

Controlling COYOTES with Snares



Snares are relatively simple devices that can be used effectively in certain situations to trap coyotes (*Canis latrans*). A snare consists of a wire loop with a locking device that tightens around the animal's body as it passes through the loop (see Fig. 1). Snares are most commonly set

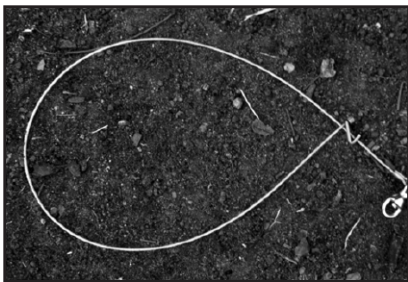


Figure 1.

where the coyotes are crawling under a fence, but they can also be set in trails in the brush, or at a den entrance. The device is looped in such a manner that the animal must put its head through the loop as it passes through the restricted area. Once the snare is around the animal's neck or body, the more the animal pulls, the tighter the snare gets.

Snares used in predator control are made of flexible cable and are either $\frac{1}{16}$ inch, $\frac{3}{32}$ inch or $\frac{5}{64}$ inch in diameter. The length of snares varies, but they are usually between 32 and 48 inches long. The snare should be long enough to allow the trapper to attach the end with the swivel to a firm object or drag, with enough of the cable left to make a loop from 8 to 10 inches in diameter. To use snares effectively, it is necessary to know as much as possible about the coyote's habits.

Habits

Like most animals, coyotes are creatures of habit. They are most active at night and in the early

morning and late evening hours. They rely on their acute sense of smell and keen eyesight for hunting prey and avoiding possible danger. Coyotes establish regular travel routes in the area in which they live. These routes are usually along ranch roads, livestock trails, canyons, ridges, or any other place that offers good visibility and easy travel. A trapper can find these travel routes by looking for coyote signs such as tracks or droppings.

Coyote tracks are similar to dog tracks, but it is possible to distinguish between the two. Dog tracks are round with the toes spread apart and are usually larger than coyote tracks. Toenail marks are usually visible on all toes. Coyote tracks are more rectangular with the toes closer together. If any toenail marks show at all, they are usually on the middle two toes (see Fig. 2). Also, coyote tracks appear more in a straight line, while those of a dog are somewhat staggered.

Coyote droppings, also called scat, contain animal hair and bone fragments. This readily distinguishes a coyote's droppings from those of domestic dogs that have been eating table scraps or dog food. Fresh coyote scats are black, but turn gray or white as they weather.

Equipment

One advantage of using snares is that only a minimum amount of equipment is needed. A trapper needs a supply of snares that have been cleaned and are ready to be placed in the field. To prepare snares for the field, place them in the open air for aging; this technique helps to remove the oil on the cables. Snares also can be boiled for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour in a

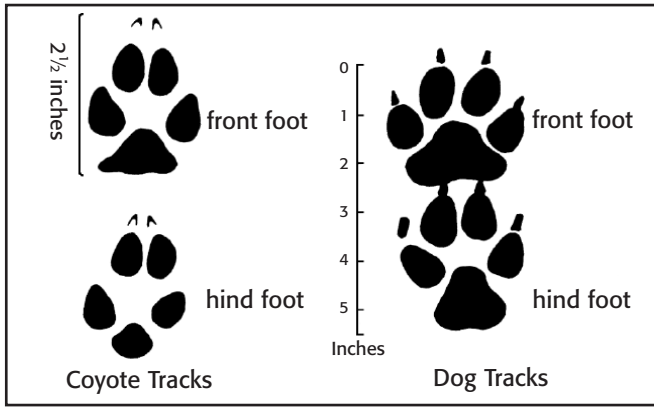


Figure 2.

mixture of 1/2 pound of baking soda per 3 gallons of water. Trap dye or wax may also be added if desired.

A pair of clean gloves is recommended. The use of gloves helps reduce the amount of human odor on the snares. Well fitting cotton or knit gloves are usually preferred since they can be laundered. In addition, the trapper will need some heavy wire, such as baling wire, to anchor the snare to the fence or drag, and small thin wire or sewing thread to hang the snare. The only other equipment needed is a pair of pliers capable of cutting and bending the wire.

Location of the Set

Snares work best when set in holes through or under netwire fences where coyotes are entering and leaving a pasture. Signs such as tracks, hair on the fence, or digging will indicate coyote crawls.

Snares may be used where there are barbed-wire fences. While some coyotes may go through the fence between the wire strands, many will dig a crawl under the bottom strand of the fence. Coyote crawls under fences often can be located by following their trails through the brush or grass leading up to the fence. Care should always be taken when using snares to avoid trapping non-target animals such as rabbits, deer, javelinas, armadillos, etc.

Making the Set

The swivel end of the snare should be firmly attached to the bottom strand of the fence or to a

drag, such as a heavy log. Some trappers prefer to use a drag instead of attaching the snare to the fence because once caught, the coyote will pull the drag away from the fence and keep the trap site from being disturbed. Although the loop size varies, it should usually be between 8 and 10 inches in diameter when set. If the loop size is too small, the snare may be knocked down when the coyote crawls under the fence. The snare should be positioned directly under the fence. The top of the loop should be attached to the fence

by means of a small, thin wire or a single strand of sewing thread (see Fig. 3). This will help keep the snare in the proper upright position, but allow it to be released with the slightest pull.



Figure 3.

Checking the Set

It is best to check snares on a daily basis. Although a snare is designed to kill an animal if it closes around the animal's neck, it is possible to catch a coyote around its body. If this happens the animal may eventually pull and chew on the cable enough to break it. Checking snares daily often will prevent the trapper from losing the coyote.

When checking the snare, approach the set only close enough to see if a coyote has been caught or if the snare is still in place. This will minimize disturbance at the set location.

After a coyote has been caught, a new snare should be used at the trap site. Once caught a coyote usually will bend and twist the cable and the snare so that it cannot be used again. However, the swivel and locking device can be removed and used on another snare.

For more information and assistance, contact the nearest office of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service—Wildlife Services.

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