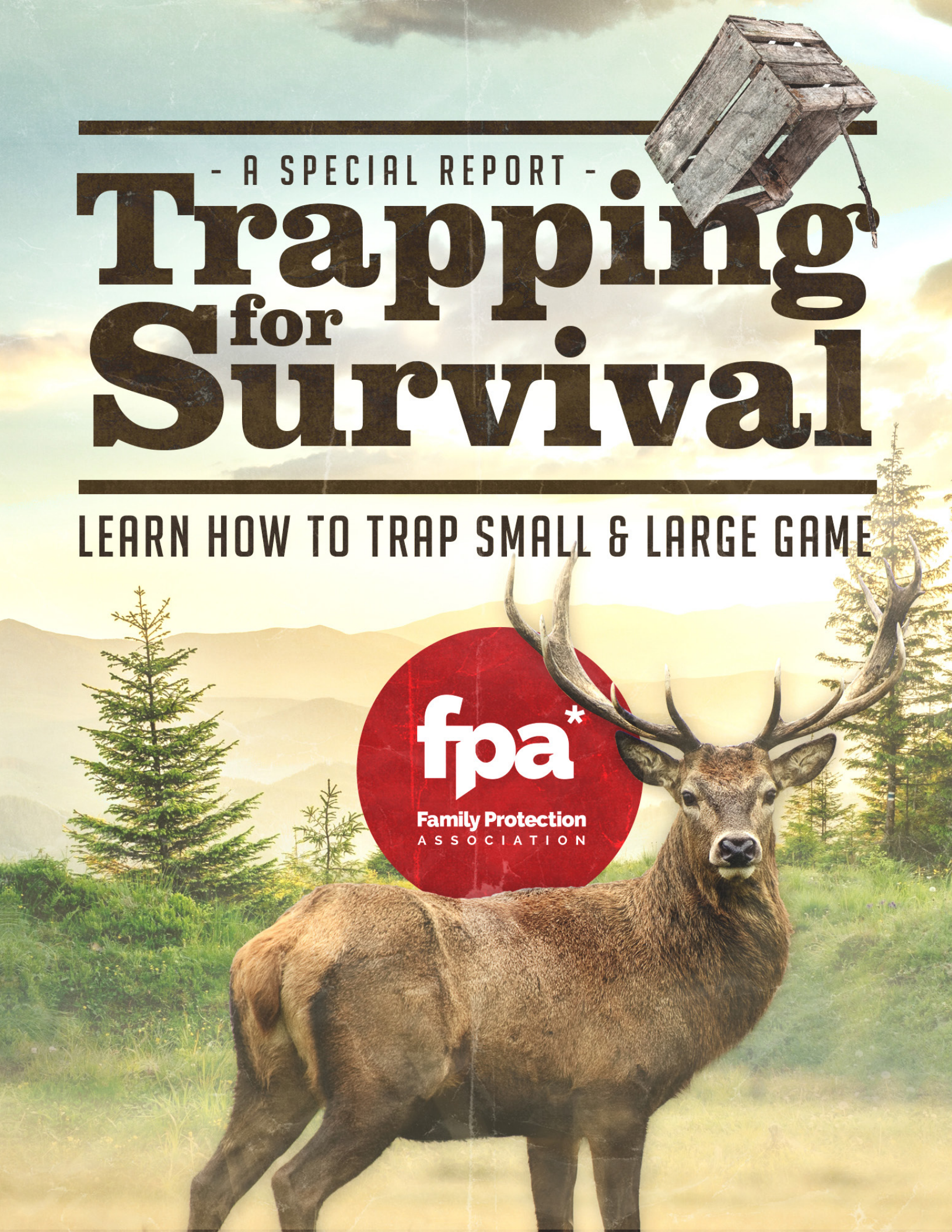

- A SPECIAL REPORT -
Trapping for Survival
LEARN HOW TO TRAP SMALL & LARGE GAME
fpa*
Family Protection
ASSOCIATION

TRAPPING FOR SURVIVAL

TRAPPING FOR SURVIVAL
Learn How to Trap Small & Large Game

A LESSON IN SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is one of the most important aspects of any survival plan. Food stores and water supplies dwindle the longer you are forced to live in a bug out situation. It's for this reason that learning to find sustainable sources of food is so important for the long-term well-being of you and your family. Hunting is an excellent way to accomplish this, but hunting takes up a lot of time and energy. Tracking game, stalking, and hopefully landing a kill shot make hunting a difficult survival skill to master. Even the best hunters aren't successful all the time. This means expending lots of energy without a guaranteed result.

Another sustainable food source is trapping. A skilled trapper can obtain just as much food as an experienced hunter but without expending nearly as much energy. Another plus is that once the traps are set, the trapper is free to complete other survival-related tasks while the food comes to him or her.

There's also the security benefits of trapping. During the aftermath of a crisis, there will be thousands, maybe even millions, of people who were not prepared to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. Discharging a firearm could let these people hone in on your location and ultimately result in a confrontation that you would be better off avoiding if possible. Trapping is silent, effective, and sustainable. What's not to like?

In this guide, you will learn how the basics of trapping your own food. From modern live traps to ancient Native American techniques, there are plenty of ways to capture your own food with a few simple materials (many of which can be sourced directly from the wilderness).

