

Outdoor Skills

Trap or Die

How to get food when you need it most.

by Keith McCafferty

I once attended a seminar hosted by Dr. Florence Dunkel, the entomologist whom the producers of *Survivor* turn to for advice about bug-eating challenges. Halfway through the wax-worm fritter I remember thinking there had to be a more palatable way to obtain protein from the woods in an emergency.

There is--trapping. Not only do you end up with a hearty meal, but compared to the hours of energy expended while foraging or hunting, traps take little time to set, and unlike firearms or fishing rods, they work for you while you sleep. But to trap animals with enough regularity to feed yourself, you need to heed these three principles as you set up:

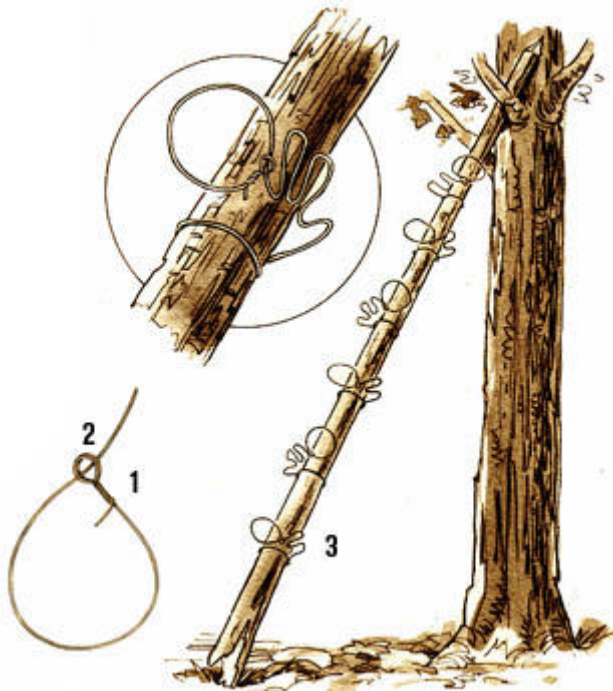
1. Location. Rabbits, muskrats, groundhogs, and other animals make distinct trails that they use over and over. These trails are the best places to set traps, but they can be difficult to see in bright sunlight. Search for them early or late in the day, when the shadows that define them are longer.

2. Direction. Where possible, narrow an existing trail—by brushing vegetation or driving a couple of small sticks into the ground—to direct the animal into the trap, or place a horizontal stick at the top of the snare so that the animal must duck slightly, ensuring that its head will go right into the noose.

3. Size. Scale your trap correctly. As a rule, the noose should be one and a half times the diameter of the head of the animal you wish to capture and made of material that will break should you inadvertently snare, say, a cougar's foot.

The most important tool you can carry for catching dinner is a spool of snare wire (26 gauge is about right for all-purpose small-game snares; use 28 gauge for squirrels, 24 or heavier for beaver-size animals). Soft single-strand wire is superior to nylon monofilament because it holds its shape and game can't chew through it. Snares can also be made from braided fishing superlines or 550 parachute cord, depending on the trap you're making.

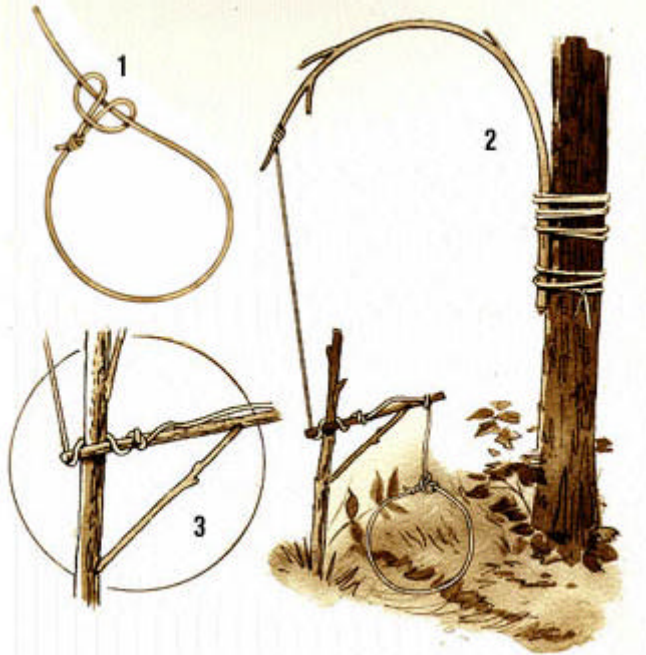
The five traps illustrated below will work in a variety of habitats and conditions. Check your state trapping regulations before trying them out.

Squirrel Snare

(1) Make a small loop by wrapping the snare wire around a pencil-diameter stick twice, then turning the stick to twist the wire strands together. (2) Pass the long wire end through the loop to form the snare. (3) To build a

