

Fox Trapping Using Cage Traps

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Background

Foxes can have a significant impact on native fauna and agricultural production. Control of foxes in urban and semi-rural areas can be difficult when required to protect small populations of fauna or to reduce predation on domestic stock such as lambs or chickens.

Fox control options include baiting with 1080, trapping, shooting, den fumigation and exclusion fencing.

Baiting using 1080 is the most effective method of fox control, however, 1080 is a restricted poison and it may pose an unacceptable risk to domestic animals on small properties.

Fumigation of fox dens can be effective, however finding fox dens can be difficult and time consuming. Effective fumigation requires the fox to be present in the den at the time of fumigation. Fox dens must not be fumigated using phosphine generating tablets (e.g. Phostoxin) as they are not registered for fox control. Carbon monoxide can be an effective den fumigant if conducted correctly.

Shooting may not be suitable on small properties. Shooting of foxes should be undertaken using appropriate firearms performed by skilled operators who have the necessary experience and who hold the appropriate licences.

Cage traps can be used to capture problem foxes in urban and semi-rural areas where the use of alternative traps or 1080 poison is unacceptable.

While cage trapping foxes is time consuming, it requires much less training compared to foot-hold traps and trapped animals are considerably easier to deal with. Due to the many complexities of foot-hold trapping, their use is not recommended by the general public.

Foxes can be extremely wary animals, so the use of cage traps may result in some foxes avoiding capture. The services of an experienced professional may be required to control foxes which are unable to be trapped using cage traps.

Animal welfare considerations

Trapping requires careful thought in order to comply with the various legislative requirements. These laws include the Animal Welfare Act (2002), Dog Act (1976), Wildlife Conservation Act (1950), Firearms Act (1973) and common law.

There are heavy penalties (up to \$50,000 fines and imprisonment) for not complying with the requirements of the law relating to the capture, control, destruction, general treatment of animals, as well as the use of firearms and poisons.

Foxes or other animals trapped may suffer distress and every effort should be made to ensure the traps are set and all captured animals are treated humanely. The Animal Welfare Act 2002 defines cruelty as causing "any unnecessary harm". Causing any harm, pain or suffering to any animal that is not necessary may be an offence.

Type and size of cage trap

Select the largest cage trap available. The trap should be at least 900mm x 450mm x 450 mm in size. A rear bait door is an advantage when re-baiting the trap.

Mesh size should be small enough to reduce the likelihood of injuries to the mouth of trapped foxes. Mesh size should be 50mm or less.

Traps are activated by either a treadle plate or a hook mechanism. Hook activated traps are preferable for capturing foxes.

Where to set traps

The trap should be set where there is fox activity. Evidence such as a foxes footprints, or foxes digging under chook yards can often be readily seen. Foxes tend to use easy access ways, so setting a trap at a hole in a fence, on a track or firebreak or along a natural barrier will give better results. If the fox is disturbing chickens in pens, set the trap against the wire of the pen.

It is preferable to set cage traps where shade and shelter can be provided to the trapped animal.

Setting traps

You cannot hide the cage trap, a fox will know it is wire and you cannot avoid leaving your own scent at the trap site. Getting the fox to accept that you have been there and that the trap will not be harmful is the key to successful fox trapping using cage traps.

If using a trap without a back bait door, attach the bait on the hook before setting the trap in position. With a bait door, set the trap before baiting the hook.

The trap must be set on a flat surface. The floor of the trap will need to be covered with soil as foxes will generally not stand on the wire floor of the cage. *Continued over >*



A cage trap being set and baited for foxes. The trap has too much covering on the sides and is the minimum effective size to be efficient.

The rear of the trap should be up against an obstruction to ensure the fox cannot access the bait from behind. Bushes, trees or other vegetation, a fence or solid wall of a building will act as a suitable barrier. Unlike cats, foxes will rarely enter an enclosure where they are unable to see to the side or rear so keep most of the cage in the open.

Peg or tie the trap to the ground so that the cage is stable. Try to have the trap door open as high as possible to increase the space for the fox.

Best results will be obtained by pre-feeding the fox before setting the trap. Tie the trap door open using wire or cable ties and place some food outside the trap. Over a period of nights, place the food closer to the trap. Once the food is taken by the fox from under the open trap door, untie the door and bait the hook with a large amount of bait (500 g or more). A small amount of additional food at the entrance to the trap will entice the fox inside.

Suitable bait for cage trapping foxes includes chicken, rabbit, lamb or kangaroo meat.

Traps should be checked inspected at least each morning.

Destruction of trapped foxes

Foxes can be destroyed in the trap by using a suitable firearm such as a .22 rimfire using standard or low velocity hollow or soft point ammunition. Shooting of foxes should only be undertaken by personnel who have the necessary experience and skills to undertake the task safely and humanely. The firearm and shooter must be licenced.

Trapped foxes can be dangerous to handle and can inflict serious bites. Traps containing live foxes should be handled with thick leather gloves or using poles inserted through the cage. However, unless the capture site is not appropriate for destroying the fox, there is no need to handle the cage until the fox has been euthanized.



Trapped foxes such as this adult should be euthanized using a firearm in a safe location

If it is safe and appropriate to do so, the fox should be shot at the capture site. In residential areas, the trap and fox should be transported to a more suitable site before euthanasia of the fox. Cover the cage with hessian, blankets or similar when transporting live foxes.

Approach the cage quietly to reduce stress and panic from the captured animal. Have the minimum number of people present at the site to avoid agitation of the fox. The fox should be euthanized as quickly and humanely as possible.

Ensure the fox is not moving before shooting. The muzzle of the firearm should be between the wires of the cage and within 5 cm of the foxes head. The shot should be directed to destroy the major centre of the brain. The fox should immediately be checked to ensure it is dead.

Foxes can carry a number of diseases and parasites that affect humans and other animals. It is preferable to wear impervious gloves when handling foxes. Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling fox carcasses.

Wash the cage after use. The trap site may be used after capturing a fox provided any blood is removed from the cage or surrounding soil.

If the captured fox is a lactating vixen, efforts should be made to find the cubs and euthanize them by den fumigation with carbon monoxide.

Capture of non-target animals

Every effort should be made to avoid capturing non-target animals. These may include domestic dogs and cats, birds and various native fauna.

Avoid setting traps where domestic animals will be captured. Set traps as late in the day as possible and cover or unset traps during the day. Traps left set during daylight hours are likely to capture birds (e.g. crows), domestic dogs and reptiles such as goannas which can suffer from thermal stress, shock, capture myopathy and predation.

Non-target animals captured should be checked for injury and either released if unharmed or if injured, appropriate attention should be sought.

Trapped domestic animals should either be released immediately or the local council ranger notified before release of the animal.

Under no circumstances should trapped domestic animals be destroyed.

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