You will also learn some of the basic techniques required to become a proficient trapper. It's not as simple as just randomly placing traps in the woods. You need to learn how to find and maintain trap lines. A trap line is the art of placing traps in areas where animals travel frequently. By learning how to look for animal sign, you will locate the best places to put your traps and greatly improve your chances of success in the field.

Although this guide is meant to teach you about trapping equipment and techniques, it's also worth pointing out the bigger picture when it comes to food sustainability. Trapping should not be your only option just as hunting or fishing shouldn't be. The idea here is that variety is the absolute best way to reliably procure food during a survival situation. By combining hunting, fishing, and trapping techniques, there is absolutely no reason why you cannot guarantee survival even in the worst of circumstances.

CHAPTER ONE: Trapping Tools

It takes some time to master the art of trapping but fortunately, understanding the tools of the trade isn't hard at all. The tools of trapping vary greatly but the end result is always the same. Once you understand proper trap placement, it's easy to modify your traps to reflect the conditions of the environment you're in. In many cases, you can even build improvised traps using only the materials found in the wilderness. This level of versatility is one of the reasons why trapping is such an essential survival skill and one that you should definitely take the time to master.

SNARES*

The snare is one of the simplest traps to make and use. Basically, a snare is nothing more than a wire noose designed to tighten around an animal as it passes through the trap. This wire is anchored to a heavy object so the animal becomes stuck until you come to check on the trap.

Depending on how the animal is snared, it may be suffocated relatively quickly but this is not always the case. If using snare traps, be prepared to come across animals that are still alive and need to be properly dispatched before taking them home for cleaning and cooking.

Effectively using snares requires proper trap placement because most snare setups do not rely on bait. Snares should be placed directly in front of animal dens or along used game trails for best results.

MAKING A BASIC SNARE

A basic snare can be made from materials probably already in your home. They can also be purchased inexpensively from most sporting goods and outdoors retailers. If you choose to make your own snares, you can make snares capable of trapping animals of up to about 10 pounds using copper wire sourced from an old lamp or another appliance. This wire (usually 18-2 gauge) provides enough material to construct multiple snares.

If you don't have an old appliance lying around, a quick trip to the hardware store should provide you with plenty of copper wire options of varying lengths and sizes.

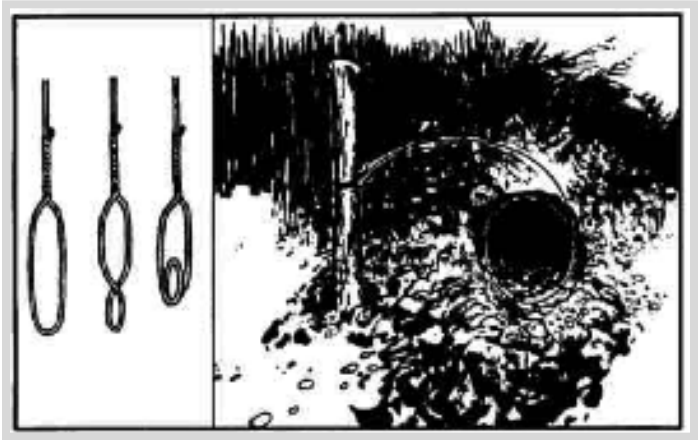
Appliance wire is actually two strands of wire held together by insulation. The first step is to cut the wire into a two foot section (this makes it easier to work with). Next, split the two strands of wire. You should be left with two lengths of copper wire each two feet long.

Use a sharp knife to peel back the layers of insulation from both strands of wire. You should notice that the copper wire is actually composed of multiple thin strands of copper. Take care not to damage these fine strands of copper while removing the insulation. Next, separate the strands in half again. Once finished, you'll be left with four strands of copper wire that are the perfect thickness for making snares.

Twist each strand together to compress the individual copper strands into a single, solid piece. You should twist each strand until it is about the size of a pencil lead. After twisting to size, cut off the ends and twist well to prevent the copper from unraveling in the future.

Now make a look the size of a dime in each end of all four strands of wire. One of these loops will attach to the anchor point and the other loop forms the noose. Put one loop through the other to form the noose and then tighten the loop that forms the noose so there is just enough room for the wire to pass through when the snare is under tension.

Once you have completed these steps for all four strands, you will be left with four snares using only two feet of appliance wire. Make as many of these as you want and can carry. The more snares you set up, the better your chances of success



assuming you place them properly (covered in a later chapter) and check them often as predators may stumble across your catch and consume it before you get a chance to check the traps.

SPECIALIZED SNARE DESIGNS

The instructions above describe how to make a simple snare but skilled trappers have learned to use this simple snare to create an assortment of designs that can be much more effective than a simple snare alone. One of these variations is known as a spring pole snare.

A basic snare requires that the animal walk through the snare and get stuck. As the animal struggles, the noose becomes tighter and the animal is unable to escape. A spring pole snare, on the other hand, forces the snare into action using a trigger system and can greatly improve your trapping success rate.

