

4.4 Eartags

Eartags of the size used for rats or fish fingerlings are satisfactory for marking all three mustelids. It is best to put one in each ear, so that if one is lost the animal can still be identified. Put the tag into the stronger cartilage at the base of the ear, and close it firmly, but not too tight (Fig. 8). If the part of the ear enclosed inside the tag is squashed or damaged, it will decay and the tag will come off in a few days. With a little practice, the tags can be made to go in well, lie flat against the head, and last for years. One stoat marked in the Orongorongo Valley on 22 February 1972 was still wearing its tag on 25 September 1974.

The disadvantage of eartags is that the stoat must be unconscious before the tags can be applied or read. However, stoats can rarely be observed or handled otherwise, and even frequent anaesthetisations apparently do not deter stoats from recapture; 57% of the 134 stoats marked in Fiordland in 1979-80 were recaptured at least once (King and McMillan 1982). The advantage is that nervous animals never see the operator, and are spared the stress of being handled while conscious.

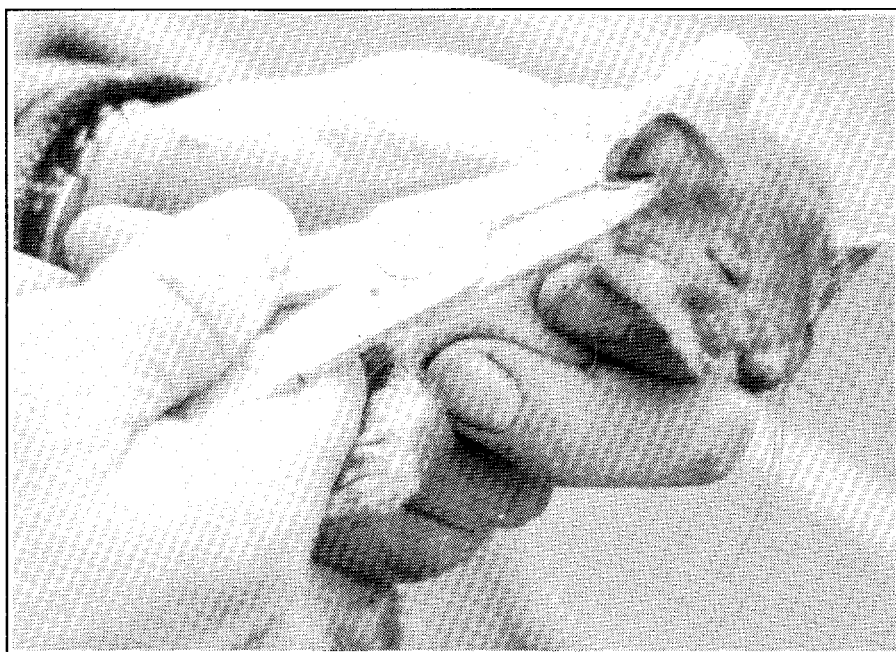


Fig. 8 Placing a metal eartag in the ear of an anaesthetised stoat. (C. McMillan)

5. FENN TRAPPING

5.1 How the Fenn trap works

The Mark IV Fenn trap is a steel spring trap designed to kill small animal: almost instantly by breaking the back (Fig. 9).

The coil spring can be left set for long periods without losing its tensile strength. When set, the jaws fold down to a compact flat square of about 13 x 15 cm the centre of which is occupied by the 6.5 x 7 cm treadle. It has an efficient safety catch to protect the operator's hands during setting. The trap may be laid on the ground or fixed to a board.

The 25 cm chain can be passed out under the side of the tunnel and pegged down outside. In tunnels of the type shown in Fig. 13, the trap is already secure so the chain can be cut off.

Figures 10-12 show how to set a Fenn trap. Place the right thumb in loop A with fingers under the base. Place the left thumb on the bar B with finger; under the spring. Pull the jaws fully open and swing the safety hook C and catch D over the bar B. Your fingers are now free to adjust the catch D and treadle E. The treadle should be adjusted so that the tang F overlaps the catch as little as possible (1-2 mm). The trap is then positioned with the spring parallel to the long axis of the tunnel. Once the trap is in position



Fig. 9 A stoat correctly caught in a Fenn trap. (J.A. Mills)