

CROW TRAPPING FOR BANDING PURPOSES

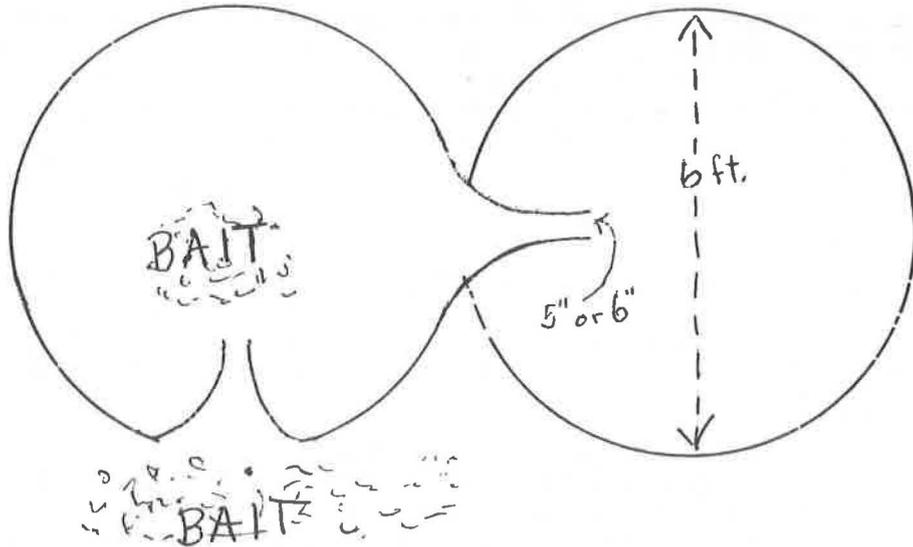
By Ralph K. Bell

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An experiment in trapping crows for banding purposes was begun during the winter of 1955-56. Since we have a poultry farm, bait was easily obtained. Although plenty of bait helps, patience is also very essential. A crow is never in a hurry -- unless someone is after him with a gun.

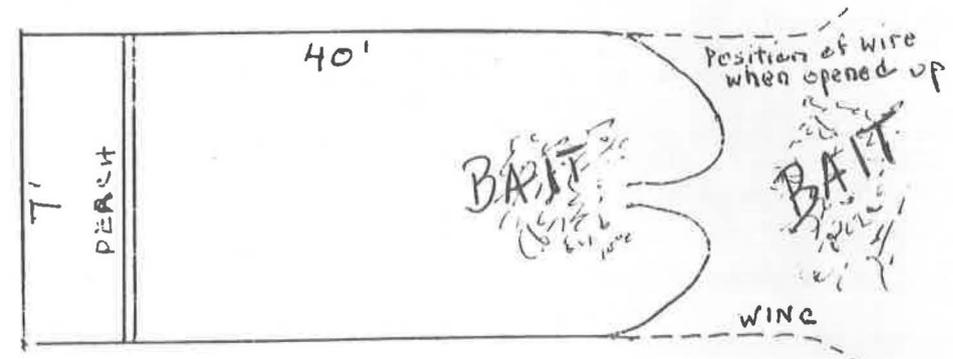
The first traps were heart-shaped, being approximately 6 feet in diameter and 18 inches high, with an entrance of about 5 inches. These traps were placed a quarter to a half mile from the house in plain view so that the reactions of the crows to different baits could be observed with binoculars. Dead rabbits (found along roads) and eggs were used mainly as bait that first year. These traps had to be watched constantly as a trapped crow would soon find his way back out. Eight were banded that first winter.

This type trap was improved during the winter of 1956-57 by placing two of them together as shown in the drawing. I do not think any crow ever escaped once he got into the second compartment. The drawing is a top view looking down.



Seventeen crows were caught in this double trap the second winter, and there were 6 retraps. 1x2 inch mesh wire may be used, but I feel that the 2x4 mesh works best. The crows were caught for banding by using a catching hook.

