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## Animal Capture and Handling (Basic)

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### This Chapter Covers:

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Equipment
- ◆ Muzzling
- ◆ Pursuit
- ◆ Territory
- ◆ Behavior
- ◆ Wildlife

### Introduction

In this chapter you will learn how to capture (catch) and restrain (hold) an animal without hurting yourself or the animal. You must learn how to use the different kinds of animal control equipment effectively and without hurting the animal. To do a better job of capturing animals, you need to understand animal behavior (an animal's response to its environment), including the behavior of dogs, cats, and wildlife. Sometimes you have to think like an animal to catch the animal. You have a better chance of catching an animal if you have an idea of what the animal is probably going to do next. If you can "outthink" an animal instead of trying to "outmuscle" it, capture will be easier.

### Equipment

**It is important for animal control officers (ACOs) to know that all animals can feel pain.** Although animals cannot always express their discomfort and suffering, they can still be hurt. **Professional ACOs are morally, ethically, and legally obligated to minimize the suffering of the animals they handle.**

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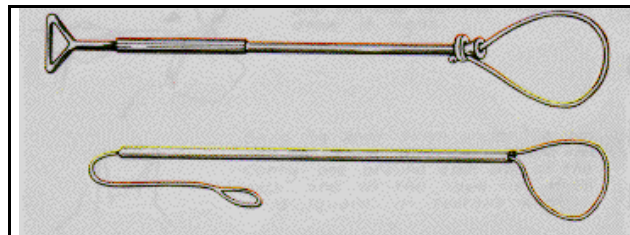
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You use different kinds of equipment to catch and restrain the animals. You must learn how to use your equipment on the animals without hurting them or hurting them as little as possible. (The equipment for the capture and restraint of animals causes some amount of discomfort or pain to the animals, even when used correctly.) **There are five major kinds of equipment:**

- × Extension of Arms
- × Physical Barriers
- × Traps
- × Chemical Injections
- × Firearms

**Extension of Arms** (equipment that allows you to control an animal without getting too close to the animal)

**Catch poles and snares** are often used and come in all styles and lengths (see figure below). They have a stiff handle with an adjustable loop of rope or cable on one end. Keep them clean, properly stored, and in good condition.



from *Restraint of Animals*, by Leahy and Barrow

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### Properties of a Catch Pole or Snare:

- × Use a catch pole that is between 3 and 5 feet long. A shorter one will not be an effective extension of the arms, and a longer one will be too difficult to handle properly.
- × Make snares or catch poles using a broom handle, pipe, or conduit (staff) and rope (loop).
- × Buy strong, lightweight catch poles. These usually have an aluminum tube for the staff, a plastic-covered wire cable for the loop, and a cable-locking device to prevent accidental release of the animal.

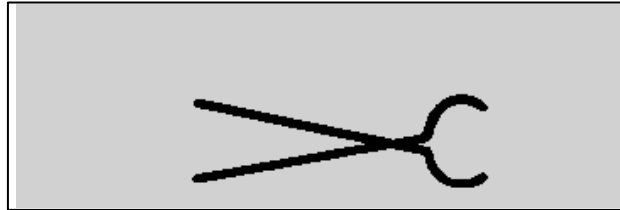
### Techniques for Using a Catch Pole or Snare:

- × **One method of using a catch pole is to have the loop enclose both the head and one forelimb of the animal to prevent choking** (see Figure 1 in chapter appendix). For other methods of proper usage, refer to the manufacturer's recommendations for the catch pole you are using.
- × Slide the catch pole along the ground towards the animal, as this will appear less threatening.
- × Once the catch pole has crossed the animal's personal space, gently stroke the animal with the end of the staff and then slowly apply the loop.
- × **Never use the catch pole to lift any animal!** Support the body with your free arm and use the catch pole to control the animal's head.

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**Long handled tongs** (see figure below) catch the animal around the neck or body and can be used for snakes, cats, and other small animals.



from *Restraint of Animals*, by Leahy and Barrow

**Ropes** can be hard to use and are normally only good for catching a large animal (30 pounds or more). Store ropes in a dry, clean place. Inspect them frequently for worn or weak areas.