A spring is constructed using a sapling that is healthy enough to spring back to its original position after being bent over and held at tension. It takes some practice to find suitable saplings but if you have any doubt about whether or not a particular sapling will work,

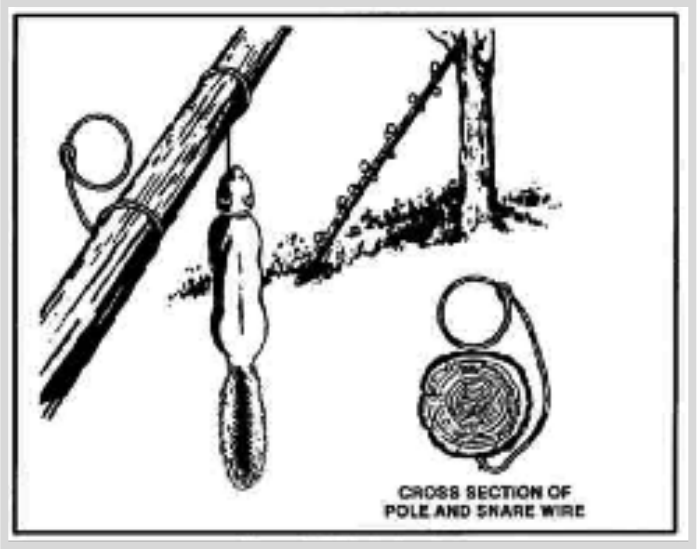
bend it an release it a few times. If it springs back into shape each time, chances are it's a good choice for the trap.

The purpose of the spring pole snare is to pull the noose tight around the animal as soon as the trap is triggered. These traps can be designed to kill the animal quickly by lifting it clear off the ground or to keep the animal alive until you have a chance to check the trap by keeping the animal on the ground but anchored in place. The strength of the sapling used for the spring pole and the weight of the animal determine whether it the snare will be a live trap or kill the animal quickly. Of course, this isn't an exact science which is why it's important to check your traps frequently.

There are quite a few variations of the spring pole snare mostly dealing with how the trigger mechanism is implemented. In the picture above, for instance, two small pieces of wood are used to create the trigger mechanism. The first piece of wood is used as a stake driven into the ground. This stake is used to hold the spring pole under tension.

Once the stake is in place, the other small piece of wood (3" -4") is attached to the stake. A piece of cordage is attached to this piece of wood and the other end is attached to the end of the spring pole. The loop of the snare is also attached to the trigger mechanism. When the trigger is activated, the sapling springs up, taking the snare and the animal with it.

A spring pole snare can be set up anywhere a suitable tree is present. If there are no saplings around, you can make a similar design by suspending rocks or large branches in the air. When the trigger is activated, the weight falls and creates an action similar to the spring pole. This is a perfect example of how versatile snare

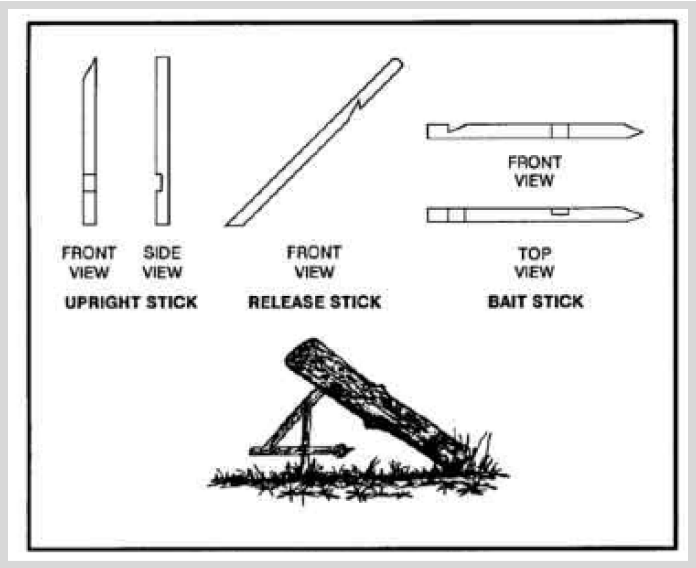


traps can be. Once you understand the basics of trap construction, there is no limit to the number of traps that can be configured using whatever materials are at your disposal.

As another example of how versatile the snare trap is, consider the squirrel pole. This trap plays on the natural curiosity of squirrels to capture multiple animals. To create a squirrel pole, locate a fallen tree or large branch. Remove all small branches and attach multiple snares along the length of this pole. Next, lean the pole against a tree showing signs of squirrel activity. You may be able to catch several squirrels per day using a simple design like this.

DEADFALLS *

Another basic trap is known as a deadfall. This type of trap can almost always be constructed from materials you stumble across in the wilderness. Rocks and tree branches are both excellent materials to use when creating a deadfall. In its simplest form, a deadfall is nothing more than a heavy object propped up by sticks to form a trigger system. When an animal enters the trap (usually because of bait stashed within the trap), the trigger

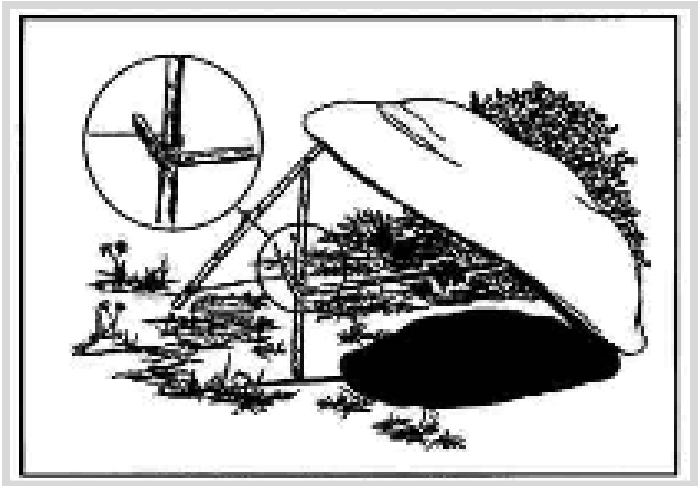


mechanism is tripped and the heavy object falls on the animal, crushing it instantly.