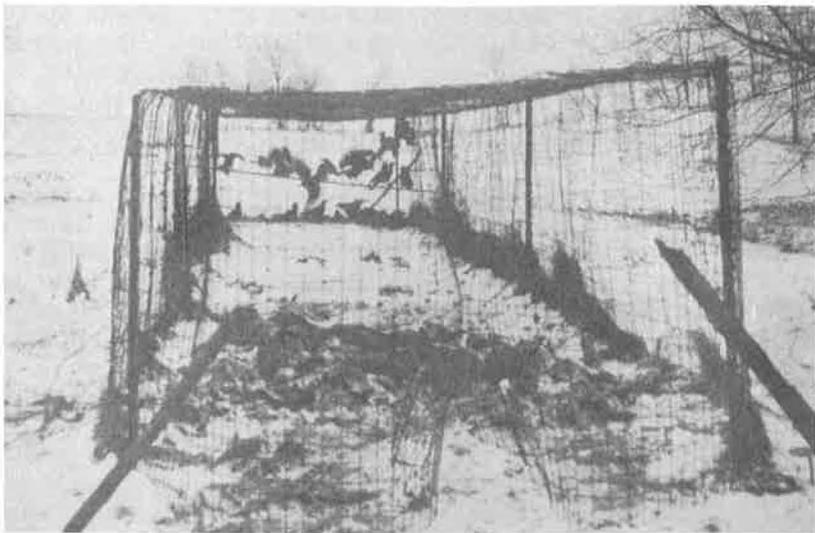
The trap that was to be so successful in 1957 was a flop during the winter of 1955-56. The dimensions of this trap are: length 40 feet, width 7 feet, and height 4 feet. The mesh 2x4 inches. The entrance to this trap was similar to the all-purpose trap, with the opening for the crows to enter being approximately 6 inches. Here is a diagram, looking down from above. (And note photographs on front cover and on page 98.)



This trap caught only one crow during 1955-56, although it was kept baited. During the winter of 1956-57, a new experiment was tried. Bait was kept in and around the trap constantly as before, but the curved wire at the entrance was opened wide for two months. From a distant hill, crows were observed (by use of binoculars) feeding constantly in and around the trap. The wings were not closed until the evening of Jan. 7th after the crows had gone to roost. This trap cannot be seen from the house and I could not wait over 2 hours the next morning to see the results. There were 28 crows in the trap and perhaps 100 trying to get in. When the crows first saw us coming, bedlam broke loose and perhaps 700 crows were flying around cawing wildly. I wished then that we had waited another hour to approach the trap, but success was here, so why complain? These were banded and released. Some flew to a tree only a few yards away and picked at their bands for five or ten minutes - not seeming to notice their buddies being caught and banded in the trap.

This big trap was then left open until the evening of Jan. 17th. Only five crows were caught this time. Four of them had bands from the first catch. These five were left in the trap as "bait" to see what would happen. All escaped within a few hours. Because of this an "extra" was added the next time the trap was set on Feb. 15th. A wire tunnel, made out of the same 2x4 inch wire, was added to the inside of the entrance. This tunnel was 28" long, 16" high and 11" wide tapered to 6" farthest inside. 19 new crows were banded this time and there were five retraps.

On March 4th, 10 more were banded with 5 retraps; March 9th, 21 banded and 6 retraps; March 10th, 26 banded and 9 retraps.



Banding two days in a row may be unwise because not a crow was seen near the trap after that. Also the season was advancing and many crows were leaving for their nesting grounds.

A total of 104 crows were banded in the big trap from Jan. 8 to March 28. 25 were retrapped at least once; 4 of these were retrapped twice; one was retrapped 3 times and one 4 times.

This proves that food has a powerful influence in winter. One crow was taken in a cage to Wheeling 60 miles away to be demonstrated at the Brooks Bird Club meeting on January 28th. This crow was brought back that night and released at midnight. On both February 6th and 26th this crow was retaken in the same trap.

When the large trap was opened up, bait was left both inside and outside the trap. When the trap was set, all bait outside was removed. Bait was left both inside and outside the heart-shaped traps at all times. Plenty of crows around and fighting for the food seemed to give some crows courage to enter the trap.

A falling door trap was not very successful for me. This type trap was experimented with in 1956. The falling door scared the other crows too much. Any movement near the traps must be avoided or the crows will not come back readily. Crows pacing back and forth inside a silent trap encourages other crows to stay around. ★ ★ ★