humaneness of snares in England and Wales. This will be reporting later in the year, and details of the contract can be found at:

<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14689> .

⁴ http://www.gct.org.uk/research_surveys/predation/predation_control/fox/1342.asp

⁵ http://www.gct.org.uk/research_surveys/predation/predation_control/fox/1342.asp

⁶ Mr Reynolds will send notification as soon as the results are published