The deadfall pictured above is known as a figure fall deadfall because the sticks used to make the trigger assembly resemble the number '4' when constructed properly. Any sticks of similar diameter can be used to construct this trap and the length can be adjusted by either cutting or breaking the sticks as needed.

Although the figure four deadfall is very effective, it takes some practice to get the stick lengths and balancing points correct. This deadfall design is also difficult to master because the sticks used for the trigger must be grooved to work. This is easily accomplished with a knife but could be difficult at best if a knife is not available. It can also be dangerous because your hands are often under the weighted object while setting up the trigger. One wrong move and you could end up being the one who gets crushed.

Another deadfall design that is much easier to construct is one that has been used by the Paiute Indians for centuries. Aptly named the Paiute deadfall, this design relies on a piece of cordage to maintain tension on the support sticks un-



til the trigger is activated. This type of deadfall is actually more sensitive than the figure four (increasing the chances of catching game) and it is also safer to construct because your hands under not underneath the weighted object during the assembly process.

The Paiute deadfall is easy to build. Two sticks of similar length support the weight of the rock, tree stump, or other heavy object. A small twig is used to form the trigger mechanism and a long, thin branch is used to hold the bait. Cordage is attached to both the trigger stick and the upper support stick. The trigger is wrapped around the lower support stick and held in place by the bait stick. When an animal attempts to get the bait, the bait stick moves, the trigger stick unwraps from the lower support stick, and the entire trap falls down on the animal.

CAPTURE TRAPS*

Capture traps are another type of trap that the skilled trappers should become familiar with. Rather than killing the animal, a capture trap is designed to keep the animal alive until you arrive to check the trap. There are a few reasons why you may want to keep an animal alive until you get to the trapping area, but the most common is to prevent meat spoilage.

This is a problem in extremely hot regions of the country where meat could spoil within a couple of hours after the animal dies. In cold climates, the animal carcass is likely to freeze, so meat spoilage isn't as much of a concern.

There are many types of capture traps available but the most commonly used is known as a box trap. These traps can be fabricated at home although in most cases it makes more sense to purchase them from a sporting goods store when you are first starting out. There will be plenty of time to learn the art of making a box trap in the future.

A box trap works by luring an animal into an enclosed rectangular box (using bait). Once the animal is inside the trap, a trigger mechanism is activated and a trap door closes. The animal is trapped inside the box until you arrive to harvest it. Some trappers drape a cloth over the box trap to help conceal it from animals. Draping a cloth over the trap also helps to protect a trapped animal from the elements until you arrive.

Successful trappers often drape a cloth over these traps to camouflage the trap. Animals are very cautious of new items in their surroundings and will be less likely to go into the trap if it is obvious that it doesn't belong in the wilderness. Draping a cloth over the trap also helps to protect trapped animals from the elements. If an animal dies of exposure before you get a chance to check the trap you have defeated the purpose of using a live capture trap in the first place.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are few other tricks that successful trappers use when setting up snares, deadfalls, and other trapping mechanisms. While these tricks don't guarantee success, they certainly improve your chances of success.

Channelization is one such technique. This refers to creating a natural looking set of obstacles around the trap in an attempt to funnel animals toward the trap. You can create such a channel by using three logs around the trap. This setup is known as a 'box canyon' and it works because animals prefer not to move backward while traveling. Once an animal has wondered into the box canyon, that animal is more likely to move forward, toward the trap, instead of turning around. This is especially true when the trap contains bait that is appealing to the type of animal you are targeting.

The box canyon should not be impassable. In fact, it should appear as a naturally occurring barrier for best results. Using small logs, like the ones you might use for a campfire, is sufficient for most small game.

Animals are extremely sensitive to human scent and will take extraordinary measures to avoid this scent whenever possible. Successful trappers always take care to avoid leaving their scent on trapping equipment or on anything in the area of the trap line. There are many ways to cover human scent when setting a trap line. Urine or blood from another animal often works to mask human scent. You can also try cover your hands and anything you touch with mud. Leaving unused traps outside for a couple of days also helps to greatly reduce human scent.

Taking the extra time to reduce or eliminate human scent greatly improves your chances of catching animals so do not skip this important step when setting your traps.

CHAPTER TWO: Big Game Traps

Trapping small game animals is much easier and usually more productive as well, but learning how to trap large game is another useful survival skill. After all, trapping one large animal could produce as much meat as trapping one hundred small game animals. It's for this reason that setting large game traps isn't a bad idea at all - even if you spend most of your time focusing on small game traps.

The good news is that large game traps aren't much different than small game traps. Even though the materials used may be slightly different to account for the size and weight of larger game, the deadfall and the snare are still the most popular trapping methods for large game animals.

The most effective large game trap is known as the deer snare (although it can be adjusted to trap a variety of large game animals). With the exception of bears, most large game will not be attracted to bait like smaller animals. This makes trap location extremely important. If the trap is not set in an area where animals regularly travel, you have almost no chance of successfully trapping big game.

You need to spend a fair amount of time scouting before setting a trap. Although this is important for trapping animals large and small, it is especially important when setting up a deer snare. Look for well used game trails and evidence of recent animal activity. These are the types of locations where a deer snare should be set up for best results.

