

Making sure curiosity kills the cat

The caracal is a wary predator. To trap it, you need careful preparation, ongoing experimentation and plenty of patience.



BY GARY LAUBSCHER

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I've found that if a caracal has killed a lamb and partly covered the carcass with grass, it will almost certainly return to the 'scene of the crime'. You can use this knowledge to set a trap for the predator.

Remember, too, that a caracal hardly ever covers its droppings.

So if you find a spot on your farm with many droppings containing bone fragments and hair or wool, this is also a good spot to leave a cage.

The structure should be about 160cm long, 65cm wide and 65cm high. The trigger plate in the middle must be wide to ensure it's easily triggered.

The cage must have two entrances, as a cat likes to see that it has a passage through a structure. Each door is held up and connected to the trigger plate. It goes without saying that the cage should be well made and sturdy.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Know how cats travel and place the cage accordingly. For example, a caracal will try to avoid crossing a wet land, but will cross a donga, or walk along the edge. It will also walk along a dirt road and hunt in a cropland. An area with trees and dead wood adjacent to a cropland is an excellent location.
- A cat is extremely careful about where it steps, so cover the cage floor (excluding the trip plate) with sand that matches the surroundings.
- Hang a tiny piece of shiny material such as tin foil about 3cm from the top of the cage and above the trigger plate. A caracal is inquisitive and will investigate the foil when it catches the sun.
- Smear fish emulsion on a small rag and hang it next to the shiny item. Place sheep's wool on the trip plate on the floor to attract the predator's eye. Red bait is also very good as a trapping lure, as is Seagro fertiliser.
- Never put lure or cat urine on the metal doorway of the cage as the cat will rub against it, dislodge the doors and probably escape.
- Make a 'cat stamp'. I carved mine out of a piece of soft wood. It makes a perfect paw print when pushed into

sand. Apply it in and around the cage, placing most of the prints inside the cage. This will encourage the caracal to enter the structure.

- Put two or three old animal droppings and the feathers of local birds on the floor inside the cage.
- Tie feathers in trees or on top of a few bushes so that they move in the wind. Cats are sensitive to movement and are likely to come and investigate. When they see the cage, they are likely to enter it, following the scents you've laid for them.
- When applying the fake prints, be sure to spread 'unmarked' soft sand around the cage as well. This will enable you to see the next day how many cats or other predators visited the spot.

PLACE SHEEP'S WOOL ON THE TRIP PLATE ON THE FLOOR TO ATTRACT THE PREDATOR'S EYE

If you're working alongside a sand road, sweep a metre-wide line across the road to the left and right of the cage so that you can see if any caracal visited the site during the night.

- Cats leave their scent and urine in cages, so replace the sand when you reset the cage after capturing a predator.

TRIGGER PLATE

Although the trigger plate must be kept clear, you can use it to conceal a lure. Dig a hole and bury an open bottle filled with cat urine and gland lure from the anal glands of cats previously trapped. Leave the opening of the bottle just sticking out of the ground, then position the cage so that the bottle is under the floor plate. Make sure the exposed part of the bottle does not interfere with the operation of the trigger plate.

LEARNING CURVE

The more time and effort you put into your trapping, the more successful it will be. You'll learn as you go along and create your own luck. ■ FW