



Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

David Rowlands AM
Chair of the Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

4 July 2018

Dear Chair,

Petition P-05-813: Ban the use of Larsen traps (Multi Corvid Traps)

Thank you for your letter regarding petition P-05-813 on banning the use of Larsen traps in Wales. RSPCA policies are created and supported by our team of scientists, who are experts in their fields, and ensure that we are at the forefront of animal welfare thinking. In addition to this letter, we were pleased to supply a briefing to the National Assembly for Wales' Members' Research Service.

As many of your committee members will know, the RSPCA is the oldest animal welfare organisation in the world and has a unique perspective on animal welfare issues with our role in taking private prosecutions against those that commit animal offences.

Every year the RSPCA in Wales receives approximately eight calls from the public concerned about the use of Larsen traps to capture wild birds. The Larsen trap, as the petition briefing explains, is a variation of cage trap and can be made of wood or metal and contain two or three compartments to allow the use of a live decoy bird (or be baited with food). It is specifically designed to catch birds (often corvids like crows and magpies) alive.

Over the last four years we have received 32 calls relating to Larsen traps, including calls around homemade Larsen traps, traps being used to capture wild birds for captivity and for pest control. A number of incidents were reported by members of public but on further investigation no decoy birds were seen in use. Concern has been raised at the method of destruction of trapped birds in some cases which has been the use of a hammer to the birds head.

RSPCA Cymru has concerns with the use of Larsen traps as it does with many other forms of trapping. The RSPCA acknowledges that there is a legal structure in place that regulates the use of these traps, but that these regulations are poorly enforced. For example, we have attended a case in the past when a Larsen trap had been baited with meat and this had attracted, and caught, a red kite. If it was not for a member of the public calling this in to us, this breach of the legislation may not have been discovered.

RSPCA Cymru
6 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Business Park
Cardiff
CF15 7AB

Cruelty Line
0300 1234 999

@RSPCAcymru
Facebook.com/RSPCAcymru
YouTube.com/RSPCAcymru
www.RSPCA.cymru
www.politicalanimal.wales

Elusen a gofrestrwyd yng
Nghymru a Lloegr
Charity registered in
England & Wales
Rhif/No 219099

www.RSPCA.cymru

Noddwr Ei Mawrhydi
Y Frenhines
Patron HM The Queen

Claire Lawson
Assistant Director, External Relations, RSPCA
0300 123 8916 claire.lawson@RSPCA.org.uk 07976 854166



Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The RSPCA believes that taking action against species listed in a general licence is an easy course of action for land managers to take and that the management of any wild animal needs to be considered carefully, following seven ethical principles; modify human practices; justify with evidence; have achievable objectives; prioritise animal welfare; be socially acceptable; be subject to systematic planning - and any decision to act should be guided by a specific problem, not by a label¹.

Our main concern is that - though the general licence conditions include a statement that the authorised individual has to have demonstrated that non lethal alternatives do not work - there is no requirement to demonstrate this to Natural Resources Wales or other regulatory body before operating under the licence. This is a problem of compliance and it is difficult to obtain evidence that authorised persons have complied with this condition.

Welfare of the decoy bird

The RSPCA has always questioned the use of decoy birds in Larsen traps due to the potential for them to suffer while in the trap. We would prefer that such methods were not used, but if they are to be retained, then there should be a maximum time limit for both, when one bears in mind that some avian experts take the view that a wild bird rendered into captivity will always suffer. However, we are not aware of any specific data on time limits and recommend that research be commissioned to address this.

How long a bird is continuously kept as a decoy in the trap and how soon it can be returned to the trap is dependent on the size of the trap and other provisions therein e.g. perches, cover, enrichment, etc, as different traps will impact the welfare of the bird differently and different birds will react differently to being held captive. However, there should be a maximum time limit for keeping a bird as a decoy.

We are not aware of any research relating to the use of decoy birds regarding how long they should be retained in the trap and how long a bird should be kept. We understand that one school of thought recommends the use of call birds that are used for an extended period of time, while others suggest that decoy birds should be replaced at regular intervals. If decoy birds are to be kept for extended periods then they should be kept in larger aviaries when not in the trap. It is likely that this would require a number of birds to be kept so that they could be used in rotation, and would necessitate more birds to be taken from the wild. We recommend that research be conducted to provide data as to which practice would be the most humane and effective.

The RSPCA would urge the committee to recommend to the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs that amendments to the legislation which seek to improve the enforcement and education around the use of these traps be made. We understand that Scotland's system requires that such traps be registered with the local police and this is something that, if introduced in Wales, would help traceability.

As an organisation that undertakes prosecutions under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, we are occasionally asked to investigate potential offences relating to Larsen traps and having a system where the owner could be traced easily would make such investigations easier. We also support the Law Commission's² proposal that failure to comply with the conditions of a licence should be an offence.

¹ Dubois S., et al., (2017) International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control. Conservation Biology DOI. 10.1111/cobi.12896

² Law Commission (2015) Wildlife Law Volume 1 - Report Law Com No 362



Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Larsen traps, like other traps, are readily available to members of the public, but there is usually no information regarding their use. Although many users will be trained in the use of the traps and trained in methods of killing any trapped animals quickly and humanely, the traps may also be used by people who are unaware of the legal conditions imposed upon the user. Furthermore, these people may also lack the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to kill any trapped animals humanely.

Guidance is available on the use of these traps from organisations like British Association of Shooting and Conservation³. While this guidance is useful at highlighting the legal implications of using such traps, we feel that more information is needed to make potential users aware of the consequences of using these traps.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Claire Lawson'.

³ <https://basc.org.uk/shooting/pest-and-predator-control/>