The small strands of copper wire used to make small game snares won't work for larger animals. Constructing a deer snare requires a length of heavy duty cable approximately 15 feet long. Although the thickness of the cable can vary, try to use something between 1/16" and 1/4". This is strong enough to hold a variety of large game without being too obvious to the animals as they travel through the wilderness. Since cable is not as easily manipulated as small pieces of copper wire, a small metal plate is used to form the noose. This metal plate should have two holes drilled through it for the cable to pass through and a cable clamp is used to secure one end of the cable to the metal plate.

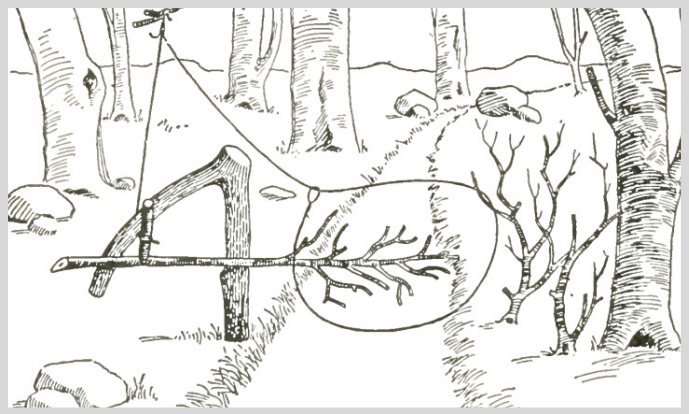
It's worth pointing out that large game traps like the deer snare aren't as easy to assemble in the

field. These traps should be constructed at home before a disaster occurs and stored for later use.

Also, unlike small game snares which are effective no matter which part of the animal gets caught, a deer snare needs to tighten around the animal's neck to be effective. This means the snare cannot sit on or near the ground. It should be elevated approximately two feet off the ground using a spring pole or another elevated object and attaching a string between the snare and this pole or object.

The purpose of the spring pole is only to elevate the snare off the ground as it would be nearly impossible to lift a large game animal off the ground in the same manner as a spring pole snare designed for small game would. The other end of the noose should be attached to a large object such as a boulder or log. This object serves as an anchor to keep the trapped animal from running off too fast. You do not want to keep the animal immobilized - this would create too much stress on the animal and ruin the meat. Instead, try to use an object weighing approximately 30 pounds. This allows the animal to move, but at a much slower rate than normal making it relatively easy to track and harvest. A wide log makes a good anchor because the brush trail created as the trapped animal will make tracking down your prey much easier.

The example above shows what a deer snare might look like. Notice that the trap is set directly in the path that deer frequent. Also notice that there is no anchor in this setup. Instead, the trap is suspended



from another tree branch. Even the trigger is made from a tree branch in this example. What you should learn from this is that conditions won't always be ideal to set up a deer snare the way it was described above, but that doesn't mean you can't make it work using the materials available.

Deadfalls also work for large game in some circumstances. Most deer are not attracted to bait and deadfalls are not very successful without bait. For this reason, large game deadfalls are best used when targeting bears and other large game that are attracted to bait. Of course, the other issue is that a deadfall large enough to kill a bear or other large mammal isn't something easily constructed by one person. Typically, a team of people would have to work together to construct one of these traps - an activity that may not be practical unless there are no other options available.

Although trapping large game is much more difficult that trapping small game, don't overlook this important survival technique. Once a large game trap has been set, you don't need to do anything other than check it regularly and all it only needs to work one time to produce at least a month's worth of meat.

CHAPTER THREE: Using Bait

It's important to understand how to effectively use bait to become a successful trapper. Some traps do not require bait while others rely on bait almost exclusively to lure animals within range (deadfalls and box traps are good examples of traps that require bait to be effective). You should also be familiar with the types of animals you are targeting. Some animals do not respond to bait at all, some will respond favorably only to certain types of bait, and some animals will be attracted to practically anything you place in the trap.

As an example, a fresh popular branch is excellent bait while trapping beaver, but it is useless as bait when trapping any other type of game. By taking the time to understand your prey, you greatly improve your chances of success.

That said, there are some bait choices that work well for a variety of small game. Two of these are peanut butter and salt. Both of these items can be stored for long periods of time and are most likely part of your survival rations anyway. The most effective way to use these baits is to spread small portions around the trap line. This

allows the animals to acquire a taste for the bait meaning they will be less wary of wandering into your trap to get some more.

There are a lot of other foods that work well as bait, but what works and what doesn't may differ from region to region. For instance, while peanut butter may work in 90% of the areas where you trap, there may be areas where animals simply are not interested in this bait. It helps to study the diet of local animals as animals are much more likely to eat your bait

if it happens to be something their natural diet lacks. Trial and error is the rule of the game when it comes to finding the correct bait for a given area and species.

When setting bait, make sure to set it up in a way that ensures the trap will be triggered. Improperly set bait affords the animal with a free meal and is a missed meal for you. If using a deadfall, for instance, make sure the bait is placed far enough under the weighted object so the animal doesn't have a chance to escape when the trap is activated.

For animals that don't respond well to bait, lures can sometimes to an effective way to attract prey. Naturally occurring scents, such as the urine of another animal, can sometimes be effective. These lures, known as curiosity lures, work by playing on the natural curiosity of some animals. Foxes and coyotes are known to be attracted to lures.