### Different Kinds of Ropes:

#### × **Soft Ropes**

- \* cotton
- \* 15 to 20 feet
- \* inexpensive
- \* flexible

#### × **Hard Ropes**

- \* manila, sisal, or other fibrous materials
- \* 30 to 60 feet
- \* strong and less flexible
- \* can cause rope burns

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- × **Synthetic Ropes**

- \* nylon
- \* strong and flexible
- \* can cause severe rope burns
- \* can stretch

**Good ropes for general animal control use are those which have a strong nylon center core and a woven cotton outer covering.**

This combination provides the necessary strength while reducing the possibility of choking the animal or causing rope burns.

### **Techniques for Using a Rope:**

- × A short underhand or sidearm throw is most effective since it is less frightening to an animal than an overhead throw.
- × In some situations, the rope may not have to be thrown at all. Lift the loop over the dog's head if it is not attempting to run.
- × Once you have applied the rope to the dog, use the rope to bring the animal closer to you and then lift the dog if it is small enough. Lead larger dogs to your vehicle and then lift them into the cage.
- × Use the rope to control the head and lift the body with your free arm.
- × **Never lift any animal off the ground by the rope alone.**

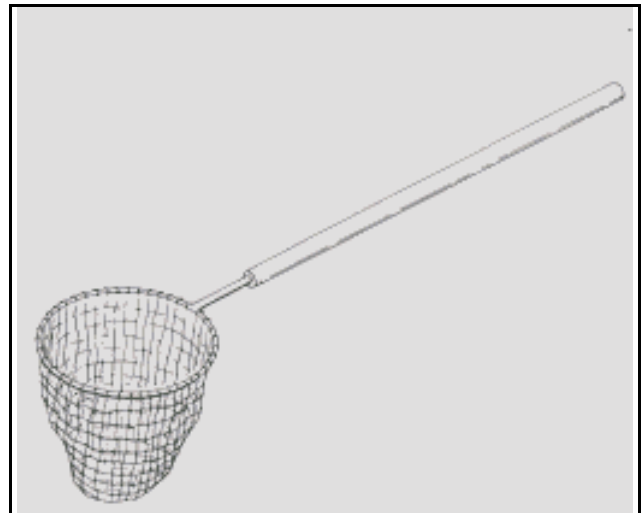
## Animal Capture and Handling (Basic)

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### Disadvantages of a Rope:

- × You can choke the animal with the rope.
- × A rope will not keep the animal from attacking you.
- × Some kinds of rope can cause rope burns on both the animal and the ACO.

**Nets** work well sometimes, particularly in capturing birds or small primates. Nets can be attached to poles (see figure at right) or can be used loose so they can be thrown over the animal. They can be difficult to use since most animals can easily avoid a net. They are also expensive, difficult to store, and require continual repairs.



from *NACA Training Guide*

### Physical Barriers

**Gloves** can sometimes, but not always, protect you from animal bites. Gloves that are thick and tough enough for maximum protection can make it difficult to grasp an animal or to feel how hard you are pressing on it. However, they can also help prevent animal saliva that might contain rabies virus from contacting any breaks in the skin on your hand.

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**Blankets**, large towels, or other heavy cloths can be placed over an animal. Use a blanket that is thick enough so the animal cannot tear it, but thin enough so that you can still grasp the animal.

- × Blankets help calm the animal and may protect you from bites because animals are less likely to attack a flat surface.
- × Many animals may be calmed by the darkness created by being covered with the blanket.
- × A blanket is useful when handling large birds because the wings, talons, and beaks can all be covered.
- × Make sure the blankets and towels are washed after each use to prevent disease transmission.

### Traps

Check with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and your local ordinances concerning possible restrictions on the use of steel jaw leghold traps. These traps are painful for the animal and have no place in animal control! The American Veterinary Medical Association considers steel jaw leghold traps to be inhumane. Use words like box trap, humane trap, or live trap when you are talking to the public so they will know that you do not use steel jaw leghold traps. This will also improve your public relations.

