MUCH ABOUT TRAPS
by Williiam A. Tompkins

(Note: The following article was submitted by Mr. Tompkins some time ago when he had been banding but a year, yet it contains many worthwhile suggestions for EBBA members.)

I started trapping with a home-made, four-cell Potter trap, a home-made Mason trap, and a manufactured Dodson sparrow trap which, however, had been converted to have a Mason entrance. These traps took birds readily, but the majority of the birds got skinned foreheads from thrusting their bills through the mesh of the hardware cloth in trying to get out. One trap had 1/3-inch mesh, another 1/2-inch mesh, and the Dodson almost one-inch mesh. All of them injured birds, and I was spending as much time swabbing on meurochrome as I was putting on bands. It worried me a great deal.

I watched my traps continually, and birds were never in them for more than fifteen minutes at the most, still they bloodied themselves. After retrapping some birds that showed no signs of ill effect from previously scraped and bleeding foreheads, I didn't worry so much, but I still didn't like it.

Then, I acquired a canary cage and converted that into a trap; it worked wonderfully, and -- the birds didn't injure themselves while in it. It looked as though I had the answer -- upright bars instead of a square mesh. Now, all I had to do was to apply what I had learned to building a new trap. A single-cell Potter was the simplest type, so that is what I started on.

My workshop is always -- or was until I started building these traps -- overstocked with black wire coathangers. These, cut to length, exactly filled the bill for bars. A wood base, 6 x 11 inches, was cut from the end piece of an orange crate. One-half inch in from the two sides and the back edges, holes were drilled one-half inch apart and about one-quarter inch deep. A 6 x 11 inch frames of three-quarter inch scrap wood was made for the top, with matching holes drilled the same depth as for the bottom. The top was covered with hardware cloth. Wooden posts were used at the corners, and the front two were grooved to take a sliding hardware cloth door. The bars were fitted in the holes, the top fitted on and nailed to the four corner posts, the whole trap given a coat of black asphaltum, and it was ready for trial. (Fig. 1)

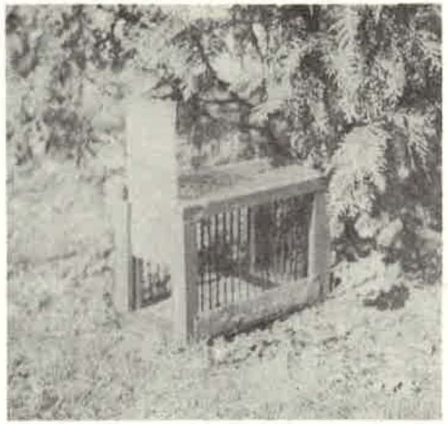

Fig. 1: Single-cell Potter Trap

Its success far exceeded my fondest hopes. Used side by side with the four-cell, hardware cloth Potter trap, it always took the first bird. The birds would not enter the hardware cloth trap so long as this one was empty. I attribute this to the fact that the visbility through this trap is so much better than through the one of hardware cloth. Despite this, it main success was that there were no more injured birds regardless of the time they were in the trap. They worried at the bars, leaving the hardware cloth door and top strictly alone.

Because of the success of this trial trap, I next built an eight-cell Potter trap, twenty-two inches square, with the cells arranged as shown in Figure 2.

It, too, was a success, the birds preferring it to any of the hardware cloth traps. I have taken seven birds at a time in this trap, and the only reason I did not catch eight was that the fluttering of the birds had shaken the trap and tripped the door of the eighth compartment. I am now disposing of all of my hardware cloth traps and replacing them as fast as possible with different kinds of barred traps.

Also, I made another Potter trap, this one with four cells, arranged alternately toward the front and back, as shown in Figure 3, as well as a top-opening tree trap as shown in Figure 4.

I am now in the process of building a barred Middleton trap. After

that, I am going to try to make a Mason trap but can visualize in advance that it is going to have a large-mesh hardware cloth entrance tunnel. I will grant that it is a little more work to build this type of trap, but I am convinced that it is well worth the added effort both in safety for the birds and in easier trapping.

