

**A FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION INTO TRAPPING  
& THE FUR TRADE IN THE UNITED STATES**

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A BOBCAT CAUGHT IN A LEGHOLD TRAP FROM THE 2011  
"VICTIMS OF VANITY" UNDERCOVER TRAPPING INVESTIGATION



A TRAPPER IN NEW YORK STANDS BEHIND  
A LARGE, SET CONIBEAR TRAP

*"Few men could endure to watch for five minutes, an animal struggling in a trap with a crushed and torn limb. Some will wonder how such cruelty can have been permitted to continue in these days of civilization."*

~ Charles Darwin, Trapping Agony, 1863

## INTRODUCTION:

In early 2011, Born Free USA released "Victims of Vanity": an undercover investigation that exposed the vicious truth the trapping industry wants to keep hidden. Although trapping apologists claim their barbarism is humane, selective, and well-regulated, we showed that the millions of animals who die from trapping in the U.S. every year endure severe injury, trauma, and suffering, as well as slow, gruesome deaths — all for the sake of fashion.

Now, five years later, little has changed; in fact, the spread of trapping across the U.S. has been slowly increasing. In 2004, there were 142,287 trappers, representing 0.048% of the 2004 U.S. population. By the 2014-2015 trapping season, the number of trappers had increased to 176,573. Even though that number still represents less than  $\frac{1}{6}$  of  $\frac{1}{10}$  of the U.S. population (0.055% of the total population in 2015), it also shows a 20% increase in trappers since 2004.

Furthermore, pro-trapping interests still claim that trapping is humane, necessary, and a "tradition" worth preserving: a tradition worth more than the lives of millions of animals. They assert that pro-wildlife organizations only publicize the extreme and rare trapping incidents, and claim that these accidents are the unfortunate, but uncommon, exceptions to the rule.

However, pictures are worth a thousand words, and Born Free USA has new footage that reveals that trapping is just as ferocious and unforgiving as we documented previously. Indeed, trapping remains largely unchanged since Charles Darwin made his appeal against trapping in a letter entitled Trapping Agony more than 150 years ago.

Born Free USA obtained this new footage through an undercover investigation that took place over the 2015-2016 winter trapping season. Our investigator documented trappers as they set cruel, indiscriminate traps not only on private and public land, but in local parks, state parks, and conservation areas: land supposedly set aside for the protection and conservation of wildlife. This follow-up footage shows the everyday truth of trapping — brutal and sometimes illegal practices, common throughout private, public, and protected land in the United States.



## THE INVESTIGATION:

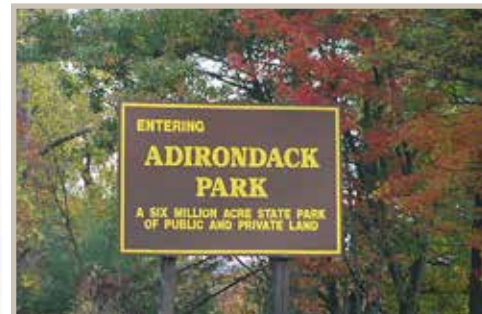
Our investigator attended the 2015 National Trappers Association (NTA) Annual Convention, held in Hamburg, New York. There, he connected with two trappers who agreed to take him along when they began trapping for the winter trapping season.

In mid-November, our investigator accompanied the first trapper to Adirondack Park: a six-million-acre park and conservation area in New York, consisting of both state-owned and private lands. With more than 10,000 lakes, 30,000 miles of rivers and streams, and a diverse range of habitats and ecosystems — including old-growth forests, virgin forests, and wetlands — this park is the country's largest National Historic Landmark. New York owns and manages 2.6 million acres of the park, which is also called the Adirondack Forest Preserve. This park was officially established in 1894, designated through the New York legislature as a protected "Forever Wild" area. This law laid the groundwork for the U.S. National Wilderness Act, which is one of the strongest federal laws protecting wilderness and the animals therein.

There are 53 known mammal species that call the park home, including the American beaver: a keystone species that had to be reintroduced to the park in the early 1900s after trapping nearly wiped the species out. In a cruel twist of irony, our investigator followed this trapper as he trapped and skinned this iconic North American symbol, and as he set even more traps on land to target other furbearers (sometimes illegally, and sometimes shockingly close to park roads and trails).

