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BAITING BOX-TRAPS EFFECTIVELY

This isn't an article about what kind of baits you should use to trap problem animals. Rather its an article about ways to place and manipulate the bait to make it more effective. In foothold trapping, the animal has full view of the bait. If any barriers are present they are typically natural. Take a pocket hole set for example. Sure the bait isn't in full view, but the animal is accustomed to looking in tiny holes for food so it tends to be less suspicious. The same goes for guide sticks or stones. These barriers, which help focus the animal's foot into the trap, are completely natural to the animal so they don't back away as often.

Box traps, on the other hand, are completely different. Now we have this metal or plastic contraption that we are trying to lure the animal into. He will sense the unnaturalness of the situation. The metal will feel harsh under his feet and his body may feel cramped by the small opening. All these factors add greater reluctance for the animal to enter the trap. So if we are going to get the animal into the trap we must make sure it has a good reason to enter.

Choosing the right bait or lure is of course very important to enticing an animal into the trap. However, if the bait isn't situated properly in the trap, the animal won't be able to smell it properly. Animals hunt primarily using three senses, hearing, smell and sight. Typically trappers do not utilize hearing in their trapping so we won't discuss techniques for this sense. (However, there are squeakers on the market now that are filling this gap in animal attraction).



Usually trappers exploit the animal's sense of smell to capture the animal. The key is to bait the trap so that the food or lure molecules have the opportunity to disperse into the air. One simple method I like to use was taught to me by Rob Erickson. He advises trappers to get a 'Y' stick and with the stem of

the "Y" scoop out some of your bait. Then insert the stem into the bait area of the trap so that the bifurcated stems grab onto the trap mesh thereby allowing the stem to dangle. With this method the bait has a very high exposure to the air around it. Other advantages lie in the techniques ability to reduce the loss of bait to hungry ants. By keeping the bait off the ground it is more difficult for the ants to find it. Finally, this technique allows the bait to remain active even if it rains. The small surface area makes it difficult for rain to wash it away and when it does then the bait can fall to ground where it may still be effective.

The downside to this method is that it works only with paste baits. If your bait or lure is especially liquid this baiting technique would not be recommended because it won't cling to the stick properly. Another downside is that you can't cover the 'Y' with a cloth like I recommend to box trappers. (I recommend all box traps be covered with a sturdy cloth or material to between 1/3 to 1/2 of the total length of the trap. I like to cover the back portion so the trap is covered on the top, sides and the back. This provides a little cubby for the animal to be safe from weather and prying eyes while waiting for your daily trap check.).

There is another baiting technique that I consider no less than revolutionary. It was so simply, easy and effective, that it is amazing it wasn't thought of earlier. I learned this technique from Matt DeBarber of P.A.C.E. Wildlife Solutions of Ansonia, CT at a WCT Seminar.



Essentially the bait stick is a half inch PVC pipe. Cut the pipe in six inch lengths and obtain at least one end plug for every cut pipe. Drill holes through the pipe, starting at the ends and working toward the middle until, at least two thirds of the pipe has been drilled. I use a ¼ inch drill bit. Place the pipe in a vice before drilling. This will make drilling safer by

preventing the pipe from rolling. I would recommend a sharp drill too.

Plunge one end of the pipe into the bait, put the end cap on and slide the pipe through the wire mess of the cage. The cap will fit snugly enough to prevent the pipe from falling off. The cap will also prevent the pipe from falling through the cage. If the pipe is too wide to fit through the wire mesh, then cut a slot through the mesh. The beauty of these pipes is that they can handle a great deal of use and abuse. If one end of the pipe gets chewed up, simply turn it over and put the cap on the other end. So don't glue the end caps on! If you have a liquid bait or lure simply stuff the inside of the pipe with cotton and then soak the cotton. Put tape on the bottom if the cotton balls slide out.