Choosing the proper bait for a given area is about trial and error and a little bit of common sense.

If you are in an area with a high concentration of carnivorous animals, it wouldn't make sense to use plant or vegetable baits. Birds, fish, cheese, and even rotten eggs would all be better choices in this scenario.

One final note about bait that successful trappers need to understand is that some animals have become "trap shy." This refers to animals who are especially wary of traps because they have almost been trapped before or they have witnessed another animal get trapped. It may be impossible to capture trap shy animals. If you see plenty of evidence of animal activity in the area but aren't catching anything, you may have trap shy animals in the area.

If this occurs, try scattering bait throughout the area (not just in the traps) to lure the animals closer. You can also try moving the bait to another area within the trap which forces the animal to approach from a different angle. Even trap shy animals aren't that smart and sometimes a little change like this is all it takes to capture even trap shy animals.

CHAPTER FOUR: Trap Location

Aside from setting up traps properly and baiting them when necessary, the location of your traps can determine whether or not your trapping efforts are a success or not. Proper trap placement has a lot to do with understanding the behavior of the animals you are trying to harvest. If you are trapping beaver, for instance, it wouldn't make much sense to set up traps miles from water where beaver activity is evident. While it's possible that a beaver would travel, you success rate will be much higher if you place the trap in an area where beavers are active.

In a survival situation, however, it's not always possible to target a specific type of animal. In fact, it's not recommended in most cases. You are trapping for food and in a crisis situation, anything is better than nothing.

One of the best ways to increase your chances of successfully trapping a variety of animals is to look for game trails. Unlike paths, which are typically only used by one animal (or one species of animal), a game trail is well-defined and serves as an "animal highway" for a variety of species. Usually these trails are used by animals as they travel between bedding and feeding areas or to local watering holes. Setting traps along heavily used game trails is one of the best ways to harvest a large amount of game on a regular basis.

In addition to looking for game trails, animal sign is a good indicator of animal activity in an area. Animal sign such as fresh excrement is a good way to locate areas where animals frequent and can even provide clues as to what certain species are eating - useful knowledge when choosing appropriate bait for your traps. Other animal sign, such as footprints, remnants of recent meals, and freshly dug holes are also indicators of animal activity that should be considered when deciding where to place traps.

Proper trap placement requires more than just finding a single spot where animal activity is high. You should look for multiple signs that indicate the direction animals are traveling. You should set your traps along this path of travel without disturbing the natural habitat. Spreading your traps along this path of animal travel is known as a trap line. Finding a good trap line is the mark of a successful trapper and is something you should take the time to locate whenever setting up traps in a new or unfamiliar area.

CHAPTER FIVE: Animal Species

Just about any animal can be caught in a trap, but there are some species that are easier to trap than others. The list of animals below represents species that are common throughout most of North America, provide good nourishment, and are consider relatively easy to trap assuming you are using the correct trap and bait combinations.

RABBIT

Various rabbit species are found all over the continent and are an excellent source of protein. Rabbits have an excellent sense of smell and can easily detect human scent on a trap. You can mask this scent by spraying a small amount of apple cider on the trap. This also acts as a lure for rabbits.

A snare set up at the entrance to a rabbit den can be effective, but rabbits are more easily caught by placing traps in areas where the animals graze for food. Rabbits are extremely wary of changes in their environment so do not become discouraged if your traps aren't successful right away. Resist the urge to move the traps as it can often take a couple of days before rabbits begin to trust the traps enough to actually get trapped.

Bait for rabbits varies greatly but any type of vegetable usually works well. Apples and other sweet fruits can work when vegetables aren't providing enough action. Peanut butter is another good option when other baits don't seem to be working.

BEAVER

Beavers are known mostly for their hides, but beaver meat is high in fat and caloric value unlike much of the lean meat you will catch as a trapper. Beavers are usually easy to find due to the destruction they cause to trees near the waterways where they live and feed. Also, beaver dams are easy to spot and indicate a beaver

population is most likely in the area.

Snares can be set up near the entrances to beaver dams or in areas where beavers enter and exit the water. Whenever you are attempting to trap beaver or other semi-aquatic mammals, try to set up traps in such a way that once snared, the animal will drown quickly. This provides higher quality meat than when the animal is left to struggle for any amount of time.

The most effective bait for beaver is poplar branches. Strip the bark from a couple of young green branches so they are easily seen by the animals. If you are setting traps on land, you can also add a few drops of popular oil to lure beavers within range of the trap.

SQUIRREL

Although relatively small, squirrel meat is quite good and often compared to the taste of chicken because the flavor is very light and not as gamey as many other animals. Squirrels are everywhere and are relatively easy to spot moving through trees and across the ground. Their distinctive chatter is also easy to recognize even from a distance.

The squirrel pole described in Chapter One is an effective method for catching squirrels and can often net multiple catches in a single day. Snares

placed at the bottom of trees used by squirrels also work but are not as effective as a properly constructed squirrel pole.

Fruits and nuts are the best bait choices when targeting squirrels. Peanuts or peanut butter also work well. Unlike other game animals, squirrels are not extremely picky and are likely to check out anything that looks like it might be food.

RACCOON

Raccoons have traditionally been trapped for their pelts but the animal has gained popularity as a food source as well. The biggest risk when consuming raccoon is rabies so avoid eating any animal that displays signs of infection. That said, the virus can be killed by thorough cooking if food options are limited. Raccoon meat is rather tough so it should be soaked in a salt water solution overnight prior to cooking for a better meal.

