

How to React in Case of Incidental Catches?

You must free a bird of prey from the trap it got caught into, whether it is dead or alive. However, do not free it on location even if the bird does not seem to be hurt. Indeed, it might be suffering from chilblain or exhaustion and needing care. When the bird is alive:

1. Wear thick gloves that can protect you from the bill and claws.
2. Cover its head (with clothing or a blanket) to blind and calm it. If you are with someone else, one person should make a diversion while the other covers the bird from its back.
3. It is important to hold its legs and cover its claws with a cloth (towel, scarf, etc.). Afterwards, hold the bird in your arms while the other person cuts the neck snare or opens the trap. If you are alone, wrap the bird in a cloth but leave out the trapped leg. Cut the neck snare or open the trap.
4. Carry the wrapped bird, or put it in a jute bag, until you put it into a large plastic container with air holes or into a strong cardboard box. There must be newspaper strips on the bottom of the container. Unwrap the bird and put it into the container.

Note: NEVER put a bird of prey in an all-metal slated body for the bird could hurt itself. Keep it in a dark room, at a temperature of 22°C, and call a wildlife officer to come and pick it up (*S.O.S. Poaching hotline: 1-800-463-2191*). The officer will bring the bird to the UQROP. The survival rate of birds sent there is 75%, and 50% of those birds are freed. The birds left may enter zoos or be used for educational purposes.

Call an officer whether the bird is dead or alive. If dead, the bird can still be an important source of information for biologists. **Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.**

Your Collaboration Can Make a Difference

The trappers' cooperation is essential for the rehabilitation of the bald eagle population. You contribute to saving bald eagles and other birds of prey that might get caught when declaring incidental catches or taking means to avoid them. Trappers are an important link in wildlife management. Therefore, we ask you to warn the right authorities concerning incidental catches and tell them about your observations of bald eagles and their nests, it will help us increase our knowledge. By helping endangered species, you show your desire to work in harmony with nature. You are the eyes and ears of the forest.

For more information, visit our Web site at www.ftgq.qc.ca

References :

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Problematics

The bald eagle is one of the biggest birds of prey in Canada. This beautiful raptor has been designated as a vulnerable species in Québec. It is estimated that there are **75 to 150 breeding pairs** in the Québec territory. Each loss or death may affect the population of this raptor because they are so few. This is the reason why trappers were approached to help with the recovery of this species.

How to Recognize Bald Eagles?

The adult bald eagle can easily be recognized with its white head and tail contrasting with its blackish-brown body. Furthermore, its bill and feet are yellow. The bald eagle has a body length from 75 to 108 cm, a **wingspan from 2 to 2.25 m**, and bald eagles weighing 7 kg are frequently seen. The juvenile bald eagle is almost entirely blackish-brown, and has a mixture of white and dark-brown on its breast and under its wings. **The juvenile bald eagle becomes sexually mature at about 5 years of age.** A juvenile bald eagle can easily be confused with a golden eagle (Figure 1). It can also be confused with the osprey, but the latter is smaller and is almost completely white on its breast.

Bald Eagle and Trapping



Illustration by John A. Crosby, courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa, Canada.

Figure 1: from the top: adult bald eagle, juvenile bald eagle and adult golden eagle.

Feeding Habits

Bald eagles eat fish, both dead or alive, but they can also eat waterfowl and sometimes even small mammals.

They are mostly scavengers during fall and winter, when they feed on carcasses. This diet makes bald eagles **particularly vulnerable to trapping** as they are attracted to bait used to attract canids especially when it is not well hidden.

Habitat

Since bald eagles are sensitive to disturbances caused by humans, they are mostly found in uninhabited regions. The two important elements in a bald eagle habitat are:

- A river containing enough fish to feed and raise its family. For example, near a reservoir;
- A mature or declining forest where there are tall trees (> 20 m), near a shore where it will be able to perch, sleep, and also, build its nest (Figure 2).



Jean Lapointe, ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune

Figure 2: The bald eagle nest has a diameter from 1.5 to 2 m, a height from 0.5 to 2 m and is located between the last third of the tree and the top. In Québec, white pines are mostly used, but the form and the size of the tree are more important than its species.

During the nesting season, which starts around the end of March depending on the region, several human activities may affect incubation. Since bald eagles locate their nest on tall trees, logging operations might destroy breeding sites. Furthermore, recreational activities held near lakes may also disturb bald eagles. Protection standards have been adopted by the Québec government since this species has a precarious status. These standards help protect known nests against logging operations done on public land and buffer areas located around nests. **Therefore, it is important to inform us if you see bald eagle nests.**

Reasons for Decrease

The bald eagle was wrongly considered a pest in the past. This is the reason why it was hunted, poisoned and trapped. Furthermore, the loss of its habitat caused by the development of agricultural land and logging contributed to the decrease of bald eagle populations in North America. More recently, the ingestion of preys contaminated with pesticides such as DDT has caused even more damage, from 1950 to 1970, to populations of bald eagles and other birds of prey, which are threatened in North America.

