

Debate Pack  
5 January 2023  
Number CDP 2022/0247

By Dr Elena Ares,  
Nikki Sutherland

---

# Debate on an e-petition on the use of snares

1	Background	2
1.1	Petition and Government response	2
1.2	Policy in England	3
1.3	Welsh Government ban on snares	4
1.4	Scottish Government review of snares	5
1.5	Stakeholder views	6
2	PQs	8
3	Further reading	11

## Summary

A Westminster Hall debate has been scheduled for 6pm on 9 January 2023 on e-petition 600593 concerning the use of snares. The subject for the debate has been chosen by the Petitions Committee and the debate will be opened by Nick Fletcher MP.

# 1 Background

## 1.1 Petition and Government response

[E-petition 600593 calling for the use of free-running snares for trapping wildlife to be made illegal in England](#) is due for debate on 9 January 2023. It has received 102,616 signatures and closed on 9 May 2022.

[A snare](#) is a wire noose attached to the ground usually set to catch foxes or rabbits round the neck as part of pest control. However, they do not distinguish between different animals so other wildlife and domestic animals can also be caught in them.

The petition calls for a ban on the sale, manufacture and use of free running snares:

The Government should prohibit the sale, use and manufacture of free-running snares under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, putting them in the same category as self-locking snares <sup>1</sup>, which are already illegal.

We believe that people setting free-running snares cannot ensure animal welfare as required under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, that such snares cause unnecessary suffering to mammals, are indiscriminate and should be banned.<sup>2</sup>

In its [response to the petition](#) in January 2022 the Government set out existing legislation which bans self-locking snares, regulates how free-running snares are used and more general animal welfare legislation. It also acknowledged concerns and highlighted that it would be issuing a call for evidence on the use of free running snares:

We know that some people consider snares to be an inhumane and unnecessary means of trapping wild animals. When used improperly, snares can cause immense suffering and we are looking at whether changes are needed to address these concerns. Therefore, we have committed to launching a call for evidence on the use of snares. This was announced in the Action Plan for Animal Welfare.<sup>3</sup>

The Petitions Committee wrote to Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in April 2022 to ask when the Government planned to

---

<sup>1</sup> According to [Code of Best Practice on the Use of Snares for Fox Control in England](#) Defra considers a self-locking snare to be a wire loop that does not relax when a trapped animal stops pulling. It states “you must never set a self-locking snare as this is illegal”.

<sup>2</sup> E-petition no. 600593, [Make the use of free-running snares illegal for trapping wildlife, 9 May 2022](#)

<sup>3</sup> E-petition no. 600593, [Make the use of free-running snares illegal for trapping wildlife, 9 May 2022](#)

launch its call for evidence on the use of snares. The [Government response \(PDF\)](#) from May 2022 stated the call for evidence would be published “in due course”. A written parliamentary response from September 2022 [stated the same](#).

## 1.2 Policy in England

The use of free running snares is legal in England under [Section 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#). The [Code of Best Practice on the Use of Snares for Fox Control in England](#), published by a number of game and land management associations in 2016, sets out principles for the legal and humane use of snares. The Code of Practice summarises the existing legislation as follows:

1. Snares must be inspected at least once a day while set.
2. It is illegal to use a [‘self-locking’ snare](#).
3. It is an offence for a person to cause unnecessary suffering to an animal under their control (this applies to animals while held in snares and the means by which they are killed).
4. It is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to a domestic animal.
5. It is illegal to set in position any trap or snare calculated to cause bodily injury to any deer coming into contact with it.
6. It is illegal to set in position any trap or snare calculated to cause bodily injury to any wild animal included in Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (currently including badger, polecat, otter, red squirrel, hedgehog and pine marten).<sup>4</sup>

The Code recommends inspecting snares twice daily rather than the once daily required, and outlines where and when snares should never be set:

1. Under or near fences or other obstructions, like saplings, hedges, walls or gates that could cause entanglement.
2. Where livestock could be caught.
3. In areas regularly and legitimately used for the exercise of domestic animals, near public footpaths or housing.
4. On or near to an active badger sett, or on the runs radiating from it.
5. On footbridges, or on fallen trees or logs spanning watercourses.