In late November, our investigator met with a second trapper in Page County, Iowa, located in the rural southwest corner of the state. As of 2014, Page County had an estimated human population of 15,496, covering an area of 535 square miles. The trapper aimed to catch and kill coyotes by setting more than 40 leghold traps and snares startlingly close to public highways and homes throughout the county. The traps and snares were placed so close to main roads that anyone passing by the area would be able to openly observe an animal caught in the trap. Coyotes are the second most trapped species in Iowa, caught most often by painful leghold traps.

Not content with just killing coyotes for their pelts, this second trapper also set a trap line for beavers in Rapp Park and Recreation Area. Rapp Park, located north of Shenandoah, Iowa, is a popular 100-acre park managed by Page County and set aside for fishing, boating, kayaking, camping, picnicking, bird watching, and hiking. Neither hunting nor trapping is permitted in this park.



## INVESTIGATION HIGHLIGHTS:

### 2015 NATIONAL TRAPPERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION: Disregard for the Law and for Wildlife



- **Bear traps for sale:**

Maine is the only state that allows private citizens to trap black bears for sport, but only using leg snares or cage/live traps. Although legal to purchase, steel-jaw leghold bear traps are not legal for commercial or recreational use in the lower 48 states, and are not a generally accepted or widely-used method for “nuisance” bears. Yet, a number of these traps were for sale.

#### INVESTIGATOR NOTES:

*“When questions were made regarding the trapping of bear, the individual would become very defensive, saying it was outside of the law and they did not take part in such activities! (So why have the traps?)”*



- **Vendors selling horrific, grotesque fur products:**

Many fur items were also available, including fur hats made with the faces and ears of the victims to give the wearers a more “animalistic” appearance; backpacks that used an animal’s skin and fur, using the face as the closing flap; and even fur beer koozies.

- **Skinning demonstrations, showing a disregard for the dead:**

In addition to vendors selling their wares, the annual convention also held several skinning demonstrations. Dead animals were seen strewn on the floor and over the tops of coolers, and skinned in front of a live audience. The skinned carcasses were then tossed in garbage bags, thrown out the door, and left to rot, dismissed and forgotten.

#### INVESTIGATOR NOTES:

*“Once the skin had been pulled from the animal, the body was simply dropped into a black bag and thrown out the door.”*





## NEW YORK: Alleged Illegal Activity

The investigator reported that the trapper routinely and often knowingly broke several trapping regulations while trapping in Adirondack Park.

- **Disturbing the beaver dams:**

The trapper's method for trapping beavers was to set traps near a dam, then dismantle or damage the dam to entice the beaver to come to the location in order to secure his home. Although it is legal to trap beavers in New York, damaging or disturbing a beaver's dam or lodge is not permitted.

### INVESTIGATOR NOTES:

*"Once we arrived...I was informed that the first thing required was to break down the current beaver dams, this was to infuriate the beaver and create a reaction that would draw them into rebuilding the dams that evening, only this time there would be body-grip traps waiting for them."*

- **Illegally-placed Conibear body-grip traps:**



### INVESTIGATOR NOTES:

*[for the photos above and right] "This is a #330 body-grip trap...positioned above ground which is against the law...deployed at the entrance of a bobcat [den] along a river bank...the sandy area showed signs of domestic dog prints too."*

The trapper set several large #220 and #330 Conibear body-grip traps on land, which is illegal. In New York, body-



(NY LAW): 6 CRR-NY 6.3(A)(6): IT IS UNLAWFUL FOR ANY PERSON TO DISTURB A BEAVER DEN OR HOUSE (AN AGGREGATE OF STICKS AND MUD, EITHER FREE-STANDING IN WATER OR CONNECTED TO A BANK) AT ANY TIME.



ILLEGALLY SET #330 CONIBEAR TRAP, WHICH HAS A 10 INCH JAW SPREAD. 6 CRR-NY 6.3(A)(5): NO PERSON SHALL SET OR USE ON LAND A BODY-GRIPPING TYPE TRAP WITH A DIMENSION OF MORE THAN 7 ½ INCHES.



- **Illegal use of bait:**

New York, it is only legal to use the carcass of an animal as bait if it is fully covered at the time the leghold trap is set or visited. This trapper used parts of trapped and skinned beavers for numerous traps, including this trap of unknown size and legality, and left the bait completely uncovered and easily seen from all directions.

