

Mink Raft Wins First UFAW Wild Animal Welfare Award

The first wild animal welfare award given by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare has been won by Dr. Jonathan Reynolds of The Game Conservancy Trust for his innovative mink raft which allows the predators to be trapped without harming other species.

The £1000 award will be presented by Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries, at 12 noon today at The Royal Society, Kensington Gore, London. The UFAW award recognises innovations that are relevant to improving the welfare of captive wild animals or which alleviate or prevent harm of human origin to animals in the wild.

Mink first established themselves in Britain in the 1950's after being released from fur farms. They are now found throughout the British Isles, where they have had a disastrous impact on water vole populations which have declined by 90% in some areas. The water vole is now a priority species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan which recognises the need to control mink to conserve dwindling numbers.

Dr James Kirkwood, UFAW's scientific director says: "We were impressed with the mink raft as it is simple, cheap and enables efficient monitoring or capture without compromising the welfare of non-target species. A drawback with many trapping systems is that they are often unselective and need to be used in large numbers over long periods of time to take effect. This results in many non-

target species such as moorhen and water vole being captured which is obviously undesirable. It's important that welfare is taken into account in all aspects of wildlife management including trapping. We hope that this award encourages a scientific approach to tackling welfare concerns in this field."

The raft is essentially a mink detector which guides trapping efforts to create an incisive population control programme. A tunnel on the raft houses a simple cartridge which records the footprints of any visiting animals in a moist clay and sand mixture. By showing where mink are active, the raft avoids wasting trapping efforts at locations without mink and also reduces non-target captures.

When a mink is detected, a trap placed in the raft tunnel typically catches within ten days. After capture, the raft is returned to monitoring mode to check whether other mink are present. Continued monitoring guides further trapping and provides crucial feedback about its impact on mink numbers. This was the missing element that previously created much uncertainty about the value of mink trapping. The raft even chronicles the recovery of water voles!

The mink raft is being used by Wildlife Trusts and other conservation bodies in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Devon, Kent, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cheshire, Cumbria, Aberdeenshire and Somerset.

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Notes to Editors

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (www.ufaw.org.uk) is an internationally recognised, independent, scientific and educational charity. It promotes high standards of welfare for all animals including wild, captive, farm, laboratory animals and pets. It depends on members and supporters for all funding. UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarship schemes; by public education especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, articles, technical reports and in its quarterly scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to government departments including the drafting of legislation and guidelines, and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals

“Improvements in the care of animals are not now likely to come of their own accord, merely by wishing them: there must be research and it is in sponsoring research of this kind, and making its results widely known, that UFAW performs one of its most valuable services.” (Sir Peter Medawar, CBE, FRS, 8th May 1957 – Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee 1951-1962)

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The Game Conservancy Trust (www.gct.org.uk) is an independent wildlife conservation charity which carries out research into game, associated species and habitats. In 2003 the Trust spent £3 million in furtherance of its charitable objects of which £2 million was spent on research that is carried out by 60 scientists based at Fordingbridge, and at study centres throughout the country. The Trust’s main areas of interest include farmland, moorland and woodland conservation, river and habitat restoration, disease, predation control and education. The Trust is also responsible for a number of Government Biodiversity Action Plan species and is lead partner for grey partridge and joint lead partner for black grouse and brown hare

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