Raccoons are scavengers so they respond well to any baited trap. Just about any food scrap will attract these animals to your trap line.

OPOSSUM

Opossum is the only marsupial living in North America and it is considered a nuisance in most residential areas. Like raccoons, these animals are scavengers and respond well to just about any bait you place in and around your trap line. You should also take care when handling opossum because of the risk of rabies.

Bait choices vary but anything with a strong smell should work well. Some trappers use canned pet food to attract opossum because of the stong odor. Fish is another good choice. When cooking opossum, you should boil the meat and then dispose of the water to remove some of the excess grease prior to cooking.

DEER

There are many types of deer found throughout the country and any of them will provide you with a sizeable amount of meat should you be lucky enough to capture one. Deer have exceptional eyesight and extremely wary of any changes in the environment, making them difficult to trap.

Due to their large size, deer sign is easy to spot. Droppings and deer trails are a good indication

that you have found a suitable spot to place a large game snare.

BEAR

Bears can grow to 1,000 pounds although most are about half that size at best. The size of bears makes finding sign easy. Bears have an excellent nose and will be attracted to any food you leave as bait. Just make sure that any bear traps you set are far away from your campsite because bears will quickly associate your home with free food otherwise.

Bear meat is quite tasty but extremely greasy. The size of these animals means that trapping one bear can provide food for a long time. The thick hide of bear is also useful for a variety of survival-related purposes.

CHAPTER SIX: Avoiding Common Mistakes

Trapping is a skill and you are guaranteed to make a lot of mistakes while mastering this essential survival skill. The tactics described so far are meant to be a general overview. Successful trapping may vary depending on the region and the type of animal being targeted. Only through practice and experience will you be able to learn these subtle differences and how to make changes to increase your likelihood of success every time you set or reset a trap.

That said, there are some common mistakes often made by inexperienced trappers that can have a definite effect on your success rate. Not using the correct tension on a spring pole, for instance, could allow an animal to escape even after it has been snared. In ideal conditions, a spring pole should lift the animal up just enough that they are unable to escape once caught. The animal should not, however, die immediately if possible. This will spoil meat quickly in hot weather. Likewise, not enough tension and the animal may be able to chew its way through the snare and escape before you have a chance to check the trap and harvest the animal properly.

When using bait, it is important to always take advantage of the prevailing wind direction. A baited trap that i placed downwind from animals will be much less effective than one that uses the wind to its advantage to draw animals closer to the area. Failure to consider wind direction could make your trapping efforts a complete failure when relying on bait to lure animals into the trap line.

Trap placement is one of the most important factors for long-term trapping success. Especially during a survival situation, you are only going to have a few traps at your disposal so it makes sense to use them in the most effective way possible. The absolute best place to setup a trap line is in an area where multiple habitat features intersect. Since animals tend to always follow the path of least resistance, they typically use the same trails to get to and from various habitat features every day. By setting your traps along these trails, you greatly improve your chances of consistently trapping enough food to survive.

Never use too much bait. Excessive bait is more likely to educate an animal and make them trap shy because a large pile of their favorite food is not natural. Most animals will be extremely wary of such a large pile of bait. Bait should always take a backseat to proper trap placement. In fact, many animals can be trapped without using bait at all assuming the trap is properly positioned. If bait is used, make sure to use only enough to attract an animal without making them overly suspicious.

Finally, always make sure to test your traps regularly both at camp and once they are set up in the field. A trap that triggers too late or in the wrong location guarantees that the animal won't come back to visit your trap line again anytime soon. Use natural cover to conceal traps whenever possible and be sure to eliminate as much of your scent as possible or most animals won't even take so much as a second look at your trap or any bait you're using.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
Caring for Meat and Furs

Another important aspect of trapping is knowing how to properly care for meat and fur once you have harvested an animal successfully. All of your hard work could be for nothing if you don't take the steps necessary to ensure the meat is handled correctly and in a timely manner. To avoid spoilage, the process of field dressing, skinning, and butchering should be completed as soon after the animal has perished as possible.

Although the process is essentially the same when dealing with large game compared to small game, there are some differences that are explained below.

LARGE GAME

The meat of deer and other large game is susceptible to rapid spoilage so every effort should be taken to cool the carcass as soon as possible. Start by rolling the animal onto its back and creating an incision from right below the chest cavity to the hind area. Be careful not to cut too deep as this may rupture internal organs. Best case scenario, this just creates a bigger mess but if certain parts (such as the bladder) are cut open, the meat could be ruined.

Use a stick to prop open the chest cavity once the internal organs have been removed. This promotes air circulation through the body cavity and helps remove trapped heat. The faster the carcass is cooled, the better the meat will taste when it comes time to cook. Assuming the animal will be dragged back to camp, leave the hide on for now so the meat doesn't become dirty on the trip home.

Once back at camp, hang the carcass upside down from a tree branch. This makes the removal of the hide much easier. Be careful when removing the hide. Fur can be extremely difficult to remove from the meat and some animals have powerful scent glands that can ruin the flavor. Deer, for instance, have scent glands in the joint of their hind legs. If these glands are punctured during the skinning process, any meat in close proximity to the area will be wasted.