## NEW YORK: Proximity to the Public

- **Traps set close to public bridges, roads, and trails:**

In New York, all traps must be set 100 feet from public highways and Conibear traps must be set 100 feet from public trails. However, the areas under bridges are exempt from this law, so the traps shown here are considered legal. Legality aside, these traps were still set alarmingly close to cars, hikers, and their animal companions. Adirondack Park receives seven to 10 million visitors per year, who partake in such activities as camping, canoeing, snowboarding, skiing, mountain biking, rock climbing, and hiking. In fact, the park has more than 2,000 miles of hiking trails, making it the largest trail system in the U.S. Just because it is legal for these traps to be placed under a bridge doesn't make it safe for the millions of tourists who come every year to experience and marvel at the unique wilderness this park has to offer.



## NEW YORK: Cruelty

- **Drown pole trap:**

This torturous device is essentially a leghold trap attached to a pole, which is then anchored low along the river bank. When the beaver is trapped and struggles to swim away, the drown pole drags the animal to the bottom of the river and slowly drowns him or her: a process that can take up to 20 minutes.

Many trappers prefer this method over Conibear body-grip traps for trapping beavers simply due to convenience. Using drown poles and leghold traps, the trapper doesn't have to put on waders or get wet, and he doesn't need to carry heavy equipment or traps along his trap line. Again, the humane treatment of the animal is never even considered.



- **Wall of death:**



The trapper took our investigator to a place he described as a "great killing area." After destroying a beaver's dam, the trapper set a row of three large Conibear body-grip traps along the only entrance to the dam, condemning the beaver to an inevitable, brutal death simply for trying to repair the dam and secure his/her pond and lodge.

- **Slow-killing Conibear traps:**

Conibear body-grip traps are advertised as quick-kill and therefore, according to the logic, less cruel than other traps. They are designed to snap shut with crushing force against the animal's neck, breaking the spinal column. However, our investigator documented an underwater body-grip trap shut around a beaver's chest and abdomen, indicating that the beaver would have drowned to death, slowly and painfully. Conibear traps cause immense suffering.



CONIBEAR TRAPS ARE DESIGNED TO SNAP SHUT AGAINST AN ANIMAL'S NECK, BREAKING THE SPINAL COLUMN. HOWEVER, AS OUR INVESTIGATOR DOCUMENTED, THAT IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE.



## IOWA: Alleged Illegal Activity

- **Trapping in a protected area:**

According to 2015-2016 Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations, trapping is included under the definition of hunting. When our investigator arrived, the trapper showed him three beavers he had trapped in Rapp Park and Recreation Area: a 100-acre county park where hunting is prohibited. The trapper and our investigator continued to check the beaver trap line in Rapp Park throughout his time there, although no more animals were caught.

## IOWA: Proximity to the Public

- **Traps set next to roads and homes:**

In addition to the illegally-set beaver traps, the trapper also set 16 leghold traps on land next to public roads, highways, and private homes. The trapper told our investigator that he had used these locations for years and was unconcerned about their close proximity to humans and their pets.

## IOWA: Cruelty

- **Trapping to torment:**

The trapper told our investigator that coyotes are regularly kept alive and sold after they are trapped. The traumatized, weakened, and perhaps injured wild animals are then put in enclosures with dogs. The coyotes' fate in this blood sport is to die horrific, torturous deaths, to the cheers of excited onlookers.

### INVESTIGATOR NOTES:

*"This sport involved placing a wild coyote in a very large fenced enclosure...other hunters would then release their hunting dogs to chase the coyote knowing it had no escape. Bets would be taken on whose dog would have the final kill. I was told this is a regular thing that takes place."*

- **Torture before prolonged death:**

During our investigator's time with this trapper, two coyotes were caught in unpadded, steel-jaw leghold traps.

Both coyotes were muddy and exhausted, and had torn up



the earth around them in their attempts to regain their freedom. Our investigator was able to fully document the suffering each coyote endured for up to 24 hours.

The first coyote appeared disturbingly calm. Perhaps he had resigned himself to the death he knew was coming. Or, perhaps the intense suffering and anxiety he had sustained resulted in a weary lethargy. Regardless, his calm demeanor remained even as the trapper needlessly kicked him to the ground, below; the only signs of distress were his open mouth and the whites showing around his eyes.



The second coyote, fully covered in mud and stumbling from fatigue, continued to struggle against the trap. He refused to give up, pulling and jumping away from the trap with all the strength he had left, until he fell to the ground one final time, utterly exhausted. Even then, he continued to push against the trap while lying on the ground. The trapper just laughed.

With both coyotes, the trapper refused to let our investigator film how he killed them. In an effort to save the pelt — not to spare the animal — the trapper shot the coyotes in the lungs. After already having endured hours of trauma and torture, these two victims of trapping were forced to die slow, excruciating deaths as their lungs filled with blood, suffocating them.