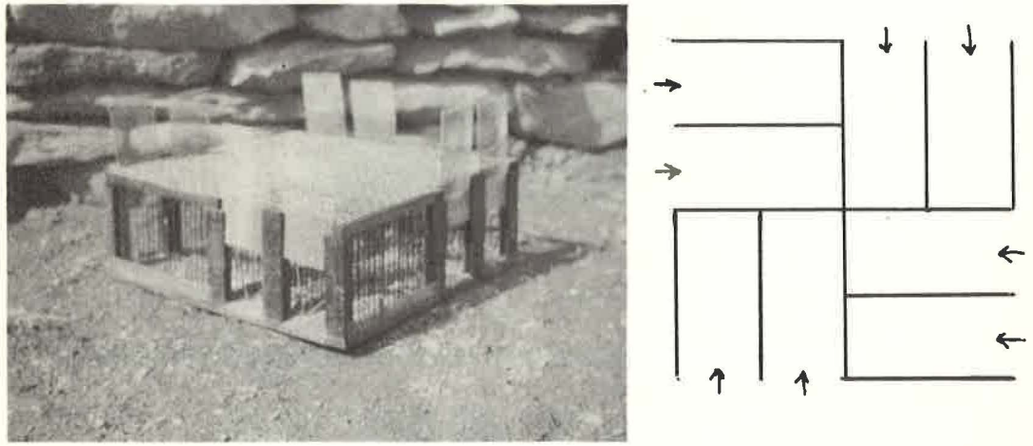

Fig. 2: (a) Eight-cell Potter trap, and (b) Floor Plan of Trap

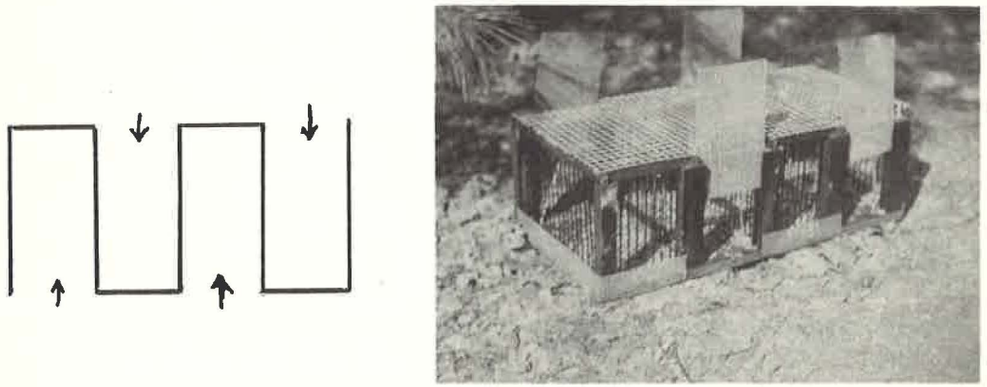

Fig. 3: (a) Floor Plan of Four-cell Potter Trap, and (b) Trap

Fig. 4: Top-opening, Trip-step Tree Trap

Another problem appeared soon after I started trapping, and that was snow. Right after a snow storm when the ground was covered and the traps should be most effective, they were snowed under. Even a light fall would cover the bait. I built a shelter over my traps with discarded Christmas trees, but even that was only partially effective. The snow would blow and swirl in under the trees, and it was a great collector of wind-blown, dead leaves when the ground was bare.

My attention fell on a weather-vane feeder, and I thought of converting that into a trap. Rather than work on the one I had in operation in the back yard, I started from scratch and built a new one. It tapered from twenty-two inches across the front to eighteen inches in back; it was ten inches deep and nine inches high at the front, sloping to seven inches at the back. Its sides, back, and top were of glass held in grooved posts. Other grooved posts were used to divide it into four compartments; glass again was used for the partitions. Hardware cloth covered the upper half of the open front and was used for the sliding doors. In effect, this was a four-celled Potter trap. (Fig. 5)

For a pivot, I used an old ball-bearing chair caster. The wheel was removed and the caster bolted through a wood strip screwed to the bottom of the trap. This trap, too, was an immediate success; it was

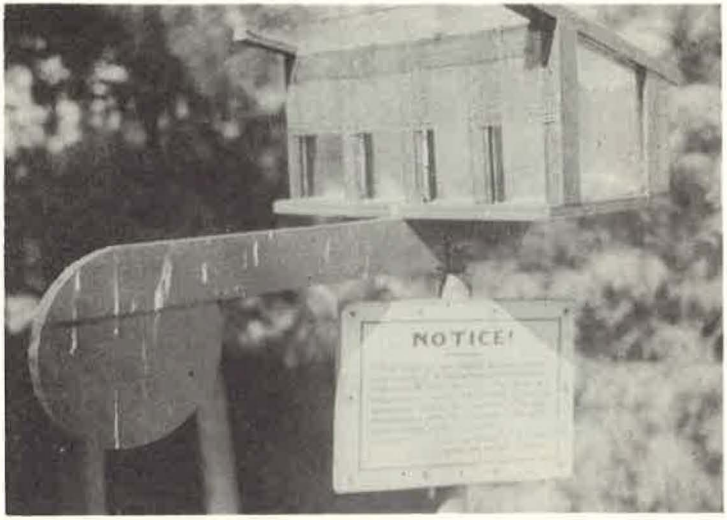

Fig. 5: Weather Vane Combination Four-cell Potter Trap and Feeder

wind, rain, and snow proof. When not in operation as a trap, the sliding doors can be held open, and birds use it as an ordinary feeding station. In this way, they get used to it and are more readily caught when it is in use as a trap. --54 Ionia St., Springfield, Mass.

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BE CAREFUL WITH EVENING GROSBEAKS

Mr. Oakleigh Thorne, II, 1201 Balsam Ave., Boulder, Colorado, contributes this note:

"I wonder if all banders know how pugnacious Evening Grosbeaks are toward each other when trapped and confined in a small space, such as a receiving cage. It is unfortunate that one must find this out by experience. I have seen Grosbeaks, under such conditions, chew each other's legs off, break each other's wings, and generally raise havoc with each other. When caught, they should always be handled separately! A receiving cage with individual compartments would be in order here."

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