---

<sup>4</sup> BASC, [Code of Best Practice on the Use of Snares for Fox Control in England, 2016](#)

6. In such a way that the restrained animal could become fully or partially suspended, entangled, drowned or strangled.

7. If forecasted weather conditions are likely to cause poor welfare or prevent daily inspection. Excess heat as well as cold/wind/rain/snow, etc. must be considered.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.3 Welsh Government ban on snares

The Welsh Government is proposing a complete ban in the use of snares. Provisions for this are included in the [Agriculture \(Wales\) Bill](#) currently before the Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru. The proposed ban is set out in [Clauses 43 to 45 of the Bill](#).

The [Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill \(PDF\)](#) sets out how the ban will be implemented, through the [Countryside and Wildlife Act 1981](#), by creating a new criminal offence:

The Bill will create new offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. A person who uses a snare to capture a wild animal will commit an offence. A person who uses a glue trap to capture a vertebrate will commit an offence. A person guilty of an offence is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not longer than 6 months or an unlimited fine – which is in line with those of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.<sup>6</sup>

The Memorandum also set out the rationale for introducing the ban together with evidence of the risks and harm to non-target species from free running snares:

3.270 Snares are known to inflict both physical and mental suffering upon the animals they capture, particularly as the animal may be trapped for many hours - legally, or days - illegally. Injuries sustained from the snare can result in a slow, agonising death for the trapped animal, and they can be attacked or killed by other animals.

3.271 When an animal struggles to free itself, the snare can slip to the body or lower extremities leading to the animal further injuring its teeth and body as it attempts to gnaw through the restraint.

3.272 Even where care is taken on the size and location of the snare, they are, by their nature, indiscriminate and as such many other non-target species regularly fall victim to being trapped injured or even killed, this includes other wildlife and domestic species as well as farm livestock.

3.273 [The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(Defra\) study](#) found that while 84 per cent of snare users reported that they made efforts

---

<sup>5</sup> BASC, [Code of Best Practice on the Use of Snares for Fox Control in England, 2016](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Agriculture \(Wales\) Bill Explanatory Memorandum](#), September 2022

to avoid capturing non-target species, 60 per cent had nevertheless caught nontargets at some time or other.

3.274 These non-target species included hares, deer, otters, and pet dogs and domestic cats (5 out of the 17 rabbit snare users in the study had caught a cat at least once). The Defra study found that the badger was the most common non-target with 25 per cent of operators reporting this species found captured in their snares.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.4

### Scottish Government review of snares

In Scotland the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provisions on snares were amended and extended through [Section 13 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#) as follows:

The provisions within Section 13 of the WANE Act introduced new requirements for the operation of snares by amending Section 11 of the WCA, particularly with regard to the introduction of training, record keeping and identification tags.

The provisions also introduced the need for establishment of approved training bodies to deliver snare training, and created an administrative role within Police Scotland to maintain records of trained operators.<sup>8</sup>

The legislation also includes a requirement to carry out a review every five years, from 2016, of the regulations covering snaring. [The latest review of snares legislation was published in February 2022](#). In addition to assessing the effectiveness of the legislation the review concluded that a wider review of the use of snares was necessary “given the continuing concerns regarding the welfare of animals caught in snares”.<sup>9</sup>

The Scottish Government published a [Wildlife Management consultation](#) in October 2022, which included acknowledged that “there is the potential for snares to cause significant injury or death to wildlife” and harm non-target wildlife and pets. It also reflected the view of land managers:

Land managers argue that their continued use should be allowed on the basis that they are an essential tool needed for the control of some species, such as rabbits and foxes in order to protect livestock and crops.<sup>10</sup>

It also made a commitment to look at the issue further following the wider review by the [Scottish Animal Welfare Commission](#), a Scottish Government advisory body:

---

<sup>7</sup> [Agriculture \(Wales\) Bill Explanatory Memorandum](#), September 2022

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government, [Snaring: review - February 2022](#), 1 April 2022

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government, [Snaring: review - February 2022](#), 1 April 2022

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government, [Snaring: review - February 2022](#), 1 April 2022

