

CATCH

A BRO

Jack Alexander photo



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DRUGGED BEAR — Robert Wood, Department of Fish and Game biologist, examines brown bear during study program on Admiralty Island. Bear has been tranquilized with drug injected by dart shot from rifle.

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME biologists studying bears on Admiralty Island have found that the big brownies are not very adept at watching their step.

In the research project at Hood Bay last fall, biologists using cable foot snares captured and tagged 18 brown bears. The bears ranged in size from 50-pound cubs up to a mature male with an estimated weight of 800 pounds.

The success with the snares followed a series of experiments that began in June, 1971. Prompted by the disclosure of plans to log south Admiralty Island, the Department of Fish and Game began studying the big brownies there. Information on range, movements and population densities was needed in order to predict the effect of logging on the bear population.

Initial efforts to tranquilize the bears utilized the traditional dart gun methods and two animals were captured and tagged during the first field season when crews concentrated on the beaches around Hood Bay.

Biologists then tried the dart gun approach in the late summer and fall when the bears were feeding on salmon in the streams.

Two more bears were tagged using this method but biologists found that the dense forest and other factors made dart guns somewhat inefficient in Southeastern Alaska.

They then turned to Jack Aldrich, a professional trapper who had developed and patented a foot snare for use on black bears in the tree farms of the Pacific Northwest.

Aldrich modified and strengthen-

ed the snare to make it suitable for the big brownies of Alaska and made several bait sets in June, 1972. The bears ignored the baits so a few snares were then placed on well-traveled trails. Four bears were captured by this method that spring.

Encouraged by the success of the trail sets, Aldrich and department biologists returned to Hood Bay in the fall of 1972 with 30 snares and placed them along the fish creeks where the bears were feeding on salmon.

The technique proved very successful and 18 bears were captured that fall. All were drugged, tattooed, tagged in the ears and decked out with a colored collar.

Robert E. Wood, a game biologist from Ketchikan and leader of the project, returned again last June

WN BEAR

to continue the bear study.

"We got close enough to look for ear tags on 38 bear observations," Wood said. "Nine of these bears had tags and the other 29 were untagged. We saw seven different tagged bears of the 25 which have been tagged since the start of the program in June, 1971."

The cable snares developed by Aldrich have some distinct advantages over steel traps, Wood says.

"The snares cost less, are safer to handle and can be safely used around people. They are light and easy to transport and they cause fewer foot injuries," he noted.

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SNARE SET — Bear snare developed by Jack Aldrich is set on trails near creeks. When bear steps on trigger, spring pulls loop tight around leg.



DOWN AND OUT — Jack Aldrich, a professional trapper who developed the cable snare, examines brown bear trapped during Department of Fish and Game project.



***TAKING IT EASY** — Admiralty Island brown bear succumbs to drug. Admiralty bears are extremely aggressive when trapped but use of cable snare prevents foot injuries.*

photos by R. M. Burnett



***MARKING TIME** — Jack Alexander, left, wields tattoo device in marking lip of brown bear captured on Admiralty Island. Tattooed numbers aid in identifying bear.*

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Wood says that his observations of the brown bears of Admiralty Island have given him an added appreciation for the big animals.

"Their hearing and sense of smell are excellent and their eyesight is a lot better than I had expected," Wood said.

The flexible cable loop of the Aldrich snare is placed on a bear trail and covered with bits of moss and leaves. When the bear steps on the trigger, a spring device throws the loop up and tightens it around its leg. The other end of the cable is attached to a substantial tree.

Bears thus snared, even though they are not injured, display considerable agitation at being captured and charge to the end of the cable at anyone who approaches them.

Biologists (and information officers) witnessing these formidable lunges take some comfort in Aldrich's assurance that in all his years of trapping, no bear has escaped from his snare—yet.

While the brown bears of Kodiak Island are perhaps better known for their size, the Admiralty Island bears appear to take top honors for aggressiveness.

Jack Alexander, a Department of Fish and Game biologist who has trapped many bears on Kodiak Island and who also worked on the Admiralty Island project, said that he was impressed by the difference in temperament between the animals from the two islands.

"Trapped Kodiak bears always try to move away when approached. The Admiralty Island bears are much more aggressive and nearly always charge," Alexander said.

Department biologists plan to continue trapping, tagging and observing the brown bears on Admiralty Island in a long-range program aimed at learning more about their habits and life history. ■

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