

Brent's trap a winner

CALM is now better able to collect information on some small animals in the jarrah forest, thanks to trapping modifications designed by CALM technical officer Brent Johnson.

"Elliott traps, which are used throughout Australia, collect data on small animals; the collapsible aluminium traps are ideal for capturing small mammals such as dunnarts and mardos," Brent said.

"However, they were no match for skilled escapologists such as brush-tailed phascogales and chuditch."

It was common for scientists using Elliott traps to find them with the bait taken, the door closed, fresh animal scratchings inside the door and remnants of fur - but with the culprit nowhere to be found.

Brent modified the trap by riveting a simple locking mechanism - a shaped

by Carolyn
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metal tab - on the door, preventing it from being opened from the inside.

"The mechanism is inexpensive but effective and is easy to manufacture and maintain," Brent said.

"The external placement of the lock does not restrict the collapsing capabilities of the trap, nor does it introduce further internal hazards to the captured animal."

The modified Elliott traps were used for scientific studies at Kingston, near Manjimup, and Batalling, near Collie, and produced immediate results.

In the first trial at Kingston earlier this year, 11 phascogales were captured in Elliott traps over three nights, which in the past would have been almost unheard of, using this method.

These successes have led to other CALM wildlife researchers using similarly modified Elliott traps.

"The traps also have the problem of being poorly insulated from extremes of weather," Brent said.

"If we don't take protective measures, captured animals can become stressed in hot, cold or wet weather."

Previous protective methods included placing traps in plastic bags to provide waterproofing and putting cotton wool, tissue paper and other nesting material inside the traps.

These methods were time-consuming and cluttered or fouled the traps.

Instead, Brent tried wrapping Elliott traps in a hessian rectangle.

Trials showed that they kept the traps warmer during cold weather but didn't work as well during extremes of heat.

The hessian and lock may also have been respon-

sible for an unexpected result - capturing a numbat during trapping at Batalling forest.

Numbats have rarely been recorded entering an Elliott trap - they feed on termites and do not take the traditional mammal baits of peanut paste and sardines.

Instead scientists have to use the time-honoured method of sight and chase, that is, they must drive around an area until they spy a numbat, then chase it into a hollow log before they can retrieve it.

The numbat caught at Batalling may have entered the hessian-wrapped trap, believing it was a small, snug hollow log and then been prevented from leaving by the lock.

Anyone who would like further information on how to modify the traps should contact Brent Johnson at CALM's Wildlife Research Centre at Woodvale on (09) 405 5100.



Brent Johnson demonstrates his modified Elliott trap. Photo by Carolyn Thomson

Brent-Johnson + his modified Elliott trap

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