

# How to Trap Moles—A Money-Making Sport For Boys

By J. Olivier Curwood



HOW TO SET THE HARPOON TRAP

FROM the beginning of May until late autumn this year boys throughout nearly the whole of America will be offered one of the liveliest methods of making money that they have ever enjoyed. Within the last year or two a new fashion has sprung up in big cities all over the world—the wearing of moleskin coats, muffs and boas, and so great has the demand for the pelts of these little burrowers become that furs are everywhere now offering boys from ten to thirty cents apiece for them. In one week recently a number of these furs advanced \$160,000 to agents for the purchase of moles that have not yet been caught.

Especially to American boys does this big demand open up a new and enticing field of sport. Almost every boy, whether he lives in a town or in the country, is quite familiar with moles. These little animals are so common that they are regarded as a pest owing to the injury they do to plants, grass, small trees and growing grain. Unlike other fur-bearing animals, they live in cities as well as on farms, and it is not an unusual sight to see mole traps set on well-kept lawns, or in the paths between flower beds.

But notwithstanding the fact that they are probably more numerous than rats in almost every community, those boys who set out to trap them this spring and summer will have need of all their cunning and skill. Most boys know how hard it is to catch a rat, but it is twice as difficult to capture a mole. These little animals seem to possess a reasoning power that is almost human. They build their underground forts, veritable castles

that the boy trapper requires for a good season's work, although more would probably bring better results.

Armed with these, the trapper should leave for the meadows and fields before the sun is up in the morning. It may be that, the day before, he ran across the hunting ground of a mole, and where there is one mole there are pretty certain to be a dozen. If a trapping place is not already located, every square rod of ground should be closely examined. In all probability it will not be long before the trapper's sharp eyes discover a little ridge winding along over the field. This ridge is where the mole's back has pushed up the sod or loose soil in making his runway. Now the common mistake of nearly all mole hunters is to set a trap on the first runway found. Instead of this a wide circle should be made by the trapper, and perhaps a dozen more of these little ridges will be found, all converging toward a common center. Now the boy should follow one of these runways toward that center, and pretty soon he will come to the place where all of the mole's highways seem to join, or are lost, in a space about as big as a house. Somewhere in that space is the castle wherein there may be dwelling a dozen of the little burrowers.

The trapper has now fairly trailed the little animals to their den, and is ready to set his traps. Imagine a great, thick steel hairpin two feet in height, and you will have a good idea of the framework of a mole trap. Suspended directly in the center of this pin is a small, fine-pronged harpoon, which is worked by a powerful spring. This harpoon should not be "cooked" before the trap is set, however, as it might be accidentally discharged and impale the hand of the trapper. First dig a good-sized hole across the mole's path so that the little round path which he travels is exposed. Then on each side of the runway force the pin solidly down into the earth, so that the harpoon hangs directly over the tunnel. At the base of the pin is what is called a trigger, which should lay directly in the path of the mole. After the trap is arranged in this way the loose dirt should be filled in where the hole was dug, of course filling up the ends of the mole's runway. Now you may safely seize the handle of the harpoon and pull it up until the powerful spring clicks, which means that the little spear is ready for action. A trap can be set in this way in about a minute, and in the same way all the traps in the possession of the trapper should be placed over the different runways. Then you may sit down and very quietly await results.

Meanwhile the mole awakes in his castle chamber, where he has been sleeping the night away with his numerous family. Without doubt every member of that family is hungry, for every morning they go foraging. A dozen different routes lead out into the fields, and one after another they scamper out. Many of them will probably leave by ways where there are no traps. But some of them are sure to go to their doom. Imagine a big one scurrying up this highway, his sensitive little nose anxious to get out into the fields after worms. Suddenly he comes to the place where the trap is set, and he finds his runway is blocked by soft earth. Without a moment's hesitation the mole dives into it, and hits against the trigger. Your

back may be turned to that particular trap, but you hear a wh-a-b-o-n—the spring shoots the harpoon down. When you pull up the trap you will find the mole neatly impaled. The trap may be set again in this same runway, and before you are so fatigued by setting your three traps may have caught half a dozen of the valuable little animals.

Of course, if a boy has no money with which to buy traps, there are other ways in which moles may be captured. Nearly every country boy knows how to "snare" rabbits. The method of catching moles in this way is exactly the same. A green stick that will bend without breaking, and which has a good deal of spring to it, is about all that is necessary. To one end of this should be tied a piece of fine cord or twine with a noose in the end of it. Then the other end of the stick must be forced deep down in the ground, so that when bent the noose will hang over the runway. A hole is dug as before, and the sapling is bent down until the noose is in such a position that the mole could not pass on his runway without putting his head into it. On each side of the runway a stake is driven into the ground, and to these two stakes is tied a stout string. This string is now caught in a notch cut into the end of the bent sapling, and of course holds it down. When the mole comes along he plunges into the loose dirt and runs into the noose. His struggles to force his way through force the sapling back a little, the string slips out of the notch, and the mole is suddenly hoisted up into the air with a force that soon strangles him. This homemade trap is of great value, for a couple of boys who set out to make a business of catching moles can easily have half a hundred of them without much exertion. The mole raises over their backs in little ridges, and these moving furrows are easily discernible to any boy with ordinarily sharp eyes. Just as a muskrat hunter shoots at the head of the white path made by these animals in the moonlight, so must the mole hunter descend swiftly upon the head of the moving ridge, and strike it a heavy blow with the flat of a spade or a paddle-shaped board. If his aim is true the mole is stunned or killed. But if he misses, even by a hair's breadth, the little burrower shoots down into the soft earth, and has a good chance of escape.

The mole is a little barrel-shaped animal, not more than five or six inches in length, and he cannot be skinned by larger fur animals. His beautiful silky gray coat is so delicate that extreme care must be taken in preserving it. The trapper should first make a slit up the middle of the stomach from the tail to the base of the lower jaw. Then the skin should be worked off sideways, the legs being pulled out of their pockets of fur, as it were. The skin should then be stretched, but not enough to tear it, and



SETTING A SNARE IN A MOLE'S RUNWAY

its edges tacked down on a shingle or a board where it will cure just as any other skin.

When it comes time to sell the furs late in the fall, it is a good practice to write to a number of furriers in large cities, preferably New York or Chicago, telling them what you have, and asking them to make you an offer. This will insure you against being cheated by dishonest furriers, and besides will show you where your best market is.

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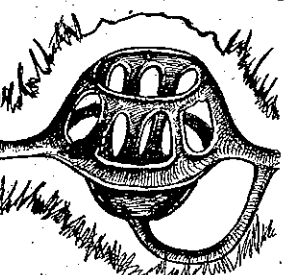
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SECTIONAL VIEW OF A MOLE'S "CASTLE," AS BURIED IN HARD SOIL

under the sod, where they may defy their enemies in the form of serpents, cats, dogs and wild animals. From the home of every mole there leads away a network of underground trails, through any one of which he may travel to safety two or three hundred feet away. I knew a man who trapped all last summer for a mole that was ruining his lawn, and even then he failed to catch him. On the other hand, I know of a young farmer lad who caught nearly a hundred during the season, and who sold them all for a good price.

So a boy must know the ways of moles before he can successfully trap them. He must also have the right kind of traps. Regular, mole traps of a good quality can be bought for fifty cents each, and two or three of these are all