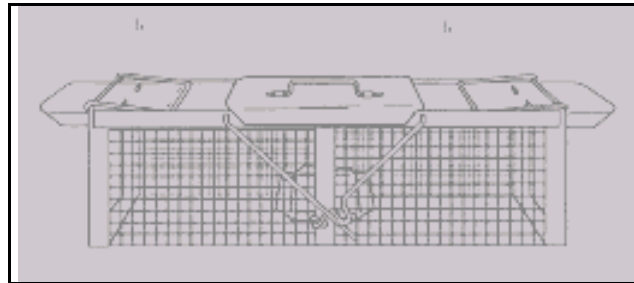
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**Box-type live traps** are good tools for capturing animals. Use traps for capture of animals when a close approach is difficult, as with animals having a large public space or a strong flight response. Also use traps to capture nocturnal animals, such as skunks, raccoons, and opossums.

- × **Box-type live traps** are made of hardware cloth or other kinds of wire mesh and are available in a wide range of sizes from ■large dog size• to “small rodent size• (see figure below).

from *NACA Training Guide*



- × **Larger live traps** are harder to store. Some commercial traps are collapsible, which makes storing them much easier.
- × **Live traps** of any size work in basically the same way. A door is opened and connected to a treadle or a metal plate on the floor of the trap. The animal triggers or releases the door when it enters the cage and steps on the treadle or tries to remove the bait. The door then closes and locks.
- × Use a **bait** that will attract the animal you want to catch. For example, canned or dry cat food will attract cats, raccoons, opossums, and skunks.
- × **Live traps** must be carefully examined after each use and kept clean and in good condition.

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- × **Live traps** can be made or commercial traps can be purchased. Commercial traps are expensive and are sometimes stolen or vandalized. Requiring a deposit from citizens who want to use the traps on their property will help reduce the financial loss if the traps are damaged or lost.
- × When providing traps to the public, ask them not to set the traps unless they can attend to and care for the animal in a timely manner.
- × Make sure to use a trap that is the right size for the animal being captured. After setting the trap properly, check it at least once a day. Check the traps more often during the summer because heat and, in some locations, fire ants can cause harm or death to any animal in the trap. Placing insecticide granules around and under traps will reduce problems from fire ants.
- × Most animals will quickly learn to recognize the trapping device and will be hard to trap a second time.

**Chemical Injections** - The use of chemical injections to capture an animal has many legal and medical problems. The drugs can be difficult for ACOs to obtain or be able to administer. Some of the drugs do not affect the animal quickly; therefore, the animal may remain mobile or aggressive for a considerable amount of time after injection. Chemical injections to capture an animal are used only as a last option and require special training.

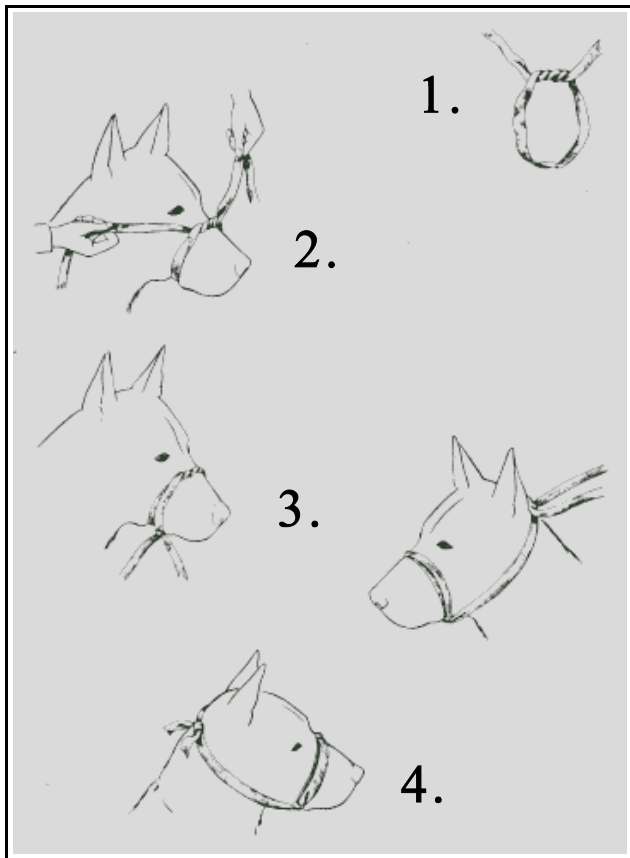
**Firearms** - Handguns, shotguns, rifles, and other firearms have very limited emergency field use in animal control activities. Check with your agency to learn about the local firearm policy.