Depending on the outcome of the wider snaring review we may undertake further consultation on additional proposals to amend the legislation governing the use of snares, at a later date<sup>11</sup>

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission published its [position paper on Trapping of Terrestrial Wild Mammals Using Snares](#) in December 2022. This recommended a complete ban on the use of snares in Scotland, for the public and industry on animal welfare grounds. It set out the rationale for this as follows:

Wild mammals and birds are known to be sentient and capable of experiencing pain and other negative sensations. Any traps that do not instantly kill or render them irreversibly unconscious are likely to impact their welfare. Therefore, the use of snares in the lethal control of terrestrial mammals raises significant welfare concerns. Non-target species caught in snares will also suffer and may die, often very slowly.

Neonates and juveniles may starve to death, if traps catch an adult on which they are dependent within their breeding season.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.5 Stakeholder views

The [RSPCA supports a ban on free running snares](#) and has been part of the campaign to ban snares in Wales.<sup>13</sup>

The [League Against Cruel Sports campaigns against the use of snares](#), with a particular focus of their use on game estates to control foxes:

The modern legal snare is meant to tighten around an animal and hold it quietly until a gamekeeper from the shoot comes to kill it. But the reality is shocking. In their desperate struggle to escape, animals may be strangled, or may suffer horrible and sometimes life-threatening injuries, or a lingering death.

Even if the snare doesn't kill the animal, they may still die at the hands of a predator, dehydration or exposure to the elements. The League Against Cruel Sports is doing everything it can to protect animals from snares, as in the UK they are mainly set up by shooting estates to eliminate animals that predate on 'game' birds, and therefore this is a subject linked to cruel sports.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Government, [Snaring: review - February 2022](#), 1 April 2022

<sup>12</sup> Scottish Animal Welfare Commission, [Position Paper on Trapping of Terrestrial Wild Mammals Using Snares](#) 14 December 2022

<sup>13</sup> RSPCA, [RSPCA welcome Ag Bill publication as snares and glue traps set to be banned](#), 30 September 2022

<sup>14</sup> League Against Cruel Sports, [Working to ban snares](#) [website visited 5 January 2023]

[Snarewatch](#), set up by Scottish animal welfare organisation [OneKind](#) publishes information on the use snares in the UK.<sup>15</sup> The [National Anti-Snare Campaign \(NASC\)](#) also campaigns for a ban on snares.

The [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust set out its view on the need for the use of snares](#) in its response to the proposed ban in Wales:

Without such a device available to them, wildlife managers will be severely impeded when undertaking fox control. They will not be able to effectively reduce predation pressure at key times of the year which will impact their livelihoods, whether that by gamebird management or livestock management.

Additionally, it will limit fox control undertaken to protect threatened ground nesting birds such as curlew, which is modelled to have an extinction date as a breeding bird in Wales by 2033. Species such as curlew and black grouse need all the help they can get in Wales and inhibiting those actively working to conserve them seems to be an own goal to say the least.<sup>16</sup>

Also in response to the proposed ban in Wales, the [British Association for Shooting and Conservation \(BASC\)](#), referring to their use in conservation efforts stated “that an “outright ban” on all snares including modern humane cable restraints [free running snares] for foxes will risk the loss of iconic species such as the curlew”.<sup>17</sup> The [Countryside Alliance](#) also supports the use of snares as a land management tool.

---

<sup>15</sup> SnareWatch, SnareWatch Annual Report 2021: Case studies of snare use in the UK, 10 March 2022

<sup>16</sup> GWCT, [GWCT response to proposed Welsh Government proposed](#) , 8 October 2021

<sup>17</sup> BASC, [“Outright ban” on snares will have devastating consequences, warns BASC](#), 11 November 2022

## 2

## PQs

### Trapping

**Asked by: Thomas, Derek**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his Action Plan for Animal Welfare, when he will be launching a call for evidence on the use of snares.

**Answering member: Scott Mann | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

Snares can cause immense suffering to both target and non-target animals, and it is an issue we are looking at closely as part of our continued drive to maintain the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

Through our Animal Action for Welfare Plan, published in May 2021, we are looking at whether changes need to be made to reflect concerns raised.