- **Callous indifference:**

The dead coyotes were taken to a filthy, bloody workshop to be skinned. The aftermath of all this cruelty was two clean coyote pelts — ready for the next step of the fur industry — and two carcasses, simply tossed outside on the trapper's property, to be eaten by whatever animal came along.

After these two coyotes were dealt with, the trapper's next course of action was to set 16 more leghold traps and 12 snare traps, all alongside highly trafficked roads.



#### INVESTIGATOR NOTES:

*"All the snares were deployed along main roads where members of the public would openly observe any animals which had been trapped."*

## **CONCLUSION:**

This compelling follow-up investigation once again makes the truth resoundingly clear; common, everyday trapping practices are cruel, barbaric, and dangerous, and have remained virtually unchanged for centuries. The stark, graphic footage shows that trappers will regularly step outside the law as it suits them, knowing that even when trapping is regulated, those laws go largely unenforced. This is the "tradition" that 0.055% — less than  $\frac{1}{6}$  of  $\frac{1}{10}$  — of the U.S. population is fighting so hard to preserve: beavers dying for repairing their dams, trapped coyotes in panicked agony, and skinned carcasses and clean pelts for sale.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

Using this footage, Born Free USA will work to halt the further spread of cruel, indiscriminate traps at the federal level by:

- Supporting legislation to ban trapping within the 150-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Supporting legislation that not only bans trapping on all federal land managed by the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — comprising an area of more than 700 acres — but also bans DOI or USDA personnel from using lethal and injurious traps in the line of duty.
- Supporting legislation that bans interstate commerce and transport of Conibear and leghold traps: the two traps used most often in the U.S. today.

We will also take the findings of this investigation to New York and Iowa to:

- Work with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources on the alleged illegal trapping activity that our investigator documented.
- Push the New York State Legislature to ban traps in state parks and other protected lands as well as to significantly restrict or ban Conibear traps.
- Push the Iowa State Legislature to strongly restrict or ban the use of leghold traps and snares.

The animals need you to act, too! You can make your voice heard by:

- Speaking up in favor of local, state, and federal legislation aimed at limiting or banning the use of traps.
- Not buying fur or shopping at stores that sell fur.
- Supporting the more than 400 retailers that have committed, in writing, to a no-fur policy by joining the Fur Free Retailer program. For more information, visit [www.furfreeretailer.com](http://www.furfreeretailer.com).

*"It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the suffering thus endured from fear, from acute pain, maddened by thirst, and by vain attempts to escape."*

~ Charles Darwin, Trapping Agony, 1863



PHOTO: SIMEON EICHMANN



PHOTO: STUDIOWORXX



## RESOURCES:

We have many resources available for learning more and taking action:

- The comprehensive website of this investigation, with video  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/victimsofvanity2](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/victimsofvanity2)
- The original 2011 "Victims of Vanity" investigation website  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/victimsofvanity](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/victimsofvanity)
- Information on the Refuge from Cruel Trapping Act (RCTA), 114th Congress  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/rcta](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/rcta)
- Information on the Public Safety and Wildlife Protection Act (PSWPA), 114th Congress  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/pswpa](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/pswpa)
- Born Free USA's Trapping Report Card, grading each state based on its animal trapping regulations  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/trapreportcard](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/trapreportcard)
- Born Free USA's database listing non-targeted victims of traps  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/database](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/database)
- Born Free USA's Trapping Victims Fund to help cover veterinary care for companion animals or wildlife impacted by traps  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/trappingfund](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/trappingfund)
- Resources for lawmakers and others interested in changing trapping laws at the state and local levels, including model legislation and ordinances  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/legislation](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/legislation)
- The Fur Free Retailer program  
>> [www.furfreeretailer.com](http://www.furfreeretailer.com)
- Sign up for Born Free USA's online eAlerts and receive newsletters keeping you informed about how to help protect animals from traps and other issues that threaten wildlife  
>> [www.bornfreeusa.org/actionteam](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/actionteam)

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ALL PHOTOS: BORN FREE USA UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



Born Free USA is a national animal advocacy non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to end the suffering of wild animals in captivity, rescue individual animals in need, protect wildlife in their natural habitats, and encourage compassionate conservation. We also operate the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary.

**For more information, visit [www.bornfreeusa.org/victimsofvanity2](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/victimsofvanity2)**

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