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### Muzzling

Muzzles can prevent an animal from biting you, and they can sometimes make an animal behave better. You can make muzzles yourself, or your agency can purchase commercial muzzles. Homemade muzzles are cheap, comfortable, and easy to make using rope, cloth, nylon stockings, or cotton gauze. Commercial muzzles come in different sizes and are usually made of nylon with buckles or Velcro straps. Muzzles can be used for both cats and dogs, but you need to be careful; many ACOs have been bitten while putting a muzzle on an animal.



1) Make a loop in the center of a four foot cord or bandage using a surgeon's knot.

2) Slip the loop over the nose and draw it snug.

3) Bring the ends down under the chin and tie them with an overhand knot. Carry one around each side of the neck and at the nape tie them in a square or reef's knot.

4) Note the finished muzzle.

text and picture from *Restraint of Animals*, by Leahy and Barrow

Do not leave a muzzle on an unattended animal. If the animal vomits while wearing a muzzle, it could choke. Also, the animal will not be able to cool itself by panting and may experience heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke.

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### Pursuit

It is not always a good idea to pursue an animal that is running away from you.

- × The animal will probably escape, and it will be even harder to catch the next time.
- × Many animals (and ACOs) have been severely hurt during a chase.
- × People watching may think that you have lost control of the situation. This can damage your and your agency's image.

Only chase an animal if you think you will capture it quickly or you will be able to follow it home.

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**Remember:** As a professional ACO, you need to "outthink" the animal so that you can capture it before it has a chance to escape.

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If an animal does run away, there are other ways to handle the situation without chasing it.

- × Follow the animal until you locate where it lives.
- × Issue a citation to the owner.
- × Try to capture the animal by setting a live trap.

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### Territory

All animals, even pets, have home ranges and territories in which they travel. When you know those areas, you will have a better chance of capturing the animal. Dogs are very social in their behavior and form packs that tend to travel together. Cats are not as social and seldom have much to do with other adult cats, except when one is in estrus or they are defending their territory.

### Fight or Flight

When you are entering an animal's home range, remember that all animals have a "flight reaction distance." This is the closest you can get to that animal before causing a reaction. The animal will either attempt to:

- × hide,
- × run, or
- × fight.

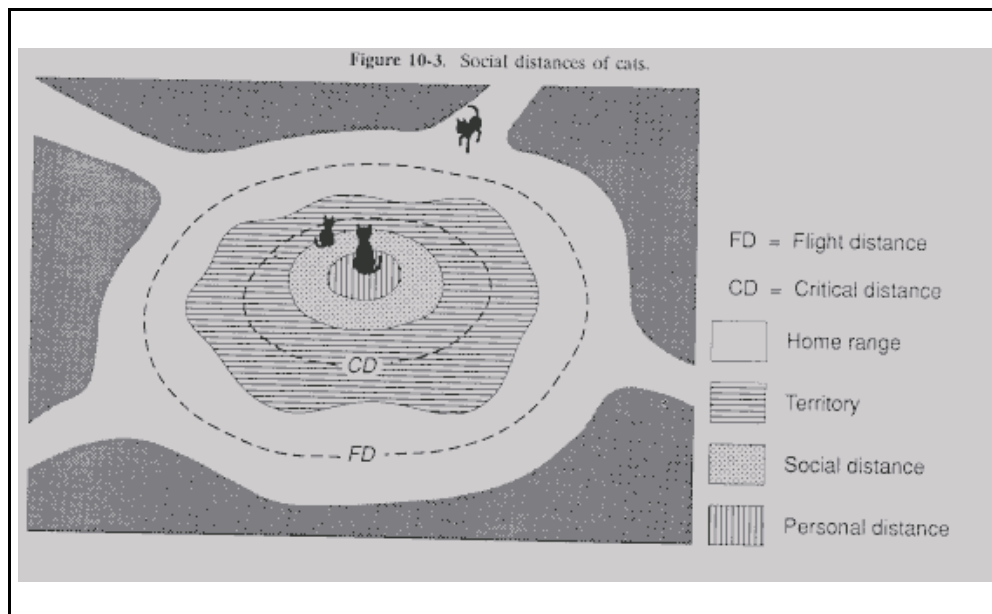
Most animals will try to run and avoid a confrontation instead of fighting when you approach them. This is the flight response. If you enter the animal's critical distance, it will usually attack you in an effort to escape.