Causes of Death

Only 20% of juvenile bald eagles live until the age of three. The majority of causes of death seem to be related to human activities. There are two or three incidental catches of bald eagles and golden eagles declared each year to the ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune (MRNF). This number is still big enough to affect the rehabilitation of the bald eagle population as their numbers are small in Québec. In fact, there are probably more catches than declared since many citizens are afraid to be blamed. **Yet, there are no sanctions for making such a declaration.**

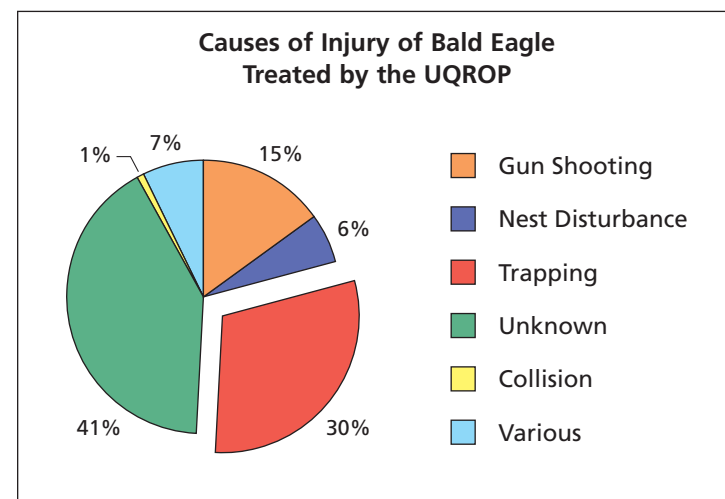


Figure 3: Between 1986 and 2006, 71 bald eagles were treated at the *Union Québécoise de Réhabilitation des Oiseaux de Proie (UQROP)*, and 21* (30%) of these injuries were related to trapping activities.

*This data only takes into account birds treated by the UQROP.

A Real Problem

The enclosure for canids seems to be the main cause of incidental catches, especially the small size enclosures located in open areas. This trapping technique represents a danger for bald eagles for they see their prey from a good distance and they are attracted to corvine birds (crows, ravens, and grey jays), which feed from bait. Indeed, if bald eagles cannot land on the bait, they land close by and walk towards it by using an entrance. Bald eagles then get caught in neck snares or restraining traps.

Most of the reported catches happen between October 18 and December 15, during the migratory period. **The most critical time is in November.**



Suivi de l'occupation des stations de nidification des populations d'oiseaux en péril du Québec (SOS-POP) and Centre de données sur le patrimoine naturel du Québec

Figure 4: Location of known breeding sites. The danger of capturing bald eagles is bigger near the nests, but it is present all over the province, especially south of 55 degrees north latitude.

Tips and Tricks to Lower the Risk of Incidental Catches*

*This section was written with the help of professional trappers.

Bald eagles use their sight to locate food. To avoid incidental catches, **bait used for canids must not be seen from the air. Therefore, it is important to hide or completely bury the bait, and solidly attach it in the center of the enclosure.** The presence of corvine birds near the bait

means the camouflage is not effective. Do not use bait of big size. This way, it is easier to hide and attach it. One would solve most of the problem by proceeding this way.

In an enclosure located in an area covered with dense vegetation, it is important:

- To completely hide or bury the bait and solidly attach it;
- To set the enclosure far from any road or open area. The wingspan of the bald eagle forces it to land only on open areas;
- Not to create a main access to the enclosure, or at least, to not put a neck snare on that access. It is least probable that canids use that access to reach the bait anyway;
- Not to cut trees inside the enclosure to make sure that bait can not be seen from the sky.

In an enclosure located in an area with little vegetation (see figure 5), it is important:

- To completely hide or bury the bait and solidly attach it;
- To set an enclosure wide enough for the bird to land inside (minimum 30 m of diameter);
- To keep a good distance between neck snares and the bait to make sure the bird does not get caught once inside the enclosure (minimum 15 m).

The *Piégeage et gestion des canidés (PIGEC)* course given by the *Fédération des trappeurs gestionnaires du Québec* includes techniques to become more efficient in trapping canids while having lower risks of incidental catches.

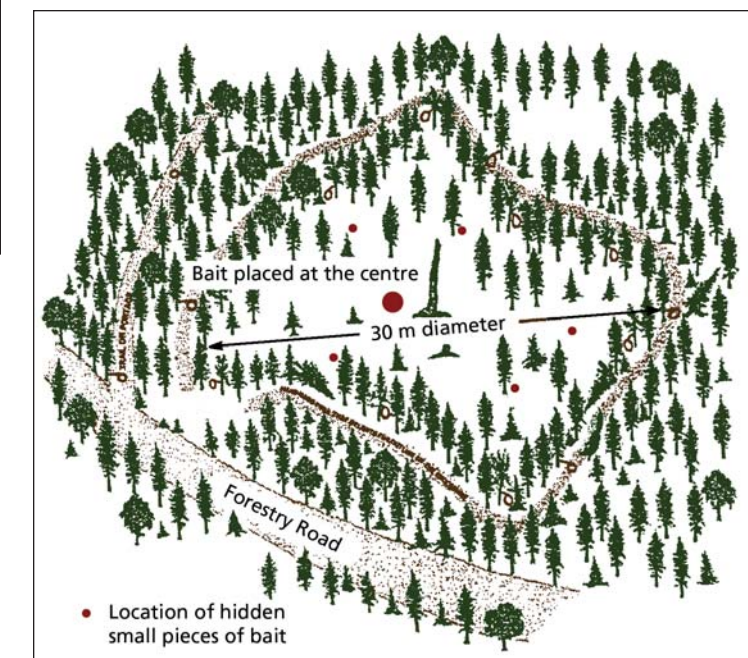


Figure 5: Characteristics of an enclosure for canids in an area with little vegetation.