

P-05-813 Larsen Traps

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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-813

Petition title: Ban the USE of LARSEN TRAPS (Multi Corvid Traps)

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to BAN the USE, Sale & Manufacture of LARSEN TRAPS (Multi Corvid Traps).

The Larsen trap is a cage bird trap where a live wild decoy bird, (call-bird), is kept trapped inside one compartment to encourage another bird to come down to it. When another visiting bird lands on top s/he falls through a one way gate or false floor into a compartment, where s/he awaits their fate.

Larsen traps were invented in Denmark but are now BANNED in that country, as they are now considered inhumane and extremely cruel.

Larsen traps are mostly used by gamekeepers & smallholders to trap magpies, crows & other corvids. The bird suffers a terrifying ordeal by being trapped day and night without food, water or any shelter from the elements, which causes extreme distress.

Because they use a captive wild bird (technically contrary to the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act) these traps have to be used under the terms of a "General Licence" issued by Natural Resources Wales, where magpies, crows, jays, jackdaws and rooks can be trapped.

The wild "decoy call-birds," with their most vital instincts frustrated & abused by confinement, suffers a most terrible fate. Close to the ground they are terrorised by predators and watch as fellow birds are brutally killed in front of them. A number end up being found dead through neglect.

Legally, the trapped decoy call-bird should have food, water, shelter & a perch & the 'trap' inspected at least every 24hrs, but, this is not the case. We have witnessed crows left to die without food & water and found dead rotting corpses of the previous decoy call-birds, who are permanently wired inside until they die of starvation or stress.

We have witnessed birds with broken beaks and cut heads where they have tried to escape. We have witnessed brutality, mutilation & maiming where the gamekeeper has cut wing flight feathers to stop the decoy bird from escaping.

The trapping continues throughout the summer months, consequently thousands of chicks starve to death in their nests due to their parent birds being trapped.

Larsen traps are indiscriminate and can trap non target birds or mammals. Although illegal, Pigeons are sometimes used to attract birds of prey who are also then killed.

Trapping wild birds in live bird traps & the use of live decoy call-birds causes untold stress to the unfortunate birds.

We urge that this persecution of wildlife be stopped.

Background

A Larsen trap is a type of cage trap, designed by a Danish gamekeeper (Christian Larsen) in the 1950's, primarily as a magpie trap. The traps are designed to catch all corvid species (i.e. crows, magpies, jackdaws, jays, rooks) at all times of the year. The most common version is cuboid, with a base measuring around 80–100cm. The trap mechanism involves a spring door to each catching compartment which, when set, is held open by a split perch. A previously caught magpie or crow (or sometimes food) is kept in the decoy compartment, and this attracts territory holders who see the decoy as an intruder. To enter the trap, birds the size of a magpie or crow drop onto the perch. The perch gives way, and the bird's momentum takes it past the bottom of the door, which flips up, capturing the bird. The bird is caught alive.



Image of a Larsen trap by Roger Cornfoot. Licensed under the Creative Commons.

In 2016, Scottish Natural Heritage published a [report into the use of corvid cage traps in Scotland](#). Corvid trapping routinely occurs in many countries as a form of pest control. The report says the practice is undertaken by farmers to protect livestock, feedstuff and crops; by game managers to protect breeding birds and their young; and sometimes by conservation managers for similar reasons. It says it may also be undertaken to prevent the spread of disease and also to reduce the risk of bird collisions with aircraft.

General license

The use of Larsen traps in Wales is covered by a [general license](#). Natural Resources Wales (NRW) issues general licenses to allow certain actions to be carried out (that would otherwise be illegal) without the need to apply for a specific license. Each general license is issued for a particular purpose and some are limited to certain species only.

Under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) (as amended) NRW annually issues a '[License to kill or take certain wild birds to prevent serious damage to agriculture, forestry or fisheries, or prevent the spread of disease](#)'. The license authorises persons to carry out a range of activities against the birds of the species listed (crow, dove, jackdaw, jay, magpie, feral pigeon, rook and woodpigeon) by shooting, by use of a cage trap or net or by any other method not prohibited by Section 5 of the Act. The license permits this activity in circumstances where the licensee is satisfied that all appropriate legal, non-lethal methods of control such as scaring or proofing are either ineffective or impracticable.

The license also states that any birds killed in accordance with the license must be killed in a quick and humane manner. It also says that any bird held captive prior to being killed must be killed out of sight of other captive birds. A condition of the general license issued by NRW is that all relevant animal welfare legislation, including the [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#), must be complied with. The Welsh Government response to the petition states “there is a duty of care on all animal keepers to protect the welfare of animals in their care, whether on a permanent or temporary basis”. The license also sets out that decoy birds must be provided with adequate food and water at all time, appropriate shelter and a suitable perch that does not cause discomfort to the bird’s feet. Each cage trap must be physically inspected at least once every day at intervals of no more than 24 hours, except where this is not possible because of severe weather conditions. An inspection must be sufficient to determine whether there are any live or dead birds or other animals in the trap. At each inspection any dead animal, including any dead bird, caught in the trap must be removed from it. When the trap is not in use it is required to be removed from site and stored in such a manner to prevent its accidental use.

The [license notes](#) state that cage traps should not be used during severe hot or cold weather, or when such conditions can be reasonably anticipated. It recommends that any cage trap used under the license should carry a tag or sign that gives the number of the local Wildlife

Crime Officer for the area, and also a unique code that allows the owner to be identified by the police.

Under the Act, the maximum penalty for an offence is a level 5 fine (£5000) and/or a six month custodial sentence.

Stakeholder views

The RSPB is [not opposed](#) to legal, site-specific control of magpies by the legal use of Larsen or other cage traps as long as the general license conditions are strictly adhered to. In a briefing provided to the Research Service, RSPCA Cymru expresses a number of concerns about the use of Larsen traps. It recognises that there are legal structures in place to regulate the use of the traps, but suggests that the regulations are poorly enforced. As previously stated, the license conditions outline that the use of such traps is only permitted if all appropriate legal, non-lethal methods of control such as scaring or proofing are either ineffective or impracticable. The RSPCA is concerned that there is no requirement to demonstrate this to NRW before operating under the licence. It suggests that it is difficult to obtain evidence that authorised persons have complied with this condition. It suggests that legislation should be changed to improve enforcement of license conditions, and recommends that such traps should be registered with the local police.

Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government has not issued any statements on the issue of Larsen traps. As discussed above, licensing of such activity is administered by NRW under a general license. The Welsh Government response to the petition reiterates the information provided in this briefing. It concludes that “animals and birds should be protected and those who choose to break the law should be prosecuted”.

National Assembly for Wales action

To date, there has been no consideration of the use of Larsen traps in the National Assembly for Wales.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.