Animals react to visual (sight), auditory (sound), and olfactory (smell) signals sent by a person, so always act in a calm, quiet manner while being deliberate and methodical in your movements. Avoid gestures the animal may see as threatening, such as a loud voice and flailing arms. An individual that towers over you, which is how you appear to an animal, can be very threatening. The tone of your voice is very important too; what you say is not nearly as important as how you say it. It is interesting to note that female ACOs may be more successful than male ACOs in capturing unconfined dogs. Soft, soothing tones along with correct body movements can actually reduce the animal's public, social, or personal spaces.

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**Animal Territories** (see figure below) - Reduce the chances of the animal attacking you by understanding how animals will react in their different spaces.

- Home range** this is the largest area in which the animal will usually roam.
- Territory** this is a smaller area within the home range, and the animal usually will defend it against intruders.
- Public space** this area is greater than 12 feet from the animal, but it is still within the animal's territory. When you approach an animal in this area, it will usually try to run from you.
- Social space** (approximately 4 to 12 feet) this is a smaller area within the public space. When you approach an animal in its social space, it may either fight or run from you, depending on other behavioral characteristics.
- Personal space** (approximately 0 to 4 feet) this is the smallest area and the area nearest the animal. When you approach an animal in its personal space, it will usually fight or submit.



from *NACA Training Guide*

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### Behavior

Ethology is the study of animal behavior. If you understand animal behavior, you will sometimes be able to guess what the animal will do next. This makes it easier to capture the animal.

**Remember:** "Normal" behavior can change when an animal is lost, chased, scared, sick, hurt, in heat (estrus), hungry, cold, hot, or stressed in any other way.

You can understand an animal's behavior better by knowing what time of the day it is most active (when it eats, drinks, or travels).

<b><u>Crepuscular</u></b>	active at twilight or before sunrise, such as foxes and coyotes.
<b><u>Diurnal</u></b>	active during the day, such as squirrels.
<b>Nocturnal</b>	active during the night, such as skunks, raccoons, bats, and opossums.

**Cats** are **nocturnal** with **crepuscular** tendencies. **Canines** are **crepuscular**. However, **domestic dogs** have **diurnal** tendencies because of their association with humans.

Many domestic pets behave differently than their wild counterparts. This is because pets have undergone domestication and socialization, which alter the wild behavior patterns. Contact with people and other animals helps to socialize animals. They learn how to behave and become familiar with people and other animals. Socializing dogs and cats at an early age helps them become well-adjusted family pets.

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- × It is easier to socialize animals when they are young (preferably before they are four months old).
- × If a puppy has not been socialized to human contact by the age of 14 to 16 weeks, it may never make a good pet.
- × It is usually best for families to adopt a puppy between 6 to 10 weeks of age because at this age it is easier to socialize.

Because pets are around people on a regular basis, they may be easier to catch than a wild animal. However, remember that some animals may behave oddly because they have not been socialized. **Just like people, animals that were neglected or abused when they were young may behave strangely when they are older.** These animals are sometimes called asocial which means that they are not as friendly around people as socialized pets.

There are three main kinds of asocial behavior in pets:

- × submissive behavior,
- × aggressive behavior, and
- × "fear biting" behavior.

Knowing the signs of different behaviors will help you decide how to handle the animal.

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### Asocial Behavior in Dogs

A submissive dog may behave in these ways:

- × whining and whimpering;
- × tucking the tail between the legs;
- × holding the ears down when approached;
- × rolling on its side or back; and/or
- × urinating when touched or lifted.

An aggressive dog may show these behaviors before it attacks:

- × growling, or a change in the sound of the bark;
- × hair standing-up on the neck and along the back (hackles);
- × curling the lips in a snarl;
- × moving the tail slowly from side to side (flagging); and/or
- × standing very rigid, looking directly at you, flattening its ears against its head, tucking its tail between its legs, and baring its teeth.

You need to act calmly and quietly when you are around an aggressive dog. Do not move quickly, as sudden movements might cause the dog to attack. Never attempt to run from an aggressive dog. Do not stare into an aggressive dog's eyes. It may perceive this as a threat and attack you.