SMALL GAME

The smaller size of these animals makes it much easier to handle the carcass. Smaller creatures do not hold heat as well after death so spoilage isn't as much of a concern. In fact, most small game trappers simply collect the animals and bring them back to camp before dressing and skinning the carcasses.

Unlike large game, it is usually easier to skin small game animals before gutting and butchering. The easiest way to skin most small game is to gently cut the hide around the circumference of the midsection. The hide can then be peeled back from both sides. Think of this technique as removing the “shirt” and “pants” from the animal.

When transporting meat back to camp, one concern is insects. Insects are attracted to animal carcasses and certain species of insects can pose a threat to the safety of the catch. For this reason, always use game bags to transport meat. These bags are inexpensive and readily available at sporting goods stores. A single bag meant for a deer quarter should be sufficient for just about anything you might trap and will protect the meat from insects and dirt on the trip home. These bags allow air to circulate while preventing insects from getting in making them an excellent addition to your survival gear. Cotton pillow cases also work well as makeshift game bags when nothing else is available.

Preserving meat that is not going to be immediately consumed is another consideration for the survival trapper. If you are located in a cold climate where temperatures remain below freezing most of the time, you don’t really need to worry about preserving meat as it will stay frozen if left outside. Just make sure to protect it from scavenging animals such as bears and coyotes.

If the weather is warmer, however, steps must be taken to preserve the meat so as not to waste this valuable source of nourishment. There are many effective ways to preserve meat in the wild, but smoking, salting, and drying are the three best options for the survivalist.

Drying meat effectively requires that it be cut into thin strips and hung in a sunny location with adequate air flow. How long the meat takes to dry thoroughly will depend on the ambient temperature, the intensity of the sun, and the amount of air flow present. Meat has been properly dried when it is dry and crispy to the touch.

When drying meat in this manner, make sure to protect meat from insects during the drying process. Also, you should be on the lookout for scavenging animals that may catch the scent of your drying meat stores and come to your camp looking for an easy meal.

Smoking is more effective than drying although setting up a smoker takes more time and effort than standard drying. The advantage is that even in hot, humid conditions, properly smoked meat can last for as long as a month. Meat can be smoked by placing it on a wooden framework over a small fire. Cloth or an old animal hide should be draped over the wooden framework to trap the heat and smoke from the fire. One to two days of smoking is usually sufficient for most meat

and smokers automatically keep insects away.

When smoking meat, the key to success is low temperatures and lots of smoke. If the fire is too large or burning too hot, the meat will be cooked instead of drying and the resulting product will not keep for long at all. Try to use wet wood to create a cool fire that produces lots of smoke for best results.

Salting meat involves completely submerging strips of meat in a saltwater solution. How long this process takes depends on the ambient air temperature, how much salt is in the solution, and the fat content of the meat itself. Once all of the water has evaporated, a layer of brine will be left covering the meat. This protects the meat from spoilage until the meat is ready to be cooked (at which time the brine should be rinsed off).

SALVAGING THE FUR

In a survival situation, you should never discard anything that you might be able to use. Animal hides have many uses including clothing and shelter. Although it may not always be practical to salvage an animal hide, think about what it could be used for before deciding whether or not to preserve it for later use. Keep in mind that even if you can't use a particular hide, it could become a useful bartering tool in the future.

Properly preserving an animal hide is a two-part process. The first step is to dry the hide. Small game hides can be dried simply by hanging them in an area with sufficient air flow. Large game hides, on the other hand, require salt to properly dry. Spread salt over the entire flesh side of the hide and rub it in. After salting, these hides should be hung up to dry for about two weeks to ensure all moisture has been removed. The drying time could be much shorter depending on the ambient temperature

and the intensity of the sun in the area.

Once drying is complete, it is referred to as rawhide. You should notice that the hide is extremely brittle at this stage. The second part of the preservation process is known as tanning and this is what softens the hide and turns it into pliable leather. The most common way to tan a hide is to use assorted chemicals, but these chemicals won't be available in a survival situation.

A common way to tan hides in the wild is known as brain tanning. Chemicals found in the brains of large game can be used to create a tanning solution. Usually, this is accomplished by creating a solution of one pound brain matter and two gallons of warm water. The hide should be soaked in this solution overnight. After soaking is complete, stretch the hide over a wooden frame and use a smooth tool to work the hide into a soft leather. If the hide isn't soft enough, you can make another tanning solution and soak the hide overnight again for an even softer final product.

Once the leather has been properly tanned, it can be used to make clothing, as part of a shelter, or be used in a variety of equipment that you may need. If nothing else, the tanned hides can be stored for use as a bartering tool with other survivalists in the future.

CONCLUSION

Trapping is a rewarding activity that can improve your existing survival strategies by adding another sustainable food source. Although the tools used may vary based on the region and the materials you have on hand, the basic premises of trapping never change. Trapping isn't difficult, but it is definitely a skill that takes practice to master.

If you plan to incorporate trapping into your existing survival plan, take some time to practice the techniques described in this guide before you actually need to depend on these skills to survive. You'll learn valuable lessons while learning how to customize your traps for maximum effectiveness. You will also learn how to read the environment for animal sign – a skill which is also useful when hunting.

If you would like to learn more about trapping, additional information is available by contacting your local Department of Fish & Game. In addition to providing information about trapping regulations in your area, many of these people will be more than happy to share details about what works and what doesn't work in a specific geographical location. Also, try reaching out to other trappers in the area as this is probably the single best resource for learning more about this essential survival skill.