

TRAPS USED FOR POSSUM CONTROL

One of OSPRI's primary objectives is to cost-effectively control bovine tuberculosis (TB) in New Zealand. The use of 1080 is vital for controlling possums, the main wildlife vector (transmitter) of TB that infects cattle and deer, but traps also play a significant role.

WHY USE TRAPS?

There are several reasons why traps are used to catch possums, these include:

1. **Alternative to poison:** In some TB risk areas where possum numbers must be reduced, the presence of livestock or pets prevents the use of poisons. In these areas traps are the only cost-effective alternative control option.
2. **Recovery of carcasses:** Often possum carcasses have to be recovered so they can be inspected (necropsied) for signs of TB infection. Traps are effective for easy carcass recovery.
3. **Population monitoring:** Traps are used to monitor the effectiveness of possum control. A National Trap-Catch Protocol has been developed to standardise the way traps are set and used for doing this.
4. **Integrated control:** Often ground-based control contractors will use encapsulated cyanide (Feratox®) to initially reduce numbers of possums; and then follow this with trapping to further reduce possum numbers to very low levels. The possums often captured in traps are shy of the poison baits, so using both methods together or in sequence increases the cost-effectiveness of ground-based control.

WHAT TRAPS ARE USED FOR CAPTURING POSSUMS?

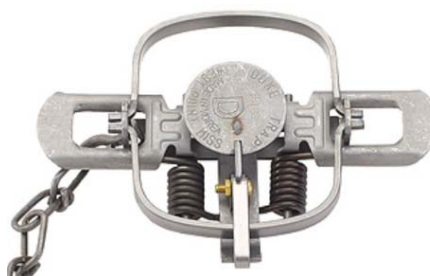
Traps can be grouped into three categories: (1) cage or box traps, (2) leg-hold or foot-hold traps, and (3) kill traps. Cage or box traps are used mainly by researchers who need live uninjured possums to ear-tag and/or radio collar and release. However, some homeowners also use cage traps where there is a high risk of pet cats or other desirable non-target species being caught. Possum control contractors might also need to use them when trapping close to dwellings.

Leg-hold or foot-hold traps are the most commonly used traps for capturing possums in New Zealand. They come in two configurations: (1) long-spring, and (2) double-coil spring traps (see figure). The No1 sized double-coil spring traps are most often used. These are supplied by a range of trap manufacturers, including originals such as Victor and Duke from the USA to several Asian made copies.

There have been no field trials carried out to compare the capture efficiency or robustness (field life) of the different makes of traps so, at least for monitoring purposes, they are accepted as having similar capture performance. There are larger traps than the No1 sized traps but these have been prohibited (see below). Some trap manufacturers make a variation of their traps that have rubber or polymer pads on the jaws in order to decrease the number of injuries (e.g. Victor Soft Catch and BMI Cushion Catch). Unfortunately these traps have a higher escape rate than unpadded traps and therefore have not been readily accepted by trappers.



Long-spring trap



Double coil-spring trap

There are a range of kill traps available for trapping possums, some of which have been designed in New Zealand specifically for possums (e.g. Timms, Possum Master, Sentinel), and some imported (e.g. Conibear, BMI). There have been no trials carried out to compare the capture efficiency of different kill traps, so it is best to talk to experienced trappers as to which kill traps are best to use.

WHAT LEGAL REQUIREMENTS RELATE TO TRAP USE?

What traps can be used and what restrictions might apply to their use is governed by the Animal Welfare Act 1999. This Act enables traps to be prohibited if they are considered to cause unacceptable distress or suffering. The only traps that have been prohibited in New Zealand are unpadded leg-hold traps larger than the No1 traps, including the trap commonly known as the gin trap, and Soft Catch traps larger than No1½.

Although some kill traps have failed to meet the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee trap testing guideline <http://www.mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/8521>), none have been prohibited as yet. A list of traps tested and the test results are available at <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/science/plants-animals-fungi/animals/vertebrate-pests/traps>

Leg-hold traps cannot be used within 150 metres of a dwelling without the express permission of the occupier in any area where there is a probable risk of catching a pet. All leg-hold traps must be inspected within 12 hours of sunrise each day that the trap remains set, starting the day after the trap was set. Trapped animals must be removed, cared for or killed appropriately.

In addition to these legal requirements, best-practice guidelines are available from the National Pest Control Agencies (NPCA) [website http://www.npca.org.nz/](http://www.npca.org.nz/). These provide instruction on how to get the best from using traps and ensuring minimal adverse welfare impacts to the animals.

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