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### Fear Biters and Capture Hints

Dogs that are **"fear biters"** bite when they are scared and usually will not act like an aggressive dog. They may even have their ears and tails down and lean away from you as you get closer to them. If you get too close, the dog will probably snap at you or bite you. If a dog shows indications of **■fear biter•** behavior, there are things you can do to calm the dog:

- × Move slowly.
- × Talk in a soft voice to the dog.
- × Squat down on one knee and turn sideways to make yourself appear less threatening.
- × Pat your thigh softly to call the dog closer.
- × Reach out to the dog carefully and touch it under the chin; do not try to touch it on top of the head or on the shoulder.
- × Touch and pet the dog gently to calm it.
- × Slip a snare or leash carefully on the dog.
- × Move away slowly if the dog does not respond and is still acting like it might bite.

Experience and knowledge of dog behavior will help you predict how different dogs will respond to you.

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### Behavior in Cats

An **alert** cat might behave in these ways:

- × stopping in its tracks;
- × holding its head and ears erect;
- × staring with an even, close-mouthed expression; and/or
- × standing with its back level and tail erect.

As the ACO continues to approach, the cat may respond in three ways:

- × aggressively,
- × fearfully, or
- × submissively.

An **aggressive** cat might behave in these ways:

- × lowering the head;
- × holding the ears to the back or side of the head;
- × arching the back;
- × fluffing the tail and holding it erect; and/or
- × growling and hissing.

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A **fearful** cat might behave in these ways:

- × crouching low to the ground;
- × fluffing the hair along back and tail;
- × pulling the tail to its side;
- × dilating the pupils;
- × flattening the ears;
- × growling and hissing; and/or
- × displaying **fear bite** behavior.

Fearful cats will try to escape by climbing anything available, including people and flat walls.

A **submissive** cat might behave in these ways:

- × similar to a fearful cat; and/or
- × leaning away from a person.

Do not assume, however, that simply because they are categorized as "fearful" or "submissive" that they have surrendered to inevitable capture and can be handled with no risk of injury. A seemingly submissive cat may suddenly roll onto its back and attack with both sets of claws.

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### Wildlife

Animal control officers will receive calls from citizens for help with wildlife problems. As our cities and towns grow, there will continue to be problems between humans and wild animals.

Nearly any wild animal can make a home in urban and suburban areas if there are food, water, and shelter. People attract wildlife by leaving their garbage and pet food outside. Wild animals can also make their homes in attics and chimneys, which can cause problems and damage to the building. The only long-term solution for dealing with problem wildlife is to not attract them with food and to "build them out" of areas where they are not wanted.

Discourage people from having contact with wildlife. Wild animals can cause injury through bites and may expose humans or pets to rabies. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and many cities have laws pertaining to keeping wild animals as pets. Know the laws regulating wildlife.

Animal control agencies may be required to help citizens with wildlife problems, or they may refer citizens to private pest control companies or wildlife rehabilitators. Your agency should develop a policy to deal with these issues.

Answer all calls for help with animals that are high risk for spreading rabies (skunks, bats, raccoons, foxes, and coyotes). High-risk animals are normally nocturnal; this means those that are active during the daytime may have rabies. It is essential to try to capture or kill (without damaging the brain) a high-risk animal for rabies testing if it had direct contact with a human or domestic animal.

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There will be times that you will have to set live traps to capture a wild animal. Think before acting and always consider your safety and the protection of private property. Much of your success will develop through experience. Learn how to identify the problem animal by its signs and tracks. Know what bait to use and where to place the trap. Wear protective gloves to handle traps containing animals.

Releasing, instead of euthanatizing, captured wild animals is a very good public relations policy for an animal control agency. The public will appreciate your efforts and your caring attitude. However, relocating and releasing all captured wildlife is not always possible or responsible. Depending on the circumstances, some animals may have to be euthanatized. Wild animals in a trap can be injected with a euthanasia solution by using a syringe pole. Syringe poles can be purchased, or you can easily make one yourself.

There are trained wildlife rehabilitators that are permitted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to care for and release **certain** animals. Rehabilitators can also transport these animals if it is not prohibited by an area rabies quarantine. Rehabilitators will probably not be able to take all your wildlife, but it can benefit your agency to establish a working relationship with one or more rehabilitators.

