



THE TRAPPING TRUTH

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INTRODUCTION

Gin traps, killer traps and cage traps are common tools used to control so-called problem animals on small stock farms. In the Karoo region of South Africa traps are primarily used to catch Black-backed jackal (*Canis mesomelas*) and caracal (*Caracal caracal*) as these animals are known to prey on small stock. However, little research has been conducted on the efficacy of these traps at catching culprit animals and whether or not their use results in improved weaning percentages. A skilled full-time trapper was followed for a period of five months over a lambing season. All animals caught in traps were recorded. This trapper worked on a 12000ha Merino sheep farm in the Victoria West region of South Africa. The traps evaluated were 20 gin traps, 3 killer traps and 2 cage traps.

METHOD

The trapper was trained with at least 15 years of experience. The researcher did not alter trapper methodology thus results are representative of trapping activity in the area. Traps were checked on average 1/wk, as a result all animals found in gin traps and killer traps were already dead.

GIN TRAPS

- set throughout farm, next to paths
- Black-backed jackal scat and urine used as lure

KILLER TRAPS

- set in crawl-through areas in boundary fence

CAGE TRAPS

- set in valleys with known caracal activity
- caracal urine used as lure
- caracals killed by wire noose to neck

RESULTS

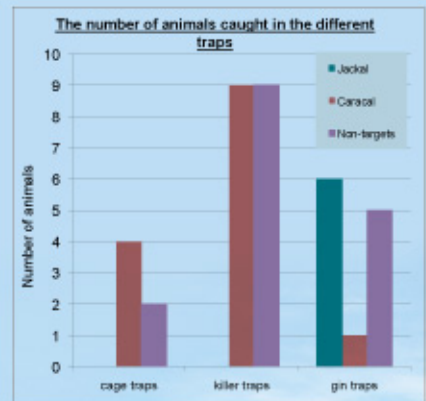
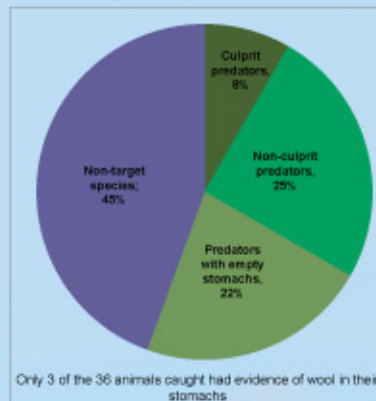
- 36 animals caught in 5 months
- 20 (55%) target species (caracal and black-backed jackal)
 - 3 with wool in stomach (culprits),
 - 8 with empty stomachs and
 - 9 with natural prey in stomachs

ECONOMICS

- Trapper salary + payment for animals over 5 months = R17 700
- Weaning % = 90% - not significantly different from the previous two weaning percentages (102% and 88%) where there was no full time trapper and thus fewer predators were caught
- Cost on biodiversity as many non-culprit animals are killed - difficult to quantify

CONCLUSION

- It is impossible for even a skilled and trained trapper to catch only specific damage causing animals
- Many innocent animals fall victim to these traps suffering a slow and painful death
- Intensive trapping does not improve weaning percentages
- Despite long-term use of traps in South Africa, the predator-livestock conflict remains
- Intensive trapping may do more harm than good
 - disrupts ecosystem balance
 - decreases natural prey base such as scrub hares (*Lepus saxatilis*) and rock hyrax (*Procavia capensis*)



KILLER TRAPS

Highest trapping rate - one catch per 25 trap nights

Lowest specificity for target species - 50% target species

Non-target animals:

- porcupine
- bat-eared fox
- rock hyrax
- aardwolf
- water mongoose

Biggest negative effect on wildlife biodiversity

GIN TRAPS

One catch per 250 trap nights, but one target specie per 429 trap nights

58% target species

Non-target animals:

- cape fox
- scrub hare

Inefficient and non-specific

CAGE TRAPS

One catch per 50 trap nights

66% target species

Non-target animals:

- porcupine
- scrub hare

Most specific for caracal but not necessarily culprit animals

It is evident that the use of traps is not cost-effective, is indiscriminate, inhumane and does not appear to solve the predator-livestock conflict issue. Perhaps it is time to take a more proactive, sustainable and ethical approach to predator control