Other benefits of the bait stick include high visibility. The stick's white color make it more noticeable at night. Of course, the sticks are inexpensive and allow you to bait your trap in a professional way. Bob Jameson suggested using a "T" end adapter so that the bait odor found inside of the pipe can find its way out the top. However, Matt doesn't recommend using "t" end on raccoon because he has found that the raccoons pull them out. It seems that the odor coming out of the "T" end draws the coon to the top instead of to the inside of the trap. Although I never cleaned them, Matt DeBarber cleans them by soaking them in a bleach solution with hot scalding water. This not only helps kill some germs but helps get rid of the paste bait clinging to the stick.



As a final bonus, the stick's durability allows them to be used as, Bob Jameson's calls them, torture toys. The raccoon pulls in the bait stick, yet another reason not to glue the tops on, and chews on it. By giving the raccoon something to do, the bait stick helps keep the raccoon from shredding everything around the cage as he reaches through the mesh.

Other bait/luring of box traps can be accomplished with trapper's wire and cotton balls. This technique would be useful for more watery based baits and lures because cotton's absorbing power would hold the bait/lure. All one would need to do would be to skewer the cotton balls with the wire and then bend the wire so that they couldn't slide off. Then you would make a loop in the other end to allow the wire to

hang from the cage. I haven't used this method personally, but I am confident that some of you may find it helpful.

As with any hanging method, be sure that the stick/wire won't move too much in the wind. (covering the trap will reduce this wind factor substantially) Failure to consider this may allow the animal to grab the bait without having to get close enough to depress the treadle. Remember, animals are just as lazy as we are. If they can grab something by reaching for it rather than moving towards it they will. So be sure you hang the bait stick/wire towards the back half of the bait area. Covering the trap will help reduce the tendency of animals to reach through the wire to get the bait.

While my preference is certainly for hanging the bait down, there are many times where this isn't possible or practical. In those situations you want to utilize eye appeal as well. A previous president of the Massachusetts Assoc. of Problem Animal Controllers, Bob Ryan, turned me on to this next technique which I think is dynamite on raccoon. He eats a lot of Chef Boy-ardee microwave lunch buckets. He noticed that this small white plastic bowl had a lid with holes already punched in it. Thus he places his bait in the bowl, covers it with the lid. The white bowl attracts the coon, the holes allow the smell to enter the air, but the lid helps protect the bait from getting completely washed out in the rain. Since I don't eat the Chef Boy-ardee lunches, I use yogurt containers. Just cut a hole in the lid and you're all set. One word of caution, be sure that there is enough weight in the bottom of the containers to prevent them from being easily blown over by the wind. You don't want your bait spilling all over the ground nor do you want the container to slide under the treadle and prevent it from firing the trap. I strongly advise the use of sight attractants when dealing with skunks or raccoon. Even tossing a couple of marshmallows in the back of the trap will help catch their eye in the darkness. I have found eye attraction for squirrel to be of limited value. For example if I use bread to hold the peanut butter, I sometimes catch birds.

At this point you might be thinking about bait placement. Some advise creating a bait trail to lure the animal morsel by morsel into the trap. I am confident that this helps reduce the chance of misfires because it helps encourage the animal to use the entrance rather than trying to reach for the bait through the cage wall. However, I typically don't do this because I always think that I am wasting bait/lure. It seems that the bait always falls through the floor of the trap and on the ground below. Now, I have created the potential for digging which could misfire the trap. My second problem with this trailing method is that if the animal doesn't like the taste then he won't have any further reason to enter the trap. It's like coffee. I love the smell but I hate the taste. If I was an animal attracted by the smell and was able to get a taste only to discover I didn't like it, I wouldn't walk into the trap any further. This isn't gospel. It is just my opinion. I know of a trapper who swears by this method. But I also know he makes baits that the animals love to eat as well. Just be sure you know what kind of bait you're using. Do the animals like to just smell it or do they like to smell it and eat it.

Finally don't forget that trap location is the most important factor to trapping success. You can have the best bait in the world but you won't catch anything if your trap location is nowhere near where the animal travels.