Having a cooperative relationship with rehabilitators is important from a public health standpoint. If your agency's policy is to only euthanatize sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife instead of placing them with a rehabilitator, many people who find such animals will decide to personally care for them rather than have them destroyed. These people usually have not been fully educated about the risks of rabies and other zoonotic diseases and have not been trained on bite avoidance techniques; they also have not received preexposure rabies vaccinations. Therefore, it is preferable to place wildlife in the hands of responsible, trained rehabilitators whenever possible.

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There are many things to consider before relocating and releasing wildlife:

- × Is it legal?
- × Are water, food, and shelter available?
- × Is the animal healthy and old enough to survive on its own?
- × Will you be spreading disease?
- × Are you doing what is best for the animal?
- × Are you relocating a problem to someone else?
- × Do you have permission from the owner of the property where the animal is to be released?

### Additional References:

*National Animal Control Association Training Guide*

P.O. Box 480851  
Kansas City, MO 64148-0851  
913-768-1319  
<http://www.nacenet.org>

*Restraint of Animals*, 2nd ed.  
John R. Leahy and Pat Barrow  
Cornell Campus Store, Inc.  
Ithaca, NY 14853

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>)

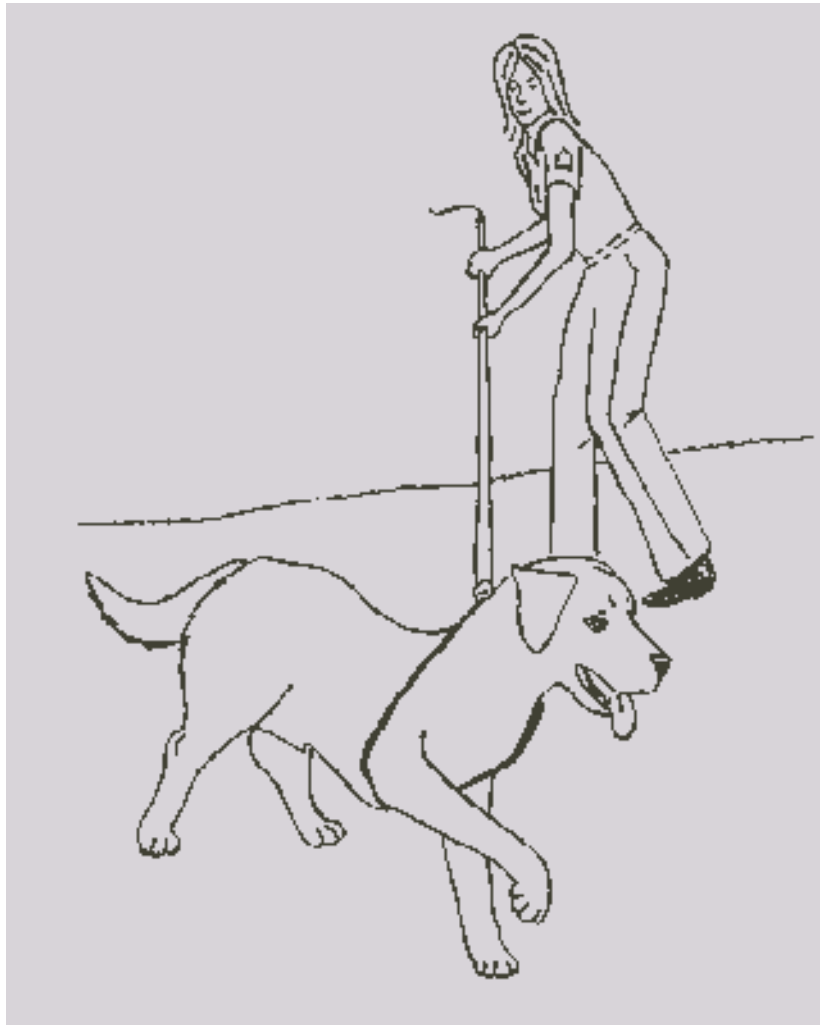
Texas Wildlife Damage Management Service (<http://wls.tamu.edu/>).

# Animal Capture and Handling (Basic)

## Chapter Appendix

Figure 1 – Example of One Technique for Using a  
Catch Pole

**Figure 1 – Example of One Technique for Using a Catch Pole**



Submitted by Evret C. Newman, DVM