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# EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BAL-CHATRI TRAP ON RAPTORS OTHER THAN THE KESTREL

By Stuart D. Henderson

Having found the Bal-Chatratri trap to be reasonably effective on Kestrels, we have attempted, over the last three years, to Bal-Chatratri trap many other species of both hawks and owls with varying results.

Several different shapes and sizes of the basic trap have been used with monofilament tests running from 4 to 35 lbs. The majority of the traps have been of a round or octagonal shape, usually with a wooden, but sometimes wire, bottom. Height has varied with the size of the live bait item utilized.

Instances are listed where banders of our acquaintance have been successful with a species which we have either been unable to trap, or have had no experience with. States where birds were trapped are listed. Other types of traps which have been successful on a given species are noted.

## HAWKS

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) - 1 adult male; Pa., 1961; by Chester J. Robertson, Jr.. Bait: pigeon. The Bow-Net Trap (hand-operated or auto) and the Tanglefoot Trap catch Goshawks, Cooper's, and Sharp-shins.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) - G. Ronald Austing of Harrison, Ohio traps many Red-tails with the Bal-Chatratri using mice, starlings, or pigeons for bait. No success on Massachusetts birds. Hand-operated Bow trap with pigeons is very effective on Pennsylvania migrants.

Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) - 3 Mass. adults by John B. Holt, Jr. Bait: mice. I have had several attacks on the Bal-Chatratri, but no captures. The Verball Pole Trap takes this species if set on a favorite perch. Infrequently caught with Bow trap and pigeon in Pa.

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) - Very prone to the Bal-Chatratri, perhaps even more so than the Kestrel. 5 Mass. adults by the author; 3 spring Mass. birds and 5 fall Pa. birds by Holt; in 1961. 1 summer Mass. bird by Holt in 1962. I have even had an incubating male drop from the nest to be taken by a Bal-Chatratri baited with an adult Chipmunk, which had been set under the nest tree. In another instance a female performed a similar feat, from a nest containing two large downy young, for a trap containing 2 white mice. Unfortunately this female broke out of the trap before I was able to reach her. Bait has always been mice or a Chipmunk. No other trap has been successful on this species to my knowledge.





Top right - Adult male Kestrel.  
The Hawk Owl is shown in the other  
three pictures. (Photographs by  
J. Campbell and the author.)

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus s. johannis*) - 1 normal phase, Ron Austing, in Ohio using a starling as bait. Mass. wintering birds have completely ignored our efforts with mice or young rats as bait. (The author once caught a small male Kestrel in a trap set for a male Marsh Hawk. The bait was a half-grown Norway Rat larger in both body size and weight than its would-be antagonist!)

Harrier (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*) - 1 adult female taken by Chester J. Robertson, Jr. on the Pa. ridges in 1960. Bait: mouse. Fall Mass. birds which I have attempted to trap in the vicinity of Plum Island, have completely ignored well-exposed traps which they have passed directly over in hunting. This has led me to believe that the Marsh Hawk would not normally be taken by the Bal-Chatri.

### OWLS

Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) - Alexander C. Nagy has caught a few Pa. birds using the Bal-Chatri, but the method of attack of this species renders the Bal-Chatri virtually ineffective. The Screech Owl strikes the trap readily and with some force, but merely sits staring malevolently at the mice inside, making little or no further attempts to reach the bait. We once observed by flashlight while an adult in one of my box areas attacked the Bal-Chatri thirteen consecutive times without so much as entangling one talon! A Pole Net captures some extremely tame Pa. adults.

Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) - 1 Mass. male by Holt using a pigeon as bait in 1961. Snowies come in to almost any type of trap baited with a pigeon very readily, but always seem to escape in some way or another when we are operating the traps.

Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula caparoch*) - 1 individual trapped and banded 02-11-62 in Meredith, N.H. by the author and John Campbell using an 8 lb. test Kestrel-size Bal-Chatri. One white mouse as bait. (Strangely enough white mice on a plain wooden bottom seem to work perfectly even when the ground is snow-covered. Movement on the part of the bait seems the only essential item.) The attack of this species was one of the most rapid and aggressive I have observed. Even as our car drew close the bird seemed to have no interest other than the mouse in the trap. An interesting development was that, although the banding manual recommends a size 5 (6 in old manual) band for this species, we found that even the locking 7B finally arrived at was a snug fit. I might add that we were also quite surprised at the amazing strength in the legs and talons of this relatively small bird. It was able to readily pierce army-issue leather gloves with thick wool inserts, and to our discomfort, also our skin beneath the gloves! That this species is able to take Ptarmigan on its home range no longer seems unbelievable to this birder!



NOTE

Mention was made of the Verball Pole Trap with relation to some success on Red-shoulders, but I wish to add that this trap has some very serious disadvantages. Using this trap I have taken Horned Owls, a Red-shoulder, and two Kestrels intentionally, and a Long-eared Owl, Flicker, Kingfisher, and Grackle inadvertently. Jack Holt has taken a Horned Owl, Red-shoulder, Long-eared Owl and an Osprey. Chester Robertson even took a Golden Eagle with one of these traps.

The major disadvantage of the trap is that the cord which it throws around a bird's legs often causes superficial or even serious injury to the bird. Two of my three Great Horned Owls, the Red-shoulder, and the Kingfisher suffered superficial cuts on one or both legs, and Holt's Horned Owl required several days of retention to treat serious swelling of the legs. Holt's Long-eared Owl died under care, and my own was found dead a few weeks later near the point of release. It had cuts on both legs and appeared groggy at release. One of my Kestrels had a non-serious leg cut, and the other a very bad cut. The Flicker which my trap took was killed, and the Grackle suffered a broken leg.

We no longer use Verball Pole Traps because:

- (1) There is no way of controlling what they will capture.
- (2) Injuries to trapped birds are altogether too frequent.
- (3) Two or three checks a day are necessary to avoid leaving a bird in the trap for too long a period of time.

If use of the Verball is limited to large species the size of Red-tails, Horned Owls, Ospreys, etc., in a situation where it can be observed at regular intervals, it is an excellent trap, but it should only be used under close supervision.

Our other trapping methods, especially the Bal-Chatrri, seem reasonably safe, and we have had no injuries whatsoever while using them.

The author thanks the other banders mentioned for the information they have shared with Jack Holt and myself, and for much assistance they have given us in developing and improving our raptor-trapping techniques.

I shall be glad to furnish any further available information to any interested persons.

33 Tewksbury St., Ballardville, Mass. - October 10, 1962.