The call for evidence on the use of snares will be launched in due course. This is planned to run for 12 weeks and will be launched online. After closing the call for evidence, responses will be analysed, and a summary of responses will be published online.

**HC Deb 29 September 2022 | PQ 45245**

- Trapping

**Asked by: Poulter, Dr Dan**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of use of (a) snare traps and (b) other inhumane forms of animal trap.

**Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

In 2012 Defra published a report titled [Determining the Extent of Use and Humaneness of Snares in England and Wales](#). This report estimated that at any one time and depending on the season, between 62,800 and 188,300 fox snares were being used in England, the maximum occurring in March.

A survey conducted as part of this report suggests that rabbit snares were in use on 1,567 holdings in England, with an average of 12 snares being set at any one time on each of these holdings.



Defra has not undertaken any more recent research into the number of snares being used and therefore cannot provide an assessment on trends in snare use.

When used improperly, snares can cause immense suffering and the Government is looking at whether changes are needed to address these concerns. The Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare, published last year, included an ambition to conduct a call for evidence on the use of snares and this will be launched in due course.

In terms of other inhumane forms of animal trap, my department is supporting the Glue Traps (Offences) Bill, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Jane Stevenson MP last year, to restrict the use of glue traps as a means of pest control to help make sure rodents are despatched in a humane manner.

Glue traps can cause immense suffering to rodents and other animals that inadvertently fall victim to their use. While the Government does not hold any official data on total glue trap sales, conversations with stakeholders have suggested that at least 250,000 glue boards were sold each year in the UK between 2017 and 2020.

**HC Deb 23 March 2022 | PQ 140423**

### Trapping

**Asked by: Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the impact of the use of snares on the populations of non-targeted animals.

**Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

When used improperly, snares can cause immense suffering to both target and non-targeted animals. The use of snares is therefore an issue we are looking at closely as part of our continued drive to maintain the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

Through the Government's Animal Action for Welfare Plan, published in May 2021, we are looking at whether changes need to be made to reflect concerns raised.

There is already a Code of Practice for the use of snares to control foxes in England which sets out clear principles for the legal and humane use of snares. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 also prohibits the setting of

any type of snare in places where they are likely to catch certain non-target animals such as badgers.

**HC Deb 03 February 2022 | PQ 112674**

### Trapping

**Asked by: Huq, Dr Rupa**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of banning the use of snares in the UK.

**Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

We are aware of the concerns around the use of snares, which can cause immense suffering to both target and non-target animals. It is an issue we are looking at closely as part of our continued drive to maintain the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

Anyone using snares has a responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to act within the law to ensure their activities do not harm protected species or cause any unnecessary suffering.

The Government has no current plans to ban the use of all animal snares. Snares are controlled in England and Wales under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This already prohibits the use of self-locking snares and the setting of any type of snare in places where they are likely to catch certain non-target animals such as badgers. It also requires snares to be inspected on a daily basis.

When practised to a high standard, and in accordance with the law, snaring can offer an effective means to reduce the harmful impacts of foxes on livestock, game and wildlife.

The code of practice for the use of snares to control foxes in England can be found at <https://basc.org.uk/cop/snares-for-fox-control-in-england/>. This code is designed and owned by the sector, rather than Government. It sets out clear principles for the legal and humane use of snares, using evidence from snare use research to improve snare deployment and design.

**HC Deb 26 April 2021 | PQ 185443**

## 3

### Further reading

Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation

19 December 2022

**[Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation welcomes debate on the use of snares in the UK](#)**

Countryside Alliance

22 October 2022

**[The future of snares as a management tool](#)**

National Anti-Snaring Campaign

**[Free-running snares](#)**

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

**[Fox snaring guidelines: What snares to use](#)**

League Against Cruel Sports

**[Why it's time for a ban on snares](#)**

Shooting UK

24 April 2020

**[How to use snares for fox control](#)**

Hunt Investigation Team

**[#SnareAware](#)**

### Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing [‘Legal help: where to go and how to pay’](#) for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hocllibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hocllibraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources) for more information.

### Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.


You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)