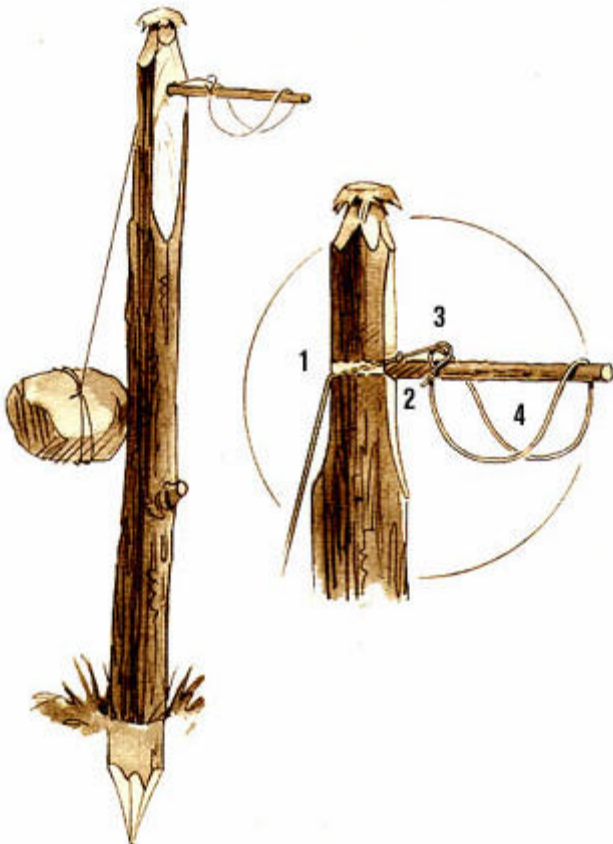
squirrel snare, attach a series of small wire snares around a long stick propped against a tree. You can catch several at a time with this setup.

Twitch-Up Snare



(1) Tie a small overhand loop knot in your parachute cord, then fold the loop back on itself to form Mickey Mouse ears and weave the tag end through the ears as illustrated. (2) To build the twitch-up snare, use more cord to tie a spring pole or the branch of a small tree in tension. (3) Set up a trigger mechanism like the one shown. When the animal's head goes through the loop, the trigger is released, and it snatches the animal into the air, out of reach of other predators.

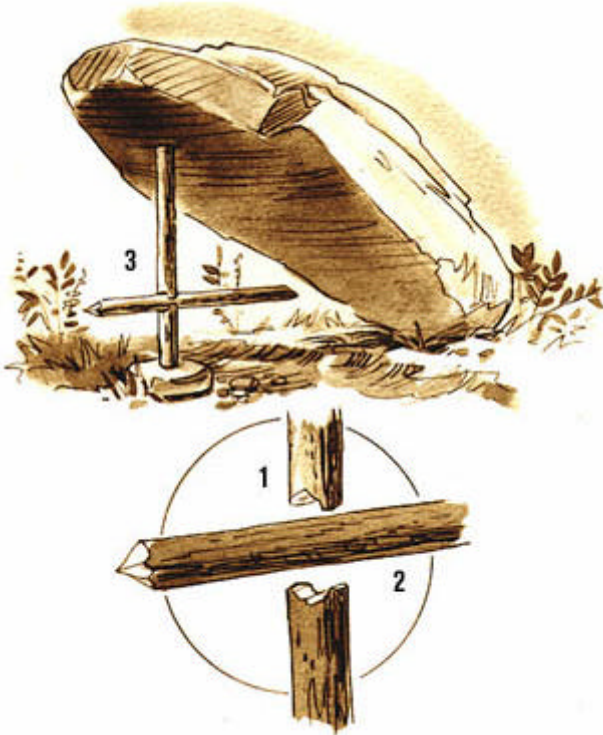
Ojibway Bird Trap



This works best when set in a clearing where the trigger stick offers a handy perch. The slightest weight on the

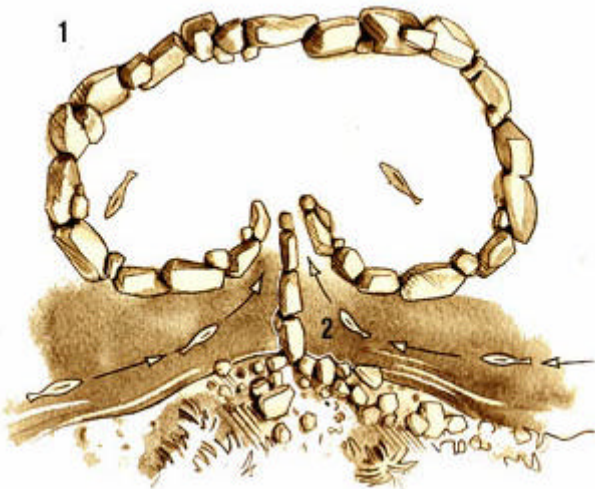
trigger should cause it to fall and the noose to catch the bird by its feet. (1) Cut a 1/4-inch-diameter hole through one end of a stout 3-foot-long pole with a knife. If necessary, shave the sides of the pole to make it thin enough to make the hole. Sharpen the bottom end of the pole and drive it into the ground. (2) Whittle the end of the trigger stick so that it resembles a pencil with the point cut off. This end should fit loosely inside the hole in the pole. (3) Insert thin cord or fishing line through the hole and tie an overhand knot. Beyond the knot, form a noose. Tie the other end of the cord to a rock. (4) Drape the noose over both sides of the trigger and insert it into the pole (if it's breezy, wet the cord with saliva to help it stay put). Draw the cord until the knot catches at the point where the trigger fits into the hole, to keep it from falling back through--until a bird alights on the small stick.

Two-Stick Deadfall Trap



Your intention here is to create a precarious balance, so the slightest jostling of the trigger will cause the trap to collapse. (1) Cut a shallow groove in one end of both upright sticks. (2) Insert the trigger stick between the grooves. The upright sticks should not meet at the center of the trigger. (3) Balance the sticks as shown under the weight of the deadfall.

Fish Trap



After dark, fish often cruise the shorelines of a lake or the shallow inside bend of a stream—ideal places for a trap. (1) Build it as shown with the materials at hand: logs, rocks, or stakes driven into the bottom. (2) The diversion arm of the trap directs fish into the V entrance. Most won't be able to find their way out. Close the entrance and net the fish with a seine made by tying a shirt between two poles. This is much more effective than trying to spear

fish or catch them with your hands.

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